



Helping to create a world where people and nature thrive



MAKING AN IMPACT: A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear friends,

As I reflect on the past year and everything we've accomplished together, I'm filled with hope for our future and hope for nature.

In Minnesota, we're restoring wetlands and seeing endangered or threatened species come back. And since this time last year, you've helped us plant more than 2.3

million trees in northern Minnesota. That brings us to a total of more than 10 million trees planted across the state since 2005!

In North Dakota, we're working with a coalition of partners to grow the number of private landowners who use conservation grazing and fire to manage their grasslands. In South Dakota, we're emulating beavers and installing simple structures made with natural materials that retain water in prairie streams, which benefits fish, wildlife and landowners.

This fall, Minnesotans have an opportunity to use their outside voice to impact the future of conservation across the state. The state lottery has funded about \$1 billion in conservation projects since 1988 through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. If a majority of voters vote "yes" on their ballot in November, this funding will be renewed for another 25 years, conserving and protecting our water, land and wildlife.

In the following pages, you'll learn more about some of the projects your support has made possible. I hope you enjoy this collection of updates and find yourself as inspired as I am each day. We are truly building—together—a world where people and nature thrive.

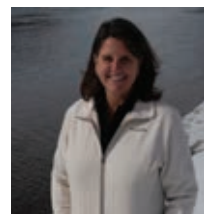
This is a defining decade for our planet, and every action we take—in our local communities and around the world—makes a profound impact on our shared future. Every gift, every letter to lawmakers, every tree planted, and every acre protected makes a difference. Your generosity makes this work possible, and it gives us all a reason to have hope for nature.

The stakes couldn't be higher—we must slow climate change and the loss of species to safeguard people and the planet. We need you now more than ever.

Thank you for protecting our lands and sustaining our waters so they can be resilient in a changing climate. As we continue to tackle the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, I hope you'll take pride in the fact that your support is making an enduring impact. Thank you!

With gratitude,

Ann Mulholland



Chapter Director
TNC in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota

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RETURNING FIRE TO FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

Fire—started by lightning or by Indigenous land stewards—maintained the prairies of the Great Plains and the forests of the Northwoods for thousands of years before the U.S. government put fire suppression policies in place more than a century ago. Fire suppression has led to trees crowding out native prairie plants and increased the risk of catastrophic wildfires by allowing an overabundance of leaves and dead trees—fuel for the flames—to accumulate in forests. As Native Nations have known for centuries, these ecosystems evolved with routine fire and need it to thrive.

The Nature Conservancy is amplifying prescribed fire practices developed by Indigenous Peoples and backed by science. Our staff are partnering with Native Nations, conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, and private landowners to help return fire to the forests and prairies of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. Our crews have conducted and assisted controlled burns on more than 28,000 acres of TNC preserves and partner lands across the tri-state area in the past year.

In Minnesota, TNC’s Fire in the Forest burn crews added staff and grew our collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Natural Resources to bring prescribed fire to the lands they manage.

TNC burn crews teamed up with the North Dakota Prescribed Fire Cooperative and the South Dakota Grassland Coalition to host prescribed fire workshops for more than 200 private landowners and conservation practitioners, including classroom instruction and hands-on training with controlled burns. Partners in these collectives hope that if enough private landowners are safely and effectively conducting prescribed burns on their land, word will spread and the benefits will be felt across the grasslands of North and South Dakota.

Pete Kronberg runs a 400-acre family ranch in the Leola Hills of North Dakota. One spring, he decided to try out prescribed fire, with support from the North Dakota Prescribed Fire Cooperative. The results were amazing: by summer, a variety of species of thick grasses sprouted. By October they towered eight feet high, and Kronberg noticed the native grasses were more resilient. “They can take the dry periods for a long time,” he said.

STRATEGY:
Return prescribed fire to the grasslands and forests of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota to improve the health and diversity of these ecosystems.



420 ACRES IN THE DRIFTLESS

The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land acquired a 420-acre property 15 minutes from downtown Rochester to establish Moon Valley Wildlife Management Area. The property was transferred to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources last year and is now open to the public for hiking, photography, birdwatching and more.

