

March 28th, 2017

Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt
463 State Office Building

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
3113 Minnesota Senate Building

House Majority Leader Joyce Peppin
459 State Office Building

Senate Minority Leader Tom Bakk
2221 Minnesota Senate Building

House Minority Leader Melissa Hortman
263 State Office Building

Dear Legislators:

We are writing to ask you to oppose any changes to Minnesota's buffer laws that would weaken protections for our state's waterways. As representatives of Minnesota hunters, anglers, environmentalists, and conservationists, we urge you to take action to prevent the rollback of legislation that seeks to protect our lakes, rivers, and streams. Clean water that is fishable, swimmable, and drinkable is vital to the health and welfare of our state, and any rollback to the buffer legislation will come at a cost to the well being of the general public.

Minnesota's lakes, rivers, and streams are an irreplaceable natural resource. Minnesota's surface waters provide drinking water for more than a million people in our state, as well as our downstream neighbors; our waters provide countless recreational opportunities for anglers and swimmers. Our water resources are threatened by runoff and pollution, and Minnesota's buffer laws are a vital part of the effort to keep our waters usable and safe.

Research has shown that riparian buffers provide a number of benefits. Buffers can provide improvements to water quality; flood water attenuation; in-stream habitat for fish and invertebrates; and habitat for birds, wildlife, and pollinators. Riparian buffers or alternative practices are a vital tool needed to improve water quality.

Proposed legislation offers severe rollbacks to the Buffer Law, removing important protections for our waters and wildlife habitat:

- We oppose provisions that limit public waters requirements to only those waters with a shoreland classification. This provision would reduce buffer requirements on two thirds of our public waterways, most of which have been in place for decades. This would mean a loss of nearly 200,000 acres of buffer protection on our public waters.

- We oppose requiring federal or state assistance to cover 100% of the cost of establishing buffers. Public-private partnerships have been the basic financial approach to water pollution control. We believe it is fair and appropriate that landowners pay some part of the cost of protecting the water that belongs to us all. Many government cost-share programs are available to assist landowners.
- We oppose weakening local enforcement authority. Giving counties and soil and water conservation districts APO authority is an important enforcement mechanism. Removing this authority will make tasks of the counties and SWCDs more difficult.
- We oppose changes to the deadline for implementation of the buffer law. No enforcement actions will take place until mapping and alternative practice disagreements are resolved. BWSR has indicated a statewide compliance rate greater than 80%. With such high rates of compliance, there is no need to turn back now. In fact, it is unfair to the landowners who have already complied with the law.
- While we strongly support funding for counties and watershed districts for implementation and enforcement, we oppose taking this money from the Clean Water Fund. The Clean Water Council has given careful consideration to water quality funding priorities through a deliberative public process. Funding for local buffer implementation was neither proposed nor considered. To the contrary, there was an annual \$10 million appropriation included in the vetoed 2016 Tax Bill. That same amount was included in this year's bill.
- We also strongly support a continued annual \$11M appropriation for Soil and Water Conservation Districts to assist landowners with buffer implementation, and we also oppose funding it from the Clean Water Fund. When the buffer law was first enacted in 2015 the Legislature directed that beginning in 2018 this appropriation would come from the general fund and be included in the base. This commitment needs to be honored and Clean Water Fund priority given to funding the Board of Water & Soil Resources to pay for on-the-ground projects that provide water quality protection, including vital drinking water protections.

Minnesotans are uniquely appreciative of our water resources and preserving and improving those resources must be a priority for the legislature. The public has a right to fishable, swimmable, drinkable waters; and our buffer law is a vital part of achieving that goal.

We urge members of the House and Senate to:

1. reject all rollbacks and delays to Minnesota's buffer laws; and
2. fund this important work through the General Fund in this and future bienniums.

Thank you for consideration of our thoughts on this important matter that affects all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy	Fish and Wildlife Legislative Alliance
Minnesota Trout Unlimited	Friends of the Mississippi River
Anglers for Habitat	The Nature Conservancy
Minnesota Forestry Association	Sierra Club
Minnesota Conservation Federation	Clean Water Action
Conservation Minnesota	Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest
Izaak Walton League – Minnesota Division	Land Stewardship Project
Water Legacy	League of Women Voters Minnesota
Save Our Sky Blue Waters	Lower Phalen Creek Project
Alliance for Sustainability	Minnesota Native Plant Society
Center for Biological Diversity	Minnesota Ornithologists' Union
CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)	Pesticide Action Network
Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness	Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas
MN350	Renewing the Countryside
Institute for Local Self Reliance	Lutheran Advocacy – Minnesota
Pollinate Minnesota	
Save Our Sky Blue Waters	