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April 29, 2020

Senator Bill Ingebrigtsen
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3207
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Representative Rick Hansen
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
407 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Ingebrigtsen and Representative Hansen,

On behalf of the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) organization, we thank you and your fellow legislators for your strong leadership during these challenging times. We applaud the Legislature's willingness to continue its work to address the needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other essential pieces of legislation.

Given the devastating economic impact of this crisis, we urge the Legislature to move forward with a bill containing recommendations from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Although there may be areas of minor disagreement, most of the recommended projects have support from legislators of both parties as well as the citizen members of the LCCMR.

While the pandemic has caused many strains on our state, it has also highlighted the importance of local 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 local parks and trails play an essential role in providing such opportunities. The LCCMR recognized this importance by recommending \$2.4 million for grants for local parks, trails and natural areas (recommendation 9-D).

These popular grant programs offer local governments matching funds so they can build or improve parks and trails close to where people live. However, these grant programs do not have a stable source of funding. At a time when our local parks and trails are especially important to the well-being of our communities, these grant programs are a wise investment.

Since the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources administers these statewide programs, it can ensure that the money is invested in quality projects that are ready for construction.

In addition, the LCCMR recommended funding for other important recreation-focused projects such as grants for the Perham to Pelican Rapids Regional Trail, the Mesabi Trail, the Rocori Trail and other projects in Greater Minnesota and the metropolitan area. These types of projects will help Minnesotans engage in recreation and stay healthy during these challenging times.

Passing a LCCMR bill this session will help provide economic stimulus to move our state forward. Parks and trails projects will provide critical jobs in the construction sector, and many of the other projects recommended by the LCCMR will provide jobs to scientists, lab workers, and others who may be sidelined right now. Moving forward with this bill now will help stimulate the economy without adding to the deficit.

Thank you again for your efforts to keep Minnesotans safe and healthy during these difficult times. We hope you will pass an LCCMR bill with funding for local parks and trails grants before the legislative session adjourns on May 18.

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

cc: Senator Carrie Ruud
Senator David Tomassoni
Representative Anne Claflin
Representative Dan Fabian
Suzanne Sobotka, Policy Advisor