

*The Minnesota Chapter  
of The Wildlife Society*

Chair Rick Hansen  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
407 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

**Re: HF 4420: Support of Elk Management Modifications**

Dear Chair Rick Hansen and committee members

At the present time Minnesota hosts two elk herds that lie entirely within the state's borders and a third whose population crosses the Canadian border at times. These herds represent the primary range of elk in Minnesota. During the 2016 legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law limiting the size of the northwest elk herd ([Chapter 184 Section 8](#)). Current law ([Minnesota Statutes Section 97B.516](#)) now prevents managing elk in a manner that would increase the size of herds in Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, or Beltrami Counties unless payments for crop and fence damage have not increased for at least two years.

Due to their small population size, elk in Minnesota are currently classified as a species of special concern and have been since 1984. Without the ability to encourage herd expansion when appropriate, the state's elk population and health is being put at risk and raises concerns about genetic variation, herd structure, and behavioral changes associated with heavy hunting pressure on these small herds. Tying elk population levels to the rise and fall of crop depredation payments does not allow our Department of Natural Resources staff to make the best decisions for the health of wild elk in Minnesota.

The undersigned groups support changes to the statutory language as written in HF 4420 Section 27 because we believe the changes support the long-term vision for elk herd health and elk management in Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration

Minnesota Conservation Federation

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers- Minnesota Chapter

Central Lakes College Natural Resources Program- Prof William Faber

Izaak Walton League- Minnesota Division

Minnesota Deer Hunters Association

National Deer Association

National Wildlife Federation

Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters

The Wildlife Society- Minnesota Chapter

Chair Rick Hansen  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

HF 4420- Support for Native Fish Bill

Dear Chair Rick Hansen and committee members-

My name is John Mertz and I am a lifelong Minnesota resident and angler. I strongly support additional protections for Native Fish proposed under HF4420. There is a pervasive and mistaken belief in our society that these fish are less valuable and indeed even harmful to our ecosystems! This is completely wrong and we must amend our statutes so that they no longer promote those mistaken beliefs.

As an avid angler, I have bought a license every year since turning 16 and plan to do so for life. I fish from a boat and from shore in the "soft water" season, I like ice fishing, and my favorite is darkhouse spearfishing. I enjoy fishing for many game fish species, but I also really enjoy pursuing native rough fish like bowfin, gar, and freshwater drum. It's fun to come across species that are new to me... despite the fact that many of them are the farthest thing from "new"! Gar and bowfin have been swimming around since before T Rex walked this earth!

While I enjoy fishing for these fish, their role in our ecosystems and their longevity in this habitat prove their value independent of human perceptions of them. So let's honor their presence in our State with the really basic updates in HF4420: to stop calling them trash fish and treating them the same.

Thank you for protecting our native fish.

Sincerely, John Mertz



Chair Rick Hansen  
House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
407 State Office Building \*  
St. Paul, MN 55155

**Re: HF 4420- Support of legislation regarding native rough fish**

Dear Chair Hansen and committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter in support of provisions related to native rough fish in HF 4420. This bill comprehensively addresses many of the issues surrounding the reclassification of native fish in the state of Minnesota. Native rough fish are an integral part of aquatic ecosystems in Minnesota. This legislation will help ensure that our state statutes fully recognize the value of these fish and allow our state agencies to manage the fish for their long term population conservation and health.

After taking part in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Native Rough Fish Work Group it was clear to our organization that many native fish species not classified as “game fish” are not being managed in a manner consistent with the critical ecosystem services they provide. The Minnesota Conservation Federation supports the recommendations for legislative action as outlined in the Department of Natural Resources Native Fish Conservation Report that was provided to the legislature. HF 4420 addresses many of the recommendations in the report.

Passage of the legislation pertaining to native rough fish in HF 4420 will make Minnesota a national leader in recognizing the ecological value of native rough fish species while also differentiating them from other invasive nonnative fish. It is exciting to see Minnesota as a leader in native rough fish conservation and this legislation bolsters the state's conservation legacy.

