

Conservation Connection



A Minnesota Legislative Outdoor Newsletter: Created by Kim Scott and Alexandra David

Sponsored by: Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Fergus Falls Fish and Game Club,
Fish Lake Conservation Club, Izaak Walton League, MN Musky and Pike Alliance,
MN Sharptail Grouse Society, Outdoor News, Pheasants Forever, Sportsmen for the BWCA*

April 25, 2025

Important Dates:

- April 29, 2025: Special Election, Senate District 6
- May 8, 2024 from 3-5 PM: Rally for Public Lands
- May 9-10: 77th Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener in Crosslake
- May 19: Constitutional deadline for adjournment for the 2025 Legislative Session

Minnesota lawmakers return for the last leg of session: State lawmakers return from a weeklong break on Monday with a two-year budget still in the works and the clock ticking down on the legislative session. With about a month left before they're supposed to adjourn, they'll hit the gas on a raft of budget bills, moving them from committees to the House and Senate floors, then into conference committees. There, legislators will iron out differences and reach final products that can pass both chambers and get the governor's signature. At the same time, top legislative leaders and the governor will meet in a series of closed-door negotiations to finalize a blueprint for the budget. Read more.

Gov. Walz delivers seventh State of the State: Delivering his annual State of the State speech to a joint session of the Legislature, the Democratic governor said Minnesota is as strong as it has ever been, but it is a "moment of great uncertainty for our nation" . . . Walz has said that he will decide after the legislative session whether to seek a third consecutive four-year term as governor . . . Walz's most immediate task, however, is working with the closely divided Legislature to enact a balanced budget for the next two years before it adjourns May 19. The House is tied at 67-67, while Senate Democrats hold just a two-seat majority, so nothing can pass without bipartisan support . . . The governor expressed particular concern about the potential impact on the state budget of cuts to Medicaid that are being contemplated by Washington Republicans, which could force him to call a special session later this year to fill the resulting holes in the budget. Read more. Watch the speech, or read here.

*You are receiving this legislative newsletter free of charge. It is being sponsored and funded by the above-listed organizations. If your organization would like to be a sponsor of this newsletter, please call Greg Kvale at 218-232-0328 to discuss a donation.

House passes \$777 million omnibus Legacy finance bill: The House passed HF2563, the \$776.9 million omnibus legacy bill on a 115-19 vote Friday, sending it to the Senate. The Legacy Amendment increases the state sales tax by three-eighths of 1% from July 1, 2009 until 2034. That additional revenue is dedicated to four funds: 33% for the Clean Water Fund; 33% for the Outdoor Heritage Fund; 19.75% for the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund; and 14.25% for the Parks and Trails Fund . . . The big difference in this year's version is how that money gets distributed from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. The bill would create a competitive grant program for projects in the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund instead of earmarking money for individual projects . . . Besides the competitive grant program, the bill would require an Arts and Cultural Heritage grant requestor provide their most recent 990 tax form, and prohibit funds to be spent on capital construction. Historical site preservation, accessibility modifications, and exhibits and art installations that require construction costs would be allowed.

Outdoor Heritage Fund: The <u>Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council</u> recommends \$162.11 million to fund 51 projects throughout the state in fiscal year 2026. The Outdoor Heritage Fund is the only fund that receives its appropriations on an annual basis rather than biennial basis and the amendment states that money may be spent only "to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife." Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars include: \$77.65 million for habitats, \$33.43 million for prairies, \$29.03 million for wetlands, \$19.96 million for forests and \$2.04 million for administration. The largest single Outdoor Heritage Fund allocation would be \$12.64 million for the <u>Department of Natural Resources Roving Crew</u> Phase 3, which has crews solely dedicated to habitat enhancement and restoration.

Clean Water Fund

The Clean Water Fund would receive \$303.93 million in the upcoming biennium. The Board of Water and Soil Resources would receive the biggest chunk of that allocation at \$139.34 million. Of that, \$88.1 million would be for watersheds. The Pollution Control Agency would receive \$49.2 million with \$18.9 million going to river and lake monitoring and assessment and \$14.5 million for watershed restoration and protection strategies. The rest of the proposed allocations are \$33.35 million to the Department of Agriculture, \$30.14 million to the Department of Health, \$28.8 million to the Department of Natural Resources, \$16.54 million to the Public Facilities Authority, \$4.15 million to the Metropolitan Council, and \$2.4 million to the University of Minnesota.

Parks and Trails Fund: The Parks and Trails Fund would receive \$130.17 million for fiscal years 2026-27. The DNR would receive \$78.59 million and \$51.32 million would go to the Met Council. Money must be used to "support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance." This year, \$100,000 of the DNR's budget and \$200,000 of the Metropolitan Council's budget is to fund Wilderness Inquiry that connects people through shared outdoor experiences. Read more.

See how the House members voted:

ACOMB	•	FALCONER	•	HUDSON	•	MEKELAND		RYMER	
AGBAJE	•	FEIST	•	HUOT	•	MOLLER	•	SCHOMACKER	•
ALLEN	•	FINKE	•	HUSSEIN	•	MOMANYI-HILTSLEY	•	SCHULTZ	•
ALTENDORF	•	FISCHER	•	IG0	•	MUELLER	•	SCHWARTZ	•
ANDERSON, P. E.	•	FOGELMAN		JACOB		MURPHY	•	SCOTT	•
ANDERSON, P. H.	•	FRANSON	•	JOHNSON, P.	•	MYERS	•	SENCER-MURA	•
BACKER	•	FRAZIER	•	JOHNSON, W.	•	NADEAU	•	SEXTON	•
BAHNER	•	FREDERICK	•	JONES	•	NASH		SKRABA	•
BAKEBERG	•	FREIBERG	•	JORDAN	•	NELSON	•	SMITH	•
BAKER	•	GANDER	•	JOY		NISKA	•	STEPHENSON	•
BENNETT	•	GILLMAN	•	KEELER	•	NOOR	•	STIER	
BERG	•	GOMEZ	•	KLEVORN	•	NORRIS	•	SWEDZINSKI	
BIERMAN	•	GORDON		KNUDSEN		NOVOTNY	•	TABKE	•
BLISS	•	GOTTFRIED	•	KOEGEL	•	O'DRISCOLL	•	TORKELSON	•
BURKEL	•	GREENE	•	KOTYZA-WITTHUHN	•	OLSON	•	VAN BINSBERGEN	
CARROLL	•	GREENMAN	•	KOZLOWSKI	•	PÉREZ-VEGA	•	VANG	•
CHA	•	HANSEN, R.	•	KOZNICK	•	PERRYMAN	•	VIRNIG	•
CLARDY	•	HANSON, J.	•	KRAFT	•	PINTO	•	WARWAS	•
COULTER	•	HARDER	•	KRESHA	•	PURSELL	•	WEST	•
CURRAN	•	HEINTZEMAN	•	LAWRENCE	•	QUAM	•	WIENER	
DAVIDS	•	HEMMINGSEN-JAEGER	•	LEE, F.	•	RARICK	•	WITTE	•
DAVIS	•	HER	•	LEE, K.	•	REHM	•	WOLGAMOTT	•
DIPPEL	•	HICKS	•	LIEBLING	•	REHRAUER	•	XIONG	•
DOTSETH	•	HILL	•	LILLIE	•	REPINSKI	•	YOUAKIM	•
DURAN	•	HOLLINS	•	LONG	•	REYER	•	ZELEZNIKAR	•
ELKINS	•	HORTMAN	•	MAHAMOUD	•	ROACH	•	SPEAKER	•
ENGEN	•	HOWARD	•	MCDONALD	•	ROBBINS	•	DEMUTH	

House passes \$172 million Agriculture finance bill: the omnibus agriculture and broadband finance bill is the first omnibus budget bill to pass off the House Floor this session. By a vote of 130-3 Thursday, the House passed the \$172 million budget bill for fiscal years 2026-27, sending HF2446 to the Senate . . . The Senate's omnibus agriculture bill, SF2458, proposes appropriating \$17.3 million less than the House bill in fiscal years 2026-27. [MORE: Compare House and Senate fiscal spreadsheets]. The breakdown of the \$172.29 million

General Fund appropriations in the bill is:

- \$147.93 million to the Department of Agriculture;
- \$13.53 million to the Board of Animal Health;
- \$8.82 million to the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute; and
- \$2 million to the Office of Broadband Development to increase high-speed internet access across the state.

The bill also calls for a \$4 million transfer from the General Fund in fiscal year 2026 to the <u>agricultural</u> <u>emergency account</u> to prevent the <u>spread of avian influenza</u>... [Moreover, under the proposed legislation], the DNR and state soil and water conservation districts would be required to develop a biofertilizer innovation and efficiency program to address water quality by incentivizing Minnesota farmers to improve nitrogen management and incorporate innovative technologies into crop nutrient management plans. <u>Read more</u>.

MN Senate energy bill could dial back landmark climate policies: The Minnesota Senate advanced a DFL-sponsored bill earlier this month that would sunset the state's pathbreaking community solar program in 2028 and significantly reduce the financial benefits of onsite solar for utility customers. ... The bill would also sunset Minnesota's Renewable Development Account, which uses millions in annual nuclear waste storage fees paid by Xcel Energy to subsidize residential solar panel installations. Environmental and clean energy advocates assailed the bill in a press conference at the Capitol, [calling it] 'a betrayal of Minnesota's climate promises.'" Read more.

