

March 11, 2020

RE: Support for HF2703 -- Parks and Trails Legacy Bill

Dear Members of the House Legacy Finance committee,

We, the undersigned, urge your support for the Legacy of Nature bill, HF2703 (Parks and Trails Legacy bill) to bring the metropolitan regional parks into compliance with the 25-year Legacy Plan and better meet citizens' expectations for the Legacy amendment itself. The bill will also greatly improve transparency and accountability for how the parks and trails funds are invested.

- The Legislature wisely established the regional parks system in 1974 to preserve and protect the highest quality open areas in the metro. The main reason people voted yes for the Legacy Amendment was to preserve nature and clean water. The overarching vision of citizens who participate in the 25-year Legacy Plan was to preserve nature and inspire the next generation of stewards. Yet spending to date within the metro regional parks has strongly focused on the built environment while our woodlands, prairies, lakes and wetlands have degraded. **This bill will re-balance of spending toward natural resource restoration and stewardship to better align with citizens priorities.**
- The bill amends the distribution formula as defined by statute in 2009 for that portion of parks and trails monies that is appropriated to the Metropolitan Council. **This correction is necessary to align with the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan completed in 2011.**
- Conflicts exist when the agencies requesting grants are the same agencies approving the requests. To eliminate this conflict, establishment of an oversight body, a technical review committee including ecology professionals must be established to review project proposals and recommend a comprehensive list of projects for funding. An oversight body will increase transparency and accountability as to how the funds are being invested. **This improved process will assure that collectively, the projects align with a balanced approach as outlined in the 25-year Plan and will help eliminate potential for Legacy spending to further diminish our natural environment.**
- We acknowledge that findings show the main reason people, including underrepresented communities, don't visit regional parks is due to lack of awareness. **As such, we encourage park agencies to connect more people to the outdoors by increasing soft investments such as outreach and programming rather.**
- We share the goal to increase accessibility for all ages and abilities. As population and diversity increase throughout our region, we need to ensure that low-impact, nature-based experiences remain available for everyone. **This bill helps increase opportunities for all ages and abilities to access high-quality, natural areas close to home that offer valuable respite from the built environment all around us.**

We must preserve our natural resources and inspire the next generation of stewards, and especially for those who cannot venture to more distant wilderness destinations, our regional parks system can provide gateways to Nature. However when Nature is diminished, so are opportunities for visitors and for wildlife. **Please vote YES for HF2703/SF3511.**

Sincerely,

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
Friends of Breck Woods
Friends of Lone Lake Park
Friends of Minneapolis Wildlife
Friends of Roberts Bird Sanctuary
Hastings Environmental Partnership
Just Food and Water
Minnesota Citizens for the Protection of Migratory Birds
Nature of South St. Paul
Neighborhood Greening
Pollinator Friendly Alliance
Richfield Open Space
Wilderness in the City