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LCCMR announces expedited funding for monitoring highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in Minnesota wildlife

Funding to come from Minnesota's lottery-generated Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

(St. Paul, MN, January 6, 2025) Governor Walz on January 3, 2025, approved a recommendation from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for \$1,267,000 from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) to address the novel and escalating threat posed to wildlife by highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), commonly known as “bird flu,” in Minnesota.

This support for the Wildlife Health Network, made possible through the LCCMR's Emerging Issues Account, will allow researchers at the University of Minnesota's College of Veterinary Medicine to collaborate with state, federal, and tribal biologists, wildlife rehabilitation centers, zoos, the Humane Society's wildlife unit, and others to ramp up testing of HPAI in wildlife and better understand the current threat beyond the state's wild and domestic bird populations.

LCCMR co-chair Nancy Gibson said, in a joint statement with fellow LCCMR co-chairs Rep. Rick Hansen and Sen. Fong Hawj, “Rapidly evolving threats like HPAI don't go on hiatus between funding cycles. We are grateful that the LCCMR can provide Minnesota's wildlife professionals with timely support from the ENRTF that allows them to do what they do best – putting their expertise to work bolstering Minnesota's immune system against HPAI.”

HPAI, which project lead Dr. Arno Wuenschmann calls a “ticking time bomb” for animal and human health, is a virus that has historically affected wild and domestic bird populations. Previous outbreaks have ended within several months of beginning. The current outbreak of HPAI, however, is already two years in duration and has spread beyond birds to domestic and wild mammals in Minnesota, including dairy cows, red foxes, black bear, and domestic cats, as well as to humans.

The LCCMR's Emerging Issues Account is for efforts addressing an unexpected and urgent need in an expedited manner, including environmental or disease issues where delay will threaten the viability of segments of the State's natural resources or human health. Requests for funds from the Emerging Issues Account follow a different process than the LCCMR's RFP and funding recommendation process. After recommendation by the commission, this request was sent to the Governor for approval. Funds may be spent upon approval of the project work plan.

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund is a permanent dedicated fund in the Minnesota state treasury that was established by 77% voter approval of a constitutional amendment in 1988. The amendment directs forty percent of the net proceeds of the Minnesota State Lottery into the Trust Fund through the year 2050. Since 1991, approximately \$1.1 billion from the ENRTF has been spent on over 1,700 projects that protect and enhance Minnesota's environment and natural resources in every county of the state.

The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources is made up of 5 state senators, 5 state representatives, and 7 citizen members. The function of the LCCMR is to make funding recommendations to the Minnesota State Legislature for special environment and natural resource projects, primarily from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The LCCMR developed from a program initiated in 1963. Since then, approximately \$1.5 billion has been appropriated to over 2,600 projects recommended to protect and enhance Minnesota's environment and natural resources.

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