



CONSERVATION MINNESOTA

February 21, 2023

Chair Hawj and Members of the Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee,

We write today to ask for your support for SF 1573 (Kunesh), providing funding to reintroduce elk to northeast Minnesota. As an organization, our mission is to protect the people and the places that Minnesotans love; and restoring the ecological, cultural, and recreational integrity of our state is central to this goal.

SF 1573 (Kunesh) appropriates \$4,000,000 from the general fund to the Commissioner of Natural Resources for a grant to the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in order to expand Minnesota's wild elk population and range into northeast Minnesota. This appropriation follows the extensive, multi-year development of an elk reintroduction proposal by the Fond du Lac Band and enables the Band to begin implementing a robust process of interagency and stakeholder planning; public review; CWD surveillance; and eventual capture, relocation, and monitoring of elk. This project represents a long overdue responsibility of our state to restore and conserve a vital species, and it's time for the legislature to commit to its advancement.

The reintroduction of elk into northeast Minnesota reflects the core mission of the Department of Natural Resources and the environmental policy of the State of Minnesota at-large. The restoration, conservation, and management of environmental quality and state natural resources extends directly toward our responsibility for the return of this species. The continued conservation of Minnesota's environment relies on our commitment to reverse the ecologically destructive elimination of key species from our natural spaces. Doing so not only helps to repair our environment, but also helps to reconstruct the human-nature relationship in Minnesota, restoring a culturally significant species for Tribal communities, strengthening recreational opportunities for hunters, and allowing Minnesotans of all ages to witness and appreciate these amazing animals in their native environment.

The reintroduction effort put forth by the Fond du Lac Band is a thorough, practical proposal founded in years of local and comparative research and bolstered by successful precedent from past reintroduction projects in northwest Minnesota and across the Midwest. The process proposed by the Band allows for a reasonable, phased approach toward reintroduction, including considerations for chronic wasting disease, habitat adaptation, and agricultural impact reduction. And the project's implementation timeline delays capture and relocation until the completion of adequate stakeholder and agency planning. We strongly believe that this effort represents an inclusive and responsible pathway toward getting this done – and getting it done right.

As the committee considers this legislation, we want to thank the Legislature and the DNR for their longstanding commitment to elk reintroduction and management. For decades, the State has helped to reestablish this key species in northwest Minnesota; and now, it has a unique opportunity to continue this tradition and to help restore elk within the northeast. We urge you to support SF 1573 (Kunesh), to help fund the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's restoration efforts, and to conserve the integrity of Minnesota's environment for current and future generations.

Sincerely,

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