

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Letter from MN DNR Commissioner Strommen re: Permitting Discussions

December 9, 2025

Good morning, Chair Hartwell, Vice-Chair Schara, and Executive Director Johnson,

I watched the LSOHC's discussion at the November 12, 2025, meeting regarding DNR permitting for OH projects, and I see that you intend to discuss at tomorrow's meeting a draft letter to the Legislature regarding permitting process and OHF restoration/enhancement activities. Respectfully, I am asking that you direct the letter to me, as DNR Commissioner, instead of the Legislature.

As I noted above, I did listen to the Council's November 12 discussion, and I would very much like the opportunity to work within DNR to address the timeliness concerns and questions raised during that discussion. As you know, LSOHC recently raised similar questions about the timeliness of the land acquisition process at DNR. That discussion led to DNR undertaking a land acquisition continuous improvement project that has yielded significant improvements. I believe that work serves as a model for approaching timeliness concerns with permitting.

I also believe DNR is suited to address the concerns strategically because of the data we keep on environmental review and permitting. For example:

- Over the last ~7 years the DNR has been the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for EAW preparation of 11 stream/habitat restoration/enhancement projects. DNR processed 9 of these EAWs in under 8 months. One took 10 months and one project that had substantial complications took 2 years to complete.
- Data over the last ten years identified 150 permit applications likely associated with stream restoration/enhancement projects.
 - 132 (88%) had a decision on the application within the statutory 150-day goal timeline.

- The 18 applications (12%) that did not reach a decision within the statutory 150-day goal had a wide range of processing time, and the specific issues that led to the delay. Some of these decisions were made within 200 days, most were in the range of 200-400 days, and 3 exceeded 400 days.
- Common reasons for not meeting the 150-day goal included: need for final designs/responsiveness of the proposer; changes in project proposal; need to address technical issues such as Threatened and Endangered species or floodplain regulations.

Data such as these allow us to target potential bottlenecks and get to solutions faster.

Please know that DNR shares LSOHC's desire to ensure environmental review and permitting doesn't take longer than necessary while upholding the requirements of state statute and rule designed to protect Minnesota's natural resources and allow for public transparency. We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with LSOHC and project partners. I am happy to discuss this request further. Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Sarah

Sarah Strommen

Commissioner

(she/her/hers)

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