

Press Release

For More Information contact

For Immediate Release

John Lenczewski at MNTU at 612-670-1629

March 14, 2017

or Gary Botzek at MCF at 651-283-4511

MINNESOTA'S LARGEST FISHING, HUNTING, AND OUTDOORS GROUPS URGE STATE LAWMAKERS TO TAKE ACTION BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

A broad coalition of Minnesota's largest fishing, hunting and outdoors groups is warning state lawmakers that inaction could harm fishing, hunting and outdoor recreation and jeopardize the state's \$5.5 Billion tourism industry.

In a letter to top leaders of both parties in the Minnesota House and Senate, the coalition of more than 40 groups urges the legislature to pass modest license fee increases as proposed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and restore historical funding for fish and wildlife management.

Under the proposed increases, a deer hunting license would rise from \$30 to \$34. An annual fishing license would rise \$3, from \$22 to \$25. Several other licenses are affected.

"Even with the \$3 bump, Minnesota's fishing license is an incredible bargain for a years' worth of quality fishing," said a spokesman for the coalition, John Lenczewski, executive director of the nonprofit conservation group, Minnesota Trout Unlimited. "That small increase costs less than a scoop of minnows or a bag of chips at the gas station," he added.

Each year the Citizen Budget Oversight Committee (BOC) scrutinizes DNR expenditures from the Game & Fish Fund and reviews budget projections. In August 2016, faced with a looming Fund deficit, the BOC requested the DNR develop a package of funding, including license fee increases for fishing, hunting, ice shelters and the like, to ensure the solvency of the Fund without a reduction in fish and wildlife management. The DNR prepared the license fee increases and they were approved by Governor Dayton.

At the urging of groups of sportsmen and sportswomen, Minnesota Trout Unlimited and the Minnesota Conservation Federation, prepared a letter of support for license fee and revenue increases for fish and wildlife management. Numerous organizations quickly signed on. The letter is being sent to key legislators in the decision-making process.

The coalition urges their members and the general public to contact their state representative and senator, saying they support the proposed fee increases, and urge their legislators to return to the State's longstanding practice of investing a small amount of the state tax generated by hunting and angling activity into the Game & Fish Fund.

The Legislature is expected to set spending targets in the next two weeks with agency budgets coming together quickly after the targets are set. Including license fee increases and additional general funds

into the game and fish fund will allow the DNR to better manage the state's natural resources, especially game and fish populations.

"This is the year to act," said MCF executive director Gary Botzek. "Waiting until next year will cause delays in natural resources projects and programs," he added.

"Minnesota's natural resources are an incredible asset," Lenczewski said. "Fishing and hunting are good right now, and people come from all over the country to enjoy it. We cannot afford to jeopardize that asset by shorting the game and fish fund."

The coalition letter is attached.

March 14, 2017

Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt
463 State Office Building

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
3113 Minnesota Senate Building

House Majority Leader Joyce Peppin
459 State Office Building

Senate Minority Leader Tom Bakk
2221 Minnesota Senate Building

House Minority Leader Melissa Hortman
263 State Office Building

Senator Bill Ingebrigtsen
Chair, Environment & Nat. Res. Finance
3207 Minnesota Senate Building

Representative Dan Fabian
Chair, Environment & Nat. Res. Policy & Finance
359 State Office Building

Senator David Tomassoni
Minority Lead, Environment & Nat. Res. Finance
2235 Minnesota Senate Building

Representative Rick Hansen
Minority Lead, Environment & Nat. Res.
Policy & Finance
247 State Office Building

Dear Legislators:

We the undersigned are writing to seek your support of fishing and hunting license fee adjustments proposed by the Minnesota DNR. We make this request as advocates for more than 1.5 million licensed anglers, 600,000 hunters and countless additional Minnesotans who value our great outdoors. Additional revenue for fish, game and wildlife management activities is needed now in order to maintain our state's high quality fishing, hunting, and trapping. This issue is important to sportsmen and sportswomen, conservationists, environmentalists and the general public.

The quality of fishing and hunting is good. Tourism is strong. Angling and hunting activities annually generate nearly \$5.5 Billion in economic activity in the state, support 48,000 Minnesota jobs and collect \$358 Million in state and local tax revenue. But sustaining this requires professional management of fish and wildlife and their habitats. Inflation and rising costs mean additional revenue is needed in the form of modest user fee increases and restoration of past levels of general fund support.

The DNR's fish and wildlife management are paid for by sportsmen and sportswomen, through the sale of fishing, hunting and related licenses and stamps, as well as federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment purchases. However, the purchasing power of those fees has declined over time and the Game & Fish Fund, which receives license revenue and pays expenses, is projected to go negative in 2019. Since state law prohibits a Fund deficit, the DNR will have to cut into core programs beginning in 2018 by delaying or cancelling habitat and research projects, reducing fish stocking efforts, and reducing

biological surveys needed for informed management decisions. Waiting to act until next year will be too late.

The current level of DNR management activities is less than the minimal amount needed to adequately manage our fish, game and wildlife populations and the habitat in our lakes, lands and rivers. Management activities cannot be reduced from current levels without dire consequences for the millions of Minnesotans who rely on these resources for their recreation and economic livelihood. As mentioned above, angling and hunting activities annually generate nearly \$5.5 Billion in economic activity in the state, support 48,000 Minnesota jobs and collect \$358 Million in state and local tax revenue. Reinvesting a small percentage of these general tax revenues to sustain this economic engine and preserve our cultural heritage of fishing, hunting and outdoor activity makes good sense.

The DNR Fish & Wildlife Division which manages the state's fish and wildlife resources has received essentially no general fund appropriations since 2010. Prior to 2010 general funds were routinely appropriated. Between 2001 and 2010 (the years for which data is readily available) Legislative appropriations of general funds to the Fish & Wildlife Division averaged approximately \$2.3 Million per year. Beginning in 2011 appropriations from the general fund dropped to near zero, aside from a 2015 appropriation to combat avian flu. This recent lack of financial support does not make sense when one considers the myriad benefits which all Minnesotans receive from sound management that produces healthy ecosystems and clean lakes and streams.

Our organizations and the many anglers and hunters we represent are supportive of the fee increases. However, fairness demands that a small percentage of the general fund revenue collected from anglers and hunters be used to help maintain and improve our natural resources. A general fund appropriation of \$3 Million per year is both justified and overdue.

We urge the legislative committees and the House and Senate to include the proposed DNR license fee increases and a modest general fund appropriation in the environmental budget bill. Please feel free to contact John Lenczewski at 612-670-1629 or Gary Botzek at 651-283-4511 if you or your staff has any questions.

Thank you for your consideration of this important policy and funding issue in the State of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

The following organizations:

Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Pheasants Forever

Ducks Unlimited

Minnesota Conservation Federation

Minnesota B.A.S.S. Nation

Minnesota Deer Hunters Association*

Minnesota Waterfowl Association

Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Alliance

Minnesota Division, Izaak Walton League

North Metro Muskies, Inc.

Fish & Wildlife Legislative Alliance
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
Anglers for Habitat
Bryon Sportsmen's Club
Central Lakes Natural Resources Club
Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Rice Area Sportsmen's Club
FM Walleye Unlimited, Inc. of Moorhead, MN
Conservation Minnesota
Hiawatha Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Chapter 33 Lake Superior Muskies, Inc.
United Northern Sportsmen
The Nature Conservancy
Leech Lake Association
Lake Superior Steelhead Association
Lake Hendricks Improvement Association
Southwest Minnesota Fishing Club
Brainerd Lakes Chapter of Muskies, Inc.
Jackson County Conservation League

Quail Forever
Minnesota Back Country Hunters & Anglers
Balaton Sportsmen's Club
Bemidji-Cass Lake Muskies Inc.
Lake of the Woods Rod and Gun Club
Waterdogs Fishing Club
Win-Cres Trout Unlimited
Citizens of Big Stone Lake
Arrowhead Fly Fishers
Vikigland Muskies
Traverse County Sportsman's Club
Gitche Gumee Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Minnesota Steelheader
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
North Star Sportsmen's Club of Walker
Crossroads Chapter 54 Muskies, Inc.
Arco Sportsmen's Club
Round Lake Sportsman Club
Cottonwood Sportsman's Club

*MDHA supports the fee increase, provided DNR deposits \$17.50 of deer license dollars into dedicated deer accounts, including \$16.00 into the Deer Management Account. The DNR has agreed to this approach.