

March 27, 2025

To Co-Chair Heintzeman, Co-Chair Fischer, and the members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee:

Thank you for allowing our organizations to express our support for HF2293 (Hollins), the bill to fund the new Community Grants Program.

Last November with 77.5% support, voters approved constitutionally re-dedicating a portion of state lottery proceeds into the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). Importantly, voters approved increasing the amount that can be spent from the Trust Fund each year from 5.5% to 7.0%. This new 1.5% of the ENRTF is directed to a new Community Grants Program through the Minnesota DNR. HF2293 is simply an appropriation for fiscal year 2026, and 1.5% of the ENRTF value amounts to \$28.18 million. The separate 5.5% of the ENRTF remains dedicated to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) process, just as it has been for decades.

The new Community Grants Program was created so that new and smaller grantees can access ENRTF funds in ways that are not feasible in the LCCMR process. The same constitutional protections that cover LCCMR recommendations also pertain to the new 1.5% for Community Grants. The constitutional protections read, “[T]he assets of the fund shall be appropriated by law for the public purposes of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state’s air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.”

Many people recognize the LCCMR as an important source of funding for natural resource related projects. However, the LCCMR process is oversubscribed, and has been challenging and burdensome for small organizations, communities and projects to access. The new Community Grants Program is designed to help smaller projects hit the ground faster and in communities that would otherwise struggle to navigate LCCMR, so that ENRTF dollars can reach more communities and grantees across the state.

The Minnesota DNR has been working with stakeholders for almost 2 years in preparation for the new Community Grants Program, and we anticipate the new Advisory Council to be open for applications this spring. Once appointed, the Advisory Council is designed to help oversee and advise the DNR set up and administer the new Community Grants Program. The DNR manages many successful grant programs and their traditional grant management safeguards are expected to apply to the Community Grants Program, and final decision-making authority remains with the agency.

With diminishing funding opportunities coming from the federal government, and increasing demand for ENRTF funding, this is the perfect time for the Community Grants

Program to begin with the appropriation from HF 2293 so that more Minnesota communities can access ENRTF dollars to improve our shared Great Outdoors.

Alliance for Sustainability
Barbette Restaurant & Amusements
Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota
Book Club
Bread & Pickle – Lake Harriet
Brainerd Area Coalition for Peace
Central Lakes College Natural Resources Club
Chester Bowl Improvement Club
City of Richfield
Clean River Partners
Clean Water Action
COGGS
Conservation Minnesota
Discover the Range
Fergus Falls Fish & Game Club
Friends of the Boundary Waters
Friends of the Mississippi River
Freshwater
Gigi's Café
Great River Greening
Green Cities Accord
Lakeville Friends of the Environment
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
Minnesota Bird Coalition
Minnesota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America
Minnesota Forestry Association
Minnesota Mycological Society
Minnesota Ski Areas Association
New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen
North Country Trail Association
Northern Star Scouting
Northern Waters Land Trust
Pat's Tap Skee-Club & Gastro Pub
Placemaker Hospitality

Pollinator Friendly Alliance
Prairie Lakes Audubon Chapter
Prairie Woods Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Reuse Minnesota
Science Museum of Minnesota
Sierra Club North Star Chapter
Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters
The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River
The Minneapolis Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
Tiny Diner
Trapeze Bubbles & Toasts
Trust for Public Land
UMN Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
Urban Bird Collective



Minnesota
Environmental
Partnership

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March 26, 2025

Minnesota House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee
Co-Chairs Peter Fischer and Josh Heintzeman

Dear Co-Chair Fischer, Co-Chair Heintzeman, and members,

On behalf of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership and the organizations listed below, I would like to express our coalition's support for HF 2293, the bill to appropriate dollars from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) to the new Community Grants program as provided in statute.

In November, an overwhelming majority of Minnesotans, including a majority of every county, voted to renew the ENRTF's constitutional share of lottery dollars. Thanks to the legislation that authorized this ballot measure, we also created the Community Grants program and enabled the ENRTF spending increase to fund it.

