

Testimony on HF 1433, Wed. 3/15/17
House State Government Finance Committee
Steven J, Ring
Sierra Club North Star Chapter Volunteer



Thank you Madam Chair, members of the committee. My name is Steve Ring and I'm here as a volunteer on behalf of the Sierra Club North Star Chapter. Within the Chapter, I chair their Waters and Wetlands Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to briefly share some of our concerns about House File 1433.

State agencies such as the Pollution Control Agency are responsible for protecting the health of our water, air and communities. When the agency signs off on a decision - whether it's a rule, standard or issuance of a permit - the public assumes that a fair and well-considered decision is being made in the best interests of the environment.

HF1433 creates new mechanisms for the Legislature to delay or block new environmental rules from being implemented. Environmental rules and regulations are based on science - our public agencies are the best equipped to review and interpret scientific data and consensus, and apply it to the public interest without bias. The Legislature, itself, recognized this in establishing a process for agency rulemaking in the first place.

In the section of the bill that defines "substantial economic impact" there is no discussion of benefit analysis. In fact, there are actual economic benefits that clean and healthy environments provide, and dirty environments can have actual economic costs. Environmental regulations and rules are promulgated to prevent degradation or improve the quality of water, land and air, and ultimately the health and well-being of our communities. Over the long term, the benefits to maintaining a clean environment are high and it is certainly easier than cleaning up the pollution afterwards.

A note on the federal context: Many of our environmental rules and standards are closely interwoven with long-established Federal laws such as the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. Making significant changes to our state rulemaking process now, at the start of a new Administration and with unprecedented levels of uncertainty about where our Federal agencies are heading, would be premature at best and irresponsible at worst.

Nothing is ever perfect and we are open to a conversation about how to improve the transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of the rulemaking process as it relates to our environmental agencies. But, any such changes should be done cautiously, with meaningful involvement from all stakeholders, and with a clear focus on outcomes that Minnesotans care deeply about: clean air, clean water and a safe and healthy environment.

This bill will needlessly block and delay environmental regulation, and basically make government less efficient and effective at fulfilling its responsibility to its citizens.

Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee with our concerns.