

Friends of the Upper Delaware River

For Immediate Release
September 2, 2010

For more information:
Dan Plummer, FUDR chairman
catskilldan@mac.com
(607) 363-7848

Summer 2010 Crisis Alert No. 3: **Mismanagement of Upper Delaware River Again Imperils Trout As Heat Wave Arrives**

The summer season is ending the way it began, with the upper Delaware River's wild trout at peril from rising water temperatures. Government mismanagement of this precious natural resource is largely at fault.

Friends of the Upper Delaware River, a nonprofit environmental group, is again calling on officials to respond to this emergency by ordering additional releases of cold water from the New York City reservoirs that feed the river.

"We are going to relentlessly keep the pressure on the water bureaucracy until they use some common sense to deal with this recurring crisis," said Al Caucci, FUDR vice president and a legendary flyfisherman, guide and author. "All they need to do is open the spigot to allow more life-sustaining cold water to flow from the reservoirs. There is plenty of water to go around."

On Monday, as water temperatures on the river reached 70 degrees in places, the New York City reservoirs were 75 percent full overall, with Roundout at 94 percent of capacity and the Croton system at 86 percent.

Water temperatures were expected to go even higher as air temperatures in the Hancock, N.Y., area were forecast to reach the 90s through Thursday. The river stretch from Hancock downstream to Lordville, N.Y., is regarded as the heart of the Delaware's wild trout fishery.

Trout are subjected to potentially lethal stress when water temperatures rise above 68 degrees. The aquatic insects essential to keeping the trout healthy are at risk, as well.

FUDR is issuing its third water temperature "Crisis Alert" of the summer. Temperature spikes in late May and a sustained heat wave after July 4th took a deadly toll on the brown and rainbow trout that thrived in the Delaware's main stem for more than 100 years.

Caucci says it has become abundantly clear that this federally designated National Wild and Scenic River has been subjected to mismanagement by the Delaware River Basin Commission, the multi-state entity charged with overseeing the system. Also to blame is the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, which has extraordinary influence with the DRBC.

Water temperatures are based largely on the volume of cold-water releases from the bottom of reservoirs, and protocols for the rates of release are spelled out in the so-called Flexible Flow Management Program, approved in 2007 by the commission.

FUDR has long been a critic of yo-yo water releases from the New York City reservoirs, which often flow heavy when trout need it least and are throttled down to a trickle when the fish need it most. FUDR advocates a common-sense release plan that would benefit the wildlife as well as those who live on and visit the river for recreation.

The simple solution, supported by environmental groups and fishery experts, is a steady release of water that will keep the water temperature below 68 degrees at Lordville.

FUDR and other interested parties have suggested a minimum flow rate of about 600 cubic feet per second out of Cannonsville Reservoir into the West Branch of the Delaware from April through September. Currently, the flow rate often is throttled back to about half that.

Even those who devised the flow plan now admit its shortcomings, but the water bureaucracy has refused to make the adjustments it knows are needed.

At the very least, the bureaucrats must devise a new water-release agreement that includes a rational emergency response mechanism to deal with these inevitable heat crises, or more preferably get a plan in place that actually works.

"It's time, once and for all, to revamp and modernize the management plan to take into account the health of the river corridor, its fish life and the millions of folks who live here," said Joe Demalderis, an upper Delaware River flyfishing guide and FUDR board member.

FUDR is urging the river's residents, fishing enthusiasts, those who use the river system for recreation, and those in the region who earn a living from outdoors tourism to contact their elected officials or the DRBC to let them know that they value a healthy river and oppose the flawed flow plan.