

May 9, 2017

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

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

Representative Josh Heintzeman
357 State Office Building

Senator Carrie Ruud
3233 Minnesota Senate Building

Representative Chris Swedzinski
400 State Office Building

Senator Torrey Westrom
3201 Minnesota Senate Building

Representative Mark Uglen
569 State Office Building

Senator Andrew Matthews
3409 Minnesota Senate Building

Representative Rob Ecklund
311 State Office Building

Senator David Tomassoni
2235 Minnesota Senate Building

RE: Additional revenue to Game and Fish Fund

Dear Conference Committee members:

We are writing to seek your support of fishing and hunting license fee adjustments proposed by the Minnesota DNR and to clarify the need for additional revenue to the Game and Fish Fund this session.

We represent a diverse group of 25 anglers and hunters serving on the statutory citizen Budgetary Oversight Committee that annually reviews the Game and Fish Fund to ensure funds are used appropriately and efficiently. The DNR's fish and wildlife management activities 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. Revenue is deposited in the Game and Fish Fund (Minn. Stat. 97A.055) and the Legislature appropriates monies for Fish & Wildlife Division activities from this fund. The complete list of citizens currently serving can be viewed at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/gamefishoversight/members.html>.

We come to the job with a healthy skepticism of the agency's management policies and operating efficiencies. Each year the Committee spends approximately 6 months scrutinizing the funding and expenditures from the Game and Fish Fund. Over the past several years the Committee has concluded that, by and large, the Fish & Wildlife Division does use funds appropriately and efficiently. We also found that the current level of fish and wildlife management activities provided by the DNR is the minimal amount needed to adequately manage our fish and game populations and their aquatic and terrestrial habitats. **The current level of effort cannot be reduced without dire consequences for our natural resources and the millions of Minnesotans who rely upon them for recreation and economic livelihood.**

Unfortunately, the Game and Fish Fund has a structural deficit that will increase by approximately \$3 Million per year. This deficit appears to be due primarily to inflationary pressures and higher costs of doing business as an agency (MNIT, facility costs, vehicle fleet, radio equipment fleet, computer equipment fleet, etc.), as well as appropriate increased spending, including increased staff time and effort managing the Mille Lacs Lake walleye fishery. **Additional revenue is needed soon. The level of expenditures for fish and game management cannot be significantly reduced from FY2015 levels without unacceptably large negative impacts for anglers, hunters, and rural economies.**

Due to the declining purchasing power of license fees the Game and Fish Fund is projected to go into the red by 2019. Last year the Committee asked the DNR to develop a comprehensive package of license fee increases (fishing, hunting, ice shelters, and the like) to ensure the solvency of the Fund without a reduction in the level of management activities. The budgeting cycle and an 8-month lag in fishing license fee increases mean the Legislature must act this spring or management activities will be cut beginning this summer. **Waiting to act until next year will be too late.**

We respectfully urge you to provide additional revenue for fish, game and wildlife management activities this session in order to maintain our state's heritage of high quality fishing, hunting, and trapping.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ James Arndt

/s/ John Lenczewski

/s/ Bert Pexsa

/s/ John Eaton

/s/ Doug Odegard

/s/ Mark Popovich

/s/ Charles Haslerud

/s/ Steve Okins

/s/ Scott Springer

/s/ Valerie Holthus

c: Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt