



CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA

March 17, 2021

To Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Conservation Minnesota members in all 87 Minnesota counties, I write to support the recommendations of the Clean Water Council and to support HF 639, as amended.

Conservation Minnesota appreciates the thorough process by the Clean Water Council to create a package of funding recommendations to protect, enhance and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams and to protect groundwater. We are pleased that the Council's recommendations match the recommendations made by Governor Walz. We would also like to point out that the recent addition of Paul Gardner as the Clean Water Council Administrator has improved the long-term strategy and the day to day transparency of the Council.

We also encourage the Clean Water Council to stay up-to-date as revenue forecasts for the Legacy Amendment funds change over time. Clear direction from the Clean Water Council could help guide legislators this year (and in the future) as revenue forecasts change.

We are glad to see that HF 639, as amended, addresses funding Minnesota's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Because SWCDs represent an arm of county government, while at the same time implementing statewide programs, we support using a combination of local and state sources to fund SWCDs. The novel proposal in HF 639 to permissively fund a portion of SWCDs with modest mortgage/deed fees represents a balanced proposal that we support.

It seems important to point out that SWCD funding should not solely rely on the Clean Water Fund that is set to expire in 2034. A balance of local and state funds could help deliver more reliable funding, and even granting SWCDs levy authority would help. Or state agencies could ensure base funding for SWCDs comes from the state's general fund. Any number of ideas are better than simply relying 100% on the Clean Water Fund for SWCD base funding.

If Clean Water Funds are used to pay base funding for SWCDs this session, we ask the Legislature to consider a payback provision - so that if there is a future budget surplus, the Clean Water Fund can be repaid for something that should come from the general fund.

Finally, we thank Rep. Hansen for incorporating a number of new provisions in HF 639, as amended, including resources for lead service line removal; new funding that emphasizes soil health, sustainable forestry, and water resource protection; and funding for new research concerning toxic chemicals from automotive tires impacting fish populations.

Sincerely,
Nels Paulsen - Policy Director