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To: Senator Ingebrigtsen, Representative Hansen, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Conference Committee

Re: Senate File SF4062

Date: May 11, 2022

Dear Chair Ingebrigtsen, Chair Hansen and conference committee members,

On behalf of the more than 135 cities, counties, businesses, non-profits, and individuals that comprise the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails organization, we thank you for your work putting together your respective versions of the Environmental and Natural Resources Omnibus bill. We wanted to comment on a few sections of those bills.

No Child Left Inside Deserves Additional Funding

We appreciate the House including additional funding for the No Child Left Inside Grant Program.(House, Art.1, sec.3, subd. 2 (q), R16) and urge the Senate to support this funding in the final conference bill. Our organization has been supportive of this program since its inception. We wholeheartedly agree we should encourage all children, especially those with limited opportunities, to experience nature at a young age. That exposure helps build a life-long appreciation of the outdoors, which in turn promotes better health and well-being.

Include Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails in Lottery-in-Lieu Funding

We also urge the conference committee to rectify a long-standing oversight by including the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota in the lottery-in-lieu funding formula as you consider changes to how the funds are dispersed (Senate, Art. 2, sec. 65, R44; House, Art. 2, sec.71, R44).

Regional parks and trails play an essential role in our recreation systems throughout Minnesota. They serve as a bridge between the local park around the corner and Minnesota's outstanding state parks as a close-to-home option that serves both the local community and visitors from throughout the region. These regional facilities exist throughout the state, yet the current formula for divvying up lottery-in-lieu funds fails to recognize or support the regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota.

Regional parks and trails have existed outside the metro area for decades, but they were not truly recognized until after the passage of the Legacy amendment in 2008 and subsequent discussions shed light on the fact that the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota were being ignored. In 2013, the Legislature created the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, which has been tasked with developing a system of regionally designated facilities in the 80 counties not served by the Metropolitan Council. Since then, more than 66 facilities across the state have been designated through a rigorous evaluation process.

When the enabling legislation for the lottery-in-lieu funding passed in 2000, it dedicated 22.5% of the available revenues to state parks and trails and 22.5% of the available revenues to metropolitan parks. Perhaps because there was no organization advocating on behalf of the 80 counties and countless cities

outside the metro area, the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota did not receive funding. This oversight should be remedied as HF4492 DE4 moves forward.

Both the House and Senate are considering changes to how lottery-in-lieu funds are disbursed. The House proposal would increase the amount flowing to the lottery-in-lieu accounts by 25%. We support this increase, but strongly urge that if that is done a portion of the increase should be captured for Greater Minnesota to remedy this two-decade long oversight. Please include funding for the regional parks and trails of Greater Minnesota in the lottery-in-lieu formula.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact either of us or our lobbyist, Elizabeth Wefel at 651-492-3998 or ewefel@flaherty-hood.com. We would love to work with you to ensure that Greater Minnesota's parks and trails continue to thrive and grow.

Sincerely,



Ben Anderson
Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails
Stearns County, Parks Director



Gina Hugo
Vice Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails
Sherburne County, Parks Coordinator