2/17/09 Summary of proposal

Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited

Identification of Fish Habitat Restoration Priorities and Resource Investment Proposal to the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council

February 23, 2009

The Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited respectfully submits this brief report to the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council identifying high priority, "shovel ready", fish habitat restoration, preservation, and enhancement projects spread across Minnesota. Trout Unlimited, as part of its ongoing coldwater fisheries habitat restoration and enhancement programs, has identified several priority projects which it proposes to complete in 2009 and 2010. Many of these projects have some funding from our customary, primarily private, sources. However, supplemental investment from the outdoor heritage fund would ensure their rapid completion and dramatically increase their scope. This increased impact would begin benefiting all Minnesotans as early as fall 2009!

As part of our ongoing program of trout and salmon habitat restoration and enhancement, the Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited ("MNTU") has identified the priority conservation projects listed below. MNTU proposes to restore or enhance fish habitat in 2009 and 2010 in and along the following Minnesota waters (counties):

1. Hay Creek (Goodhue);
2. Kabekona Creek (Hubbard);
3. Lawndale (Wilkin);
4. Little Rock Creek (Benton);
5. Middle Branch of Whitewater (Olmsted);
6. Mill Creek (Fillmore);
7. Pickwick (Winona);
8. Trout Run Creek (Fillmore);
9. Straight River (Becker &Hubbard);
10. Sucker River (St. Louis);
11. Vermillion River (Dakota).

Our mission is to conserve, protect, restore and sustain Minnesota's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds. The Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited is a part of a larger national non-profit, 501(c)(3), conservation organization working to conserve, protect, restore, and sustain coldwater fisheries across North America. Our several thousand Minnesota members, spread across the state in seven chapters, are dedicated volunteers working to protect and improve Minnesota's trout and salmon fisheries. Our vision is that by the next generation, Trout Unlimited will ensure that robust populations

of native and wild trout and salmon will thrive in Minnesota's coldwater lakes and streams, so that our children can enjoy healthy fisheries in their home waters.

Our habitat work: An important part of Minnesota Trout Unlimited's work is the restoration and enhancement of coldwater fish habitat. Trout Unlimited is the national leader in trout and salmon habitat restoration work, and is celebrating its 50th anniversary of coldwater conservation work. In Minnesota, our chapters and members have been planning, funding and executing high quality fish habitat restoration and enhancement projects for more than 25 years. All our conservation work is guided by the best available science and consequently we identify, design and complete habitat work based on science and biology and target it toward long term self-sustainability. Our habitat restoration and enhancement work is tailored to the conditions found in each ecologically-based regions and watershed to ensure sustained increases in trout and salmon abundance. MNDNR surveys confirm that our habitat improvement projects consistently produce significant, sustained increases in adult trout abundance, even with the increased angling pressure which usually accompanies them.

Trout Unlimited meets all criteria for funding: MNTU's funding request meets all the proposal and organizational criteria laid out in the LOHC guidance document adopted January 12, 2009. The full proposal which we will present on February 23, 2009 will detail all this. MNTU is uniquely positioned to complete fish habitat improvements in 2009. Trout Unlimited is the only NGO which has been undertaking significant fisheries habitat restoration and enhancement work in Minnesota. While we believe that habitat acquisition, whether by fee or by permanent conservation easement, should be a top funding priority, the public expects that a portion of the outdoor heritage fund will be spent on fish habitat restoration and enhancement. For many years Minnesota Trout Unlimited has been working with our partners to prioritize fish habitat restoration projects and we have identified a number of "shovel ready' projects which we can complete in 2009 and 2010. Our national organization has agreed not only to administer any funds we may receive, but to advance its own funds to our Minnesota chapters so that the habitat work can begin as early as June 2009.

Trout Unlimited (TU) is well positioned to administer funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund and has a long track record of effectively administering such projects. Since Trout Unlimited was founded in 1959, on-the-ground restoration of streams, watersheds, and fisheries has been our hallmark. Since 1994, TU national staff has complimented these local efforts by implementing an impressive array of large-scale watershed projects under its flagship program, the Home Rivers Initiatives. The Kickapoo Valley Watershed Conservation Project in Wisconsin, which operated from 1996 to 1999, was the second site in the nation for TU's Home Rivers Initiative. A project manager was located in Southwest Wisconsin to work with cooperating agencies to build the capacity of groups to conduct both stream and watershed protection projects. Many of these coldwater streams are again capable of supporting naturally reproducing populations of wild trout, a sign that overall watershed health is improving. Area resource management agencies and sports clubs began to restore degraded stream habitat, further improving the fishery. Their activities helped TU's project succeed and contributed to the region's emergence as a regionally important fishery.

