

Southeast Asians in Minnesota



ENHANCED RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN COMMUNITIES

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



STATE OF
MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

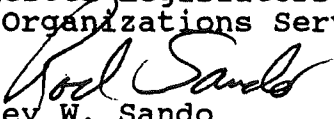
500 LAFAYETTE ROAD, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA 55155-4037

OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONER

DNR INFORMATION
(612) 296-6157

Date: April 29, 1992

To: Minnesota Legislators, Federal and State Agencies
and Organizations Serving the Southeast Asians

From: 
Rodney W. Sando
Commissioner

The Department of Natural Resources has submitted to the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources many excellent projects, among them a proposal entitled "Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities."

This brochure provides background information on the Hmong and, in particular, the language and cultural problems the Hmong and natural resources management professionals face. A copy of the proposal is included.

The Southeast Asians, who are frequent users of our natural resources, have great and immediate needs for information and education on Minnesota's outdoor activities. The Southeast Asian communities have expressed interest in working with the Department of Natural Resources to help meet these needs. There is also strong support from other groups and organizations for the project.

I believe that the Commission will agree that the Department of Natural Resources needs to reach out and serve minority communities. This proposal is the beginning of such efforts. For more information about the brochure or our project, please contact Josee Cung, Office of Planning, at (612) 297-4745.

att.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES - LCMR PROPOSAL 1993.

Program Title: Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities.

Program Manager: Josée Cung, Senior Planner, Office of Planning

Address: Department of Natural Resources, Box 10
500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155
(612) 297-4745

Total Biennial Budget: \$490,720

I.- Narrative: The Southeast Asians who resettle in Minnesota live in urban areas from which they disperse to a few intensively used sites for hunting, fishing and camping, causing serious conflicts with other user groups. Interested community and DNR leadership propose to bridge the cultural and language gap through community education, the development of bilingual communications exchanges, and cultural and sensitivity training.

II.- Objectives:

A:Title: Collaborative Community Education and Outreach

A.1. Summary: Develop in partnership with Hmong organizations a series of bilingual educational workshops for Hmong TV Almanac, to be followed by information presentations and field trips. Activities will focus on hunting, fishing regulations and ethics, firearms safety training, new recreational opportunities and natural resources management careers.

A.2. Budget: \$160,820

A.3. Timeline:

	7/93	1/94	6/94	1/95	6/95
▶ partnerships	[*****]				
▶ workshops/Hmong TV	[*****]				
▶ community information		[*****]			
▶ field trips		[*****]			

A.4. Benefits: Southeast Asian communities will be involved in designing culturally appropriate public information and education activities for their communities. These programs will help community members learn, understand, and use information, thus increase compliance with laws and regulations. They will successfully complete firearms safety training, learn about new places to recreate and receive information on career opportunities. Strong working relations will develop between DNR and its ethnic constituents.

B.- Title: Bilingual Communications Exchanges

B.1. Summary: DNR will initiate bilingual oral & written communications exchanges by using translators at community presentations, meetings and in field management activities. We will also undertake revision of existing public information materials or develop new culturally appropriate resources as needed.

B.2. Budget: \$277,200

JUN 23 1992

B.3. Timeline : on going

7/93 1/94 6/94 1/95 6/95
[*****-->

B.4. Benefits: More effective communications will develop between DNR staff and ethnic constituents. Southeast Asians will gain better understanding of regulated natural resources concepts, and be more able to conform to standard conservation practices. DNR professionals have the resources to intervene effectively and resolve conflicts among different ethnic user groups.

C: Title: Cultural and Sensitivity Training

C.1. Summary: Plan and schedule for DNR and other professionals a series of cultural sensitivity training sessions, and follow-up programs with Southeast Asian speakers who will share their natural resources traditions and practices and discuss common problems/conflicts.

C.2. Budget: \$52,700

C.3. Timeline :

7/93 1/94 6/94 1/95 6/95
▶ training [*****] [*****] [*****]

C.4. Benefits: DNR and other natural resources professionals will learn to appreciate other natural resources cultures and traditions, and then gain skills to work effectively with ethnic communities. Southeast Asians will have opportunities to share their experiences as well.

III.- Context:

A. Significance: Southeast Asians are the fastest growing segment of Minnesota's population. In their homeland, they live close to the land and have devised unique natural resources practices. Resettled in Minnesota, they now live in urban areas from which they disperse to a few intensively used sites for recreation. Southeast Asians are heavy users of natural resources, but are unfamiliar with the concept of regulated resources. Traditional public information and involvement approaches have failed. Wide cultural gaps exist between DNR, the general public and this ethnic group. DNR does not have full-time staff, expertise, or budgetary resources to address this issue. Unique opportunities now exist to partner with the Southeast Asian communities. This project is the first of its kind, and has the potential to become a model for more effective services to ethnic constituents.

B. Strategy: The priority will be to enhance recreational resources opportunities for a special user group experiencing cultural and language barriers, and by thus, reduce community tensions and conflicts.

C. Time: 2 years with 2 additional years at less intensity.

D. Cooperation: Hmong mutual associations in Twin Cities; University of Minnesota's Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project; KTCI-Channel 17.

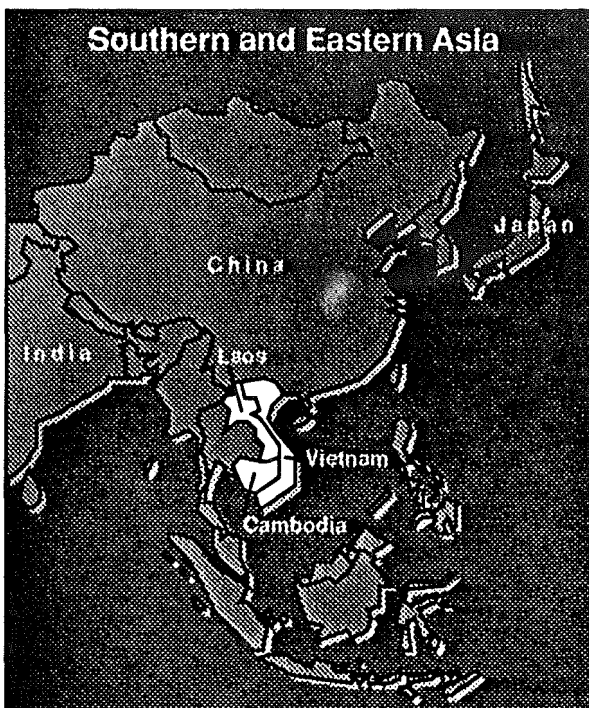
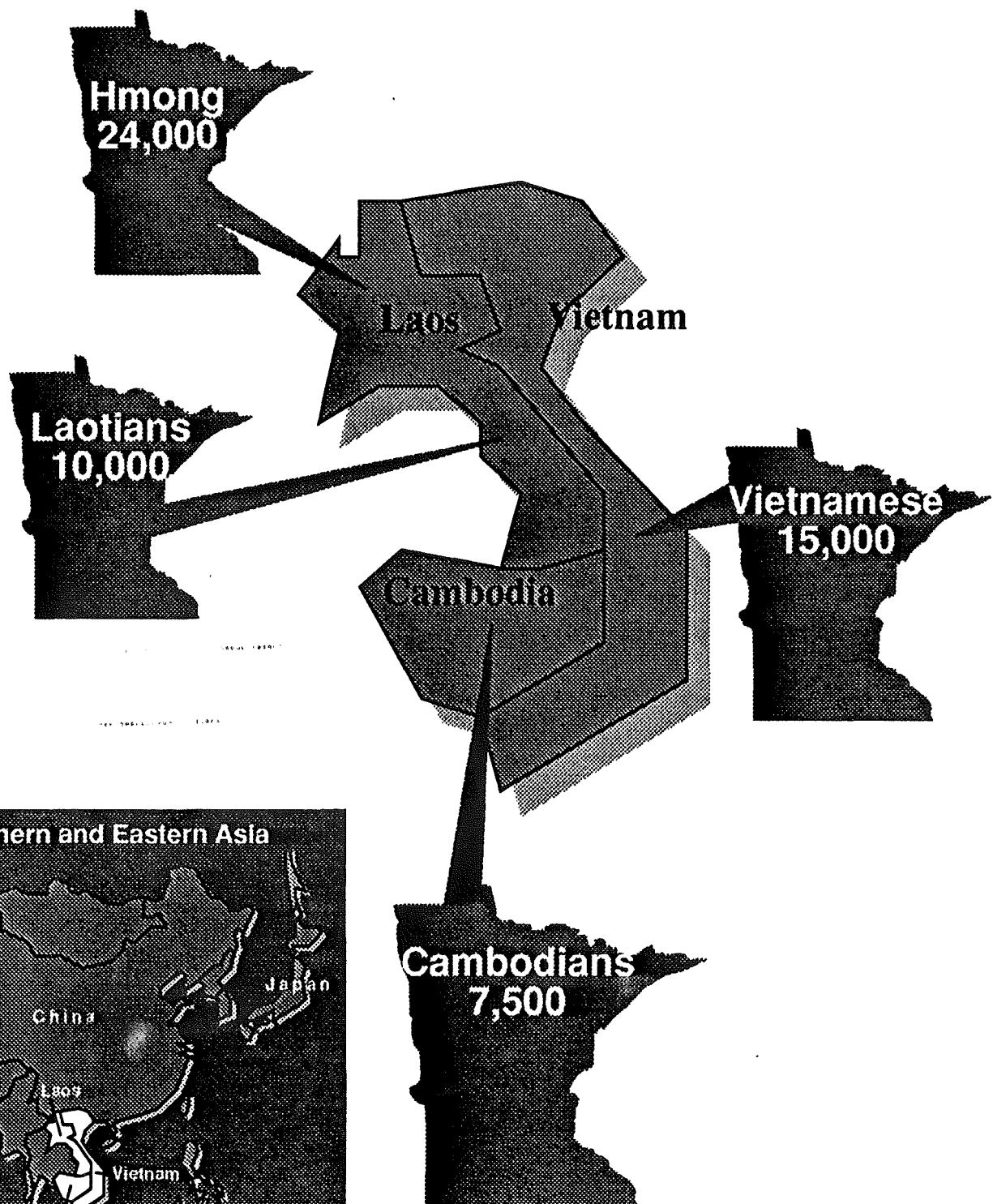
IV.- Budget History: This is a new program. No similar efforts have been attempted before.

SOUTHEAST ASIANS IN MINNESOTA

**ENHANCED RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR
SOUTHEAST ASIAN COMMUNITIES**

COVER ART COURTESY OF THE SCIENCE MUSEUM OF MINNESOTA

Southeast Asian Peoples in Minnesota



Sources: 1992 estimates from
Southeast Asia Service
Organizations

ENHANCED RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN COMMUNITIES

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Office of Planning
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4010



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Almost all of the Minnesota's Southeast Asian immigrants are here, in one way or another, because of the Vietnam war. Most fled their homeland either because they were associated with the U.S. government during the war and feared reprisals, or because of harsh social and economic conditions after the war.

Nationally, Minnesota is fourth in Southeast Asian refugee population, after California, Texas and Washington State.

□ *Total estimated Southeast Asian population: 56,500*

Though the Southeast Asians are often thought and talked about as a group, their cultures are very different. The main four groups: Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese and Hmong.

*** THE CAMBODIANS ***

The Cambodians arrived in Minnesota in two sub-groups, and now number nearly 7,500. The first refugees came in 1975 after the country fell into communist hands. This group is comprised mostly of well-educated individuals who had worked for Americans in big cities. They were followed in 1981 by people from the countryside who didn't speak English, and mostly were farmers, or war widows and children.

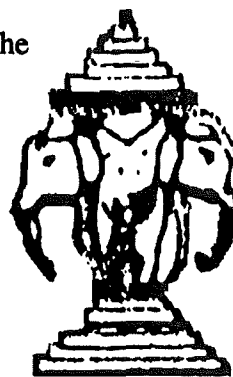
Cambodia achieved a great civilization during the 9th through 13th centuries. It then ruled parts of the territories now covered by Laos, Vietnam and Thailand.

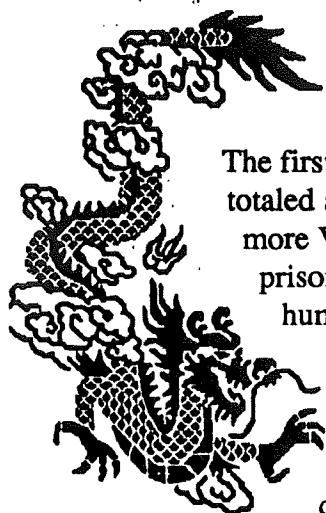


*** THE LAO ***

The least visible of the Southeast Asian groups numbering about 10,000 in Minnesota, the Lao are from the lowland of Laos and practice Buddhism. The Lao language belongs to the Tai language family, but its written form is of the Indic origin. Like the Cambodians, the first Lao arrivals were mostly well-educated former government functionaries. The later immigrants were from small villages and less prepared for a new life in the United States. They fled their country when political conditions there greatly deteriorated after the fall of Laos.

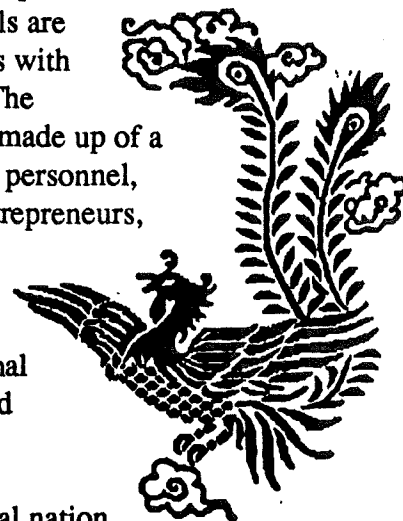
Among Southeast Asians, the Lao are known for their extreme gentleness, and their peaceful and deeply religious qualities.





✱ THE VIETNAMESE ✱

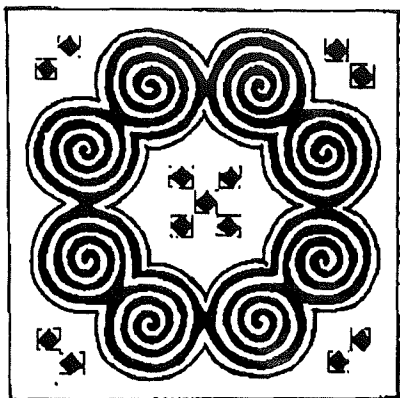
The first refugees to arrive from Southeast Asia in the mid-1970s, the Vietnamese totaled about 15,000 in 1992. This number continues to increase as more and more Vietnamese leave their country to join families, or because as ex-political prisoners, they are admitted to the U.S. under a special humanitarian program. Among the late arrivals are also some five hundred Amerasian youths with their immediate and extended families. The Vietnamese community in Minnesota is made up of a mixed group of military and government personnel, civil servants, private businessmen and entrepreneurs, and literary people, most of whom have good educational background, work experience and foreign language skills. But the group also includes laborers, farmers and fishermen with minimal education and little exposure to western culture and ways of life.



Vietnam was for a long time a sophisticated cultural nation with historical ties to centers of both Asian and European civilizations.

✱ THE HMONG ✱

One of the many ethnic minorities of Laos, the Hmong are the largest Southeast Asian group in Minnesota with some 24,000 members. The Hmong originally lived in China, and migrated south into French Indochina in the 19th century to escape political persecution and annihilation. In Laos, the Hmong lived in high and isolated mountainous areas, practicing slash-and-burn agriculture, and raising small livestock for a living. Though Hmong history goes back to some four thousand years, it was not until 1950 that a Hmong written language was developed. The Hmong, however, still retain the oral tradition; the use of the written language is not very widespread.



Recognized for their superior guerrilla combat skills and their familiarity with jungle territory, in the 1960s and 1970s the Hmong were enlisted by the Central Intelligence Agency to help with the anti-communist war. Because of their association with the Vietnam War, the Hmong fled to Thailand to escape

persecution when Laos was taken over by the Communist forces. There were only some 60 Hmong persons arriving in Minnesota in 1976. Today, Minnesota has the nation's largest urban concentration of Hmong immigrants.

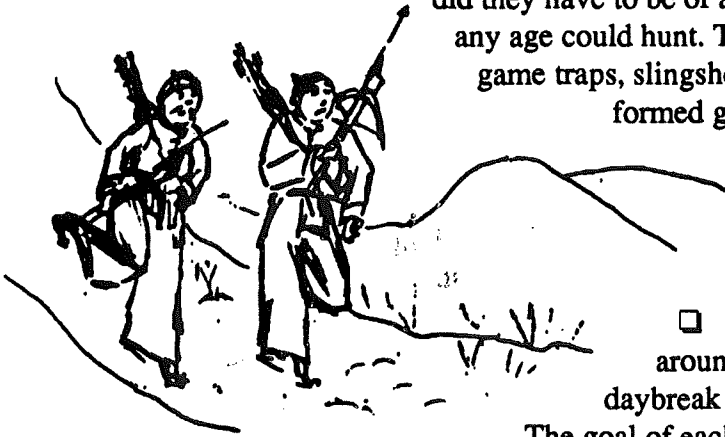
The Hmong have brought their own social organization to Minnesota. They maintain a strong family structure, and a clan system to preserve solidarity among their people. They continue to observe age-old traditions, while striving to adjust to American multi-cultural society.



HMONG TRADITIONAL NATURAL RESOURCES ATTITUDES & PRACTICES

- ❑ In Laos, the Hmong lived high up in isolated mountainous and jungle covered areas free from any government control. They were free to use the natural resources around them, however and as much as they wanted.
- ❑ Though Laos' natural resources were unregulated by the government, the Hmong had deep reverence for nature, and only took away from nature what was absolutely necessary for their survival. They would regularly invoke the spirits and ask for blessings before going into the forest to clear the land for planting, or before going to hunt.

- ❑ In their homeland, the Hmong did not need a license to hunt or fish, nor did they have to be of a certain age. Hmong men and young boys of any age could hunt. The Hmong hand-manufactured crossbows, game traps, slingshots and flintlock rifles to hunt. The Hmong formed groups to hunt. They would meet to discuss where to go, choosing areas with animal tracks or sites they had gone before and had successes.



- ❑ The Hmong camped in one area and hunted around it. Individual hunters would leave the camp at daybreak to hunt, and must return to camp before dark. The goal of each hunter was to kill as much as he could carry home to feed his family. Hunters kill any animals they came across.

- ❑ The Hmong are used to fish in highland fast-running and shallow waters, and fished either by hand grabbing or damming up sections of stream and using bamboo fish traps. They also made poles, spears and occasionally employed poison, but used the type harmful to fish only.
- ❑ When the Hmong killed fur animals such as squirrels, they always singed them before cleaning the whole animals for food, and they would eat the skin with the rest of the meat. With large preys such as deer, boar, they would thinly slice and hang the meat high over an open fire to dry and preserve it because of lack of refrigeration.
- ❑ Hmong women regularly combed parts of the forests for fruits, shoots, mushrooms and vegetables for food.

EXAMPLES OF CROSS CULTURAL CONFLICTS

REGULATED NATURAL RESOURCES

- ❑ This is a very alien concept for the Hmong. For them this is a free country, and this means that citizens are free to do whatever they like, including hunt, fish, cut trees, camp, wherever, however, and as much as they need and like. In Laos, the Hmong lived high up in isolated and mountainous areas free from any government control.

LICENSE AND BAG LIMITS

- ❑ In their homeland, the Hmong did not need a license to hunt, or to fish. When they went hunting, they would shoot at any animals they came across, including birds, not distinguishing whether their preys were from an endangered or protected species or not. The Hmong also have difficulty with the concept of limits on the numbers and types of animals they can catch or shoot. In Laos, if a Hmong hunter managed to kill more than he needed, he would share his catch with a fellow hunter who had been unsuccessful. When a group went hunting, nobody would come home empty handed. The same thing happened when the Hmong went fishing, or gathering foods in the forest.



LAND PROPRIETORSHIP

- ❑ In Hmong lands, the concept of proprietorship does not apply. The Hmong had free access to all areas surrounding and stretching far beyond their settlements. They could hunt and chase their preys, or fish and camp anywhere without fear of trespassing. For many Hmong elders who are here, leaving the crowded cities to go camping provides relief from the problems of homesickness, loneliness and mental depression. They do not understand why they are not allowed to camp on lands that are inhabited. For them, Minnesota's vast natural and forest covered spaces do not belong to anybody, and therefore, they should be able to go in a forest, or to a wilderness area anytime of the year without having to make reservation or obtain permission.

PROBLEMS AND CONFLICTS

- ☐ **Dick Tuszynski, Wildlife Area Supervisor, Mille Lacs.**

... "Regardless of whether or not prejudice is involved, there are some real and perceived problems with the southeast Asian use of Mille Lacs. The other major units experience a few of the same difficulties... I've tried working with some of the southeast Asians but frequently find language a barrier... Would it be possible and practical for someone in (Central Office) to provide me with some names of southeast Asians that I might contact for assistance? .."

- ☐ **Doug Ellens, Ham Lake, MN.**

... "I am writing about some concerns I have in regard to the Mille Lacs Wildlife Management Area hunting grounds... these people (...) either aren't aware of the rules and law, let alone hunters etiquette, or they simply don't care ... I'm also concerned that (they) are properly licensed for the game they may be taking .. and know what they can and can't take by law ... My family and I have enjoyed the area for hunting to (sic) long to have it ruined by people with no concern for nature."

- ☐ **Greg DeWitt, Shoreview, MN.**

..." there were at least 25 Southeast Asians hunting out of the DeWitt pool area alone and they were all ages... I have heard from other sources that the Carlos Avery area found out that a large number of these people were hunting there without licenses or gun safety certification for their kids... I also know for a fact that they camp back there, which I think is against the law... it is obvious that they have no concept of litter... they also shoot just about anything that moves ... The group has no concept of hunting etiquette ..."

- ☐ **Susan Robeson, Executive Director, KTCI - Channel 17, St. Paul.**

..." Over the months, we have consistently heard talk of the need for better interaction between the Hmong community and the Department of Natural Resources — for the Hmong community to have a better understanding of how to access DNR resources and for the DNR to better understand Hmong culture and needs concerning hunting, fishing and camping."

- ☐ **Greg Berg, Executive Director, MN Waterfowl Association, Minneapolis.**

..." The difficulties that the DNR, user groups, and the Hmong have experienced with each other is a part of 15 years of oftentimes painful history. Trying to deal with the conflicts has been virtually impossible because of language and cultural barriers and the fact that DNR has not been able to hire trained Hmong professional staff".

- ❑ **Ann Damon**, Director, Refugee & Immigrant Assistance Div., MN Dept. Human Services.

..." I have heard of the conflicts between Southeast Asians and other concerned users ..."

- ❑ **Harold Burley**, President, MN Deer Hunters Association.

..." There is ocnsiderable concern among Minnesota hunters regarding real or imagined hunting problems associated with SE Asian immigrants ..."

- ❑ **A DNR manager**, at Fall 1991 conference Brainerd, MN.

"I'm not convinced that SE Asians are ignorant of our rules. Their concern is to practice their culture. Ignorance is their excuse".

SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT

INSTITUTIONS

- ☐ Anne Damon, Director, Refugee & Immigrant Assistance Div., MN Dept. of Human Services.

... " I have heard of the conflicts between Southeast Asians and other concerned users... The strategies of community education, bilingual communication exchanges and cultural and sensitivity training make sense to me and are well conceived."

- ☐ Dr. Albert DeLeon, Executive Director, Minnesota Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans.

..." I am impressed with the level of thinking and sensitivity (..) shown in the development of something quite unique for our communities.... the major strength of (this) project is its emphasis on connecting and working closely with the Southeast Asian communities as partners ...

- ☐ Prof. Bruce Downing, Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, U. of M., Minneapolis.

..." This program can help (...) Asian Americans utilize the natural resources our state offers to greater advantage and to join with others in efforts to conserve our environment... I would like to indicate my willingness, as a member of the Southeast Asian Refugee Studies project at the University of Minnesota, to cooperate in any way possible."

- ☐ Lou Casagrande, Senior Vice-President, The Science Museum of Minnesota.

..." through education, the unknown becomes less mysterious, less threatening, and less fearful... The DNR's proposal takes this education one step by working hands-on with the Hmong community and generating a forum for two way communication ... Their proactive approach to increased understanding and cooperation will provide a future benefit to all."

- ☐ Susan Robeson, Executive Producer, KTCI-Channel 17, St. Paul.

..." The Department of Natural Resources has developed a proposal to make recreational opportunities more accessible to Southeast Asian communities ... and to do so in a way that is culturally appropriate and sensitive.... We are thrilled to participate in this project ..."

- ☐ John G. Rogers, Acting Regional Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

..."The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is supportive of your proposal ... Federal lands within the state have been intensively used by Hmong communities to hunt, fish and camp ... The Service agrees there is a great need to overcome cultural barriers and bridge the communication gap between natural resource agencies and Hmong communities ... Region 3 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the MN Department of Natural Resources in their efforts to enhance Southeast Asians' understanding of management and regulated resource use ..."

SPORTSMEN'S GROUPS:

- ☐ Harold Burley, President, and John Kvasnicka, Executive Director, MN Deer Hunters Association, Grand Rapids, MN.

..." There is considerable concern among Minnesota hunters regarding real or imagined hunting problems associated with SE Asian Immigrants.... We feel that we could work in a cooperative networking and communication program if the (DNR) Hmong proposal is supported. We also definitely feel that the funding ... for the proposal should start July 1, 1992. The earlier we start

the program, the sooner we head off any potential problems ... we respectfully request that LCMR support this program."

- ☐ **Greg Berg**, Executive Director, MN Waterfowl Association, Minneapolis.

... " I am pleased to offer our support for a unique proposal... I understand the Hmong community is strongly supportive of this approach and I believe it will work if adequately funded... sportsmen's organizations such as ours recognize the problems which have been created ... see the need to work cooperatively to provide the education necessary for the Hmong to learn about Minnesota resources and about how we regulate their use..."

SOUTHEAST ASIAN ORGANIZATIONS:

- ☐ **Vu Yang**, Vice President, Hmong American Veterans Alliance, St. Paul.

..." the DNR project can achieve its objectives because it was developed and will be carried out with the community's participation. The proposal identifies our alliance as one of the major cooperators. We want to participate in the project."

- ☐ **Robert E. Anderson**, Executive Director, Hmong American Partnership, St. Paul.

... " The Department of Natural Resources will receive the full support and cooperation of Hmong American Partnership in implementing the program. We are prepared to make this effort a major priority and feel well equipped to serve as DNR's community partner ..."

SOUTHEAST ASIAN CITIZENS:

- ☐ **Boulieng Phommasouvanh**, PhD., Lao-American citizen, Eagan, MN.

... " (this) proposal (..) will enable your office to provide training to the Southeast Asian groups on the use of natural resources and American laws, as well as to promote a better understanding among the American public ..."

- ☐ **Tong Vang**, Community University Health Care Center, Social worker, Hmong-American Member on Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans.

..." The Hmong community is very interested in learning more so we can use the outdoors without fear of committing violations because we do not have good information... The Department of Natural Resources project will be very useful for members of the Hmong and other refugee communities..."

- ☐ **Yer Xiong Stewart**, Metro State U., Program Coordinator, Hmong-American, St. Paul

..." I am glad to see that the DNR is reaching out to the Southeast Asian communities, and working with them to bridge a cultural and communication gap. The DNR project will have many positive results for all of us."

- ☐ **Christopher Thao**, Attorney at Law, Christopher Thao & Associates, Minneapolis.

" This is to express my support for (the) project ...named Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities... the DNR developed this proposal using ideas and suggestions coming from many of us, other Hmong leaders and myself..."

SOUTHEAST ASIAN CULTURAL TRAINING SESSION FEEDBACK & COMMENTS FROM DNR MANAGERS

September 1991.

At the 1991 Fall DNR Managers Conference, Josée Cung presented a Natural Resources in Southeast Asian Societies workshop. The two-hour session consisted of a panel presentation on Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese and Hmong natural resource practices and beliefs, followed by a question and answer period.

The workshop earned high marks in the evaluations submitted by DNR managers. Among the comments:

- ☐ Good concepts presented on use of the land & what the real resource needs and issues are.
- ☐ My previous conceptions were off base.
- ☐ It was extremely educational. I learned a lot about their cultures. We in the DNR need more cultural interaction.
- ☐ I'm not convinced that SE Asians are ignorant of our rules. Their concern is to practice their culture. Ignorance is their excuse.
- ☐ Thought providing - the Southeast Asians had much to say about values that we would do well to emulate.
- ☐ It will help us in being more sensitive to diversity.
- ☐ Appreciation for other's opinions and customs".
- ☐ Impressed ...the Southeast Asian community is recognizing the need to adapt to their new Minnesota home.
- ☐ This was really outstanding presentation.
- ☐ Hopefully I can be more open and understanding.
- ☐ I'd like to work with Josee Cung in involving SE Asians in natural resource experiences to help them understanding our laws/perspectives on nature and (to) learn from them.
- ☐ This presentation will help me understand reasons why the Hmong people have different views on utilizing our natural resources.

- ☐ Increased sensitivity, understanding of need to continue the dialogue.
- ☐ I have a much better idea of the communication and attitudinal problems our society faces in integrating SE Asian refugees into "our world".

FROM THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Cultural clash complicates resources management

We had many excellent presentations at the 1991 Fall Managers Conference, but one keeps popping back into my mind.

Senior Planner Josee Cung assembled a panel representing Southeast Asian cultures that comprises significant portion of Minnesota's population and one, as the panel made clear, that we must expect to grow and become ever more important in our program development.

I was struck by several things in the presentation. It became clear that the five cultures represented at the front table were only a fraction of those present in the relatively small area called Indochina. It was also clear that the panel members were very aware of their cultural differences and sensitive to the importance of those differences as they interact and cooperate in this alien land of snow and bitter winter weather. Finally, as I heard them describe their value systems, religions, and traditional lifestyles, I was awed by the culture gap that must be bridged to integrate established resource management goals with their needs and values as clients of the Department of Natural Resources.

For example, the very existence of fish and game laws is a totally alien concept. In some of the cultures we heard from, restraint in harvest is an integral part of their religion. It does not translate easily into six walleyes and three northern pikes, but is grounded in seasonal and daily consumption needs.

Imagine most Americans' reactions to artificial controls imposed on their religious values. We've got work to do!

As I reflect on the discussion, I wonder how cultural differences contribute to conflicts with our more traditional clients. We usually think of Minnesota's predominant population as a single culture, but is it? Some who make their living from the land have a "religion" unique to their work (loggers and farmers). Resource professionals may have their own "religion" driving them to do the best they can for the resource. Isn't this culture clash?

I've reached two conclusions from this experience. First, I can think of no more compelling argument for affirmative action. Bridging the culture gap demands that we integrate members of many cultures into our work force to facilitate communication and improve understanding. Second, when we become frustrated with the apparent inability of an individual or business to do what is obviously "the right thing", perhaps we need to ask if culture is preventing communication. DNR views and policies may be as alien to some Minnesota natives as our climate is to Josee and her family. In effect our policies may be offending someone's "religious values." We need to pause and ask, "How does what I'm saying sound to my audience?"

Ron Nargang
Deputy Commissioner

(Reprint from DNR Resource Review, November 1991).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PROJECT MANAGER RESUME

Program Title: Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities.

Name: Josée Cung

Affiliation: Department of Natural Resources
Office of Planning
500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155

Phone Number: (612) 297-4745

EDUCATION:

Post-graduate Degree in Economic Project Evaluation & Analysis, United Nations' Asian Institute for Economic Development, Bangkok, Thailand.

B.A. in Political Science, Sydney University, Sydney, Australia.
Certificat d'Etudes Supérieures de Littérature Française, University of Saigon, Saigon, Vietnam.

French Baccalauréats, Lycée Marie Curie, Saigon, Vietnam.

OTHER TRAINING:

Management I & II, College St. Thomas
Business Writing Skills, College St. Thomas
Leadership Skills, University of Minnesota

MOST RECENT WORK EXPERIENCE:

Senior Planner, unclassified, Dept. Natural Resources, Office of Planning, since 12/90. Responsibilities: 1) Coordinate LCMR-funded natural resources management scholarships & internships project; 2) Assist in the development of the LCMR Environmental Learning Centers Study. As a special assignment, designed and conducted a cultural training session on Southeast Asian traditions and practices in natural resources for the 1991 DNR Fall Managers Conference, and began the development of working relations with ethnic communities to connect DNR with its under-served Southeast Asian constituents.

Community Development Associate, United Way of Minneapolis, from 1/85 to 12/90: Responsible for developing linkages to minority communities, and for designing a cultural diversity program. Successfully planned and conducted an agency-sponsored series of cultural diversity training sessions on the four main ethnic minorities for volunteers, school teachers, social workers and social services professionals.

COMMUNITY WORK AND INVOLVEMENT:

Public Appointment:

- 1) Council member on Governor's State Advisory Council for Refugees since 1984; served as Executive Committee member, chaired task forces on refugee employment, refugee community development and policy development; was selected to participate in fact-finding delegation to southeast asian refugee camps in Thailand in 1986.
- 2) Candidate for Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans.

Volunteer Board Membership:

Member of Board of Directors of The Schubert Club, COMPAS, YWCA St Paul, United Way of Minneapolis' Cultural Diversity Committee, Vietnamese Cultural Association in Minnesota, Minnesota World Wide Women Organization, and "Colors" Journal of Opinions.

Working Relations and Contacts:

Maintain regular contacts with, and/or provide consultation and advice on Asian communities, refugee and immigration, and cultural diversity issues and programs, to:

- 1) Private foundations. e.g. McKnight, Bush and Honeywell;
- 2) Southeast Asian refugee organizations including Cambodian Children Fund, Lao Assistance Association, Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women, Hmong American Partnership, Hmong Elders Programs, Vietnamese Social Services, Vietnamese Buddhist Association;
- 3) Voluntary agencies such as Lutheran Social Services, International Institute of Minnesota, Minnesota Refugee Consortium;
- 4) Department of Human Services' Division of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance.

APPENDIX B
LETTERS OF SUPPORT



STATE OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Human Services Building
444 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-38__

Josée Cung
Research and Planning Analyst
Office of Planning
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-4010

Dear Josée:

I am pleased to support the proposal by the Department of Natural Resources for funding which would bridge the cultural and language gap between Southeast Asians and other users of recreational sites for hunting, fishing and camping.

As the Director of the Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Division of the Department of Human Services, I have heard of the conflicts between Southeast Asians and other concerned users. I agree with you that some of the misunderstandings have to do with a lack of awareness on the part of both groups.

The strategies of community education, bilingual communication exchanges and cultural and sensitivity training make sense to me and are well conceived.

Best wishes in your pursuit of funding for his worthwhile endeavor.

Sincerely,

Anne Damon
Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Division



AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER



STATE OF MINNESOTA
Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans

Summit National Bank Building, Suite 100
205 Aurora Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55103
612-296-0538

February 27, 1992

Ms. Josee Cung
Office of Planning
Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Ms. Cung:

I am writing in support of the Department of Natural Resources' project to provide better recreational opportunities to Southeast Asian Minnesotans.

After a carefully reading of your proposal, I must say that I am impressed with the level of thinking and sensitivity you have shown in the development of something quite unique for our communities. Up until now, to my knowledge, no efforts in the community have been directed at addressing the recreational needs of Southeast Asian Minnesotans. Therefore, I believe that your funding request to the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources deserves very serious consideration.

In my view, the major strength of your project is its emphasis on connecting and working closely with the Southeast Asian communities as partners. Having had the chance to work with you before on both community development and cultural diversity projects, I know that you have the talent and experience to undertake this new initiative.

With my best wishes for your project's success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "A. de Leon".

Dr. Albert V. de Leon
Executive Director



MINNESOTA DEER HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

2820 South Highway 169
P.O. Box 5123
Grand Rapids, Minnesota 55744-5123
Phone: (218) 327-1103
Toll Free: 1-800-777-4503
Fax: (218) 327-1349



2 April 1992

Senator Gene Merriam, Chair
Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
State Office Building
John Ireland Boulevard
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Senator Merriam:

I am writing to express the support of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association for the Hmong Education Project, which was submitted by the Department of Natural Resources. There is considerable concern among Minnesota hunters regarding real or imagined hunting problems associated with SE Asian Immigrants.

The Hmong are outdoor people who hunt and fish. They are active deer hunters, and our members come in contact with them during hunting season. Conflicts arise because they have little knowledge of our hunting customs, techniques, ethics, and game laws. There are reports of frequent violations, which may well be due to lack of knowledge. They often hunt in large groups in a single area, which may be because they do not know other locations where they could hunt. The potential for a serious conflict is real, and a comprehensive educational effort is needed.

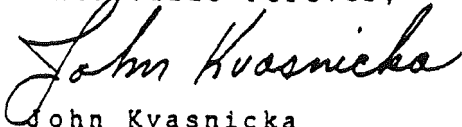
The Minnesota Deer Hunters Association is working very diligently with Forkhorn Camps for youth, deer clinics, post-secondary Natural Resources Scholarships, advance hunter education programs, and firearm safety programs.

We feel that we could work in a cooperative networking and communication program if the Hmong proposal is supported. We also definitely feel that the funding for the proposal should start July 1, 1992. The earlier we start the program, the sooner we head off any potential problems.

"...Organized to achieve the best possible deer herd-and to promote high quality deer hunting."

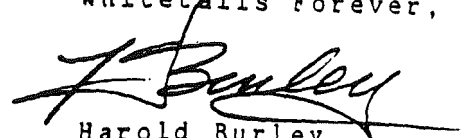
The Minnesota Deer Hunters Association believes that the DNR has developed a proposal to begin dealing with these problems, and we respectfully request that LCMR support this program.

Whitetails Forever,



John Kvasnicka
Executive Director
MDHA

Whitetails Forever,



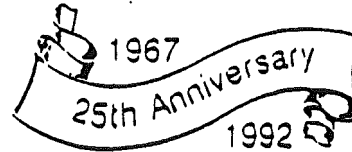
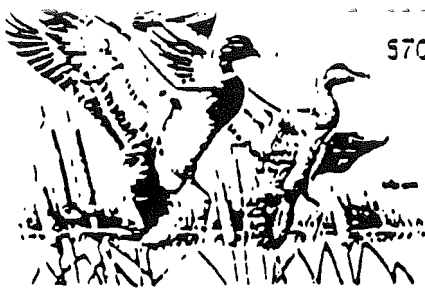
Harold Burley
President
MDHA

srg

cc: Rod Sando, DNR Commissioner
MDHA Executive Committee



"...Organized to achieve the best possible deer herd and to promote high quality deer hunting."



April 8, 1992

RECEIVED

APR 13 1992

COMMISSIONER

Senator Gene Merriam, Chair
Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Senator Merriam,

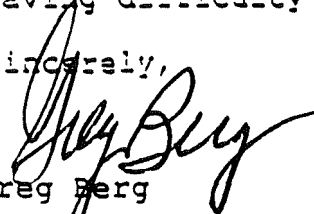
As Executive Director of the Minnesota Waterfowl Association, I am pleased to offer our support for a unique proposal to create a program to reach Southeast Asian communities, especially the Hmong who are very actively involved in hunting.

The difficulties that the DNR, user groups, and the Hmong have experienced with each other is a part of 15 years of oftentimes painful history. Trying to deal with the conflicts has been virtually impossible because of language and cultural barriers and the fact that DNR has not been able to hire trained Hmong professional staff.

I understand the Hmong community is strongly supportive of this approach and I believe it will work if adequately funded. I think sportsmen's organizations such as ours recognize the problems which have been created. I think most of us see the need to work cooperatively to provide the education necessary for the Hmong to learn about Minnesota natural resources and about how we regulate their use.

With this project LCMR has a unique opportunity to protect our natural resources while at the same time providing an important service to a special population who has been having difficulty with our laws and customs.

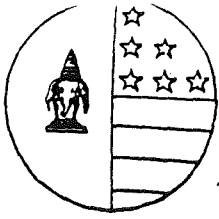
Sincerely,


Greg Berg
Executive Director

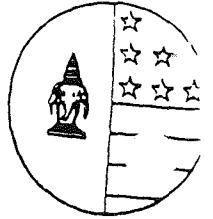
c: Rod Sando, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources



We Don't Duck Waterfowl Issues



**Hmong and American
Veterans Alliance**
1544 Timberlake RD.
St. Paul, MN. 55117
(612) 488-0243



March 25, 1992

The Honorable Gene Merriam
Chair - Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
122 Capital, Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Honorable Merriam,

My Name is Vu Yang, a Hmong American in St. Paul. I am currently the Vice President of the Hmong-American Veterans Alliance (HAVA) in Minnesota, a non-profit organization of 300 members, the majority of whom are Hmong ex-veterans having served in the special forces in Laos on the side of American soldiers during the Vietnam war.

Last Fall, two HAVA members and I met with some officials of the Department of Natural Resources(DNR), including the Commissioner, to discuss the issue of the Hmong community's outdoors activities such as hunting, fishing and camping. At this meeting, we got the chance to share with DNR officials Hmong culture and hunting practices, and to bring up the problems we have encountered whenever we went hunting, fishing or camping.

The Department of Natural Resources has now developed a proposal to address the recreational opportunities of Southeast Asian Communities, in particular the Hmong community. I have read the DNR proposal. I see that it contains many ideas and suggestions we discussed with DNR. I believe the DNR project can achieve its objectives because it was developed and will be carried out with the community's participation. The proposal identifies our alliance as one of the major cooperators. We want to participate in the project.

I am writing this letter to express my strong support for the work to obtain funding for its Southeast Asian project. This is a project that will benefit our communities. Its results will help close the communication gap, and permit us to become more informed hunters, fishermen or campers.

Sincerely,

Vu Yang
Vice President
HAVA



Hmong American

PARTNERSHIP

March 2, 1992

Josee N. Cung
Research and Planning Analyst
Office of Planning
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-4010

Dear Ms. Cung:

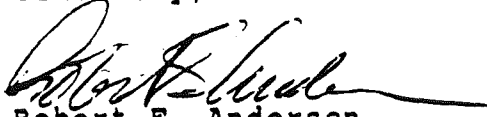
Please accept my thanks, on behalf of Hmong American Partnership (HAP), for the efforts that you and the Department have made in conceptualizing a program to increase Hmong community understanding of DNR managed programs and issues.

The difficulties that the DNR and members of the Hmong community have experienced in their encounters with each other have a lengthy and sometimes painful history. I know that the Department has made some limited attempts to resolve some of these difficulties in the past. However, the current proposal is the first to be comprehensive enough that we might expect it may really have a significant impact. The interests of the DNR, the Hmong community and all the citizens of Minnesota - as stewards in common of the natural resources of the state - would be well served by the proposed program.

The Department of Natural Resources will receive the full support and cooperation of Hmong American Partnership in implementing the program. We are prepared to make this effort a major priority and feel well equipped to serve as DNR's community partner in the program.

Again, our thanks to Commissioner Sando and the DNR for this initiative.

Sincerely,



Robert E. Anderson
Executive Director

T. CHRISTOPHER THAO & ASSOCIATES

Attorney at Law

5637 BROOKLYN BLVD., STE 200

MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55429

Phone: (612) 536-8094

Facsimile: (612) 536-0053

April 4, 1992

The Honorable Gene Marriam
Chair, Legislative Commission
of Minnesota Resources
122 Capitol
St. Paul, Mn 55155



Dear Chairman Merriam,

This is to express my support for a project by the Department of Natural Resources named Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities.

I am the past-chairman and founder of the Hmong American Partnership (HAP), a non-profit organization serving the Hmong American citizens in Minnesota. This past winter, I met with the Department of Natural Resources Commissioner and his staff to discuss about opportunities for recreational activities and involvement in the DNR for Hmong citizens. We also discussed the many problems DNR and the Hmong share, arising from the lack of effective communication between the department and the Southeast Asian communities.

I understand that the DNR developed this proposal using ideas and suggestions coming from any of us, other Hmong leaders and myself. At least two of the three project's objectives will be carried out with the active participation of our organization. Hap has the necessary staff and expertise to work with the DNR, and to ensure that the project will be successful.

If you have questions about this letter of support, or wish to have further information about our organization, please contact me at 536-8094 or Mr. Robert Anderson, HAP Executive Director at 642-9601.

Thank you for your interest and support of Southeast Asian communities.

Sincerely

T. Christopher Thao, Esq.

cc: Josee Cung ✓
Robert Anderson

Honorable Senator Gene Merriam
Chairman of the Legislative Commission
in Minnesota Resources
122 Capital Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101



Dear Senator

I am a Hmong-American residing at 1571 Wheelock Ridge in St. Paul MN working as a social worker at the Community University Health Care Center in Minneapolis. I currently serve on the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, representing the Hmong community. I also, serve on the St. Paul Public Housing Board of Commissioners. In the present time I have serve on the Governor's State Advisory Council for Refugees, and was President of the Lao Family Community Inc. in St. Paul from 1986 to 1988.

Recently I was invited to meet with the staff of the Department of Natural Resources in St. Paul to review a project the department developed to serve Southeast Asian populations, especially the Hmong. I have family members and friends who enjoy going on hunting trips, or go fishing and camping in the outdoors during weekends, holidays or vacation. I know that many members of our community have met with problems when they go hunting or fishing. Many of us know about some laws about hunting and fishing, but sometimes we are not completely sure we know everything we need to know.

The Hmong community is very interested in learning more so we can use the outdoors without fear of committing violations because we do not have good information. We also want to learn more about the many opportunities for recreation, employment and other programs within the DNR.

So I think the Department of Natural Resources project will be very useful for members of the Hmong and other refugees communities. I have no hesitations to express my full support for this project. As a Counselor, I worked with many Hmong and I know they experience personal problems because they used to live in forests or the mountains, and now they have to live in the city.

Sincerely yours,

Tong Vang



The Science Museum of Minnesota

THIRTY EAST TENTH STREET, SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55101 TEL. (612) 221-9488
FAX (612) 221-4777

April 8, 1992

Senator Gene Merriam
122 Capitol
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Merriam:

This is a letter of support for the LCMR proposal submitted by the Department of Natural Resources entitled "*Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities.*"

Unfortunately it is a common trait of human nature to view the unknown with caution, suspicion and fear. Southeast Asians make up one of the largest ethnic groups in Minnesota. Currently there is a lack of cultural understanding of Minnesota's Southeast Asian community among most Minnesotans. Fortunately through education, the unknown becomes less mysterious, less threatening, and less fearful.

The Science Museum of Minnesota has been actively involved with one group of Southeast Asians for the past 10 years, the Hmong community. Minnesota is home for over 17,000 Hmong refugees. The museum's exhibit *Hmong Odyssey: Tradition in Transition* is a visual representation of our involvement. The museum views this exhibit as one method to communicate the Hmong culture and experience to the general public. The DNR's proposal takes this education one step further by working hands-on with the Hmong community and generating a forum for two way communication.

The DNR's proposal specifically addresses the serious conflicts between the Southeast Asians and other groups in the area of hunting and fishing. Their proposal is a well conceived step toward bridging existing communication gaps.

Senator Gene Merriam
Page Two

The Science Museum of Minnesota strongly supports the DNR's proposal for outreach to Minnesota's Southeast Asians. Their proactive approach to increased understanding and cooperation will provide a future benefit to all.

I appreciate your time.

Sincerely,



Lou Casagrande
Senior Vice-President, Programs

cc. John Velin
Josee N. Cung

March 4, 1992

Ms. Josee Cung, Senior Planner
Office of Planning
Department of Natural Resources
Box 10
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

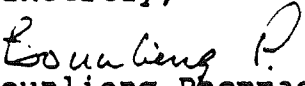
Dear Josee:

I am writing to support your proposal, entitled "Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities," to the Department of Natural Resources of Minnesota. The Southeast Asian population in Minnesota represents a diverse group of individuals in terms of their views on their rights and use of natural resources, and their knowledge of American laws regarding these issues. Most have a strong love and appreciation for nature.

I believe your proposal merits funding, which will enable your office to provide training to the Southeast Asian groups on the use of natural resources and American laws, as well as to promote a better understanding among the American public about this new group of immigrants. The Lao, like other groups, will benefit from this project.

If I can be of further assistance at this time or in the implementation phase of this project, feel free to call me at (612) 296-1064. Let us hope that this much needed project has the support it deserves, so that Minnesota maintains a healthy and caring environment for its culturally diverse population.

Sincerely,


Bounlieng Phommasouvanh, Ph.D.
1883 Sunrise Court
Eagan, MN 55122

March 11, 1992

The Honorable Gene Merriam, Chairman
Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
122 Capitol
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Mr. Chairman


I am Yer Xiong Stewart, residing at 2196 Doswell Ave. St. Paul, MN 55108. I currently work at Metropolitan State University as a program coordinator of the Workforce 2000 and multicultural projects. Prior to that I worked as a parks and recreation community liaison at the City of St. Paul's Parks and Recreation department. I also served on the Board of Hmong American Partnership and the Women's Advancement of Hmong and Lao.

Last fall I was a speaker on the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) cultural training panel presenting Hmong culture and natural resources practices. Recently I met with staff of the Department of Natural Resources to review a project the department developed to serve the Southeast Asian populations, especially the Hmong. I am very much in support of this project.

In Laos, my father and other family members often hunted and fished. Here they, and many other members of the Hmong community, still very much enjoy the outdoors activities, going on hunting and fishing trips whenever possible. However, many Hmong hunters and fishermen are very uncomfortable about these trips because they feel they do not know all the rules and regulations. Some people give up hunting and fishing all together for fear of getting into troubles.

I am glad to see that the DNR is reaching out to the Southeast Asian communities, and working with them to bridge a cultural and communication gap. The DNR project will have many positive results for all of us.

Sincerely,



Yer Xiong Stewart



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
TWIN CITIES

Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project
Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
330 Hubert Humphrey Center
301 19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 625-5535

March 24, 1992

Senator Gene Merriam
Chair, Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
122 Capitol
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Senator Merriam:

I am writing to express support for the proposal for Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Southeast Asian Ethnic Communities.

The proposed program addresses some serious issues that the DNR has faced and attempted to address over the years since Southeast Asian refugees entered our community in the late 1970s. Efforts have been made by the DNR in the past to deal with problems of education, access, and community relations with respect to these immigrant communities, but apparently with limited success. Now, with the development of a specific and comprehensive plan and with the involvement of an especially well qualified professional, Ms. Josée Cung, the Department is in a position to move effectively. This program can help these Asian Americans utilize the natural resources our state offers to greater advantage and to join with others in efforts to conserve our environment.

The need for the program is evident from the fact that many of these immigrants come from countries where there was no enforced management of public lands. With limited command of English it has been difficult for them to learn the complex rules that govern the use of this state's resources and recreational areas. This lack of knowledge of "the system" and the rationale behind it has sometimes made them appear uncooperative, which in turn leads to conflicts with officials and other users of recreational areas.

The design of the program seems to effectively address the important issues. It includes appropriate attention to the means of communication between representatives of the Department and a public that may not speak, read, or understand English readily. It also appropriately includes training designed to help agency staff become more sensitive to culturally-based differences of perspective.

In view of the potential value of the proposed program, I would like to indicate my willingness, as a member of the Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project at the University of Minnesota, to cooperate in any way possible. In particular, the Community Interpreter Training Program which I direct stands ready to work with Ms. Cung in selecting and training interpreters to help ensure full and effective communication in community meetings and educational activities conducted by the DNR for members of the Southeast Asian ethnic communities.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce T. Downing, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Linguistics
Director, Community Interpreter Training Program

copy: Ms. Josée Cung, Senior Planner, DNR



April 13, 1992

The Honorable Gene Merriam
Chair, Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
122 Capitol
St. Paul, MN 55155

The
new
series
celebrating
Hmong
history and
culture
with host
T. Christopher
Thao.

