



April 2, 2025

Chair Hawj, Lead Green, and members of the Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee:

I am writing in support of the Governor's budget recommendations for the Metropolitan Council that can be found in [SF 2077](#) (Hawj). I would respectfully encourage you to consider including these recommendations as you work on compiling an omnibus Environment and Natural Resources bill next week.

### **Regional Parks and Trails**

The Metropolitan Council requests continuing the base funding of \$2.54 million in general fund and \$8.95 million from the natural resources fund (lottery-in-lieu) in each of the next two fiscal years (FY26 and FY27) for regional parks operations and maintenance.

State funds to operate and maintain regional parks are an investment in the people who call this region home. Every dollar allocated to the Met Council for this program is passed through to the 10 regional park implementing agencies. An estimated 69.5 million visits were made to the Regional Parks and Trails System in 2023. It takes \$133 million each year to keep the system in good order. That's 46 regional parks, 12 park reserves, eight special recreation features, and nearly 500 miles of regional trails.

These high-quality spaces connect people to the outdoors, build health, and support assets that drive our economy. The funding included in SF 2077, Article 1, Section 5, helps fund:

- Facility maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation
- Trail maintenance and upkeep
- Forestry and groundskeeping, including mowing, tree trimming, native plant restoration, and invasive species control
- Staff salaries and overhead expenses such as facilities, natural resources, and programming

### **Budget neutral items included in SF 2077**

SF 2077 also includes three budget-neutral recommendations for the Met Council:

- Expansion of allowable uses for the highway Revolving Acquisition Loan Fund (RALF) to parks and trails acquisition projects (Article 2, Section 33)
- Adding tribal governments as eligible recipients for the community tree planting grant program (Article 2, Section 34)
- Simplifying inflow and infiltration (I/I) grant requirements (Article 2, Section 35)

Thank you again for your consideration of these provisions. I look forward to working with you over the next few months as you complete your work. Please reach out to me or Judd Schetnan ([judd.schetnan@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:judd.schetnan@metc.state.mn.us)) with any questions or comments. We are available to meet at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles A. Zelle".

Charles A. Zelle  
Chair