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Minnesotans Rally in Duluth to Tell Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to “Stay the Course” and Require U.S. Steel Keetac Sulfate Limits

DULUTH, MINN., December 8, 2025 – On Wednesday, December 10, Minnesotans will gather outside the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s (MPCA) Duluth office to support the agency’s draft decisions limiting U.S. Steel’s Keetac discharge to comply with the wild rice sulfate standard and denying U.S. Steel a variance that would delay compliance with sulfate pollution limits. They will ask MPCA to “stay the course” and protect water, wild rice, fish, and human health.

The rally will begin at 12:00 noon in the parking lot (harbor side) of the MPCA office in the Paulucci Building in Canal Park. Speakers will include State Senator Jen McEwen; retired aquatic ecologist Janet Keough; Fond du Lac Band Elder Ricky DeFoe; and retired miner and union leader Mike Maleska.

Background: In 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that Keetac violated its previous sulfate permit limits 299 times. In March 2025, the Minnesota Court of Appeals upheld the MPCA’s denial of an 800% less stringent “site-specific” standard for wild rice waters downstream of the Keetac mine area and tailings basin. In July 2025, the MPCA then issued draft Keetac permits setting limits based on the state’s 10 parts per million (ppm) sulfate standard and issued a preliminary denial of U.S. Steel’s request for a variance to put off compliance.

“Northern Minnesota needs clean water, abundant wild rice, and fish that are not contaminated with mercury in order for us to thrive as a region,” stated Sen. Jen McEwen. “It’s long past time for the MPCA to require corporate investments in modern sulfate pollution controls to protect our health, economy, and way of life in the Northland.”

Janet Keough, retired EPA Duluth science director and board president of conservation group WaterLegacy, explained, “The sulfate standard is up to date and scientifically sound. Sulfate levels above 10 ppm harm wild rice by reducing growth, cutting seed production, and leading to population collapse.” She emphasized, “MPCA must rely on science-based enforcement rather than political influence or industry pressure.”

Ricky DeFoe, Fond du Lac Band Elder and Pipe Carrier, highlighted past regulatory failure saying, “It has taken 52 years since the standard was adopted to require any mine in Minnesota to meet it.” He added, “Now is the time for us and MPCA to act. Stand up, step up, and speak up about your great-grandchildren’s future! Listen to their needs.”

Retired Hibbing miner Mike Maleska explained that controlling sulfate pollution will create jobs and avoid future costs to local communities: “Sulfate pollution has been leaking from the Keetac facility for decades. Investing in proper treatment will create good jobs and

protect clean water, healthy fish, and thriving wild rice.” He added “If the MPCA doesn’t act now, taxpayers and local communities will bear the costs of sulfate pollution for decades and even centuries. We’re counting on the MPCA to stand firm, enforce the Keetac permits, deny the variance, and keep Minnesotans safe from toxic pollution.”

Additional Information:

Nippon Steel purchased U.S. Steel in June 2025. Since that purchase, Nippon Steel has promised to invest \$11 billion in U.S. Steel by 2028, including \$800 million in investments at Keetac and Minntac by 2028. In addition, Nippon Steel’s June 2025 purchase agreement prohibits closure or sale of U.S. Steel Keetac or Minntac facilities before June 18, 2035.

Even before this purchase and investment infusion, in its 2024 Annual Report under the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934, U.S. Steel’s CEO and other top executives specifically acknowledged the State of Minnesota’s 10 ppm wild rice sulfate standard, asserted that environmental expenditures “are capitalized if the costs mitigate or prevent future contamination or if the costs improve existing assets’ environmental safety or efficiency,” and stated that “U.S. Steel intends to comply with all legal requirements regarding the environment.”

More information from WaterLegacy on scientific, legal, and economic grounds for MPCA requiring U.S. Steel compliance with Minnesota’s wild rice sulfate standard are available [here](#).