Made
possible
by grants
from:
The Bush
Foundation,
The
Saint Paul
Foundation,
The
F.R. Bigelow
Foundation,
Mordag
Foundation,
The
B.C. Gamble &
P.W. Skogmo
Foundation.

Dear Honorable Merriam,

I am the Executive Producer of **Kev Koom Slab (Path to Unity)** - Twin Cities Public Television's weekly series that is produced by and for the local Hmong community. We have been on the air since September of 1991 and are providing a unique and desperately needed service to the Hmong community.


Because the program is widely watched in the Hmong community on a regular basis, the program has become a primary resource for service providers to the Hmong community - there is no better way to reach and teach the Hmong community than through **Kev Koom Slab**.

Over the months, we have consistently heard talk of the need for better interaction between the Hmong community and the Department of Natural Resources - for the Hmong community to have a better understanding of how to access DNR resources and for the DNR to better understand Hmong culture and needs concerning hunting, fishing and camping.

The Department of Natural Resources has developed a proposal to make recreational opportunities more accessible to Southeast Asian communities - the Hmong in particular - and to do so in a way that is culturally appropriate and sensitive. Channel 17 is identified as a major partner in this project through our weekly, Hmong TV series **Kev Koom Slab**. We are thrilled to participate in this project and urge you to support it.

Because this project is so timely and so sorely needed, we urge you to accelerate the funding timeline so that the project might begin in July of 1992. I would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this further, or supply any additional information you might need from us.

Sincerely,


Susan Robeson
Executive Producer

KTCI-17

Twin
Cities
Public
Television

172
East
Fourth
Street
St. Paul,
Minnesota
55101

(612)
222-
1717

THE *Saint Paul* FOUNDATION

52 Years Of Service To The Community

April 17, 1992

Ms. Josee N. Cung
Senior Planner, Office of Planning
Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road, Box 10
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

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Barbara B. Roy

President

Donna L. Sherlock

Dear Josee:

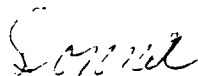
Thank you for inviting me to review your funding proposal. The Department of Natural Resources should be commended for its interest in the well-being of Minnesota's growing Southeast Asian communities.

I found the proposal to be generally comprehensive in scope. It places primary emphasis on the Hmong community, Minnesota's largest Asian community. As you know, strong needs exist within other Southeast Asian communities as well. I assume that an equitable portion of the project will be directed to those communities as well. I hesitate to comment on the budget because the summary did not include detailed financial information, but with nearly \$500,000 over two years, you should be able to offer a high level of service.

The activities described in the proposal appear to fall within the scope of Foundation activities, but please be aware that we are currently receiving large numbers of requests from organizations interested in serving the Southeast Asian communities. This places an increased strain on Foundation resources and many worthy projects do not receive funding. In addition, The Saint Paul Foundation is currently involved in fundraising for a major special project to help increase the management capacity of Southeast Asian non-profit organizations.

As always, it was a pleasure to speak with you. Please accept my very best wishes for the success of your project.

Sincerely,



Donna L. Sherlock
Senior Program Officer

DLS:aea

ds.4.17b



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
3815 East 80th Street
Bloomington, Minnesota 55425-1600

4/17/92

Josee Cung
Research and Planning Analyst
Office of Planning
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4010

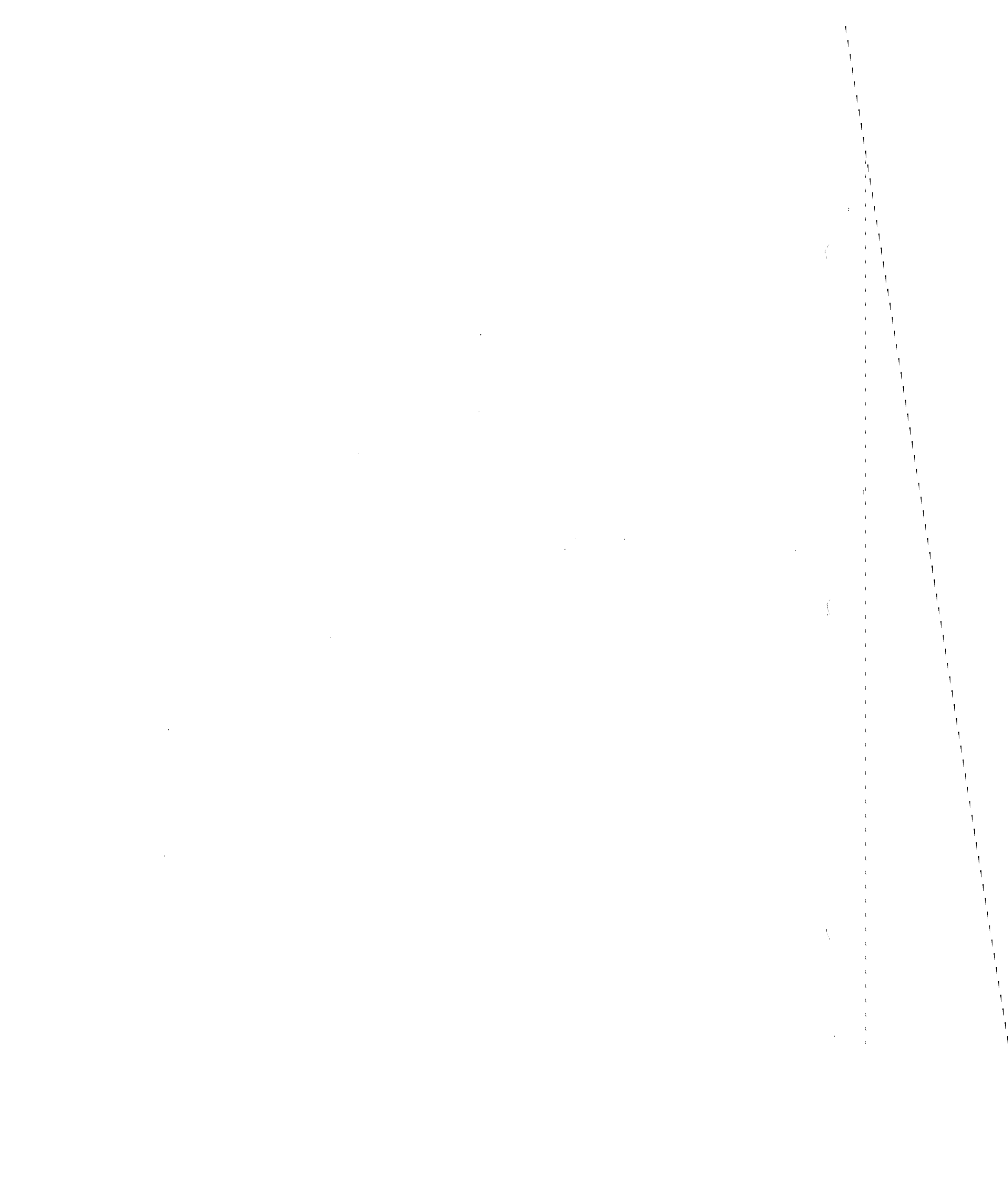
On behalf of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, I am pleased to support the Southeast Asian Outreach Program. There is a considerable need to bridge the communication and cultural gap between Southeast Asians, natural resource professionals and other resource users. This program serves to educate all users of the natural environment.

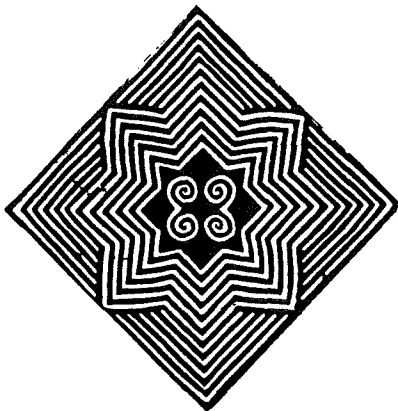
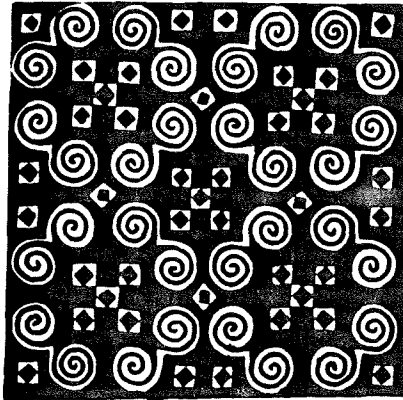
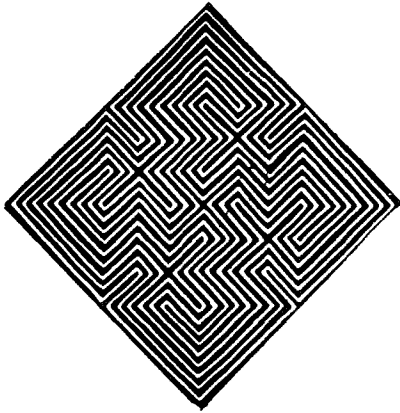
I and my staff look forward to working cooperatively with you and the Southeast Asian communities in Minnesota and piloting an outreach/education program. We feel this proposal specifically addresses the lack of cultural understanding through hands-on activities and by creating a forum for two-way communication.

