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January 11, 2021

Dear members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance & Policy Committee,

On behalf of the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) organization, we thank you for acting on the 2020 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Bill. In a time of continuing economic crisis, it is important to move this legislation forward to create jobs, fund important research, and help expand outdoor and recreational opportunities for all Minnesotans.

While the pandemic has caused many strains on our state, it has also highlighted the importance of local parks and trails. Health experts and government officials at all levels emphasize that citizens should continue to go outside and be active while maintaining safe physical distances. Minnesota's local parks and trails play an essential role in providing such opportunities and have seen record usage over the past year.

The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) recognized the importance of local parks and trails by recommending \$2.4 million for grants for local parks, trails and natural areas (recommendation 9-D, [H.F. 30](#) at line 20.25). These popular grant programs offer local governments matching funds so they can build or improve parks and trails close to where people live. However, these grant programs do not have a stable source of funding. At a time when local parks and trails are especially important to the well-being of our communities, these grant programs are a wise investment.

Since the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources administers these statewide programs, it can ensure that the money is invested in quality projects that are ready for construction.

In addition, LCCMR recommended funding for other important recreation-focused projects such as grants for the Perham to Pelican Rapids Regional Trail, Mesabi Trail, Rocori Trail and other projects in Greater Minnesota and the metropolitan area. These types of projects will help Minnesotans engage in recreation and stay healthy during these challenging times.

Passing the 2020 LCCMR bill now will help provide economic stimulus to move our state forward. Parks and trails projects will provide critical jobs in the construction sector, and many of the other projects recommended by the LCCMR will provide jobs to scientists, lab workers, and others who may be sidelined right now. Moving forward with this bill will help stimulate the economy without adding to the deficit.

Thank you again for your efforts to move this important legislation forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Nigbur", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Nigbur

Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

Rochester Parks & Recreation, Park and Forestry Division Head

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Anderson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ben Anderson

Vice Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

Stearns County, Parks Director