Sincerely,

Brad Gausman  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Conservation Federation  
[brad@mncf.org](mailto:brad@mncf.org)



The Nature Conservancy in  
Minnesota, North Dakota, South  
Dakota  
1101 West River Parkway, S.200  
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1291

tell (612) 331.0700  
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nature.org

Chair Rick Hansen  
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
407 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 18, 2024

Dear Chair Hansen and committee members,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on HF4420, the “Native Rough Fish” bill. Conserving freshwaters for biodiversity and communities are priorities for TNC. There are 26 species of “native rough fish” with proposed new protections in the bill, representing 16% of all native fishes found in the state. I represented TNC as an invited stakeholder under the Department of Natural Resources’ “Rough Fish Working Group” in 2023, which provided input used to develop the DNR’s recommendation to the legislature and ultimately the draft bill language. If passed, **HF4420 will be the first comprehensive native fish conservation bill in the country** that we believe is a significant step needed to ensure their sustainability for generations to come.

While TNC supports nearly the entirety of the draft bill language, the following are elements of the bill that we think should be included or retained to ensure that the bill works most effectively to conserve these “native rough fish” in the state:

Future expedited, permanent rulemaking needed: Expedited rulemaking was a recommendation of the DNR’s report to the legislature; however, that language is missing in the current version of HF4420. We recommend inserting language that directs the Commissioner establish daily and possession limits for “native rough fish” under section 84.027, subdivision 13a, as well as language explicitly requiring permanent rulemaking versus annual to ensure consistent protections as other sportfish species are currently provided.

Restitution values should be retained: Among the most important elements in the bill, is the establishment of restitution values for “native rough fish”. We strongly support retention and protection of restitution value language in the bill to ensure accountability needed for rule enforcement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on HF4420. We hope the above recommendations will be fully considered to ensure the bill provides durable protections for “native rough fish” per its intent. If passed, **HF4420 will be the first comprehensive native fish conservation bill in the country** and will protect our natural heritage for Minnesotan’s enjoyment for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "SJH", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Steven J. Herrington, Ph.D.  
Associate Director of Water, The Nature Conservancy, MN-ND-SD

Chair Rick Hansen and committee members  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. St. Paul, MN 55155

HF4420 - Hoffman: Native rough fish provisions and aquatic farm licenses and taking and possessing fish conforming changes

Dear Chair Rick Hansen and committee members,

On behalf of the Minnesota angling community, I wish to offer support for HF4420.

Subjected to limitless exploitation and treated as trash, some species of Minnesota native fish are maligned due to their position next to truly invasive fish and are collectively called “rough fish”. For years, many ecologically significant native fish species in Minnesota have been unfairly persecuted at the hands of well-meaning yet ill-informed anglers who see **anything called a rough fish as bad**.

With HF4420 on the horizon, Minnesota is uniquely poised to change this narrative in support of species that function as ecologically significant, positive members of their ecological communities.

These native rough fish:

- Serve as hosts for imperiled native freshwater mussels
- Function as prey for terrestrial and aquatic predators including eagles and larger fish
- And provide genuine recreational and culinary opportunities to the angling public

I once guided a family from California who had never seen a redhorse sucker in person. They had never heard of a sucker, never heard the term rough fish, and only fished for largemouth bass. When we caught a handful of redhorse suckers adorned in their red spawning colors, the family told me that the redhorse sucker was their favorite fish they caught among the smallmouth bass, catfish, bluegill, and yellow perch we caught alongside them. Without the negative preconceptions that the sole term rough fish conveys, these species can start to be seen as ecologically, recreationally, and socially important by the existing angling public and by new anglers.

Thank you for hearing this bill. I believe that the Committee should advance the bill and continue to support this landmark native fish initiative to help break down misconceptions and support Minnesota’s native fish.

Hiroto Hayashi

Minnesota Angler, Writer, Photographer, and Fishing Guide



From: Friends of Pool 2  
P O Box 284  
Newport, MN 55055

Date: March 16, 2024

To: Chair Rick Hansen and Committee Members  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 4420 - Support for Native Fish Bill

Dear Chair Rick Hansen and committee members:

I serve as the Executive Director of the Minnesota nonprofit organization called Friends of Pool 2. On behalf of our Board of Directors, members, and followers, I respectfully submit the following written testimony in support of the bill referenced above.

**Why we care.** The mission of Friends of Pool 2, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, includes advocating for all river users on the Mississippi River, and protecting and improving the health of the river in Pool 2. We currently represent the interests of more than 1200 recreational and commercial river users, river-related businesses, marinas, and riverfront property owners, many of whom enjoy this body of water on a daily or weekly basis. We are proud to live in harmony with the river and we care passionately about water quality, the health of the river environment, and protecting our native ecosystem. Here are a few reasons why we support this bill:

Native rough fish are a resource to the people of Minnesota. They provide fishing opportunities and numerous ecological services, such as hosting native mussel larvae, preying on invasive species, and as forage for eagles, ospreys, and otters. Several species are culturally significant to indigenous communities. Unfortunately, many of these species are in long-term decline or now gone from significant parts of their historical range. The Native Fish Bill is necessary for managing and conserving these species for generations to come.

**For more information.** We would be delighted to share our thoughts on this issue when it is convenient. For more information about our organization, please feel free to visit our website at [www.FriendsofPool2.org](http://www.FriendsofPool2.org). You may also contact us via our Facebook page, or directly through our email address, which is: [info@FriendsofPool2.org](mailto:info@FriendsofPool2.org)

Sincerely,

Linda Michie, Executive Director

Chair Rick Hansen  
Minnesota House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

HF 4420 - Support for Native Fish Bill

Dear Chair Hansen and committee members,

I wish to register my support in the strongest possible terms for HF 4420. This bill helps further a process that has the potential to lead to nationwide and lasting progress in conserving North America's diverse and irreplaceable freshwater ecosystems. By enacting the first comprehensive native fish conservation legislation in any state, Minnesota is blazing a trail for the rest of the country. This is fitting, as Minnesota is in many ways the state where the native fish movement began.

The importance of native biodiversity for the health and resiliency of ecosystems cannot be overstated, but aquatic ecosystems are often overlooked, despite being intimately and inextricably linked to our own wellbeing. This is a unique opportunity to move to protect this critical biodiversity before it is too late, both for species we already know are in trouble in Minnesota and—even more importantly—for species about which we have insufficient data to judge.

In the face of increasing problems caused by invasive species, it is important to emphasize, as this bill does, that invasive fishes and native fishes cannot be managed together. It is imperative to recognize and study the roles played by native fish species and protect them when necessary.

I and my family fish in Minnesota, my child attends college in Minnesota, and my family has ongoing ties to the state going back well over a century. I am proud to know that Minnesota is leading the country on this issue.

Olaf Nelson

Brookfield, IL

[olaf@moxostoma.com](mailto:olaf@moxostoma.com)

[www.moxostoma.com](http://www.moxostoma.com)



Minnesota Division



# Minnesota's Native Fish Bill

The First Comprehensive Native Fish Conservation Bill in the Country

## What is Minnesota's Native Fish Bill?

The provisions in HF 4015/4420 and SF 4142/ SF 4898 represent the first comprehensive native fish conservation bill in the country. These DNR policy bills amend 36 statutes to formally define “native rough fish” and provide them the same legal protections as game fish and minnows. These recommendations are the product of the Native Fish Conservation report required by 2023 Minnesota Session Law Chapter 60, Article 4, Sec. 104.

## What are “native rough fish”?

“Native rough fish” are the species formerly managed as “rough fish”, except the invasive Common Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*). The current statutory definition (97A.015 subd 43) is incomplete and uses ambiguous common names. This new definition lists the 26 “native rough fish” species, which comprise 16% of all native fishes found in Minnesota.

## What protections will “native rough fish” receive?

The same protections provided to game fish, minnows, and leeches. The bill requires restitution values, prohibits unlicensed sales, prohibits transporting native fish in excess of the possession limit, and requires revocation of license after conviction for selling native rough fish. Note that Bowfin (*Amia calva*) is also exempted from the list of commercial fish species.

## Why is Minnesota's Native Fish Bill necessary?

Minnesota law requires fish to be conserved and enhanced through scientific management (§84.941); however, current statutes combine native and invasive species which preclude scientific management and biases public perception. Native rough fish are a resource to the people of Minnesota. They provide fishing opportunities and numerous ecological services, such as hosting native mussel larvae, preying on invasive species, and as forage for eagles, ospreys, and otters. Several species are culturally significant to indigenous communities. Unfortunately, many of these species are in long-term decline or now gone from significant parts of their historical range. The Native Fish Bill is necessary for managing and conserving these species for generations to come.

## Does Minnesota's Native Fish Bill ban harvest of “native rough fish”?

The Native Fish Bill does not close seasons, create possession limits, or restrict methods of harvest. All traditional methods of harvest (angling, bowfishing, spearing, and gillnetting) will continue. There is an administrative change to bowfishing and spearing seasons from starting “the last Saturday in April” to “May 1”, and from ending “last Sunday in February” to the “last day in February”. Possession limits for native rough fish will be made by DNR biologists under the commissioner's existing rulemaking authority, which includes substantial public input and review. Importantly, invasive Common Carp will receive fewer protections under the bill.



Chair Rick Hansen  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee  
407 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

**RE: HF4420, Elk Management Modifications**

Dear Chair Hansen and committee members,

Kittson County is writing to advocate that proposed language regarding an increase of the elk population within Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, or Beltrami Counties not be stricken from HF4420, Section 27.

The language was first put into statute in 2016 as the elk population increased and so did the cost of damages to local farmers.

Increasing the size of the elk population creates an undue financial burden for farmers in our frontier status county. Farmers may claim damages but receive minimal compensation.

Many claims go unreported as the process is bulky and the claim maximum is \$20,000 in crop damages and \$1,800 for fence damage.

While damages may go unclaimed, recorded damages more than doubled from 2022 to 2023 due to the increase of the herd size and the damages they caused.

Farmers have resorted to taking federal crop insurance claims on elk damaged land. This raises the cost of their federal crop insurance premiums and lowers their average yield, which adds an additional undue burden to farmers.

The Elk Management Work Group was created to provide local input at the grassroots level. The herd has grown outside of the local Elk Management Work Group's agreed-upon goal for the past several years and, at points, has nearly doubled.

Outside organizations have too heavily influenced policy that we deal with in our own back yards. By striking previous language, local cattle and grain farmers' voices are being ignored.

Removal of statute to not increase herd size would create an undue burden on Kittson, Marshall Roseau, and Beltrami county grain and cattle farmers by allowing the Department of Natural Resources to set heard limits without proper research.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kittson County Board of Commissioners  
Hallock, MN



Fritz Rohde President · North American Native Fishes Association  
2000 Trinity Avenue · Wilmington · North Carolina · 28411

March 19, 2024

Chair Rick Hansen and committee members  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building  
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HF 4420 - Support for Native Fish Bill

Dear Chairman Hansen and committee members:

The North American Native Fishes Association (NANFA) is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to the appreciation, study, and conservation of North America's native fishes. NANFA was established in 1972 and has over 500 active members- a diverse group including fisheries professionals, academics, and amateur native fish hobbyists. Our founder, the late John Bondhus, lived in Monticello, Minnesota. In addition, the organization is the oldest and most respected of its kind and strives to serve as a voice for native fishes (and their habitat), especially nongame species, which are often little known, little studied, and offered little protection.

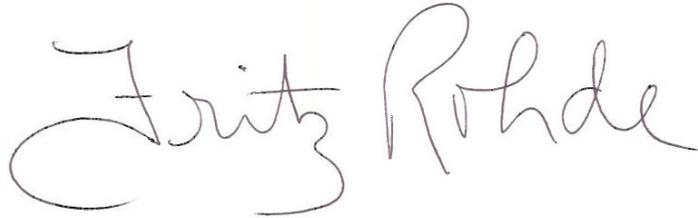
North America hosts the largest temperate freshwater fish assemblage in the world, with over 1,100 species currently described. Unfortunately, nearly 40 percent of these species are imperiled (according to the American Fisheries Society and other respected sources). Furthermore, that number is increasing, and the Southeast and Central US have an especially high number of threatened fishes. Virtually all of these imperiled fishes are nongame species with little management or regulation.

NANFA is familiar with Minnesota's diverse fish assemblage and the efforts to increase appreciation and conservation of its nongame native fish species. In 2022 NANFA held its national convention in Winona

These efforts to protect native rough fish and provide them the same protection as game fishes and minnows are directly aligned with NANFA's mission of increasing appreciation and conservation of native nongame fishes and we commend Minnesota's efforts to manage and delegate value to these important native species. Please consider this letter as an official

comment of support for the proposed rule changes and Minnesota's efforts to increase appreciation, awareness, and management of its nongame native fishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fritz Rohde". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "F".

Fritz Rohde

President, NANFA

Cc: [Peter.Strohmeier@house.mn.gov](mailto:Peter.Strohmeier@house.mn.gov)



President: Drew Geving

✉ [drew@nf4t.org](mailto:drew@nf4t.org)

[www.nativefishfortomorrow.org](http://www.nativefishfortomorrow.org)

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Chair Rick Hansen and committee members  
MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

HF 4420 - Support for Native Fish Bill

Dear Chair Rep. Hansen and committee members,

I am a lifelong Minnesota angler and also President of Native Fish For Tomorrow. Our group advocates for under-appreciated native sport fish. This Native Fish Bill (HF4420) is a great step in the right direction toward promoting the recreational, cultural and ecological importance of our wonderful native fish species. Minnesota has an opportunity to be a leader in native fish management with HF4420 as no other state has native fish legislation like this yet.

For too long in Minnesota, this group of roughly 26 varied and unique species representing 9 genera has been lumped together with exotic, invasive carp as “Roughfish”. Exotic carp can cause damage to certain ecosystems, and have rightfully been vilified by the public. However, our incredible native fishes such as redhorse, gar, mooneyes and bowfin suffer from the same perception because current statutes group them with carp. This needs to change, and The Native Fish Bill is a great start.

Native Fish For Tomorrow fully endorses HF4420, and we also speak for thousands of Minnesota fisherpeople from all walks of life who enjoy angling for all of the wonderful native fishes that swim in our waters. Fish scientists and researchers we collaborate with are also excited because they understand the impact that simple change in perception can have on our native fishes. We are lucky to have the diversity of fishes in Minnesota to enjoy angling for, and all of us have seen the need to stand up and protect our heritage.

Kind regards,

Drew Geving  
President, Native Fish For Tomorrow

7970 Red Oak Drive  
Mounds View, MN 55112

3/18/24

Chair Rep. Rick Hansen and Committee Members

MN House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
10 State Office Building Building  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

HF 4420- Support for Native Fish Bill

Dear Chair Rep. Hansen and Committee Members:

I'm writing in support of HF 4420 (Native rough fish provisions and aquatic farm licenses and taking and possessing fish conforming changes), also known as the No Junk Fish Bill. As a forward-thinking state, this important bill must be passed.

As it stands today, our current approach towards fish species classified as "rough fish" is unscientific and unsustainable. Our fish are an invaluable natural resource and maintaining them into the future should mean conservation of all native species in the state. While some anglers may not put them on a pedestal like walleye or muskies, they're still critical parts of the ecosystem regardless and largely unappreciated partially due to the DNR turning a blind eye to them for decades. Its incompatible with the conservation model we've used for decades to protect and save other species, and to continue down this path is a mistake. Now we have an opportunity to correct it with HF 4420.

I appreciate your time and consideration!

Regards,  
Evan Koch