

Dear Mr. Strohmeier:

My name is Ellen Fuge, 75 Hickory Street in Mahtomedi, MN. I worked as Management Supervisor for the SNA Program from 1987 until my retirement in 2013. This is my testimony **in favor of HF 4107**.

Lands in Minnesota administered by the Scientific and Natural Areas Program (SNA) include **168 SNAs encompassing 192,000 acres and 157 Native Prairie Banks (NPB) with 14,000 acres**.

These sites are acquired, primarily with state funds and others through private donation or are on an existing public land base, for the purpose of **protecting and perpetuating rare plant and animal species, plant communities and geological features that are of statewide significance**

General Fund money on an annual basis to support permanent staff for the SNA Program has declined since the early 2000s to the point that the rare resources, plants and animals protected by these sites are being threatened and lost. Special and temporary funding such as the Outdoor Heritage Fund and the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund cannot be efficiently utilized for permanent staff to direct and monitor essential activities for maintenance of these resources. These other funding sources may also have limits as to how they may be used.

Once an SNA is acquired, annual maintenance is essential to maintain the integrity of these sites. Similar to an established perennial crop like an orchard or a dairy herd, annual maintenance is required to ensure a healthy and stable resource. On Natural Areas this may include prescribed burns on prairies to exclude invasive trees and brush; invasives control for weeds such as garlic mustard or buckthorn in woodlands that destroy the native habitat and rare plants or animals that need them. The ability to hire professional contractors to carry out maintenance activities is required.

There is currently a shortage of permanent staffing for SNAs throughout the state. For example, in the DNR's southwest Region 4, there are 32 counties with 37 SNAs and 110 Native Prairie Banks (NPB) (also managed by the SNA Program). In total, SNAs and NPBs protect nearly **12,000 acres** of native plant and animal communities, but there are only **4 SNA personnel** to carry out all the monitoring and maintenance activities needed in the region. As a result, some sites may not be visited, monitored, or have needed maintenance carried out for years. Without attention, rare native species and features are lost

HF4107 would provide the funds for basic staffing necessary for