

Capital Investment Committee
State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

April 29, 2024

Dear Chair Lee, and members of the Capital Investment Committee,

We are committed to protecting wild birds and the habitat they need. This lofty goal can only be achieved by using the best science to guide our ethical commitment to a thriving environment. The importance of this work was amplified in 2019 when a [study of long-term population trends](#) showed that North America has lost roughly 30% of its birds, nearly three billion overall, since 1970. This shocking revelation, paired with our understanding of birds as environmental bellwethers, has highlighted the need to discern and respond to the factors responsible for bird declines. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on critical components considered for bonding in the DE Amendments to H.F. 5220 and H.F. 5162 and specifically support:

- Natural Resources Asset Preservation, Betterment of Buildings, and Improving Accessibility to State Parks, Recreation Areas, and Wildlife Management Areas
- Reforestation and Community Tree Planting Grants.
- Reinvest in Minnesota – CREP
- Metropolitan Regional Parks & Trails Program including Tree Planting Grants

While many factors contribute to bird declines, the loss, and degradation of habitats are the most important, and drives our efforts to improve Minnesota's tree canopy, particularly when environmental justice areas can also be prioritized. Many of the birds we work to protect are migratory birds whose annual trips north to breed, south to winter, and back again, are dependent on suitable stopover habitat where they can rest and refuel along their journey. Recent research shows that wooded areas in urban and suburban communities, often considered of lower importance to species of conservation need for breeding habitat, are important migratory stopover sites. Thus, trees that get planted in human communities create not only shade and beauty and capture carbon but also provide important habitat for migratory birds as they move between their summer and winter homes.

Finally, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report "[Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis](#)," tells us that, as of 2016, there were 45 million bird watchers in the United States, a number that has surely grown since the pandemic reinvigorated Minnesotan's interest in the outdoors. As of 2016, trip and equipment-related expenditures by these forty-five million bird watchers generated nearly \$96 billion in total industry output, 782,000 jobs, and \$16 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenue, with an impact distributed over local, state, and national economies.

Clean water, clean air, native plants, trees, and natural habitats are good for birds, good for people, and good for our economy.

Thank you.

Rob Schultz,
Vice President
[Audubon Upper Mississippi River](#)

Dale Gentry, Ph.D.
Conservation Director

Lindsay J. Brice
Policy Director