

Representative Rick Hansen
House Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee
407 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Hansen and Committee members,

March 24, 2021

As your committee considers HF1877, which would make changes to the use of the Critical Habitat matching account, we write to highlight the history, use, and importance of the Reinvest in Minnesota Critical Habitat Match Program.

The Critical Habitat Match program and account, created in 1986, modified to include the Critical Habitat Match License Plate Program in 1995, was established to protect habitat for fish, wildlife, and native plants through acquisition or improvement of land. This has included the creation of and improvement of lands in wildlife management areas (WMAs), scientific and natural areas (SNAs), aquatic management areas (AMAs), as well as other state-recreation lands like forests and state parks. Minnesotans voluntarily purchase critical habitat license plates and make contributions to the Critical Habitat Matching account. These voluntary contributions currently are then also matched on a 1:1 basis by land or financial contributions from private citizens, organizations, and businesses, resulting in millions of private dollars leveraged toward publicly accessible conservation lands.

The current uses of the funds, for land acquisition and improvements, results in increased availability of lands for many forms of public recreation, including bird watching, hiking, fishing, and hunting opportunities. Lands acquired and managed with Critical Habitat Match also provide habitat for cherished fish and wildlife species including rare birds, pollinators, and other animal and plant species of greatest conservation need, in addition to water quality and quantity benefits, carbon sequestration, and more.

Private individuals, organizations, and businesses have donated \$99,230,195 in contributions and land value over the life of the program. And while there have been many important habitat projects completed, there is ongoing need and demand to continue to protect and improve habitat for all wildlife and public land visitors to enjoy. With climate change and other increasing threats to biodiversity, the program has only grown in importance.

The Critical Habitat Match program generates funds dedicated for these purposes outside of traditional state funding sources and is almost entirely comprised of private donations. As our lands, waters and wildlife face growing challenges, these investments and this program has never been more critical.

We ask that the legislature maintain the intention of this the fund to permanently protect and improve critical habitat and continue the benefits the program provides.

Sincerely,

Audubon Minnesota
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Conservation Minnesota
Ducks Unlimited
Fish & Wildlife Legislative Alliance
Friends of MN Scientific and Natural Areas
Minnesota Conservation Federation

Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Alliance
Pheasants Forever
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
Trout Unlimited
Trust for Public Land