



**CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA**

Protect the Minnesota you love.

March 5, 2019

Dear Chair Hansen and Members of the Division:

Conservation Minnesota is a statewide conservation organization focused on finding constructive solutions to problems that affect Minnesota's lakes, lands, and quality of life. When we ask our network of over 80,000 citizens what environmental issues they are concerned about, we consistently find that waste reduction is a broadly held concern for Minnesotans across the entire state. **We write to express our strong support for H.F. 1215, which increases funding and state support for recycling efforts throughout Minnesota.**

Citizens strongly support recycling

In our communications, we find that Minnesotans strongly support reducing the waste going to landfills, especially organic waste and plastics. Forty-three percent of Minneapolis residents now participate in the city's system of voluntary residential organics collection and many other communities are interested in offering programs for organics recycling.¹ Similarly, Minnesotans are consistently dismayed to learn that the percentage of plastics in our waste stream is increasing, and want to know that we are doing everything we can to recycle and reduce the amount of plastic going to landfills or ending up in our environment.

Additional funding is needed

The state's waste management hierarchy identifies landfilling as the least preferred option for solid waste management. Landfills are long term problems that require ongoing and permanent maintenance to ensure they do not cause environmental harm. In 2014, the Legislature recognized the need to reduce the waste going to landfills and updated the state's recycling goals to require the metropolitan area to recycle 75% and Greater Minnesota to recycle 35% of solid waste by 2030. However, to achieve these goals, our local governments need additional support. The most recent review by the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) found that state support for county recycling efforts has not kept up with inflation, forcing counties to bear the burden of maintaining and supporting recycling programs.²

Recycling reduces energy consumption and emissions

Beyond reducing the problems associated with landfilling, recycling has significant benefits in reducing energy consumption and emissions. It takes 90% less energy to manufacture an aluminum can from recycled aluminum, 50% less energy to manufacture glass projects with recycled glass, and 75% less energy to produce recycled paper.³ If the metropolitan area achieves its waste management system objectives, including the statutory 75% recycling goal, by 2030, the benefits in energy and emissions reductions could include:

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions by over 3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, equal to taking over one million vehicles off the road, and
- conserving over 18 million BTUs of energy per year.⁴

¹ Hennepin County Recycling Progress Report (April 2018) at <https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/your-government/projects-initiatives/documents/recycling-progress-report.pdf?la=en>

² Office of Legislative Auditor, Recycling and Waste Reduction (February 2015), page 17.

³ MPCA, *Energy, Economy, Environment* at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/why-recycle>

⁴ MPCA, *Metropolitan Solid Waste Management Policy Plan 2016-2036* (March 2017) at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-sw7-21.pdf>



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In addition, landfills are significant sources of methane emissions, which are especially potent greenhouse gases. Municipal solid waste landfills are the third-largest source of human-related methane emissions in the United States, accounting for approximately 14.1 percent of these emissions in 2016.⁵

Recycling supports jobs

Recycling also benefits job creation and economic development throughout Minnesota. The MPCA reports that recycling in Minnesota supports over 37,000 jobs in the state and over \$8 billion in estimated gross economic activity.⁶ However, even more can be done to encourage Minnesota businesses to develop new ways to recycle and use recovered materials. HF 1215 would increase the funding available to counties and local governments for direct support for recycling programs and would also help them work to create and develop markets for recycled products.⁷

For these reasons, we strongly support HF 1215 and encourage the Legislature to approve this important funding for recycling in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Nels Paulsen
Policy Director
Conservation Minnesota

⁵ EPA, Methane Emissions from Landfills, at <https://www.epa.gov/lmop/basic-information-about-landfill-gas>

⁶ MPCA, *Energy, Economy, Environment* at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/why-recycle>

⁷ Minn. Stat. 115A.557, Subd. 2 (a) (3).

Increase SCORE funding

HENNEPIN COUNTY MINNESOTA

SCORE advances recycling outcomes

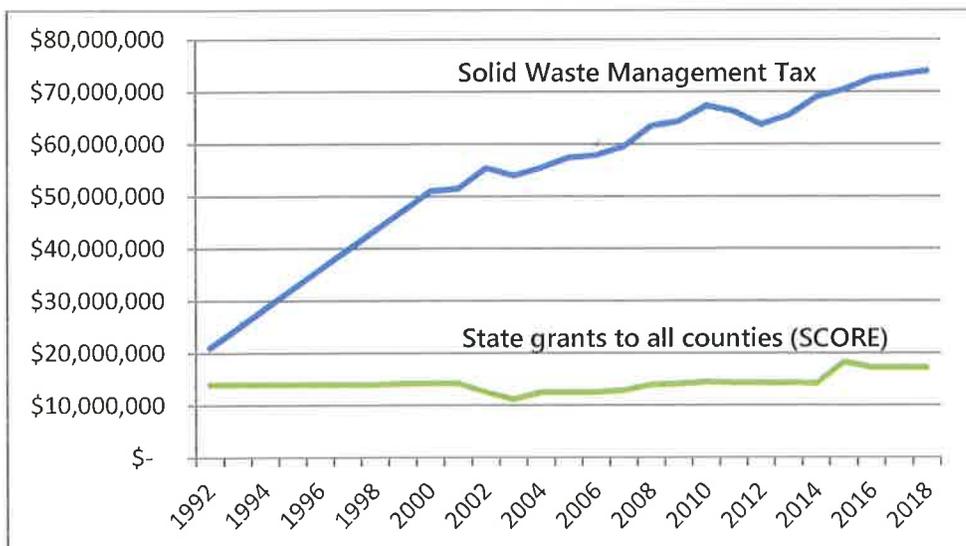
Minnesota law requires counties to manage solid waste and adopt state recycling goals. Currently, each metro county must recycle 75 percent of waste by 2030. Greater Minnesota counties have a goal to recycle 35 percent by 2030. The state provides grants to counties to meet these goals using SCORE funds. Appropriations have not kept pace with increased state mandates.

Hennepin County supports increasing SCORE grants to counties from the solid waste tax to improve recycling rates. This was the original intent for this tax on Minnesota businesses and residents.

Working towards zero waste to landfills and new organics processing capacity requires significant state support, just as new recycling infrastructure needed SCORE funding 30 years ago.

Only 21 percent of solid waste taxes go to county SCORE grants

- Support for county recycling programs has remained flat over time while the portion of this tax redirected to the state's General Fund has grown dramatically.



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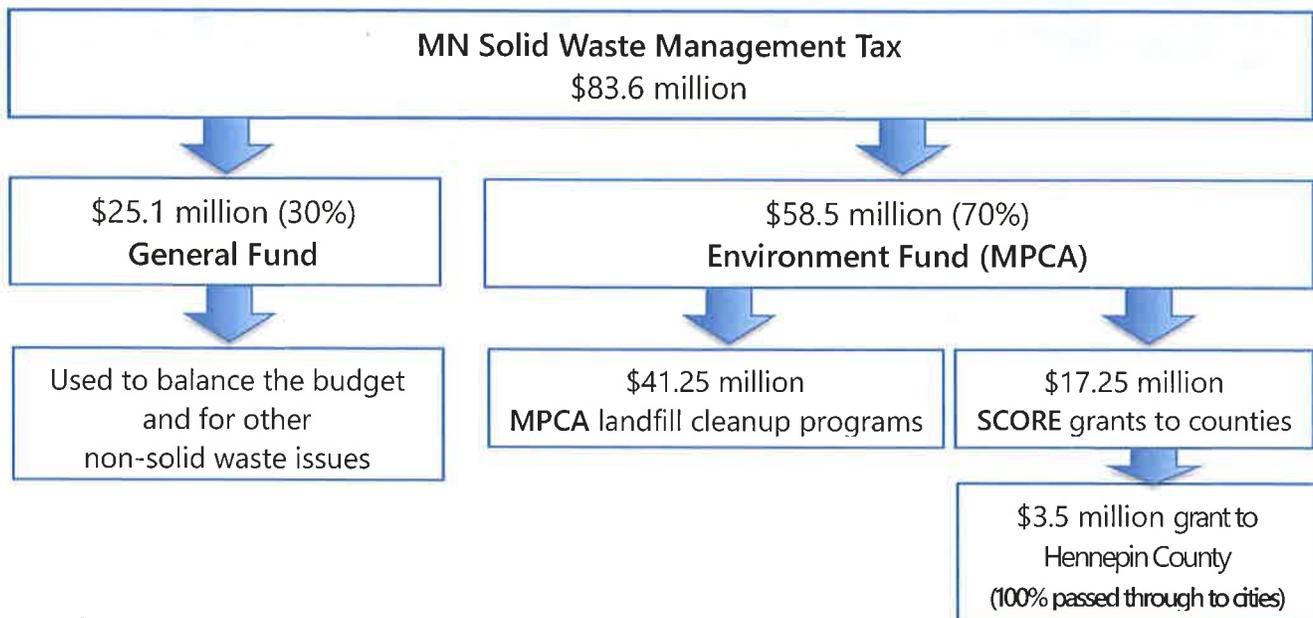
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Where does the solid waste tax revenue go?

Less than one-quarter of solid waste taxes goes to support SCORE recycling grants



Hennepin County on a path to zero waste to landfills

- In 2018, Hennepin County spent \$10.3 million and its cities spent an additional \$9.3 million on waste reduction and recycling programs. The state contribution to this effort was only \$3.6 million.
- Changing technologies and consumer demands require counties and cities to adapt recycling services to include organics recycling, expanded public engagement, and other opportunities.
- Putting organics to a better use is our best opportunity to achieve recycling goals because they make up about 30 percent of the trash. The county has prioritized diverting edible food to hunger relief organizations. Food scraps from commercial kitchens, schools and homes can be turned into compost to make healthier soils and plants.
- Organic materials decomposing in landfills generate methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Waste prevention and recycling keep our land, air and water clean.
- Recycling is a better use of resources than dumping waste in a landfill. Minnesota has spent \$400 million cleaning up landfills.

Recycling makes the economy more competitive

- Minnesota's recycling industry employs 37,000 workers, and it has room to grow.
- Recycling's estimated economic benefit to Minnesota is \$15.7 billion.
- Changes in overseas markets and policies have resulted in other countries no longer importing American recycled materials.
- Developing local recycling markets keeps resources, jobs, money and businesses here.
- Market development builds demand for collected recyclables. This effort has regional impacts and is best done by the state.

Support Recycling

Minnesota counties lead on solid waste

Recycling is the responsible way to manage waste and keeps our land, air, and water clean. In Minnesota, counties are responsible for managing solid waste and meeting ambitious recycling goals. The seven metro counties are required to meet a 75% recycling goal by 2030.

Minnesotans support recycling

Every household in Partnership Counties has curbside collection of recyclables thanks in part to SCORE dollars, but SCORE dollars are not enough and counties are greatly subsidizing recycling programs. People want to recycle more and already pay taxes intended to support additional recycling efforts.

- Recycling is a better use of resources than dumping waste in landfills. Minnesota has spent \$400 million cleaning up landfills.
- Recycling participation in Minnesota is among the highest in the United States, but more can be done.
- Recycling does not happen spontaneously. Programs, infrastructure, and outreach need continued investment to maintain high participation rates.

