



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



5600 American Blvd West, Suite 990
Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458

IN REPLY REFER TO:
FWS/R3/RD

August 7, 2023

Commissioner Sarah Strommen
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Commissioner Strommen:

This letter is in response to the ongoing discussions we have been having related to documentation required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to ensure the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has complied with the terms and conditions of the approved Statewide Habitat Management grant (F21AF02911).

Specifically, the DNR has acknowledged that it sold logging permits without providing the necessary advance documentation of the habitat purpose of these sales to the Service as specified in grant F21AF02911. As we have discussed, this pre-sale documentation is essential for the Service to ensure compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Historic Preservation Act and other grant requirements.

It is the Service's responsibility to ensure that potential impacts to federal interest lands are avoided or minimized, and proper review and approvals are completed before the next grant segment, beginning July 1, 2023, is approved.

In our discussions, we have reached mutual agreement on a series of next steps to reach timely resolution on outstanding issues. These steps include joint field visits by leadership and staff from both agencies and a staff-level meeting to agree upon process and documentation details. Until all grant conditions and environmental compliance review processes have been successfully identified and agreed to by both parties through the steps outlined above, the Service and DNR agree to take the following actions:

- 1) The DNR will not offer timber for sale on any State Wildlife Management Areas and Aquatic Management Areas. For any timber permits issued prior to the date of this letter, the DNR will provide documentation/certification of the wildlife purposes as soon as practicable for acceptance by the Service. Forest management planning work will continue, and sales will resume once further agreement on the form and timing of documentation is reached.

- 2) The DNR will submit documentation to fulfill the remaining grant conditions in the F21AF02911 grant to the Service before any additional disbursements will be approved.
- 3) The Service will hold the FY 23-25 Minnesota Statewide Wildlife Habitat Management grant until both the Service and DNR agree all grant compliance and documentation issues are agreed to, as described above.

We know you take this seriously, as do we, and we look forward to working with you and your staff to promptly resolve these issues and continue to implement our joint Management Action Agreement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. W. Traxler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Charles W. Traxler
Acting Regional Director