

Chair Rick Hansen
Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee
407 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: HF1733, Soil and Water Conservation District Funding

March 17, 2021

Chair Hansen and members of the Committee:

The benefits Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) provide to the State of Minnesota through their work in counties across the state is essential to ensuring clean water. In addition to their important work, SWCDs are a trusted partner to state agencies, NGOs and local communities to advance and implement many state programs. It is because of their important work and role in the state that we support permanent, stable funding for SWCDs.

We appreciate that the proposal laid out in HF 1733 seeks to provide a permanent funding source devoted to SWCDs. As with other county government activities, we believe a combination of state and local resources is an appropriate means of financing SWCDs for the essential benefits they provide. We also think a permanent, reliable source of funding from the state will help SWCDs plan ahead for the long-term and help them fulfill commitments made through One Watershed One Plan (1W1P) and Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) plans.

As we have witnessed in recent years, the legislature's use of Clean Water Funds to finance SWCD capacity has been a short-term solution that does not provide SWCDs long-term stability. In addition, relying on Clean Water Funds for SWCDs capacity instead of identifying another permanent funding source into the future may result in decreased implementation of Clean Water Funded programs to achieve clean water outcomes, and will face a funding cliff for SWCDs when the Legacy Amendment and Clean Water Fund expires in 2034.

Thank you for your consideration of alternative, long term funding solutions for SWCDs and thank you for your work on behalf of the State of Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Rich Biske
Freshwater Program Director
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota