



March 15, 2023

State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee
State Office Building, Room 10
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: House File 2408, St. Anthony Falls area geophysical study appropriation

Dear Chair Klevorn and Members of the Committee:

The National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System for more than 100 years. On behalf of our more than 1.5 million members and supporters, including over 25,000 in Minnesota, we write this letter of support for House File 2408. This bill will address one of the Twin Cities' most crucial but overlooked pieces of infrastructure: the cutoff wall that helps hold up St. Anthony Falls.

St. Anthony Falls and the natural and historic resources in the area surrounding it are among the most important nationally and internationally significant resources within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. These are the resources Congress explicitly directed the National Park Service to preserve, protect and enhance for the benefit of the American people.¹ However, the falls are not certain to last forever.

St. Anthony Falls was saved by the Army Corps of Engineers when it built the cutoff wall in 1876 after a series of mill tunnel collapses undermined the surrounding geology. Today, in addition to maintaining the falls, the cutoff wall helps maintain the upstream water levels for Minneapolis' water supply intake and some of St. Paul's, serving one million Minnesotans in 15 cities.

But the geology surrounding the falls area is also what puts it at risk because the wall was built in the riverbed's highly erodible sandstone layer. Many geologists have told us that it's reasonable to assume that the river is flowing over, under, or even through this nearly 150-

¹ Public Law 100-696, Section 701(a), 102 Stat. 4599, Nov. 18, 1988.

year-old wall in ways that will eventually undermine its structural integrity. Today no one claims ownership of the wall and consequently it has not been inspected or maintained for decades. We just don't know the cutoff wall's true condition, only its critical importance.

HF 2408 would allow us to take initial steps toward addressing the potential for failure by funding the University of Minnesota's St. Anthony Falls Lab to study the condition of the cutoff wall and surrounding geology. Based on that research, Hennepin County will be able to conduct a Hazard Assessment to begin planning how to protect our community from these risks. This will give us enough information to make more informed decisions about how to move forward, including determining ownership.

We ask you to support the full \$750,000 appropriation for HF 2408. Thank you.

Sincerely,



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