



12 April 2021

The Honorable Rep. Rena Moran  
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee  
449 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Blvd  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Moran;

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on **House File 1076, the Omnibus Environment and Natural Resources Budget and Policy bill.**

Minnesotans value their natural resources and care about clean water and productive use of their land and infrastructure. Minnesotans also expect a great deal from the state agencies charged with overseeing natural resources, and we take that responsibility seriously. Working in partnership with the local governments who implement on-the-ground conservation practices, we have been making noticeable progress.

We appreciate the many important conversations we have had thus far this session about environment and natural resources issues. This bill contains several provisions that will help improve the important work of locally led conservation. Specifically:

- **Support for Necessary Operational Adjustments**  
This investment allows BWSR to continue meeting statutory requirements and the needs of local government partners while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars. It benefits state and local governments by maintaining the agency's capacity for financial services, budget management and analysis, and grants allocations while upholding the level of service our partners both deserve and expect.
- **Support for Soil Health program**  
Soil health practices are a critical element of conservation efforts that provide climate mitigation and resilience benefits as well as productivity enhancements on Minnesota's working lands. The included policy provisions and \$1 million in funding are a good start and we'll continue working with House Members to accomplish the acceleration as proposed in the Governor's recommended \$5.5 million of base funding for this work.
- **Support for Water Storage and Treatment program**  
Another aspect of climate resiliency is managing the increasing volume and rate of water runoff caused by increased rainfall intensity. We appreciate the inclusion of \$1 million and the policy provision that provides a mechanism for state support for projects at strategic locations as identified in local watershed management plans. Again, we'll continue to work with House

Members to incorporate the Governor's recommended base funding for this effort at \$3 million for the biennium.

- **Support Easement Stewardship Account**

The modifications to the Easement Stewardship and Mitigation accounts are budget neutral and will ensure prudent use of these dedicated funds to protect the state's investments in these public assets.

- **SWCD supervisor compensation increase**

We support the catch-up adjustment to assure elected local officials are adequately compensated for carrying out their public official duties.

- **Lawns to Legumes program established**

We support the enactment of this important effort to accelerate the work of local partners in establishing habitat patches beneficial to pollinators and endangered bees and butterflies.

We appreciate that both the **2020 and 2021 LCCMR recommendations for Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) appropriations** are included in this bill and there are no changes to the projects recommended by the Commission. Specifically;

- The 2020 ENRTF appropriations include an appropriation to BWSR for a *Pollinator and Beneficial Insect Strategic Habitat Program*. This project builds upon existing public investment and enhances high-value pollinator habitat on existing conservation easements, Conservation Reserve Program lands, city and county parks, and protected natural areas.
- The 2021 ENRTF appropriations include funding for the second phase of the popular Lawns to Legumes Program.
- Project extensions for the ML 2017 CREP outreach and implementation project is important to finish the work of restoring wetlands, protecting drinking water and establishing riparian buffers.
- The \$900,000 transfer to BWSR for Lawns to Legumes is appreciated as we work towards finding a reliable funding source for this popular and beneficial program.

As you know, the state's **Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)** are vitally important in conservation implementation. We appreciate your recognition of their work and attempt to find a source of additional funding via the Soil and Water Conservation District fee. In combination with partial funding streams contained in the Legacy Bill and potentially also in the Tax Bill, we will need to work together to secure full funding for SWCDs for this biennium and beyond. We look forward to working with House Members as you consider the best path forward to achieve sufficient and stable funding essential to assure all SWCDs can continue to be the "boots on the ground" conservation experts working with landowners statewide.

We stand firm in the belief that now is the time to start ongoing, long-term investments in climate mitigation and resiliency. The Governor's Soil Health and Water Storage packages are a small start – but impactful and practical parts of the state's base commitment to accelerate work in these areas. We believe there is room for further discussion on a long-term strategy and look forward to working with House members to enact priorities supported by science with clear public benefits.

We appreciate the Committee's work leading up to this bill and the inclusion of provisions ensuring our agency is positioned to support our local government partners and their conservation work in Minnesota and look forward to continuing work with Chair Hansen and other Committee Members in the weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Jaschke", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

John Jaschke, Executive Director, Board of Water and Soil Resources

Cc: Rep. Rick Hansen, Chair, Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee  
Rep. Josh Heintzeman, Minority Lead, Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee