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To: Minnesota House Transportation Finance and Policy,
Chair Representative Hornstein

Re: Support for Highway for Habitat HF4313

March 29, 2022

Here are some of my field observations from over the last 30 years or so of Minnesota roadside habitat:

- Numerous times I've seen a hawk sitting on a highline wire. It's hunting ground? A strip of mowed roadside with plowed fields on both sides of the road.
- A bluebird advocate and I put up a new bluebird house on a remote roadside. A half hour later we drove by and there was a bluebird sitting on it.
- I heard from the "shooting star scenic byway" group (about 5 yrs ago) that MNDOT had completely mowed their own scenic, wildflower byway.
- My wife and I were driving south on highway 218 when we saw a crop spraying airplane ahead. As we drove by his field he, coincidentally, passed directly overhead and sprayed our car and the ditch on his trip across the field. When we get to our destination, we saw our car was covered with spray droplets.
- On a gravel road near our home one side of the road has a normal ditch. On the other side, the ditch right of way is only about half as wide and is planted in corn as part of the adjacent farm field.
- I was riding my bike near my home, Walcott township, Rice county. I saw a group of redwing blackbirds, maybe 4 or 5, flying around looking lost near the roadside. The roadside had been their home of tall grass and had just been completely mowed.
- I noticed a roadside with a lot of common milkweed and stopped to examine it. There were several monarch caterpillars on the milkweed that I saw. This ditch section was about 100 yards long. I drove by about a month later and the roadside had been completely hayed.
- I was collecting native flower seeds, purple prairie clover, along a roadside for the purpose of planting them in a native prairie restoration. This is the legal and appropriate method of preserving our native, local genotype, vegetation. I was stopped and interrogated for about 10 minutes by a MNDNR conservation officer who seemed to have no idea about people's rights.

- Our roadside group, the “Rice County Integrated Roadside Committee”, (RCIRC) had an agreement and partnership with the county to install habitat signs (no mowing) at remnant prairie roadside sites. Despite this, the county has annually mowed the roadsides up to and around the signs.
- Some of the roadside habitat signs installed by the RCIRC in the right of way were mysteriously removed or destroyed by farm equipment (plows).
- I sent emails in 2020 to two MNDNR employees who were involved with roadsides to inquire about the status of the “Roadsides for Wildlife” program and availability of signs. I received no replies.
- Approx. 20 yrs ago Rice County had a project to straighten and pave the road through Nerstrand State Park. This would have destroyed native roadside vegetation. We were able to change the road status to a “natural preservation route” saving the county about a quarter million dollars and preventing the loss of the roadside habitat..

A couple years ago, just before covid, MNDOT conducted a series of “stakeholder” meetings to discuss management issues mostly in regard to the haying controversy. Despite about a dozen meetings and a lot of effort, there was no consensus or action taken. Since that time there has been a lot of publicity and realization at all levels about the importance and decline of monarchs, pollinators and other wildlife. It is past time to revisit this issue and pass meaningful legislation. With the loss of other suitable habitat, roadsides are one of our largest and best remaining habitats for wildlife. Roadsides also have the added benefit of being corridors for migration and breeding.

Thank you for this opportunity to give my input.

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