What's going on with the DNR's long-anticipated outdoor activity licensing app? Minnesota anglers who want to fish anytime soon are still going to need paper licenses despite last year's assurance by the Department of Natural Resources that outdoors licenses and registrations would go digital well before opening day. The agency has been working on the \$3.5 million project since 2021 and last year hired a former head of the DNR's Fish and Wildlife Division to solve potential problems and provide leadership for the system's final development. Still, the DNR and its project partners, Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) and Paylt Outdoors, a private vendor, failed to deliver by its March 4 deadline. The two agencies have not announced a new timeline other than to say it'll launch before 2026. Digitizing millions of permissions a year for hunting, skiing, horseback riding, snowmobiling and other pursuits, will allow people to display licenses on their phones, even when out of cell phone range. The new system also is designed to provide faster titling of boats and recreational vehicles. People could buy licenses from home, register their harvest, sign up for safety training, fill out small game harvest surveys and keep track of their own hunting lottery applications. Read more.

Dozens rally at Minnesota Capitol on Earth Day, urging policies protecting environment: Dozens of Minnesotans gathered at the state capitol on Tuesday for an Earth Day rally, urging policymakers to double down on curbing climate change and protecting Minnesota's natural resources. Read more/Watch.

Forest Service won't issue Boundary Waters canoeing permits at busy Ely and Grand Marais ranger stations: Paddlers planning to venture into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness this summer need to make alternative plans if they had hoped to pick up their permits at the Kawishiwi ranger station in Ely and the Gunflint station in Grand Marais, Minn. The Forest Service notified permit holders via email Thursday that, effective immediately, those locations will not be issuing permits this year. Read more.

Several U.S. regional climate centers shut down Thursday — including those in the Midwest, Great Plains and South. Those three centers are responsible for collecting weather data across 21 states, as well as sharing drought conditions and other online tools. But their operations ceased at midnight on Thursday due to a lapse in federal funding, which comes from the Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Read more.

Select DNR News releases

- Minnesota DNR accepting comments on environmental documents for proposed Mud Lake Habitat
 Restoration Project: The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is accepting comments until
 4:30 p.m. Thursday, May 22 on an environmental assessment worksheet related to the proposed
 Mud Lake Habitat Restoration Project, located in St. Louis County.
- Minnesota DNR announces opening of new public water access on St. Croix River: The St. Croix
 River's newest public water access is now open for anglers, boaters and more to enjoy recreating
 along this National Wild and Scenic River.
- <u>Changes coming to Eagle Lake public water access in Sherburne County</u>: Sherburne County residents
 and visitors should be aware of upcoming adjustments to the Eagle Lake public water access near the
 city of Big Lake.

Last Week at the Legislature:

On Monday at 1:00 PM, House <u>Ways and Means</u> discussed: <u>HF2446</u> (Anderson, P.H.) <u>Agriculture Finance Bill</u> (see: <u>House Research Summary</u> and <u>Fiscal Tracking Sheet</u>); and <u>HF2563</u> (Vang) <u>Legacy Finance Bill</u> (see: <u>House Research Summary</u>, <u>Fiscal Tracking Sheet</u>, and <u>testimony</u> from: Metropolitan Council, environmental groups coalitions, and Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails, along with a factsheet on Minnesota's Dedicated Conservation Funds.

At 3:00 PM, Senate Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband, and Rural Development discussed, among other bills: S.F. 2653 (Kupec): Solar pollinator programs special license plate establishment and agrivoltaic solar sites eligibility for solar site management practices provision (Bill Summary, Audubon Letter of Support Coalition Letter of Support and Agrivoltaics Fact Sheet, and Replace Letter of Support); and S.F. 3083 (McEwen): Pesticides from treated seeds addition to the Commissioner of Agriculture's pesticide management plan requirements; appropriating money (see Bill Summary and testimony from: American Seed Trade Association (ASTA), Corteva Agriscience (presentation), Minnesota Corn Growers Association, MSGA, NRDC Action Fund, Louis Robert, Former Agronomist, Sierra Club, Minnesota Trout Unlimited, and Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation).

On Tuesday at 9:00 AM, Senate <u>Finance</u> met to hear <u>S.F. 2865</u> (<u>Hawi</u>): Omnibus Legacy appropriations. See also: <u>Spreadsheet 1st-Engrossment</u>, <u>Spreadsheet With A31 Amendment</u>, <u>A31</u> Amendment, <u>Legacy Handout</u>, <u>Coalition Support Letter</u>, <u>METC Chair Zelle-Support Letter</u>, <u>Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System Support Letter</u>, <u>OHF Coalition Support Letter</u>, and <u>Wilderness Inquiry Support Letter</u>.

