



Dear GMPT Members -

There are three weeks left in the Legislative session and there is still a lot of work to be done. We're writing to update you on initiatives that we are working on right now.

BONDING

In mid-April, the Senate Capital Investment Committee held a hearing on Trails. Elizabeth Wefel, Flaherty & Hood, and Jolene Foss, City of Princeton testified on behalf of the Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails organization. Elizabeth explained the distinctions between local, state and regional trails, how our request for bonding money would be used, and details regarding the grant program. The City of Princeton is a recent recipient of money from the Local Trails Connection program and Jolene talked about how this grant money would be used. This was the third hearing on our bonding requests this year, with two previous hearings in the House.

Senator Stumpf unveiled the Senate Bonding bill yesterday. Unfortunately, GMPT's request for money for the local trail grant and outdoor recreational grant program was not included. We're disappointed, but not surprised given how bonding bills are assembled. Because a 2/3rds majority is required to pass each legislative body, bills are assembled with an eye to gathering the votes needed from both parties. The challenge is that most legislators will prioritize a specific project for their district over a grant program, which may or may not benefit their district.

It is still possible that the House could include the funding in its bonding bill. Therefore, we will continue to reach out to legislators in the House and ask that all GMPT members reach out to their legislators. **Ask your House members to support funding**

for the Local Trails Connection program and the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program in the bonding bill (HF 2852)

After the legislative session is over, it is worth discussing how GMPT may want to seek funding for these trails. Options to consider include pursuing bonding funds in the off year, when the proposal is not competing with hundreds of individual projects and/or requesting a general fund appropriation.

FINANCE BILLS

Both the Senate and House have passed omnibus finance bills that affect state trails. Of interest to communities with state parks or trails nearby, the finance bills (HF [2749](#) and HF [3931](#)) contain a one-time appropriation for DNR state park and trail maintenance. The Senate version states that maintenance may not drop below 2015 levels.

The topic of trail maintenance has come up in multiple hearings, particularly with the GOP. They are very reluctant to fund new trails when there are maintenance needs for existing trails and that will likely affect the bonding proposals. They are also examining ways to address maintenance through other means, such as volunteers. Rep. Fabian introduced an amendment to the House bill that would make it easier for volunteer groups to assist the DNR with trail maintenance.

Right now the Senate has a single massive omnibus finance bill with almost no policy provisions in it. The House has three omnibus bills, with lots of policy in them. It will be challenging for the two legislative bodies to match these dueling bills up and it is highly likely that many policy provisions will be dropped out as the bills move forward.

LEGACY

The House has introduced a supplemental Legacy bill that is awaiting action on the Floor of the House. The primary focus of this bill is to deal with shortfalls in several categories due to lower than expected sales tax results. There is no money coming out of the Parks & Trails fund, however. There is language requiring that an applicant for parks and trails legacy funding must disclose where they received funding after 2016. The original language had imposed a much more onerous requirement on recipients, but we worked with the author, Rep. Urdahl to make the requirement much easier to

meet. The Senate will need to pass its own bill to deal with the shortfall. We will monitor to ensure for any impact to Greater Minnesota Park and Trail funding.

POLICY ISSUES

The longer the session goes, the less likely it is that we will see any negative policy issues, such as restrictions on eminent domain. We will continue to monitor for any such developments.

These issues have been mentioned in passing at several hearings. At the Senate hearing on trails, one Senator asked several testifiers about the use of eminent domain in parks and trails. No action was taken, but we'll continue watching this session to see if anyone tries to amend the bonding or legacy bill to include restrictions.

At the end of the Legacy hearing last week, Rep. Urdahl allowed Catherine Zimmer, Executive Director of a non-profit "Women Observing Wildlife" to testify. She argued that the Legacy funds were being misused because too much money is being spent on building new trails, particularly criticizing Greater Minnesota's use of the funds. No action was taken as a result of her comments, but we'll need to watch to ensure others don't latch onto this argument to push back against trail funding.

We mention these incidents because they illustrated that property rights focused arguments are still floating around the Capitol. It is something that GMPT will need to monitor and to prepare for during the next several legislative sessions.

As always, please contact us with any questions! And please contact your House member to ask them to support funding for the Local Trails Connection program and the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program in the bonding bill (HF 2852).

Update provided by Flaherty & Hood
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