

MINNESOTA ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERSHIP
2016 BRIEFING BOOK



ONE MINNESOTA:
PROTECTING OUR GREAT OUTDOORS

Minnesota
Environmental
Partnership



MEPartnership.org



Not since the overwhelming passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008 have Minnesota’s environmental policies played such a critical role in our public statewide debate. With issues like the permitting of sulfide mining in northern Minnesota, finding solutions to agricultural water pollution, and clean energy and transportation investments all on the table this year, the time to act is now. The public has been clear: Protect and

invest in Minnesota’s Great Outdoors. It’s essential for the health, happiness, and economic prosperity of all Minnesotans. The coalition partners of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership urge our elected leaders to listen to Minnesotans, act to protect the Great Outdoors, and support the initiatives outlined in the following pages.



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RESTORE THE MPCA CITIZENS' BOARD

In 1967, when the Minnesota Legislature first created the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), it structured the agency so that final decision-making authority over contentious environmental review and permitting questions was vested in the Citizens' Board. The choice of this structure was deliberate, to ensure that the MPCA served the public interest, to establish an open and transparent decision-making process, and to serve as a bulwark against the political pressures that could corrupt the MPCA's decision-making. The Citizens' Board worked well and was a model of which Minnesota could be proud.

In the final hours of the 2015 Legislative Session, though no such provision passed any committee in either the House or Senate, language was inserted into a must-pass budget bill that abolished the 48-year-old Board. In its place, the final decision-maker within the agency is now the MPCA Commissioner, who serves at the pleasure of the Governor.

Governor Dayton's August 4, 2015 executive order creating a Citizens' Advisory Committee to the MPCA was a positive step, yet the newly framed body lacks the decision-making authority needed to ensure that the MPCA functions as intended: transparently, free of political interference, and in the public's interest.

► **Restoring the MPCA Citizens' Board to its full capacity and authority is a top priority of Minnesota's environmental and conservation community.**

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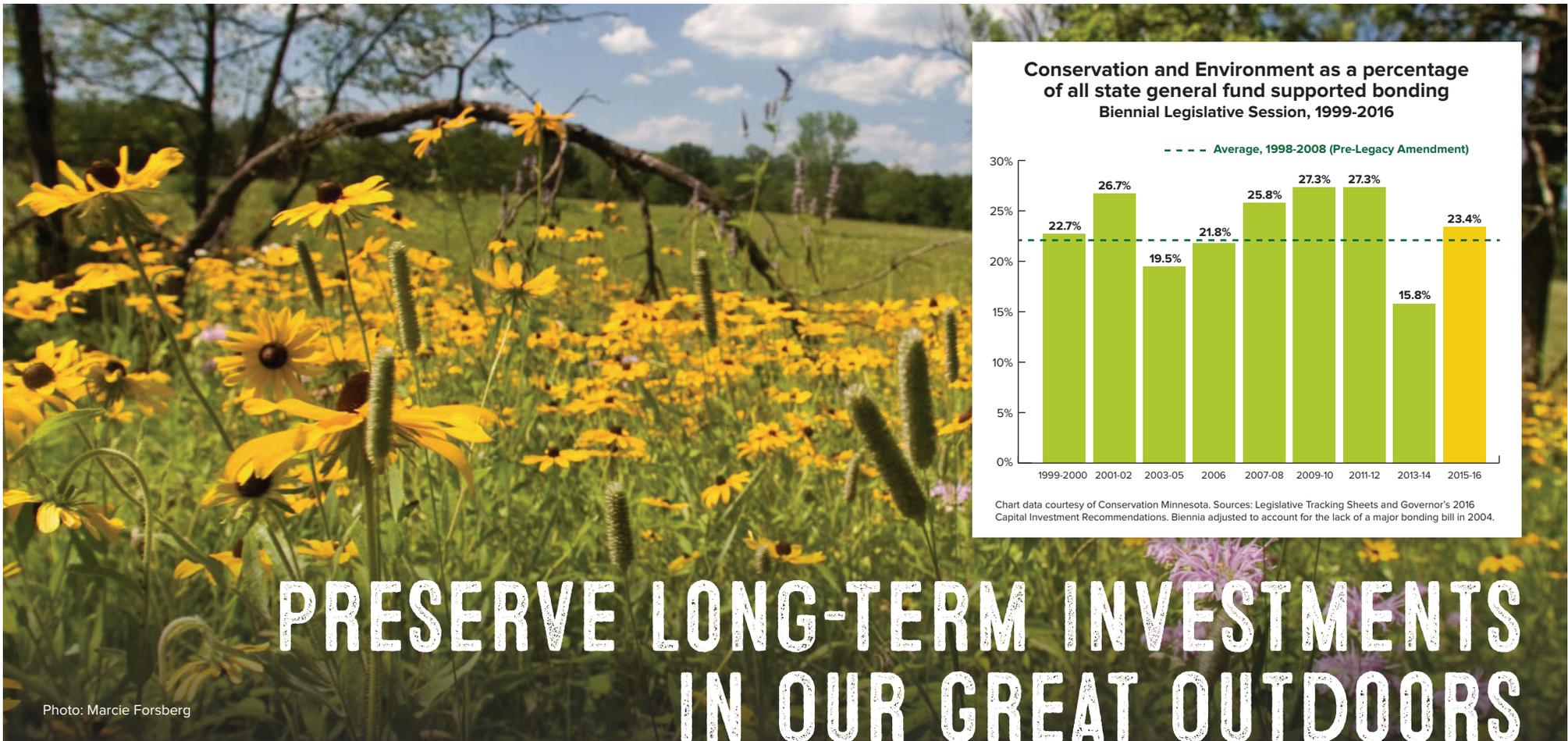
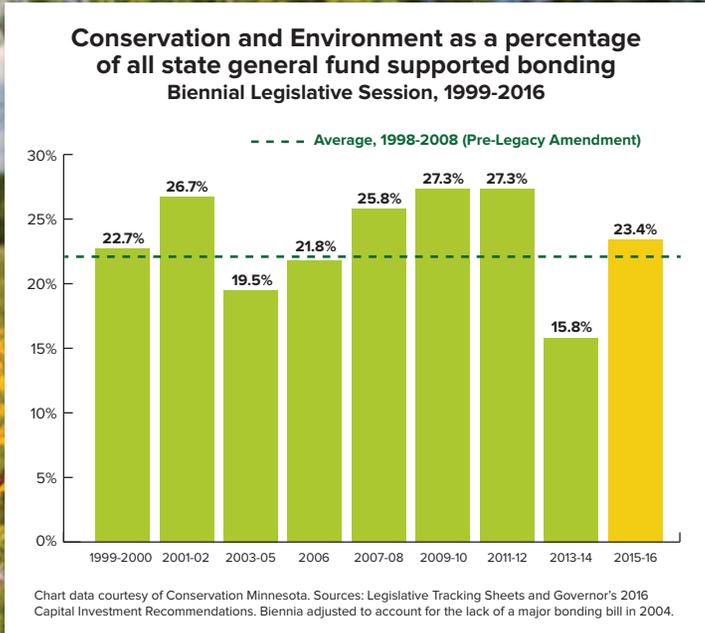


Photo: Marcie Forsberg

PRESERVE LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS IN OUR GREAT OUTDOORS



Minnesotans share a tradition of protecting and investing in our Great Outdoors. It is a tradition that we expect our elected leaders in St. Paul to respect and continue. Minnesotans dramatically made this point on Election Day 2008, as the country was falling into recession, by voting overwhelmingly for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution, and raising taxes and dedicating the funds for additional investment in the things we treasure most about Minnesota.

In 2016, we will work to ensure that capital investments for Minnesota's Great outdoors make up at least the traditional 22% of total state general obligation bonds. This level will keep the faith with Minnesota voters and comply with the Constitutional language of the Legacy Amendment, which states: *"money under this section must supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a substitute."**

MEP coalition bonding priorities include:

- ▶ **Governor Dayton's historic water bonding proposal, including;**
 - > \$167 million to help communities repair and modernize their aging wastewater and drinking water systems. A portion of these water infrastructure funds will be matched four times by Federal grants.
 - > \$30 million for targeted conservation easements with willing farmland owners to conserve soil, eliminate erosion, and protect habitat and water quality. These state RIM-Reserve funds would leverage up to a \$120 million federal match, as part of a five-year 100,000 acre Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
 - > \$12.7 million to remove polluted riverbed sediment from the St. Louis River estuary. These state funds would leverage \$23.6 million in federal dollars.
- ▶ **Capital investment for key public transportation infrastructure. Including bus facilities and Safe Routes to School statewide, and Twin Cities Metro Area light rail expansion.**

*Article XI, Section 15 of the Minnesota Constitution



INVESTING IN CLEAN WATER AND LIVING LANDSCAPES

Clean, safe water is important to Minnesota's families, communities, and economy, and yet many of our rivers, lakes, and streams remain polluted. Smart investments in promising solutions are needed to protect and restore our water quality.

