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March 9, 2017

Commissioner Tom Landwehr
MN Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

Assistant Commissioner Sarah Strommen
MN Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Landwehr and Assistant Commissioner Strommen,

On behalf of local parks and trails—and the citizens across the state who use them—we are writing to ask you to include a request of \$5 million for the local parks and trails grant programs authorized under Minn. Stat. 85.019 in the DNR's proposals to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).

Our organization, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT), is made up of cities, counties, parks groups, individuals and others who seek to improve the quality of life for the citizens of our state by promoting parks and trails throughout Greater Minnesota. We believe that funding these grant programs will have a significant impact on the health and economic well-being of our communities.


We all know that Minnesota's state parks and trails are an invaluable asset. Unfortunately, they are geographically out of reach for many citizens, at least on a daily basis, because of distance or a lack of trail connections. That's why local parks and trails perform an essential function, especially in Greater Minnesota. Local parks and trails provide more than daily recreational opportunities, they also promote economic development. As communities strive to attract younger workers, as well as promote healthy living for all ages, these local facilities are indispensable.

However, with increasingly tighter budgets, it is difficult to obtain the funding needed to modernize our local park and trails to meet the emerging needs of our communities or connect them to state and regional trails. Although Legacy funding is helping to build out and maintain state and regional parks and trails, local trails and parks are not eligible for those funds. Funding for the grant programs authorized under Minn. Stat. 85.019 is limited to a small percentage of lottery-in-lieu and some federal funding. While these programs are open to the entire state, they are especially important to Greater Minnesota because they are among the few grant programs our local parks and trails can access.

We believe more funding for these programs is needed given the high demand for grants and the statewide reach. The Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund administered by the LCCMR is a perfect source of additional funding. It has made awards to these grants programs in the past and changes to the wording in its request for proposal suggest it would be willing to consider such an award again. For this to happen, the DNR would need to make an application. We urge you to include a request for this funding as part of the DNR's application to the LCCMR. Our organization is happy to provide any assistance that you may need in moving forward with such a request at the LCCMR, whether it be letters of support, testimony, or any other show of support.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at greaterminparkstrails@gmail.com or 218-333-1860 or reach out to our lobbyist Elizabeth Wefel at 651-492-3998.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcia Larson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marcia Larson
Bemidji Parks & Recreation Director
Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks & Trails

cc: Erika Rivers
Laura Preus