

April 28, 2006

Re: Petition requiring an EAW for a Commercial Planned Unit Development on Deer Lake, DNR DOW No. 31-0719, Unorg. #45, District 2, Itasca County

To whom it may concern:

As a veterinarian and physiologist and currently Professor Emeritus, University of Minnesota, I have served as an advisor and board member for organizations that seek to protect human and animal health and the welfare of Minnesota's residents. These organizations include the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, Minnesota Lakes Association, and Aitkin and Itasca County Lakes Associations.

Deer Lake exhibits classical oligotrophy and is an outstanding resource, one of only 40 native muskellunge lakes in Minnesota. The establishment of a large commercial enterprise on the shoreland of Deer Lake will have significant harmful environmental impacts, not only on the fisheries and wildlife that currently live in the area but on water quality as well. Recent ordinance updates focused on ensuring that water quality, fisheries and shoreland aesthetics would be adequately protected as development of shoreland continued. Attempts to reach these objectives have been well described in reports on management planning for Deer Lake and for Itasca County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) that was adopted in 2000. Because of the many harmful environmental impacts, the proposed Commercial PUD should not be located in this environmentally sensitive site.

In seeking to protect Itasca County's lakes and shorelands that are not as fully developed as in parts of Minnesota to the south, citizens urged adoption of protective goals and objectives in the CLUP. Included, for example, were the following:

Page 19: "IV. Commercial/Industrial Goal, L. Commercial Development Objective – Direct commercial development to existing commercial nodes and areas with adequate transportation, sewer and water infrastructure." ... "3. Location of commercial development – Discourage commercial development of lakeshore, and encourage commercial development in existing commercial areas and designated areas with adequate transportation, sewer and water infrastructure."

Page 12: "II. Housing and Development Patterns Goal – G. Lakeshore Development Objective – Area 2 – Single-family homes – Encourage new lakeshore development as single-family homes."

Page 21: "V. Recreation Goal – F. Sensitive Areas Objective – Identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas. 3. Limit trail development – Limit trail development through environmentally sensitive areas."

In addition to the aforementioned actions, one conservation easement and an acquisition through the DNR Aquatic Management Area (AMA) program now protects over 1/2 mile of lakeshore in Kocemba's Bay that is immediately adjacent to the proposed site for the Commercial PUD. Almost 1/3 of the muskies captured in the 2003 assessment were captured in nets in that bay, indicating the importance of the area to the muskellunge population. This area is intended to protect one of the best spawning areas in Deer Lake for muskies and other species as well as providing an unspoiled, natural area for a variety of wildlife and waterfowl. Habitat protection through wise lakeshore development and widely practiced catch and release will maintain and possibly improve the quality of this unique fishery.

A Commercial PUD located in the proposed shoreland of Deer Lake ignores plans of citizen of Itasca County who, over the last 8 years, were guided by the advice of professional resource managers and were encouraged to take a long term view. Large numbers of active visitors repeatedly venturing into the sensitive near shore lake, with or without watercraft, will stir up bottom sediments, kill or impair aquatic plants, destroy spawning habitat and impair or inhibit reproduction of the muskellunge. Wildlife species that inhabit the eastern shoreland of Deer Lake require protection from human activity for their survival. Activities associated with nearly daily, year-around use of the shoreland area by large numbers of visitors in a commercial venture is expected to eliminate most of the suitable environment and wildlife habitat in this area.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Dziuk, PhD
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