



# 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,  
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**May 30, 2025:**

**Important Dates:**

- February 17, 2026: First day of the 2026 Legislative Session.

**Ten days after the legislative session ended, lawmakers still don't have a budget in place; Gov. Walz is targeting next week for a special session:** Gov. Walz and legislative leaders met again at the capitol on Thursday afternoon to put the finishing touches on the state budget, which remains unresolved more than a week after the legislative session ended on May 19 . . . Walz briefly addressed the status of the budget and said he now hopes to schedule a special session next week. Although he set a goal of completing most of the work by late Wednesday evening, he said the legislature still has to sort out a few more areas of the budget before a special session can begin.

**Legislative leaders provide update on budget negotiations:** House DFL Leader Melissa Hortman said the tax bill is "probably the biggest outstanding bill" in the legislature right now, along with other items such as health and education . . . GOP House Speaker Lisa Demuth said the narrowly divided legislature, where the House is tied and the DFL controls the Senate by a single vote, has made negotiations more challenging . . . Despite optimism from leadership, there are still some contentious issues between the House and Senate that are holding up spending bills. DFL Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy pointed to one example in the jobs bill, where House Republicans have pushed for changes to non-compete policies for employees [and the] higher education bill has been slowed in recent weeks by a policy disagreement over the appointment process for University of Minnesota regents . . . However, with the special session now unlikely to happen until next week at the earliest, the state will miss a deadline to avoid sending [layoff notices](#) to state employees warning of a potential government shutdown. [Read more.](#)

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**Working group strikes agreement on Environment and Natural Resources finance, policy package:** [The total General Fund spending would be \$429.4 million in fiscal years 2026-27]. [The] [agreement](#) would increase the aquatic invasive species surcharge for watercraft from a flat \$10.60. Beginning Jan. 1, 2026, surcharges would range from \$14 to \$62 depending on the size, type and use of the watercraft. The DNR would also increase large groundwater-use permit fees and water appropriation permit application fees, including a rise from \$150 to \$600 for a business to apply for a permit to appropriate groundwater. In addition to raising fees, the agreement would make several cuts to ongoing programs in state agencies, boards and departments to meet a negative \$6.5 million target given the group in the [May 15 leadership global budget agreement](#). That includes canceling a \$5 million fiscal year 2024 appropriation to the DNR for enhancing prairies and grasslands and restoring wetlands on state-owned wildlife management areas. [S]ome game and fishing license fees would be lowered, including those for veterans and disabled veterans.

Much of the policy changes proposed in the bill focus on reforming the permitting processes used by the Pollution Control Agency . . . the bill would:

- require the PCA's annual permitting efficiency report to focus on the more complicated Tier 2 permits, and include additional information about permits that have not met the statutory goal, as well as other modifications;
- require the PCA to give permit applicants five business days to remedy identified deficiencies in permit applications; and
- limit who could file discretionary environmental assessment worksheets to those residing in the county in which a proposed project will be undertaken or in one or more adjoining counties.

The agreement would also make statutory changes to the [Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund](#) community grant programs, managed by the DNR. The bill would:

- require community grants to be expended for benefits across all regions and residents of the state;
- allow community grants to be awarded for trail maintenance and improvement and aquatic invasive species management; and
- prohibit the awarding of community grants to a state agency, the University of Minnesota, or for scientific research.

Several changes would relax regulations prohibiting intentionally added perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances in consumer products and other substances, [including excluding] certain children's recreational vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles, children's electric-assisted bicycles, and replacement parts for these items from the prohibition on the sale of items containing intentionally added PFAS.

