



DNR NEWS – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DNR seeking comments through Nov. 4 on permit to draw water from Poplar River

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking public comments on a proposal for a temporary permit that would allow Lutsen Mountain Corporation (LMC) to continue to draw water from the Poplar River for its snowmaking operation. Normally, pumping operations would be discontinued due to the river's low flow, but the DNR is authorized by statute to allow exceptions under unique circumstances.

The 2011 Legislature authorized LMC to take up to 150 million gallons of water from the Poplar River for snowmaking this fall, but included a provision that suspends the appropriation if flows fall below 15 cubic feet per second (cfs) for more than five consecutive days. The flow in the river has been at or near that threshold for weeks. A separate provision of Minnesota statutes, however, authorizes the DNR to issue a permit beyond what is normally allowed if there is "just cause."

In this case, the DNR believes there is just cause to issue LMC a permit based on the potential economic impacts to the local community, the low numbers of trout present in the affected reach of river, and the likelihood that some trout mortality will occur, whether LMC temporarily appropriates water or not.

"The most important aspect of this issue is that the Poplar River is not a long-term sustainable source of water for LMC," explained DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr. "We need concurrence from LMC and key legislators that they are committed to finding an alternate source of water for snowmaking – probably Lake Superior – within three years to prevent a reoccurrence of this very difficult situation."

According to the DNR, the average flow for the Poplar River in November is 86 cfs. It has been hovering around 20 cfs for some time, and will likely drop significantly during winter, when limited water drains into the river.

The draft permit and an FAQ with additional background information can be found at www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/issues/poplar_river/index.html.

The public may submit comments from Oct. 26 through Nov. 4 at publiccomment.dnr@state.mn.us.