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

April 29, 2020

Dear Chair Hansen and members:

I am writing on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to express support for a provision included in your Omnibus Environment bill, House File 4554 Sections 4 and 8,(and in the delete-all amendment, Article 1, Sections 18 and 32) which would enable the purchase of conservation easements on School Trust Lands (“Trust Lands”) for the purpose of generating revenue from ecosystem services. We recognize the importance of Trust Lands and the funding support they provide to our education system in Minnesota. We believe looking for creative ways to generate revenue while also conserving and restoring critical lands held in trust can provide benefits for all.

This policy change would provide the Office of School Trust Lands on behalf of the Permanent School Fund (‘trust’) with an option to sell easements to either maintain lands that have high conservation value or to provide the opportunity to improve or restore lands while adding value to the trust. One example would be to use Trust Lands to restore wetlands and to provide a mitigation opportunity for local and state projects. Another example would be to sell an easement to allow a forest to be managed for the benefit of carbon storage so that the trust could generate revenue by selling credits for the stored carbon onto a voluntary market. These examples would put Trust Lands to work in a new and innovative way that would benefit both education and the environment.

I thank the committee for all its work this session and for adjusting to a new and unprecedented way of getting legislation passed right now. I hope each of you and your families continue to stay safe and well.

Sincerely,

/s/ Elizabeth Crow
Director of External Affairs
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota