



# 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\***

**May 9, 2025**

**Important Dates:**

- May 9-10: 77th Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener in Crosslake
- May 19: Constitutional deadline for adjournment for the 2025 Legislative Session

**Budget talks slow going while other legislation on the move:** Gov. Tim Walz is taking part in marathon negotiations with Republican and Democratic legislative leaders that have been going on over the past week. So far, little to report in the way of tangible progress . . . It seems every budget is difficult to settle when there's divided government. The Legislature has required a special session in every budget year with divided government since 2015. [Read more](#). Leaders from both parties agree the education and healthcare budgets are the threads that could unravel the entire budget sweater. . . May 19 is the end of the session, but June 30 is the deadline to avoid a government shutdown, so if they need a special session, there's a little wiggle room. [Read more](#). "We have a lot of work to do," DFL House Speaker Emerita, Rep. Melissa Hortman, said after saying this week a budget target agreement is likely needed by the end of the week in order to finish by the legislative deadline of May 19. [Read more](#).

**House passes \$2.3 billion 'lights-on' omnibus environmental budget bill:** The House passed [HF2439](#) in a 129-5 vote on Monday. The bill now [is in conference committee to resolve the differences between the Senate and House versions.] The financials between the versions are similar with the House calling for \$2.28 billion to fund the DNR, Pollution Control Agency, and the Board of Water and Soil Resources in the 2026-27 biennium and the Senate calling for just a bit more, \$2.33 billion. But proposed policy differences are great. For example, the Senate would allow the DNR and Pollution Control Agency to increase fees for their programs and services to raise more revenue. The House version contains no policy provisions and no fee increases. [Rep. Josh Heintzeman](#) (R-Nisswa) co-chairs the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee with [Rep. Peter Fischer](#) (DFL-Maplewood) . . . Both Heintzeman and Fischer acknowledged that policy negotiations would be at the forefront in a conference committee with the Senate. Senate policy provisions that will likely be on the negotiating table include increasing the aquatic invasive species surcharge

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for watercraft, and replacing the current flat \$10.60 surcharge with one whose amount depends on the size and use of the watercraft; and requiring the DNR to seize and forfeit any watercraft that have been tagged by peace officers as abandoned if the condition that led to its tagging has not been remedied within 14 days. Heintzeman said one policy provision he hopes would be non-controversial and would make it into a conference committee report: [HF2824](#) that would allow a [year-round fishing season](#) for largemouth and smallmouth bass. [Read more.](#)

See how your legislators voted:

ACOMB	●	FALCONER	●	HUDSON	●	MEKELAND	●	RYMER	●
AGBAJE	●	FEIST	●	HUOT	●	MOLLER	●	SCHOMACKER	●
ALLEN	●	FINKE	●	HUSSEIN	●	MOMANYI-HILTSLEY	●	SCHULTZ	●
ALTENDORF	●	FISCHER	●	IGO	●	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	●	HEMMINGSSEN-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	●

**Conference Committees begin their work:** with the May 19 session deadline approaching, state lawmakers will begin the conference committee process this week on multiple spending bills, to merge House and Senate versions into final legislation for Gov. Walz to sign. So far, [eight total bills](#) have passed both the House and Senate to reach conference committees: higher education, judiciary and public safety, transportation, agriculture, veterans, commerce, housing and state and local government [and environment]. . . The purpose of a conference committee is to resolve differences between House and Senate bills, through lengthy and complicated negotiations that compare each bill line-by-line . . . Meanwhile, Gov. Walz met again [this week] with legislative leaders from both parties to negotiate over "global" budget targets for the conference committees to follow. [Read more.](#)

**Environment, natural resources conference committee begins work:** As explained during walkthroughs of the [fiscal comparisons](#) and [side-by-side comparisons](#), each body brought a version of the omnibus bill to the conference committee based on different budget targets from their respective leadership.

The Senate constructed a budget with a target of reducing General Fund spending by \$1 million in the 2026-27 biennium. The House was charged with cutting \$10 million. The House met its target by cutting:

- \$5 million from a 2024 appropriation to the DNR for enhancing prairies and grasslands and restoring wetlands on state-owned wildlife management areas;
- \$3 million from a 2025 Pollution Control Agency appropriation for a local government climate resiliency and water infrastructure grant program; and
- \$2 million from a 2025 appropriation to the Board of Water and Soil Resources for conservation easements and restoration and enhancement for purposes of climate resiliency, adaptation, and carbon sequestration.

The Senate cuts are more spread out, but one major financial difference between the bills is that the House would not appropriate any money from the General Fund to increase the operating budgets of the departments and agencies funded by the omnibus bill. The Senate version fully funds operating adjustment increases at the levels [recommended by the governor](#) of the [Department of Natural Resources](#), [Pollution Control Agency](#), [Minnesota Zoo](#) and the [Board of Soil and Water Resources](#).

Still, even with those different starting points, the proposed House and Senate total new General Fund spending in 2026-27 are only \$9 million apart, with the Senate at \$434.9 million and the House at \$425.9 million. The policy picture is much different [as the bill contains] no major policy provisions due to a lack of agreement between [the Chairs]. A [policy comparison sheet](#) made that evident, with 17 of 21 entries labeled as “Senate-only” provisions . . . A major policy issue left unresolved is Pollution Control Agency permitting procedure. [Read more](#). Some of the notable Senate-only provisions include:

- a watercraft surcharge increase;
- a water appropriation permit fee application increase;
- penalties for abandoning watercraft;
- water use permit fee increases;
- outdoor schools for all grant program; and
- reduced license fees (game and fish, deer and small game, angling) for disabled veterans.

**Governor Walz, legislative leaders will work on some "walleye diplomacy" at fishing opener with budget deal looming:** Ahead of the governor's fishing opener in Crosslake, Minnesota, Governor Tim Walz says he's confident lawmakers can strike a budget deal ahead of the close of the legislative session. Walz says both sides will need to be open to compromise, crucial due to a tie in the Minnesota House and a slim, one-vote advantage for the DFL in the Senate . . . Walz does say he's ready to get some fishing - and negotiating - done this weekend when he heads to Crosslake the opener. The governor says he'll be with all of the legislative leaders during Saturday's opener. [Read more](#).

**In Crosslake, governor's fishing opener spotlights lethal impact of lead tackle to Minnesota's loons:** When Gov. Tim Walz casts a line into the Whitefish Chain of Lakes in north-central Minnesota on Saturday, he'll be pinning his hopes for landing a lunker on a lure that doesn't contain lead. Walz and an entourage of politicians, business leaders and members of the media will descend on Crosslake this weekend for the Governor's Fishing Opener, an annual tradition designed to promote the state's fishing and tourism industries.

Crosslake is also home to the [National Loon Center](#), a nonprofit dedicated to research, education and conservation of Minnesota's state bird. It plans to break ground on a new \$18.5 million facility in June. Jon Mobeck, the center's executive director, said the fishing opener is an opportunity to highlight that one of the biggest threats loons face comes from swallowing lead sinkers, lures and jigs . . . Loons and other birds don't have teeth, so they swallow small rocks to help digest food. Lead sinkers or small jigs can resemble those rocks. Once lead enters a loon's bloodstream, it gets disoriented. It can't swim, dive or care for its chicks . . . The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency estimates that about 25 percent of adult loons die from lead poisoning. Lead tackle also can be deadly for swans, geese, ducks and eagles. [Read more.](#)

**BWSR Accepting Applications for Clean Water Legacy Partners Program:** The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is now accepting grant applications for the Clean Water Legacy Partners Program, which seeks to protect, enhance and restore water quality throughout the state. Tribal Governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are eligible to apply for this round of funding. The grants can be used for a wide range of conservation activities including urban stormwater practices, agricultural best management practices, shoreline stabilization projects, drinking water protection and public engagement efforts. A total of \$1.066 million from the Clean Water Fund is available: \$272,000 is available for NGOs and \$794,000 is available for Tribes. Grant requests must be between \$50,000 and \$250,000; a non-state match of at least 10%, provided via cash or in-kind services, is required. The application period opens today and closes August 5, 2025. For more information on how to apply, see the program's Request for Proposals on [BWSR's website](#).

