



Last Chance for Wild Rice Hotdish?

**STATE ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION
SENDS EARTH WEEK MESSAGE TO LEGISLATORS**

Wild Rice Provision Seen As One Of Many Threats to Minnesota's Great Outdoors

Saint Paul (April 20, 2011) – Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP), the statewide coalition of more than 80 conservation and environmental organizations, sent a tongue-in-cheek message to Minnesota legislators this week: Better enjoy your wild rice hotdish now – before our waters are too contaminated to produce our state grain.

To celebrate Earth Week, MEP asked Minnesota voters to send their favorite wild rice hotdish recipes to their state legislators to underscore the host of “bad” bills and policy provisions that threaten Minnesota’s lakes, rivers and streams; natural areas; wildlife habitat; and parks and trails.

“While Minnesota legislators are at home in their districts this week, we suggest that they enjoy an iconic Minnesota wild rice hotdish – while we still have edible wild rice,” said the group’s executive director Steve Morse. Morse was referring to a policy provision tucked into the Senate environment budget bill that would remove sulfate pollution standards for wild rice waters, threatening Minnesota’s wild rice production and Native American heritage.

“During Earth Week, it is critical that all Minnesotans know there’s an attack on Minnesota’s Great Outdoors underway at the Capitol,” said Morse, noting that there are scores of bills and provisions that rollback Minnesota’s environmental protections currently under discussion at the State Capitol. “We ask Minnesotans to take time this week to tell their legislators that they value Minnesota’s great outdoors tradition and ask their lawmakers to stop this assault on Minnesota’s air, land and water.”

Among the other legislative measures that would rollback Minnesota’s environmental protections:

- Removal of the requirement that new coal plants providing electricity to Minnesota offset their carbon pollution – delaying the development of clean energy jobs.

“Already we are sending \$500 million a year to North Dakota and Wyoming to purchase coal,” said Margaret Levin, state director of the Sierra Club North Star Chapter. “Opening the door to new coal is a bad investment, committing our state to an expensive and polluting source of energy and pulling Minnesota off track from its clean energy goals.”

- Weakening water quality standards for phosphorus discharges into Lake Pepin

“This is another unbelievably bad and brazen water provision hidden in the Senate environment budget bill that essentially allows pollution of the Mississippi River and Lake Pepin for eight months of the year,” said Whitney Clark, executive director of the Friends of the Mississippi River. “Lake Pepin already fails to meet our basic water quality standards. This bill would actually increase phosphorus pollution to that prized Minnesota lake and that will spark rapid algae growth and degrade the lake further.”

MEP said additional assaults on Minnesota’s environmental policy foundation include (view a list of bills and provisions at <http://bit.ly/MEPBillList>):

- Severe cuts to the general fund conservation budgets that would result in an end of services, such as parks security, running water and grounds upkeep, in 10-12 state parks
- Prohibiting for two years new water rules to protect and restore Minnesota’s lakes, rivers and streams
- Repealing important water quality, habitat and scenic protections for the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area.
- Exempting large ethanol facilities from mandatory environmental review, and
- Weakening permit standards for large feedlots

“The vast majority of these provisions threaten Minnesota’s lakes, rivers and streams, and that goes against the wishes of 1.6 million of Minnesotans who voted for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment,” Morse said.

“Our annual polling repeatedly shows that Minnesotans want to protect our lakes, rivers and streams. Clean water is the number one reason Minnesotans voted to raise their taxes for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

“Earth Week is a time for all of us to reflect upon the Great Outdoors legacy we want to leave our children and grandchildren. We ask our state legislators to share a wild rice hotdish with their family and friends this week, and come back to work next week, ready to protect our air, land and water.”

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EDITOR’S NOTE: To schedule an interview with Steve Morse, Whitney Clark, Margaret Levin or other MEP members about the threats to Minnesota’s lakes, rivers and streams, wildlife habitat and parks and trails, contact Cathy Kennedy at 612.309.3951 or cathykennedy@mepartnership.org or Kara Cook at 651.789.0651 or karacook@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.