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Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

February 14, 2023

Re: Support of SF 755 / HF 820

Dear Members of the Committee:

The wildlife that Minnesotans hold dear, including the birds Audubon strives to conserve, are dependent on an interconnected food web that requires healthy air, water, and soil. Eagles, loons, and herons eat the fish that eat the fish, amphibians, and microorganisms at the bottom of the food chain that depend on healthy freshwater. Warblers and swallows eat the insects that eat the plants that require healthy soil to grow. In natural environments with adequate and healthy soil and water, populations are relatively stable and thrive. However, a growing body of research finds that road salts are making their way into our soils, groundwater, and surface water, throwing these systems out of balance and negatively affecting wildlife and human interests.

A recent study of Twin Cities lakes found sodium and chloride levels 10 and 25% higher than non-urban lakes. With these high levels, we can measure a reduction in the diversity and abundance of zooplankton that eat the algae that cause algae blooms. Many small fish and amphibians are less healthy in these saltier lakes and survive at lower rates making less food available for large fish. The salt can also alter water density and inhibit the seasonal turnover of water, affecting nutrient availability in lakes.

In addition to the impact of salt on the food web and lake hydrology, many large vertebrates actively pursue salt. Studies show a higher incidence of vehicle collisions with deer, moose, and many other small and medium-sized mammals on roads treated with salt.

We know that freshwater ecosystems are critical to the well-being of birds and humans. Scientists have documented widespread wildlife declines over the past century. A recent study from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology shows a staggering loss of almost three billion birds since 1970. These population declines are tied to reductions in habitat quality associated with human-dominated landscapes.

While we understand that road salt is an economical and effective deicer that reduces safety risks to humans, it is also important to minimize negative impacts on birds and other wildlife. Audubon Minnesota supports programs that require training to help reduce the amount of salt in our environment.

Sincerely,

Rob Schultz,
Vice President
Audubon Minnesota Iowa Missouri

Dale Gentry, Ph.D.
Conservation Director

Lindsay J. Brice
Policy Director