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Minnesota Land Trust and Osprey Wilds ELC permanently protect Grindstone Lake shoreline and woods

January 26, 2022—St. Paul, Minnesota— It’s a 54-year-old gift that keeps on giving. Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center, located on Grindstone Lake in Sandstone, Minn., started its life as a 535-acre gift from Marguerite Schwyzer in 1968. On January 25, 2022, Osprey Wilds and the Minnesota Land Trust completed a conservation easement that now protects 460 acres of that land in perpetuity. Acquired with funding from the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Funds, this easement preserves shoreline, forests, prairies, wetlands and wildlife habitats, providing a stable venue for Osprey Wilds’ visitors to discover nature and forge lasting commitments to the land.

“Minnesota’s nature centers are essential institutions that give our youth the opportunity to experience the wonders of the outdoors and develop a life-long conservation ethic,” explains Kris Larson, executive director of the Minnesota Land Trust. “We are so thrilled that organizations like Osprey Wilds have the foresight to protect their land base and ensure that this legacy will continue for generations.”

With over 4,000 feet of shoreline on the deep, cool waters of Grindstone Lake—a DNR-recognized “lake of biological significance”—this easement now formally protects unique and at-risk Minnesota habitats for species like the mudpuppy and, according to Osprey Wilds executive director Bryan Wood, “serves as a buffer to climate change.” Thriving old-growth forests beyond the shoreline hold the potential to shelter vulnerable and threatened native species like the red-shouldered hawk and the northern long-eared bat. The property’s northern mixed cattail marshes present an exciting opportunity to preserve and restore an increasingly rare community of native Minnesota plants.

The conservation benefits extend beyond the Osprey Wilds easement itself: as a tributary to the Grindstone, Kettle, and St. Croix Rivers, keeping Grindstone Lake and its surrounding woods and wetlands clean will help keep these other vital waterways healthy as well. It’s a win for all—

the species who rely on these habitats will have safe places to live, and Minnesotans will have beautiful, restorative landscapes to enjoy.

This legacy's significance is clear to Wood, "Once in a great while, you have the opportunity to do something that reaches far beyond the evanescence of your own life, where your actions leave an impact for generations to come. The chance to permanently protect Osprey Wilds' property with a conservation easement through the Minnesota Land Trust is one of those rare occasions."

It's a natural fit with Osprey Wilds' educational mission, too. For over 50 years their youth and adult programs, educator trainings, and community events have helped cultivate a sense of stewardship in Minnesotans of all ages. Combined with the 416 acres of land Osprey Wilds acquired at the end of 2021 from the Blacklock Nature Sanctuary—most of which are protected with Minnesota Land Trust easements completed in 2013 and 2014—and their additional campus assets, the Grindstone Lake easement will help ensure that Osprey Wilds will have a space to foster connections between people and nature "that will last through the ages."

Says Wood: "We are extremely grateful for the ability to work with the Minnesota Land Trust on this consequential project to protect Osprey Wilds' campus and hope that our example inspires others to consider doing the same. Together, we can all help make the future of Minnesota's environment healthier and more resilient, and ensure that there are biological repositories for nature's processes to continue on."

The Grindstone Lake permanent conservation easement was made possible thanks to the members of the Minnesota Land Trust and with funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 1 and St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 2 grants, as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature and recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC).



The [Minnesota Land Trust](#) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to protect and restore Minnesota's most vital natural lands in order to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences and scenic beauty for generations to come. The organization has completed 630 conservation projects statewide, permanently protecting over 70,000 acres of natural and scenic land and over a million feet of fragile shoreline.

A [conservation easement](#) is a voluntary, legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or other qualified agency that permanently limits certain uses of land in order to protect its conservation values. Landowners continue to own and enjoy the land, pay property taxes, and control land access. Once created, the conservation easement is binding on all future owners of the property. More information can be found at www.mnland.org.

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