TO:        City Council
FROM:  City Manager and Staff
DATE:  August 6, 2010
RE:  Cosmo-Bethel Park Trout Fishing Program  
      (Council Tracker 3040)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
At the August 2, 2010, City Council Meeting, Councilman Dudley requested information regarding the winter trout fishing program at Cosmo-Bethel Park. This program which originated as a partnership between the Parks and Recreation Department, Trout Unlimited, and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) provided a winter trout fishing program at the lake in Cosmo-Bethel Park from 2003-2009. The program was discontinued when funding for support of the program was deleted by the Council as part of the budget reductions necessary for the City’s Fiscal Year 2009 budget. The City’s portion of the program’s cost (amount of the budget reduction) was $2,600. If Council chooses to re-establish the program, MDC believes that it may be possible to start with the 2010-11 season, but since they now raise the trout themselves, they would like to see a two year commitment from the City.

DISCUSSION:
Under the terms of a cooperative agreement initiated in 2003, the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Mid-Missouri Chapter of Trout Unlimited annually stocked trout into Cosmo-Bethel Lake to create an urban winter fishery in central Missouri. The program which began in the fall of 2003 continued with City involvement through the 2007-2008 season. In Fiscal Year 2009 (October 2008 - September 2009), funding for the City’s portion of the program’s cost was cut from the City’s annual budget as part of budget reductions deemed necessary by the City Council.

The trout required for stocking the lake for the 2008-2009 winter season had already been ordered by the Department of Conservation by the time the FY09 budget decisions were made. At that time, the Mid-Missouri Chapter of Trout Unlimited agreed to pick up the City’s portion ($2,600 – 50% of the total cost) of the cost of the program for the winter of 2008-2009. No funds for the program were included in the Department’s FY10 budget, therefore the program was discontinued for the 2009-2010 winter season. Currently the program remains unfunded, and no plans have been made to restore the program for the 2010-2011 season.
One of the goals of the Missouri Department of Conservation’s Urban Fishing Program is to increase fishing opportunities and species diversity in urban lakes. Since 1989, the Missouri Department of Conservation has stocked rainbow trout in St. Louis and Kansas City area lakes to provide close-to-home fishing opportunities. Urban winter trout fishing was so successful in those cities that the program was expanded to include Columbia.

In 2009, the last year of the Columbia program, about 2,400 trout were stocked into Cosmo-Bethel Lake during the first week of November. Most of the trout stocked were 10 to 12 inches long; however, some larger fish were also released. All trout caught by local fishermen had to be released, unharmed from November 1-January 31. Only artificial baits (no natural or scented baits) could be used from November 1-January 31. After January 31, anglers were allowed to harvest trout under statewide regulations with the goal of removing the majority of the fish from the lake prior to the warm spring and summer weather raising water temperatures to a point where the trout could not survive.

Originally, trout used in the program were purchased by the Department of Conservation from private trout hatcheries in the spring of the year. The trout were raised by these private hatcheries throughout the summer and then delivered to the lakes participating in the program in late October/early November. Now, Department of Conservation raises all of the trout in their own hatcheries located throughout the state. Staff has checked with MDC personnel to see if there would be any possibility of restoring the program for the winter of 2010-2011 should the Council be supportive of such an effort. Even though MDC had not planned for the program for this winter, they believe that they can do a partial or even a full stocking program. However, since MDC has to raise the trout themselves, Conservation officials expressed a strong interest that if this program is revived, they would like a two year commitment from the City in order to offset their start-up costs (advertising, trout, enforcement of trout rules, etc).

The Department of Conservation requires local entities to fund 50% of the total cost of the program (total annual costs for the program in the past were in the $5,000 - $5,200 range). When the program initially began, the Mid-Missouri Chapter of Trout Unlimited donated half of the local cost of the program with the City providing the remaining funds. By the 2009 budget year, the City had begun absorbing the entire local cost of the program. Should Trout Unlimited be willing to again contribute to the partnership, the cost to the City to restore the program would likely be under $1,500.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**
Should the Council wish to restore funding for the winter trout fishing program at Cosmo-Bethel Lake, the estimated cost is between $1,300 - $2,600 annually depending upon whether any local donations to support the program would be forthcoming. Department of Conservation will be able to match the local support for the 2010-11 season if so desired.

**VISION IMPACT:**
This action addresses vision goal 12.1 which recommends that all Columbia residents have access to a full range of outdoor and indoor recreational opportunities.

**SUGGESTED COUNCIL ACTIONS:**
Accept this report. If the Council wishes to take any action in regard to restoring the winter trout fishing program, provide staff with appropriate direction.