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Copper mining critics hold Minnesota Capitol rally, seminar at St. Scholastica

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By: **News Tribune**, Duluth News Tribune

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Wednesday's rally drew about 35 people, including Ojibwe drummers who were not allowed by security officers to drum on the Capitol steps, supporters said.

The rally included speeches, and many of the protesters later entered Gov. Mark Dayton's reception room where they sat quietly and then left messages for the governor urging him to oppose legislation to weaken the state's sulfate standards for wild rice waters.

The rally, organized by a new group called "Protect Our Manoomin," was aimed against HF 1010, state legislation that would raise the state's standard for sulfate in wild rice waters from 10 parts per million to 50 parts per million. Mining supporters say the change is necessary to allow for both new copper and iron ore mine proposals and that the standard will still protect rice. The bill also calls for a new study to determine the impact of sulfate on wild rice.

Opponents say existing data already show that higher sulfate levels damage wild rice in Northeastern Minnesota.

The legislation has passed the House and Senate, but final action by a conference committee is pending.

Meanwhile, on Saturday, copper mining skeptics will meet at St. Scholastica from 12:30-4 p.m. in the Burns Wellness Center, Room 249. The meeting is free and open to the public.