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February 13, 2024

Dear members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance & Policy Committee,

On behalf of the more than 145 cities, counties, businesses, non-profits, and individuals that comprise the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails organization, we thank you for acting on the 2024 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund bill. This legislation will help expand outdoor and recreational opportunities for all Minnesotans, fund essential research, and create jobs.

Regardless of where they live, spending time outdoors is important to Minnesotans. Local and regional parks and trails help provide opportunities to do so.

The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) recognized the importance of local parks and trails by recommending \$4.791 million for grants for local parks, trails, and natural areas. These popular grant programs offer local governments matching funds so they can build or improve parks and trails close to where people live. At a time when local parks and trails are especially vital to the well-being of our communities, these grant programs are a wise investment. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources administers these statewide programs and has a vetting process in place to ensure that the money is invested in quality projects that are ready for construction.

In addition, the LCCMR recommended funding for other important recreation-focused projects, such as grants for the Dent and Vergas spur trails, the Zumbro Regional River Water Trail, and other projects in Greater Minnesota and the metropolitan area. These types of projects will help Minnesotans engage in recreation and appreciate all the natural wonders our state offers.

Parks and trails projects will provide critical jobs in the construction sector, and many of the other projects recommended by the LCCMR will provide jobs to scientists, lab workers, and others. Passing the LCCMR bill now will help provide economic stimulus to ensure our state continues to thrive without adding to the deficit.

Thank you again for your efforts to move this important legislation forward.

Sincerely,

Gina Hugo
Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails
Sherburne County, Parks Director

Joseph Tart
Vice Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails
Chisago County, Parks Director