

Kristen Blann

As an ecologist and a rice harvester, I support the denial of a waiver. It is my understanding that MPCA has made the right decision here, and US Steel has not shown that it would face financial hardship in complying with state water quality protections. We need to learn how to develop economic activities that are not at the expense of future ecological health. The idea of continuing to issue waivers, or to develop standards, based on individual water bodies is very concerning to me, as this ignores the fact that waters are connected, and that the ecology of all of these systems is intimately synchronized with the natural patterns of variation in flows and water chemistry that have developed over thousands of years. We cannot just alter "one" thing in nature in isolation -- every change ripples through the system and we are seeing the negative impacts of that every single day with declines in water quality and biodiversity. We need to protect wild rice as a cultural and ecological keystone species, a sentinel indicator of watershed health, and as an umbrella species whose protection confers protection on many other species, ecological systems and communities.