

Senator Foug Hawj
Senate Environment, Climate and Legacy Committee
Minnesota Senate Building, 3231
95 University Ave. W
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: SF 2077, Environment, Climate and Legacy Committee Budget bill

April 8, 2025

Chair Hawj and members of the Committee,

As the Committee reviews SF 2077, we write to share our support for proposed general fund investments and Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriations in programs that will benefit people and nature across the state, as Minnesota faces climate and biodiversity challenges. We are particularly pleased to see the following items included in the bill:

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) State Park Fees and Groundwater Permitting Fees

DNR has faced significant unmet needs related to some of the highest visibility uses of DNR facilities. Failing to address these areas of need inhibits the DNR to address other worthy natural resources needs, so raising fees will help to alleviate the backlogs in these two areas can allow DNR to focus on growing challenges facing nature.

Red River Mediation Agreement Appropriation

As interest in water storage expands in Minnesota, the concept used by watershed districts in the Red River Basin is demonstrating results for flood reduction and water quality benefits. Multi-purpose water storage projects are a critical approach to meeting water quality while reducing flood impacts to communities and individuals.

Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources Recommendations

We appreciate the inclusion of the full recommendations from the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) in the bill as they were recommended to the legislature by the commission, to spend associated Environment and Natural Resources Trust Funds.

Community Grants Appropriation

The new Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) Community Grants Program is poised to provide a needed benefit to communities seeking to tackle environmental challenges and provide access to the outdoors all across the state. We appreciate the 1.5% of the ENRTF that voters approved overwhelmingly in November 2024 is designated toward that purpose, to provide the first year of funding for that program in this bill.

While we appreciate the reasons for cancelling unencumbered funds that were appropriated for drought-killed tree seedling replacement in the 2023 legislative session, there are many ongoing unmet DNR forestry needs including reforestation, forest stand improvement, and response to and

management of forest pests on state forest lands. The minimum investment to keep up with reforestation alone is \$8 million/biennium. Between capital investments and general fund investments, we continue to 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, and encourage the committee to work with the Capital Investment Committee to ensure these needs are addresses.

We recognize the challenging situation the committee faces this biennium to balance the budget and appreciate your consideration as to how to best steward funds toward pressing issues facing Minnesota's environment and natural resources.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Pinkalla
Government Relations Director
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota