

**Date:** February 14, 2022

**To:** Chair, Representative Michael Nelson

**From:** Joanna Eckles, Conservation Biologist, Avian specialist

**Affiliations:** (current) American Bird Conservancy, Minnesota Master Naturalists, Bird-safe Building Alliance, (former) National Audubon Society, The Raptor Center, World Parrot Trust, Minnesota Zoo

**Re:** Support for *HF2618 “Cities required to allow native landscapes on private land”*

**For:** Testimony for Hearing – State Government Finance and Elections on February 15, 2022

**Support Summary:**

I am writing in support of [HF2618 to allow native landscapes on private lands](#). Habitat loss and the changes in our climate which exacerbate such loss, are the biggest problems facing all wildlife, including birds and the ecosystems they depend on – namely the plants and insects.

It is imperative that we create habitat anywhere and everywhere possible. Therefore, we must remove any possible barriers to creation of biodiverse native habitat on private land.

According to the [Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas](#):

- Substantial numbers of species are in decline and many species are barely surviving in the state
- Besides [historic problems such as persecution, plowing prairies, clearing forests, draining wetlands] we have two additional threats, climate change and invasive species.

In addition, new research by [Rosenberg and colleagues \(2019\)](#) documented a 30% decline in wild bird populations – a loss of nearly 3 billion birds - across the US and Canada in the last 30 years.

We must not only make it easy for homeowners to create native habitat on their property, but we need to go even further by incentivizing habitat creation. Our municipalities need to lead by increasing the use of native plants in our public landscapes, and training public servants not in mowing and chemical application but instead in how to create and maintain native habitat and providing assistance to homeowners in these areas.

Healthy native habitat supports pollinators and birds but also enhances human health and well-being, beautifies our communities and increases property values among many co-benefits. Healthy native landscapes also improve water quality, reduce the need for water and chemical inputs, sequester carbon and, provide habitat for all wildlife including pollinators.

**I am not sure, on the other hand, what is intended by including the phrase “vegetation overgrowth within cities prohibited”** in the description. This is exactly the kind of language that has been used by cities to create an unwelcome environment for anything but mowed grass and very tidy cultivated plants – neither of which provide much, if any, habitat value for wildlife. We need to move beyond this archaic norm of manicured park space and continue redefining beauty in our urban and suburban landscapes to prefer native plants, and diverse lawns devoid of chemical inputs.

Thank you for your work on this legislation,

Joanna Eckles

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