John P. Lenczewski, Executive Director
Minnesota Trout Unlimited
PO Box 845
Chanhassen, MN 55317
612.670.1629
John.lenczewski@mntu.org

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Representative Samantha Vang
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Vang and Members of the Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee:

I write today on behalf of Minnesota Trout Unlimited's thousands of members around the state to express our concern over the impacts that persistent nitrate pollution are having on aquatic resources and our angling culture. We are alarmed by the decades of inaction to effectively curb nitrate pollution from agricultural runoff and feedlots to our streams and rivers.

Minnesota Trout Unlimited is a grassroots conservation organization working to protect, restore and sustain coldwater fisheries and their watersheds across Minnesota. Our several thousand members living and working in communities around the state understand that activities on the land determine the quality of the water in streams and lakes, and the health of trout and aquatic organisms that live in these waters. We have been improving stream habitat since the 1960s and in the past 15 years we have restored habitat on more than 100 miles of Minnesota streams.

We all want clean water for drinking. But we are particularly concerned about the impacts of nitrate contamination on coldwater ecosystems, **since nitrates reduce the size and potential survival of trout populations.** Nitrates act as nutrient enrichment which can lead to algal blooms, oxygen depletion, and a general deterioration of trout habitat. Increased nitrates in streams can lead to decreased suitability of habitat, especially for spawning and nursery areas; stress on adult fish which can make them more susceptible to disease and impact their reproductive success; and have been shown to decrease the number of aquatic insects available as a trout food.

Unique landscape and world-class fishery in southeast Minnesota

Southeastern Minnesota, often called the Driftless or Karst Region, is a unique landscape dominated by porous limestone that makes it especially susceptible to groundwater contamination. Water can move rapidly from the surface to groundwater through fractures and conduits in the limestone rock. Nitrates come from a variety of sources, both natural and human based, but we know agricultural runoff and livestock manure are the primary sources. In fact, **90% of nitrate in Southeastern Minnesota's waters comes from fertilized croplands.** (MPCA, 2013. Manure applications from feedlot operations are one means by which excess nitrogen runs off cropland. Nitrogen also seeps straight through drainage tile lines and other pathways directly into the groundwater.

Groundwater emerges from the springs common in this landscape that feed our coldwater trout, but also provide a direct conduit from the surface to groundwater aquifers for pollutants like nitrates. Even modest rainfall events can wash manure applied to the land into sink holes, underground waterways, and streams.

Nitrate Pollution Impacts Minnesota's Economy

What is at stake is the health of public waters and public fisheries which are a major economic engine in southeast Minnesota. The hilly southeast portion of the state has no natural lakes and fishing here means stream fishing, primarily trout fishing. An economic study conducted in 2016 determined that trout angling in southeast Minnesota generates more than **878 million dollars in economic activity annually**. The number of trout anglers has grown by approximately 20% since that study and the economic boon to southeast Minnesota and the State now likely **exceeds 1 billion dollars per year.** Trout angling is an economic boon to southeast Minnesota and the State.

Nitrate Pollution Must Be Addressed

Preserving both our fishing culture and fishing economy requires protecting public waters from nitrate pollution. Two recent reports from the Minnesota Departments of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency offer some suggestions for reducing nitrate contamination. But they do not go far enough to effectively address the crisis our trout streams and water resources face.

Numerous bills will come before your committee this session. We urge you to act boldly to reduce the amount of nitrates reaching our groundwater and ultimately our surface waters.

Respectfully,

John P. Lenczewski