Statement of Kristen Hoeft
Student Delegate from Minnesota
Youth Watershed Summit (October 6-10, 2002)

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. Good Morning and thank you so much for inviting me here to talk with you about the Clean Water Act. My name is Kristen Hoeft. I come before the Committee as a representative of the Youth Watershed Summit and as a citizen of the land of 11,842 lakes, the great State of Minnesota. I am currently a senior at the School of Environmental Studies in Apple Valley, Minnesota. Mr. Chairman, I am very honored to be appearing before you today and I want to share my thoughts about growing up in Minnesota, a State that has water virtually everywhere. I have been able to experience some of our State's beautiful lakes and rivers from canoeing in the boundary waters in northern Minnesota, hiking along the shores of Lake Superior or boating on the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers.

My parents felt it was very important for me to know how to swim and to learn boating safety because we spend most of our summers along the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers. I look back and realize the important foundation my parents gave me because, not only do I enjoy the recreational aspect of the water we have in Minnesota, but I also have come to appreciate water ecology, the need to educate people about shore erosion and the reduction of chemical pollution in our lakes, rivers and streams. Over the years, I have seen the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers flood many times where farmers have lost crops and precious topsoil. This erosion has not only hurt the farmers, it adds to the pollution of the Minnesota and eventually the Mississippi River. I have come to understand that it is not only topsoil that is eroding into our stream and lake waters it is also the variety of chemicals used in the farming process.

I have always thought that if our country's pollution problems were really important, the adults would take care of…. finding a solution to pollution. But I have come to realize that this has not always been the case.

In my junior year of high school, I decided to attend the School of Environmental Studies (SES) because it is a much smaller setting than the traditional high school. From the four high schools in our district, 200 juniors and 200 seniors are selected to attend. SES, as it is known, has an innovative way of teaching the basic subjects of English, Social Studies and Science by collecting data, analyzing it and reporting the information blending all three subjects together with an environmental theme.

The mission statement of SES reads "a community of leaders learning to enhance the relationships between people and their environments." The first project of my junior year started with the Pond Profiles. This is an activity that the City of Eagan helps us with a great deal. We were given a course in identifying water plants and organisms as well as land plants and running chemical tests. Then we were sent out with a teacher to a specific lake or pond in the City of Eagan. While at the pond or lake, we were required to identify organisms found in and around the water and conduct several water quality tests such as Secchi disk to determine the clarity of the pond or lake and chemical tests such as pH and dissolved oxygen.

All of this data is collected and then presented to the City of Eagan water officials and put on permanent record in Eagan. We provide this service because with over 1,000 ponds, lakes and wetlands in the watershed city staff do not have time to collect such data. This is the first of many such projects that SES does for the City of Eagan. This was a gratifying way to expand the learning process beyond the classroom and I enjoyed it thoroughly. Learning environmental science with hands on experience is much more interesting than just reading out of a textbook. That is why we at SES are excited about participating with America's Clean Water Foundation and its many co-sponsors, in National Water Monitoring Day. On October 18, 2002, students, seniors, professionals and those who just want to help protect water quality are coming together to sample water quality throughout the nation. I am so excited to think that hundreds of thousands of people will join together on the actual 30th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act to test for pH, DO, temperature and turbidity.

Another experience I have regarding the environment is that I frequently walk my dog around the lake at the park across the street from my home. It is a small lake that is enjoyed by many people in the area. Any time of the year you will see people fishing in the lake. In the spring when the snow and ice have melted the lake is beautiful. It appears to be clean and clear. But looks can be deceiving because by early summer the growth of algae is so thick that it would appear as if you could walk across the lake. The city then comes in with a large machine that harvests the weeds and rids the lake of most of the algae. I wish that the same people that enjoy that lake year round would take some time to think about the chemicals that they dump on theirs lawns to make their lawns lush and green at the expense of the water quality of the lakes in our watershed district. The City of Eagan is attempting to combat the phosphorus chemicals found in the fertilizer used by many people and has recently started to add a chemical called Alum that removes the phosphorus in the water and should eventually lessen the amount of algae growth in the lake.
Mr. Chairman, I would like to see legislation and education to maintain water quality so that my neighborhood lake and the thousands of other lakes and rivers in Minnesota can be clean for future generations.

For the past four summers, I have worked as a nanny for a family with three girls. One day last summer the girls and I decided to go for a bike ride on a trail that overlooks the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers It was a clear, bright and sunny day. We stopped where the rivers come together and I decided to point out some interesting river ecology facts to the girls. The first thing I asked the girls was to tell me which river they thought was the Minnesota and which one they thought was the Mississippi. Because it was a very bright day, one river looked very clean and the other very dirty. The girls were amazed to learn that it was actually the Minnesota River that appeared very dirty. They found this hard to believe because everyone seems to think of the Mississippi as the "Muddy Mississippi." But the fact remains; it is the farm chemicals, livestock runoff and silt that pollute the Minnesota River. When the two rivers join, you can see the line of suspended soils from the Minnesota River blending into the Mississippi. So, it is actually the Minnesota River that gives the Mississippi a bad reputation in our part of the nation.

In 1819 Fort Snelling was settled because of its location between the two rivers. The Native Americans in this area believed that the land near the confluence was the origin of all life. It is sad that today we do not think it is important enough to try and improve the quality of these rivers and are slow in doing anything to fix the problems.

I have come to realize that although some people are aware of the problems regarding water quality, it will be the responsibility of my generation through awareness and education to clean and protect the environment. That is why I wanted to come to the Youth Watershed Summit. I want to learn as much as I can about water quality, pollution and remediation in the various states.

I know that the problems we face in Minnesota are not Minnesota's alone; these are the problems of our nation. It will be necessary to work together to clean up and restore the lakes, rivers and oceans. I say let's make America even greater by setting an example to the rest of the world that clean water is an important issue for everyone. While I know that there have been significant improvements over the past three decades, I also know that I want clean water for my generation and the generations to follow. I want clean water for my children and the children of my children.

So when I was looking on the Year of Clean Water website (www.yearofcleanwater.org) I was surprised to notice that the last time the Congress reauthorized the Act was in 1987. Through my studies I know that there have been many changes over the past 15 years and I also know that water detection and protection has become far more complex. So more advanced technologies should be translated into the Clean Water Law. So I must ask you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, to begin the process of reauthorization to assure that our country can provide clean, fresh water for all of us for many generations to come.

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today.