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## **MEP: Legislature must put forth fair, clean budget bill during Special Session that protects our water, Great Outdoors**

### *Legislature must also stop disturbing trend of special interest exemptions*

**Saint Paul, MN (May 24, 2011)** – As the Minnesota Legislature ended their 2011 regular session and began preparing for a Special Session, the Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP) vowed to stay vigilant in its commitment to protect Minnesota’s Great Outdoors. The statewide coalition of more than 80 nonprofit conservation and environmental organizations hopes the Legislature’s Special Session produces a fair environmental finance bill, free of extraneous policy provisions.

“When Governor Dayton vetoes the Omnibus Environmental Finance Bill, many damaging measures that threaten Minnesota’s water and unravel decades of environmental protections will be defeated,” said Steve Morse, executive director of MEP. “When lawmakers reconvene to tackle the budget, we implore them to focus on balancing the budget and to stop the disproportional cuts that target our Great Outdoors and are inconsistent with the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

“In addition, the Legislature must not add to the finance bills any policies that threaten Minnesota’s wild rice, water, forests and clean air, as they did in the environment finance bill currently on the Governor’s desk. We support Governor Dayton’s request that Minnesota legislators keep policy measures out of budget bills.”

In addition, Morse said that legislators need to identify additional revenue sources to maintain traditional funding for Minnesota’s Great Outdoors, as outlined in the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. He also stressed that the Legislature must pass the Legacy Amendment bill, which failed to pass in the last minutes of the 2011 regular session. Morse noted that the Legislature must maintain traditional funding sources in the general fund budget to abide by the Amendment and not use Legacy funds as a substitution.

### **Support for Fee Increases**

“When the dust settles from the regular session, we urge lawmakers to focus attention on additional revenue sources, such as increasing user fees on hunting, fishing and boat licenses,” Morse said. He noted MEP’s support for a hunting and fishing license fee increase to provide additional funds to the game and fish fund, and raising the boat license registration surcharge to provide additional revenue for the Aquatic Invasive Species program.

## Special Privileges for Special Interests

The coalition also sounded the warning bell on the Legislature's habit during the 2011 session of granting special exemptions for businesses wanting to evade existing environmental protections for land, water and air.

"This session, the Legislature has charted a disturbing course, granting businesses and special interests their own special exemptions from laws that protect Minnesota's Great Outdoors – whenever those protections become inconvenient," Morse said. "This trend must stop." Among the entities that were allowed special exemptions this session were:

- **Lutsen Ski Resort**, which received a special exemption to extract water from the Poplar River, a designated trout stream already undergoing a clean-up plan, further endangering the trout and the health of the river;
- **Spiritwood coal plant in North Dakota**, which received a special exemption to allow coal-fired electricity to be imported into the state, without having to reduce excess pollution;
- **Excelsior Energy's Mesaba Power Plant**, a stalled natural gas project, which had previously received \$41 million federal and state tax dollars, this session received additional special permitting exemptions;
- **Taconite Mines** and future non-ferrous mining operations, for which wetland mitigation rules were altered; and
- **Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board**, which received a special exemption from environmental permitting, providing a special privilege for PolyMet Mining Corp.

(Details about legislation with these provisions available here:  
<http://bit.ly/SpecialExemptions>)

For more information on MEP's priority issues, go to [www.Protect.MN](http://www.Protect.MN) or [www.MEPartnership.org](http://www.MEPartnership.org).

To arrange an interview with Steve Morse, please contact Cathy Kennedy at [cathykennedy@MEPartnership.org](mailto:cathykennedy@MEPartnership.org) or 612.309.3951.

*Minnesota Environmental Partnership is a statewide coalition of more than 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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