

May 18, 2006

To: Itasca County Board of Commissioners
Cc: Robert Olson, County Auditor
Don Dewey, Environmental Services Director
Mike Haig, Assistant County Attorney

From: Dick Osgood
OSGOOD CONSULTING

RE: Petition for Environmental Assessment Worksheet
Living Word Bible Camp Application, Deer Lake

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I represent Holly Newton, who represents the petitioners for an environmental assessment worksheet (EAW) regarding the Living Word Bible Camp's application for a conditional use permit on Deer Lake. The Commission is considering whether to order the EAW, as requested in the petition. I am writing in support of that action.

I am a professional lake ecologist, or limnologist, and lake manager and environmental planner and have 30 years experience working with Minnesota lake issues. As well I have served on numerous boards, currently serving as an Executive Officer and chair of the Public Policy Committee on Minnesota Waters.

As you are aware, the Commission's action to order an EAW follows a finding that the proposed project may have "the potential for significant environmental effects." My comments speak to this issue.

Deer Lake is of Exceptional Quality

Deer Lake lies within the Northern Lakes and Forests (NLF) Ecoregion. In Minnesota, ecoregions are large areas with lakes sharing similar physical, chemical and geographical traits. The NLF Ecoregion contains the highest quality lakes of all of Minnesota's ecoregions. Based on reports of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Itasca County Soil and Water Conservation District, Deer Lake's water quality is in the 'upper quartile' of lakes in the NLF Ecoregion. Simply, Deer Lake's quality is in the upper tier of lakes in the NLF Ecoregion, which collectively are in the upper tier of all lakes in Minnesota - among the best of the best.

Ecologically, Deer Lake is classified as 'oligotrophic,' literally meaning nutrient-poor. Oligotrophic lakes are exceptionally high quality and exceptionally sensitive to impacts. Land use changes will result in increases in runoff volumes as well as increases in the kinds and amounts of pollution carried in the runoff. There are

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some measures that will minimize these increases in pollution, but there are no measures that will totally eliminate the increases. Thus, because Deer Lake is highly sensitive, any land use changes and the attendant increases in runoff pollution, have the potential for negative environmental effects.

It is also important to weigh these impacts against the cumulative impacts that might be expected in the context of future developments on Deer Lake. The analysis of such cumulative effects is an element of the EAW. Without that evaluation, it is not possible to objectively assess the incremental impacts of individual developments. This is especially critical for a sensitive lake like Deer Lake, because once watershed changes are in place and a lake becomes polluted, it cannot be undone. Indeed, there are no known documented cases in North America where runoff pollution is mitigated after the fact and a lake has recovered!

For these reasons, a precautionary approach to considering lakeshore and watershed development around Deer Lake is the only rational approach.

Other Considerations in Support of Ordering and EAW

1. Land use and zoning controls consider environmental impacts only in a very general way and in the context of a 'lowest common denominator.' Land use and zoning controls should not be relied on in lieu of a more specific environmental assessment.
2. The proposal lacks a stormwater management plan. In addition to the typical impervious surfaces – rooftop, roads, etc. – there are other development activities that will have the effect of compacting the land surface, making it impervious as a practical matter. It is not possible to fully evaluate lake impacts lacking a complete stormwater management plan. As with no. 1

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above, stormwater management ordinances should not be relied upon in lieu of a proper evaluation.

3. The possibility of routing stormwater into a wetland presumes the wetland will provide mitigation of the impacts. Wetlands do not uniformly or totally mitigate the impacts of stormwater runoff. Also, the stormwater may cause impacts to the wetland directly.
4. In addition to land runoff, there are possible shore-related environmental effects. I have reviewed MN DNR Fisheries concerns and note there are sensitive aquatic plants and fisheries habitat adjacent to the proposed development. Specifically, the plant chara, has been demonstrated to be one of the most susceptible to disturbance from boating and adjacent shore uses. The marl substrate and the presence of chara point to another level of sensitivity and therefore a potential for environmental effects.

The EAW is designed to provide a reasonably quick overview of possible environmental effects.

Because Deer Lake is of high quality from many perspectives - water quality, fisheries, wildlife - and because Deer Lake is especially sensitive to impacts in these areas, ordering an EAW is a wise and prudent precaution.