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## **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Testimony on FY2021 Interior-Environment Appropriations**

Thank you Representative McCollum for inviting the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to speak on the importance of federal funding for Minnesota's natural resources. Minnesota's natural resources are an important component to the quality of life here in our great state.

Habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, and disease are all harming Minnesota wildlife and natural resources. Reliable, dedicated funding sources are crucial to protecting our state's natural resources and wildlife heritage.

### **State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program**

Thank you for your continued support of funding for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant program. Over 1/3 of Minnesota DNR's \$3 million per year budget for wildlife protection and recovery in Minnesota comes from this program. The funds are crucial to implementing the MN Wildlife Action Plan. Without these funds, the state would lack the necessary resources to monitor and conduct scientific research on fish and wildlife populations and take actions like invasive species control, habitat restoration, and management needed to sustain healthy fish and wildlife populations.

### **Recovering America's Wildlife Act**

The need for funding in this area is much greater, though. The federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act, if passed, would provide the Minnesota DNR, other state fish and wildlife agencies, and tribal nations with increased dedicated funding to collaboratively make a difference long-term. Increased funding is essential for accelerating the implementation the MN Wildlife Action Plan which includes research, monitoring, and habitat restoration/enhancement efforts for species of greatest conservation need. For example, Minnesota could accelerate the protection of native prairie habitats in Minnesota, increase restoration and enhancement work on public and private lands, and ensure continuation of ecological communities that support many rare and vulnerable wildlife species. Funding preventive measures to restore habitats that sustain threatened species before they are on the brink of extinction lessens the likelihood of these species needing protection under the Endangered Species Act.

### **Chronic Wasting Disease**

The Minnesota DNR is very concerned about the long-term implications of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) on deer populations and hunting traditions. Minnesota currently has 500,000 deer hunters who contribute at least

\$500 million annually in total economic activity to the state, and the habitats that support deer sustain Minnesota's \$14 billion dollar a year outdoor recreation economy. The discovery of CWD in Minnesota in wild deer in close association with captive facilities requires an aggressive and comprehensive response. Since the disease was discovered in Wisconsin in late 2001, the Minnesota DNR has spent over \$10M on CWD response, most which has come from state hunting license fees. CWD is a national crisis that requires support at the federal level.

While not in this committee, H.R. 1550 would provide federal funding to support state and tribal efforts to develop and implement management strategies to address CWD and support applied research regarding the causes of CWD and methods to control the further spread of the disease. Funding for rapid response at the state level to combat CWD and continued support for research are extremely important. Federal support would assist the state in management strategies managing CWD with the primary goal of eliminating the disease when it is found.

### **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Exchange**

Finally, the Minnesota DNR thanks you for the continued support of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) exchange. To date \$17.5 million has been appropriated for this important project. As you are aware, the State of Minnesota, Superior National Forest and The Conservation Fund are working together on a mutually beneficial strategy to transfer ownership of school trust lands located within the BWCAW to federal ownership. Minnesota's school trust beneficiaries are entitled to the economic benefits from these lands that were granted at statehood to support public education. This project will resolve the decades-old controversy of school trust lands within the BWCAW that originated with the 1964 Wilderness Act and subsequent passage of the 1978 BWCAW Act that confined approximately 83,000 acres of school trust lands within the wilderness area.

This project has undergone environmental analysis pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The Forest Service published its Draft Environmental Impact Statement in August 2017 and continues to work towards issuing its final environmental impact statement and draft record of decision in 2020. Concurrently, the Forest Service also will be completing an appraisal of school trust lands within the BWCAW.

The Minnesota DNR again thanks Representative McCollum for listening to Minnesota's needs and being a strong advocate for conservation efforts within the state.