

one minnesota: building a sustainable future

2017
BRIEFING
BOOK

**Minnesota
Environmental
Partnership**



MEPartnership.org



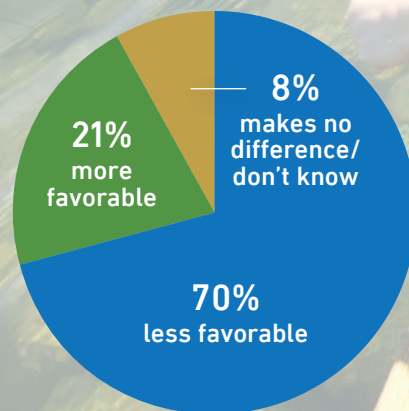
Minnesotans want strong environmental protections

Our environmental policies are front and center in our public statewide debate. With issues like finding solutions to agricultural water pollution, permitting of sulfide mining in Northern Minnesota, and clean energy and transportation investments all on the table this year, now is the time to act. Recent polling shows that 70% of Minnesotans statewide want their state legislators to hold firm on our environmental protections.**

**See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

“Suppose that your state legislator voted to weaken environmental protection laws. Would you have a more favorable or less favorable view of them?” **

Minnesota voters say:



(Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.)

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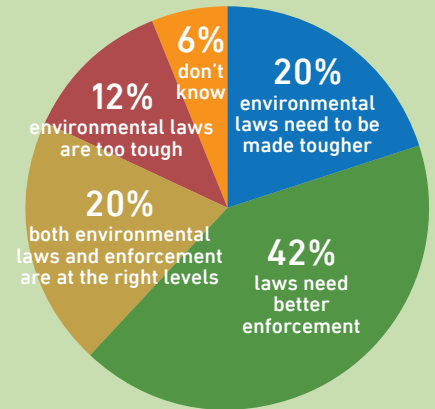
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PHOTO: TIM SCHLEICHER, CC BY 2.0

**Minnesotans think our
environmental laws need
to be made tougher or
need better enforcement.****



** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

protecting what Minnesotans care about



At the Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP), we believe that economic prosperity and environmental stewardship go hand in hand. Minnesota's heritage of plentiful, clean, flowing water has driven our state's growth and made fertile ground for agriculture, business, and recreation. Minnesotans want to protect that legacy and leave a healthy future for their children.

Our natural resources don't just take care of themselves, as Minnesotans know. It takes strong, common sense environmental laws and policies to ensure the safety of our drinking water and sustainability of our groundwater, and create safe and healthy cities, towns, and communities in which to live, work, and play.

As the 2017 Minnesota Legislature progresses, our lawmakers will consider many opportunities to make our state even better, including protecting our Great Outdoors. We call upon representatives from every corner of our state to listen to their constituents and preserve Minnesota's treasured way of life.

Over the years, the Minnesota Environmental Partnership and our member organizations have fought for laws that promote clean energy and strengthen protections for our land, water, and air. 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 Minnesota voters. In accordance with the values of Minnesotans, we will continue to defend existing laws from being weakened or repealed. These include:

- ▶ **Clean energy:** Minnesota is a national and global leader in our use of renewable energy sources. Our progressive energy policies increase our use of renewable energy sources, provide incentives to promote energy efficiency, and help us achieve our goal of reducing Minnesota's carbon pollution 80% by 2050. This includes maintaining a moratorium on the construction of new nuclear reactors and coal plants.
- ▶ **Minnesota Environmental Policy Act:** Minnesotans overwhelmingly want to maintain Minnesota's environmental review standards, which protect our Great Outdoors and our communities from avoidable harm caused by poorly thought-through projects and decisions.
- ▶ **Plentiful and clean water:** Minnesota's clean water laws and standards are essential to eliminating pollution, and restoring and protecting our lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and groundwater. It is through these laws and standards that our state can avoid waste and overuse that imperils our quality of life and economic prospects.

On behalf of those who breathe the air, drink the water, and play on the land, we urge our lawmakers to look beyond today and see what's possible. Minnesotans are counting on it.



74% of Minnesota voters are concerned about rollbacks of our laws that protect our land, air, and water.**

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling

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forever green forever clean

Clean water is a core Minnesota value. The Forever Green research initiative at the University of Minnesota is developing perennial and cover crops that are both profitable for farmers to grow and drastically improve our water quality.



the problem

Unfortunately, on any given weekend this summer, more than 4,600 of Minnesota's lakes and streams are "impaired." Many are no longer deemed safe for swimming or fishing. Nitrates in groundwater from excessive fertilizer use exceed safe-drinking water standards.

The agricultural economy in Minnesota is essential to our way of life, but the current system is also impairing our water quality. Fields are dominated by summer-annual crops such as field corn and soybeans, which soak up most of the available nutrients available during the production season. But the active production season of row crops is just a few months of the year. The majority of the year the fields are barren and inactive. Without active plant root systems to hold soil in place and absorb water, fields are much more vulnerable to wind and water erosion and nutrient run off. Six out of seven (86%) water quality impairments in Minnesota are caused by excess nutrient run off.¹

the solution

To resolve this, we must diversify our farming systems to include substantially more continuous living cover on the fields. Perennials and cover crops are the next generation of agricultural practices, designed to provide a good economic return for farmers while improving our water quality.

Ongoing funding for long-term research on the development of high-efficiency perennial and cover crop systems is required. Since 2014, the Legislature has provided one-time funding to the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative, which has been successful in the first stages of developing Minnesota's next generation crops, such as perennial crops like intermediate wheat grass and cover crops like pennycress. Crops like these have extensive root systems that prevent runoff into lakes, rivers, and streams and they provide continuous living cover on the land. They also improve soil quality by replenishing nutrients and don't require expensive fertilizers. In addition, many of the crops being developed have forage value, helping get more livestock back on the land in ways that improve water quality.

Key to this program's success, however, is consistent, ongoing funding to do the necessary research over multiple growing seasons. This public investment is needed to produce the public good of clean water.

To reach our clean water future:

- **Provide long-term funding to advance the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative,** accelerating the development of economically viable cover crops and perennial crops that enhance water quality, soil health, and habitat while providing an economic return for farmers. Full funding is \$5 million per year.

¹ Source: Minnesota Water Quality - David Fairburn - University of Minnesota Water Resources Center - Minnesota Water Sustainability Framework (page 24)



81% of Minnesota voters are concerned about runoff from farms polluting Minnesota's lakes, rivers, and streams.**

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

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statewide investment in transportation options

Minnesota's transportation system has been neglected for too long. Increased investment is urgently needed to expand public transportation, create safe bicycling and walking options, and fix aging roads and deficient bridges.



the problem

Our current transportation system harms our economic competitiveness and quality of life, makes it difficult for people in both rural and urban communities to access jobs and other critical destinations, and exacerbates long-standing racial disparities and income inequality.

Transportation also 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 and congestion, creating an increase in asthma attacks and a variety of other health problems. Research shows that communities of color are exposed to nearly 40 percent more air pollution than white residents, putting them at higher risk for these adverse health effects.² Demand is growing for transportation options that are more affordable, more efficient, healthier, and less resource-intensive, like safe biking and walking.

- ▶ Building out the metro region's public transportation system would save \$185 to \$395 million in reduced emissions.³
- ▶ Bus transit produces 33% less carbon pollution per passenger mile than the average single-occupancy vehicle.⁴
- ▶ Inadequate funding is the biggest challenge faced by 94% of Greater Minnesota transit providers.⁵
- ▶ In the Twin Cities metro area, only 8% of jobs are reachable by transit in 60 minutes.⁶
- ▶ More than 50 communities across Minnesota have unfunded Main Street enhancement projects, and statewide in 2013 MnDOT received proposals for nearly four times as many Safe Routes to Schools projects as it could fund.⁷
- ▶ Minnesota's roads are in poor condition, costing the average motorist \$396.25 per year in extra vehicle repairs and operating expenses.⁸

the solution

It is time for the Minnesota Legislature to pass balanced, comprehensive transportation funding that addresses these urgent needs. Increasing long-term statewide investment in all modes of transportation — bus, rail, bicycling, walking, roads, and bridges — will pay valuable health and environmental dividends, spur economic development, and support communities where everyone has equal access to opportunity. These investments can and should positively impact the people who have struggled the most during the recent Great Recession — communities of color, the elderly, low-income families, and people with disabilities.



68% of Minnesotans statewide want a transportation package that includes funding for safe bicycle and pedestrian routes.**

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

² Lara P. Clark, et al. (University of Minnesota), National Patterns in Environmental Injustice and Inequality: Outdoor NO₂ Air Pollution in the United States. PLOS ONE, April 15, 2014. <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0094431>

³ Itasca Project. 2012. Regional Transit System Return on Investment Assessment. http://www.corridorsofopportunity.org/sites/default/files/Transit_ROI_Executive_Summary.pdf

⁴ Federal Transportation Administration, Public Transportation's Role in Responding to Climate Change. January 2010. <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/PublicTransportationsRoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf>

⁵ MnDOT. Greater Minnesota Transit Plan 2010-2030. Dec. 2009.

