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Letter to the Editor

As Executive Director of the Minnesota Discovery Center (MDC), I have the privilege of leading a nonprofit organization that manages a state-owned asset: a museum and cultural hub dedicated to preserving and sharing the history of Minnesota's Iron Range. Our operations are made possible through funding from the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation (IRRR), supported by taxes paid by our mining industry.

MDC acknowledges that our land and water are critical to life. We recognize the importance of caring for our natural resources, and we know that the Iron Range community shares this responsibility. The Iron Range has long been an innovator in the mining industry, and its people care deeply for the land because we call it home.

That is why I am deeply concerned that imposing the current wild rice sulfate standard without adjustment will have significant negative impacts not only on our mining partners but also on organizations like MDC that depend on the stability of mining-related funding. If these standards are applied without variance or reasonable timelines, the result could threaten the very existence of our museum and diminish quality of life across the Range.

I urge Governor Walz and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to grant U.S. Steel Keetac a wastewater permit variance for its mine and tailings basin. Please refrain from including the outdated sulfate limit in the permit or, at minimum, provide the company with additional time to meet compliance. Failure to do so risks thousands of jobs and millions in tax base revenue for our state—resources that sustain institutions like ours and support communities across northern Minnesota.

The state should also uphold the 2011 law requiring the update of the wild rice sulfate standard using modern science. This is not simply a mining issue; permit holders across Minnesota are at risk from outdated, unworkable standards.

MDC's mission is to preserve and share the story of the Iron Range, but our ability to remain open depends on balanced, science-based policies. I encourage our leaders to take a thoughtful approach that protects both our environment and our communities.

Respectfully,
Char Conger
Executive Director
Minnesota Discovery Center