

Chair Fong Hawj
Senate Committee on Environment, Climate, and Legacy
Minnesota Senate Building, 3231
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 14, 2024

Dear Chair Hawj and committee members,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on SF4898, the “Native Rough Fish” bill. Conserving freshwaters for biodiversity and communities are priorities for TNC. There are 26 species of “native rough fish” with proposed new protections in the bill, representing 16% of all native fishes found in the state. I represented TNC as an invited stakeholder under the Department of Natural Resources’ “Rough Fish Working Group” in 2023, which provided input used to develop the DNR’s recommendation to the legislature and ultimately the draft bill language. If passed, **SF4898 will be the first comprehensive native fish conservation bill in the country** that we believe is a significant step needed to ensure their sustainability for generations to come.

While TNC supports nearly the entirety of the draft bill language, the following are elements of the bill that we think should be included or retained to ensure that the bill works most effectively to conserve these “native rough fish” in the state:

Future expedited, permanent rulemaking needed: Expedited rulemaking was a recommendation of the DNR’s report to the legislature; however, that language is missing in the current version of SF4898. We recommend inserting language that directs the Commissioner establish daily and possession limits for “native rough fish” under section 84.027, subdivision 13a, as well as language explicitly requiring permanent rulemaking versus annual to ensure consistent protections as other sportfish species are currently provided.

Restitution values should be retained: Among the most important elements in the bill, is the establishment of restitution values for “native rough fish”. We strongly support retention and protection of restitution value language in the bill to ensure accountability needed for rule enforcement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on SF4898. We hope the above recommendations will be fully considered to ensure the bill provides durable protections for “native rough fish” per its intent. If passed, **SF4898 will be the first comprehensive native fish conservation bill in the country** and will protect our natural heritage for Minnesotan’s enjoyment for years to come.

Sincerely,



Steven J. Herrington, Ph.D.
Associate Director of Water, The Nature Conservancy, MN-ND-SD