

April 17, 2025

Re: Support of Senate File 2653 / House File 2297

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

We support the vital financing of the successful but underfunded Habitat Friendly Solar Program and the expanded use of agrivoltaics across Minnesota as outlined in [H.F. 2297/S.F. 2653](#). Both approaches reflect necessary multi-benefit strategies to accelerate the clean energy deployment needed to combat climate change while minimizing negative impacts on birds, wildlife, and people.

The National Audubon Society's [Survival by Degrees report](#) paints a dire picture for the future of birds: more than 150 species in Minnesota are threatened by impacts of changes to the state's weather patterns. A recent study from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology also found a staggering loss of birds. North American bird populations have declined by 29%, and grassland bird populations have declined by 53% since 1970. To address the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, we must rapidly deploy well-sited solar projects while minimizing impacts to habitat. Strategies such as agrivoltaics and the Habitat Friendly Solar Program enable Minnesota to do both.

By prioritizing native plants at solar sites, Minnesota can meet critical clean energy goals while restoring pockets of lost habitat. Audubon was a proud partner in the broad coalition of energy, agriculture, and conservation organizations that worked to pass the Pollinator-Friendly Solar Act in 2016, the nation's first ground cover standard for solar facilities. Using seed mixtures that cost less than 0.1% of the overall project budget, the flexible and science-based standard established minimum requirements that solar site owners must implement before claiming the projects "provide habitat beneficial to pollinators, songbirds, or game birds."¹

The Habitat Friendly Solar Program, a cost-effective, successful program² managed by Minnesota's Board of Water and Soil Resources, operates at limited capacity without consistent, adequate funding. This lack of funding will prove more challenging as Minnesota's implementation of ambitious renewable energy and carbon-free electricity goals result in significantly more solar projects throughout the state. By creating the nation's first license plate featuring a solar facility,³ this bill establishes a voluntary and dedicated funding mechanism without impacting Minnesota's general fund.

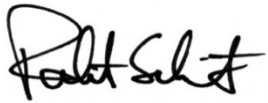
¹ [Minn. Stat. 216B.1642](#)

² According to a longitudinal field study led by Argonne National Lab from 2018–2022 on solar projects that meet Minnesota's Habitat Friendly Solar ground cover standard, insect communities respond positively to newly established habitat on solar energy facilities in agricultural landscapes. The study also indicates a 20x increase in native bee abundance. From the Argonne report: Our observations highlight the relatively rapid (<4 year) insect community responses to grassland restoration activities and provide support for solar-pollinator habitat as a feasible conservation practice to safeguard biodiversity and increase food security in agricultural landscapes.

³ License plate artwork by [REPLACE](#) design studio, commissioned by Natural Resources Services with contributions from Connexus Energy and employees of US Solar and Bare Honey.

Minnesota must deploy renewable energy while minimizing negative impacts. Multi-benefit strategies such as agrivoltaics and the Solar Pollinator Habitat Program support the rapid, well-sited deployment of needed renewable energy while benefiting and/or reducing detrimental impacts on Minnesota's birds.

Sincerely,



Rob Schultz, Vice President

[Audubon Upper Mississippi River](http://umr.audubon.org), a regional office of the National Audubon Society

Alongside the following independent organizations across Minnesota:

Austin Audubon Society
Central Minnesota Audubon Society
Land of Lakes Bird Alliance
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society
Prairie Lakes Audubon Chapter
Saint Paul Bird Alliance
Wild River Audubon Society
Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Alliance for Sustainability
Land Stewardship Project
Minnesota Ornithologists' Union
MN Division, Isaak Walton League of America
Roots Return Heritage Farm, LLC
Vote Climate
Wild Ones, St. Croix Oak Savanna Chapter
Pollinator Friendly Alliance
Austin Ch 10, Isaak Walton League of America
Friends of MN Scientific & Natural Areas

