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April 13, 2021

Dear Chair Lee and members of the House Capital Investment Committee,

On behalf of the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) organization, we are reaching out to provide comments on the House Capital Investment Bill, HF 337. GMPT is a member organization of more than 125 cities, counties, individuals, non-profits and businesses dedicated to improving quality of life for all Minnesotans through strong local and regional parks and trails.

We thank you for all the work you have put into creating a bonding bill. In a time of continuing pandemic and economic crisis, it is important to invest in our infrastructure and create jobs throughout the state. We also appreciate the emphasis you have put on outdoor recreation in this bill, but we are disappointed and alarmed at the continuing inequitable treatment of the parks and trails of Greater Minnesota.

While the pandemic has caused many strains on our state, it has also highlighted the importance of parks and trails. Health experts and government officials at all levels emphasize that citizens should continue to go outside and be active while maintaining safe physical distances. Minnesota's state, regional, and local parks and trails play an essential role in providing such opportunities and have seen record usage over the past year.

This committee recognizes the importance of providing outdoor recreational opportunities. This bill includes \$11.5 million for Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails, as well as \$4.8 million to the Department of Natural Resources for state trail maintenance. However, the bill contains nothing for regional or local parks in Greater Minnesota, perpetuating the inequity that we see across multiple bills in the House. We fully support providing money to these entities, but we urge this committee and the House to step forward and show support for parks and trails in Greater Minnesota as well.

Greater Minnesota regional parks and trails are already at a disadvantage because they receive half the amount of Legacy funding that the metropolitan area and DNR receive. And unlike those two entities, our parks and trails do not receive dedicated general fund or lottery-in-lieu funding operations, which totals more than \$18 million this biennium for Metropolitan Parks and Trails alone. In contrast, our simple request for \$900,000 for operating funds for the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission was denied even a hearing, for the second biennium in a row.

This year, our organization is advocating for bonding for two statewide programs in HF 1039, which would provide \$2 million each to the DNR's outdoor recreation and local trail connections grant programs. Although these programs are open statewide, they at least provide Greater Minnesota communities an opportunity to compete for project funding.

Parks and trails play an essential role in the health and wellbeing of all Minnesotans. We appreciate the support you have provided to the metropolitan area, but respectfully request that you also recognize the importance of that support for Greater Minnesota parks and trails in your final bonding bill.

Sincerely,



Michael Nigbur
Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails
Rochester Parks & Recreation, Park and Forestry Division Head



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