METROPOLITAN
COUNCIL

April 17, 2025

Chairs Torkelson and Stephenson and members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing in regard to provisions in the first engrossment of HF 2563 (Vang/McDonald), the House's omnibus Legacy bill, that relate to the Met Council.

Regional Parks and Trails
The Metropolitan Council supports the continued 40-40-20 split of the parks and trails funding found in the first engrossment. The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund is shared between the Metropolitan Council, the Department of Natural Resources, and Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails. The 40% of funds allocated to the Met Council are passed through to the 10 regional parks implementing agencies, which use Legacy funds to ensure that the metro region has access to high-quality recreational opportunities. This vital funding fuels our efforts to connect people and the outdoors, acquire land and development opportunities, and take care of the existing system.

The Metropolitan Council has concerns about the $200,000 appropriation from Regional Parks and Trails funding to Wilderness Inquiry found in Article 3, Section 4(b). The Council supports the Governor's recommendations for distribution of parks and trails funding that supports the regional parks implementing agencies in their efforts to connect youth and families to the abundant natural resources in our regional parks and trails.

Clean Water Fund Recommendations
The Metropolitan Council also supports the Governor's and Clean Water Council's recommendations for the Clean Water Fund. The first engrossment of HF 2563 includes two recommendations related to the Met Council. Adjusted for the February budget forecast, the recommendations include:

- Water Sustainability Program: $2.75 million for the FY26-FY27 biennium would support local actions that address emerging drinking water supply threats and overall water sustainability, provide cost-effective regional solutions, leverage inter-jurisdictional coordination, support local implementation of wellhead protection plans, and prevent degradation of groundwater and surface water resources.

- Water Efficiency Grant Program: $1.4 million for the FY26-FY27 biennium would allow the Met Council to give grants to cities and townships served by a municipal water supply system to offer residents rebates or grants to replace toilets, washing machines, dishwashers, and more with efficient appliances, install advanced metering infrastructure technology to better prevent loss of water from major leaks, install smart irrigation systems, and allow municipalities to conduct water audits.

I appreciate your consideration of these provisions. Please reach out to me or Judd Schetnan (judd.schetnan@metc.state.mn.us) with any questions or comments. We are available to meet at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Charles A. Zelle
Chair

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P 651.602.1000 | F 651.602.1550 | TTY 651.291.0904
metrocouncil.org

Co-Chair Paul Torkelson
House Ways & Means Committee
658 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Co-Chair Zach Stephenson
House Ways & Means Committee
658 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55155

April 17, 2025

Co-Chairs Torkelson and Stephenson, and members of the House Ways & Means Committee,

The organizations listed below support the recommendations the Clean Water Council to the legislature for Clean Water Fund appropriations contained in HF2563. The 28-member Council is comprised of citizen members, as well as legislative and state agency representatives, chosen for their expertise and interest in the management and stewardship of our water resources in Minnesota.

Each two-year budget cycle, the Council goes through a rigorous and thorough months-long process to review and assemble a list of recommendations to the legislature for how Clean Water Funds should be spent to reflect the current clean water priorities of the state. This thorough process includes stakeholder engagement before recommendations are made. Because water management is complex and involving many different agencies and entities across the state, the Council's ability to take a holistic look is important to identifying priorities that align with the Council's strategic plan.

Especially in this year when funds available based on the change between the November 2024 and February 2025 budget forecasts have resulted in a reduction of anticipated funds, it is imperative the legislature follow the lead of the Council to make the best use of these limited funds that address priorities that will benefit water across the state.

We appreciate the Committee's support of these recommendations forwarded by the Council. Thank you for helping to protect Minnesota waters.

Sincerely,

CONSERVATION MINNESOTA

FRESHWATER

FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

MINNESOTA CONSERVATION FEDERATION

MCEA

Minnesota Environmental Partnership

The Nature Conservancy

Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

April 7, 2025

We write to you, as dedicated members of Minnesota's conservation community, to express support of the funding recommendations for the Outdoor Heritage Fund forwarded to you by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) and included in HF2563.

This nation-leading Outdoor Heritage Fund was created when Minnesotans voted overwhelmingly in 2008 in favor of the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment. With that vote, Minnesotans called for acceleration of conservation in Minnesota and full transparency of spending decisions and outcomes. The structure and process followed by the LSOHC has met and continues to meet those expectations.

This year's funding package was unanimously approved by the LSOHC before being submitted to the legislature. The recommendations contain 50 high priority conservation projects across the state, in addition to more projects that will be funded through the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program. The selected projects have been thoroughly vetted by the LSOHC through its competitive, public process, which received over **$400 million in requests** and resulted in recommendations to you that total $162.886 million.

In considering full approval of the recommendations, we encourage you to reflect on the following:

1. LSOHC members are citizens and legislators chosen for their expertise in conservation from a statewide perspective. The LSOHC is well-qualified to select projects that are urgent and most likely to return positive results from taxpayer investment.

2. The LSOHC's competitive grant application process is thorough, fair and transparent. It demands that proposals are well-designed, high-priority, science-based projects that address conservation goals enumerated by LSOHC and state plans.

3. The LSOHC adheres to a rigorous review process each year to determine its final recommendations for the Legislature. It prioritizes projects based upon several criteria, including urgency, reasonableness and ability of the proposer to achieve the outcomes.

4. The conservation projects recommended by the LSOHC are urgent and ready to implement.

5. LSOHC and the Minnesota DNR developed the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program, which sub-grants funding to smaller, community-level conservation projects. This popular Outdoor Heritage Fund program funds projects up to $500,000.

The LSOHC package presented to you is worthy of your support. We are available as a resource to you and thank you for your support of conservation in Minnesota.

Respectfully submitted by the following organizations,

Audubon
UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER

BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

DUCKS UNLIMITED

CONSERVATION MINNESOTA

GREAT RIVER GREENING

Friends of Minnesota Scientific & Natural Areas

LAKE OF THE CROSS CONSERVATION LEAGUE

FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA — DEFENDERS OF SOIL, AIR, WOODS, WATERS AND WILDLIFE

MCEA

MINNESOTA MDHA DEER HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

MINNESOTA TROUT UNLIMITED

MINNESOTA CONSERVATION FEDERATION — SINCE 1936

Minnesota Environmental Partnership

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY — EST. 1986

nwtf — National Wild Turkey Federation

MINNESOTA VALLEY TRUST
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.

RGS AWS — RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY | AMERICAN WOODCOCK SOCIETY

PHEASANTS forever — The Habitat Organization

QUAIL forever — The Habitat Organization

RMEF

THE CONSERVATION FUND
LAND SUSTAINS US

The Nature Conservancy

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

The Outdoor Heritage Fund created by the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment "may be spent only to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife."

Minnesota Constitution, Art. XI, Sec. 15

Metropolitan Regional Parks & Trails Implementing Agencies

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Chair Joe McDonald
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Samantha Vang
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair McDonald and Chair Vang:

As metro regional park implementing agencies, we are writing with shared concerns and opposition to the H.F. No. 2563DE1 Amendment. In Article 3, Sec. 4 it states the following:

(b) $100,000 the first year and $100,000 the second year are for grants to Wilderness Inquiry to connect Minnesota youth and families to natural resources through activities that support parks and trails of regional significance within the seven-county metropolitan area.

We appreciate the opportunity to express our strong opposition to the proposed earmark legislation that would allocate Parks and Trails Legacy funds to a nonprofit organization, contrary to the clear constitutional intent of the Legacy Amendment. These funds are expressly dedicated to benefit state, regional, and Greater MN park and trail agencies—public entities that are accountable to taxpayers and have a proven track record of stewarding these resources for the public good.

When Minnesota voters approved the Legacy Amendment, they did so with the understanding that funds would be used transparently and equitably to support publicly managed parks and trails. Earmarking public dollars for a private nonprofit—no matter how well-meaning—undermines that promise and sets a dangerous precedent that weakens accountability, public oversight, and constitutional integrity.

Our park and trail systems are among the most cherished assets in our communities. They rely on stable and appropriately allocated funding to maintain accessibility, environmental stewardship, and public trust. Redirecting funds to a nonprofit not only diminishes the resources available to these agencies, but also violates the spirit of the Legacy Amendment.

I urge you to remove this provision and protect the constitutional framework that voters overwhelmingly support.

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* recommends how the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund should be used. The Parks and Trails Fund, one of the four funds created by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment passed in 2008, receives 14.25% of the money raised by the sales tax increase. The purpose of the amendment is to provide supplemental financial resources to traditional funding sources for support of

state and regionally significant park and trail systems. The 40/40/20 allocation between the DNR/Metro Parks and Trails/Greater MN Parks and Trails has been in place for over 15 years and has proven to be successful.

As always, we remain grateful for the work that you do with our agencies to provide vital park spaces and programs to metro area residents, and all the health, recreation and economic benefits that come from this investment.

Sincerely,

Jeff Perry
Parks Director
Anoka County

Niki Geisler
Director of Parks
Dakota County

Ann Kattreh
Parks and Recreation Director
City of Bloomington

Al Bangoura
Superintendent
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

Martin Walsh
Parks and Recreation Director
Carver County

Mark McCabe
Director of Parks and Recreation
Ramsey County

Andy Rodriguez
Parks and Recreation Director
City of Saint Paul

Superintendent
Three Rivers Park District

Patricia Freeman
General Manager of Parks and Trails
Scott County
Boe Carlson

Alex McKinney
Parks Director
Washington County

Minnesota's Dedicated Conservation Funds

Protecting our Great Outdoors

Minnesotans overwhelmingly support investment in environment and conservation.

The success of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment has earned strong citizen support. Since its initial passage in 2008, public support for the amendment has increased. In February 2017, a statewide poll found that **75% of Minnesotans support the Legacy Amendment.** Support is equally strong in rural Minnesota: 73% of Minnesotans in rural areas support the Amendment *(Public Opinion Strategies, Statewide Voter Survey, February 1-5, 2017)*.

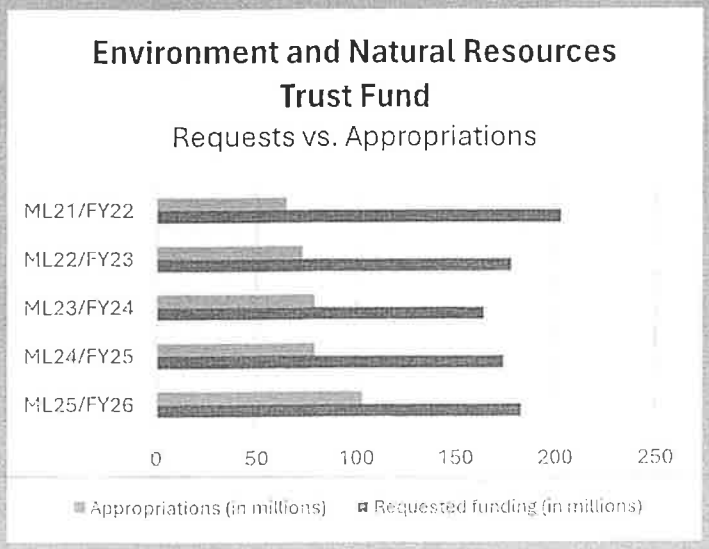
In 2024, Minnesotans for a third time overwhelmingly supported renewing the lottery dedication to the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). **77% of Minnesota voters approved the ENRTF constitutional amendment renewal.** The measure passed with a majority of the vote in every county in the state.

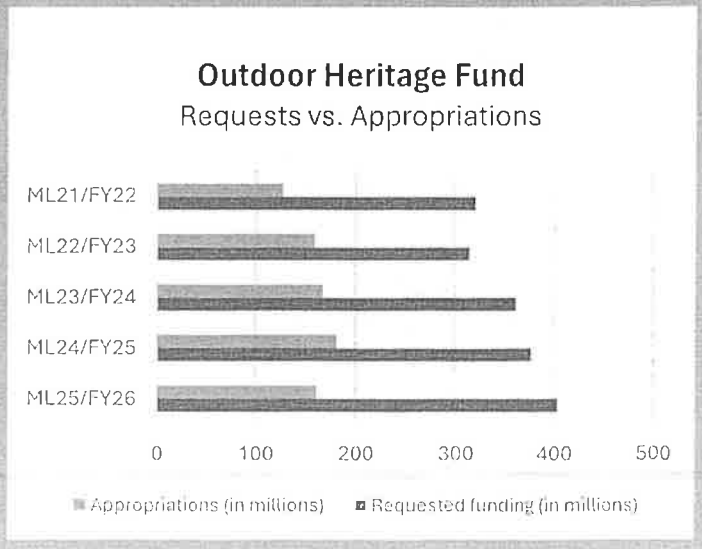
CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND

Requests for investments in the outdoors far exceed available dedicated funds.

Minnesotans want the state to invest in environment and conservation in their communities in every corner of the state. Requests for funding through the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund far exceed the investment available through these dedicated funds which are constitutionally intended to supplement traditional sources of funding, and not be used as a substitute. Minnesotans see the need for strong investment in their environment to ensure lasting conservation benefits for generations to come. **A lot more investment is necessary to meet the needs of Minnesotans.**

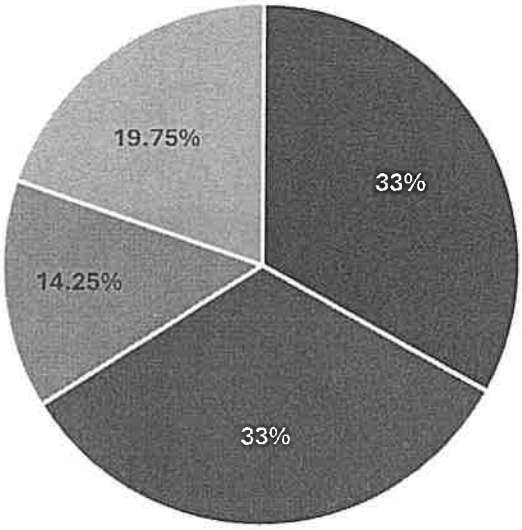




Let's break down the two constitutionally dedicated funds.

The Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment dedicates $^{3}/_{8}$ of 1% of state sales tax—approximately 4 cents on a $10 purchase—to the Legacy account, which is then divided into four funding streams.

Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment Funds



- **Outdoor Heritage Funds (33%)** must go to on-the-ground habitat projects and cannot be used for research or studies. The Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council comprised of legislators and citizens with technical expertise, reviews project proposals and provides recommendations to the Legislature for appropriating annual funds.
- **Clean Water Funds (33%)** can only be used to "protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams and to protect groundwater from degradation," and 5% must be allocated to drinking water. The Clean Water Council comprised of legislators and citizens with technical expertise, provides recommendations to the Legislature for appropriating biennial and supplemental funds.
- **Parks & Trails Funds (14.25%)** are limited to parks and trails of regional or statewide significance; funds are divided by statute between the State Park, Metro Park and Greater MN park systems; non-profits do not receive PTF funds.
- Arts & Cultural Heritage Funds (19.75%) are limited to "arts, arts education, and arts access and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage."

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund receives **40% of the net proceeds** from the state lottery. As illustrated below, this **equates to 7 cents of $1** of a lottery ticket sale.

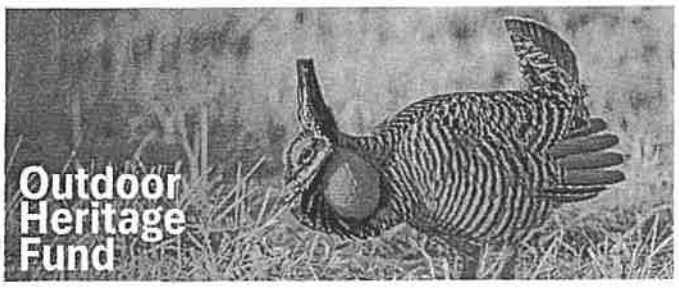
The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) makes annual recommendations to the Legislature for allocation of 5% of the Trust Fund comprised of project proposals from around the state.

The Department of Natural Resources makes decisions on statewide appropriations for the ENRTF Community Grants Program based on the 1.5% annual appropriation by the legislature.

Where does a lottery dollar go?

11 CENTS	7 CENTS	6 ½ CENTS	6 CENTS	11 ½ CENTS	58 CENTS
GENERAL FUND (60%)	**ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND (40%)**	SALES TAX	RETAILERS COMMISSIONS AND INCENTIVES	ADMINISTRATION	PRIZES

Accomplishments and Benefits of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment Funds



© Mark Staples

Outdoor Heritage Funds have been used to **restore over 61,000 acres of wetlands, 600,000 acres of grasslands, add over 40,000 acres of wildlife management area (WMA) habitat and public access, and provide hundreds of local grant projects through the popular Conservation Partners Program.** OHF projects have increased access to public land for all Minnesotans with projects in every county of the state. *(Legacy.mn.gov)*

© Richard Hamilton Smith

Clean Water Funds have provided critical resources to clean up pollution in Minnesota's waters and prevent degradation of other waterways in the state. Between 2010 and 2023, Minnesota's Clean Water Fund **awarded more than 4,271 grants to protect and restore Minnesota's water resources and permanently protected over 31,164 acres along riparian corridors.** *(Clean Water Fund Performance Report, Jan. 2024)*

© Mark Godfrey

Parks & Trails Funds have **increased state park attendance by 25%, introducing new and younger audiences to the outdoors.** The Funds have resulted in over 800 projects in Greater Minnesota parks and trails, and regional parks projects in the 7-county metro area. *(Legacy.mn.gov)*

© Morgan Baum

As of 2024, the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund has **supported more than 22,000 projects in every county in the state** and benefits a broad spectrum from libraries to theater performances, and visuals arts to history programs. *(Legacy.mn.gov)*

Accomplishments and Benefits of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

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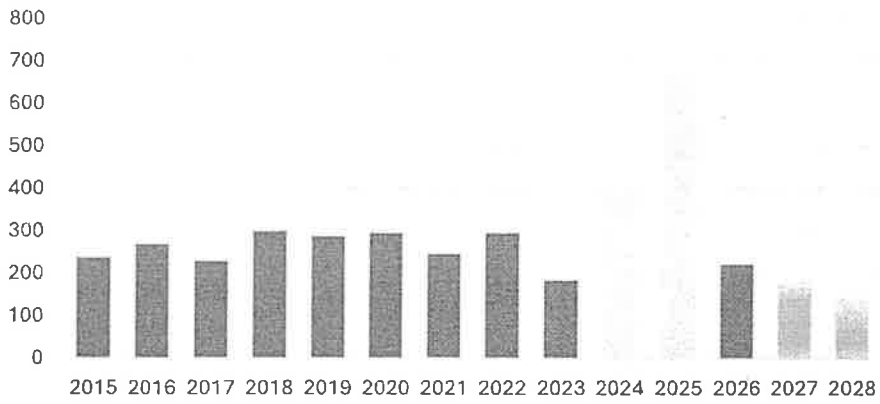
The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund has **supported over 700 projects around the state** that have **restored and enhanced habitat** for iconic Minnesota species, **increased environmental education** opportunities for students around the state, **supported local communities**, and funded projects to **protect our bountiful waters** (Legacy.mn.gov).

The Future of Conservation Funding

While Legacy funds and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund have provided a critical infusion of conservation funding, General Funds and bonding have remained stagnant while dedicated funds have struggled to keep up with needs they were not intended to fill.

FY24 and FY25 have been grayed out due to one-time surplus funding. FY27 and FY28 are projected values.
Source: MMB

General Fund Spending
in Environment and Natural Resources

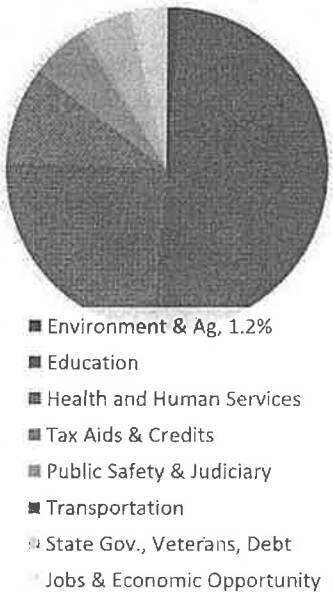


Spending on conservation and environment has never exceeded 3% of Minnesota's general fund budget and continues to be stagnant as a portion of the state budget.

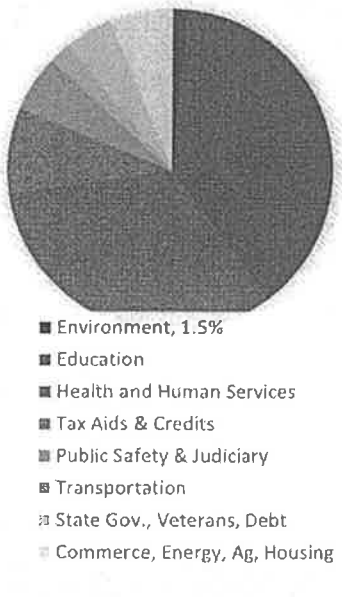
This has been true even since the creation of the Legacy Amendment.

General Fund Spending
FY06-07

The last biennium before voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.



General Fund Spending
FY24-25



What legislators can do to help:

- Protect and continue dedicated funds as intended by Minnesota voters.
- Ensure the dedicated funds are used as intended: to supplement state investment in conservation, restoration, enhancement and protection.
- Prevent further stagnation in general fund investment in the environment and natural resources.
- Support strong investments in conservation and the outdoors through bonding.