SF4304 Outdoor heritage fund Appropriation and prior appropriations extension and modification

Testimony Opposing Funding for the Roseau Lake Rehabilitation Project

Dear Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Debby Stone, and I represent the Minnesota Landowners Coalition, a group of more than 75 landowners in Roseau County that oppose projects in the watershed district. In addition to supporting the landowner coalition, my family are multigenerational landowners whose land lies directly within the proposed Roseau Lake Rehabilitation Project the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council is considering additional funding for. I am here to strongly oppose funding for this project because the process used to advance it is deeply flawed and places landowners at significant risk.

First, the Roseau River Watershed District has moved this project forward **without delineating private land** within the project footprint. This is not a technical oversight — it results in a **grossly underestimated project cost** and hides the true impact on private property, infrastructure, and long-term obligations. Over the past years, experts have confirmed this and identified a loophole in the District's process, and that issue is now central to a major legal challenge in Federal Court. We have also raised this with Senators Johnson and Green and Representative Burkel to garner support from the legislature and we are here today asking for your help.

Second, a **federal lawsuit** has been filed involving **approximately 100 landowners** and more than **12,600 acres** of private agriculturally productive land primary homes, farms and other building structures all affected by both the Roseau Lake Rehabilitation Project and the Roseau River Restoration Project. This case raises **eight counts of violations of Articles 5 and 14 of the U.S. Constitution**, including concerns about eminent domain abuse. The legal pleading will request an immediate **stop-work**. Moving forward with additional state funding when these issues are being decided by the judiciary branch while this case is active would be premature, but most importantly it will seriously impact Minnesota families their farming operations, economic productivity in Roseau and Kittson Counties and forever threaten their land.

Third, the District's analysis ignores the extensive improvements made during the **1910 and 1914–1916 drainage projects**, as well as more than **110 years of landowner investment** that transformed this region into productive farmland. By disregarding this history, the District undervalues private property and misrepresents the true impact of the project.

Finally, despite objections from landowners and legal counsel, the Watershed District has already begun constructing components of the project. This undermines public trust and disregards the rights of the very people whose land and livelihoods are at stake.

For these reasons, I urge the Council to **withhold funding** until the legal and procedural issues are fully resolved. Members of the Minnesota Landowners Coalition and our legal counsel are available to brief you in detail on how this affects them as these issues move forward. We ask you in your positions in the legislature to support us in literally the most important fight of our lives.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to responsible stewardship of public funds.