Recycling is economic development

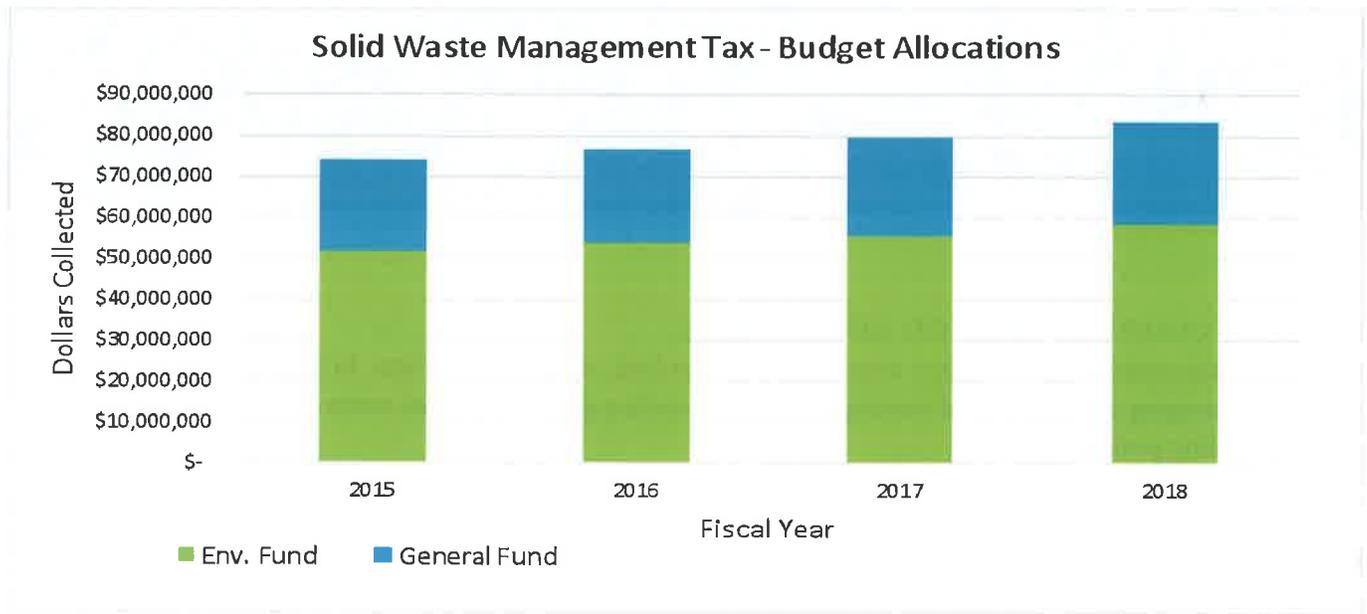
Being a national leadership on recycling creates more job opportunities in Minnesota, and helps us be a more competitive state.

- Recycling creates more jobs than landfilling. The recycling industry employs 37,000 Minnesotans.
- Recycling's total economic benefit to Minnesota is an estimated \$15.7 billion.
- Developing local recycling markets keeps resources, jobs, and businesses here.

Counties step up in the face of Solid Waste Management Tax diversions

Approximately 30 percent (\$25.1 million) of the Solid Waste Management Tax, intended to support county recycling programs, goes to the General Fund. Restoring this funding (commonly referred to as SCORE) for its intended purpose would help counties fulfill their obligations and meet the expectations of taxpayers.

This graph shows where revenue from the Solid Waste Management Tax is allocated.



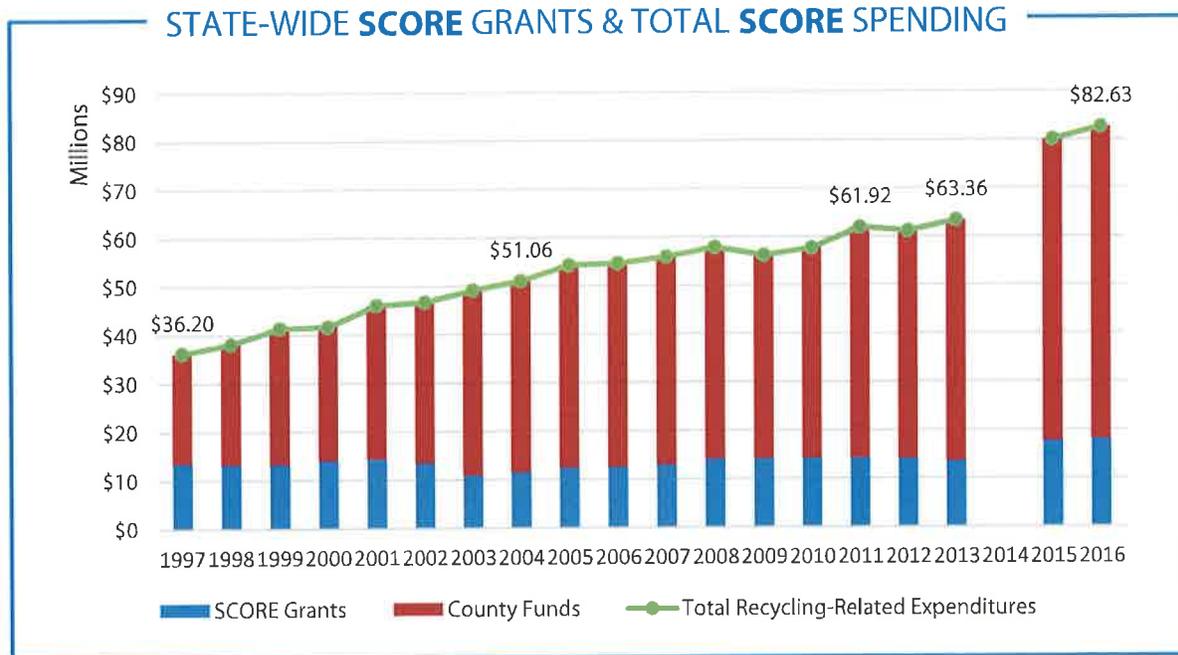


OTTER TAIL COUNTY

SCORE GRANT DOLLARS FOR RECYCLING

Otter Tail County (OTC) is a leader in greater Minnesota regarding Solid Waste Management. OTC supports the Minnesota Waste Hierarchy by processing more than two-thirds of its Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) in a regionally owned Resource Recovery facility. We also divert more than 4,000 tons of recyclables from landfills each year.

Current SCORE grants are not enough to address state recycling goals (35% in greater Minnesota). Counties need more help. SCORE funding remains flat (\$17.75 million per year), while the cost of recycling continues to increase – see illustration below:

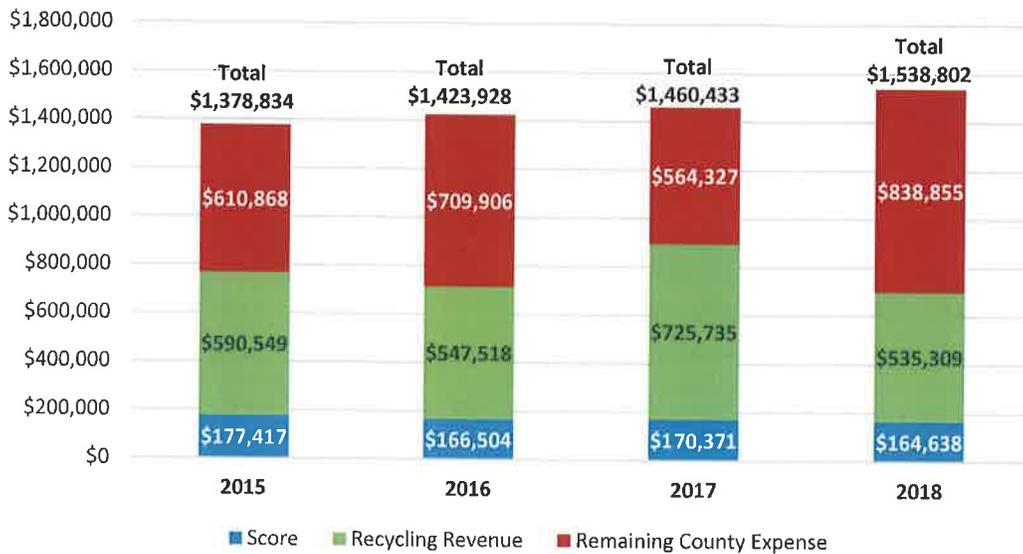


Otter Tail County operates a 24-year old MRF in Fergus Falls and handles most of the recycling collection in the 2,225 square mile county. Our expenses in 2018 for recycling activities totaled more than \$1,500,000, while only receiving just under \$165,000 in SCORE grants leaving the remaining cost to the county (a table summarizing our cost and SCORE grant is provided on the following page).

Otter Tail County and several other counties in west-central Minnesota are reviewing options for single sort recycling to increase our recycling rates. Unlike the metro counties, we do not have a local processing facility for single-sort, which means our costs will go up for either transportation or local processing of this material.

If the State of Minnesota would dedicate more of the Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) to the counties, we will be able to increase recycling and reduce the burden on taxpayers.

OTTER TAIL COUNTY RECYCLING EXPENSE, REVENUE, & SCORE FUNDING



ESTIMATED SWMT GENERATION IN OTC FOR DISPOSAL ONLY

