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LETTERS FROM READERS - 8-13-25

Aug 14, 2025



We have a sacred duty to protect water and manoomin (wild rice)

Did you know the natural stands of wild rice (manoomin) in the lakes and rivers of Minnesota's Tamarack Region are among the most abundant in the world? The health of our relative, wild rice, sustains the health of our lakes, fish, wildlife and human communities.

But the sacred and ecological abundance of Minnesota's "wild rice basket" is threatened by Talon Metals and Rio Tinto's proposal to mine copper and nickel from sulfide ore in one of the wettest areas ever considered for such a project.

No sulfide ore mine in a water-rich environment has avoided polluting nearby surface and/or groundwater. Rio Tinto, Talon's minority owner, has a global track record of pollution and is notorious for destroying sacred indigenous sites. Talon Metals has never operated a mine.

Exploratory drilling by Talon Metals reveals the Tamarack deposit contains “massive sulfide mineralization.” More sulfide means more risk for sulfate pollution. Unlined sumps with high sulfide tailings already scab the region. One of the region’s most abundant wild rice waters, Big Sandy Lake, is directly downstream from the proposed mine.

Big Sandy and its flowage are designated “outstanding” wild rice waters by the Minnesota DNR. This abundance attracts indigenous and non-native harvesters from across Minnesota. DNR surveys have shown that 25% of wild rice harvesting trips in Minnesota--more than any other county--were in Aitkin County.

Many Minnesota tribes with few wild rice beds on their reservations come to Aitkin County to exercise treaty-reserved rights and gather shelf-stable, nutritious food. Wild rice beds also shelter young fish and feed migrating waterfowl each fall, supporting hunting and fishing.

Talon’s proposed nickel mine would dig thousands of feet into the earth and discharge sulfates into surface water. The mine threatens to pollute water, wild rice and fish with sulfate and other chemicals and reduce water levels in shallow lakes. Pollution and dewatering would first harm lakes and rivers in the region then spread to downstream Mississippi and St. Croix rivers. If these waters are polluted, our fish become too toxic to eat, our wild rice dies and our health will suffer.

This is not just an environmental concern. While we come from different spiritual backgrounds, many of our beliefs share a teaching of reciprocal care. All living beings are part of God’s creation and caring for that creation is a sacred duty.

For the Ojibwe, protecting manoomin is a covenant. Wild rice is a sacred gift from and to the Creator. Losing this relationship with manoomin would be devastating.

We can't allow the talons of greed to destroy this unique abundance. We must defend life-giving waters from mining pollution. Now is the time to put our values into action and protect manoomin.

Jean Skinaway Lawrence, chairwoman of the Sandy Lake Band of Mississippi Chippewa

Sophia Patane, Community Engagement director

for WaterLegacy

<https://waterlegacy.org/wild-rice-tamarack/>