**Nitrates, arsenic in MN drinking water systems exceed standards in some communities:** Report: A report to determine the quality of water available to Minnesota's residents found that 97% of the state meets federal safety standards, but 3% of communities have fallen below them due to excessive levels of nitrate and arsenic contaminations. [Read more.](#)

#### Select DNR News releases

- [Wildlife Drive at Roseau River Wildlife Management Area open May 17-18](#): The 27-mile Wildlife Drive within the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area will be open to the public on Saturday, May 17, and Sunday, May 18.
- [Teal Lake drawdown in progress this spring](#): The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has begun a drawdown on Teal Lake in Jackson County, located south of Wilder. The temporary lowering of water levels on this 91-acre shallow lake is taking place to improve wildlife habitat and water quality.
- [Red Flag Warning issued for extreme fire risk](#): The National Weather Service has issued a Red Flag Warning for several counties in northwest Minnesota effective today, May 4, from noon until 9 p.m.

due to extreme fire risk conditions.

- [During fishing opener weekend and always: Clean, drain, dispose every time](#): The approaching walleye fishing season comes with a reminder from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to always follow state laws to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species.

### **Last Week at the Legislature:**

On Tuesday at 9:00 AM, House [Taxes](#) convened to hear a number of bills, including [HF2437](#) (Davids) Individual income taxes, corporate franchise taxes, property taxes, local government aids, sales and use taxes, and other taxes and tax-related provisions modified; certificate of rents paid provisions modified; cannabis tax provisions modified; and money appropriated. (The DE Amendment to [HF2437](#) is the 2025 House Taxes Bill); [HF2257](#) (Gomez) Property tax; provisions related to public charity institution exemptions modified. (This is a vehicle bill); and [HF2730](#) (Gomez) Local government debt financing modified. (This is a vehicle bill.) See also: [2025 House Taxes Bill](#), [House Fiscal Spreadsheet](#), [House Research Summary](#), and [testimony](#) from: Department of Revenue, Minnesota Chamber, Partnership on Waste and Energy, Factsheet: Aquatic Invasive Species Aid, Association of Minnesota Counties, City of Minneapolis, Carlton County, Minnesota Forestry Association, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers, Conservation Minnesota, Minnesota Inter-County Association, League of Minnesota Cities, Legal Services Advocacy Project, Minnesota Association of Assessing Officers, Minnesota Business Partnership, Metro Cities, Minnesota Land Trust, Minnesota Resource Recovery Association, Environment Coalition letter, Factsheet: Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts: Increase SWCD Aid to support state conservation goals, and The Nature Conservancy.

On Wednesday at 8:30 AM, Senate [Taxes](#) held an informational hearing on the [Senate Tax bill, S.F. 2374 \(Rest\)](#): Tax provisions modifications. See also [Bill Summary](#), [Senate Change Items](#), [Senate and Governor Comparison](#), [Senate SWCD Aid](#), [Senate Seasonal Tax Base Replacement Aid](#), [Senate LGA](#), [Senate CPA](#) and testimony from: [Department of Revenue](#), [AARP](#), [TechNet](#), [Explore Minnesota](#), [MICA](#), [AMC](#), [MN Chamber](#), [Agriculture Coalition](#), [MFU](#), [LMC](#), [MASWCD](#), [The Nature Conservancy](#), [MFBF](#), [Minnesota Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy](#), [100 Percent](#), and [Fresh Energy](#).

On Thursday at 8:30 AM, Senate [Capital Investment](#) met to hear a number of bills, and move the the following bills as vehicle-only bills: [S.F. 2827 \(Pappas\)](#): Library construction grant program renaming provision and library construction project grants bond issuance and appropriation; [S.F. 0390 \(Pappas\)](#): Safe routes to school grant program bond issue and appropriation, and [S.F. 2802 \(Pappas\)](#): Early childhood learning and child protection facilities bond issuance and appropriation. These will be the vehicles for future capital investment bills.

Also at 8:30 AM, Senate Taxes heard [S.F. 2374 \(Rest\)](#): [Tax provisions modifications](#). See also:

[Bill Summary](#), [Senate Change Items](#), [Senate and Governor Comparison](#), [Senate SWCD Aid](#), [Senate Seasonal Tax Base Replacement Aid](#), [Senate LGA](#), [Senate CPA](#), and testimony from: [Friends of the Mississippi River](#) and [City of Saint Paul](#).

At 10:30 AM, Senate [Finance](#) met to discuss: [H.F. 2442 \(Frentz\): Omnibus, Energy, Utilities, Environment and Climate policy and appropriations](#). See also: [Spreadsheet](#), [Bill Summary](#), and testimony from: , [Department of Commerce](#), [Building the Future](#), [MN Chamber of Commerce](#), [ILSR Community and Rooftop Solar](#), [CEEM](#), [CLEAR](#), [CleanCapital](#), [ENGIE](#), [HASI](#), [Solar Landscape](#), [CSG](#), and [CCSA](#).

At 12:30 PM, House [Ways and Means](#) met to hear [HF2437](#) (Davids) Omnibus Tax Bill.

On Friday at 9:30 AM, the [Conference Committee on HF 2446 \(Agriculture and Broadband Finance\)](#) began meeting to do a walk-through of change-item spreadsheet and side-by-side comparison documents. The House Conferees are Anderson, P. H., Hansen, R., Harder, Smith, Burkel, Gottfried, and the Senate Conferees are Putnam, Kupec, Westrom. See also: [Ag Appropriations Side-by-side](#), [Ag Policy Side-by-side](#), [Broadband Appropriations Side-by-side](#), [Change Items Spreadsheet](#), [Detailed Spreadsheet](#), [House Research Summary](#), [Side-by-side Policy Differences Summary](#), [Senate Counsel Summary](#), and [Written Testimony and Handouts](#) from: Minnesota Farm Bureau, Minnesota Farmers Union, Minnesota Corn Growers Association, The Nature Conservancy, MCEA, Association of Minnesota Counties, Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities, Minnesota Bio-Fuels Association, Growth Energy, AgCentric, Minnesota Crop Retailers, Food Bank Coalition, MAPE, MGFA, and various constituents.

At 1:00 PM, the [Conference Committee on SF 2077 \(Omnibus Environment Bill\)](#) met to walk through the [SF2077](#) side-by-side and budget comparison spreadsheet. The House Conferees are Heintzeman; Schultz; Nelson; Fischer; Pursell; Finke, and the Senate Conferees: Hawj; Kunesh; Johnson Stewart; Green; McEwen. See: [Tracking Sheet](#), [Combined Comparison](#), [Side-by-Side](#), and testimony from the following: [MN-Zoo](#), [MDVA](#), [METC Chair Zelle](#), [The Nature Conservancy](#), [Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas](#), [Freshwater Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System](#), [ATV-MN](#), [St. Louis County](#), [MAPE](#), and [MPCA](#).

#### **Next Week at the Legislature:**

Committee schedules may be scheduled, subject to change, or delayed with minimal notice, given the dynamic nature of the legislative session. The legislative body has almost completed the passage of omnibus bills through the House Ways and Means committee and the Senate Finance committee. At this point in the Legislative Session, the frequency of floor sessions will increase to facilitate the processing of the bills. Conference committees are beginning to meet to reconcile differences between the House and Senate bills before a final vote in each respective body.

**Bills Introductions of Interest:**

**Environment and Natural Resources:**

**Republican Legislation:**

**Senator Draheim introduced--[S.F. No. 3494](#):** A bill for an act relating to natural resources; appropriating money for pilot program to buy out flooded commercial, industrial, and residential properties. Referred to the Committee on Environment, Climate, and Legacy.

**Kresha introduced: [H. F. 3289](#),** A bill for an act relating to natural resources; modifying wetland replacement ratios; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 103G.222, subdivision 1; 103G.2242, subdivision 12; 103G.2243, subdivision 2. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy.



## PUBLIC LANDS RALLY AT THE MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL MAY 8, 2025