THE PROBLEM

Despite decades of voluntary conservation and cost-share programs, farm runoff remains the largest source of surface water pollution in Minnesota. The summer-annual crops (corn and soybeans) that dominate Minnesota agriculture leave fields unproductive, bare, and unprotected by active root systems or leafy green cover for more than eight months each year. Bare soil has little wildlife value and is prone to runoff and erosion, carrying sediment and farm chemicals into nearby streams, rivers, and lakes.

Fields lacking active root systems also leach nitrogen into the groundwater. In central Minnesota, 40% of tested shallow wells contain nitrate concentrations that exceed the state health risk limit, and groundwater contamination remains high in certain other parts of the state. At the same time, Minnesota has lost more than 859,000 acres of Conservation Reserve Program lands since 2007, reducing the perennial vegetation necessary for clean water, soil conservation, and healthy lands. Nearly 400,000 more acres of CRP lands are due to expire in the next three years.¹ We need innovative, transformational solutions.

¹ Statewide, 64% of impaired rivers and 57% of impaired lakes are impacted primarily by agriculture. Source: Minnesota Water Quality – David Fairburn – University of MN Water Resources Center – MN Water Sustainability Framework – page 24; Minnesota’s “Nitrogen in Minnesota Surface Waters” study found high nitrate pollution in much of Minnesota’s waters with 73% of nitrates coming from cropland.

² Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Summary: Conditions of Minnesota’s Groundwater, July 2013

³ BSWR Statewide Conservation Lands Summary - updated Summer 2015.

⁴ <ftp://ftp.fsa.usda.gov/crpstorpt/RMEPEGG/MEPEGGRI.HTM>

THE SOLUTION

The state has an opportunity to provide support for new initiatives that diversify the agricultural landscape and help ensure continuous living cover that protects soil health and water quality while maximizing economic return for producers. Realizing the opportunity requires smart investment from the state.

Two key steps to reach our clean water future include:

- ▶ **Fully funding the University of Minnesota’s Forever Green Initiative** to accelerate development of economically viable cover crops and perennial crops that enhance water quality, soil health and habitat while providing an economic return for producers.
- ▶ **Completing the Minnesota Perennial Biofuels Program** by funding the incentive program for farm operations to grow perennial crops suitable for advanced cellulosic biofuel production in Minnesota.

Bare soil has little wildlife value and is prone to runoff and erosion, carrying sediment and farm chemicals into nearby streams, rivers, and lakes.

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Photo: Land Stewardship Project





Photo: Transit for Livable Communities

A COMMITMENT TO CLEAN AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION STATEWIDE

Minnesota's transportation systems are out of date. Repairs and improvements are necessary. Public transportation, bicycling, and walking options are key to a more sustainable future—and essential to quality of life in communities of all sizes. With comprehensive and balanced statewide funding, we can create a cleaner, more efficient transportation system in Minnesota, an investment that will pay valuable health and environmental dividends.

THE PROBLEM

Transportation generates 25% of the carbon pollution in Minnesota, second only to the power sector.¹ Air quality is often worst near areas with bad traffic congestion. This means residents in suburban and urban areas, especially those living close to major roads and highways, confront the highest health risks due to poor air quality.

- Building out the metro regional transit system would save \$185 to \$395 million in reduced emissions.²
- Bus transit produces 33% less carbon pollution per passenger mile than the average single-occupancy vehicle.³
- Minnesota's roads are in poor condition, costing the average motorist \$396.25 per year in extra vehicle repairs and operating expenses.⁴
- Inadequate funding is the biggest challenge faced by 94% of Greater Minnesota transit providers.⁵ In the Twin Cities metro area, 70% of jobs are not reachable by transit in 90 minutes.⁶
- More than 50 communities across Minnesota have unfunded Main Street enhancement projects, while statewide in 2013 MnDOT received proposals for nearly four times as many Safe Routes to Schools projects as it could fund.⁷

¹ Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, January 2015, <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/lraq-2sy15.pdf>

² Itasca Project. 2012. Regional Transit System Return on Investment Assessment. http://www.corridorsofopportunity.org/sites/default/files/Transit_ROL_Executive_Summary.pdf

³ Federal Transportation Administration, Public Transportation's Role in Responding to Climate Change, www.fta.dot.gov/documents/PublicTransportation-RoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf

⁴ American Society of Civil Engineers, <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/minnesota/minnesota-overview/>

⁵ MnDOT. Greater Minnesota Transit Plan 2010 – 2030. December, 2009.

⁶ Adie Tomer et al., Missed Opportunity: Transit and Jobs in Metro America (Brookings Institution, May 12, 2011). Twin Cities data <http://www.brookings.edu/media/Series/jobs%20and%20transit/MinneapolisMN.PDF>

⁷ MnDOT. MnDOT Safe Routes to School grants support 101 Minnesota schools. News Release. Feb. 10, 2015

THE SOLUTION

Minnesota's transportation problems cannot be solved with one-time stop-gap fixes. We need a long-term plan that solves our transportation problems by dedicating new investments in roads, bridges, transit, and safe walking and bicycling and accessibility infrastructure throughout the state.

We support:

- ▶ **Increasing the current metro sales tax for transit by ¾-cent**, with 10% devoted to safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the metro, and 90% to complete the current metro transit plan, including expanded bus service and transitways;
- ▶ **A statewide gas tax increase** to address statewide needs for maintenance and safety improvements on aging roads and bridges;
- ▶ **Dedicating 50% of leased vehicle sales tax revenue to meeting Greater Minnesota residents' transit needs** by adding new bus routes and expanding service hours. Remaining revenue would go to suburban county road work;
- ▶ **Reallocating \$16 million in current flexible federal transportation funds** to help Greater Minnesota communities create vibrant downtowns and develop safe, accessible pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; and
- ▶ **Substantial General Obligation (GO) bonding for key public transportation projects**, including both bus facilities and Safe Routes to School statewide, as well as Twin Cities metro light rail expansion.

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GROWING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Access to high-speed broadband internet is a critical enabling condition for sustainable development of small businesses, attracting residents who utilize the internet for distance work, and attracting new industries that rely on high-speed internet. Broadband access is one part of a larger effort to build a stronger, more diverse, resilient and sustainable economy for the future across Minnesota.

THE PROBLEM

Access to high-speed broadband internet is this generation's opportunity to make a leap similar to rural electrification in the 1930s. High speed internet is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. Greater Minnesota needs access to the broader economy and opportunities to develop products and services that are value-added and retain profits in the community. Greater Minnesota's public health and economic stability can be improved by extending to it the best modern information infrastructure available.

According to the Governor's Task Force on Broadband, 20% of rural Minnesota households lack access to high-speed broadband. There are a number of success stories on which to build, in meeting the goal of universal access to high-speed internet for all Minnesota residents. Lake and Cook Counties are being wired with fiber-optic cable to the door of every residence and business.

The economic development facilitated by broadband internet access encourages high-wage, high skill jobs and value-added businesses. Small manufacturers, farmers, and entrepreneurs all benefit from connection to the information economy.

THE SOLUTION

It's time to increase statewide investment in the information infrastructure that will power the growing, sustainable economy of tomorrow. Seize the opportunity to fully fund broadband development and bring all of Minnesota into the 21st Century information economy.

► **Fund the Border to Border broadband initiative to make sure no community is left behind. This includes support for Governor Dayton's request of \$100 million in 2016 for the Broadband Development Grant Fund, for broadband infrastructure statewide.**

Greater Minnesota's public health and economic stability can be improved by extending to it the best modern information infrastructure available.

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GREAT PROGRESS, GREATER BENEFITS IN MINNESOTA'S CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION

Progressive energy policies have made Minnesota a Midwest leader in building a clean energy economy, and demonstrated that cutting carbon pollution grows jobs, reduces waste, cleans our air, and generates economic opportunities for all Minnesotans.¹ Renewable energy and energy efficiency industries are growing at a faster rate than the rest of the economy in our state, employ more than 15,300 Minnesotans, and pay 43% more than the average Minnesota job.²

Minnesota's path to achieving a carbon-free economy is open, and the urgency and economic benefits are unmistakable.^{3,4} Late in 2015, Congress extended federal tax credits for wind and solar, credits that are expected to spur more than \$73 billion of investment in the U.S. through 2020 and continue Minnesota's clean energy growth.^{4,5} Minnesota's in-state clean energy production from wind increased from 1.8% in 2001 to 16% in 2014, representing a doubling, re-doubling, and doubling again in just 13 years.⁶ Minnesota's solar growth curve is steeper still. Having quadrupled between 2010 and 2014, the amount of Minnesota's installed solar power is projected to increase more than 18-fold between 2014 and December, 2016.^{5,7}

The importance of continuing our clean energy transition goes beyond delivering economic, health, and other direct benefits to Minnesotan citizens.⁸ By maintaining our policies and capitalizing on existing and emerging opportunities in how we generate, deliver, manage, and use electricity, Minnesota can meet its goal to cut carbon pollution 80% economy-wide by 2050, as directed in state law. In achieving our forward-looking carbon pollution reduction goals, Minnesota will carry its weight in the national and global efforts to build a better tomorrow.

¹ Camdus. *The Aggregate Economic Impact of the Conservation Improvement Program 2008-2013*. Prepared for the Minnesota Department of Commerce. October 2015. <http://mn.gov/commerce/industries/energy/efficiency/>

² Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. "Minnesota Clean Energy Economy Profile." October 2014. <http://mn.gov/deed/data/research/clean-energy.jsp>

³ Bloomberg Business. "Wind Power Now Cheaper Than Natural Gas for Xcel, CEO Says." October 23, 2015. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-23/wind-energy-cheaper-than-natural-gas-for-xcel-ceo-fowke-says>

⁴ Minnesota Power's Integrated Resource Plan. Filed September 1, 2015.

⁵ Midwest Energy News. "A year after launch, community solar picking up pace in Minnesota." December 11, 2015. <http://midwestenergynews.com/2015/12/11/a-year-after-launch-community-solar-picking-up-pace-in-minnesota/>

⁶ American Wind Energy Association State Wind Energy Statistics for Minnesota.

⁷ Fresh Energy estimate, based on proposed utility scale solar projects, Made in Minnesota and Solar Rewards incentive availability, and conservative estimate of community solar gardens that are likely to make it through interconnection by the end of 2016.

⁸ Op-ed in Star Tribune. "How tackling climate change will pay off." December 23, 2015. <http://www.startribune.com/how-tackling-climate-change-will-pay-off/363426141/>



Photo: Pete Markham, CC BY-SA

GREAT LAKES DESERVE GREAT PROTECTION

Minnesota is the headwaters state for the Great Lakes, counting 190 miles of rugged Lake Superior coastline among its natural assets. The North Shore contains 246 trout streams and eight state parks. While Minnesota's Great Lake is widely viewed as the cleanest of the five Great Lakes, it can also be considered the most threatened.

SAFEGUARDING THE GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE

The Great Lakes region's business leaders, mayors, governors, tribes and conservation and environmental communities have worked together since 2005 to implement a science-based plan of action known as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The GLRI is a long-term regional plan to protect and restore the Great Lakes while stimulating the region's economy. The first six years of funding provided Great Lakes projects in Minnesota with an estimated \$45 million in federal grants, with an emphasis on the St. Louis River estuary.

The GLRI has also funded North Shore trout stream restoration, research on ballast water treatment and support for tribal engagement. The North Shore's famed Poplar River is on the brink of celebrating successful clean-up of their long-term water turbidity problems.

SUPPORT STATE MATCHING FUNDS FOR LAKE SUPERIOR

The GLRI has been a powerful tool to address our state's restoration needs. Minnesotans help lead the way by supporting full Congressional funding. An unprecedented action plan maps out nearly 60 actions to restore the St. Louis River by 2025.

- ▶ Here at home, we must take advantage of the federal funding by leveraging state dollars, including funds from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment and the 2016 Bonding Bill. A current critical priority is securing the \$12.7 million requested by the MPCA in 2016 and 2018 to remove polluted riverbed sediment from the St. Louis River estuary. These funds will be matched by \$47.2 million in federal funds.

OTHER PRIORITY ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF LAKE SUPERIOR

- ▶ Maintain strong standards to protect the St. Louis River from new water quality threats, including pollution from proposed sulfide mines.
- ▶ Finish the long-delayed St. Louis River mercury clean-up plan.
- ▶ Protect the integrity of the Great Lakes-Saint Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, by carefully evaluating the proposed Great Lakes diversion at Waukesha, Wisconsin, and acting to uphold the Compact criteria.
- ▶ Work with our allies to reduce the threat of spills from oil transport by pipeline and tanker.

SULFIDE MINING THREATENS OUR CLEAN WATER

Proposed sulfide mines in Northeast Minnesota, such as the PolyMet NorthMet project and the Twin Metals Minnesota project, threaten our lakes and rivers with significant ongoing water pollution. PolyMet's own data show that ongoing water treatment would be required long after the mining stops – for 500 years or more.

No operation of this type is known to have operated and closed without polluting nearby lakes, rivers, or groundwater. The proposed sulfide mining areas drain into the St. Louis River and Lake Superior or the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park. PolyMet relies on out-of-date, bargain basement technology, including the practice of storing tailings mixed with water in a basin much like the one that collapsed at Mt. Polley in 2014. The PolyMet proposal doesn't meet modern standards and should not be approved.

The technology to fully protect our clean water for future generations does not exist. Even the most advanced water treatment does no good if water can't be captured to be treated. Sulfate from mining has been shown, by science recently funded by the Legislature, to affect the entire ecosystem.

Sulfide mining in a water-rich environment like Minnesota is a high-risk gamble. We need to protect our water, our families' health, our wildlife and taxpayer resources from pollution and harm caused by sulfide mining.

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Trust for Public Land
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Urban Roots
urbanrootsmn.org

Voyageurs National Park Association
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Women's Environmental Institute
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ISSUE BRIEF: PROTECT OUR POLLINATORS

BY PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK
NORTH AMERICA

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

Austin Coalition for Environmental Sustainability
Center for Biological Diversity
Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy
Environment Minnesota
Friends of The Parks & Trails of St. Paul
& Ramsey County
Humming for Bees*
Izaak Walton League - Minnesota Division
League of Women Voters - Minnesota
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
Minnesota Ornithologists' Union
Minnesota Public Interest Research Group
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
MN350
Pollinate Minnesota *
Pollinator Friendly Alliance *
Renewing the Countryside
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Sierra Club - North Star Chapter
Wild Ones - St. Croix Oak Savanna Chapter*

* Indicates not an MEP member organization.

¹ http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2006/10/25_pollinator.shtml

² http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/documents/factsheet_pollinator.pdf

³ <https://beeinformed.org/results/colony-loss-2014-2015-preliminary-results/>

⁴ <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mbs/grasslandbees.html>; <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2014/08/04/minn-bee-survey>; <http://www.xerces.org/pollinator-redlist/>

⁵ http://www.mimp.org/results/findings/pleasants_and_oberhauser_2012_milkweed_loss_in_ag_fields.pdf

⁶ "Conclusions of the Worldwide Integrated Assessment on the risks of neonicotinoids and fipronil to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning." Van der Sluijs J.P., Amaral-Rogers V, Belzunces LP, et al. Environmental Science and Pollution Research International. 2015; 22:148-154.

⁷ "Colonies of Bumble Bees (*Bombus impatiens*) Produce Fewer Workers, Less Bee Biomass, and Have Smaller Mother Queens Following Fungicide Exposure." Bernauer, O.M.; Gaines-Day, H.R.; Steffan, S.A. Insects 2015, 6, 478-488.

⁸ "Interaction between Varroa destructor and imidacloprid reduces flight capacity of honeybees." Blanken L.J., van Langevelde F, van Dooremalen C. 2015.

One in three bites of food we eat relies on pollinators like honey bees, native bees, butterflies, and birds.¹ They are responsible for the reproduction of 90% of all flowering plants.² But in Minnesota and nationwide, pollinators are in decline. In 2014-15, Minnesota beekeepers lost more than 50% of their colonies,³ and Minnesota's 400 native bee species may be similarly threatened.⁴

THE PROBLEM

Multiple interacting factors are contributing to pollinator declines:

Habitat loss: Pollinators need flowering plants throughout the growing season. Native bees require safe places to nest. Monarch butterflies need milkweed to mature and reproduce. Decreased plant diversity in rural and urban areas, and increased use of herbicide-resistant crops, have reduced the amount of high-quality pollinator habitat.⁵

Pesticides: Neonicotinoid pesticides are a driving factor of pollinator decline. At high doses, neonics can kill bees, butterflies, and songbirds outright. At lower doses, neonics damage pollinators' navigation, reproduction, communication, and immune systems.⁶ Other pesticides, on their own or in combination with neonics, weaken pollinator health.⁷

Diseases and parasites: Honey bees and other pollinators become more vulnerable to parasites and diseases when subjected to stressors like pesticide exposure and poor nutrition.⁸

THE SOLUTION

- » Phase out sale of neonicotinoids and neonic-coated seeds in Minnesota by 2019;
- » Provide support by 2017 for farmers to transition away from use of neonics;
- » Restore the 2014 "nursery labeling law" to ensure plants containing bee-harming pesticides cannot be advertised as pollinator-friendly; and
- » Increase pesticide-free pollinator habitat, especially in strategic areas such as roadsides and in stream buffers, emphasizing native plants.



Photo: Joshua Mayer, CC BY-SA

Fossil fuels are the greatest source of carbon pollution fueling global climate change. Leaving our state pension funds invested in the fossil fuel industry is morally wrong and it threatens our financial security. Fossil fuel divestment allows us to hold the industry accountable, spur economic growth in renewable markets, and protect the state pension funds.

THE PROBLEM

Fossil fuel pollution threatens our health, standard of living, environment, and financial security. The world's nations acknowledged this at the 2015 Paris climate negotiations and agreed to stay below 1.5°C of warming to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. To maintain a stable climate, more than 80% of fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground.¹ As a consequence, more than \$100 trillion worth of coal, oil, and gas assets could become stranded assets.² The “carbon bubble”’s predicted impact is so large it represents a systemic global financial risk, dwarfing bubbles of the past.³ At the same time, fossil-free funds and indices are outperforming fossil fuels and market benchmarks like the S&P 500, while many carbon-heavy investments are underperforming the market.⁴ It is morally wrong for Minnesota to maintain investments in fossil fuels. For Minnesota to continue to help finance the fossil fuel industry while at the same time seeking to accelerate the clean energy transition is counterproductive and therefore illogical.

THE SOLUTION

Minnesota should take all reasonable steps to avoid the risk fossil fuels pose to state pension funds, and to insulate the state budget and taxpayers from the risk of pension funds insufficient to meet obligations. Divesting Minnesota state pension funds from fossil fuels is not just reasonable; it is morally right, financially prudent, and effective as a method of cutting ties with the biggest single source of carbon pollution in the world today.

ISSUE BRIEF: DIVESTING MINNESOTA STATE PENSION FUNDS FROM FOSSIL FUELS

BY MN350

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

Austin Coalition for Environmental Sustainability
Center for Biological Diversity
Environment Minnesota
Humming for Bees*
Izaak Walton League - Minnesota Division
Minnesota Public Interest Research Group
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Renewing the Countryside
Save Our Sky Blue Waters

* Indicates not an MEP member organization.

¹ CTI. (2013). Unburnable Carbon 2013: Wasted capital and stranded assets. London. Retrieved from <http://www.carbontracker.org/wastedcapital>

² Citi GPS: Global Perspectives & Solutions, August 2015. Energy Darwinism II: Why a Low Carbon Future Doesn't Have to Cost the Earth. 132 p. <https://ir.citi.com/hsq32Jl1m4alzicMqH8sBkPnbsqfnwy4JgbUJ2kiPYWlw5eM8yD3FY9VbGpK+aax>

³ Gilding, P. (2013). Victory at Hand for the Climate Movement? Renew Economy. Retrieved March 19, 2013, from <http://reneweconomy.com.au/2013/victory-at-hand-for-the-climate-movement-99405>

⁴ https://www.msci.com/resources/factsheets/index_fact_sheet/msci-acwi-ex-fossil-fuels-index-gbp-gross.pdf

ISSUE BRIEF: “PROVE-IT-FIRST” - PREVENTING HARM FROM COPPER-NICKEL SULFIDE MINING

BY SIERRA CLUB
NORTH STAR CHAPTER

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

Austin Coalition for Environmental Sustainability
Center for Biological Diversity
Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy
Environment Minnesota
Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest
Humming for Bees*
Izaak Walton League - Minnesota Division
Minnesota Public Interest Research Group
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
MN350
Renewing the Countryside
Save Lake Superior Association
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
WaterLegacy

* Indicates not an MEP member organization.

Minnesota’s quality of life is threatened by metallic sulfide mining, a new type of mining with significant potential for contaminating the waters of northeast Minnesota. The mining would destroy high-quality wetlands and create mountains of waste rock and tailings that would leach pollutants into our environment.

THE PROBLEM

Metallic sulfide mining generates sulfuric acid and leaches toxic heavy metals into ground and surface waters. At even a few parts per billion, this discharge adversely impacts the aquatic food chain, eventually affecting fish, wildlife and people. The first sulfide mining proposal for Minnesota is going through the environmental review process. The proposed PolyMet mine near Hoyt Lakes would destroy nearly 1,000 acres of wetlands in what is now Superior National Forest, and create a persistent toxic legacy cost for future generations. But the issue goes beyond this proposal. Exploration for copper-nickel and other non-ferrous metals is advancing across the Arrowhead, from Duluth, along the North Shore, to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and also in Carlton and Aitkin counties and along the Mississippi River.

THE SOLUTION

Minnesota should enact a “prove-it-first” law similar to Wisconsin’s sulfide mining moratorium, which prohibits metallic sulfide mines until they have been proven safe through long-term operation and closure of similar mines elsewhere. This policy would make sure Minnesotans are not the recipients of untested mining practices, insurmountable clean-up costs and human health issues, including the loss of clean drinking water. Additionally, Minnesota should prohibit mines that would require long-term treatment of surface runoff or groundwater after the mine’s closure. There is no way to predict closure and clean-up costs for mines requiring ‘perpetual treatment’. PolyMet has never operated a mine and has no financial reserves. The burden becomes that of the taxpayer.

Threats from the mining of sulfide ores in the Triple Watershed region of Minnesota are of great significance. As waters drain into Lake Superior, the Rainy River, and the Mississippi, the issue of pollution becomes one of international importance.

Northeast Minnesota is known for its forests, wetlands, and wildlife, for its fish and wild rice, and for the valuable clean waters of its lakes and rivers. We must not sacrifice these resources to centuries of poisonous pollution.

Photo: XXX



Photo: USFWSmidwest, CC BY

DEFENDING MINNESOTA'S ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FOUNDATION

Minnesotans love to enjoy and are committed to protecting our lakes, rivers, streams, forests, and natural areas – our Great Outdoors. Our natural resources don't just take care of themselves, as Minnesotans know.

Strong, common sense environmental laws are essential safeguards of our outdoors, and help ensure the purity of our drinking water and sustainability of our groundwater. That's why more than 85% of Minnesota voters want Minnesota's environmental laws to be stronger or better enforced.*

Over the years, Minnesota Environmental Partnership and our member organizations have fought for laws that promote clean energy and strengthen protection of our land, water and air. As was the case in 2015, we have also vigorously opposed short-sighted efforts to block, undermine, and undo those laws. Such efforts are out of step with the wishes of the voters of our state. As we work to advance our priority issues this year, we will continue our work of defending existing laws from being weakened or repealed. These include:

Clean Energy – Progressive energy policies that increase our use of renewable energy sources, provide incentives to utilities to promote energy efficiency, and achieve our goal of reducing Minnesota's carbon pollution 80% by 2050. This includes maintaining the moratorium on the construction of new nuclear reactors.

Minnesota Environmental Policy Act – Minnesota's environmental review law, which protects our communities and our Great Outdoors from avoidable harm that poorly thought-through projects and decisions can inflict.

Plentiful and Clean Water – Minnesota's clean water laws and standards, by which we eliminate pollution; restore and protect our lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and groundwater; and avoid the waste and over-use that imperils our quality of life and economic prospects.

Community and Township Rights – The core democratic principle of community and township rights allows local communities to enact planning and zoning ordinances stronger than state regulations. This ensures proposed projects benefit the local area and do not come at the expense of neighbors and their local environment.

*Polling data from a statewide telephone poll of 600 registered Minnesota voters, conducted February 4-6, 2014, for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership by the bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies. The margin of sampling error for the full statewide samples is 4.0 percentage points, plus or minus.

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