



The Nature Conservancy in
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Chair Rick Hansen
Environment and Natural Resources
Policy & Finance Committee
407 State Office Building
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Bill Ingebrigtsen
Environment and Natural Resources
Finance Committee
3207 Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Environment Finance and Policy Omnibus, SF 4062

May 6, 2022

Dear Chair Ingebrigtsen, Chair Hansen, and members of the Committees:

As the Conference Committee works to produce a final Environment Finance and Policy bill, we thank you and the members of your committees for considering many important programs and investments that will benefit people and nature.

We write to highlight several important investments and policy provisions that have been discussed by both of House and Senate Environment committees that we recommend the legislature advance this session:

- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) incentive** funding, which would provide payments and technical assistance for existing CRP enrollees for the purposes of conservation easements issued by the Board of Water and Soil Resources. In the face of increasing land prices and rental costs, the state should support those landowners who have determined the highest and best use for their land is to enroll in a conservation program. These funds leverage additional federal dollars and resources that could double or triple the state's investment.
- **Soil health** funding to accelerate the adoption of soil health practices. Existing programs enacted in 2021 were a good start, but are not accessible to all types of operations. Large-scale adoption of soil health practices will require participation by all types of farms and service providers. Grant funding to provide financial assistance to overcome real barriers to soil health, and developing a comprehensive plan to expand use of soil health practices across the state is critical to advancing soil health.
- **Investments in Minnesota's forests and tree planting**, such as reforestation, replacement of trees lost to drought or Emerald Ash Borer, and increasing the capacity of the Badoura State Forest Nursery. We appreciate both committees' discussion on these topics, and recognize these efforts can also be funded through bonding. We encourage the conference committee to consider the opportunity to invest in these significant needs through capital investments as well.



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- **Statutory changes to the Office of School Trust Lands** to clarify duties of the Office of School Trust Lands and its director.
- **Provision on conservation easements and ecosystem services** that would allow county boards to enter into conservation easements that provide ecosystem service benefits on tax-forfeited lands.

The Nature Conservancy recognizes there are many tools in the toolbox to sustain and grow the health of Minnesota's natural and working lands by using a right-fit approach for each type of program. We appreciate your committees' further consideration of topics such as forest inventory, water storage and flood resiliency, maintenance and enhancements to grasslands, wildlife management areas, and scientific and natural areas, and the nongame wildlife program, and hope investments in these programs will continue to be discussed by your committee.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Minnesota's environment and natural resources.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Pinkalla
Government Relations Manager
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota