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April 4, 2022

House Legacy Finance committee
Honorable Leon Lillie, Chair
Members
Via email to Mike Molzahn, Committee Aide, Mike.Molzahn@house.mn

RE: HF 3438, Legacy Omnibus bill

Dear Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy committee,

The Legacy of Nature Alliance (LONA) brings together organizations and individuals with a unifying mission; "to ensure ecosystems are restored and preserved within the metropolitan regional parks system and throughout the entire region to provide high-quality habitat for wildlife, and year-round Nature-based opportunities to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards." LONA is comprised of 27 organizations and numerous individuals with thousands of others on mailing and contact lists.

As follow up to our letter dated March 23, 2021 (attached) we offer the following for your consideration as you review HF3438 DE5.

1. \$46.455 million Legacy Parks and Trails to the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for FY2022-23

Most of these funds (32/37 projects or 86%) will be spent on capital improvement projects as proposed by the regional park implementing agencies. This spending is contrary to:

- the reason most citizens voted YES for the Legacy Amendment¹,
- a balanced approach as called for in the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy plan²,
- the Metropolitan Regional Parks System was established by the legislature to acquire, **preserve and protect** the highest quality remaining open space in the metro region.³
- Regional parks are defined as those proving a natural setting and offer natural resource-based recreation.⁴

¹ 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy plan, 2011, p37.

² 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy plan, 2011, p32, p38.

³ Minnesota Statutes 473.302

2. **HF 3821, Metropolitan Regional Parks System bonding request, an additional \$30 million for 32 more capital projects** (see attached Metro Parks House Delegation deck p12).

3. Increasing funding gap for maintenance and operating expenses

As presented by the regional park agencies at the March 7 Metro Parks Legislative meeting (see attached p8), there is an increasing gap in the amount of money dedicated to operating expenses and maintenance vs. what is approved by the legislature.

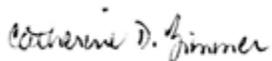
When looking at the bigger picture, if funding continues in this manner citizens and taxpayers are expected to further to foot the bill for:

- “improvements” which conflict with a Nature-based park setting,
- built recreation amenities which at times duplicate amenities appropriately found in local city parks/recreation areas and are contrary to the Regional Parks Policy Plan⁵,
- ongoing increases in annual maintenance expenses.

Critical ecological restoration is needed throughout the regional parks system, yet natural resource restoration and conservation are neglected with the natural resource base being further degraded. This is a concerning downward trend. We ask for your support in reversing this trend throughout our valuable “state parks” of the metro region.

We look forward to further discussing this issue with you in weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,



Catherine Zimmer, Coordinator

CC: Legacy of Nature Alliance

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
Bloomington Natural Resources Stewardship Initiative
Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhood Association
Cedar Lake Park Association
Environmental Friends of Veterans Memorial Park
Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary
Friends of Lake Hiawatha
Friends of Roberts Bird Sanctuary

⁴ MN DNR, Park Criteria for Regional or Statewide Significance

⁵ The Regional Parks Policy Plan p16 states, “The Regional Parks System plays a key role in providing parks and open space for the metropolitan area. But by itself, it cannot and was never intended to provide all the metropolitan area’s recreational opportunities.”

Friends of Thomas Lowry Park
Kids for Saving Earth
Lakeville Friends Of the Environment
Lower Phalen Creek Project
Minnesota Citizens for the Protection of Migratory Birds
Minnesota Herpetological Society
Friends Minneapolis Wildlife
Nature of South St Paul
Pollinator Friendly Alliance
Neighborhood Greening
Sierra Club - Forest and Wildlife Stewards
Urban Bird Collective
Wilderness in the City
Friends of Lake Hiawatha
Friends of the Parks & Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County
Bee Safe MPLS
Minnehaha Falls Landscaping
Stand Up for Property Rights Big Woods Wetlands
Urban Bird Collective

Attachments: LONA/House Legacy Finance committee March 2021 letter
Metropolitan Council/Park Agency FY 2021-2022 project list
Metro Parks House Delegation March 7, 2022 deck