

To all members of the Minnesota Legislature,

On behalf of Waankam: People for the Estuary, we write in strong support of SF 1247 and HF 2134, and urge you to pass these bills this session to recognize the rights of manoomin and ensure lasting protections for our sacred waters.

We are an Indigenous-led organization based in Duluth, at the mouth of the St. Louis River, the largest U.S. tributary to Lake Superior. Our work centers on restoring relationships between people and water through education and advocacy rooted in Indigenous values and lived knowledge. At the heart of our work is the St. Louis River Estuary, a living ecosystem that is home to manoomin.

Manoomin is often among the first species to show us when the water is out of balance. It is deeply sensitive to pollution, development, and climate shifts. In listening to and learning from the estuary, including from manoomin, we receive the message loud and clear: this place needs protection, now.

While significant resources have gone into cleaning up the estuary over the past several decades—efforts we honor and support—there is a deeper shift still needed. Without fundamentally changing our relationship to this ecosystem and to manoomin as a being with inherent rights, we risk repeating patterns of harm and finding ourselves back in crisis again.

With environmental protections increasingly under threat at the federal level, Minnesota has both the opportunity and the obligation to lead. As the place where so much of our continent's—and our world's—freshwater begins, our state holds a unique responsibility to protect these waters not just for ourselves, but for all beings downstream, now and into the future.

Now is the time for Minnesota to lead.

Miigwech for your consideration,

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