

April 28, 2024

Senate Finance Committee

Re: **SF3887 Article 4 Sections 5 Sub. 2a and 11 Opposition** - Upper Sioux Agency State Park and Historic Site Abolishment as well as surplus declaration and conveyance of Redwood County Land

Dear Senate Finance Members:

We, the undersigned, are opposed to the abolishment of Upper Sioux Agency State Park and Historic Site in Yellow Medicine County (Article 4, Section 5, Subd. 2a) as well as surplus declaration and conveyance language addressing Redwood County land (Article 4, Section 11).

Both sites are unique to multiple Minnesota ethnic groups for their historic events, cultural sense of place, hallowed ground, geologic features, and recreational opportunities – all have coexisted for 60 years and are now freely accessible for religious observation with 2021 state law enacted providing free park permits to tribal members and free passes to all others through a DNR/MN public library program.

No deadline exists for either to be transferred out of State ownership or from statute which is the only items Article 4 Section 5, Subd. 2a and Section 11 address. Neither has been vetted or approved by the State Historic Preservation Office, the nonpartisan Department of Administration Office in charge of historic sites and preservation. Both parcels play critical roles in their own listing on the National Register of Historic Places or the State's designation as a Historic District or is adjacent to such an area.

A \$250,000 defeasance appropriated in 2023 addressed on State capital investment funds for Upper Sioux Agency State Park. It has since been discovered that the DNR has federal financial obligations including keeping Upper Sioux Agency State Park open through 2039 under contract terms with the Federal Highway Administration's 2018 Recreational Trails Program. Financial entanglements resulting from the transfer of the property out of state ownership and public use were not part of the DNR's mandated 2024 report nor required in 2023 law, chapter 60.

There is a new issue that requires additional transportation funding as several non-tribal taxpayers are left with no public access/road to the homes and businesses that were accessible by a state highway; the highway was transferred to an Indian tribe along with the State Park and Historic Site.

There is also legal considerations regarding the State's decision to act against federal decisions made between federally recognized tribes and the federal Indian Claims Commission who settled land disputes with Sioux tribes. In addition, an 1858 Yankton Treaty identifies the occupant of the area as Yankton/Yanktonai Sioux tribes, not the members of the Upper Sioux Community. It is unknown what legal issues will arise and require legal counsel for the DNR in these situations.

The local area has been given no consideration for the \$1 million annual loss of revenue from the closure of the State Park and Historic Site. The DNR's and other nonprofit's watercraft trips that use the State owned shorelines are impacted and have not been prepared for needed changes to their opportunities. Scheduled tour groups to the venues have not been notified nor compensated for the upcoming disappointment.

Local government and residents were not involved in discussions of this bill as was stated by the DNR's Ann Pierce in April 2023 and repeated numerous times by local politicians including Senator Gary Dahms.

As there is no urgency and no address of the DNR's requirements under federal acts/programs, the best thing to do is to remove Article 4, Section 5 2a and Section 11 from SF3887 for this legislative session. Once the federal encumbrances have been tested, discussed, and eliminated and the public has had ample opportunity to add to the conversation regarding replacement property for the Park, and exploration of the State property for US Army soldiers recorded as missing in action from the shoreline and Minnesota River Battle of Redwood Ferry, the technical processes presented in this session can be comfortably and confidently addressed and moved forward.

Please remove Article 4, Section 5 2a and Section 11 from SF3887 to avoid financial distress to Minnesota. These sections involving Redwood County Minnesota River shoreline adjacent to the Battle of Redwood Ferry where three soldiers remain missing in action and where several historic sites exist including the first county seat of Yellow Medicine County and the Upper Sioux Indian Agency can be added to a future legislative session's bill.

Thank you,

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