



City of Cottage Grove  
Emily Schmitz  
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Cottage Grove, MN 55016

October 24, 2025

The purpose of this letter is to document Dakota County's concerns regarding the proposed Nelson Mine Backwaters Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

On January 16, 2025, Dakota County submitted comments on the Draft EIS, raising a number of concerns about the project's impact on the Spring Lake Regional Park Reserve (Park), managed by Dakota County, as well as the general health of the Mississippi River. Upon review, it is apparent the Final EIS is substantially unchanged from the Draft EIS, meaning that the further study, mitigation, and avoidance recommendations made by Dakota County have not been addressed—or even further investigated—by the City of Cottage Grove (as the Responsible Government Unit) or applicant Amrize Midwest Inc. Accordingly, it is the County's position that the Final EIS, if left unchanged, is both procedurally and substantively inadequate.

#### Visual Impacts

While the County appreciates that additional photographs from the Park were included in appendix C as part of the visual analysis of the proposed mining operation (for Alternative B – Proposed Action), our conclusions as to anticipated impacts are entirely different. The photos included on pages 6, 7, and 10, illustrate the direct line of sight and prominent visual impact that a 65' tall mining dredge and linear conveyor system would have on park visitor views of the Mississippi River from the Park. The photographs in the Final EIS are taken on Schaar's Bluff at the visitor gathering center and main event lawn, the busiest areas of the park. It is no exaggeration that millions of visitors over the course of the proposed 25-year project will now be looking at a view that frames an active mining operation. We do not think that the magnitude of this impact can be overstated.

However, the Final EIS does not propose mitigation of this significant impact in any meaningful way. Chapter 6 of the Final EIS, which remains entirely unchanged from the Draft EIS, speaks only in generalities about mitigative measures which "may be incorporated" "where feasible" and "where possible." Entirely absent from the document is any mention of the specific concerns raised by the County in its comments to the Draft EIS as to the visual impacts on the Park, much less concrete measures to address these concerns. Simply asserting such concerns "could be" addressed through subsequent study and permitting processes, per the response to County comments in Appendix F, is plainly inadequate.

#### Noise Impacts

As referenced in our original comment letter on the Draft EIS, the 24-hour continuous noise impacts of dredging, conveying, screening, and crushing is entirely incompatible with the peaceful and natural setting of the Park and the

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greater Mississippi River area. The fact that there are other intermittent noises in the area resulting from trains, airplanes, and boats neither minimizes nor excuses the introduction of the type of continuous additional noise anticipated with the project. The occasional, momentary sound of a plane, automobile, or other man-made source is markedly different—in both kind and degree—compared to the constant, monotonous industrial din that will be emitted toward the Park and throughout the river area by the proposed mining operation. While both the Draft and Final EIS cite to a 2010 noise study, said study is not included in either document. Thus, it is impossible for the County to conclude how the measurements or conclusions made in 2010 are relevant, if at all, to the present concerns attributable to the current proposal and conditions. The level and type of noise anticipated by this project could seriously degrade the ability of park visitors to experience the sounds of nature—birds' songs, rustling leaves, flowing water—in a contemplative setting. Again, the Final EIS contains no study or measurements whatsoever that attempt to quantify these impacts, much less any mitigative measures tailored to the County's concern. The stated reliance on the implementation of existing noise measures at the current Nelson Mine site or deferral of the issue to a future permitting process does not adequately address the specifics of the County's comment to the Draft EIS, nor does the conclusory statement that noise levels are anticipated to fall within NAC guidelines.

#### Wildlife and Environmental Impacts

Finally, Dakota County raised concerns about wildlife and environmental impacts in the Draft EIS. It is clear from the overwhelming responses from other agencies in the Final EIS that this is a widely held concern. The oft-recited response in the Final EIS is that these concerns will be addressed in a future permitting process. Again, these concerns are too significant to be disposed of with a cursory 'wait and see' response and are, in fact, central to the decision about whether the Final EIS is adequate under applicable law.

The stakes here are high. The mining operation, as proposed, will impact an entire generation of Park visitors, posing the risk to seriously impair a regional natural and cultural resource which the County has invested millions of dollars in public funds to develop. The proposed Final EIS completely side-steps the above comments posed by the County, along with myriad other interested parties concerning the impacts of the proposal. The time to address these matters is now, not some indeterminate time in the future when the momentum of the project will inevitably create additional challenges. The Final EIS does not take a "hard look" at the concerns raised by the County and other interested parties regarding the impacts raised by the Draft EIS and comments thereto. Accordingly, the County asserts that the Final EIS is inadequate and urges the City to revisit the issues in a more substantive, collaborative manner tailored to the unique resources at risk here.

The County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Nelson Mine Final EIS.

Sincerely,



Heidi Welsch, County Manager  
Dakota County

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