

Senator Foug Hawj
Senate Environment, Climate and Legacy Committee
Minnesota Senate Building, 3231
95 University Ave. W

Re: Department of Natural Resources Budget Recommendations

February 26, 2025

Chair Hawj and members of the Committee,

As the committee considers the Governor's budget recommendations for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), we write to share our considerations about how proposed investments in programs can benefit people and nature and help address the challenges facing Minnesota's climate and biodiversity.

We know, in recent years especially, the DNR has faced significant unmet needs related to some of the highest visibility uses of DNR facilities, so we are supportive of the agency seeking increases in fees for groundwater permitting and State Park and Recreation area usage. Failing to address these areas of need inhibits the DNR to address other worthy natural resources needs, so helping to alleviate the backlogs in these two areas can allow DNR to focus on pressing challenges facing nature.

Additionally, proposed rescinding of funds appropriated in 2023 for 'drought-killed tree seedlings' may accurately reflect the need those funds fulfilled; however, there are many ongoing unmet forestry needs including reforestation, forest stand improvement, and response to and management of forest pests on state forest lands that could benefit from rerouting those funds. The minimum investment to keep up with reforestation alone is \$8M/biennium. Further, forest stand improvement and management of forest pests is crucial to maintaining healthy forests and ensuring the state's assets—trees-- are well cared for so they flourish into maturity and provide many benefits for clean air, clean water, recreation, forest products, and wildlife.

Between capital investments and general fund investments, we recommend an investment of \$10 million in reforestation and \$8 million in forest stand improvement and forest pest management to stay on top of needs and challenges facing state forest lands.

We recognize the challenging situation the committee faces this biennium to balance the budget, and appreciate your consideration as to how to best steward funding toward pressing issues facing Minnesota's iconic forest lands.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Pinkalla
Government Relations Director
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota



Angelica Day
Government Relations Specialist
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota