



February 7, 2023

Via E-Mail Delivery

Senator Sandy Pappas, Chair
Senate Capital Investment Committee
2113 Minnesota Senate Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Representative Fue Lee, Chair
House Capital Investment Committee
485 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Senator Karin Housley, Lead
Senate Capital Investment Committee
2213 Minnesota Senate Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Representative Dean Urdahl, Lead
House Capital Investment Committee
279 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Governor's Bonding and Capital Funding Recommendations

Dear Chair Pappas, Chair Lee, Lead Housley and Lead Urdahl:

Thank you for your work this session and for hearing the Governor's bonding and capital funding recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature.

The MN-FISH Coalition collectively represents anglers and related organizations from around the state. The boating and outdoor recreational industries is a vital part of Minnesota, supporting 91,000 jobs and \$9.9 billion in economic benefit to the state each year (Outdoor Industry Association survey, 2022).

That's why we are supporting three funding recommendations as part of the Governor's *Get Out MORE* initiative -- **\$60 million for updating the state fish hatcheries** operated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), **\$50 million to upgrade, renovate and modernize the state's Public Water Accesses (PWAs)** operated by local governments and the DNR and **\$5 million for Shore Line and Fishing Pier** opportunities in our local communities. The Governor is recommending a combination of bonding and General Fund appropriations to fund the *Get out MORE* initiative.

Fish Hatcheries

The Governor has recommended \$60 million (\$25 million in bonding and \$35 million General Fund) to repair and upgrade the fish hatchery system at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR operates four cold water and 11 warm water fish hatcheries around the state. The Statewide Fish Hatchery system supports stocking walleye in 900 lakes throughout the state. These lakes today would offer little or no walleye fishing were it not for stocking by the DNR.

The most urgent needs at our state's fish hatcheries include:

- Biosecurity updates to fight against fish disease and aquatic invasive species
- Antiquated water piping and technology control systems
- Employee safety related concerns
- Energy efficiency updates

The DNR conducted feasibility studies in 2018 and 2019 on four hatcheries. The studies found that the DNR needs at least \$60 million to address the immediate needs of the fish hatcheries. The most urgent fish hatchery in need of updates and repair is in Waterville, and then Crystal Springs and Spire Valley. The \$60 million request included in the Governor's budget recommendations to the legislature will ensure that the five highest need fish hatcheries are modernized, renovated and repaired, something that hasn't happened since the 1950s.

The Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$2 million for fish hatcheries in 2014 but since then there has been no additional direct bonding or General Fund appropriations in the facilities. The DNR has invested \$6.3 million in asset preservation funding since 2012 in an effort to make the most urgent repairs to the state's fish hatcheries.

MN-FISH believes the need is urgent for the Minnesota Legislature to invest one-time funds into repairing this critical infrastructure to make sure we maintain our quality of outdoor recreation experiences and ensure we have the technology to make biosecurity updates against invasive species.

Public Water Accesses (PWAs)

Minnesota is ranked #1 in the U.S. for the number of registered watercrafts per capita according to the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Census Bureau. Minnesota also ranks #2 in the country for the number of boat owners according to the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA, 2018).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Minnesotans enjoyed our state's recreational opportunities in record numbers. As a result, it is critically important that the state improves crumbling public water accesses (PWAs) across the state.

The DNR maintains 1,691 state public water access sites. The typical lifecycle is around 15-25 years, according to the DNR. In addition, most of the state's PWAs were constructed before the passage of federal ADA legislation and prior to the state's focus on stopping the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Over the past decade, the DNR has invested an average of \$2.8 million each year for deferred maintenance and critical repairs. This is not enough to keep up with deferred maintenance costs and as a result we are supporting the Governor's budget recommendation of \$50 million to address deferred maintenance and reconfigure and replace older PWAs.

Shore Line and Fishing Piers

It's important to make sure that we have wide access for all Minnesotans to enjoy our lakes and recreational opportunities. The DNR currently manages 360 shore fishing sites and fishing piers across the state. Many current and new anglers rely on these fishing opportunities because they have limited resources to access Minnesota's public waters.

The new shore line fishing and piers will be added in communities that are currently underserved. By investing in updating and creating new shore line and fishing piers, the DNR and other organizations have the opportunity to enhance programs such as Fishing in the Neighborhood and other opportunities to bring outdoor recreation to youth and communities in the metro and throughout the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments to you. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dave Osborne
President
MN-FISH Coalition

C: Members of the Senate Capital Investment Committee
Members of the House Capital Investment Committee
Governor Tim Walz
Commissioner Sarah Strommen, DNR