At 12:30 PM, House <u>Ways and Means</u> discussed a number of bills, including: <u>HF2439</u> (Heintzman): Environment & Natural Resources Finance Bill. See: <u>House Research Summary</u> and testimony from: <u>BWSR</u>, <u>Charlie Zelle, Met Council, Minnesota Zoo, MPCA, Public Stewardship Institute</u>, and <u>DNR</u>).

At 9:00 AM, Senate <u>Taxes</u> discussed a number of bills, including: <u>S.F. 1633</u> (<u>Hauschild</u>): Class 2c managed forest lands classification eligibility clarification provision. See also: <u>Bill Summary</u>, <u>Author's DE amendment</u>, <u>Class 2c Eligibility Clarification Revenue Estimate</u>, <u>DNR Factsheet on 2c Lands</u>, and testimony in support of the bill fro <u>Minnesota Forestry Association</u> and <u>The Nature Conservancy</u>.

On Friday at 9:30 AM, the <u>Legislative Audit Commission</u> met to present key findings and recommendations of the evaluation, Department of Natural Resources Land Acquisition.

Next Week at the Legislature:

The legislative body has commenced the passage of omnibus bills through the House Ways and Means committee and the Senate Finance committee. As these bills get approved by their respective finance committees, the frequency of floor sessions will increase to facilitate the processing of the omnibus bills. Committee schedules may be subject to change or delayed with minimal notice, given the dynamic nature of the legislative session.

On Monday at 9:00 AM, the <u>Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources</u> will convene for a hearing. The agenda is as follows: the Commission will welcome new members, hear the Director's report on: 2023 <u>Completed projects</u>, 2024 <u>Completed projects</u>, <u>Peer Review Status</u> for 2025 Recommendations, and <u>2026 RFP by the Numbers. The Commission will take action on</u>: Proposal evaluation / selection process for 2026 LCCMR recommendations (see also: <u>Memo</u> on 2026 RFP evaluation and recommendation process and <u>Example</u> of Last Year's Scoring Sheet). The Commission will also take action on the election of Executive Committee Members (<u>Elections and Proxy Memo</u>), and <u>discuss</u> LCCMR site visit options (<u>Site Visits</u> Overview). The Commission will also hear a legislative update on 2025 LCCMR Recommendations.

On Tuesday at 9:00 AM, House <u>Capital Investment</u> will hear a number of capital budget requests and hear a presentation on the <u>PFAS Removal Report</u> by the MN Pollution Control Agency.

At 9:00 AM, Senate <u>Taxes</u> will hear a number of bills, including: <u>S.F. 2530</u> (<u>Hauschild</u>): Orderly and environmentally responsible development of the states gas resources facilitation provision and appropriation.

Bills Introductions of Interest:

Environment and Natural Resources:

Bipartisan Legislation:

Senators Kupec, Weber, Dornink, and Hoffman introduced--S.F. No. 3423: A bill for an act relating to environment; modifying requirements for water appropriations permits; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 103G.287, subdivision 1; 103G.305, subdivision 1, by adding a subdivision. Referred to the Committee on Environment, Climate, and Legacy.

Republican Legislation:

Senator Draheim introduced--S.F. No. 3384: A bill for an act relating to noxious weeds; requiring notice of entry for noxious weed inspections; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 18.79, subdivision 3. Referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband, and Rural Development.

Rarick and Igo introduced: H. F. 3229. A bill for an act relating to energy; requiring spent fuel located at Prairie Island to be transferred to another site for storage; authorizing additional storage to be constructed at the Monticello nuclear generating plant; authorizing the public utility to withhold money from the renewable development account to pay for the cost to transport spent fuel; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 116C.771; 116C.777; 116C.779, subdivision 1, by adding a subdivision; repealing Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 116C.779, subdivision 2; 216C.41. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Energy Finance and Policy.

Burkel and Anderson, P. H. introduced: <u>H. F. 3236</u>, A bill for an act relating to environment; modifying requirements for water appropriations permits; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 103G.287, subdivision 1; 103G.305, subdivision 1, by adding a subdivision. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy.

Outdoor Recreation

Bipartisan Legislation:

Fischer and Heintzeman introduced: H. F. 3250, A bill for an act relating to transportation; establishing an outdoor recreation license plate endorsement to allow motor vehicle access to state parks and recreation areas, including use on license plates, fees, public information, and exemptions; appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 85.053, subdivision 2; 168.002, by adding a subdivision; 168.012, subdivision 13; 168.0135, subdivision 1; 168.09, subdivision 7; 168.12, subdivisions 1, 5; 168.27, subdivision 28; 168.29; 169.79, subdivision 8; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapters 85; 168. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy.



RALLY FOR THE BOUNDARY WATERS