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For immediate release:

October 20, 2016

Iron Range Community Gathers to Discuss Impacts of Wild Rice Water Quality Standard

The Iron Ore Alliance, a joint initiative of U. S. Steel and United Steelworkers, hosted an informational meeting in Mountain Iron

Mountain Iron, Minn. – The Iron Ore Alliance on Wednesday brought together more than 45 Iron Range leaders interested in Minnesota’s wild rice water quality standard to work toward a resolution based on science. Attendees received an update on research and an overview of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s (MPCA) rulemaking process and timeline. Local business leaders and representatives from municipalities received an update about the topic, including information about the MPCA’s public comment period expected to begin in early 2017.

Minnesota has a 43-year-old rule limiting how much sulfate can be discharged into wild rice waters. The current standard of 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L) is not consistently enforced, and there has been significant discussion and research on whether the standard is scientifically supported. Minnesota is the only state with a wild rice sulfate standard.

“We live here, we work here, and we sure as heck care about protecting our environment and safeguarding Minnesota’s wild rice,” said John Rebrovich, Iron Ore Alliance Co-chair and Assistant to the District 11 Director of United Steelworkers Union. “Our priority is making sure that robust data and science drives the MPCA rulemaking process, because quite frankly, it just doesn’t exist yet.”

Speakers Kurt Anderson of Minnesota Power, Rob Beranek of Cliffs Natural Resources, and Chrissy Bartovich of U. S. Steel provided an update about ongoing research that commenced when discussions about the wild rice issue began in 2011. They also provided information about the potential costs to municipalities and industry on the Iron Range of complying with a sulfate water quality discharge standard. In attendance were federal and state Iron Range lawmakers, including Congressman Rick Nolan, State Senator David Tomassoni, and State Representative Rob Ecklund, who all applauded attendees for coming together to learn more about the issue and work toward a science-based solution.

According to information presented at the meeting, installing and operating new treatment technologies to achieve the MPCA's current water quality standard could cost an individual Iron Range city millions of dollars and could require individual households to pay hundreds of dollars per year in new wastewater treatment fees.

“It is clear that some options the MPCA is considering for a revised standard would negatively impact households, businesses, and local governments throughout Minnesota,” said Chris Masciantonio, Iron Ore Alliance co-chair and general manager of state government affairs for U. S. Steel. “It’s important for local communities to participate in the MPCA process. No one wants a rule put in place that costs taxpayers money and in the end, doesn’t protect wild rice. A new rule must be based on credible scientific data and take into account the economic impact on Minnesota households and businesses.”

The Iron Mining Association co-hosted the October 19 meeting, which was held at the Mountain Iron Community Center.

About the Iron Ore Alliance

The Iron Ore Alliance is a joint initiative of the United States Steel Corporation and the United Steelworkers to help educate Minnesotans about the importance of U. S. Steel’s iron ore business. Located in northeastern Minnesota, U. S. Steel’s Minnesota Ore Operations is the state’s largest iron ore producer and a critical part of U. S. Steel’s North American operations. Minntac, located in Mountain Iron, is the single largest iron ore pelletizing operation in the United States. For more information, visit www.ironorealliance.com.

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