



For Immediate Release
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For More Information Contact
Tom Baird: 517-290-6647

Administrative Law Judge recommends DEQ permit fish farm to pollute Au Sable River; Anglers of the Au Sable to contest

Lansing, MICH. – Anglers of the Au Sable plans to challenge a recommendation by a state administrative law judge requiring some alterations to a Department of Environmental Quality permit issued to a fish farm in Grayling, but still allowing pollution of the Au Sable River.

“While the judge did call for additional monitoring of the river, and he mandated some minor improvements at the Grayling Fish Hatchery, his ruling still allows fish feces, excess food and escaped farm trout to continue polluting this pristine cold water resource,” said Tom Baird, president of Anglers of the Au Sable, an organization formed to protect the river. “The fish farm will still use the river as its sewer, and that should be unacceptable to all who use and live on this outstanding waterway. We will ask DEQ Director Heidi Grether to reject this permit completely and restore common sense to this situation.”

“We respectfully disagree with the judge’s recommendation on a variety of grounds. We call on anglers from around the state and nation to join us in contesting this permit that will allow the fish farm to degrade the pristine waters of one of America’s top trout rivers,” said Baird. “The judge’s recommendation admits the fish farm will lower water quality in the river. But he said the creation of two minimum wage jobs offset the damage the fish farm likely will do to the river, ignoring the potential negative economic impact the farm will have on fishing, canoeing, local businesses and real estate values on the river.”

Administrative Law Judge Daniel L. Pulter issued his proposal for decision, dated Feb. 1, after the Anglers challenged a DEQ permit allowing Harrietta Hills Trout Farm LLC, operator of a fish farm on the East Branch of the Au Sable River, to discharge pollutants into the river. The Sierra Club also filed.

The river’s clean water is diverted into the fish farm, then is discharged directly back into the river, allowing the fish farm to use the East Branch as its sewer with virtually no cleansing of the water. The fish farm’s capacity could expand from 20,000 to 300,000 pounds a year under the permit.

The state of Michigan runs a state-of-the-art fish hatchery adjacent the Platte River, also an important trout stream in our state. At that facility, water is used by the hatchery and then is thoroughly treated before being discharged into the Platte River. Anglers of the Au Sable has said it would support this type of fish farm in Grayling.

The judge's recommendation calls for the permit to be granted even though:

- The permit will allow the farm to increase phosphorous (a key food for algae), formaldehyde and total suspended solids (silt-like particles) in the river.
- The permit will increase the likelihood of an outbreak of deadly whirling disease in the river.
- Farm-raised fish can escape into the river. While the fish are supposed to be sterile, the judge noted that some will still be capable of breeding with wild river fish, introducing undesired new genes into the Au Sable's fish.

These will endanger the fishery, which is the backbone of the economy along the river and the communities it flows through. But the judge recommended only minor changes to the permit, which will not resolve these important issues.

"We are still shocked that state officials would willingly allow one of the nation's top trout streams to be subject to pollution from any source. To allow Harrietta Hills Trout Farm LLC to discharge pollutants into the Au Sable instead of using proven pollution prevention practices is an outrage to all who live along the river or use the river for recreation," said Baird. "We will continue the fight, and encourage donations to cover expert witness and legal fees at www.ausableanglers.org."