With six weeks of the session already history and the seventh week underway, the 2019 Legislative Session is starting to kick into high gear. As of Monday, Feb 18 the Senate has introduced 1,473 bills, while the House is at 1,409 introductions. The revisor’s office has indicated that they are busier than normal with bill drafting and had a two week backlog.

MAWD and the Red River Watershed Management Board have been working to get bills introduced from our respective legislative programs. We have been making progress but have encountered significant resistance on the proposed general levy increase. Because this is primarily a rural watershed district issue, we need to garner support from House and Senate rural members to move forward on this legislation. If you haven’t talked to your local house or senate member you need to double down and ask them to sign onto this important bill to meet and keep pace with our general fund needs.

Governor Walz introduced his budget on Tuesday, Feb 19th and Walz’s proposal for 2020 and 2021 would be a more than 8 percent increase from the roughly $46 billion current two-year budget. He also proposed a 20 cent per gallon gas tax increase. We will be reviewing the governor’s budget in the next few weeks to determine who are the winners and losers in this first round of the budget process.

We have not seen any bill introductions attacking watershed districts and our authorities. We have been told to expect something in the near future, so for now please stay tuned for any future developments.

Committee deadlines have been announced. In addition, for the first time in memory the leadership and governor have agreed on deadlines for a smooth session conclusion. These deadlines include:

- 1st Policy Committee Deadline – March 15, 2019
- 2nd Policy Committee Deadline – March 29, 2019
- Finance Committee Deadline – April 12, 2019

Please review the bills below that we are working on and our legislative priorities for the session. Please share this MAWD Legislative Update with your managers, staff and key partners. – Ray Bohn, MAWD Lobbyist

**TOP Legislative Priorities**

**INCREASE GENERAL FUND LEVY LIMIT**

Remove (or increase) the $250,000 general fund levy limit while keeping the not-to-exceed levy limit of 0.048 percent of estimated market value.

- Bill drafted to eliminate $250,000 cap, lobbyist seeking authors in House and Senate (see comments above).
- Will probably need to redraft legislation to retain a dollar cap in our bill. Legislators don’t like open ended levies that could raise over $4 million for several watershed districts and greatly increase others from the present $250,000 cap.

**UPDATE THE PROJECT LEVY STATUTE**

Modify the project tax levy statute to allow this option to be applied for ALL types of state and federal grants, not just for Clean Water Partnership (CWP) grants.

- **SF 1391 WD construction or implementation fund and project tax levy sources of financing expansion**
  - Senate Authors: Andrew Lang, Dan Sparks, Kent Eken, Mark Johnson, Bill Weber
  - 2/18/19 Referred to Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Legacy Finance committee
  - We are still working on author signatures for the House file.
INCREASE OUTSTANDING LOAN LIMITS FOR WDs

Remove (or increase) the $2M limit on outstanding loans watershed districts, especially for those entities that serve as drainage authorities.

- After further review of this proposal, questions have arisen if the borrowing limit cited only applies to projects undertaken under Chapter 103D. The borrowing limit does not appear to pertain to 103E drainage projects. Because this legislation was intended to deal with 103E projects drainage we are still in discussions on the need for this legislation.

IMPROVE COORDINATION BETWEEN LOCAL/STATE WATERSHED PLANS

Improve coordination and remove duplicative efforts of water management planning being conducted at both the local and state levels.

- **HF 0875 Clean Water Legacy Act modified, and coordinated watershed management provided for**
  - House Authors: Peter Fischer, Paul Torkelson, John Poston, Jeff Brand
  - 2/07/19 – Referred to Environment and Natural Resources Policy (ENR-P) committee
  - 2/13/19 – Hearing in ENR-P committee. Emily Javens (MAWD) and LeAnn Buck (MASWCD) testified.
  - 2/13/19 – Bill referred to the Ways and Means committee
- **SF 1069 Clean Water Legacy Act modification; coordinated watershed management establishment**
  - Senate Authors: Mark Johnson, Carrie Ruud, Charles Wiger
  - 2/11/19 – Referred to Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Legacy Finance (ENR-PLF) committee

REINFORCE RIGHTS TO MAINTAIN AND REPAIR 103E PUBLIC WATERS DRAINAGE SYSTEMS

Reinforce existing rights to maintain/repair drainage systems that operate under MN Statute 103E.

- Drafting legislation to clarify several 103E statute provisions dealing with repair and maintenance in public waters.
- Held meeting with DNR to discuss issues surrounding their pubic waters drainage guidance document.
- Plan on additional meetings with DNR to introduce legislation.

INCREASE MANAGER COMPENSATION (PER DIEMS)

Increase maximum daily manager per diem rates.

- Rep. Rick Hanson, chair of the House Environment & Natural Resources Finance Committee, has agreed to author our per diem increase to $125 but asked that we also include the SWCDs in the legislation. After discussions with MASWCD, we are in the process of drafting a new bill to include them in our bill.
- MAWD is exploring options for expanding the activities that would be eligible for per diems. For instance, watersheds may be allowed to pay a per diem for meeting prep. More details will follow.

REMOVE COMMERCIAL FISHING MONOPOLY ON COMMON CARP

Remove permitting restrictions when hiring contractors to remove common carp from lakes.

- After consultation with DNR we have agreement on legislation to exempt local units of government from the requirements of the Commercial Fishing Areas statute (97C.815). This bill is being drafted and Sen. Pratt will author the legislation in the Senate, and we are working with a member to chief author the bill in the House. Rep. Tony Albright will co-author the bill in the House. DNR supports the legislation.

FLOOD HAZARD MITIGATION PROGRAM

The Governor’s Capital Budget Recommendations (bonding bill) we believe will be released soon. We have been told that it is doubtful that the Governor will include any funding for the Flood Hazard Mitigation Program. If that turns out to be the case, watershed districts impacted by a no funding recommendation will need to redouble efforts with their local legislators to insure the program is adequately funded for our ongoing flood programs.

For more detailed information on specific bills, visit [www.mnwatershed.org/policy-issues](http://www.mnwatershed.org/policy-issues) and watch for legislative updates delivered to your inbox starting next week. Thank you for your assistance in our legislative efforts!