



2021 Legislative Agenda

Clean Energy Now

Climate change is real and Minnesota is already experiencing the tragic consequences. Record high temperatures and extreme weather events are just the beginning. We can and should do more to combat carbon pollution — and make Minnesota a leader in innovative climate solutions along the way. The alternative is unacceptable: widespread ecological and economic destruction.

Keep It in The Ground

We simply cannot protect Minnesota from climate disaster unless we stop expanding our capacity to extract, transport and refine fossil fuels like crude oil and fossil gas. Enbridge Energy Partners is now building a massive expansion of its Line 3 pipeline, currently crossing over 300 miles of Minnesota including the Leech Lake and Fond du Lac reservations. This expansion would double the pipeline's capacity and let Enbridge move dirty tar sands crude across Minnesota to refineries in other states. We firmly oppose the Line 3 expansion and support legislative, executive, and/or agency action to stop it. We also oppose any legislative efforts to undermine legal challenges to the pipeline's approval or criminalize advocacy against the pipeline.

100% Renewable Electricity

We have the power to harness clean, abundant energy from the sun and the wind, and we can do it more efficiently and cheaply than ever before. Yet we're still producing, consuming and wasting energy in ways that

do lasting damage to our environment and our health — fracking for gas near schools instead of putting solar panels on their roofs, and burning coal, oil and gas instead of powering our homes, cars and lives with clean, renewable energy.

Minnesota has made significant progress in moving our electricity grid away from dirty fuel sources like coal and natural gas and towards clean, renewable sources like wind and solar. Thanks, in part, to a bill supported by Environment Minnesota, all utilities must now produce 25 percent of their power from renewable sources as part of the state's renewable energy standard ("RES"). With Xcel Energy's recent commitment to go 100 percent carbon-free by 2050, however, the old RES badly needs updating. All of Minnesota should enjoy the benefits of truly clean, renewable energy, not just Xcel's customers.

Put simply: Minnesota can and must do better. We have to go 100 percent renewable as soon as possible to ensure a cleaner, healthier future and liveable climate. This year, a bill introduced by Rep. Jamie Long proposes a new carbon neutral standard to get Minnesota's electrical grid off of fossil fuels by 2040. We support this reasonable approach to transitioning our economy to clean energy.

We will also support more aggressive timelines for transitioning to 100% clean energy. That includes the CLEAR bill, which would reform our broken utilities and create a path to clean, distributed energy.

Defending Solar Power

More Americans are going solar every day. By 2019, our country had enough solar energy capacity installed to power the equivalent of more than [12 million homes](#).

Yet we're still not even close to reaching our solar potential. Every year, enough sunlight shines on America to provide [100 times more power than we need](#). We're capturing only a tiny percentage of that resource. Harnessing more of the sun's energy would mean cleaner air and a more stable climate, less strain on natural resources, more resilient communities and an energy source we can depend on to be virtually pollution-free [for as long as we can imagine](#).

Solar power is an increasingly important and affordable investment opportunity for homeowners. Unfortunately, some utilities and their allies continue resisting the decentralization of our electricity grid by fighting for exorbitant "distributed generation" fees and other unfair barriers to universal solar power and energy efficiency. We support on-bill inclusive financing options that make solar power — and energy efficiency — affordable for everyone. We're also supporting a new law that will [add solar power to every new home in Minnesota](#).

We have one of the best community solar garden programs in the nation. These gardens allow industrial, commercial, and residential customers to buy some of their electricity from nearby gardens. Unfortunately, some want to hamstring these programs, creating unnecessary restrictions on the gardens' size and who can subscribe. We firmly oppose any attempt to limit the power of our solar gardens and will work to expand access to everyone.

Cutting Out Waste

Our society has a nasty habit of hyper-consumerism and of throwing away things that have a lot more use in them. Environment Minnesota supports initiatives that promote repairing and reusing products to reduce waste. Right now, big companies like Apple restrict repair by refusing to provide the necessary tools and information. As a result, consumers must go back to the manufacturer, who can charge an arm and a leg or push consumers into purchasing unnecessary upgrades. All of that drives up increasing product obsolescence. Farmers are forced to get certain equipment repairs done at the dealerships due to software locks against repair, driving up costs.

In 2021, we will advance a bill to restore the Right to Repair for all our digital electronic equipment. This means that consumers will finally get to choose where they fix their smart phones — and farmers can fix their own equipment without being forced to go to the dealer.

Wildlife Over Waste

Throwaway plastics are a huge burden on our environment. Plastic creates carbon pollution at nearly every stage of production, from its creation to its degradation. Worldwide, we consume about 100 million tons of plastic a year, creating anywhere from 100 to 500 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution.¹ This needs to change — now.

This session, Environment Minnesota will protect local controls on solid waste, while advancing statewide restrictions on non-recyclable, hazardous forms of single use plastics. We will actively oppose any "preemption" of local waste restrictions, like those in Minneapolis, St. Paul and St. Louis Park's that require to-go containers be recyclable, reusable, or compostable. We also strongly support statewide restrictions on unnecessary single-use plastics like polystyrene foam to-go containers and grocery bags, clear and accurate labeling of compostable products, and developing real incentives and content targets for using recycled plastic instead of new plastics made from fossil fuels.

Protecting Our Water

Decades ago, some people thought polluted rivers and streams were the price we had to pay for progress. That's not a world we have to live in anymore. Nor is it the future our children deserve. For the past four years, President Trump and his allies in Congress pushed for changes that would turn back the clock to when environmental protection was an afterthought — not the foundation for a better quality of life and a brighter future.

Minnesota's connection to water is special. We're the headwaters of the Mississippi River, the home to well over 10,000 lakes, and the protectors of the Boundary Waters. We are committed to keeping our water safe, clean, and accessible to all — but that commitment isn't yet fulfilled. We must restore federal protections for all of Minnesota's waterways, stop lead contamination of our drinking water, halt sewage and runoff pollution by investing in green infrastructure, and permanently protect the Boundary Waters.

Get the Lead Out

A potent neurotoxin, lead affects how our children learn, grow and behave. Unfortunately, lead contamination of drinking water is widespread - even in our schools. That's why we're working to get the lead out in Minnesota.

According to the EPA, "In children, low levels of [lead] exposure have been linked to damage to the central and peripheral nervous system, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells."

Yet too many of our water service lines and water fountains still contain lead. And wherever there is lead, our children's drinking water is at risk. Despite this, the state does not require schools to take action unless lead levels are above 20 parts per billion (ppb) — that's twenty times higher than the level recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.²

We need to get the lead out of our water delivery systems — at school and at home. That means proactively replacing lead service lines, as well as faucets and fountains in schools, and installing filters certified to remove lead. This will cost money, but we think our children's health is worth it. We'll be working to ensure that sufficient funds from the recently-approved water infrastructure bond are used to ensure that all of Minnesota's children have safe drinking water.

Protecting the Boundary Waters from Toxic Mining

The Boundary Waters are one of the few pristine, wild places we have left. They're essential to Minnesota's identity, but only because they're so special: inaccessible by vehicle and unsullied by permanent structures. They're also under constant threat by short-sighted mining interests pushing false narratives about metal scarcity.

Some members of Congress are still pushing to open up the Boundary Waters — and areas near them — to sulfide ore mining, a particularly dangerous and dirty form that leaves behind tons of poisonous, acidic tailings. We will continue to oppose any federal or state legislation or agency action that opens up the Boundary Waters to sulfide ore mining.

Sulfide ore mining also presents a clear threat to Minnesota's clean water. That's why we're keeping a watchful eye on the proposed PolyMet mine in Northeastern Minnesota, a project that presents a myriad of environmental risks. In 2018, the Minnesota Senate proposed SF 2204³, requiring the DNR Commissioner to demonstrate that there is a single safe sulfide ore mine in the United States or Canada before granting a permit to a sulfide ore mine here in Minnesota. This would ensure that PolyMet can't move forward until we truly know that our surface and groundwaters are safe from the project's impacts. Environment Minnesota supports re-introducing and passing SF 2204.

No Bees, No Food

In recent years, beekeepers report they're losing on average 30 percent of all honeybee colonies each winter — twice what they can afford. Just as worrisome, wild bee populations are also in decline. We rely on bees to pollinate 71% of the crops that provide most of the world's food. Imagine no almonds, no coffee, fewer apples and strawberries, less alfalfa to feed dairy cows, and the list goes on.

Put simply, our food supply is under threat —and that's a big deal in Minnesota, where agriculture is our 2nd largest industry.

We support a statewide ban on neonicotinoid pesticides, one of the biggest threats to pollinators like Minnesota's state bee, the rusty patched bumble bee. We also support measures that will reduce the harm to pollinators while giving Minnesota's cities the flexibility to try out new, innovative approaches to pest and disease control. That's why we support banning neonics in wildlife areas and giving Minnesota's biggest cities (Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth and Rochester) the ability to regulate pesticides on the local level.

Notes

- 1 Samantha Staley, "The Link Between Plastic Use and Climate Change: Nitty-gritty," *Stanford Magazine*, August 31, 2011
- 2 "With No Amount of Lead Exposure Safe for Children, American Academy of Pediatrics Calls For Stricter Regulations," June 20th, 2016.
- 3 SF 2204/HF 2283