

February 28, 2020

Memo To: Minnesota Honey Producers Association
From: Judy Erickson, Joe Birkholz
RE: Legislative Session Update

CONSERVATION
STRATEGIES

On February 27th, Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) released the February Budget Forecast for the State of Minnesota. The forecast shows the state with a \$1.5 billion budget surplus, up from \$1.3 billion in November 2019. In the coming days, Governor Tim Walz (DFL) will release his supplemental budget request. An excellent overview on the revenue forecast, the state's economic health, and the DFL and GOP priorities for the surplus can be found [here from Minnesota Public Radio](#).

Thus far in the Legislative Session, the House and Senate have picked up unfinished work from the 2019 session, begun hearing bonding requests, as well as laying the groundwork for work on the budget surplus. The DFL House has passed insulin and gun safety legislation off of the floor and their committees have begun hearing bonding and supplemental budget requests. In the Senate, Republicans have highlighted their priority for the budget surplus, which proposes tax cuts for all Minnesotans and utilizes all of the budget surplus to pay for it.

We have been tracking the following bills and issues for MHPA:

CRP: HF 3431, HF 2957, & HF 3513

There are three bills in the House right now that are giving one-time state funding to incentivize landowners to enroll or re-enroll in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP payments are made to farmers in exchange for taking low-production agriculture land out of production and put conservation practices in place including pollinator habitat and riparian buffer strips. Current rate payments were set by the 2018 Federal Farm Bill and are not as competitive as they have been in past years. [HF 3431](#), authored by Rep. Brad Tabke (DFL-Shakopee), appropriates \$6.5 million in one-time payments to incentivize landowners to enroll their land in general CRP and bring more federal dollars to Minnesota in the form of CRP payments. This bill came from the Climate Action Caucus. [HF 2957](#), authored by Rep. Rick Hansen (DFL-St. Paul), appropriates a lower amount of \$1.75 million in one-time payments that will be used for continuous CRP, which is used for conservation practices on land deemed more environmentally sensitive. Both of these bills were heard in the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee on 2/27, and much of the discussion revolved around how much the final amount of money might be as well as what the criteria will be for landowners seeking the state incentives.

Additionally, [HF 3515](#), also authored by Rep. Hansen, has been introduced in the House and has a hearing scheduled in the House Legacy Finance Committee on March 4th. The bill is identical to HF 2957 in every way except one: the \$1.75 million comes from the Clean Water Fund instead of the General Fund.

Lawns to Legumes: HF 3524

According to BWSR, the Lawns to Legumes program funded by the LCCMR has been very successful, with 13 demonstration neighborhoods funded across the state along with about 1,000 individual projects funded with nearly 5,000 applicants. BWSR testified to the success and public enthusiasm for the program. [HF 3524](#) by Rep. Kelly Morrison (DFL-Deephaven) takes \$900,000 of canceled money from the 2019 LCCMR appropriation and puts more money in the current Lawns to Legumes program. Questions and discussion ranged from how much demand was there across the state, how much acreage had been planted, and how much money has been spent on administrative costs.

LCCMR: SF 3525

The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) has not made any official recommendations on how money from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund should be spent as there was not enough votes to reach the requisite supermajority to send the recommendations to the Legislature. There are, however, tentative recommendations. Included in these recommendations are a number of pollinator projects MHPA is supporting. The crux of the disagreement is if LCCMR money will be used for wastewater treatment infrastructure. The Senate has introduced an LCCMR Bill, [SF 3525](#) (Sen. Ingebritsen, R-Alexandria) that funds wastewater treatment infrastructure. In the House, Rep. Rick Hansen has indicated that there will be a House bill but it has not been introduced yet.

Looking Ahead

In the coming days Governor Walz will release his supplemental budget recommendations on how the state should use the \$1.5 billion budget surplus. House and Senate committees will also receive target spending amounts from their respective leadership groups and will be assembling their larger bills to meet those targets. As the legislative session progresses and committee deadlines arrive we will continue to monitor and assess the progress of the previously mentioned legislation as well as engage with legislators and stakeholders to gain support.