

Transportation Finance and Policy
Chair Representative Frank Hornstein
545 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155



April 5, 2022

Re: HF4313 Highways for Habitat Program (Transportation Finance and Policy Omnibus HF1683)

Dear Chair Hornstein and Committee members,

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (ACM) urges you to support HF4313 (Omnibus HF1683), Highways for Habitat Program, which would establish more sustainable roadside practices, mandate an integrated vegetative management protocol, increase critical habitat for birds and pollinators, and establish and enhance native plantings. These actions to create roadside wildlife-friendly habitat and vegetative buffers are essential in this time of climate crisis and the ongoing critical decline in bird and insect populations and their habitat.

- Bird populations are [dramatically declining](#). A [recent study](#) showed that nearly 30% of birds disappeared during the last 50 years—[a loss of over 3 billion birds](#). Two-thirds of North American birds are at [risk of extinction from global temperature rise](#). According to conservation scientist Ken Rosenberg, “These bird losses are a strong signal that our human-altered landscapes are losing their ability to support birdlife. And that is an indicator of a coming collapse of the overall environment.”
- Insect populations are also in steep decline. In 2019, [an alarming study published in the journal *Biological Conservation*](#) concluded that more than 40 percent of the world’s insect species could go extinct in the next three decades. According to the [Xerces Society](#), the evidence is clear that we are losing insects at an alarming rate.
- Habitat loss and poor habitat management are major threats to birds and other wildlife, including insects and other pollinators that birds and humans need to survive. Roadside habitat supports a variety of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, moths, flies and other insects, and also provides migratory birds places to rest and feed. With native plants, shrubs and other vegetation, improved roadside management also reduces habitat fragmentation by providing connected corridors that wildlife need for survival.
- According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), ground nesting birds in highway rights-of-way “are vulnerable to direct mortality due to blanket mowing practices. The most vigorous spring growth and onset of mowing in May or June coincides with nesting season.” The [National Wildlife Federation notes](#) “Carefully timed mowing ... gives many species of ground-nesting birds—including meadowlarks, vesper and grasshopper sparrows, ring-necked pheasants, upland sandpipers, bobolinks, killdeer and even several duck species—a chance to lay their eggs and raise their young.”

Changing the way roadsides are managed through the Highways for Habitat program will benefit people as well as wildlife. Fewer sprayed chemicals, reduced pollution runoff, improved air quality, better resistance to invasive species, and more carbon storage will help create a healthier Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Keith Olstad
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