

DFL Environmental Caucus
2022 Platform Resolutions
Adopted 11/07/2021

1. **Ag/Food/Land Stewardship - Sustainable Agriculture** - Support funding for research, technical assistance, and education to rapidly implement regenerative farming, establish perennial crops, rotational grazing, cover crops, and no-till farming, to invest in rural communities and our food and farming system, conserve and build healthy soils, clean our water, sequester carbon and bolster farm income.
 - Principles of soil health include “armoring the soil” to protect it from erosion and degradation, minimizing disturbance of the soil, increasing and maintaining plant diversity, encouraging healthy roots, and integrating the soil biological activity with livestock.
 - Continuous living cover systems along with managed rotational grazing can remove excess carbon from the atmosphere and store it in the soil, build up the soil’s organic carbon, store more water in soil, resulting in less runoff, cleaner water, and more resilient crop fields and pastures.
 - On average only about 3% of Minnesota cropland is planted with continuous living cover in a given year. Funding for research, technical assistance, market development, and education is needed to improve this.
 - Sustainable agriculture has been shown to increase net profits for individual farms, because costs are reduced while yields remain good. With initial support from the state and supply chain development for sustainable crops, this is achievable for family farmers.
 - For more information:

<https://dflenvironment.org/2021/11/04/we-get-the-food-systems-we-fund/>

https://landstewardshipproject.org/repository/1/3603/grazing_white_paper_3_12_21.pdf

2. **Energy and Climate- Green New Deal** - Support a Green New Deal to provide an equitable energy future in which all Minnesotans, especially in front-line and underserved communities, can reap the health and economic benefits of efficiency programs, renewable electricity, and clean energy jobs.
 - Climate change disproportionately impacts communities of color, indigenous communities, farmers, and low-income communities that are often living close to environmental hazards and have the fewest resources to mitigate those impacts.

- Widespread use of fossil fuels, none of which is extracted in Minnesota, robs wealth out of Minnesota's economy. Renewable energy keeps "energy" wealth local, making our economy more resilient.
3. **Energy & Climate - Zero Carbon Economy** - Support a transition to a zero carbon economy. Mandate 100% carbon free electricity throughout Minnesota by 2030 and meet or exceed "net zero" carbon emissions by 2050. Support a massive shift in electricity generation towards a future powered by wind, solar, storage, and a modern electrical grid that will power our homes, businesses, and transportation.
- Actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have not matched the critical nature of the problem.
 - The Next Generation Energy Act of 2007 that came out of the Pawlenty administration is an example of an outdated framework in urgent need of an update. Electrical Cooperatives, the Public Utilities Commission, and other agencies are still using these outdated standards as rationale for supporting projects that jeopardize our ability to hold the warming to 1.5 degrees C.
 - Each year we delay, our future becomes less certain.
 - The cost to mitigate and adapt to rising seas, poor air quality, ecosystem collapse, extreme weather, floods, droughts, extreme heat and humidity, loss of biodiversity, forest fires, spread of infectious diseases, and invasive species dwarfs the cost of changing course.
 - Minnesota imports all its fossil fuel energy and this is an extraction of wealth out of our state's economy. Renewable energy keeps money spent on fossil fuel local, and thus makes our economy more resilient.
4. **Health & Human Services - Clean Water Infrastructure** - Support upgrading our failing public water infrastructure: water treatment plants and the piping to supply public water, sewage, and stormwater to assure safe drinking water and to protect aquatic ecosystems from pollution.
- Many Minnesota water systems across the state are aging and failing, especially in rural communities, leaving Minnesotans at risk of unsafe water or flooding, and leading to pollution in our lakes and rivers. Smaller municipalities often find it difficult or impossible to fund upgrades on their own without state or federal help.
 - Thanks to the Biden infrastructure law, Minnesota will benefit from more than \$680 million in federal dollars for water infrastructure. The Legislature should pass funding to ensure we build on this investment and secure matching grants so that every community in Minnesota has safe drinking water and healthy aquatic ecosystems.
5. **Natural Resources & Environment: Prove It First** - Support a moratorium banning copper-nickel sulfide mining in Minnesota's watersheds until it is proven first to be safe in water-rich environments for the protection of some of America's greatest treasures

including but not limited to Lake Superior, the BWCAW, Voyageurs National Park, and the Mississippi River.

- Non-ferrous sulfide mining has never been done in a water-rich environment like Minnesota without polluting, degrading, or destroying the surrounding waters.
- The potential harm to the region will displace residents and shutter small businesses that are dependent on the natural resources in our state for other purposes.
- Wildlife and humans depend on clean water and air and need the region protected from toxic sulfide mining
- The current laws of the land established to protect the Superior National Forest, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, the Lake Superior watershed, and the entire State of Minnesota, are being weakened by legislation and ignored by governmental agencies.
- The majority of permits issued in relation to the PolyMet project have been overturned, suspended, or remanded by the courts because of purposeful failure to follow procedure or faults in the permits related to the project.
- A 2020 StarTribune/MPR survey shows that over 60% of Minnesotans do not support these proposed projects, and a recent survey from the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy shows that only 21% of Minnesotans surveyed support staying the course with the PolyMet project.
- Sulfide mining's harmful impacts grow and extend over distance with time. There will be more water and energy used, and more tailings produced per ton of mined metal. The threat of mined tailings entering rivers and lakes will increase as the number and intensity of severe weather events continue to increase with climate change.
- Elevated sulfate levels caused by mine drainage would harm wild rice beds. Wild rice, also known as manoomin, is a rich source of protein and has cultural significance to the Ojibwe and Lakota tribes who are guaranteed the right to gather it under treaties.
- Elevated sulfate levels also increase the uptake of methylmercury to fish and humans who eat fish. Methylmercury stays in the fish's muscle, in their meat, and when women eat it, they absorb it, and eventually pass it on to babies in the womb, which impacts the children's ability to think and learn per cognitive testing done in the 3rd grade.
- The PolyMet mine would destroy nearly 1,000 acres of wetlands and peatlands. According to a DNR study, destruction of 1,000 acres of peatlands is equivalent to 2 percent of Minnesota's entire carbon footprint.

- “To get an idea of the scope of the huge carbon footprint that this mine proposal would impose on Minnesota, PolyMet’s carbon dioxide equivalent emissions of 707,342 metric tons per year would be more than one-fourth of the CO2 equivalent calculated in a 2011 report for the entire city of Duluth — including the commercial, industrial, residential, transportation and waste sectors.” Paula Macabee
- There is no need to mine copper, copper mined here will go on the world market and likely end up in China and other nations, with the waste staying here.
- We currently only recycle about 33% of our copper. If we increased this rate by just 1% we would add copper equivalent to a PolyMet mine to our supply.
- The U.S. Government Accountability Office, an independent nonpartisan agency that reports to Congress, says that financial assurances for toxic nonferrous sulfide mining have been inadequate to cover cleanup costs. According to one GAO report, ‘after cleanup became mandatory, many parties responsible for hard rock mining sites have been liquidated through bankruptcy or otherwise dissolved, [leaving the cost of cleanup] to the taxpayer.’” –Rebecca Otto, former MN State Auditor.
- Links
 - <https://www.mepartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MEP-Sulfide-Mining-Fact-Sheet-2018.pdf>
 - https://www.backcountryhunters.org/hunters_anglers_oppose_northern_minnesota_a_sulfide_mining_proposals
 - <https://waterlegacy.org>
 - https://www.sosbluewaters.org/Beware_Hidden_Costs_of_Mining_Ventures_Jane_Reyer.pdf

6. **Ag, Food & Land Stewardship: Reduce Pesticides** - Support policies to reduce or eliminate the use of unsafe pesticides such as cancer-causing glyphosate and neonicotinoids, which harm pollinators, in agriculture, recreational land, and lawns.

- Pesticide use has caused widespread environmental damage and increased health risks in homes and commercial settings.
- Pesticides such as neonicotinoids should be banned in order to preserve and protect pollinators and other insect populations.
- All pesticides that are used should be used in the safest way possible.
- Lawns use more pesticides and fertilizers per acre than farmlands, and have a higher rate of overapplication. The runoff from these chemicals are an unmeasured yet likely important source of water pollution.

7. **Health & Human Services: Get the Lead Out** - Support the reduction of lead exposure in people and animals by eliminating lead in drinking water, investing in lead remediation in Minnesota homes and other locations, and banning the use of lead ammunition and fishing tackle.
- There is no safe level of lead - it is one of the greatest long-term health threats to children in Minnesota, especially in communities of color.
 - Lead testing and remediation can help eliminate lead exposure from paint and other sources.
 - The Biden Infrastructure law will help our state identify the more than 100,000 lead service lines in Minnesota homes. Further funding can help replace these lines to keep Minnesotans - especially children - safe from lead exposure in their drinking water.
 - It is voluntary not to use lead shot or tackle in hunting and fishing. Voluntary compliance has been tried in Minnesota but according to the DNR it has failed.
 - There is strong evidence that loons, swans, and other waterfowl are threatened by lead tackle in Minnesota lakes. Eagles are particularly threatened because, like Condors in California (where lead is largely banned in order to protect Condors), they are primarily scavengers, and consume deer entrails containing lead shot left by hunters. There is no evidence that Minnesota hunters avoid leaving lead behind.
 - Many states have chosen to ban the use of lead, all or in part, in fishing and/or hunting, based on studies showing the damage lead does to wildlife. The DNR rejects a wholesale ban on lead because many other states only ban some use of lead, and because about half of the hunters in the state prefer to keep using lead. It is not clear that the DNR has taken environmental impacts seriously in their consideration of this matter.
8. **Government Accountability: Oppose Rollbacks** - Oppose any effort to circumvent or weaken state or federal environmental laws or protections involving administrative procedures and permitting.
- Every legislative and congressional session sees corporate-backed efforts, driven by members of both major political parties, to gut the protections that keep Minnesotans safe from pollution. In recent years, our existing permitting laws have been weakened or bypassed with loopholes, benefitting big polluters at the expense of people and nature.
 - Hundreds of environmental rules and policies were weakened or administratively removed by the Trump administration and it will require the rulemaking process to begin again for many of them to be restored and to undo that damage.

- State and federal agencies have inadequately enforced or weakened existing protections such as the Clean Water Rule to the detriment of Minnesotans' health and natural resources.
 - As Minnesota grapples with climate change, water impairment, and emerging pollutants, we cannot afford rollbacks or inadequate enforcement of our environmental protections.
9. **Transportation: Clean Transportation** - Support development of sustainable public transportation, including mass transit, commuter rail, light rail, and buses, charging stations for electric vehicles, as well as viable options for pedestrians, bicycles, and other non-motorized transportation options.
- The transportation sector has taken over as the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. We need to reduce vehicle miles traveled by providing alternative options including safe routes for biking and walking, and electrifying the remaining miles.
 - Governor Walz should sign the Multi-State Medium-and Heavy-Duty Zero Emission Vehicle Memorandum of Understanding.
 - Expanding transportation options leads to greater equity for all Minnesotans.
 - Infrastructure to support and allow the easy use of electric vehicles and electrified public transportation, including expanded passenger rail, should be deployed equitably across the state so all have access.
 - Expanding Minnesota's transportation infrastructure will create jobs.
 - Improved and expanded transportation options will reduce the cost of living for many individuals and boost the quality of life in Minnesota communities.
10. **Energy & Climate: No new fossil fuel infrastructure** - Mandate the calculation of climate impacts including external and social costs of carbon, for all new infrastructure projects; limit funding or deny permits for high impact projects and incentivize those with the lowest carbon footprint; remove existing fossil fuel-based infrastructure as quickly as possible.
- The International Energy Agency (IEA) recently published its flagship report titled "Net Zero by 2050", and the verdict is clear. No new fossil fuel expansion projects can be built in order to get to net zero emissions by 2050 and keep temperatures under 1.5 Degree C of warming.
 - A recent study showed we've already installed enough fossil fuel infrastructure to commit to more than 1.5 degrees Celsius of planetary warming, even without new planned installations.
 - We should not rely on carbon capture, geoengineering, or offsets as alternatives to reducing emissions in our strategy to limit warming.
 - Putting a price on carbon will make the polluters pay and drive the economy to cleaner, renewable sources. Economists agree this is the most effective way to dramatically reduce emissions while protecting low and middle income families.

11. **Retirement Security: Divestment** - Support the continued divestment from fossil fuels funds by the Minnesota State Board of Investment to protect the pensions of Minnesota civil servants and educators from financial risk and to help move our economy to clean energy sources.

- Besides the obvious moral argument for divestment, the financial risk of continued investment in fossil fuel funds makes this a poor investment. These assets will become stranded assets and of little value as we move away from fossil fuels to a clean energy economy.
- Litigation risks increase as the cost of climate related disasters soar. Local governments are holding energy companies responsible for infrastructure and property damage.
- Governments are also using cap and trade or carbon taxes to reduce greenhouse gas emission. This makes high carbon energy sources more expensive and less profitable, and sends a clear market signal to switch to renewable energy sources. Solar and wind are often less expensive than any other energy option.
- Numerous institutions made divestment announcements recently. The leaders of these institutions declared that they are taking these divestment actions as prudent fund managers. Recent announcements of divestment were made by: New York State Common Retirement Fund, Macalester College, the University of Minnesota, Harvard University, Boston University, the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, some California State Universities, and Dartmouth College.

12. **Civil, Human, and Constitutional Rights: Rights of Nature** - All waters and wetlands in Minnesota have a right to exist, flow, and be protected against harm. Government entities or citizens shall have standing to bring an action against any entity who intentionally or negligently damages waters and wetlands in Minnesota.

- The ever-growing list of impaired waterways in Minnesota is evidence that our environmental laws do not fully protect our communities and their environments. If we set ecosystems on equal footing with people and corporations by giving them standing to sue, rather than treating them as property, we will be better able to stave off the assault on our clean water, air, and planet.
- Ecosystems are living entities with rights, just like humans and corporations. They have the right to exist and flourish and multiply. With our current biodiversity and climate crises, the status quo in terms of environmental laws is not adequate to protect our most valuable and necessary resources.
- In 2018, White Earth leaders adopted a tribal law recognizing the rights of wild rice to exist and flourish. And in 2021, the Constitutional Court in Ecuador ruled that the constitutional rights of nature were violated by the issuance of mining permits that would harm the biodiversity of the Los Cedros Protected Forest, including species at high risk of extinction and fragile ecosystems.

13. **Corporate & Business Accountability to the Public: Electric Co-Ops** - Support legislative oversight of Minnesota's member-owned electric cooperatives to improve transparency and ensure there is opportunity for input from members before key decisions are made that affect asset management, member payments, or climate impacts.

- Electric cooperatives serve 83% of Minnesota's geography and are making decisions with very little state oversight, unlike investor-owned utilities.
- A lack of transparency with member owners has been an ongoing problem. Some cooperatives don't even allow their member owners to attend board meetings.
- Decisions are being made that greatly impact the carbon footprint of electricity generation for decades to come. Member owners should be consulted before these decisions are made to evaluate the true costs and benefits of decisions including the continued use of coal and other fossil fuel sources of energy.

14. **Government Accountability to the Public: Mining Conflict of Interest** - Support eliminating the conflict of interest between mineral regulation and promotion in the Department of Natural Resources by reassigning responsibility for development and economic analysis of state minerals to the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

- By law, Minnesota's government must "provide for the diversification of the state's mineral economy through long-term support of mineral exploration, evaluation, environmental research, development, production, and commercialization." That duty falls largely on the DNR.
- The DNR's dual role of advancing and regulating mining creates a conflict of interest that has influenced permitting decisions. The influence or perception of influence in favor of mineral extraction companies due to this dual role casts doubt on the DNR's objective decision making on permits.
- The Department of Employment and Economic Development does not have responsibility for environmental protection, thereby making it a better agency to handle the promotion of mineral exploration and extraction.

15. **Consumer Protection or Ag, Food, Land Stewardship: Waste Reduction** - Develop and deploy a comprehensive policy to make available and maximize the expected use life, facilitate efficient repair, reuse, and recycling of manufactured products. Minimize the use and maximize recycling of strategic materials. Promote widespread reduction, usage, or composting of food waste.

- Verifiable estimates of the expected use life of products would influence consumer decisions, encouraging the manufacture of more durable goods, thus reducing the environmental effects of consumerism such as landfills, incinerators, and threats to public health. It would conserve energy and natural resources, save citizens money, and encourage the manufacture of goods that are more efficiently repaired.
- Guarantee the right to repair goods, such as electronics and farm equipment.
- Ensure the widespread ability to recycle the components of consumer products that can't be repaired or reused.
- Promote the reuse and recycling of strategic minerals such as copper or other expensive metals to reduce the environmental effects of mining, better secure our supply chains, and save businesses and consumers money.
- Food waste and food processing byproducts represent a major source of greenhouse gasses (through methane) and a waste of materials and energy. Composting benefits soils, reduces the use of fertilizers, and reduces negative environmental effects. Many communities compost most of their food waste.

16. **Consumer Protection - Toxic Substances** - Support the reduction or banning of toxic and carcinogenic substances, such as harmful PFAS chemicals, in consumer goods, and require newly developed similar substances to be proven safe before widespread manufacture and use.

- Almost all Minnesotans have been exposed to some level of PFAS, with residents of places like the East Metro especially at risk. Many PFAS chemicals contribute to cancer and other diseases. While these chemicals are being phased out or restricted in many areas, new cancer-causing pollutants continue to emerge.
- Our current system allows corporations to introduce chemicals without the burden of proving that they are safe - it is on regulators that have to prove that the chemicals are harmful.
- Minnesota and the United States should introduce the precautionary principle in regulating new chemicals - ensuring that harm is prevented beforehand rather than addressed afterward. It would require corporations to prove that their new substances are safe prior to approval for widespread use.
- Research is needed to better understand sources of trace contaminants like PFAS and pharmaceuticals so they can be effectively controlled before they enter surface water and groundwater.