

January 26, 2009

COMMENTS FOR THE LESSARD OUTDOOR HERITAGE COUNCIL

CITIZEN EXPECTATION

My comments today are in regard to the Outdoor Heritage Fund that will soon be generated by the sales tax amendment.

Having promoted a healthy environment, wearing many different hats, for the past 50 plus years, I can assure this council that the majority of the citizens of this state are 100 percent behind you as we move forward in an attempt to recover our degraded environment.

What you have seen thus far are stakeholders who come to you with out-reached hands looking for money to further the goals that are important to their particular group. The list of organizations, state and county agencies and cities who are now developing funding proposals for your examination is long and complex. Many of these proposals will be exceptional projects and merit your funding consideration.

You have also listened as some of these organizations and agencies have presented ways in which they would deliver programs beneficial to the environment. These stakeholder groups are well organized, and have put considerable resources into their presentations. Bear in mind, there will be some benefit to these groups as well as to the environmental improvements they produce. As you well know, the sluggish economy affects both government agencies and private organizations with financial shortcomings.

Having said all of these things that you already know, there is another stakeholder involved with the Outdoor Heritage Fund. That stakeholder is the citizen who is watching to see how this amendment applies itself by doing what it said it was going to do. The movement to initiate the idea of the sales tax amendment as a means of providing the money necessary for clean and abundant wildlife and water habitats came from these stakeholder citizens. These people are passionate and have expectations. Whether they voted for or against the amendment, these stakeholders expect the rivers to become less impaired than they now are, they expect that their children will be able to play in the water, they expect fish consumption advisories to decline, they expect wildlife to be more abundant, and they expect that there will be more places where the natural world can be observed. They expect not just restoration but also acquisition. We need to put this money to work in the very best possible places so that the expectations of the citizen stakeholder can be manifested. We can not afford environmental degradation because it is good for the economy. We can not afford government that stands in the way of providing for clean water and more wildlife habitat. We can not afford to make biased and unwise decisions. We can not afford more of the same. We can not afford more excuses. The citizen stakeholder expects results.

It is uncomfortable for all of us to discuss those circumstances which have contributed to the degradation of Minnesota's environment. But overwhelmingly, the citizens have declared that

we need a different approach to solving this problem. The citizen stakeholder is not asking how polluted is Lake Pepin, they are calling for it to be cleaned-up. The citizen stakeholder is not asking why can't we save our wetlands, they are insisting they be saved, restored and created. The citizen stakeholder is not asking why are we unable to have more habitat for wildlife and native plants, they are demanding acquisition of areas that can be converted back into those natural habitats.

We know what to do. We know how to have cleaner lakes, streams and rivers, and we know how to bring into being abundant wildlife resources by providing better habitat. We know how to protect our supply of drinking water. The challenge will be getting around all of those factors that stand in our way. In the past, environmental problems have brought about the creation of government agencies. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, was created to perform as a regulatory operation and was supposed to be the answer to clean lakes, rivers and drinking water. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources was supposed to be the solution to shrinking natural plant and animal habitats, and, likewise, their populations. The answer to environmental concerns has always been to give government agencies more money in the hope that things will improve. The citizen stakeholder, by agreeing to fund the environment through a different model, is expecting that type of thinking to change. The citizen stakeholders are not criticizing past performances but are recognizing the importance of finding ways to spend the Lessard Heritage Fund money in ways that result in direct environmental improvements. Spin as we might, layers of administrators, technicians, engineers, seminars, and paperwork are part of the problem. For this money to pass through several different government agencies before getting to a project is not what tax payers expect. Additionally, legislators need to enact and enforce regulations which would produce immediate, positive environmental benefits. The citizen stakeholders feel that the intent of the amendment was to take positive, immediate steps to fix those environmental problems that we have created, rather than grow government.

I want to leave you today with an example of what citizen stakeholders have done. The aerial photograph on the next page is from LeSueur County, Minnesota. The owners name is Arnold Kreuger. The largest wetland is about 30 acres. The six or seven additional wetlands are about 10 acres in size. Much of the farm is in native grasses, although some crop land is rented out to a neighbor. None of the wetlands existed prior to Mr Kreuger's ownership. Through a series of diversions and dikes, Arnold was able with minimal cost, to create what you see in this picture. It is home to waterfowl, pheasants, turkeys, deer, abundant non-game animals and a wide variety of diverse plant life. This project was similar to the movie, "Field of Dreams", when it was said, "build it and they will come". Mr Kreuger spent about 20,000 dollars on the wetland projects (excluding the cost of the land).

The majority of Minnesota citizens understand that our environment is degraded and want the government to act. Legislators, "lets roll"!!!

Thank you for your consideration.....

Respectfully
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