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## **Testimony to the Legislative Subcommittee on Water Policy**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about this important issue. My name is Doug Thomas. I and my wife are business owners in Henderson, Minnesota. I trust you are familiar with Henderson. We're in the news nearly every year, sometimes three, four, five times a year. We are the flood capital of Minnesota and I can attest to the flood history of the area for the past nearly seventy years. Trust me, we can't take much more water.

We have experienced eight near one-hundred-year floods in the past twenty years. I can only remember three or four in the previous fifty years. And as much as we appreciate your assistance to raise our roads in the recent bonding bill, that is just putting a band aid on a symptom of something much bigger. It has become obvious to us that whatever happens upstream on the Minnesota River affects us dramatically two days later. When a storm system moves through the state, we don't look to see how much rain we got, we want to know how much Redwood Falls, Granite Falls, New Ulm and Mankato got. A six-inch rainfall in any of those places causes us to check our sandbag inventory. When it happens, it is likely that three of the four roads in and out of Henderson are going to be closed, and often for a considerable length of time. I'm sure I'm not the first to tell you that flowing water starts local and can become a big problem for many others. Our waters don't recede until the tiles and the channels stop running full.

For the Henderson area that problem manifests in three major ways: First, it is a major safety issue. Our police, fire and ambulance services are severely restricted due to impassable roads during floods. We've been fortunate so far to not have a serious health crisis or a fire at one of our many marooned households or farms. Second is the economic loss to our community. It is estimated that the cost to Henderson when the three roads are closed is \$93,000 a day and that doesn't include loss of business to our Main Street. In 2018, our roads were closed sixty-one days. You do the math. We are a tourist community, our downtown is a national historic preservation district. If people can't get to our community, we don't thrive. Five years ago, the City of Henderson conducted a comprehensive planning process. The number one

issue in every major category was flood mitigation. It affects housing, business, infrastructure, transportation and other government services.

Our third problem is protecting the future of our community from eminent and even greater floods. Our levee is currently certified by the Army Corps of Engineers as a One Hundred Year levee and needs be recertified in a couple of years. It likely will not be because of the recent water history in the basin. It will need to be upgraded at a cost of tens of millions of dollars and if not, no one in lower Henderson will be able to get flood insurance. I don't know of anyone living there who isn't seriously worried about the water coming over the levee in the not-so distant future and destroying our hometown.

What has this got to do with Limbo Creek? We think it's all too obvious. Whether it's Limbo Creek, Hawk Creek, the Cottonwood River or any other tributary of the Minnesota River, controlling runoff is essential to the health and long-term vitality of the entire Minnesota River Basin. Good water policy is critical. Bad water policy is not just local and inevitably leads to problems downstream. Our former mayor is fond of saying the Minnesota River basin is "one gigantic storm sewer". I'd like to think better of us and that's why we support the Department of Natural Resources effort to clarify the public waters inventory regarding Limbo Creek.

Thank you for listening.

Respectfully

Doug Thomas