



NICK BANCKS

Protecting the uplands ensures clean water for our kids to enjoy. East Indian Creek, Wabasha County

## Looking Ahead

As far as we know, time travel isn't yet an option. But if you could leap ahead to see Minnesota in 2117, we hope you would find the landscape of our state more ecologically balanced than it is today, from clean water in our lakes and streams to healthy communities of native plants and animals.

That vision is what drives the Minnesota Land Trust to do its work. It has completed 530 conservation projects (and more coming) statewide, permanently protecting 50,000 acres of natural and scenic land and over a million feet of fragile shoreline.

It's also what motivates the wonderful Minnesotans who have partnered with us along the way, like Larry Gates. In fact, if there was a gene for conservation, we're certain he would have it.

Larry was employed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for 34 years, retiring in 2007. He spent a chunk of that time working throughout the state, first with fisheries and then in watershed management. By 1997, he wanted to narrow his focus. He'd just purchased land in the Blufflands of Southeast Minnesota a couple of years earlier and wanted to put his energies into that area.

Southeast Minnesota is characterized by pastoral valleys rimmed with dry prairies and hardwood hills, and bisected by cold-water trout streams. Unlike any other part of the state, this ecological subsection of southern Minnesota was largely untouched by



LARRY GATES SPENT YEARS HELPING OTHERS PROTECT WILDLIFE HABITAT IN SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA. NOW HE'S DOING THE SAME ON HIS OWN PROPERTY.



HANSI JOHNSON



than 1.5 miles of shoreline along several cold-water streams. In doing so, it reduces the amount of pollutants that might enter East Indian Creek, a state-designated trout stream with native brook trout.

Key to this project is the link it creates between two large areas of state land, Whitewater Wildlife Management Area and part of Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood State Forest, and adjoining federal lands. By joining these areas, a 278,000 acre protected-land complex was created. The agreement ensures this connection is permanent.

"I want to reduce fragmentation in this region," says Larry "and knit this landscape together."

In doing so, he's protecting plant communities as well as habitat for animals at risk, like the timber rattlesnake, red-shouldered hawk and Louisiana waterthrush.

"Having a protected corridor is a huge piece for our work in Southeast Minnesota," says Nick. "It allows for additional management and also ensures biodiversity."

Another highlight of the project? Beginning this fall and over the next 10 years, about 70 acres of tilled land will be seeded with locally collected seeds and turned into a

hardwood forest of bur oak, swamp white oak, shagbark hickory and other trees. This will reduce water runoff and improve the land's ecological performance.

Larry knows he won't see the full impact of his efforts in his lifetime. And he's okay with that.

"It might take hundreds of years," he says, "but as foresters often say, the best time to plant a tree was a hundred years ago. The second best time is now."

"THE BLUFFLANDS ARE MINNESOTA'S BIOLOGICAL HOTSPOT."  
NICK BANCKS.  
MINNESOTA LAND TRUST PROGRAM MANAGER

glaciers. As a result, it's home to a distinctive landscape that supports a diverse array of forests, prairies, streams and wildlife. It's also a region that's at risk.

"The Blufflands are Minnesota's biological hotspot," says Nick Bancks, Minnesota Land Trust Program Manager. "The region has the greatest biodiversity in the state but also the greatest threats, and less than 5% of this region is in any kind of protected status."

Larry's property, which he increased in size twice by purchasing adjacent

land, is steep in places and includes forest, grasslands, cultivated land and wetlands. He has raised sheep, grown

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LARRY GATES

market crops and wild-harvested edibles. But a conservationist at heart, he had his sights set on the future:



KRISTINA GEIGER

SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA IS RENOWNED FOR ITS COLD-WATER TROUT STREAMS.

## Updates

from the Minnesota Land Trust

### MEET OUR NEW STAFF

#### VANESSA PERRY



- Program manager, land protection projects and program development in the Mississippi Headwaters and Metro areas
- 20 years experience in natural resources management
- Ph.D. pending, University of Minnesota, Natural Resource Science and Management

#### ANDREW MOE



- Stewardship associate, working with landowners, volunteers, other stakeholders to ensure conservation easements remain beneficial
- Formerly conservation easement steward for Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire
- M.S. in Wildlife and Conservation Biology from University of New Hampshire

### WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We're pleased to announce four new appointments to the Minnesota Land Trust board.



**BRADLEY FULLER** previously served on the board. He's a senior attorney with extensive experience in sophisticated real estate financing and development work and the General Counsel for Accessible Space in St. Paul, a nonprofit provider of affordable housing and supportive services for seniors and individuals with physical disabilities.

