Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has approved a permit for a local farmer to discharge up to 8.64 million gallons of wastewater into the Au Sable River each day. The discharge permit allows Dan Vogler, co-owner of Harrietta Hills Trout Farm LLC, to turn the Grayling Fish Hatchery into the state's largest commercial fish farm, producing 300,000 pounds of trout per year. The effluent from the farm would enter the Au Sable upstream of the 9-mile catch-and-release section known as The Holy Waters. The DEQ admits the water quality on the Au Sable will suffer by allowing a discharge containing 25 pounds of phosphorous and 432 pounds of suspended solids (excrement and uneaten fish food) per day, but says the decrease in water quality is necessary to support "important social and economic development in the area."

The Grayling facility is a historic yet obsolete 100-year-old fish hatchery owned by Crawford County, and leased to Vogler for $1 for the next 20 years with the expectation that Vogler will keep it open to the public as a tourist attraction.

"His business model is for free cold, clear Au Sable River to raise his fish, and also to be the sewer for all his waste," said Tom Baird, president of the conservation group Anglers of the Au Sable (ausableanglers.org). "And he gets the property for a nickel a year."

Anglers of the Au Sable and the Sierra Club have been granted a permit appeal hearing that is open to the public Feb. 8-12, 2016, at the DEQ offices in Lansing Michigan.

After the DEQ granted the permit, State Sen. Rick Jones introduced Senate Bill 526 that would ban all aquaculture in the Great Lakes and also in waters flowing into the Great Lakes (including the Au Sable).

"Concentrated fish poop is just not Pure Michigan," Jones said. "A typical 200,000-fish operation creates as much waste as a city of 65,000 people, which would make the Great Lakes a giant toilet bowl."

In response, Vogler told michigandr.ru.org that "It'd be really a shame to see this ruined by a group of mean-spirited individuals with $2,000 fly rods who are intent on destroying the livelihoods of hardworking farm families."

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Maxine McCormick

Eleven-year-old Maxine McCormick became the youngest person ever named to the American Casting Association's All American Team after scoring a 289 out of a possible 300 points in fly-casting accuracy at the 2015 ACA National Tournament. The score exceeded the current women's fly-casting record by 286 and became a new junior casting record. The score was the fourth highest overall, behind only casting legend Steve Rajeff, her coach Chris Korich, and one point behind her dad Glenn McCormick. The highest women's score at the 2015 nationals was 270.

"Maxine's performance was magical," said Korich. "She executed like Michael Jordan."

Maxine now holds seven junior casting records, six for accuracy, and a 111-foot distance record.

Maxine McCormick holds seven junior national records including a 111-foot distance benchmark.

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Photo: George Daniel

The Holy Waters of the Au Sable is a 9-mile catch-and-release area revered by Michigan flyfishers.

Photo: Glenn McCormick