

For immediate release
December 7, 2005

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Judge blocks pre-drilling work near Au Sable River

Michigan anglers celebrated a victory today, when a federal judge halted plans by oil and gas companies to bulldoze Forest Service land near the Au Sable River in preparation for drilling. A federal court judge in Bay City issued a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction in response to an emergency motion from the Anglers of the Au Sable, the Sierra Club and Tim Mason.

“The courts are showing what Michigan anglers have known all along: that the Au Sable River is one of the most special places in our state, and shouldn’t be hastily destroyed,” said Rusty Gates, President of the Anglers of the Au Sable. “Not only is the Au Sable a world-class trout stream, it’s part of our heritage that we want to pass on to our children.”

“Fishing and oil just don’t go together, period. What about that is so hard for the Forest Service and Savoy Energy to understand?” added Alan Diodore of Grayling, a member of the Anglers of the Au Sable.

The groups argued successfully that the courts need to hear all the facts before companies can rush forward with oil and gas drilling at this site. Experts for the conservation organizations spelled out the damage to hunters, anglers and other recreational users of the area, and the likelihood that the proposed bulldozing would set back old growth conditions on the site 150 to 500 years, causing irreparable harm.

The lawsuit was brought after the federal agencies failed to consider viable alternate sites for Savoy to use to access the oil and gas rights they have leased under the Mason Tract. The Forest Service approved the permit despite the largest outpouring of opposition in the history of the Huron Manistee National Forest to any proposed project. Motion for a preliminary injunction requested by the conservation organizations were filed today as well.

The two experts for the Anglers and the Sierra Club were Charlie Guenther, former head of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Division, and Dr. Burton V. Barnes, emeritus professor with the University of Michigan. “Scientific experts have shown how critical this area is to our environment,” said Marvin Roberson of the Sierra Club. “But the biggest experts of all are the generations of hunters, anglers, hikers and others who have been coming here for generations—and we are speaking out to say no to drilling.”

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