



LEGISLATIVE CITIZEN COMMISSION ON MINNESOTA RESOURCES

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Susan Thornton, Director

July 15, 2016

Robert Venette
Director
Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center
1992 Folwell Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55108

Dear Director Venette,

On July 12-13, 2016, the LCCMR selected from the proposals responding to the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2017 Request for Proposal process to determine the projects that will be recommended for funding to the 2017 Minnesota Legislature. Two proposals responding to that process – #107-D “Implementing Biological Control of Garlic Mustard” and #112-D “Mountain Pine Beetle Phase II: Protecting Minnesota” – were not selected as part of the recommendations to the legislature. However, the LCCMR did see merit in both proposals and therefore a motion was passed by the LCCMR that both proposals must be funded from the approximately \$8.965 million in yet to be allocated ENRTF funds appropriated to the Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center (MITPPC) at the University of Minnesota at the following funding levels:

- \$421,000 for #107-D “Implementing Biological Control of Garlic Mustard”
- \$384,000 for #112-D “Mountain Pine Beetle Phase II: Protecting Minnesota”

Given that both of the species targeted in the two proposals were identified as ranking very high within the MITPPC’s recently released draft of the document “Minnesota’s Top 124 Terrestrial Invasive Plants and Pests: Priorities for Research” – mountain pine beetle as the #1 overall priority and garlic mustard as the #28 overall priority – the LCCMR thought it was important and appropriate that these projects be enabled to get underway as soon as possible to target MITPPC identified priorities using ENRTF funds that are presently available and not otherwise being utilized at this time.

The motion funding these two projects from existing appropriations for the MITPPC was in part the result of LCCMR discussions of some items pertaining to the MITPPC that were raised during the 2017 proposal process. First, initial funding for the MITPPC was first appropriated in 2014 and has therefore been available for over two years. To date the total amount appropriated for the MITPPC now equals \$13.61 million. However, at this point only a handful of projects have gotten underway accounting for \$1.244 million. Part of the intention of creating the MITPPC was to provide a more flexible, informed, and responsive funding mechanism for research to address the greatest invasive species threats to the state. The importance and significance of the MITPPC undertaking the lengthy prioritization process is appreciated by the LCCMR and it is understood that the process is now nearing finalization. However, given the potential for significant consequences for the state of waiting longer than necessary to make decisions and take action on a particular invasive species, it is also important for the MITPPC to seek a balance between having thorough consideration of priorities and judging when adequate information is available on an issue to take appropriate, expedient action. Given your testimony that the mountain pine beetle has been identified as likely being the number one invasive insect threat to the state and perhaps the most important terrestrial invasive species issue that the entire state faces, the LCCMR felt it is justified and prudent to get the efforts identified in proposal 112-D underway as soon as possible.

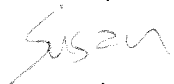
Second, given your characterization of the parameters around how the MITPPC defines its mission it appears that perhaps there has been some misunderstanding about the intent of the legislature when it created the MITPPC. With regard to proposal 112-D your testimony on 06/27/16 suggested that there are components of that proposal that would not be eligible for funding through the MITPPC. With regard to 107-D your letter to the LCCMR on 05/13/16 indicated that this proposal is operational in nature and not eligible for funding through the MITPPC. You have suggested that the reason components of 112-D and 107-D as a whole are not eligible is that MITPPC is an applied research center and these projects, in part or in whole, are not applied research. However, it is the position of the LCCMR that both of these proposals do fall under the category of applied research, particularly 107-D as it is research pertaining to the final stage of testing and applying research findings on a potential garlic mustard biocontrol. As such, both proposals are eligible for funding through the MITPPC with the ENRTF funds appropriated to it. While both proposals have elements that may not be "applied research" independently, the efforts are being proposed in support of the overall purpose of each effort to conduct applied research to find solutions to invasive species threats. As such, the LCCMR felt it is justified and prudent to also get the efforts identified in proposal 107-D underway as soon as possible.

Mission definitions defined too narrowly should not hinder this ultimate purpose of the MITPPC to pursue the best outcomes for Minnesota and the LCCMR welcomes the opportunity to work with the MITPPC to ensure this flexibility exists for it.

The LCCMR has taken these actions funding these two proposals out of the existing ENRTF appropriations to the MITPPC to help enact the will of the Minnesota Legislature when it created the MITPPC and the intent of the LCCMR when it recommended a total of \$10.21 million of funding for the center. Please contact LCCMR staff to begin the process of directing portions of ENRTF appropriations to the MITPPC toward the efforts represented by the proposals #107-D "Implementing Biological Control of Garlic Mustard" and #112-D "Mountain Pine Beetle Phase II: Protecting Minnesota" and to begin the work plan development and peer review process for each. Additionally, it is requested that the appropriate parties be convened in the upcoming months to work with the LCCMR to revisit the mission of the MITPPC so that it aligns with the broader intentions of the Legislature and the LCCMR.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Susan Thornton
Director, LCCMR

CC:

Brian Buhr, Dean, CFANS

Greg Cuomo, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs, CFANS

Heather Koop, Associate Director, MITPPC

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Ms. Nancy Gibson, Co-chair
Rep. John Persell, Co-chair
Sen. David Tomassoni, Co-chair
Legislative and Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Blvd.
Room 65 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155-1201

August 4, 2016

Dear Ms. Gibson, Rep. Persell, and Sen. Tomassoni,

On August 3, 2016, LCCMR Staff (Ms. Susan Thornton, Mike Banker, and Michael Varien) met with us to discuss and clarify decisions that affect the Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center (MITPPC). Specifically, we discussed projects #107-D, "Implementing biological control of garlic mustard," and #112-D, "Mountain pine beetle phase II: protecting Minnesota" that were submitted to LCCMR in response to the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund 2017 Request for Proposals. We are pleased to hear of LCCMR's support for these proposals. This letter summarizes the outcome of our discussion with staff.

MITPPC has committed to the state to identify high priority themes for applied research on terrestrial invasive species and to vet proposals for scientific merit and practical relevance. Any research supported by MITPPC must have a strong potential to lead to the elimination or mitigation of risks posed by high-priority, terrestrial invasive species. This approach allows for the wise investment of limited research dollars to achieve practical outcomes. The Center approach requires the University to engage with numerous, diverse stakeholders to ensure that applied research meets needs of those who actually manage terrestrial invasive species in the field. At the same time, the Center approach allows scientists to identify where genuine research needs exist and to scrutinize proposals to ensure sound, rigorous approaches to research questions.

Projects #107-D and #112-D address garlic mustard and mountain pine beetle, respectively, each of which was identified as a significant threat to the state in our prioritization process. Thus, we are fully prepared to vet these proposals to ensure that they meet standards for high-quality research. We will begin immediately to work with the lead scientists on those projects to clarify the scope and intent of the work in expanded research plans. Those plans are to be completed by September 30, 2016. We will then solicit peer review of the proposals. We understand that earlier phases of these projects underwent peer review, but in our opinion, those reviews were conducted long enough ago or the scope of work has changed sufficiently to warrant another round of review. MITPPC may ask scientists to modify the research plan in response to comments received. After peer review, MITPPC will make a final funding determination. We will provide you with an update on the status of those reviews and decisions no later than at your meeting on November 14, 2016. We will then work with LCCMR staff on final approvals to incorporate these proposals as sub-projects into an existing work plan with LCCMR that

supports the Center. Our intent is for research outlined in the work plans to be able to begin no later than January 1, 2017, if approved.

We will also engage with LCCMR staff in the near future to discuss whether and how it might be possible to avoid duplicate grant proposals to LCCMR and MITPPC. Our intent is to work with the LCCMR to develop a long-term strategy to direct Terrestrial Invasive Species project proposals through the MITPPC. Ultimately, the MITPPC has no authority to prevent anyone from responding to an open call for proposals from LCCMR.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage with you at your earliest convenience to provide a more detailed update to the outcome of our prioritization process, the status of our next call for proposals, and plans for the future of MITPPC. The legislature made an eight-year commitment to the development and support of a research center on terrestrial invasive species. That decision sets Minnesota apart nationally. We are extremely grateful for the support and have worked diligently to put procedures into place to make that vision a reality. We look forward to working with you as your help is essential to the long-term success of MITPPC.

Sincerely



Robert C. Venette, PhD
Director, Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center



Greg J. Cuomo, PhD
Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs
College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences

Cc: S. Thornton, Director LCCMR