Looking Ahead

As far as we know, time travel isn’t yet an option. But if you could loop-ahead to see Minnesota in 2027, you’d find the landscape of our state more ecologically balanced than it is today. From clear water in our lakes and streams to healthy wildlife, it’s been a long journey to get to this point.

In the fall of 2015, Larry and the Minnesota Land Trust entered an agreement for a conservation easement on his property. The project is supported with funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota Legislature and managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for 34 years, retiring

Nick Bancks
East Indian Creek, Wabasha County

clean water for our kids to enjoy.

Protecting the uplands ensures Minnesota was largely untouched by 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 at risk.

That vision is what drives the Minnesota Land Trust to do its work. It has completed 50 conservation projects (and more coming) statewide, permanently protecting 56,000 acres of natural and scenic land and over a million feet of riparian shores.

“It’s also what motivates the wonderful Minnesotans who have partnered with us along the way,” Larry Gates. If there was a prize for conservation, we’d have to award it to Larry. 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. With wildlife and fisheries in their watershed management. By 1977, he was ready to narrow his focus. He bought purchased land in the Blufflands of Southeast Minnesota as a couple of years earlier, he decided to retire from the Minnesota land Trust to do its work. The agreement ensures this connection is permanent.”

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

LARRY’S GATES

market crops and wild harvested edibles. But a conservationist at heart, he had his sights on the future, protecting his land to contribute to a healthy watershed. He had helped a number of people in the area establish conservation easements with the Land Trust. Now it was his turn.

In the fall of 2015, Larry and the Minnesota Land Trust entered an agreement for a conservation easement on his property. The project is supported with funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature and recommended by the Legislative State Outdoors Trust Council (LSOTC). The agreement protects 112 acres of forest and some small areas of wetland and grassland. It also protects more than 1.5 miles of shoreline along a couple of cold-water streams.

If doing so, it reduces the amount of pollutants that might enter East Indian Creek, a state-designated trout stream with native brook trout.

“They 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.”

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

Key to this project is the link it creates between two large areas of state land, Winona Wildlife Management Area and part of the 752-acre Minnesota Shoreland State Forest, and adjoining federal lands. By joining these areas, a 2,100-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 the landscape together.”

In doing so, he’s protecting plant communities as well as habitat for inland at risk, like the tinderfesculent, 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 30 acres of tilted land will be worked with locally collected seeds and turned into a hardwood forest of oak, hickory and maple. Other trees will reduce water runoff and improve the land’s ecological performance.

Larry knows how we’ve seen the full impact of his efforts in his lifetime. As far as we know, time travel isn’t yet an option. But if you could loop-ahead to see Minnesota in 2027, you’d find the landscape of our state more ecologically balanced than it is today. From clear water in our lakes and streams to healthy wildlife, it’s been a long journey to get to this point.

To find out more about the Minnesota Land Trust, visit www.minnesotalandtrust.org.
**THE BLUFFLANDS OF SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA**

are a state treasure. No other area boasts the beauty and the biodiversity of this region. But its not unique. The area's watered and more than 150 species of animals and plants are at high risk. The region's unique ecosystems (in particular a 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 Driftless Edge, acts as a natural water filter, providing drinking water for Rochester and several other cities. If vegetation is lost on top of the Driftless Edge, water quality would be compromised, and that could result in a tragic economic event. A University of Minnesota study estimated 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 land 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 federal support, the Trust has been able to permanently protect and improve the Blufflands' quality.

SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA: A TOP PRIORITY

**VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**

Tom Hoffman likes the idea of preserving nature for future generations. Located in Winona County, he's coordinator for Winona County, he's responsible for bringing landowners and the private sector together to create a future for this region.

Larson, Executive Director of the Minnesota Land Trust. But Tom Hoffman believes that it's not only land owners who steward the protected properties. 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 locating landowners on the ground and on the computer. In addition, Tom has inherited land documents through the region as behalf of the Land Trust.

**LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR**

Jon and Lori Peterson own 80 acres. They started out as a small farm, but then learned that you can indeed accomplish both. The Peterson family conservation easements have been critical in helping the Land Trust make progress with its goals of establishing conservation easements in the region. As a wildlife specialist with the DNR, Jaime Edwards is guided by a personal desire to protect and restore Southeast Minnesota's wildlife habitats. And it'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 white"). She also educates landowners, working with them to implement habitat restoration on their property. Jamie's commitment and her connections have been critical in winning the trust of the landowners that make progress with its goals of establishing conservation easements in the region.

JAMIE EDWARDS

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**FISHING CONTEST CELEBRATES A ST. LOUIS RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT**

On Saturday, August 26, avid fly anglers gathered in the early hours to compete in a contest. While fishing competitions in Minnesota are 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 creating the shoreline, preventing boats 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 Fish 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 to 19 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.