



SIERRA CLUB

NORTH STAR CHAPTER

Sierra Club North Star Chapter
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260
Saint Paul, MN 55114

February 21, 2023

Senate Transportation Committee
Minnesota Senate
Minnesota Senate Bldg.
95 University Ave. W.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for Senate File 718 “Highways for habitat program establishment.”

Dear Chair Dibble, Vice Chair Morrison and Committee Members:

Founded in 1968, the Sierra Club North Star Chapter is a non-profit environmental organization representing over representing over 50,000 members and supporters across Minnesota. The Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation.

As a leading grassroots voice working to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment, we empower volunteer leaders to act through environmental advocacy, community organizing, and outdoor exploration. We participate in the administrative process to encourage environmental health and sustainability, long term wildlife and habitat protection, and biodiversity goals.

Among the Sierra Club's stated policy and goals in Minnesota and across the country include achieving much more support and protection for pollinators (<https://www.sierraclub.org/grassroots-network/food-agriculture/pollinators>) as well as for all wildlife and native plants through rehabilitation and restoration of degraded natural landscapes and habitats (which also overlap rural, urban and suburban communities) as posted on our national website:

Sierra Club Policy on Wildlife & Native Plants – Top Points 1 and 2 (<https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/wildlife/wildlife-and-native-plants>)

The key to wildlife and native plant conservation is the continued existence of diverse natural ecosystems and the preservation of native biodiversity. The Sierra Club is committed to maintaining the world's remaining natural ecosystems, and, where feasible, to the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems. Wildlife, plants, and their ecosystems have value in their own right, as well as value to humans and to the health of the biosphere.

1. Habitat -- Habitat simplification, fragmentation, degradation, and elimination pose the greatest threats to natural ecosystems and biodiversity and must be counteracted by reasonable and effective measures for the long-term preservation of intact ecosystems. Such measures should be incorporated into decisions made by all levels of government. All society should help develop and implement wildlife and native plant conservation measures that protect ecosystems and our wildlife heritage.

2. Wildlife and Native Plant Management -- Within natural ecosystems, natural diversity and abundance of wildlife and plants should be ensured by means that involve a minimum of overt human interference. Ecosystems modified by human activities should be managed to ensure optimum native diversity and numbers of wildlife and plants to natural historic levels where feasible, with emphasis on restoration and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems to a more natural condition.

On January 26, the House's Transportation Committee moved and approved the Highways for Habitat Bill HF498 be laid over for possible inclusion in a future Transportation Finance and Policy omnibus bill (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/bill.php?f=HF498&b=house&y=2023&ssn=0>). We are thankful for that action and the bill's current 16 authors, including our status as an Associate Member of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership which submitted a coalition letter of support for the bill that same day in complement to letters of support by Audubon Minnesota and The Nature Conservancy (https://www.house.mn.gov/schedules/01262023#h_35172). We also appreciated the strong verbal introduction by main bill author Representative Rick Hansen and testimony by the Pollinator Friendly Alliance as well as the helpful news segment by WCCO – CBS News from November 28, 2022 shown by Representative Frank Hornstein on the benefits of living snow fences to drivers and property owners (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dnH5h1K2Io&t=91s>).

We also now join in the strong support for the complementary Highways for Habitat Senate Bill SF718 put forward by authors Senators Fong Hawj, Scott Dibble, Kelly Morrison, and Jennifer McEwen (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/bill.php?b=senate&f=SF718&ssn=0&y=2023>). The bill would provide needed funding appropriations for “roadside vegetation and living snow fence purposes” with General Requirements including “(6) identify funding sources and develop proposals for ongoing funding for the program” and also includes the following important “Management Standards:”

Subd. 4. Management standards. (a) The commissioner, in consultation with the commissioner of natural resources and the Board of Water and Soil Resources, must develop standards and best management practices for integrated roadside vegetation management plans under the program.

(b) The standards and best management practices must include:

- (1) guidance on seed and vegetation selection based on the Board of Water and Soil Resources' native vegetation establishment and enhancement guidelines;
- (2) requirements for roadside vegetation management protocols that avoid the use of pollinator lethal insecticides as defined under section 18H.02, subdivision 28a;
- (3) practices that are designed to avoid habitat destruction and protect nesting birds, pollinators, and other wildlife; and
- (4) identification of appropriate right-of-way tracts for wildflower and native habitat establishment.

For the many reasons described above including our support for wildlife and native plants including our concern and dismay over the many negative impacts of pesticides such as neonicotinoid insecticides (aka “neonics”), we at the Sierra Club North Star Chapter look forward to passage of Senate File 718.

Thank you,

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(including the letter participants below)

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