

Transportation Committee  
Senate Office Building  
95 University Avenue West  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

January 23, 2023

**Re: Support of S.F. 718/H.F. 498 – Highways for Habitat**

Dear Chair Dibble and Members of the Committee:

Audubon Minnesota supports establishing and appropriating funds for the Highways for Habitat program, as described in S.F. 701 / H.F. 498. This program will increase habitat for bees, birds, and butterflies at a time when we see dramatic declines in their populations. With 96 percent of all land-based bird species in North America feeding insects to their young, we need plants that support the food web.

Recent studies confirm that native plants offer significantly more value to local conservation efforts for birds and pollinators ([Burghardt et al. 2009](#), [Burghardt et al. 2010](#)). Comparisons of areas with similar diversity and biomass of native vs. non-native plants found that sites containing native plants supported significantly more birds (including species of greatest conservation need) and insects. These and numerous other studies confirm that native plants offer more value to local conservation efforts. Using native plants on the borders of our highways will create habitat for pollinators and birds.

Audubon's recently released Survival by Degrees report paints a dire picture for the future for birds: More than 150 species in Minnesota are threatened by the impacts of changes to Minnesota's weather patterns. A recent study from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology also found a staggering loss of birds. Collectively, North American bird populations have declined by 29%, and grassland bird populations have declined by 53% since 1970. By adding more native plants to highways through programs like Highways for Habitat, we can help birds in the face of changing weather, urban development, and other threats.

Sincerely,

Rob Schultz  
Vice President

Dr. Dale Gentry  
Conservation Director

Lindsay J. Brice  
Policy Director

[Audubon Minnesota Iowa Missouri](#)

**Alongside the following independent Audubon chapters across Minnesota:**

- Peter Mattson, President of [Austin Audubon Society](#)
- Catherine McGoldrick, Vice President of [Brainerd Lakes Area Audubon Society](#)
- Daniel Kneip, President of [Central Minnesota Audubon Chapter](#)
- Rob Daves, President of [Minnesota River Valley Audubon Society](#)
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- Viola Riggle, President of [Prairie Lakes Audubon Society](#)
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- Dann Adair, President of [Wild River Audubon Society](#)
- Joel Dunnette, President of [Zumbro Valley Audubon Society](#)

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### Works Cited

[Burghardt, K. T., Tallamy, D. W., & Gregory Shriver, W. \(2009\). Impact of native plants on bird and butterfly biodiversity in suburban landscapes. \*Conservation biology\*, 23\(1\), 219-224.](#)

[Burghardt, K. T., Tallamy, D. W., Philips, C., & Shropshire, K. J. \(2010\). Non-native plants reduce abundance, richness, and host specialization in lepidopteran communities. \*Ecosphere\*, 1\(5\), 1-22.](#)