

My name is Jason Jukich, and I am a third-generation miner, lifelong resident of the Iron Range, and proud member of USW Local 6115. I've spent the last 12 years working in Minnesota's mining industry—an industry that not only sustains my family, but also underpins the entire economy of Northeastern Minnesota.

Mining is not just part of our heritage—it is the economic backbone of this region: • Over 10,000 jobs in Northeastern Minnesota are directly tied to mining operations. • Mining contributes hundreds of millions of dollars annually in production taxes, utility fees, and local purchases—supporting schools, healthcare, infrastructure, and small businesses. • The wages paid are family-sustaining, often supporting entire households on a single income.

We are a rural, isolated region with limited economic alternatives. Due to our geography, soil composition, and climate, large-scale agriculture is not viable. Despite decades of sincere effort to diversify, no industry has emerged that can replace mining—only ones that complement it. For our communities to survive and thrive, mining must continue to play a central role.

To borrow a familiar phrase: Mining is not done to us—it is done for us. Iron mining provides essential raw materials that support not only Minnesota, but the broader U.S. manufacturing and steelmaking sectors—benefiting an estimated 11 million people nationwide.

On Sulfate Standards and Wild Rice

Concerns surrounding sulfate discharge and its impact on wild rice have been widely discussed. However, a growing body of scientific understanding suggests the issue is far more complex than a single pollutant. • Wild rice is a natural crop. As with any crop, yields vary from year to year due to environmental factors such as water levels, temperature extremes, and wildlife—not solely because of sulfate levels. • The waters of Northeastern Minnesota are among the cleanest in the state, which speaks to the strength of environmental practices in the region. • The current sulfate standard is neither technically nor economically feasible to meet. The proposed solution—reverse osmosis—is cost-prohibitive, energy-intensive, and unsuited for this scale of treatment, especially amid rising energy costs and constrained supply.

Modern mining operations in Minnesota are highly regulated and deeply committed to environmental responsibility. The idea that mining is inherently reckless or destructive is an outdated misconception. Our workforce consists of local residents—people with families and a vested interest in protecting our communities.

Economic and Community Consequences

The economic consequences of inaction are real and immediate: • Without a variance, Keetac may be forced to suspend operations, and other mines may follow. • A shutdown would devastate our communities. Local governments would lose tax revenue, schools would lose funding, and the burden would shift to retirees and fixed-income residents. • In the 1980s, I watched my community suffer through a similar collapse. Families left, homes were abandoned, and childhood friends moved away—some never to return.

Today, food insecurity is again on the rise. Our local food shelves—many supported by union members and mining families—are seeing record demand. If our mines close, those who now donate will become

those in need.

A Practical Path Forward

I urge the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other decision-makers to: 1. Grant Keetac the requested variance to ensure continued operations. 2. Develop a science-based, economically viable sulfate standard that municipalities, industries, and tribal communities can realistically meet. 3. Invest in comprehensive wild rice research and restoration, rather than placing undue blame on one industry. 4. Acknowledge that responsible, modern mining is essential to both our local economy and the national supply chain.

In Closing

I write not only as a miner, but as a father, neighbor, and lifelong resident of the Iron Range. We are not asking to be exempt from environmental responsibility—we are asking for a balanced, workable solution that preserves both our natural resources and our livelihoods.

Let's move forward together with policies rooted in science, economics, and fairness—not fear or fiction.

Sincerely, Jason Jukich USW Local 6115 Member Lifelong Resident of the Iron Range