

For Immediate Release: December 5, 2023

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Local Groups Charge Governor Walz and State Agencies with Regulatory Failures

St. Paul, MN--- Environmental groups are confronting the Walz administration and state commissioners for failure to enforce existing protections for Minnesota air, water, soil, wildlife and human health.

The Friends of the Boundary Waters, Pollinator Friendly Alliance and Water Legacy are among the many organizations charging the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) for collaborating with or compromising standards for the benefit of extractive industries including mining, timber and fossil fuels corporations as well as industrial agriculture.

At 1:00 PM on December 11 at the state capitol, a group of concerned citizens and environmental groups will deliver a letter to Governor Walz demanding better enforcement and protections for the environment and human health.

Their efforts come on the heels of a November 3, 2023 EPA report that charged Minnesota agencies with failure to protect water resources.

Environmental groups point out that the Walz administration and legislative leaders from both parties are subordinating the public good for the benefit of foreign conglomerates such as Canadian-based Enbridge Energy, Switzerland-based Glencore AG and its subsidiary PolyMet. These corporations have substantial bad track records when it comes to honoring agreements and preventing pollution. For example, Glencore AG is listed by The Guardian as one of the world's most dangerous companies for its record of fatalities and environmental damage.

The groups also object to a pattern of state regulatory agencies overlooking violations and delaying or not enforcing protections in numerous cases. The charges range from small, specific locations such as Smith Foundry in Minneapolis, which has been violating its air permit since 2018, to entire regions such as drinking water in southeast Minnesota affected by toxic runoff from

industrial agriculture operations leaching into groundwater and the unique karst geology.

“In the 1970s, Minnesota was far ahead of the EPA on the issues of protecting our water and land,” said former Minnesota Governor Arnie Carlson. “We excelled nationally because the Minnesota PCA was tough on business and our DNR and Health Department understood they were here to protect the public. That was light years ago.”

“Now moneyed interests are being allowed to shape legislation,” said Carlson. “And media has done an appalling job of reporting on it. The entire thing is corrupt. So who in state government now actually works for the people? This is very, very serious.”

Among the consequences to the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes: the MPCAs biennial reporting of water quality impairments (failing to meet basic water quality standards) grew that list to 6,349.

Don Arnosti is former director of Audubon Minnesota, of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy’s Community Forestry Resource Center and water campaign coordinator for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership among other positions.

“This problem is systemic, widespread and does not include just state but also local agencies and federal agencies, through both Republican and Democrat administrations,” said Arnosti. “We are at the point where commissioners do not enforce the law.”

The commissioners ignore their mandates and also disregard science, said Arnosti, citing the DNR hiking timber quotas to levels that harm wildlife habitat, and the MPCA standing aside when the legislature eliminated its citizens board of experts which held MPCA decisions to account.

“Regulatory malfeasance issues are very opaque under Walz administration,” said Arnosti, pointing out that MPCA records are now automatically deleted in one day to 39 days. “The Walz administration is upfront about this being fine to destroy public records on a routine basis.”

In addition, keeping the public informed of the actions or inactions of the commissions is insufficient, say Arnosti and Carlson.

“We do not have enough environmental and investigative reporters,” said Arnosti. “And generalist reporters don’t have the depth of knowledge or background to cover issues. To have a working democracy means public transparency, following the law, and acting in the public interest.”