

**Minnesota Conservation Federation  
Legislative Report  
Gary Botzek, Executive Director  
April 2010**

As spring continues to unfold, so does the end of the legislative session. By law they must be done with their work by May 17 this year. They are in pretty good shape. They have passed part of a budget deficit bill and are waiting on word from the federal government regarding health care dollars that may be coming to Minnesota which the legislature can use to balance another part of the budget. That leaves K-12 education and those are big dollars and more cuts are expected.

As these big picture items are moving or not, the legislature is finishing up the “normal work”, including environmental and conservations bills.

Here is a summary:

**Lessard Council/Dedicated Sales Tax dollars:**

The second year of dedicated sales tax dollars totals nearly \$60 million. There is money for prairie restoration, aquatic habitat, land restoration and forest-related projects. Over 16,000 acres would be protected; 6,700 through easements and 9,800 through acquisition. Over 42,000 acres would be enhanced; 4,700 acres would be restored and over 100 miles of shoreline protection. Each \$1 in state money would be matched with 63 cents from local efforts. 82 counties would have a project including all seven metro counties where 20% of the money would be spent. This is exactly what the voters expected to see done with this new money when they voted for the Dedicated Sales Tax Constitutional Amendment in 2008.

The bills to watch on this one are SF3275—Senator Ellen Anderson (D-St. Paul) and HF 3702-Rep. Jean Wagenius (D-Minneapolis). HF3790—Rep. Mary Murphy (D-Hermantown) also has a bill that covers the Lessard Council dollars, as well as some clean water changes.

There has been action to resolve the definitional concerns from last session. The Senate has voted to repeal the definitions in current law and use the definitions of “enhance, restore and protect” from the constitution and Lessard Council. The House continues to support the definitions in the statute which allows them more flexibility as to how and where the sales tax dollars can be spent. This issue is expected to be debated and hopefully resolved in a conference committee.

**LCCMR Funds from Lottery Dollars:**

Around \$26 million in appropriations from state lottery proceeds is moving through the legislature as well. The Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota’s Resources made their recommendations and has turned the bill over to the legislature to pass. Forty-eight projects were chosen to be funded including natural resources data and information, land, habitat, and recreation, water resources, aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, renewable energy, and environmental education.

The bills to watch here at SF2462-Anderson and HF2624-Wagenius.

This bill is headed for conference committee due to amendment added by Rep. Tom Rukavina (D-Virginia) which would redirect \$4.2 million from proposed land acquisition toward state parks improvements. The Senate did not add this language.

Much fuel has been added to continued acquisition of state land for conservation purposes from an Office of the Legislative Auditor's report that was released in March. The report contains strong concerns and recommendations regarding DNR's ability to manage the lands it already owns.

**Other Game and Fish Matters:**

Each year the legislature assembles an omnibus game and fish bill with a variety of issues and policy changes to our hunting and angling statutes and rules. This year these matters appear to be landing in SF2900-Senator Chaudhary (D-Fridley) and HF3124-Rep. Dill (D-Crane Lake).

The House bill includes elimination of the height restrictions for tree deer stands, changes in the muskrat, mink, otter, and beaver season in the forest trapping zone, would allow anglers to purchase a second license for \$10 to fish with two lines, allow counties to offer a bounty on taking coyotes, and allow spearing for northern pike in Cass Lake.

The Senate bill would restrict recreational feeding of wildlife from Sept. 1 to Dec. 31, contains a number of youth hunting provisions, standardizes tree stands at 16 feet for all big game, requires that hunters be 20 feet from a vehicle before shooting at a grouse, removes the requirement that the waterfowl season not open before the Saturday closest to Oct. 1, and would create a variety of rules for the 2010 3A deer season.

SF2900 also contains a fishing license increase in order to pay for the youth hunting changes and angling changes, as well as provides for the dollars for a two-year pilot walk-in program for hunters on private property.

**2010 MCF Policy Resolutions:**

Some of the MCF 2010 policy resolutions that were passed at the annual meeting have gotten some attention at the Capitol and elsewhere.

**Protection of Young Ducks in Minnesota Wetlands:**

This resolution calls on state and local governments to protect nesting hens and young ducks by delaying wetland and storm water pond grass mowing until September 1. We did get the bill introduced as SF2906-Chadhary (D-Fridley) and HF3289-Gardner (D-Shoreview) but did not get a hearing. A number of legislators and local government lobbyists have asked me about this bill.

**Proposed Canada Pipeline through Minnesota:**

This resolution calls for the strongest, tightest environmental protection of the 1,000 miles of pipeline from Alberta, Canada to Superior, Wisconsin. The pipeline, which will carry Alberta tar sands oil for refining in Superior, had been fast tracked by the federal government. The line is done and operational and now over 80% of the crude oil received in Minnesota arrives from the Alberta Tar sands. Keith Blomstrom, for the MCF, took a pipeline safety/dirty fuel resolution to the recently held NFW annual meeting held in Houston.

**Property Tax Relief for Sportsmen's Club Properties:**

The resolution calls on the state legislature to consider changes in the state tax code to better protect shooting ranges and sportsmen's club properties from ever increasing property tax increases. I had a series of meetings with key legislators and staff regarding the current property tax relief under "open spaces" protection. I believe that relief provisions provided under MS273.112 may be just what some of our sportsman's clubs and shooting ranges may be able to use in order to provide some property tax relief for the valuable properties. Talk to your county auditor about that law. If we have to make changes to the current law, we will next year. We are also looking into sportsmen's club property that may be leased from a local unit of government.

The MCF will continue to stay involved in the policy and funding decisions made at the State Capitol regarding conservation and the environment. I hope to see some of you at our quarterly meeting to be held on Saturday, June 12 at the Lakeview Gander Mountain.

If you have questions about the MCF and our priorities, please call me at 651-293-9295 or email me at [gary@capitolconnections.com](mailto:gary@capitolconnections.com). Be sure to visit our website at [www.mncf.org](http://www.mncf.org).