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June 28, 2024

Dear members of the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources,

On behalf of local parks and trails and the citizens across the state who use them, we are writing to ask you to support the Department of Natural Resources' request G2025-122 to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for funding for Local Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas Grants.

Our organization, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT), is comprised of more than 130 cities, counties, parks groups, individuals, and others who seek to connect people to the outdoors and improve the quality of life for Minnesotans. We believe funding these grant programs will significantly benefit the natural resources, health, and economic well-being of our communities.

Local parks, trails, and natural areas are often the first—and sometimes only—exposure many Minnesotans have to nature and outdoor resources. These local assets are where young kids learn to fish, swim, and appreciate the nature of Minnesota. While our state parks and trails are invaluable assets, unfortunately, they are out of reach for many citizens—at least for daily or frequent use—due to distance or a lack of trail connections. That is why local parks and trails are so important to the health of our communities across Minnesota. Investing in these resources will serve to protect, conserve, and enhance Minnesota's natural resources for generations to come.

With increasingly tighter budgets hit hard by inflation, it is difficult to obtain the funding needed to modernize our local parks and trails, meet the emerging needs of our communities, or connect them to state and regional trails. Legacy funding helps to build out and maintain state and regional parks and trails, but local trails and parks are not eligible for those funds. These programs are especially important to Greater Minnesota because they are among the few grants that we can access.

We are not the only beneficiaries, however. These programs have a statewide reach and benefit communities everywhere in Minnesota. Cities, counties, and townships from Bagley to Otsego, Saint Paul to Winona, Woodbury to Isanti County, and many communities beyond and in between have received matching grants to acquire land with high levels of biodiversity, build fishing piers, construct access to state and regional trails, and much more that will increase the ability of Minnesotans young and old to spend time outside.

We are grateful for the support the LCCMR has provided in the past to these programs and encourage you to fully fund the DNR's request of \$5 million in your recommendations. Given the high demand and the statewide reach of these programs, more funding is desperately needed. Allocating a portion of the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund to these programs would provide much-needed support to community resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Gina Hugo at [Gina.Hugo@co.sherburne.mn.us](mailto:Gina.Hugo@co.sherburne.mn.us) or 763-765-3308 or Joseph Tart at [Joseph.Tart@chisagocountymn.gov](mailto:Joseph.Tart@chisagocountymn.gov) or 651-213-8961. We would love to work with you to ensure Greater Minnesota's parks and trails continue to thrive and grow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gina Hugo', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Gina Hugo  
Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails  
Sherburne County, Parks Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Tart', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Joseph Tart  
Vice Chair, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails  
Chisago County, Parks Director