



March 25, 2011

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**Groups Criticize House Bill to Harvest Timber
From Treasured State Parks To Fill Budget Gap**

Saint Paul (March 25, 2011) – The Minnesota Environmental Partnership and its member groups expressed great concern over an amendment adopted by a Minnesota House committee late Wednesday that authorizes the harvesting of timber from two popular state parks, Frontenac and Whitewater in Southeastern Minnesota.

The amendment, passed by the Minnesota State House Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee, was added to an omnibus finance bill, and allows “black walnut and other timber resources suitable for harvest” to be logged in Frontenac State Park and Whitewater State Park. The proceeds generated from selling these resources would be used to fund state park operations.

Steve Morse, executive director of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, emphasized that even in these tough economic times, Minnesotans want to protect their Great Outdoors.

“Minnesotans passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008 to ensure our parks, trails and other natural areas are preserved for our children and grandchildren,” Morse said. “Now, the Legislature is significantly and disproportionately cutting state support for our state and regional parks, and looking for other ways to backfill these cuts, such as selling off priceless features of these state parks. The old growth native trees are an important attraction and a key piece of our citizens’ enjoyment of our state parks. These should not be sold off fix a short-term state budget problem.”

The Minnesota House budget bill recommends cutting general state support for the state parks by 10 percent. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) estimates they would have to close 10-14 state parks if the House’s proposed reductions were to become law.

Current Minnesota laws require the DNR to “*preserve, perpetuate, and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement.*”

Don Arnosti, policy director for Audubon Minnesota, highlighted the importance of the woods to Audubon members and other birding enthusiasts.

“Every spring, more than a hundred birders come specifically to Frontenac State Park because its forests offer some of the best places to observe the warblers’ spring migration,” Arnosti said. “Audubon members are shocked to hear of the Representatives’ plan to log this treasured park. It’s not a sensible fix to Minnesota’s budget problem.”

Morse agrees. “We cannot sell off our state’s long-term natural assets to fix a temporary budget problem,” Morse said. “Doing so jeopardizes our responsibility to pass on Minnesota’s Great Outdoors heritage to future generations.”

For more information on MEP priority issues, go to www.Protect.MN or www.MEPartnership.org.

Minnesota Environmental Partnership is a statewide coalition of 80 nonprofit conservation and environmental organizations, representing more than 500,000 Minnesotans. Formed in 1998, MEP works with its member organizations to protect and restore Minnesota’s lakes, rivers, streams, forests, wildlife habitat and natural areas.

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