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January 30, 2023

Senator Fuong Hawj
3231 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Hawj and members of the committee:

On behalf of the more than 135 cities, counties, businesses, non-profits, and individuals that comprise the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails organization, we are writing to ask that as you consider S.F. 356 that you take this opportunity to rectify a long-standing oversight by including the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota in the lottery-in-lieu funding formula.

Regional parks and trails play an essential role in our recreation systems throughout Minnesota. They serve as a bridge between the local park around the corner and Minnesota's outstanding state parks. Regional parks and trails are a close-to-home option for both the community and visitors. These regional facilities exist throughout the state, yet the current formula for divvying up lottery-in-lieu funds fails to recognize or support the regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota.

Regional parks and trails have existed outside the metro area for decades, but they were not truly recognized until after the passage of the Legacy amendment in 2008 and subsequent discussions shed light on the fact that the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota were being ignored. In 2013, the Legislature created the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, which has been tasked with developing a system of regionally designated facilities in the 80 counties not served by the Metropolitan Council. Since then, more than 74 facilities across the state have been designated through a rigorous evaluation process. These parks, trails, and special features that serve Greater Minnesota are as deserving of funding as the parks and trails that serve the metropolitan area.

When the enabling legislation for the lottery-in-lieu funding passed in 2000, it dedicated 22.5 percent of the available revenues to state parks and trails and 22.5 percent of the available revenues to metropolitan parks. Perhaps because there was no organization advocating on behalf of the 80 counties and countless cities outside the metro area, the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota did not receive funding. We ask that this oversight be remedied by amending S.F. 356 to dedicate at least some of the lottery-in-lieu funds to the Regional Parks and Trails of Greater Minnesota.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact either of us. We would love to work with you to ensure that Greater Minnesota's parks and trails continue to thrive and grow.

Sincerely,

Ben Anderson
Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails
Stearns County, Parks Director

Gina Hugo
Vice Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails
Sherburne County, Parks Coordinator