Other notable policy provisions include:

- establishing a sustainable foraging task force to recommend to the Legislature science-based foraging guidelines for state lands that balance public access with conservation needs;
- making the open season for bass fishing continuous;
- repealing the shotgun zone for deer hunting, effective January 1, 2026; and

- authorizing DNR officers to tag abandoned watercraft and making owners criminally and civilly liable for abandoning watercraft. [Read more.](#)

**No agreement on Bonding:** A bill to fund critical public works projects — including upgrading the state’s roads, protecting Minnesota’s drinking water and expanding city sewers — is dead this year, legislative leaders said Thursday . . . The DFL-controlled Legislature passed a \$2.6 billion infrastructure package in the 2023 session, including \$1.5 billion in bonds, following three legislative sessions without an infrastructure deal . . . Last year, the Legislature failed to pass a bonding bill . . . Bonding bills require a 60% supermajority in both the House and Senate to pass, meaning it needs robust bipartisan support. [Read more.](#)

#### **Select DNR News releases:**

- [Minnesota DNR seeks applicants for Lake Winnibigoshish, Rainy Lake input groups](#): The DNR is seeking people with a range of perspectives and experiences, including local fishing guides, local anglers, anglers from across Minnesota, local businesses and local resorts, and water-based businesses, to serve on two fisheries input groups, one for Lake Winnibigoshish and the other for Rainy Lake.
- [Minnesota DNR webinar series offers ways to learn about the outdoors this summer](#): Webinars on walleye genetics, buckthorn management, and fish dubbed “living fossils” like gar and paddlefish will be among the outdoors topics covered in the summer series of the Minnesota Outdoor Skills and Stewardship Series from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- [Minnesota DNR accepting comments on environmental review documents for proposed 3M Oakdale surface water diversion project](#): The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is accepting comments until 4:30 p.m. June 26 on an environmental assessment worksheet related to the 3M Oakdale surface water diversion project, located in Washington County.

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

With no final agreement, and no special session scheduled, conference committees continued to meet as working groups alongside House and Senate Leadership to reconcile differences and negotiate a final agreement. [Most working groups have wrapped up their work](#), but a few sticking points remain with the tax bill; and their final agreement rests on the tax bill being passed.

On Wednesday at 8:30 AM [Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council](#) convened for a meeting. Chair Hartwell introduced new members: Matt Kucharski (Governor Appointee), Darrel Palmer (House Citizen Appointee), Ted Suss (Senate Citizen Appointee), and Representative Samantha Vang (House Member Appointee). The

Council proceeded with discussion and action items: the Executive Director's Report included a recap of the legislative session, a summary of the May 9 site visit to The Nature Conservancy's prescribed burn presented by Sandy Smith, and an update on the ML2026/FY2027 Call for Funding Requests from Tom Rebman. The Council discussed and approved the 2025 meeting calendar. A presentation and discussion followed on the Restoration Evaluations Report (ML2023, Ch. 40, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 6(c)), led by Wade Johnson of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The Council then considered a request for conversion/conveyance related to MN DNR trout stream conservation easements (ML2021, First Special Session, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(h)), presented by Rick Walsh from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Wayne Ostlie from the Minnesota Land Trust. This was followed by discussion and action on another request for conversion/conveyance and permission to record a notice of funding restriction for the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum (ML2013, Ch. 137, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(e)), presented by Andrew Gapinski from the University of Minnesota. A presentation and discussion on the Minnesota Duck and Pheasant Action Plans update was given by Rob Baden, Detroit Lakes Area Wildlife Supervisor, and Joe Stangel, Acting Regional Wildlife Manager, both with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The Council also discussed the 2025 Outdoor Heritage Fund tours and site visits, including the upcoming June 24–25, 2025 tour and suggestions for additional summer and fall visits.

On Thursday at 2:00 PM, the [2025 Omnibus Environment Bill Working Group](#) met to reveal, and walkthrough of the [Omnibus Environment Bill final agreement](#). The House Working Group Members are Representatives Heintzeman; Schultz; Nelson; Fischer; Pursell; Finke, and the Senate Working Group Members are Senators Hawj; Kunesh; Johnson Stewart; Green; McEwen. See also: [Omnibus Environment Bill Spreadsheet](#), [Bill Summary](#), and [comment Letters](#) from: Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota AgriGrowth, APEX, ATV Minnesota, Conservation Minnesota, Clean Energy Economy, Minnesota Bowhunters, Jobs for Minnesotans, Keep it Clean Coalition, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Minnesota Milk Producers Association, Range Association of Municipalities and Schools, Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas, and The Nature Conservancy.