

February 24, 2026

Re: MN School Trust Lands Recreational Use Study

Dear Ms. Zipko:

I would like to submit the following comments regarding the MN School Trust Lands Recreational Use Study.

The MN School Trust Lands Recreational Use Study shows that school trust lands provide substantial recreation benefits to the public. Being an avid hunter and fisherman in northern Minnesota, I am not surprised. I have hunted upland birds and deer on State school trust lands for more than 60 years. Likely, the State will have to pay the school trust an annual fee for this recreation benefit. My concern is where this money will be deposited. Currently such annual rents are placed in the Permanent School Fund, from which a portion of the investment income is distributed to the school districts each year.

Instead, renewable income, such as from rents and leases of school trust lands, should be distributed directly to the schools the year they are collected, rather than being placed in the Permanent School Fund. Doing so would make the full amount of the rental income available to our schools immediately that year, rather than receiving a much smaller amount, the rent's investment interest each year.

The School Trust would not be harmed with this change. Since such recreational use does not reduce land value, the rental income from each tract will not decrease, and would increase along with the land value. Also, I believe the rental income from school trust lands would be higher than the returns received from the Permanent School Fund.

Unlike rental income, it makes sense to place NON-renewable income into a Permanent School Fund, such as income from sale of school trust lands. Such sales are a one-time income, and the Permanent School Fund provides a sustainable, annual income to schools from sold lands, rather than a one-time windfall.

Is such a change to school trust rental income deposits possible? I understand that the states of Arizona and Washington already distribute annual rents from school trust lands directly to schools. Unfortunately, Minnesota's constitution requires that ALL income from school trust lands be placed into a permanent school fund. So, a minor change in Minnesota's constitution would be required, and could be achieved with voter approval at an upcoming election.

Distributing school trust land rental income directly to schools makes sense. Schools would immediately receive more income from the school trust. It is more financially efficient to handle school trust rental income this way. No harm would be done to the school trust. All Minnesotans would benefit from this change. I urge our State Legislators to pursue this change.

Thank you for hearing my comments.

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