

# Minnesota Environmental Partnership 2026 Legislative Wrap-Up



Minnesotans have learned not to expect much these days from a closely divided State Legislature. Bipartisanship has all but disappeared on some issues, and a crucial election year can make compromise especially challenging. And with pressing issues including the fallout of Operation Metro Surge, recent high-profile fraud cases, and rising healthcare challenges, this Legislature had their hands full, leaving less space for progress on the environment.

Fortunately, Minnesota's environmental community showed up consistently and effectively during the 2026 Session and achieved some key successes, both advancing good policy and investments and preventing steps backward.

## Key steps forward

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**The following good provisions - all passed on a bipartisan vote - were signed into law by Governor Walz:**

- The state's **tax credit for sustainable aviation fuel was renewed with new environmental guardrails** aimed at protecting our land, water, and climate. SAF aims to reduce the carbon footprint of airplane fuel using various alternatives to petroleum. If leveraged correctly, it can help reduce climate pollution from transportation while significantly improving water quality at the same time by incentivizing continuous living cover crops, which produce oil, grow during the winter, and help prevent water pollution and soil erosion.
- The Legislature passed nearly **\$200 million in funding for conservation** and land improvement projects from the Outdoor Heritage Fund.
- Over \$1.2 billion for infrastructure or capital investment that includes more than **\$400 million in funding for clean water projects**. Those dollars will help secure clean drinking water and responsible management of wastewater for numerous Minnesota communities. Disappointingly, however, only \$15 million was designated for lead drinking water service line replacement. The state still has around 87,000 lead service lines - each of which threatens the long-term health of residents - and will require hundreds of millions of dollars more to replace them.
- Over **\$130 million** in funding was appropriated from the **Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund**. Projects will invest in conservation, water quality, and research around the state, and will include opportunities for small and disadvantaged groups to access funding. However, we're concerned about new requirements for the **Community Grants** program that were passed along with the funding. These were part of an effort to prevent fraud in state government, but the heightened level of review and reporting and the expense of using a fiscal agent or purchasing a surety bond are just some of the new mandates that could put the program out of reach for some smaller groups.

- The Legislature successfully passed **new guardrails for extraction of gas resources** in Minnesota, largely in response to the discovery two years ago of a world-class helium deposit in Northern Minnesota. The new regulations also address natural gas, however, and notably ban the practice of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in Minnesota. Minnesota is not known to have significant natural gas resources or geology favorable for fracking, but this is still a sound move to safeguard our environment.



## Bad policy blocked

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**Environmental groups successfully worked to stop a provision that would have rolled back a key part of Amara’s Law – Minnesota’s nation-leading law protecting us against PFAS “forever chemicals.”** This carve-out would have pushed back the requirement for industry to report the use of PFAS in consumer goods by a year. A year is a significant amount of time when it comes to PFAS. The class of chemicals contributes to cancers, birth defects, pre-eclampsia, liver injury, and other conditions. The level considered “safe” in drinking water is extremely low, and numerous communities across Minnesota are already contaminated. Forever chemicals do not break down in the environment or in the human body, so the best solution is to phase them out as quickly as possible.

**MEP members also successfully opposed a \$41.7 million cut to Metro Transit.** Thousands of Minnesotans rely on the state’s largest – and growing – public transportation system, which helps to reduce the massive climate impact of our transportation sector. This cut, proposed by the Walz Administration, would have meant significant service reductions.

## ➡ Progressed, but not yet passed

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**Despite the pressing environmental needs of this moment - and active efforts at the federal level to roll back bedrock protections for our water, air, land and climate - the Legislature did not take action on several key MEP-backed priorities:**

- The **Wild Rice Act**, which would establish new protections for Minnesota’s wild rice waters.
- The **Battery Extended Producer Responsibility bill**, which would set up a producer-funded program to extend free battery recycling sites to all of Minnesota, easing the burden that local governments face due to battery fires and managing toxins in batteries. This program would benefit local taxpayers, groundwater, our climate, and industries that rely on rare metals like lithium.
- Passing new protections – up to and including a temporary moratorium – on **hyperscale data centers**. The state’s currently proposed data centers, if built, would consume more power than all Minnesota households combined. We need stronger guardrails in place to ensure that our power grid, water, and community health is protected.
- **Protections for the Boundary Waters and other northern watersheds from sulfide mining.** With the recent overturning of the federal ban on sulfide mining in the Superior National Forest near the BWCA, state protections are more vital than ever. Unfortunately, the closely-divided Legislature and controversy surrounding sulfide mining means that progress is not yet within reach.

- Setting a definition for what constitutes an **acceptable demand forecast for petroleum pipelines requiring a certificate of need** from the Public Utilities Commission. This would help ensure that any company applying to build a petroleum pipeline in Minnesota would have to demonstrate demand from end-use consumers, making it less likely for an unneeded pipeline to be built. This bill was heard in the House Energy Committee but did not pass.
- Establish a right for Minnesota landowners to have a **decommissioned pipeline removed from their property** and their land restored at the pipeline company's expense. This bill was heard in the Senate Energy Committee but did not pass into law.
- Establishing a reasonable effective date, after which **toxic lead ammunition and toxic lead fishing tackle** are prohibited. This proposal received an informational hearing in the Senate Environment Committee but did not advance.



## Positive Legislative Oversight

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On Tuesday, April 7, the Minnesota Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee held a well-attended and historic oversight hearing on an issue of critical importance to Minnesota's environment: **polluter capture of state agencies**.

The People Not Polluters coalition, in which MEP and several of our members participate, asked Senators to hold this hearing because agencies too often treat polluting industries and companies as clients to be aided, not as sources of potential pollution to be reduced and managed. We expect that when industries violate environmental laws, state agencies will penalize these companies as needed and force them to modify or halt operations. On numerous occasions, that has not happened. On some issues, the U.S. EPA has stepped in to side with communities over state agencies on pollution, but the EPA is no longer a reliable backstop.

The hearing focused on three sample issues: the nitrogen crisis caused by intensification of row crop agriculture and the failure to limit fertilizer use, the mismanagement of Wildlife Management Areas to the benefit of the timber industry at the expense of wildlife, and the failure to protect Minnesotans in the Twin Cities from the air pollution of waste incineration.

Not only did the hearing room at the Senate Building fill up almost immediately, but the overflow room where the live feed was being streamed had more than 75 attendees, demonstrating the resounding support that Minnesotans share for upholding our environmental protections. No company, no matter how deep its pockets, should be above the law.

Moving forward, MEP and our allies will continue to keep up the pressure on agencies to put Minnesotans' health - and the lands and waters we depend on to stay healthy - first.