



# Conservation Connection



A Minnesota Legislative Outdoor Newsletter: Created by Kim Scott and Alexandra David

Sponsored by: Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Fergus Falls Fish and Game Club,  
Fish Lake Conservation Club, Izaak Walton League, MN Musky and Pike Alliance,  
MN Sharptail Grouse Society, Outdoor News, Pheasants Forever, Sportsmen for the BWCA\*

June 10, 2025:

Important Dates:

- February 17, 2026: First day of the 2026 Legislative Session.

**Minnesota lawmakers finish work on \$66 billion budget before deadline:** Minnesota lawmakers finished work on the \$66 billion state budget early Tuesday morning, averting a shutdown and capping off a year of political turmoil in a Legislature that is almost evenly split between Republicans and Democrats. The Legislature gavelled into a special session on Monday morning, and by evening the House had finished passing all of the 14 bills that will fund state government. The state Senate finished its work a few hours later, avoiding a fast-approaching requirement to warn employees they could be laid off. It was an outcome that at times seemed uncertain. The year started off with a [power struggle for control of the House](#) and boycott by Democrats, but also featured a [senator who resigned in scandal, growing tension between Gov. Tim Walz](#) and Washington, and a [\\$6 billion projected deficit](#) in a future budget that tested the most closely divided group of lawmakers in the nation.

**Lawmakers acknowledged as they worked on the budget that neither Republicans nor Democrats were completely happy with the deal,** which required compromises from members of both parties.

The bill to strip health care from undocumented immigrants passed largely with Republican votes, but DFL leaders who pledged to support the legislation as part of the larger budget deal voted in favor of it, along with three moderate Democratic senators. As they debated other spending bills, several legislators at the Capitol complained about the way the budget was passed. Most of the controversial issues were resolved in negotiations behind closed doors over the past few weeks. Some committees met only briefly in public to reveal what was in the bills before a vote. [Read more.](#)

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**\$1.19 billion Environmental and Natural Resources bill heads to Governor:** [T]he omnibus environment and natural resources budget and policy bill would fund two large state entities, the Pollution Control Agency and the Department of Natural Resources. [The] bill also has a breadth to it that would fund projects touching almost every aspect of daily life, ranging from making improvements to regional parks and trails, funding outdoors schools for K-12 students, and studying ways to reduce toxic algae blooms in lakes. There are significant policy changes in the bill, also wide-ranging, from restructuring the environmental permitting processes used by the Pollution Control Agency to extending the bass fishing season to all year. Passed 105-26 by the House and 38-29 by the Senate Monday, SSHF8/SSSF3\* now heads to the governor. [Rep. Josh Heintzeman](#) (R-Nisswa) and [Sen. Foung Hawj](#) (DFL-St. Paul) are the sponsors.

Some of the big-ticket items that would be funded by \$1.19 billion in 2026-27 General Fund appropriations include:

- \$796.9 million for the Department of Natural Resources;
- \$305.3 million for the Pollution Control Agency; and
- \$32.2 million for the Board of Water and Soil Resources.

The bill would also appropriate \$103.3 million in fiscal year 2026 from the [Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund](#) for more than [100 projects](#). Trust Fund money is generated by the Minnesota State Lottery, and each year the Legislature distributes grants from the fund as recommended by the [Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources](#). Hawj said the projects will protect and preserve the state's natural resources through a new funding system requiring grants to focus on communities affected by climate change, low-income communities, and other underserved areas . . . referring to a provision in the bill that would make statutory changes to Trust Fund [community] grant programs by requiring community grants to be expended for benefits across all regions and residents of the state, allowing community grants to be awarded for trail maintenance and improvement and aquatic invasive species management, and prohibiting the awarding of community grants to a state agency, the University of Minnesota, or for scientific research.

**Policy changes:** Many of the proposed policy changes focus on reforming the permitting processes used by the Pollution Control Agency by making them more efficient and speedier for businesses needing environmental permits to operate in the state. Rep. Heintzeman called the changes long overdue, while also acknowledging the result is a compromise not everyone is happy about.

Pollution Control Agency [permitting] reforms would:

- require the agency's annual permitting efficiency report to focus on the more complicated Tier 2 permits, and include additional information about permits that have not met the statutory goal, as well as other modifications;
- require permit applicants five business days to remedy identified deficiencies in permit applications; and

- limit who could file discretionary environmental assessment worksheets to people residing in the county in which a proposed project will be undertaken or in one or more adjoining counties.

Other notable policy provisions include:

- Repealing the shotgun zone for deer hunting, effective January 1, 2026;
- establishing a sustainable foraging task force to recommend to the Legislature science-based foraging guidelines for state lands that balance public access with conservation needs;
- making the open season for bass fishing continuous; and
- authorizing DNR officers to tag abandoned watercraft and making owners criminally and civilly liable for abandoning watercraft.

[View summary of policy provisions](#), [Environment Special Session Budget Bill](#), [Environment Special Session Bill Summary](#).

See how legislators voted:

Y ABELER	Y FRENTZ	Y KUPEC	Y PAPPAS
N ANDERSON	N GREEN	N LANG	Y PHA
N BAHR	N GRUENHAGEN	Y LATZ	Y PORT
Y BOLDON	Y GUSTAFSON	N LIESKE	N PRATT
Y CARLSON	Y HAUSCHILD	N LIMMER	Y PUTNAM
Y CHAMPION	Y HAWJ	N LUCERO	N RARICK
Y CLARK	Y HEINTZEMAN	Y MANN	N RASMUSSEN
N COLEMAN	Y HOFFMAN	Y MARTY	Y REST
Y CWODZINSKI	Y HOUSLEY	N MATHEWS	Y SEEBERGER
N DAHMS	N HOWE	Y MAYE QUADE	N UTKE
Y DIBBLE	N JASINSKI	Y MCEWEN	N WEBER
N DORNINK	N JOHNSON	N MILLER	N WESENBERG
N DRAHEIM	Y JOHNSON STEWART	Y MITCHELL	Y WESTLIN
Y DRAZKOWSKI	Y KLEIN	Y MOHAMED	N WESTROM
N DUCKWORTH	N KORAN	Y MURPHY	Y WIKLUND
N FARNSWORTH	N KREUN	N NELSON	Y XIONG
Y FATEH	Y KUNESH	Y OUMOU VERBETEN	
SF 3	HAWJ		
FINAL PASSAGE		YEA 38	NAY 29

ACOMB	●	FALCONER	●	HUDSON	●	MEKELAND	●	RYMER	●
AGBAJE	●	FEIST	●	HUOT	●	MOLLER	●	SCHOMACKER	●
ALLEN	●	FINKE	●	HUSSEIN	●	MOMANYI-HILTSLEY	●	SCHULTZ	●
ALTENDORF	●	FISCHER	●	IGO	●	MUELLER	●	SCHWARTZ	●
ANDERSON, P. E.	●	FOGELMAN	●	JACOB	●	MURPHY	●	SCOTT	●
ANDERSON, P. H.	●	FRANSON	●	JOHNSON, P.	●	MYERS	●	SENCER-MURA	●
BACKER	●	FRAZIER	●	JOHNSON, W.	●	NADEAU	●	SEXTON	●
BAHNER	●	FREDERICK	●	JONES	●	NASH	●	SKRABA	●
BAKEBERG	●	FREIBERG	●	JORDAN	●	NELSON	●	SMITH	●
BAKER	●	GANDER	●	JOY	●	NISKA	●	STEPHENSON	●
BENNETT	●	GILLMAN	●	KEELER	●	NOOR	●	STIER	●
BERG	●	GOMEZ	●	KLEVORN	●	NORRIS	●	SWEDZINSKI	●
BIERMAN	●	GORDON	●	KNUDSEN	●	NOVOTNY	●	TABKE	●
BLISS	●	GOTTFRIED	●	KOEGEL	●	O'DRISCOLL	●	TORKELSON	●
BURKEL	●	GREENE	●	KOTYZA-WITTHUHN	●	OLSON	●	VAN BINSBERGEN	●
CARROLL	●	GREENMAN	●	KOZLOWSKI	●	PÉREZ-VEGA	●	VANG	●
CHA	●	HANSEN, R.	●	KOZNICK	●	PERRYMAN	●	VIRNIG	●
CLARDY	●	HANSON, J.	●	KRAFT	●	PINTO	●	WARWAS	●
COULTER	●	HARDER	●	KRESHA	●	PURSELL	●	WEST	●
CURRAN	●	HEINTZEMAN	●	LAWRENCE	●	QUAM	●	WIENER	●
DAVIDS	●	HEMMINGSSEN-JAEGER	●	LEE, F.	●	RARICK	●	WITTE	●
DAVIS	●	HER	●	LEE, K.	●	REHM	●	WOLGAMOTT	●
DIPPEL	●	HICKS	●	LIEBLING	●	REHRAUER	●	XIONG	●
DOTSETH	●	HILL	●	LILLIE	●	REPINSKI	●	YOUAKIM	●
DURAN	●	HOLLINS	●	LONG	●	REYER	●	ZELEZNIKAR	●
ELKINS	●	HORTMAN	●	MAHAMOUD	●	ROACH	●	SPEAKER	●
ENGEN	●	HOWARD	●	MCDONALD	●	ROBBINS	●	DEMUTH	●

**Lawmakers pass \$700 million bonding package funding water, road projects across state:** Minnesota lawmakers unveiled and passed a pair of capital investment packages during Monday's special session. The agreements, which focus on transportation and water infrastructure, would fund those projects and more with about a net \$700 million, including more than \$646 million in proceeds from bond sales, \$73 million from the transportation fund and \$6.5 million in cash. Cancellations from previous appropriations help lower the overall total. [Read more](#). See: [general obligation](#), [General Fund](#) spreadsheets. Included in the general obligation proposals is:

- \$80 million for transportation purposes, including \$42 million for the local road improvement program and \$31 million for bridge replacements;
- \$60 million in asset preservation for both Minnesota State and the University of Minnesota;
- \$44 million for natural resources purposes, including \$33 million for asset preservation and \$9 million for flood hazard mitigation;
- \$16 million to the Metropolitan Council with \$15 million going to the inflow and infiltration public infrastructure grant program; and
- \$12 million to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency with \$6 million going to statewide drinking water contamination mitigation.

#### **Select DNR News releases:**

- [Minnesota DNR and Council on Disability host ribbon cutting to celebrate accessibility improvements at William O'Brien State Park](#): Minnesota DNR and Council on Disability host

ribbon cutting to celebrate accessibility improvements at William O'Brien State Park

- [Four new dog/handler teams join the DNR's K9 Unit](#): The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources K9 Unit has expanded by four dogs and handlers and increased its ability many times over to detect aquatic invasive species, locate lost people, detect possible game and fish violations, and assist local law enforcement agencies with their evidence-detection needs.
- [State, local officials to celebrate Perch Lake Habitat Restoration Project completion](#): In 1987 the St. Louis River was listed as an Area of Concern by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) due to the unintended consequences brought on by years of industrial use of the river before modern environmental regulations were put into place.
- [New education requirements in effect July 1 for some boaters in Minnesota](#): Beginning July 1, 2025, more people who operate motorboats or personal watercrafts on Minnesota waters must obtain a valid watercraft operator's permit. The updated requirements, passed into law during 2023, are intended to make boating safer by ensuring people operating motorized watercraft know the rules and are properly trained.