

# Conservation Connection

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

*Sponsored by: Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Pheasants Forever, Mn Musky and Pike Alliance, Sportsmen for the BWC/A, Mn Sharptail Grouse Society, Outdoor News, Ferguson Falls Fish and Game Club, Nicollet Conservation Club\**

**April 28, 2023**

## **Important Dates:**

- May 12-12: Governor's Fishing Opener, greater Mankato area
- May 22, 2023: Regular Session adjourns.

## **2023 Legislative News Highlights**

**With a \$17.5B surplus, MN Democrats aim for a budget with big spending, tax increases:** Minnesota Democrats are putting together a new two-year state budget that includes an unprecedented growth in spending as well as increased taxes and fees to fund new services and programs for the long term. Democrats say the roughly \$17.5 billion in new money for things like education, health care, transportation and other government programs is long overdue. While part of that new spending is one-time, DFLers also are poised to raise new taxes and fees to cover ongoing costs. . . Announced in late March, the DFL's agreed-upon spending targets are divided over dozens of different committee jurisdictions in the Minnesota House and Senate. Both chambers started passing their versions of the spending bills in early April. Any differences between the House and Senate plans will have to be settled by conference committees of select lawmakers from each chamber. Here's a look at where some of the biggest and most consequential budget bills stand: [Read more](#) and [here](#). [Read about the House tax plan](#). [Read about the Senate tax plan](#).

Now that both chambers have approved a number of omnibus bills, small conference groups will have to work out the differences between the House and Senate versions before they can go to Walz for his signature. Lawmakers' work on many different omnibus bills will continue over the final four weeks of the session. Read more on the status of omnibus bills [here](#).

**Just \$2 million apart, Legacy conference committee opens discussion:** Conferees on the omnibus Legacy finance bill (HF1999/SF1692), who met for the first time Wednesday learned they aren't too far apart. House and Senate versions of the bill are separated by a little over 0.25%, or \$2.09 million. The House omnibus bill would appropriate \$820.84 million; the Senate version comes in at \$818.75 million.

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Ratified by voters in 2008, the [Legacy amendment](#) splits a 0.375% sales tax increase four ways: 33% to the [Clean Water Fund](#); 33% to the [Outdoor Heritage Fund](#); 19.75% to the [Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund](#); and 14.25% to the [Parks and Trails Fund](#). The two legislative bodies agree on the appropriations for the Outdoor Heritage Fund at \$171.79 million. They nearly agree for the Parks and Trails Fund with the House suggesting \$136.61 million and the Senate wanting an additional \$4,000 on top of that. The Clean Water Fund differs by about \$1 million with the House at \$317.4 million and the Senate at \$318.4 million. It's the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund where the main differences show, although still slight. The House proposed a \$195.05 million appropriation, whereas the Senate planned for a \$191.95 million appropriation. [Read more](#). There are a few policy differences between the bills, but much of the consternation lies around whether the Legislature should make direct appropriations to organizations out of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund and how to address accountability for direct appropriations.

**On Wednesday, the Senate passed SF2904, the Environment Policy Omnibus bill off the floor** in a bipartisan vote of 51 to 16. Senator Hawj [amended the bill](#) to require the DNR to make recommendations to the legislature for reducing aquatic invasive species contamination in trout streams. Senator Drazkkowski and Senator Nelson also successfully [amended the bill](#), limiting the shotgun only zone during regular firearm deer season to Olmsted and Dodge counties. An amendment to allow for rulemaking regarding the importation of live minnows was adopted. Senator Pha also amended the bill to allow crossbow hunting to occur during archery seasons. No amendments to ban wolf hunting were offered in the Senate. See the bill summary [here](#).

On Wednesday, **the Senate also passed the omnibus Agriculture policy bill**, HF1587 (Putnam) on a 61-4 vote.

**Judiciary, public safety omnibus bill that includes gun-control measures passes House after extended debate:** Tuesday and Wednesday's nearly 11 hours of floor debate included two gun-control measures: universal background checks for handgun sales, and a "red-flag" provision that would allow family members and others to petition a court to have firearms removed from a person found to pose a significant danger to themselves or others. Sponsored by [Rep. Kelly Moller](#) (DFL-Shoreview), the amended [HF2890/SF2909\\*](#) contains language from [HF1580](#), the omnibus judiciary finance bill, and [HF2890](#), the Moller-sponsored omnibus public safety finance and policy bill. The House passed the bill, as amended, 69-60 late Wednesday afternoon. Initially passed [34-33](#) by the Senate April 14 along party lines, a conference committee is expected to iron out the differences. [Sen. Ron Latz](#) (DFL-St. Louis Park) is the Senate sponsor. [MORE: Read about the omnibus [judiciary](#) and [public safety](#) bills in the House] [Read more](#).

**Loons are falling from the sky in Minnesota and Wisconsin:** The Raptor Education Group, Inc., a northern Wisconsin nonprofit, says "loon fallout" events were reported. While it's common for a few loons to mistakenly land, REGI says the increase is due to the recent mixture of rain and snow and changing air currents, which causes the loons to develop ice on their bodies and become unable to fly. These "icing" conditions have been prevalent in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin this week and could continue into the weekend, said Bring Me The News [meteorologist Sven Sundgaard](#). Icing can occur at

temperatures as high as around 35 degrees Fahrenheit . . . Loons are unable to walk, rendering them vulnerable if they land out of water. [Read more.](#)

**Minnesota's Camp Ripley wins top environmental award:** the Department of Defense awarded the 2023 Secretary of Defense Environmental Award for Natural Resources Conservation on a large installation to Camp Ripley: the award states Camp Ripley has long been recognized as one of the most ecologically pristine training sites in the nation, sustaining training for the Minnesota Army National Guard on 53,000 acres that also support more than 600 plant species, 233 migratory and resident bird species, 51 mammal species, and 23 reptile and amphibian species; incredible habitat diversity; and 18 miles of untouched Mississippi River frontage. [Read more.](#)

**DNR takes important step toward building a modernized electronic license system:** The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota IT Services have selected conservation technology company S3 as the vendor to build a modern electronic licensing system to serve the state's anglers, boaters, hunters and recreational vehicle owners . . . Minnesotans will still be able to buy licenses at their favorite bait shop or sporting goods store, but the new system will provide much improved online capabilities, including the ability to buy and store licenses on mobile devices. Recreational vehicle and boat license and registration services will continue to be provided by mail, online or in-person at deputy registrar offices. The new system's construction and testing are expected to take about two years to complete, with a public launch expected in early 2025. [Read more.](#)

**Flooding, lock closures halt barge traffic on stretch of Mississippi River:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has closed eight of its Mississippi River locks in Minnesota and Wisconsin, saying river levels are unsafe for any navigation for the time being. The temporary closures block barge and other river traffic south of the Twin Cities. . . . The closures come as the Mississippi has been steadily rising — in some cases to the highest water levels seen in more than 20 years. . . . The Corps said it expects that locks and navigation are likely to reopen in a week or so, gradually at first as the impact of the flooding becomes clearer. [Read more.](#)

**Bait shortage presents issue for anglers as fishing opener looms:** Minnesota's fishing opener is May 13 and Wisconsin's opener is next weekend, but many anglers may not find the bait they want. Greg Fisher is co-owner of Vados Bait and Tackle in Spring Lake Park, and he's been in the bait business a long time. But just like an angler isn't sure if they'll catch a fish, Fisher isn't sure if he'll have enough spottail shiners for anglers. They're a favorite food of walleyes. . . . Spottails [are] a hot commodity and a rare one. The reason they're so hard to come by has to do with Mother Nature and invasive species. 'Most of the spot tail lakes are also zebra mussel lakes,' said Fisher. Zebra mussels have taken over some of the bait lakes up north. A large snowpack this year and drought the past couple of years have also hurt supply -- as some lakes and ponds have shrunk. To help with the shortage, the DNR is looking into new strategies, including potentially opening up more state land to bait suppliers. [Read more.](#)

**The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has selected seven applicants to receive Clean Water Funds through the pilot Clean Water Legacy Partners Grant Program.** Awarded applicants: Red Lake Nation; Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; Upper Sioux Community; Clean River Partners; Upper Red

Lake Area Association; Spark-Y: Youth Action Labs; Briggs Lake Chain Association. ... A total of \$1 million from the Clean Water Fund was available to nongovernmental organizations and tribal government applicants. More than 20 applications were received between Nov. 17, 2022, and Feb. 15, 2023. Funded projects include streambank and shoreline restoration, community engagement for water protection, and working with agricultural producers to protect and restore water quality. [Read more.](#)

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

- [Visitors to DNR-managed lands urged to check current conditions, take safety precautions:](#) Spring brings a variety of conditions visitors should be prepared for.
- [Minnesota moms: Join this Mother's Day weekend fishing challenge:](#) Moms who live in Minnesota are invited to join a free virtual fishing challenge Saturday, May 13, through Sunday, May 14, during Take a Mom Fishing Weekend, when all Minnesota moms can fish without purchasing a fishing license.
- [DNR seeks public input on Mille Lacs WMA master plan update:](#) The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources invites people interested in the Mille Lacs Wildlife Management Area to participate in a webinar and help inform the DNR's updates to the WMA's master plan.
- [Minnesota Twins offer free hats:](#) Anyone with a 2023 Minnesota fishing or hunting license can receive a free special edition orange Minnesota Twins logo cap and a ticket discount thanks to a special ticket offer from the Twins.
- [Report fish die-offs to help DNR, others respond as needed:](#) The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources encourages Minnesotans to contact the state duty officer if they see evidence of a fish die-off in a lake or stream.

#### **Last week at the Legislature:**

On Monday at 8:30 AM, the [Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources](#) convened for the following agenda items: Director's report, Information: Presentations from recently- completed projects: Den Boxes for Fishers and other Nesting Wildlife, U of MN - Duluth NRRI, Michael Joyce, \$190,000 and Characterize Unregulated Contaminants in Source Water and Drinking Water, Minnesota Department of Health, Stephen Robertson, \$1,000,000. The commission also received an update regarding rights exchange, environmental remediation, and restrictive covenant from Jim Janssen - Town of Crane Lake, Jennifer Force - SEH, and Jeff Anderson. See also: [Staff Memo](#) from August 27, 2022 and [Site Aerial Map](#) Voyageurs National Park Visitors Center, Crane Lake: Land Acquisition for Voyageurs National Park Crane Lake Visitors Center, \$950,000, Crane Lake Voyageurs National Park Campground, \$3,100,000 and Voyageurs National Park Crane Lake Visitors Center Project, \$2,700,000. The Commission will take action on LCCMR [operational procedures](#) modifications and Proposal evaluation/selection process for 2024 LCCMR recommendations: see also [Staff Memo](#). The commission also discussed Site Visits for Fall 2023 and took public testimony.

On Wednesday at 9:00 AM, the [Conference Committee on HF 1999](#), the Omnibus Legacy Finance Bill, convened to walkthrough the [side-by-side](#) and [spreadsheet](#). The House Conferees are Reps. Lillie, Hussein, Her, Cha, Backer and the Senate Conferees are Sens. Hawj, Morrison, Mohamed, Pha, Housley. See also: [written testimony to the committee](#) from: Metropolitan Council, Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT) organization, Association of Minnesota Counties, Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities, Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance, League of Minnesota Cities, and [Interagency Coordinating Team \(ICT\)](#), consisting of: Departments of Health, Agriculture, and Natural Resources, the Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Metropolitan Council, the Pollution Control Agency, and the Public Facilities Authority.

