

## Appendix B: LCCMR Member Interviews Summary

---

Between July 2 and July 18, 2019, Management Analysis and Development (MAD) staff conducted phone interviews with 16 of the 17 members of the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) to gather their personal perspectives on key questions at the start of the 2020-26 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) strategic planning process. MAD contacted members via email, through their legislative assistants, and by phone to schedule interviews.

This document summarizes the themes that emerged across LCCMR member responses to questions regarding their top concerns for Minnesota's environment and natural resources, emerging threats, successes to build on, and bold funding strategies. Members were asked the following questions:

1. What does the vision for the ENRTF mean to you?
2. What top three concerns related to the environment and/or natural resources do you feel are most urgent to address?
3. What one or two bold funding strategies do you think LCCMR should pursue?
4. What is your opinion on striking the right balance between funding research versus funding implementation?
5. What do you believe is the greatest emerging threat regarding Minnesota's environment and/or natural resources?
6. What successes related to the environment or natural resources could ENRTF funding build upon to have an even greater impact on Minnesota?

Throughout this document, the numbers in parentheses indicate the times that certain topics or themes were mentioned in member comments. An individual member's comments may be counted more than once across different themes, as MAD was not always able to neatly separate comments on some topics into just one theme.

### Top Concerns and Emerging Threats

The majority of members indicated that clean water or water quality is one of their top concerns for Minnesota's environment and natural resources (13). Other concerns mentioned multiple times included invasive species (7), climate change (6), pollinators (4), and habitat or land preservation (4).

Concerns that may fall into one or more of these topics, but which were mentioned fewer than four times included: trails and parks (3), waste water treatment infrastructure in rural areas (2), forests (1), overpopulation (1), funding (1), chronic wasting disease (1), and encouraging youth to experience and enjoy the outdoors (1).

Almost all members said that their top concerns were statewide issues, rather than regionally specific concerns. Some members did say that solutions to these issues may need to be different or adapted, depending on the area of the state impacted.

There was clear overlap between members' top concerns and what members indicated is the greatest emerging threat for Minnesota's environment and natural resources. Climate change (4), invasive species (4), and clean water (3), were all mentioned more than once as the greatest emerging threat.

Other emerging threats that may fall into or overlap with those three main areas, but which were mentioned only once each included some specific issues: habitat preservation, plastics, chemicals, chronic wasting disease, and livestock

epidemics. Also mentioned once each were broader emerging threats: depletion of the ENRTF, skepticism of science, and general world-wide environmental impacts.

When asked about the barriers to addressing these problems, members cited disagreement among stakeholders (including among LCCMR members) about both the problems and solutions, politicization of the issues, lack of trust in science, challenges with getting stakeholders on board and working together, the complex nature of the issues, and lack of funding.

Most members responded that they feel like the ENRTF is already addressing many of these challenges and emerging threats, but that more work needs to be done. Multiple members cited such successes as the creation of the research centers on aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, research on triclosan that led to a statewide ban, and work on state trails and parks.

### **Ideas for Bold Funding Strategies**

Members were asked to identify bold funding strategies for the LCCMR to pursue. A few members indicated that they like the current way that the LCCMR determines which projects to fund (4). Some talked about appreciating the broad scope within the current approach. One member expressed concern that limiting the scope for proposals may result in missing out on funding innovations that are not yet on their radar.

A few members recommended that the 2020-26 strategic plan limit the scope of the ENRTF (3). One member recommended picking one big issue to focus on, like climate change, while another recommended picking four to five issues for each year of the strategic plan. Members who talked about the need to limit the scope referred to an overwhelming number of proposals for review each year, in addition to a desire to help potential grantees better target their proposals to the interests of the Commission. One member who recommended limiting the scope also recommended maintaining some funding each year specifically for emerging issues.

A few members' comments indicated that members of the Commission come with their own bias toward certain topics, issues, or strategies (4). These members recommended, for the sake of transparency, having the LCCMR members clearly identify their personal priorities, and to set-aside funds for them at the start of the process. Two members recommended designating a specific amount of money for research projects. The next section explores issue of funding research versus implementation.

At least a few members disagreed on funding small projects. One member cited the small projects funding as a success of the ENRTF, while another expressed concern over how allowing small project proposals increases the number of proposals that must be reviewed.

Other bold ideas for funding strategies included:

- requiring projects to have multiple benefits or impacts;
- creating new opportunities, or enforcing current requirements, for projects that will return money to the trust;
- funding pilot and test programs to address climate change;
- funding more demonstration projects;
- staying involved with projects longer-term;
- allowing for more than 5% of the principal of the trust be made available for projects each year;
- using more funds for waste water/sewer treatment facilities in small communities;
- having research projects go through a peer review or other process, rather than being reviewed and approved by the full LCCMR membership;
- requiring research project proposals to identify how the research will lead to action;

- partnering more closely with Commissioners and Executive Branch; and
- coordinating more with Legacy Amendment funds.

## **Funding Research v. Implementation**

On the topic of funding research versus funding implementation, there was not consensus. Although several members' comments indicated that research is important for finding "what works" (6), comments were then divided between members who would rather "see things get done" (6) versus members who want a balance between funding both research and implementation (6).

One member recommended requiring proposals for research to include how the project would be followed-up by implementation.

One member said there was a need for research for its own sake, indicating that the ENRTF is one of the only current government sources of funding for research and that research projects selected by LCCMR in the past have been successful.

The topic of supplanting will be explored more in the next section, but a couple of members' comments related to concern about whether funding a large number of research projects at the University of Minnesota is supplanting. One member instead saw using the trust funds for U of M research as helping fulfill the land grant mission of the University.

In addition to the tension between research and implementation, a few members brought up perceived tension over the issues of funding capital projects and land acquisition projects. These issues were also raised by some members when talking about issues around supplanting.

## **Avoiding Supplanting**

A few of members' comments recommended that if LCCMR focuses only on innovative proposals or brand new projects, then it would help avoid supplanting (4). Other comments recommended continuing to have members take responsibility for "calling it out" when they think a proposal would supplant (3), and continue to have LCCMR staff point out when proposals may be supplanting (1).

A couple of members' comments expressed concern that the trust fund was becoming a "slush fund" (2). However, concerns about who was using it in such a way were divided. Some comments, as stated above, expressed concern – or perception of a concern – over too much funding going to the University of Minnesota and the Department of Natural Resources. While other comments expressed concern about using the funds for waste water treatment infrastructure or capital projects. One member expressed concern about getting proposals from private businesses.

Several members made comments about the unique nature of the ENRTF, and how valuable it is for the state. However, opinions were divided about whether the fund should be used to "fill gaps" where other funding sources may be falling short, and what types of projects members would support funding when there are questions of supplanting.