Minnesota Valley Natural Wildlife Refuge strongly supports this program and proactive approach to increase understanding and cooperation of the use of the natural resources.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Larson
Refuge Manager





INTRODUCTION

The Science Museum of Minnesota has produced the exhibit "Hmong Odyssey: Tradition in Transition" to tell the story of the Hmong people, their traditional culture in Southeast Asia, and their resettlement in the United States and Minnesota. People in the local Hmong community often were the storytellers, interpreting their ways for museum scientists and ultimately for the public.

Through the active involvement of the Hmong community, this exhibit has become a living testimonial to the courage and culture of a refugee people. It can only grow in importance as the years between Laos and Minnesota slip by.

"Hmong Odyssey" is sponsored by the Dayton Hudson Foundation on behalf of Dayton's and Target Stores.

FOR WEAR AND FOR SALE: "PAJ NTAUB" IN TRANSITION

In Laos, girls as young as five years old began to acquire the skills to create the brightly decorated clothing that identified them as Hmong. Learning the techniques of applique, embroidery, and batik required years of training. "Paj ntaub" (pronounced "pan dau"), or "flowery cloth," reflected the skill and industry of a young woman, increasing her value to a potential mate.

In Laos, this elaborate work adorned the clothing worn every day. Preparation for the celebration of the New Year called for the creation of a new costume for the festivities. In this country elaborate costumes are still a focal point of the celebrations for the New Year, which take place at the end of November in Minnesota.

In the refugee camps, encouraged by church groups and other volunteer organizations, Hmong women have adapted their needlework skills to produce objects intended for sale to foreigners. Wallhangings, pillowcases, bedspreads, coin purses, and potholders found in specialty shops and markets in this country display traditional needlework skills transferred to a salable commodity. In order to appeal to Western consumer tastes, the brilliant colors of the traditional Hmong paj ntaub have been replaced by more subdued shades of brown, blue, and gray in many of the pieces seen for sale in this country. Made both in this country and in the refugee camps for export, these textiles often provide refugees with their only source of cash income.

CLOTHING

The two principal Hmong groups in Laos are the Hmoob Dawb, or White Hmong, and the Moob Ntsuab, translated as either Green or Blue Hmong. These names are derived from the colors used in traditional women's clothing. The two groups have distinctive customs and dialects but are usually able to understand each other.

GREEN HMONG MOOB NTSUAB

In Laos, Green Hmong women wore knee-length skirts of woven hemp. The tightly pleated skirt was decorated with intricate batik, appliqué, and embroidery. The skirt can contain up to nine yards of fabric. The tiny pleats are basted together before storage to keep their shape. Their jackets were made of cotton with embroidery and appliqué decorating the collar and opening. The collar piece was attached with the embroidered side down.

Batik is done by applying a wax design to the fabric. The waxed areas retain the original lighter color when the fabric is dyed. The Green Hmong are the only tribal group of Southeast Asia to use batik.

For the Green Hmong in Laos, this type of clothing was worn every day, with new and more elaborate variations created for the New Year celebrations.

In the United States, where Hmong girls dress in the Hmong style mainly for the New Year celebrations, a variation of the traditional skirt has become popular. It is made of stiff cotton decorated with a batik pattern and adorned with fluorescent pink-and-red synthetic trim. This new style of skirt is frequently purchased from relatives in Thai refugee camps.

Men wore loose-fitting, black pants and short, collarless jackets of black cotton. The jacket was appliquéd and embroidered on the chest and worn with a long, embroidered sash with the ends folded into points.

WHITE HMONG HMOOB DAWB

White Hmong women in Laos wore loose-fitting, black cotton pants with a black "apron" edged in blue and attached to an embroidered and appliquéd sash. For more festive occasions, these "apron-sashes" were heavily decorated and tasseled with bright yarn on the ends. A jacket of black cloth with strips of embroidery and appliqué down the front was worn for special occasions with a plainer version sufficing for every day. Like the Green Hmong, White Hmong women decorated a collar panel. Theirs, however, was worn with the decorated side out.



Some White Hmong groups wore a tightly pleated, undyed hemp skirt for special occasions. For other White Hmong groups, this white skirt was considered part of the burial dress.

Men wore loose-fitting, black pants with a low crotch and short, collarless jackets of black cotton. The jacket was embroidered on the chest and sometimes worn with a long, embroidered sash with the ends folded into points.

In the United States, each New Year's celebration is a showcase for further fashion innovations. Collars, lapels, cuffs, and aprons are elaborately decorated with colorful yarns, beads, and sequins. A velvet glitter cloth from France is currently a highly desired fabric for the women's jackets in both Hmong groups. Decorated money bags and sashes frequently are worn with plastic coverings to keep them clean.



TRADITION IN TRANSITION

THE HOUSE

The number of households in a highland village usually is determined by the amount of good land available for cultivation. A typical village has several clusters of houses with six to eight houses in each cluster.

The vegetable garden and rice fields might be a two-hour hike from the village. A village might have a well, or villagers might have to carry water from a nearby mountain stream. Pigs and chickens roam freely throughout the village, keeping it clean by eating organic debris.

The Hmong carefully choose a house site that is acceptable to their ancestors. The ancestors are consulted during a special ceremony in which paper spirit money is offered. If no negative signs follow the offering, the site is cleared and leveled.

Building materials are gathered and prepared first. Family members cut down tropical hardwood trees and split the logs into planks. (In lowland areas and in more recent times, houses frequently are constructed of split bamboo.) At this point the neighbors join in the building process, helping to hand-hew and stack the planks, prepare the pegs and fasteners, and gather roof materials. The roof is made of either wooden shingles, thatch grass, rattan leaves, or, more recently, corrugated metal. Once construction begins, it takes two or three days for the family members and neighbors to build the house.

When the house is completed, chickens are sacrificed at the altar and the spirits of the ancestors are welcomed into the house.

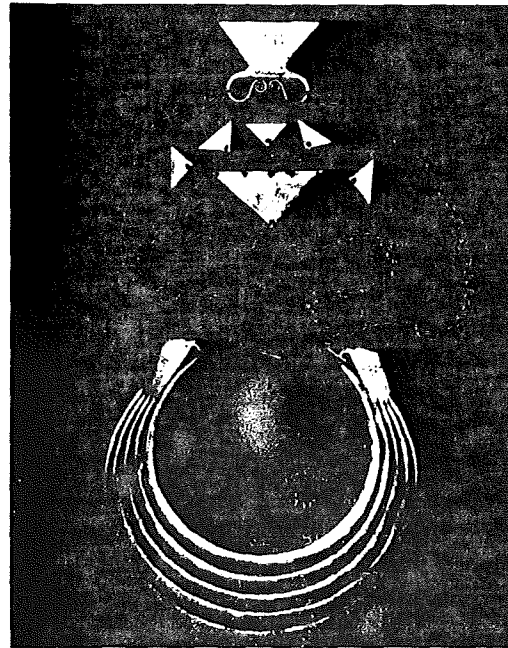
The house has one main large room with a central fireplace, shelves, an altar (placed on the wall opposite the front door), a rice pounder, and a stove. The fireplace is where meals are cooked; the stove is used mainly for cooking food for the pigs or for cooking large quantities of food.

There are no windows so the scant light that enters the house comes from the doorways and the gaps in the boards that form the walls. Constant burning in the indoor fireplace gives the walls a patina of black soot contributing to the darkness of the interiors.

There is an open attic space for the storage of food, tools, and seeds. This storage space is reached with a notched log ladder.

Bedrooms are partitioned off with boards or bamboo mats. There can be one to three bedrooms and a sleeping platform for guests.

Pig pens, granaries, and stone mills for grinding maize are separate from the house, but stables for ponies and mules and chicken coops frequently are built against the house.



JEWELRY:

THE PORTABLE BANK ACCOUNT

The Hmong traditionally kept most of their wealth in the form of silver jewelry. Men, women, and children wore silver neck rings and bracelets usually made by a village blacksmith. During the celebrations for the New Year more elaborate pieces would be worn. For example, a simple neck ring might have attachments of heavy silver chains and incised pendants to exhibit greater wealth. French silver coins decorated hats, sash pockets, and mens' vests worn for special occasions.

A popular "new style" necklace consists of up to five hollow rings soldered together and decorated with incised patterns. Other styles depart from the traditional only in the material used. Aluminum, scavenged from downed aircraft parts and soda pop cans, became a substitute for silver during the Vietnam war era. It frequently is seen in the elaborate necklaces worn for New Year's celebrations in the United States. These necklaces frequently are imported from relatives still in the Thai refugee camps.

