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## ***Yellow Medicine County Board of Commissioners***

180 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Granite Falls, MN 56241

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### **Commissioners:**

Greg Renneke – District 1

John Berends – District 2

Mitch Kling – District 3

Ron Antony – District 4

Glen Kack – District 5

To: The Department of Interior, National Parks Service  
Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith  
Seventh District Congressional Representative Michelle Fischbach,  
State Legislators Senators Gary Dahms and Andrew Lang, Representative Chris Swedzinski

To all:

We are writing this letter as the Yellow Medicine County Board of Commissioners on behalf of all of those who appreciate and benefit by the values this park provides. Legislation that calls for transferring the 1,300 acres of park land to the Upper Sioux Community has led our organization to focus its attention on the process of identifying “replacement recreation values” for its loss.

We want to alert the National Park Service and our elected officials that the replacement process to date is not a sincere one and incapable of meeting the federal mandates attached to the land.

The process has been flawed from the start. The allocation of \$5 million by the legislature towards this objective is completely arbitrary. Step one in this process should be public discussion on what is the appropriate funding to meet the needs. That has not happened.

We ask our legislators to address this fundamental flaw by authoring legislation to provide a more appropriate allocation. We believe the amount should be at a minimum of \$35 million.

Discussions led by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have focused on bits and pieces, such as improving amenities in city and county parks in the region.

We call attention to the fact that when citizens have been asked what they would like as a replacement recreational opportunity, the clear and overwhelming response has been a desire to replace what is being lost. Area residents and park users want an operating and staffed park that offers equestrian and hiking trails, a wilderness escape close to home, camping, access to the Minnesota River, and importantly, the opportunity to appreciate and understand the region’s historical and cultural heritage.

The decision to transfer the park occurred without any public input. The greater community was not informed of the possibility of this transfer and as a result, had no opportunity to suggest possibilities such as partnerships that could benefit everyone.

The resulting process has placed the Department of Natural Resources in an adversarial position with the greater community it is to serve.

The ultimate responsibility for this process belongs to the legislature. We ask our local legislators to give us a voice in this process. We ask for legislation to not only increase the allocation of funds for replacement recreational opportunities, but also to establish a process where citizen input is required. Assigning the task of finding replacement value to a state agency and expecting the public to somehow be represented by virtue of an online survey and a couple of public input meetings in the late afternoon hours is a failed approach.

We ask the National Park Service to recognize that the current process will not meet the need to find replacement recreational value. The National Park Service has the responsibility to hold the Minnesota Legislature and the Department of Resources accountable to the law or deny the transfer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Renneke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Greg Renneke, Yellow Medicine County Board Chair

April 5, 2024

House Ways & Means Committee

Re: **HF 3508 Sections 5 and 12 Opposition** - Upper Sioux Agency State Park and Historic Site Abolishment as well as surplus declaration and conveyance of Redwood County Land

Dear House Ways & Means Members:

We, the undersigned, are opposed to the abolishment of Upper Sioux Agency State Park and Historic Site in Yellow Medicine County (Section 5) as well as surplus declaration and conveyance language addressing Redwood County land (Section 12).

Both sites are unique to multiple Minnesota ethnic groups for their historic events, cultural sense of place, hallowed ground, geologic features, and recreational opportunities – all have coexisted for 60 years and are now freely accessible for religious observation with 2021 state law enacted providing free park permits to tribal members and free passes to all others through a DNR/MN public library program.

### **Hallowed Ground**

Closing the locations and conveying them to tribal governments destroys the religious rights and freedoms provided by Minnesota and US law to human remains and grave visitation. Redwood County land proposed to be declared surplus is down river from the US – Dakota War's Battle of Redwood Ferry along the Minnesota River; three soldiers' remains were never recovered from the area. Proposed surplus land is an outcropping into the Minnesota River downstream from where the fighting took place. The DNR has made no effort to explore the area for remains or artifacts.

### **Fraudulent Federal Fund Use**

Upper Sioux Agency State Park has a following among horseback riders. No replacement property has been documented meeting federal requirements under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF) that requires all recreational land purchased or enhanced with LWCF be replaced with like opportunities. In fact, the MN DNR accepted private funds for trail improvements to Yellow Medicine Trail within the Park with terms that require the trails to be publicly accessible through 2039 (Recreational Trails Program, Federal Highway Administration, 2018, MN Trail Riders Association). The DNR negotiated closure of the park with tribal government while it accepted federal and state funds that required the land be open to public recreational use. Repayment of these funds was not found in 2023 legislation.

### **Negative Local Impact**

Local government was excluded from negotiations. The State has not identified strategies being taken to mitigate the estimated \$1 million economic loss due to park closure. Public meetings held provided no alternative park operation proposals nor was there any address to conversion suspicions of the recreational land into Indian Trust.

## Section 5 and 12 Removal Recap

HF3508 Section 5 seeks to abolish a known historic site related to the suffering of Minnesotans, Native and Non Native. HF3508 Section 12 seeks to remove hallowed ground from the protection of state and federal regulation knowing the area's potential to contain soldiers killed at the Battle of Redwood Ferry.

Show respect to all Minnesotans with removal of Sections 5 and 12 from HF3508 (1<sup>st</sup> Engrossment).

Thank you,

\*Pete Anderson  
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Watford ND 58854-0582

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Civil War Researcher  
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Kathy Skroch  
Former North Dakota  
Representative District 26  
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Lidgerwood MN 58053

Lisa Smith  
1312 Main Ave  
International Falls MN  
56649

\* denotes Yellow Medicine County Resident or Land Owner



**Renville**  
COUNTY  
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To: The Department of Interior, National Parks Service  
Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith  
Seventh District Congressional Representative Michelle Fischbach,  
State Legislators Senators Gary Dahms and Andrew Lang, Representative Chris Swedzinski

To all:

We are writing this letter as the Renville County Board of Commissioners on behalf of all of those who appreciate and benefit by the values this park provides. Legislation that calls for transferring the 1,300 acres of park land to the Upper Sioux Community has led our organization to focus its attention on the process of identifying “replacement recreation values” for its loss.

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Sincerely,

Randy Kramer, Renville County Board Chair



## BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

629 N. 11th Street  
Montevideo, MN 56265

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To: The Department of Interior, National Parks Service  
Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith  
Seventh District Congressional Representative Michelle Fischbach  
State Legislators Senators Gary Dahms and Andrew Lang, Representative Chris Swedzinski

To all:

Chippewa County Board of Commissioners is writing to express concern regarding the transfer of public land to the Upper Sioux Community and the economic impact that has on Chippewa County. The Upper Sioux State Park is a wonderful resource for all the State's residents and visitors. We heavily rely on the tourism generated by visitors to the park who then stay, shop, and explore our area communities. We anticipate lost revenue for our local business owners and lost resources to our communities due to the privatization of this land.

Access to the park improves the quality of life for residents in our region by providing opportunities for recreation and cultural and historical experiences. Public parks make our communities more attractive and enhances the amenities we can offer to prospective residents and businesses.

Chippewa County feels the land transfer process lacked transparency and timely communication with stakeholders. It is unfortunate this process has created conflict between the State and local communities. We must work together to serve the public, but we feel the State has no interest in partnering on finding a solution or considering our region's welfare.

We ask that you support our region by reviewing how this transaction was handled. We also ask that you open the lines of communication between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota State Legislature so we can repair the relationships and develop a path forward benefitting all parties.

Sincerely,

Candice Jaenisch, Chippewa County Board Chair