⁶ Andrew Owen et al., (University of Minnesota), Access Across America: Transit 2015. January 5, 2017. <http://www.cts.umn.edu/Publications/ResearchReports/reportdetail.html?id=2554>

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

⁸ American Society of Civil Engineers, Report Card for America's Infrastructure, 2013. <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/minnesota/minnesota-overview/>

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

protect our pollinators

One in three bites of food we eat relies on pollinators, like honey bees, native bees, monarchs and other insects, and birds. Pollinators are responsible for the reproduction of 90% of all flowering plants.



the problem

In Minnesota, and across the nation, our pollinators are in decline. During 2014-2015 alone, Minnesota beekeepers lost more than 50% of their colonies,¹ and Minnesota's 400 native bee species may be similarly threatened including the Rusty Patched bumble bee, *Bombus affinis*.

Multiple factors are contributing to pollinator losses:

- **Pesticides:** Many pesticides are toxic to pollinators, and neonicotinoid insecticides (or neonics) are known to be 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.²
- **Habitat loss:** Pollinators need flowering plants throughout the growing season. Native bees and butterflies require safe places to nest. Decreased plant diversity in rural and urban areas, fragmentation and destruction of native habitat, encroachment of invasive plants, and increased use of herbicide-resistant crops have reduced the amount of high-quality habitat that pollinators need to survive.³
- **Diseases and parasites:** Pollinators become more vulnerable to parasites and diseases when subjected to stressors like pesticide exposure and poor nutrition.⁴

In August 2016, Governor Dayton released an Executive Order with a comprehensive plan to protect pollinators. This was issued at the same time as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) "Review of Neonicotinoid Use, Registration, and Insect Pollinator Impacts in Minnesota." If implemented well, the new rules would make Minnesota a national leader in protecting pollinators.

However, the Executive Order and the MDA's proposed steps need additional legislative action to fully address the problem. Unfortunately, while neonics are primarily used as coatings on seeds for crops like corn and soybeans, the MDA does not have the authority to regulate the sale and use of pesticide treated seeds. That means that the most significant use of these bee-harming pesticides is not monitored or regulated by the MDA — including almost all corn seed and 20% of soybean seed. This loophole is a major contributor to pollinator decline.

the solution

Minnesota has the opportunity to be a national leader in protecting our pollinators and their contributions to our food system. We need to close the loophole that allows seed coatings, such as neonics, to be exempt from pesticide rules. We will seek to:

- Tackle the problem of neonicotinoid-treated seeds in Minnesota by:
 - authorizing Minnesota regulatory agencies to track and regulate pesticide seed treatments just as they regulate other pesticide applications
 - increasing funding for research and outreach on the efficacy of neonicotinoid seed treatments
 - setting state targets for reducing use of neonicotinoid seed coatings
- Fund ongoing pollinator conservation activities by assessing a fee on sales of pesticides known to harm pollinators.



87% of Minnesotans are concerned about the disappearance of species essential for pollinating crops, like honey bees and monarch butterflies.**

¹ <https://beeinformed.org/results/colony-loss-2014-2015-preliminary-results/>

² "Conclusions of the Worldwide Integrated Assessment on the risks of neonicotinoids and fipronil to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning." Van der Sluijs JP, Amaral-Rogers V, Belzunces LP, et al. Environmental Science and Pollution Research International. 2015; 22:148-154.

³ http://www.mlmp.org/results/findings/pleasants_and_oberhauser_2012_milkweed_loss_in_ag_fields.pdf

⁴ "Interaction between Varroa destructor and imidacloprid reduces flight capacity of honeybees." Blanken LJ, van Langevelde F, van Dooremalen C. 2015

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

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keep Minnesota's great lake Superior

PHOTO: SCOOTERCO, CC BY 2.0

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 of the GLRI. 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 federal funding by leveraging state dollars, including funds from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment and capital bonding. A current critical priority is securing the \$25.5 million requested by the MPCA in 2017 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.

sulfide mining doesn't belong in Minnesota's cherished waters

These mines, which are different from traditional iron ore mines, have never been operated safely; no mine of this type is known to have operated and closed without polluting nearby lakes, rivers, or groundwater. Sulfide from mining has been shown, by science recently funded by the Legislature, to affect the entire ecosystem.

With the proposed sulfide mining areas draining into the St. Louis River, the headwaters of Lake Superior, or the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park, Minnesotans know better than to endanger our cherished waters for any price.

PolyMet's own data show that ongoing water treatment would be required long after the mining stops — for 500 years or more. And even that isn't good enough. The technology to fully protect our clean water for generations going forward does not exist. Even the most advanced water treatment does no good for water that can't be captured and treated.

Sulfide mining in a water-rich environment like northern 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.



74% of Minnesotans
oppose the PolyMet sulfide
mining proposal.**

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

Proposed sulfide mines in Northeast Minnesota, including the PolyMet NorthMet project and the Twin Metals Minnesota project, threaten our lakes and rivers with significant ongoing water pollution.

Minnesota as a clean energy leader

Minnesota has taken great strides toward a sustainable energy economy and our state has tremendous potential to be a true clean-energy leader in our country.



the problem

Our progressive energy policies have built a strong clean-energy economy and demonstrated that cutting carbon pollution grows jobs, reduces waste, cleans our air, and generates economic opportunities for all Minnesotans.¹ But there's a lot more work to do, and now is not the time to turn the clock backwards on progress.

Minnesota has 131 companies in the supply chains of the wind and solar industries, and many of these companies are growing and expanding, adding more jobs because of Minnesota's renewable energy policies.²

the solution

The coalition of more than 70 environmental and conservation nonprofits in the Minnesota Environmental Partnership will defend existing clean energy laws from being weakened or repealed. These include progressive energy policies that increase our use of renewable energy sources, provide incentives to utilities to promote energy efficiency, and achieve the goal of reducing Minnesota's carbon pollution by 80% by 2050. We urge lawmakers to protect the Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) and we oppose efforts to weaken the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) or Environmental Quality Board (EQB).

We oppose short-sighted efforts to block, undermine, or undo Minnesota's Clean Energy laws.



71% of Minnesota voters support a requirement that would get the state to 50% of its electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar.**

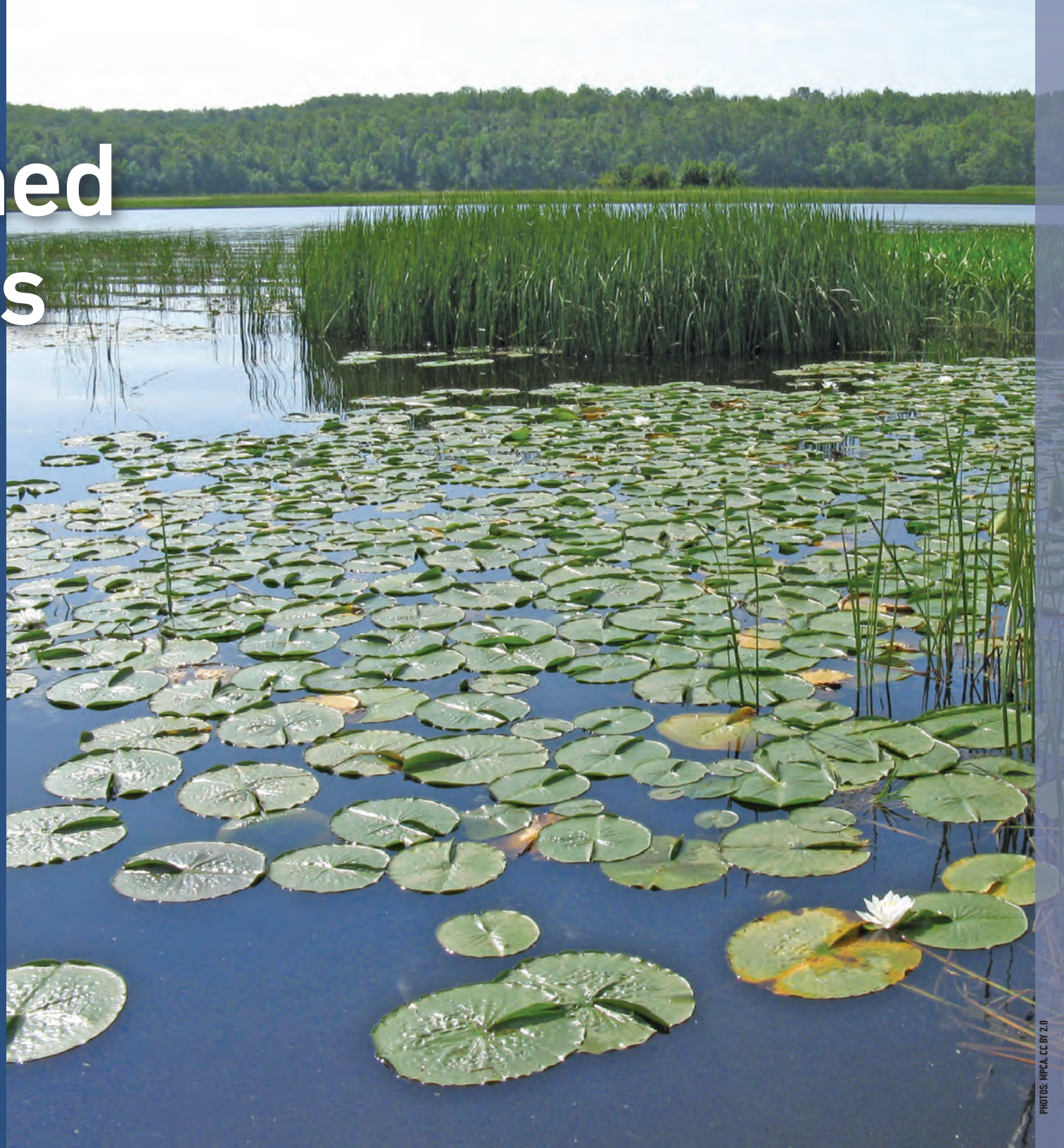


¹ Campdus. The aggregate Economic Impact of the Conservation Improvement Program 2008-2013 (Prepared for the Minnesota Department of Commerce)

² Environmental Law and Policy Center, Minnesota Wind Power & Solar Energy Supply Chain Businesses: Good for Manufacturing Jobs, Good for Economic Growth and Good for Our Environment, 2017

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

unfinished business



the problem

The Minnesota Legislature missed an opportunity to make concrete investments in some of Minnesotans' top priorities — including for our environment — when it failed to pass a bonding bill in 2016. Yet, the Legislature can still take advantage of that opportunity with a bonding bill in 2017.

the solution

MEP's coalition bonding priorities include:

- ▶ Governor Dayton's historic water bonding proposal, which includes:
 - \$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 by federal grants.
 - \$25.5 million to remove polluted riverbed sediment from the St. Louis River estuary. These state funds would also leverage federal dollars.
- ▶ \$45 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 \$120 million federal match as part of a five-year 100,000-acre Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
- ▶ Capital investments for key public transportation infrastructure, including bus facilities and Safe Routes to School statewide, and Twin Cities metro area light rail expansion.

Legacy Amendment

Minnesota's clear and unwavering support for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in the Minnesota Constitution has resulted in dedicated funds for additional investments in our Great Outdoors as well as arts and cultural programs. These funds are intended to be above and beyond the traditional sources of funding, such as bonding. The Minnesota Environmental Partnership 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, keeping the faith with Minnesota voters and complying with the constitutional language of the Legacy Amendment.



In 2008, the Legacy Amendment passed with a 56-39 margin.

Today, **75%** of Minnesotans support the Legacy constitutional amendment.**

¹ Article XI, Section 15 of the Minnesota Constitution

** See endnote on page 23 regarding polling.

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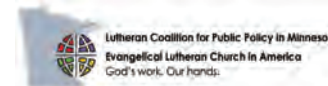
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Women's Environmental Institute
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Women's Environmental Network
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member issue brief: **TARIFF-BASED INCLUSIVE FINANCING**

by Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)

Supporting Organizations:

Alliance for Sustainability
CURE
Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division
MN350
MPIRG*
Mankato Area Environmentalists

* Not an MEP member

We need to rapidly implement tested, innovative tools that create local jobs, spur economic development, and foster climate resilience to benefit all Minnesotans. Currently, widespread participation in the new clean energy economy is blocked due to restrictive financing options and limitations for renters. Tariff-Based Inclusive Financing would open the clean energy economy — and the energy savings, jobs, housing affordability, home comfort, and climate resilience that comes with it — to universal participation.

the problem

Minnesota has enormous opportunity and need for economic revitalization, job creation, and energy and housing affordability: we have plentiful roofspace, great solar potential, qualified contractors, eager workforce, drafty older homes, and an impressive seasonal temperature range. Yet local participation in energy efficiency and renewables remains sluggish, only reaching 1-2% of eligible households a year. While most energy-efficiency improvements, and increasingly solar and other renewables, can pay for their own install cost through energy savings within 5-15 years, most residents and businesses can't finance them. Customers who rent, lack the credit to take out a loan, or do not have upfront capital are currently locked out. Rural and low-income Minnesotans are most impacted. These barriers prevent a majority of Minnesotans from lowering their energy bills, increasing housing stability, and making their home comfortable. They also block local economic development and thousands of new, local jobs that could be created from universal participation in energy efficiency and renewables.

the solution

Adoption of Tariff-Based Inclusive Financing will allow all energy users to reduce their energy costs by participating in vital energy programs with no upfront cost and no personal debt. Based on the PAYST™ model, utility customers can install insulation, efficient appliances, or rooftop solar using capital from the utility or partnering capital providers. The utility can then recover the costs in a simple and transparent line-item on the customer's monthly bill at a rate that is less than the savings these improvements will produce. Importantly, the recovery charge can stay with the property, rather than the customer, enabling investments that would not make sense for bill-payers who do not plan to permanently remain at that property. Additionally, this financing model eliminates the split-incentive problem for rental properties; renters can sign up for improvements that impact bills they pay, with landlord permission.

Since 2002, PAYST™-style programs have been adopted in Kansas, Kentucky, Arkansas, California, and North Carolina. Other states and utilities are exploring such initiatives. Tariff-Based Inclusive Financing offers immediate savings, universal access, simplicity, bigger savings, and low risk.

Minnesota's quality of life is threatened by metallic sulfide mining, a new type of mining with significant potential for contaminating internationally important watersheds in northeast Minnesota. This mining would destroy high-quality wetlands and create mountains of waste rock and tailings that would leach pollutants into our soil, surface water, and ground waters.

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 and create a persistent toxic legacy cost for future generations. But the issue goes beyond this proposal. Exploration for copper, nickel, and other precious 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: waters drain into Lake Superior, the Rainy River, and the Mississippi River. 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.

member issue brief:

"PROVE-IT-FIRST" — PREVENTING HARM FROM COPPER-NICKEL METALLIC SULFIDE MINING

by Sierra Club Northstar Chapter

Supporting Organizations:

Alliance for Sustainability
Center for Biological Diversity
Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest
Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division
Mankato Area Environmentalists
Minnesota Ornithologists Union
Save Lake Superior Association
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Sierra Club North Star Chapter
WaterLegacy

PHOTO: JIM BREKE CC BY-NC-ND

member issue brief: **A BILL TO SEPARATE MINERAL PROMOTION DUTIES FROM THE DNR**

by Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division

Supporting Organizations:

Alliance for Sustainability
Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest
Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas
Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division
Mankato Area Environmentalists
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Sierra Club North Star Chapter
WaterLegacy

the problem

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been given responsibility to both promote the development of minerals and to regulate the mining industry to protect the environment and public welfare. This conflict of mission is resulting in a loss of confidence among many citizens in the ability of DNR to regulate the mining industry, with the industry and their supporters having an undue influence. (Three past directors of the Lands and Minerals Division of the DNR currently work for the mining industry or associated companies.)

the solution

Transfer mineral promotion duties and associated personnel from DNR to Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). The two agencies, each with clear missions, will be able to focus on their own responsibilities. This will allow the public to understand and to weigh in on any compromises necessary to pursue both mineral promotion and regulation.

A proposed reorganization – in summary:

- » Clearly articulate that the DNR is responsible for environmental protection, DEED for mineral commercialization and related activities.
- » Add environmentalists, recycling experts, and local elected officials to the Mineral Coordinating Commission to diversify perspectives.
- » Direct that new public mineral leases undergo environmental review prior to lease sale, allowing public comment on possible effects of mineral lease sale on surface ownership and resources, which in some instances is private.

Benefits:

- » Such reorganization would eliminate an inherent conflict of interest in current DNR mission.
- » Would allow the DNR to become the agency most members of the public want them to be: focused on natural resource management and protection.
- » Would give more credibility to regulatory decisions DNR makes concerning mining.
- » DEED would continue to promote economic development through resource utilization.



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** Polling data referenced in this book came from a statewide telephone poll of 502 registered Minnesota voters, conducted February 1-5, 2017, for the Minnesota Environmental Partnership by the bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Mastin, Maulin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies. The margin of sampling error for the full statewide samples is 5.3 percentage points, plus or minus.



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