

Kentucky Fly Fisher

Au Sable River: World Class Trout Stream Protected

By **Tim Guilfoile**

The Au Sable is a major tributary to Lake Huron. It drains a north-south basin that includes 1,932 square miles in north-central lower Michigan. Many of us have fished the Au Sable River but many may not be aware of the fight that has been going on for years to protect the river.

In a major victory for anglers, hikers and canoeists, the US Forest Service has dropped its appeal of a Federal Court decision to protect the Mason Tract and nearby Au Sable River from oil and gas drilling. The Au Sable River is one of the world's premier blue ribbon trout streams.

The agency action follows a decision issued by Michigan Eastern District Federal Court Judge David M. Lawson in July. The decision came in response to concerns raised by the Anglers of the Au Sable, Sierra Club, and Tim Mason about the Forest Service plan to allow Savoy Energy Company to clearcut and drill on National Forest

land adjacent to the Mason Tract and within earshot of the river.

The Federal Court found that the Forest Service failed to adequately consider the environmental impacts and alternatives to address concerns including noise and habitat destruction in its plan. As a result the court enjoined the Forest Service from engaging in any activities. The decision by the Forest Service to drop its appeal leaves the lower court decision and injunction in place and protects the Au Sable River.

"This portion of the Au Sable is the most pristine trout stream in the lower peninsula" said Rusty Gates, President of the Anglers of the Au Sable, a Federation of Fly Fishers affiliated club. "People come here from all over the world to enjoy the beauty and solitude afforded by this river. We're glad to see that it remains protected"

The Mason Tract was established in 1955 when Tim Mason's grandfather, George Mason, bequeathed a 1,500 acre parcel with eleven miles of frontage on the South Branch of the Au Sable River to the State of Michigan. George Mason's gift was conditioned on maintaining the pristine condition of the Tract.

According to Tim Mason, who represented the living Mason heirs in this suit, "This unique gift that my Grandfather left to the people of Michigan and this country has provided recreational hikers, skiers, canoeists and dedicated fishermen and sportsmen an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors in ways that are rare and hard to find these days. On behalf of our Grandfather and the rest of the Mason family we are grateful for the efforts of The Anglers of the Au Sable, Sierra Club, and all of the volunteers that made this happen."

