



SIERRA CLUB

NORTH STAR CHAPTER

Sierra Club North Star Chapter
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260
Saint Paul, MN 55114

January 20, 2023

House Ways and Means Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for House File 207 “Lawns to legumes grant program established; and money appropriated.”

Dear Chair Olson, Vice Chair Edelson and Committee Members:

Founded in 1968, the Sierra Club North Star Chapter is a non-profit environmental organization representing over 20,000 members and 80,000 supporters across Minnesota. The Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation. As a leading grassroots voice working to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment, we empower volunteer leaders to act through environmental advocacy, community organizing, and outdoor exploration. We participate in the administrative process to encourage environmental health and sustainability, long term wildlife and habitat protection, and biodiversity goals.

Pollinators are important part of achieving all those Sierra Club goals in Minnesota as well as part of the important national level, too, where the organization explains its support for Pollinators (<https://www.sierraclub.org/grassroots-network/food-agriculture/pollinators>) as well as Wildlife and Native Plants (<https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/wildlife/wildlife-and-native-plants>) through rehabilitation and restoration of natural landscapes and habitats across rural, urban and suburban locations on its public website.

Per the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources [BWSR], the "Lawns to Legumes pilot program" (<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/121>) offers a combination of workshops, coaching, planting guides and cost-share funding (individual support grants) for installing pollinator-friendly native plantings in residential lawns. The program also includes demonstration neighborhoods, which are pollinator programs run by local governments and nonprofit organizations with support from BWSR, and a public education campaign to raise awareness about creating pollinator habitat. BWSR is partnering with Metro Blooms and Blue Thumb – Planting for Clean Water to administer the program."

On January 11, the Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee heard and thankfully passed Representative Brad Tabke's Lawns to Legumes bill (HF207) that currently has an impressive total of thirty-five (35) supporting legislative authors. We happily join these authors in their desire and recommendation that the Minnesota Legislature establish a Lawns to Legumes grant program to help grow the widely popular program's residential and neighborhood pollinator gardens. We also add our letter of support for the program to complement those who also provided their own

letters of support for the bill (https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/schedules/01112023#h_35058) including Audubon Minnesota and its independent chapters across our state, Conservation Minnesota, League of Minnesota Cities and Metro Cities who also asked that the program be allowed to include more municipally-owned land, too.

The rapid growth of pollinator gardens is indeed crucially needed to help Minnesota's pollinators across many species of bees, birds, butterflies and more (including the endangered rusty-patched bumble bee) as well as to subsequently help people and wildlife who all benefit in several ways from Minnesota's pollinators and the planting of more native plants. This was echoed during the first hearing with testimony in support of the program by University of Minnesota Professor Dr. Marla Spivak and Extension Educator and Researcher and Bumblebee Specialist Dr. Elaine Evans who said the Lawns to Legumes program is also helping to meet the goals of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to recover the population of the rusty-patched bumble bee and help prevent declines of other bumblebees who we don't want to see listed as endangered in the future. Dr. Spivak also shared how Minnesota's Lawns to Legumes program for pollinators is also leading and inspiring other states across the U.S. to start and do more work for pollinators who are responding rapidly to the gardens including even small and distributed gardens across the state where the plan and flower pollen and nectar due to plant chemistry has been proven to boost their immune systems and help to detoxify them from pesticides and the deeper root structures of native perennial plants helping to prevent soil and water erosion.

The \$2 million in grant funding for each of the years 2023 and 2024 would therefore greatly help to achieve more pollinator garden increases across Minnesota with applications being received across 86 of Minnesota's 87 counties and the total grant applications of 17,707 so far vastly outnumbering the number of interested program recipients which was shared in the bill's first hearing this session by the primary author (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kOg8zARi-w&t=2560s>). In addition, we believe that the percentage of those who did not ultimately receive garden reimbursements through a grant due to unfinished gardens for various reasons (Sept. 2022 NPR story at: <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/09/27/pollinator-program-popular-but-many-dont-follow-through-on-planting-plans>) will continue to decline with some plant supply chain issues being increasingly solved after the pandemic and with more pollinator garden knowledge and establishment occurring across Minnesota as a direct result of the availability of more grant funding.

For the many reasons described above, we look forward to continued passage of the Lawns to Legumes grant program establishment with no less than \$2 million in 2023 and 2024 as well as subsequent funding in future years beyond 2024 due to the many places across our state where more native plants and pollinators are needed right now and will continue to be needed in the future because of 1) ongoing local, state and national environmental and wildlife survivability challenges, and 2) increasing public interest and demand for a variety of locally-grown and regional foods of which many require the health and abundance of pollinator species.

Sincerely,

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