



## Minnesota Environmental Partnership Legislative Wrap-Up 2024

### Summary

During the 2024 Minnesota Legislative Session significant steps were taken to build on historic commitments made last year to protect the environment, climate and public health. This year's environment bill and the bill covering commerce, agriculture, and climate, along with other key legislation, included many provisions that advance environmental justice, reduce waste, and foster healthy communities. MEP's network of partner organizations and community members played an integral role in safeguarding our clean water, air, land and natural resources, and protecting the health of all Minnesotans.

### Key Victories:

#### Fighting for a Healthy Climate

- **Investments in natural climate solutions** include funding of over \$8 million to remove and replace trees posing a significant public safety concern and to establish a more diverse forest community to better withstand disease and pests in the Community Tree-Planting grant programs. Also, the Minnesota Releaf Program expanded funding by \$3.4 million to **enhance community forest ecosystem health and sustainability**.
- **Maintains a robust “carbon-free” standard for energy sources** under the 100% Law by rejecting an amendment to add ill-conceived woody biomass language.
- **Ensures a just and equitable transition toward a clean energy future** by upholding the moratorium for all nuclear-generating facilities.
- **Streamlines the permitting process for clean energy development.** While MEP and its members agree with the need to speed up the deployment of renewable energy generation—namely solar, wind, and battery storage—and transmission, we are deeply concerned with the approach the legislature chose to achieve this goal. **The final language left open the possibility of polluting fossil fuel facilities like natural gas to undergo a less rigorous permitting process** and would allow applicants of certain projects to conduct their own environmental review.



## People and Planet-Centered Public Institutions



- Authorizes the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) commissioner to issue an **emergency order for the immediate discontinuation or reduction of pollution** when that pollution presents an imminent and substantial danger to the health and welfare of people.
- Establishes a **regulatory framework that ensures gas extraction projects in Minnesota are conducted safely**. This rulemaking is an important step to protect human and environmental health in light of the massive helium deposit recently found in St. Louis County.
- Requires utilities to accept individual taxpayer identification numbers in lieu of a Social Security number to **reduce unnecessary barriers for all utility service applicants**.

## Environmental Justice



- **Enhances enforcement of air regulatory work in environmental justice areas**, dedicating onetime funding of nearly \$3 million and ongoing funding of \$2.6 million.
- **Expands the use of mobile air pollution testing equipment in communities overburdened by pollution**, appropriating onetime funding of \$1 million and ongoing funding of \$535,000.
- **Packaging Waste and Cost Reduction Act** establishes producer responsibility for packaging, reducing waste upstream by requiring producers to pay for the lifecycle of their packaging and move towards more recyclable, compostable, and reusable products and packaging. Over time, this legislation will help **dramatically reduce the waste we send to incinerators and landfills**.
- \$6 million to construct a **geothermal energy system at Sabathani Community Center**. This South Minneapolis community hub provides vital resources to a community overburdened by air pollutants and carbon emissions. This geothermal energy system will help **foster a healthier community for residents by reducing carbon pollution and promoting sustainable practices** while providing space heating and cooling.
- **Improves water quality and addresses the nitrate crisis** in southeastern Minnesota, including funding of \$2.8 million for **home water treatment for private wells**, \$2.8 million from the Clean Water Fund to **inventory, test, and provide education and outreach** around private wells, and \$3 million from the Clean Water Fund to **monitor and evaluate nitrate levels**.

## And More Steps Forward:

### Climate, Energy, Equity and Transportation



- \$1 million for **small electric outdoor equipment** grants, with prioritization given to residents in environmental justice areas.
- Establishes the **Geothermal Energy System Planning Grants** program and provides \$1.2 million to support the expansion of clean geothermal building heating in Minnesota.
- **Investments and incentives to make solar energy more accessible**, including funding of \$2 million to award financial incentives to local units of government that deploy the **Solar Automated Permit Processing Plus (SolarAPP+)** program. This federally developed software automates the review of applications and issuance of permits for residential solar, making solar energy more accessible. The **Solar Interconnection Bill** streamlines the process of connecting solar systems to the grid.
- **Comprehensive Plan Clarity Fix** clarifies that metro area comprehensive plans approved by the Metropolitan Council do not require environmental review on plan provisions. This is an important step towards increasing housing density on already-developed land and **stopping metropolitan sprawl**.

### Agriculture & Working Lands



- \$125,000 for the **Farm to School and Early Care Program** to provide more local and fresh food to schools and early childhood education centers, including in-home childcare providers.
- \$300,000 for **Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grants**, prioritizing emerging farmers and applicants experiencing limited land access or limited market access. This is an important step towards building a more resilient and just food system in our major agricultural state.
- An additional \$495,000 for the **Soil Health Financial Assistance Program** to reduce barriers to adopting soil health practices and address the nitrate crisis in southeastern Minnesota.

### Waste & Pollution



- Addresses surplus food and food waste by **prioritizing composting ahead of anaerobic digestion** in Minnesota's hierarchy of waste management practices and investing \$593,000 to **encourage composting by residents in multifamily buildings**.
- Tracks progress in waste diversion by conducting **ongoing waste composition studies** which will provide critical information to inform decisions and track progress in our efforts

to **divert organics and electronics out of the waste stream** and into composting and recycling.

- **Clean lighting provision** phases out all mercury-containing lightbulbs to protect Minnesotans' health and accelerate our transition towards more energy efficient lighting alternatives.
- Establishes the **Critical Materials Recovery Task Force** to advise the commissioner of the Pollution Control Agency on ways to increase the recovery of critical materials from end-of-life products.

### Water, Lands, & Wildlife

- Allocates \$25 million to Minnesota's Clean Water Fund to support water-quality-related projects.
- Allocates \$192.7 million to Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund **to enhance and restore wildlife and habitat**, including \$12 million for a deterrent system to **protect the Upper Mississippi River from invasive carp**.
- Clarifies the definition of public waters with funding of \$8 million for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to **comprehensively update Minnesota's Public Waters Inventory (PWI)** over the next eight years. This will provide clarity and guidance towards future management and protections of all public waters in Minnesota.
- **Monitors PFAS substances in sewage sludge**, and directs the Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Department of Health (MDH) to **develop strategies to protect Minnesotans from PFAS in drinking water**.
- A **State Salt Purchase Report and Reduction Goal** to quantify the amount of salt the state uses for deicing purposes and to reduce that usage by 25 percent from the initial reported total.
- A **State Nitrogen Fertilizer Purchase Report and Reduction Goal** to quantify the amount of nitrogen fertilizer the state uses and to reduce that usage by 25 percent from the initial reported total.



### Missed Opportunities:

- The Legislature was **unable to come to an agreement on a capital investment bill** - with funding for water infrastructure, public lands, and other projects relevant to the environment - before the session ended. Among the projects was an update to the Badoura State Forest Nursery to address the shortage of tree planting stock for the state.



- A policy change to **reduce exposure of people and wildlife to neonicotinoid pesticides**, through a prohibition on the sale of seeds treated with these harmful pesticides for non-agricultural uses, failed to pass.
- The **100% Electronic Waste Collection and Recycling bill** did not pass this session. This bill would have provided free e-waste collection funded by producer responsibility, generated 1,700 jobs, supplied almost 40% of the essential metals required for Minnesota's transition to clean energy, and helped protect our air, water, and land.
- Several bills to improve water quality in Minnesota, including a requirement for **disclosure of subsurface drain tile** in property transactions and **mandatory environmental impact statements for feedlots** with more than 10,000 animal units, failed to pass this session.
- A **repeal of the preemptive bag ban**, which would allow local municipalities to reduce unnecessary and problematic waste, did not pass this session.

#### Steps Backward:

- We are especially concerned about provisions that were passed that **set unworkable deadlines for major projects subject** to review by the Department of Natural Resources and the Pollution Control Agency, **requiring that these state agencies defer to the desires of industry at the expense of human and environmental health.**