#### **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. Conference committees on bills that have passed out of both bodies have begun; leadership has requested that conference committee reports be completed by May 5th.

On Monday at 8:30 AM, the Conference Committee on S.F. 1955, [The Agriculture, Broadband and Rural Development Finance Bill](#) will meet to walkthrough of Side-by-Sides and Spreadsheet. Senate Conferees: Kupec, Westrom, Putnam; House Conferees: Anderson, P. H., Pursell, Vang. The Senate has the gavel. See also: [Article 1 Side-by-Side](#), [Article 2 Side-by-Side](#), [SF 1955 Conference Committee Spreadsheet - Change Items Only](#), and [SF 1955 Conference Committee Spreadsheet - Detailed Base](#).

At 9:00 AM, the [Environment, Natural Resources, Climate and Energy Conference Committee \(HF2310\)](#) will meet for a walk-through of the Side by Side and Spreadsheets, take testimony from State Agencies, and adopt potential items of agreement. House Conferees: Hansen, Acomb, Hollins, Jordan, Kraft, and Senate Conferees: Hawj, Frentz, McEwen, Xiong, Coleman. The House has the gavel.

At 10:00 AM, the [Conference Committee on SF 2909 - The Omnibus Public Safety & Judiciary Finance Bill](#) will meet for an overview of language in Senate and House bills. House Conferees: Moller, Becker-Finn, Feist, Frazier, Curran and Senate Conferees: Latz, Oumou Verbeten, Pappas, Seeberger, Westlin. The Senate will have the gavel.

At 1:00 PM, the [Conference Committee on SF1955 - The Agriculture, Broadband and Rural Development Finance Bill](#) will meet to continue their work on the walk-through side-by-side documents and spreadsheet, take public testimony, and review of same and similar provisions.

On Wednesday at 8:30 AM, Senate [State and Local Government and Veterans](#) will convene to hear, among other bills: [S.F. 2404 \(Hawj\)](#): Constitutional amendment providing for the renewal of the environment and natural resources trust fund: see also: [Fiscal Note](#) and [Bill Summary](#).

### **Conference Committee Membership:**

#### **Omnibus Legacy bill:**

The conferees are as follows:

**House:** Lillie, Hussein, Her, Cha, Backer

**Senate:** Hawj, Morrison, Mohamed, Pha, Housley

#### **Omnibus Environment bill:**

The conferees are as follows:

**House:** Hansen, R.; Acomb; Hollins; Jordan; Kraft

**Senate:** Hawj; Frentz; McEwen; Xiong; Coleman

#### **Omnibus Agriculture bill**

The conferees are as follows:

**House:** Anderson, P. H., Pursell, Vang

**Senate:** Putnam, Kupec, Westrom

### **Bills of Interest:**

There are no deadlines on bill introductions during session, however, committee deadlines have expired for the 2023 session and action is unlikely to be taken on any bills being introduced.

**Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) and Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF):** Please click [here](#) for a list of bills of pertinence to the OHF maintained by LSOHC staff.

### **Environment and Natural Resources:**

#### **Majority Party legislation:**

**Stephenson introduced:** [H. F. 3284](#). A bill for an act relating to capital investment; appropriating money for capital improvements to the Rum River Dam in the city of Anoka; authorizing the sale and issuance of state bonds. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Capital Investment. *Senate companion:* [S.F. No. 3297](#) (Hoffman).

**Pursell introduced:** [H. F. 3292](#), A bill for an act relating to agriculture; establishing a soil-healthy farming mentorship grant program; appropriating money for grants promoting soil health practices. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy. *No Senate companion.*

**Pursell introduced:** [H. F. 3293](#), A bill for an act relating to agriculture; setting soil-healthy farming goals for the state of Minnesota. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy. *No Senate companion.*

**Minority party legislation:**

**Skraba introduced:** [H. F. 3291](#), A bill for an act relating to natural resources; appropriating money for capital improvements to the International Wolf Center. The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Capital Investment. *No Senate companion.*