

April 16, 2025

Representative Zack Stephenson
Co-Chair, Ways and Means
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Paul Torkelson
Co-Chair, Ways and Means
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Co-Chair Stephenson and Co-Chair Torkelson:

I am writing to supplement testimony given in the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy regarding the House Omnibus Environment and Natural Resources Budget and Policy Bill (House File 2439). Below please find DNR's comments on the bill.

This bill continues the DNR's existing budget into FY26-27 largely untouched. We are concerned that the bill does not include any of the Governor's budget recommendations, as follows:

- The bill does not include the Governor's proposed operating adjustment. Without this operating adjustment, Minnesotans will experience service erosion in the coming years. Keeping pace with inflation is essential to maintain park operations, forest management, conservation work, and timely permitting processes at current service levels in the face of rising costs.
- The bill also does not include water use fee increases as proposed or the aquatic invasive species (AIS) surcharge increases. The water fee increases are needed to improve DNR's permitting responsiveness, ultimately contributing to the sustainable use of the state's groundwater. These water fees have not been increased since 2008. The AIS surcharge increases are essential to protecting our lakes, rivers, and streams from the harm of aquatic invasives. The AIS surcharge was increased for the first time in 25 years in 2019, but this increase did not provide for needed program capacity and grant funding, as this proposal does.
- Proposed State Park permit fee increases are omitted from the bill. These fee increases are necessary to keep pace with rising costs, and without this additional revenue, the DNR will be forced to make publicly visible reductions to State Park services. Combined with a lack of an operating adjustment, cuts may include reduced up-keep and cleaning of campgrounds and visitor centers in State Parks, as well as reduced camping seasons and park customer service hours in the fall, spring, and winter seasons. Park permit fees were last increased in 2018.
- The bill omits funding for legal costs, which will force costs to be paid from programs and services in areas that are already stretched by General Fund pressures.
- The bill also does not include funding for public safety preparedness that is necessary for our conservation officers to be available for general public safety needs and protection of state assets.

With regards to policy, we hope to continue working with the House to incorporate provisions such as the lands bill and continuous bass season, which received bi-partisan support.

Again, we thank you for your consideration of this bill. We look forward to working with the House as the bill moves towards finalization.

Sincerely,



Sarah Strommen
Commissioner

CC: Representative Peter Fischer, Co-Chair, Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy
Representative Josh Heintzeman, Co-Chair, Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy