

FORAGER | CHEF

Hunting Mushrooms + Wild and Obscure Foods

March 12, 2025

RE: Written Testimony of Alan Bergo – Forager Chef
Senate hearing on SF1464, the Minnesota Sustainable Foraging Task Force Legislation]

Good afternoon Chair Hawj, Sen. Pha, and members of the committee. My name is Alan Bergo but people from around the world know me professionally as the Forager Chef and I am based out of St. Paul.

I am writing to you today in support of Senate File 1464 which would establish the Minnesota Sustainable Foraging Task Force. As a chef who has dedicated my career to celebrating local ingredients and sustainable culinary practices—and as someone honored with a James Beard Award for this work,—I have seen firsthand how Minnesota’s natural bounty fuels creativity and fosters community connection in our kitchens and beyond.

Minnesota is uniquely blessed with diverse ecosystems and a rich tradition of foraging. One of which I didn’t understand until seeing a chicken of the woods mushroom while I was out playing disc golf with friends. It dawned on me that the mushrooms that I cleaned and prepped to feed people in the restaurant I was working at were just outside and anybody could go and find them and make a beautiful meal. I have been exploring Minnesota lands since and writing about sustainable foraging and cooking. My first book, the Forager Chef’s Book of Flora was released in 2021 and showcases incredible meals that anyone could make after a few hours in the woods.

This legislation is needed because throughout the years, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources seems to believe that foraging isn’t an acceptable use of state lands. I ask the MN DNR, where is the average person supposed to forage? You shouldn’t have to be a land baron in order to experience the food gifts that our state lands provide.

This legislation smartly calls for a task force to develop scientifically sound, data-driven recommendations for foraging on state lands and this is both timely and essential. Interest in nature is growing and that is a good thing. By balancing ecological sustainability with the public’s right to access our state’s abundant natural resources, this bill ensures that foraging practices continue to contribute to our local food culture and foraging traditions without compromising the health of our ecosystems.

The thoughtful structure of this bill stands out to me. The task force’s diverse membership—ranging from legislative representatives and scientific experts in botany, ecology, and environmental science, to representatives of Indigenous communities, and local foraging advocacy groups—ensures that recommendations will be comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and rooted in both scientific evidence and time-honored traditions. This inclusive approach not only honors Minnesota’s natural heritage but also reinforces the shared responsibility we all bear in stewarding our environment.

As a chef, I rely on the quality and integrity of every ingredient that reaches my kitchen. Sustainable foraging practices offer an invaluable source of unique, seasonal ingredients that inspire creativity and showcase the flavors of our state. The task force's mandate to review existing regulations, gather critical data, and develop actionable recommendations will provide a framework that protects both our natural resources and the culinary traditions that depend on them.

I strongly support this legislation. It represents a collaborative approach and a proactive step toward preserving Minnesota's ecosystems. I urge you to pass this bill so Minnesotans can continue to enjoy our state's natural bounty in a way that is both responsible and inspiring.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Alan Bergo
Forager Chef