The Moon family operated a farm on the land for nearly a century, and wanted to see it preserved as a natural area. Moon Valley includes about 200 acres of former cropland, which TNC is restoring to wetlands, prairie and floodplains to improve water quality and provide habitat for fish and wildlife. The site has forested bluffs, a large spring, and three miles of shoreline along the Zumbro River, which flows into the Mississippi River. The new wildlife management area will provide critical habitat for bald eagles, Blanding's turtles, timber rattlesnakes and more species that call the Driftless home.

STRATEGY:

Expand the amount of land protected and restored in Minnesota's biologically rich Driftless Area for wildlife, water and recreation.



CHANNELING BEAVERS

TNC is partnering with private landowners, Indigenous communities, and state and federal agencies in Western South Dakota to restore streams using beaver dam analogs (BDAs). Beavers were once common in the area. BDAs are low-cost, human-made structures that mimic the function of a beaver dam. A BDA made of natural materials, including sticks, rocks and mud, can hold water and stop erosion. As silt and water collect to expand the floodplain behind the BDA, more vegetation grows and naturally slows water to create habitat for fish, wildlife and grazing animals. So far, TNC and our partners have installed 350 BDAs in South Dakota.

BDAs are helping ranchers manage the challenges of feast-or-famine rainfall in the area. Rancher Markus Erk worked with TNC to install BDAs on his property near Castle Rock. Two years later, the stream banks are starting to heal. "The beaver analogs are working well to cut down on erosion and hold water to spread it out more," Erk says.

STRATEGY:

Improve water quality and boost biodiversity by slowing grassland streams in Western South Dakota.



STRATEGY:

Use low-tech, cost-effective techniques to restore wetlands and improve water quality near the Mississippi Headwaters.



RESTORING WETLANDS

TNC has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and private landowners to restore 72 wetlands—most in the Mississippi River Headwaters area—totaling 675 acres since 2018. TNC contributes scientific expertise and funding from supporters like you through the Our Water campaign, and helps leverage federal funds. The USFWS and TNC plan to complete 75 more restorations by the end of 2025.

Wetland restoration improves water quality, helps prevent floods, improves carbon retention and provides wildlife habitat. Scientists at TNC and the University of Minnesota developed the Wetland Restoration Effectiveness Tool, which agencies and municipalities are using to quantify the benefits of wetland restoration.

In 2022, USFWS and TNC blocked ditches and installed a dam on a previously drained wetland in Elk River. This summer, landowner Mike Niziolek saw signs of Blanding's turtles—an endangered species—for the first time.

STRATEGY:

Leverage research and partnerships to guide peatland restoration work in Minnesota to maximize carbon storage benefits.



RESTORING PEATLANDS

Our peatland team is learning more about this weird and wonderful wetland ecosystem—including how it can help fight climate change. Peatlands cover only about 3% of the Earth's surface, but globally store about 30% of all land carbon. Minnesota has more peatlands than any other state in the Lower 48—roughly 6 million acres. Many have been ditched and drained, causing the soil to emit carbon rather than store it.

TNC scientists have written the playbook for peatlands, detailing the state of Minnesota's peatlands and a path toward restoration and protection of this vital tool for climate mitigation. Our ongoing research explores carbon and methane emissions from peatlands in various states of health, degradation or restoration to understand how best to focus our conservation efforts. TNC also convenes partners from state and federal agencies, Native Nations and nonprofits to maximize our collective impact on peatlands. Learn more at nature.org/mnpeatlands.

MINNESOTA'S FORESTS

Forests once stretched across more than 31 million acres of the land now known as Minnesota. But nearly half were destroyed through logging, agriculture and development because of European settlement.

Recognizing the rich benefits that forests offer for our economy and environment, including wildlife habitat, carbon storage, improved air and water quality, beauty and outdoor recreation, TNC kicked off our tree-planting efforts nearly two decades ago.

As this work ramped up, we set our sights on an ambitious goal to plant 8 million trees by 2025. But thanks to our partners and generous donors like you, our team has exceeded this milestone! Our crews have planted 10.7 million trees in Minnesota since 2005. This accomplishment would not be possible without the hard work of seasonal guest workers. Guest workers have planted or tended to 175 million acres of forests in the United States in the last 30 years. Learn more about how we manage forests for resilience at [nature.org/mnforests](https://www.nature.org/mnforests).

STRATEGY:

Restore resilience to Minnesota's Northwoods by planting and protecting millions of diverse, climate-resilient trees.



ADAPTING TO CLIMATE

Scientists and conservationists at TNC have developed climate adaptation plans for five landscapes across Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota: the Prairie Coteau, Leola Hills, Missouri River Breaks, Ordway Glacial Lakes and Lac Qui Parle, and the Driftless. Partners at local agencies and conservation organizations contributed to the plans and will help enact them with our staff.

The evidence-based plans outline a vision and goals for these landscapes and recommend strategies to adapt to climate change and be more resilient to climate change in the future. Adaptation strategies include changing when we seed or what we plant as part of a prairie restoration project, or adjusting our fire management season based on changes in weather patterns. Climate adaptation planning allows our conservation staff and partners to coordinate our collective efforts for the greatest impact for people and the planet. Learn more about our climate work at [nature.org/mnclimate](https://www.nature.org/mnclimate).

STRATEGY:

Develop climate adaptation plans backed by the latest science to empower conservation practitioners and maximize our collective impact.



PUBLIC FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION

In 1988, more than three in four Minnesota voters approved a constitutional amendment to establish the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) using a portion of proceeds from the Minnesota State Lottery. A strong majority of voters extended this critical funding in 1998 to conserve and protect our water, land and wildlife. Voters have a chance to renew this funding for another 25 years in November. **If a majority of voters vote “yes” on the ballot, this funding will continue to support critical projects around the state.** Leaving the measure blank on the ballot is counted as a “no” vote.

Since the ENRTF was established, it has provided about \$1 billion in conservation funding. Just this year, lawmakers approved \$80 million in conservation funding from the trust fund with bipartisan support. Learn more about the ENRTF at MNGreatOutdoors.org.

Prepared by Minnesotans for Our Great Outdoors, 1101 West River Parkway, Suite 250, Minneapolis, MN 55415.

Other wins for nature at the Minnesota legislature this year included funding for community tree planting, and legislative approval to spend over \$218 million through Clean Water, Land and Legacy funds to support conservation and clean water projects and programs. Minnesota became the first state in the nation to pass a law putting in place protections for native rough fish, ensuring that their populations can be managed similarly to how the state has managed sport fish, like walleye and northern pike. These species help maintain freshwater ecosystem health and ultimately provide clean water.

Your support elevated key priorities for nature and climate at the legislature. Advocates like you sent more than 1,600 letters to Minnesota lawmakers during the 2024 session to speak up for investments in Minnesota’s land and water. Visit nature.org/mnadvocacy to learn more about how you can advocate for nature.

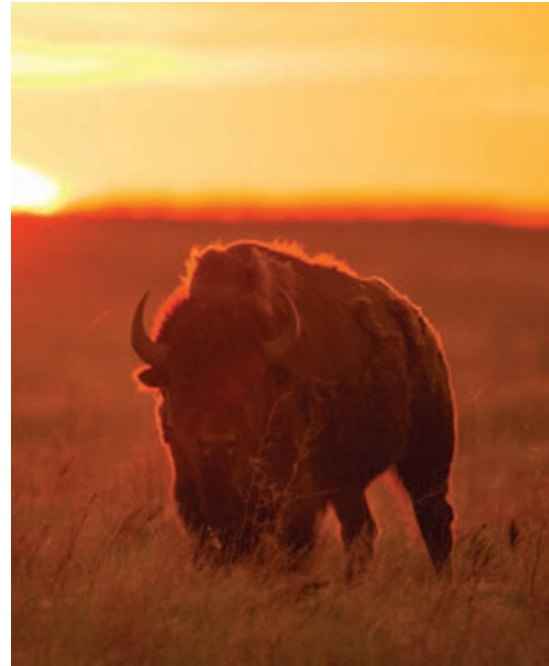
STRATEGY:

Highlight the value of investments in healthy land, air and water to lawmakers and advocate for public support of conservation.



YOUR IMPACT

You made these wins for land, water and wildlife possible! We could try to quantify the ripple effects of your support in miles reforested, acres protected, wetlands restored or threatened species now prospering. But the beauty and benefits of nature are immeasurable, and so is your impact. We’ve accomplished so much together, and we have much more work ahead of us to ensure a future where people and nature thrive. Visit nature.org/tristateimpact to make a gift.



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S MISSION

is to conserve the lands and
waters on which all
life depends.