The Community Grants program is designed to empower small organizations and disadvantaged communities that have historically lacked the means to access the ENRTF funding process under the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). It will extend the reach of the lottery proceeds to benefit grassroots projects and local organizations across the state, supporting protection of our natural resources, pollution prevention, and environmental education. This program will be run by the DNR but overseen by an advisory council of Minnesotans representing our state's diversity and deep environmental expertise.

Public participation by all in protecting and enhancing our environment is a fundamental value here in Minnesota, and the Community Grants program is in keeping with that value. It will provide small organizations across the state the chance to make a direct, visible impact on the environmental well-being of their communities.

We encourage you to vote in favor of HF 2293 to appropriate all funds directed under current law for the Community Grants program. We ask that you respect the will of the voters and give Minnesotans the opportunity to lead on making their communities cleaner and healthier.

Sincerely,

Steve Morse
Executive Director

Submitted on behalf of the organizations listed on the following page.

Alliance for Sustainability
Audubon Upper Mississippi River
Austin Audubon Society*
Austin Coalition for Environmental Sustainability
Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota
Central Minnesota Audubon Society, Inc*
Clean River Partners
Climate Generation
Climate Land Leaders
CURE MN
Environmental Initiative
Eureka Recycling
Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas
Friends of the Boundary Waters
Izaak Walton League Minnesota Division
League of Women Voters Duluth
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota
Metro Blooms*
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
Minnesota Well Owners Organization
Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society*
MN350
Move Minnesota
Pollinator Friendly Alliance
Renewing the Countryside
Resilient Cities and Communities
Saint Paul Bird Alliance
Sustainable Farming Association
Third Act Minnesota
WaterLegacy
Zumbro Valley Audubon Society*

**denotes non-MEP member*



March 26, 2025

Minnesota House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee
Co-Chairs Peter Fischer and Josh Heintzeman

Dear Co-Chair Fischer, Co-Chair Heintzeman, and members,

On behalf of Environmental Initiative, I would like to express our organization's support for H.F. 2293, the bill to appropriate dollars from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) to the new Community Grants program as provided in statute.

Environmental Initiative is a nonprofit organization that brings together people from business, nonprofits, community, and government to solve environmental challenges in partnership. Since 2021, Environmental Initiative and Rainbow Research have co-convened a coalition of BIPOC environmental leaders and mainstream environmental organizations to build consensus around the need for a more accessible ENRTF grant program—one that recognizes the systemic barriers preventing rural-led community groups, Tribal Nations, small nonprofits, and BIPOC-led organizations from accessing ENRTF dollars through the traditional LCCMR process.

Many years of conversation helped shape the vision for the Community Grants Program and advocacy for its passage in 2023. With grant program administration from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and oversight from a statewide advisory council of experienced community and environmental leaders, this program will help ensure funding reaches more communities and supports locally led solutions across Minnesota.

Environmental Initiative, BIPOC leaders, and environmental groups in the partnership have connected with leaders from rural communities, Tribal Nations, and BIPOC organizations statewide about the community grants program. Many groups have project ideas they are ready to pursue. Alongside our partners, we will continue to engage community leaders so the grants can have a positive impact around our state as envisioned in the law.

With voters' overwhelming support in 2024 to renew and expand the ENRTF, Minnesotans clearly signaled their desire for public investments that benefit all communities—not just those with the means to front load programmatic expenses and capacity to navigate the existing LCCMR process. H.F. 2293 follows through on that mandate by fully funding a program designed to meet communities where they are and fortify grassroots, community-led environmental solutions.

We support H.F. 2293 because it will:

- Increase distribution and use of ENRTF funds across Minnesota by directing resources to communities and organizations that experience barriers in the current LCCMR process.
- Support and strengthen the capacity of rural-led community groups, Tribal Nations, small nonprofits, and BIPOC-led organizations to further deploy their specialized skills and local knowledge for the benefit of our natural resources and all Minnesotans.
- Complement and enhance LCCMR's stable and long-term funding to protect, conserve, and restore Minnesota's air, land, and water.

We urge you to vote in favor of H.F. 2293 and appropriate the full 1.5% of ENRTF funds as intended by voters. This is an opportunity to deploy a transformative funding source that supports local problem-solving, strengthens environmental outcomes, and builds long-term capacity where it's needed most.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Harley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Mike Harley
Executive Director