**TONY GRUNDHAUSER** is Executive Director of the Minnesota Zoo Foundation. He's responsible for raising philanthropic support for the zoo's mission to connect people, animals and the natural world to save wildlife. His previous experience includes leading capital campaigns for Hamline University and The Nature Conservancy.

**MARK NORQUIST** owns GreenHead Strategies, a Minnetonka-based consulting company that develops marketing and media strategies focused on conservation and outdoor experiences. A native Minnesotan, he has a lifelong commitment to protecting land in the state.

**RICHARD SNYDER** is a civil litigator representing businesses and individuals in a wide range of commercial disputes. He also specializes in disputes with governmental entities and others over land use rights and environmental matters.



## SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA: A TOP PRIORITY

KRISTINA GEIGER

**THE BLUFFLANDS OF SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA** are a state treasure. No other area boasts the beauty and the biodiversity of this region.

But it's in trouble. The area's watershed and more than 150 species of animals and plants are at high risk. The region's karst system (its particular combination of geology and topography) makes it particularly vulnerable to climate change, urbanization, agriculture and mining. A rock formation that runs through the region, called the Decorah Edge, acts as a natural water filter, providing drinking water for Rochester and several other cities. If vegetation is lost on the top of the Edge, water quality would be compromised, and that could result in a huge economic cost: A University of Minnesota study estimates that it would cost \$5 million annually for Rochester to purify the same amount of water.

Because only 5% of the land is publicly owned, we need a

private lands strategy to protect this region. Understanding the urgent need for preservation and the challenges in protecting it, the Minnesota Land Trust has made the Blufflands a top priority. In partnership with the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land, and with Outdoor Heritage Funds as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature, work is underway. Using conservation easements and land acquisition, we plan to restore and enhance hundreds of acres of declining habitat and permanently protect and improve watershed health.

"Southeast Minnesota is home to more species of greatest conservation need than anywhere else in the state," says Kris Larson, Executive Director of the Minnesota Land Trust. But thanks to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, the generous donors and the wonderful landowners in the region, we have more opportunity than ever to protect it."

### VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Tom Hoffman likes the idea of preserving natural spaces, especially in Southeast Minnesota where the landscape is so unique. So he's put his passion into action, volunteering as a certified monitor for the Land Trust. Volunteers not only walk the land, but make connections with the private landowners who steward the protected properties.

Tom's uniquely qualified for the work. As a geographic information systems (GIS) coordinator for Winona County, he's experienced in looking at land both on the ground and on the computer. In addition, Tom has ferried land title documents throughout the region on behalf of the Land Trust.

### LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR



Jon and Lori Peterson wake each day before sunrise to go about their work, tending to the needs of their organic farm. There's milking to do and livestock to care for, fencing to repair and pastures to tend. Every day is a bit different but one thing is constant: They're committed to being farmers *and* good land stewards. And in doing so, they are showing others that you can indeed accomplish both. The Peterson family conservation easements total 740 acres.

"We hope that our work with the Minnesota Land Trust will inspire other farmers in the area," says Jon.

### PARTNER OF THE YEAR



As a wildlife specialist with the DNR, Jaime Edwards is guided by a personal desire to protect and restore Southeast Minnesota's wildlife habitat. And that's a big job.

Jaime spends a great deal of time in the field, focusing particularly on the region's at-risk species and their habitat. One of her specialties is the state-threatened timber rattlesnake (hence her nickname, "the rattlesnake lady"). She also educates landowners, working with them to implement habitat restoration on their property.

Jaime's commitment and her connections have been critical in helping the Land Trust make progress with its goals of establishing conservation easements in the region.



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## Fishing contest celebrates a St. Louis River restoration project



Anglers ignored rain and cool temps to compete this summer in the "Paddle the Pads" fly fishing tournament at Chambers Grove. Recently completed work there has restored access to the St. Louis River for boats and provided a fishing-friendly shoreline.

On Saturday, August 26, avid fly anglers gathered in the early hours to compete in a contest. While fishing competitions in Minnesota aren't unusual, the location of this one was remarkable. It was held at Chambers Grove Park in Duluth.

Situated on the St. Louis River, Chambers Grove hasn't been much of a draw for fishing enthusiasts in recent years. A 1,000-foot steel retaining wall that had been installed years ago had the unintended consequence of eroding the shoreline, preventing boat access to the river and destroying important fish spawning habitat.

That all changed this spring when a two-year project was completed. The wall was removed, the shoreline restored and more than a quarter mile of essential spawning beds and fish habitat were recreated, thanks to the State of Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund.

To celebrate the project's completion, Great Lakes Fly Shop sponsored the catch-and-release contest, with proceeds going to the Minnesota Land Trust. It was a cool and rainy day, but dedicated anglers showed up none the less to land the biggest small-mouth bass. Great prizes were awarded to the top six catches, which ranged from 14 3/4 to 18 1/2 inches long. Carson Spohn from Duluth took first place. The day was capped off with a beer-and-brat social. But the celebration continues because Chambers Grove is back in the game.



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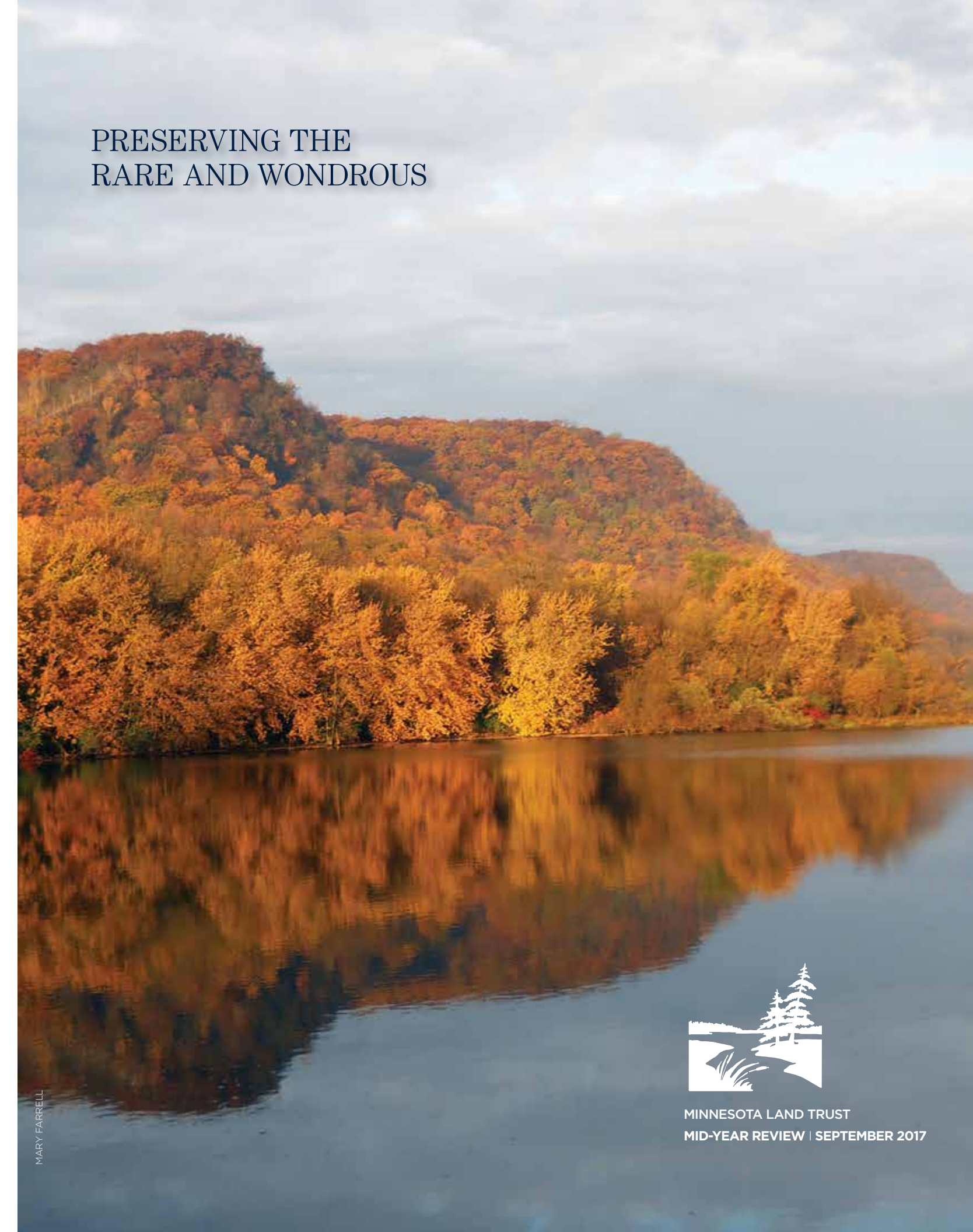
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## PRESERVING THE RARE AND WONDROUS



MARY FARRELL



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