

## 2 - Legislative Update from Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates

By Jeff Forester, Executive Director, Minnesota Lakes and River Advocates

**All politics may be local, but water is not. It moves through and across our communities, our state, and our continent.**

The Legislature began on January 3, 2023 and is scheduled to end on May 22, 2023. For the first time in many years they seem likely to finish their work on-time.

In years past the committee work began with topic overviews, particularly after an election and even more so following a once a decade redistricting. Many of the legislative old guard retired or lost their primary races. About a third of the legislature is serving in a new role or is newly elected.

But this year the committees began hearing bills straightaway. In the 30 years I have been with Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates I have never seen a legislature move so quickly.

Currently MLR is tracking over 25 separate bills. At this writing we do not know final outcomes, but MLR will be putting out action alerts and blog posts to keep you up-to-date on outcomes. You can sign up for our Citizens Action Network (CAN) at [www.mnlakesandrivers.org](http://www.mnlakesandrivers.org).

On the CAN page you can see a partial list of all of the bills that are currently moving through the legislative process. These will be combined into an Omnibus bill for each committee. The MN House Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee, chaired by Rep. Rick Hansen, released its Omnibus package, HF 2310, shortly before Easter/Passover break.

The legislature began with an almost \$18 billion budget surplus, the largest in state history. HF 2310 makes the largest investment in our outdoors, including lake priorities, in state history. The House Environment Omnibus addresses a backlog of capital improvement projects and needs that have been languishing for decades, including updating fish hatcheries, some of which are almost a century old. It funds improvements to boat access sites to include Aquatic Invasive Species prevention efforts, improve traffic flow and replace dilapidated piers.

In 2013, when MLR worked with Dr. Peter Sorensen to create the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, Dr. Sorensen predicted that it would take ten years to develop new solutions to Aquatic Invasive Species prevention and management. His predictions were prescient. It has been a decade since the MAISRC was created, and they have a number of applied science solutions that are ready to be implemented. HF 2310 funds these on the ground programs in an effort being called "Lab to Lakes."

For many years MLR has lobbied to increase the AIS surcharge on three year boat registrations so that AIS programs and grants have reliable and ongoing support. In addition to significant

one-time investments in lake and river protection and improvement, HF 2310 provides reliable and ongoing funding for these critical programs.

### **HF 2310 contains significant proposals-both policy proposals and funding proposals.**

#### Policy proposals:

- Creates a Boaters Education and Certification program for MN Boaters,
- Invests \$1 million for a lead fishing tackle reduction program at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and puts a lead sinker ban in place on designated swan protection areas within the 7 county metro area,
- Funds the University of Minnesota to study trends to discern the quantity and quality of Minnesota waters, and make a recommendation on future areas of inquiry and coordinate efforts 50 years ahead,
- Requires the MN DNR to work with partners (counties, lake associations and others) to write and implement a 5 year comprehensive and coordinated statewide plan to prevent the spread of AIS,
- Report on “Rough” fish to learn the ecological roles of previously misunderstood or disregarded fish like the Bigmouth Buffalo,
- Reinstate the Legislative Water Commission,
- Implement the “Keep It Clean” program to prevent waste left on lake ice following ice fishing season,
- Create sustainable Diversion Limits on Groundwater Appropriations,
- Increase DNR Enforcement Authority for Water Laws,
- End Commercial Turtle Harvest in MN,
- Remove County Board Approval requirements for Land Acquisitions,
- Establish Salt applicators training program.

#### Funding proposals:

- Ongoing funding for the MN Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) funded with proceeds from an enhanced AIS surcharge on boater registration,
- \$10 million in program funding for Lab to Lakes implementation of MAISRC solutions,
- \$1.4 million AIS Management Grants for Lake Associations Established,
- Enhanced Funding for SWCD,
- Increased funding for Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (septic) monitoring and improvement,
- Appropriates Funding for Invasive Carp Deterrents in Mississippi River,



House Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Funding Committee Chair Rep. Rick Hansen, said as he recently described HF 2310, the environment budget bill, *"This is a problem solving bill, solving problems that have accumulated over many years."*

In addition, the [bill to renew Minnesota lottery funding](#) to protect our air, water, land, and wildlife before it sunsets in 2025, is still moving through the legislative process too. This funding is the source for MLR's Stop Starry program, which is putting boat cleaning equipment on the accesses of lakes infested with starry stonewort. This containment strategy provides protection for all other lakes in Minnesota.

**MN Lakes & Rivers Advocates ~ PO Box 22262 ~ St. Paul, MN 55122**  
**[www.mnlakesandrivers.org](http://www.mnlakesandrivers.org) ~ 952-854-1317 ~ [jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org](mailto:jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org)**