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July 25, 2022

Dear members of the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources,

On behalf of local parks and trails and the citizens across the state who use them, we are writing to ask you to support the Department of Natural Resources' request G2023-039 to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for funding for Local Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas Grants.

Our organization, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT), is made up of more than 130 cities, counties, parks groups, individuals, and others who seek to connect people to the outdoors and improve the quality of life for Minnesotans. We believe that funding these grant programs will have a significant and beneficial impact on the natural resources, health, and economic well-being of our communities.

Local parks, trails, and natural areas are often the first, and sometimes only, exposure many Minnesotans have to nature and outdoor resources. While Minnesota's state parks and trails are invaluable assets, unfortunately they are out of reach for many citizens—at least for daily or frequent use—due to distance or a lack of trail connections. That is why local parks and trails are so important to our communities across Minnesota. Investing in these resources will serve to protect, conserve, and enhance Minnesota's natural resources for generations to come.

With increasingly tighter budgets hit hard by inflation, it is difficult to obtain the funding needed to modernize our local parks and trails and meet the emerging needs of our communities or connect them to state and regional trails. Legacy funding helps to build out and maintain state and regional parks and trails, but local trails and parks are not eligible for those funds. These programs are especially important to Greater Minnesota because they are among the few grants that we can access.

We appreciate the support that the LCCMR has provided in the past and encourage you to provide that same level of support in your recommendations. More funding for these programs is needed given the high demand for grants and the statewide reach. The recently announced FY2023 Outdoor Recreation and Local Trail Connections grants paint a picture of this broad reach with projects across the state from Prior Lake to Elbow Lake, Marshall to Cottage Grove, South St. Paul to Douglas County, and many places in between. Allocating a portion of the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund would continue to provide much-needed support to underfunded community resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Ben Anderson at Benjamin.Anderson@co.stearns.mn.us or 320-654-4725 or Gina Hugo at Gina.Hugo@co.sherburne.mn.us or 763-765-3308. We would love to work with you to ensure Greater Minnesota's parks and trails continue to thrive and grow.

Sincerely,



Ben Anderson
Chair, Greater MN Parks & Trails
Stearns County, Parks Director



Gina Hugo
Vice Chair, Greater MN Parks & Trails
Sherburne County, Parks Coordinator