

Mayor Mike LaBine (Mike LaBine)

Dear MPCA,

As the Mayor of Keewatin, I represent a community that has long been shaped by mining, local industry, and hardworking families. Our town, like many across northern Minnesota, depends on both the protection of our natural resources and the stability of good-paying jobs to ensure a strong future for our residents.

I urge the MPCA to reconsider the enforcement of the outdated 10 mg/L sulfate standard. This standard, adopted in the 1970s and based on research from the 1940s, does not reflect today's scientific understanding of wild rice habitats.

Minnesota is the only state in North America with a sulfate standard of this kind. Decades of research, including findings from the University of Minnesota and the 2018 Governor's Task Force on Wild Rice, show that wild rice can thrive in waters with sulfate levels far above 10 mg/L, and that other factors—such as iron and carbon content—play a significant role in plant health.

A one-size-fits-all approach is not only unscientific, but it also places an undue burden on Minnesota communities. For towns like Keewatin, the high cost of variances and compliance challenges creates financial strain on small wastewater treatment facilities, local governments, and employers. These added costs directly affect our ability to provide essential services and sustain the family-supporting jobs that are critical to our region's future.

I strongly encourage the MPCA to develop a modern, science-based standard that recognizes site-specific conditions and is financially achievable. Northern Minnesota communities like Keewatin should not be forced to choose between protecting natural resources and maintaining economic stability. With a balanced, updated standard, we can and should achieve both.

Mike LaBine
Mayor of Keewatin