

April 3, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing our organizations to express our support for SF2547 (Hawj), the bill to fund the new Community Grants Program.

Last November with 77.5% support, voters approved constitutionally re-dedicating a portion of state lottery proceeds into the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). Importantly, voters approved increasing the amount that can be spent from the Trust Fund each year from 5.5% to 7.0%. This new 1.5% of the ENRTF is directed to a new Community Grants Program through the Minnesota DNR. SF2547 is simply an appropriation for fiscal year 2026, and 1.5% of the ENRTF value amounts to \$28.18 million. The separate 5.5% of the ENRTF remains dedicated to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) process, just as it has been for decades.

The new Community Grants Program was created so that new and smaller grantees can access ENRTF funds in ways that are not feasible in the LCCMR process. The same constitutional protections that cover LCCMR recommendations also pertain to the new 1.5% for Community Grants. The constitutional protections read, “[T]he assets of the fund shall be appropriated by law for the public purposes of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state’s air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.”

Many people recognize the LCCMR as an important source of funding for natural resource related projects. However, the LCCMR process is oversubscribed, and has been challenging and burdensome for small organizations, communities and projects to access. The new Community Grants Program is designed to help smaller projects hit the ground faster and in communities that would otherwise struggle to navigate LCCMR, so that ENRTF dollars can reach more communities and grantees across the state.

The Minnesota DNR has been working with stakeholders for almost 2 years in preparation for the new Community Grants Program, and we anticipate the new Advisory Council to be open for applications this spring. Once appointed, the Advisory Council is designed to help oversee and advise the DNR set up and administer the new Community Grants Program. The DNR manages many successful grant programs and their traditional grant management safeguards are expected to apply to the Community Grants Program, and final decision-making authority remains with the agency.

With diminishing funding opportunities coming from the federal government, and increasing demand for ENRTF funding, this is the perfect time for the Community Grants Program to begin with the appropriation from SF 2547 so that more Minnesota communities can access ENRTF dollars to improve our shared Great Outdoors.

Thank you for allowing us to express our support for SF2547 (Hawj):

Alliance for Sustainability

Audubon Upper Mississippi River

Barbette Restaurant & Amusements

Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota

Book Club

Bread & Pickle – Lake Harriet

Brainerd Area Coalition for Peace

Brainerd Lakes United Environmentalists

Central Lakes College Natural Resources Club

Chester Bowl Improvement Club

City of Richfield

Clean River Partners

Clean Water Action

COGGS

Conservation Minnesota

Discover the Range

Fergus Falls Fish & Game Club

Friends of the Boundary Waters

Friends of the Mississippi River

Friends of the Parks & Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County

Freshwater

Gigi's Café

Great River Greening

Green Cities Accord

Hospitality Minnesota

Huellas Latinas

Lakeville Friends of the Environment

Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

Metro Blooms

Minnesota Bird Coalition

Minnesota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Minnesota Conservation Federation

Minnesota Deer Hunters Association

Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America

Minnesota Forestry Association

Minnesota Mycological Society

Minnesota Ski Areas Association

National Loon Center

New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen

North Country Trail Association

Northern Star Scouting

Northern Waters Land Trust

Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center

Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota

Pat's Tap Skee-Club & Gastro Pub

Placemaker Hospitality

Pollinator Friendly Alliance

Prairie Woods Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

Reuse Minnesota

Science Museum of Minnesota

Sierra Club North Star Chapter

Shelly Carlson, Mayor of Moorehead

Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters

The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River

The Minneapolis Foundation

The Nature Conservancy

Tiny Diner

Trapeze Bubbles & Toasts

Trust for Public Land

UMN Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships

Urban Bird Collective

Urban Roots