



MINNESOTA ZOO

May 7, 2019

Dear SF2314/HF2209 Conferees:

I am writing today to request your support for maintaining the Minnesota Zoo as a world-class recreational and educational institution. Contrary to the goal of increasing access to the Zoo, several provisions in the Senate bill would severely limit our ability to maintain the quality Zoo experience our guests expect while continuing to expand our access programs to under-served communities. I urge your support for provisions in the final bill that would fund:

- The state share of rising Zoo operating costs, which is a smaller share of the total than when the Zoo opened decades ago,
- One-time support for improved communications and security equipment to protect the health and safety of guests, staff, volunteers, and animals, and
- Two Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR)-recommended conservation projects to save endangered pollinators and restore native prairie as well as to share the science behind the state's moose decline.

Rather than funding these key priorities, the Senate version of this bill cuts the Zoo's current statutory base budget by \$2.7 million over the biennium, through a General Fund reduction of \$1.966 million (10.7%) and a reduction of earned income by another \$760,000. Additionally, the Senate position removes the \$800,000 LCCMR-recommended project, Saving Endangered Pollinators through Data-Driven Prairie Restoration, from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) appropriations. I am greatly concerned about these provisions because:

- These provisions would not result in more Minnesotans experiencing and learning from all that the Minnesota Zoo has to offer, but would instead result in a significant cut to our services and increased stress on our facilities.
- The proposed cut is equivalent to 16 staff positions, or nearly 6% of our workforce. To give you an idea of how thinly spread we are already, this is equal to the combined Health and Safety, Zoomobile and Bird Show teams.
- Free days in the Zoo in the late 1980s through mid-1990s led to traffic management and public safety problems, with State Troopers wanting to shut down the Zoo due to backups stretching all the way onto Minnesota Highway 77, 1.5 miles away from the Zoo's parking lot. Learning from that experience, we have partnered with the Legislature and private funders on access programs that bring people to the Zoo in a way that is respectful of our neighbors and preserves the quality of the experience.



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- The Minnesota Zoo already provides half-price admission for elementary school field trips, and the modest cost pays for the staff who coordinate field trips and support teachers in connecting their Zoo experience to educational standards.
- Without the ENRTF appropriation, an internationally respected program working to save a piece of Minnesota's natural heritage and provide a roadmap to delist the Dakota Skipper butterfly from the Endangered Species Act will dissolve, and the previous investment and hard work will fall short of long-term goals to recover imperiled pollinator populations.
- The Minnesota Zoo needs the flexibility to manage operations sustainably and ensure safe and positive experiences for visitors. Targeted access programs allow us to lower barriers for the groups who need it the most, while ensuring a quality experience for paying guests, who are key to a sustainable financial model. For example, *Free to Explore* helped 90,000 people from across the state experience the Zoo last year. Additionally, our Zoo Safari and Zoo Explorers programs brought students from over 150 Minnesota schools to access high-quality educational opportunities.

I take my stewardship of this state asset very seriously and I am committed to increasing access to the Minnesota Zoo. I would be happy to discuss how to build on the success of our access programs like *Free to Explore*, but the first step is to ensure that the committee report contains the resources needed for the Minnesota Zoo to continue as a world-class zoo and remain an asset to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Frawley'.

John Frawley
Minnesota Zoo Director



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MEMORANDUM

TO: SF2314/HF2209 Conferees
FROM: John Frawley, Minnesota Zoo Director
DATE: MAY 7, 2019
SUBJECT: Minnesota Zoo provisions in SF2314/HF2209

The following summarizes the Minnesota Zoo's concerns with provisions in SF 2314, and requests for the final conference committee report:

SENATE BILL PROVISIONS

- **Cuts Minnesota Zoo budget:** Over the biennium, the Senate bill would cut the Zoo's current statutory base budget by \$2.7 million over the biennium, including:
 - \$1.966 million (10.7%) General Fund reduction
 - \$760,000 reduction in earned revenue (Special Revenue Fund).
- **Decreases Zoo's operational flexibility:** The Senate bill requires the Zoo to be free on 5 major holidays, which are already busy, and for elementary school children on organized school trips.
- **Defunds important conservation work:** The Senate bill removes the \$800,000 LCCMR-recommended project, Saving Endangered Pollinators through Data-Driven Prairie Restoration, from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) appropriations.

IMPACTS TO THE ZOO

- Cuts to Zoo services and increased stress on facilities
 - Proposed cut represents **16** staff positions (approximately 6% of the workforce)
 - Equivalent to the combined **Health and Safety, Zoomobile, and Bird Show** teams
- Decreased educational support
 - Modest admission (\$6/student) for elementary school field trips pays for staff to coordinate these trips and **support teachers** in meeting educational standards
- Free days in the past caused serious **traffic management** and **public safety** issues
 - The Zoo's Safety Administrator, Ken Weisenburger, recalled that State Troopers wanted to **close the Zoo early** when Zoo traffic created **backups 1.5 miles away** on MN Hwy 77
- Negative guest experiences for guests on extremely-high attendance days, with hundreds of complaints regarding all aspects of Zoo operations

Please support provisions in the final bill to fund:

- The state share of rising Zoo operating costs, which is a much smaller share of the total than when the Zoo opened decades ago
- One-time support for improved communications and security equipment to protect the health and safety of guests, staff, volunteers, and animals
- Two Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR)-recommended conservation projects to save endangered pollinators and restore native prairie as well as to share the science behind the state's moose decline.

JF:ch

Enclosure: Letter to conferees on SF2314/HF2209

