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February 24, 2025

Dear Chair Heintzeman, Minority Lead Fischer, and members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of local parks and trails and the citizens across the state who use them, we are writing to ask you to support H.F. 1218, which makes recommendations for the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). Our organization—Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT)—is made up of more than 130 cities, counties, parks groups, individuals, and others who seek to connect people to the outdoors and improve the quality of life for Minnesotans. We believe that the funding recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), particularly with respect to parks, trails, and outdoor recreation, will have a significant and beneficial impact on the natural resources, health, and economic well-being of our communities.

Regardless of where they live, spending time outdoors is important to Minnesotans. Local and regional parks and trails help provide opportunities to do so. The LCCMR recognized the importance of local parks and trails by recommending \$4.769 million for grants for local parks, trails, and natural areas. These popular grant programs offer local governments matching funds so they can build or improve parks and trails close to where people live. At a time when local parks and trails are especially vital to the well-being of our communities, these grant programs are a wise investment.

Local parks, trails, and natural areas are often the first—and sometimes only—exposure many Minnesotans have to nature and outdoor resources. These local assets are where young kids learn to fish, swim, and appreciate the outdoors. While Minnesota's state parks and trails are invaluable assets, unfortunately, they are out of reach for many citizens—at least for daily or frequent use—due to distance or a lack of trail connections. That is why local parks and trails are so important to our communities across Minnesota. Investing in these resources will serve to protect, conserve, and enhance Minnesota's natural resources for generations to come.

We are not the only beneficiaries, however. These programs have a statewide reach and benefit communities everywhere in Minnesota. Cities, counties, and townships from Bagley to Otsego, Saint Paul to Winona, Woodbury to Isanti County, and many communities beyond and in between have received matching grants to acquire land with high levels of biodiversity, to build fishing piers, to construct access to state and regional trails, and much more that will increase the ability of Minnesotans young and old to spend time outside. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources administers these statewide programs and has a vetting process in place to ensure that the money is invested in quality projects that are ready for construction.

In addition, the LCCMR recommended funding for other important recreation-focused projects, such as a new facility at Chester Park in Duluth, the construction of a new segment of the Mesabi Trail, water accessibility at Lake Zumbro in Olmstead County, facility improvements at Echo Bay County Park in Otter Tail County, and other projects in Greater Minnesota and the metropolitan area. These types of projects will help Minnesotans engage in recreation and appreciate all the natural wonders our state offers. Finally, the bill also contains

important extensions to projects that have been unavoidably delayed due to supply chain, labor shortages, and other issues.

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. With impending cuts at the federal level, passing the LCCMR bill now will help Minnesota move forward on a variety of essential projects without adding to the deficit.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gina Hugo', with a stylized, flowing script.

Gina Hugo
Parks Director, Sherburne County
President, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Tart', with a stylized, flowing script.

Joseph Tart
Parks Director, Chisago County
Vice President, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails