



April 10, 2021

The Honorable Rena Moran
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
449 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Moran and Ways and Means Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on **House File 1079, the Legacy Omnibus bill**.

Minnesotans value their natural resources, care about clean water and healthy soils, and cherish natural lands for outdoor recreation and wildlife habitat. Minnesotans also expect a great deal from the state agencies receiving funds from the Clean Water Fund and the Outdoor Heritage Fund, and we take that responsibility seriously. Working in partnership with the local governments to transition to a watershed-based natural resource management approach and strategically implement conservation practices on the ground, we are making noticeable progress.

Support:

Article 1 contains the *Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) recommendations for Outdoor Heritage Fund* expenditures. This includes BWSR led projects and local government led projects to restore and protect native grasslands, wild rice lakes, and wetlands. These projects leverage federal, local, and private sector resources and provide long-term protection to enhance habitat.

Article 2 contains many of the Governor's and *Clean Water Council's Clean Water Fund recommendations* for BWSR. Our agency's unique mission and structure provides for effective and efficient use of Legacy dollars with proven results. Working through Minnesota's local governments enables state resources to be used strategically to meet high-priority water quality goals using a science-based watershed approach to achieve clean water results.

Concern:

We appreciate the inclusion of the *Wetland Restoration Easements* appropriation; however, we encourage the House to work to increase the amount to reach the Governor's recommendation of \$10 million for the biennium. Minnesota has lost an estimated 42% of its original 16 million acres of wetlands to drainage, fill, or conversion. The loss of wetlands is most severe in the prairie regions of the state with over 90% lost. Restored wetlands and grassland complexes provide water quality improvements and habitat for wetland and water dependent species.

The elimination of funding for *Conservation Drainage Management and Assistance* is a concern as the state's public drainage systems comprise substantial portions of the headwaters of many watersheds in the agricultural parts of Minnesota. Identifying optimal locations within public drainage systems and adding

effective supplemental water quality practices to that infrastructure leads to downstream improvements in the health of lakes, rivers, and streams.

The inclusion of \$12 million of FY22 *funding for Soil and Water Conservation districts (SWCDs)* is a critical element to support the important role they play in much of the work prescribed by the Clean Water Legacy Act and related programs and policies. In combination with funding streams contained in the Environment and Natural Resources Omnibus Budget and Policy Bill and potentially also in the Tax Bill, we will need to work together to secure full funding for SWCDs for FY23 and beyond.

We recognize the addition of funding for *Soil Health Practices* in this bill as an effort to accelerate voluntary conservation practices protecting groundwater and surface water. We encourage the House to also work toward the Governor's recommendation for base funding and related policy in order to help achieve the scale-up effort needed to address climate and water quality challenges on our working lands.

We look forward to continuing work on specific elements of this important legislation with Chair Lillie and other House members in the weeks ahead.

Cc: Rep. Leon Lillie, Chair, Legacy Finance
Rep. Green, Minority Lead, Legacy Finance

Sincerely,



John Jaschke
Executive Director
Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)