



CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA

March 18, 2021

To Chair Hansen and the Environment & Natural Resources Finance & Policy Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HF 1733 (Hansen). Conservation Minnesota has long supported the important work that local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) do in implementing on-the-ground restorations and protections to enhance Minnesota's lakes, rivers and water resources.

Some SWCDs have been serving Minnesota in one form or another for decades. Upon the passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, the role of SWCDs became more important in connecting state funding to SWCDs in all corners of the state.

Unfortunately, the importance of those SWCDs was not always recognized in county budgets, state agency budgets or through the state's General Fund. This issue has become even more apparent if you look at the number of bills this session addressing SWCD funding in some form or another. Whether you review bills recently introduced that increase SWCD supervisor compensation, bills that allocate SWCD base funding, or bills that allow SWCDs levy authority in their communities - the pattern is clear. SWCDs are not receiving the local funding support they need, so they are coming to the state legislature looking for additional assistance.

Because SWCDs represent an arm of county government, while at the same time implementing statewide programs, we support using a combination of local and state sources to fund SWCDs. The novel proposal in HF 1733 allows counties to choose whether or not they would like to receive Clean Water Funds for their SWCDs, if they agree to implement a modest \$25 mortgage or deed change fee. This represents a balanced proposal that Conservation Minnesota supports.

SWCDs play a vital role in cleaning up Minnesota's impaired lakes, rivers and streams, while also protecting our most pristine water resources. Clean water benefits both local communities and the entire state, so resources from both local governments and state sources makes sense to achieve the outcomes we all desire.

Thanks for the opportunity to express support for HF 1733 (Hansen).

Sincerely,
Nels Paulsen
Policy Director