

April 30, 2020

Representative Rick Hansen, Chair
Environment & Natural Resources Finance Division
407 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: HF4554 Environment & Natural Resources Omnibus Bill

Dear Chair Hansen:

I am submitting this letter in support of two specific sections of HF4554. They are section 4 – conservation easements, and section 8 – conservation planning leases. Both provisions have been included in the delete-all amendment at Article 2 sections 18 and 32, respectively.

As School Trust Lands Director, I am charged with identifying strategic revenue generating opportunities for Minnesota's school trust lands. In 2013, I led the inventory of school trust lands that classified over 800,000 acres as uneconomic or unproductive. I believe there are opportunities to generate revenue streams through mitigation markets while also preserving natural systems on otherwise uneconomic school trust lands.

The sections for conservation planning leases and conservation easements will permit the Office of School Trust Lands, and DNR, to research and initiate projects to establish wetland banks, carbon storage projects, or habitat banks on school trust lands. Other states with similar school trust land portfolios – Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon and Utah – have already entered mitigation markets and are deriving revenue from otherwise unproductive lands.

Minnesotans will be assured that school trust lands with potential to provide these ecosystem services will remain in a natural state and continue to offer the benefits of clean water, biodiversity and habitat. Moreover, doing so will increase revenue to Minnesota's School Trust from unproductive school trust lands and, in turn, increase distributions to the beneficiaries.

I thank you and the Committee for your consideration of this new management opportunity for school trust lands.

Regards,



Aaron M. Vande Linde

cc: Rep. Dan Fabian
Rep. Dale Lueck, Vice Chair PSFC