

PRESS ADVISORY

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Conservationists Urge Skiers to Tell Lutsen “Don’t Kill the Poplar”

Conservationists are calling on skiers to tell Lutsen that snowmaking should yield to saving the health of the Poplar River. Over their strong objections, the DNR decided today to give Lutsen Mountains Corporation a special permit to allow it to virtually dry up the Poplar River, a designated trout stream, to make snow for its ski area.

“This is a self-created problem that could have easily been avoided with better planning. The ski resort has apparently built its business plan based on artificial snowmaking, but they have not made any plans to secure a sustainable supply of water. At their doorstep is the world’s largest supply of freshwater yet the owners have chosen to dewater a trout stream rather than use the obvious alternative, Lake Superior.” Said Henry VanOffelen, Natural Resource Scientist of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. “The state’s laws don’t allow a private corporation to wreck a public resource for private corporate gain.”

For the past decade the Lutsen Mountains Corporation has dramatically increased its water appropriation from the trout stream and its water use exceeded the legal limit by nearly 10 times in recent years. In 2011, the Legislature and Governor enacted special legislation giving the company a major exemption from state law. But now, DNR, in violation of the 2011 special statute, will allow the ski resort to draw water from the river to below minimum levels designed to protect the stream. (The 2011 legislation says “appropriation shall cease when flow in the Poplar River falls below 15 cubic feet per second”. The new permit would allow withdrawal down to 5 cubic feet per second citing a “just cause” exemption.)

“DNR is setting a very bad precedent,” said John Lenczewski, Executive Director of Minnesota Trout Unlimited. “The DNR is charged with protecting our public resources -- resources that a large majority of Minnesotans recently voted to protect, restore, and enhance not dry up. The laws that protect these resources benefit all Minnesotans and apply to all Minnesotans equally – the DNR should not be in the business of granting special exemptions for private corporations to improve their bottom line.”

“If the Lutsen ski hill needs snowmaking to be profitable, then it needs a business plan that includes a sustainable source of water for that snow. All Minnesotans should be asking why DNR is giving away our public resource and allowing the ski hill to sacrifice a trout stream” Lenczewski said. “Skiers who care about good snow but not at the expense of rivers, should be outraged.”

In addition, the DNR has indicated that it will allow the Lutsen ski resort to continue to make withdrawals from the Poplar River not just this season, but until 2016. Conservationists assert that there is no justification for allowing the corporation to continue harming the Poplar River and will press for a solution before the next season.

"The Minnesota Environmental Partnership and nearly three dozen of our member organizations opposed the special legislation and we are opposed to this new special permit. We call on Lutsen Mountains Corporation to commit to find a sustainable source of water within a year, and for the DNR to make sure it happens." Said Steve Morse executive director of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, the state’s largest coalition of environmental and conservation organizations.

In comments submitted last week on the proposed permit, eight conservation groups representing thousands of Minnesota members identified many aspects of the then proposed permit that violate state and federal laws. They are weighing next steps.