Trout Unlimited currently leads the Driftless Area Restoration Effort (TUDARE) Program in Southeastern Minnesota. This program is one of TU's most ambitious endeavors yet to restore and protect coldwater streams and their watersheds. The project started in June of 2006 with a full-time manager. The project is located in the heart of the Upper Mississippi River basin, the 24,000 square-mile unglaciated, or "Driftless", region of northeast Iowa, southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin, and northwest Illinois is one of America's unique natural resource treasures. The landscape is characterized by craggy limestone and sandstone valleys, steep hillsides and abundant coldwater springs.

More than 600 spring creeks interlace the 24,000 square-mile landscape and drain into the Mississippi River. The streams support populations of native brook trout and wild brown trout.

In addition, TU has several productive partnerships with federal agencies which enhance out ability to restore rivers and fisheries across the country. Several of the Home Rivers projects are funded through the Bring Back the Natives (BBN) program. BBN is a national grant program established in 1991 to fund restoration of native aquatic species and their habitats on public lands. Trout Unlimited is currently working with program partners, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service, to establish new restoration programs throughout North America.

Each year Trout Unlimited has an external financial audit completed. The last audit was completed by McGladrey & Pollen and there were no serious negative findings.

Short summary of priority fish habitat projects, listed alphabetically:

Hay Creek (Goodhue): To mitigate the effects of agricultural run-off and sedimentation into the watershed we will restore at least another 3,000 feet of degraded stream. This will include sloping degraded banks, stabilizing them and planting native grasses. The stream channel will be narrowed and cover structures installed to provide better fish habitat. The project will reduce sediment loads and chemicals in the creek, and provide a stable environment for the aquatic species that depend on the watershed.

Kabekona Creek (Hubbard): Install fencing along one half mile of stream to reverse and prevent damage from grazing, including hillside erosion, loss of vegetative cover, loss of vegetative shading, widening of the stream channel, animal waste entering the stream, and consequent increased water temperatures.

Lawndale (Wilkin): Restoration of 3.5 miles of stream channel of a rare, spring fed, prairie brook trout stream located in the Red River Valley. Involves reconstruction of historic channel to restore trout habitat, historic hydrologic patterns and the water table in a WMA. It will provide flood storage capacity and benefit plants, birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles dependant upon this prairie wetland ecosystem.

Little Rock Creek (Benton): Brush cutting and bundling on 2,000 feet of this St. Cloud area stream. Includes removal of brush to permit growth of native prairie grasses, reduce erosion, narrow and deepen the stream channel, and lower water temperatures to benefit brook trout and other fish and micro-invertebrates.

Middle Branch of Whitewater (Olmsted); Mill Creek (Fillmore); Pickwick (Winona); and Trout Run Creek (Fillmore): Accelerate restoration of approximately **5 miles**, or 300 acres, of in-stream habitat and stream banks through out SE Minnesota in 2009 and 2010. Trout Unlimited has been the leader in the design and construction of productive trout stream habitat improvements. Using qualified and experienced TU members in design and construction, MNDNR personnel in permitting and assessment, volunteer TU labor, and private fundraising to pay contractors, TU restores approximately one half mile of stream per year in Southeastern MN. Supplemental funding will enable us to accelerate stream restoration to more than 2.5 miles per year. Our habitat restoration and improvement projects enhance stream quality, cure stream bank erosion and increase stream productivity including trout populations. Removal of undesirable woody vegetation from the stream corridors is also included.

Straight River (Becker &Hubbard): Considered one of the top 100 best trout streams in America. Continue MNTU's program of placing large trees in strategic locations in the stream channel to narrow and deepen the channel, provide fish cover and trap sediments.

Sucker River (St. Louis): Restoration of year-round adult trout cover and habitat to provide a stable brook trout fishery in this important trout stream between Duluth and Two Harbors. Work includes placement of woody cover and rock veining along 1,300 feet of the Sucker River, seeding of disturbed areas with native riparian vegetation, tree planting and fencing in the riparian corridor.

Vermillion River (Dakota): The first of two projects on this rare metro area stream addresses stream bank erosion and an over-wide channel along approximately 4,000 feet of stream channel. A number of methods will be used to stabilize stream banks and provide habitat for trout and other species. The second project will restore a more natural stream channel to a section ditched prior to the 1930's. The new stream channel will replace the existing mile of ditch with over 1.5 miles of meandering stream channel. Fish cover structures will be installed on bends to enhance habitat and to help stabilize the stream banks.

Estimated OHF investment needed to complete all priority projects listed above: $2,200,000

On behalf of all MNTU members and all Minnesota anglers, we thank you for your consideration of request. We are confident that the taxpayers of Minnesota will agree that the fish habitat restoration and enhancement projects that Minnesota Trout Unlimited will complete in 2009 and 2010 are exactly the type of conservation work which they hoped to see accomplished when they voted for passage of the Lessard Amendment.