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Minnesota Land Trust, Washington County, and Science Museum of Minnesota permanently protect St. Croix Watershed Research Station Land

March 15, 2022—Saint Paul, Minnesota—At the [Science Museum of Minnesota’s St. Croix Watershed Research Station](#), groundwater bubbles up to the surface through a “boiling sand spring.” Native plant communities like cold-water wetlands, oak forests and restored prairie harbor a large number of Minnesota’s Species in Greatest Conservation Need. A clear, chilly stream boasts brook trout—a surprising sight in Washington County. And as of March 15, Washington County and the Minnesota Land Trust have completed a conservation easement to protect the remarkable land found on the Museum’s station and its surrounding property forever.

The project provides current and future environmental benefits for residents of Washington County and the state of Minnesota, and secures a foundation for the Science Museum’s continued research. As Minnesota Land Trust Executive Director Kris Larson notes, it “not only protects the property’s water resources and wildlife habitats, but it will also allow the Research Station to continue its critical scientific work for decades to come. We applaud the Science Museum’s vision and leadership; this is an important win-win for Minnesotans.”

Protecting this land helps maintain clean, healthy water. It preserves drinking water for residents of Washington County and protects beautiful scenery and water recreation sites on the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The property’s boiling sand spring is a vivid reminder of what is at stake in keeping natural lands free of contaminants: this groundwater source is so close to the surface that you can see it. The cold temperatures and rich biodiversity found in the property’s spring-fed stream and wetlands are testaments to the water’s quality—and the urgent need to protect it for the plants, animals and humans who rely upon it and its connected water systems.

It also helps maintain a vital asset in the Science Museum of Minnesota’s research program. The Museum’s research scientists use these facilities to examine data collected from Minnesota, the United States, and the rest of the world to better understand and manage ecosystem threats, from invasive species like “rock snot” (a mucky algae) in Minnesota streams to climate change.

The land surrounding the station is itself a valuable research resource. According to the Museum’s Director of the Department of Water and Climate Change, Adam Heathcote, “The natural lands included in this easement will continue to function as a field laboratory for scientific research and as a preserve for the native flora and fauna that call it home.”

Maintaining the land’s pristine quality is therefore doubly important. Heathcote continues: “Although access to the St. Croix Watershed Research Station will continue to be reserved primarily for private research purposes, the wildlife habitat and water quality benefits of preserving this land will benefit all Minnesotans who enjoy the natural beauty of the St. Croix Valley and wish to see it protected for generations to come.”

This conservation easement was made possible thanks to the members of the Minnesota Land Trust and with funding from Minnesota’s Outdoor Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature and recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC). Funding was also provided by the Washington County Land and Water Legacy Program, a voter-approved bond referendum for the preservation of water quality, woodlands, and other natural areas.



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About the Minnesota Land Trust: 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 645 conservation projects statewide, permanently protecting over 72,000 acres of natural and scenic land and over 430 miles 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, provide for its ongoing care, 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.

About the Science Museum of Minnesota: The [Science Museum of Minnesota](#) is one of the state’s most beloved museums, with a reach that extends well beyond its riverfront location in downtown Saint Paul. The museum brings fun, relevant science learning to people through its combination of physical and digital exhibitions and films, hands-on STEM exploration, and world-class collection of fossils and artifacts. The museum supports teachers and sparks science learning in students in all 87 Minnesota counties; provides needed STEM workforce development and leadership training for BIPOC youth and girls and lower income youth; and conducts critical research on water quality, climate change, paleontology, and archeology in locations around the world. Equity is in the Science Museum’s DNA, demonstrated through its internal commitment to change and its equity-based learning experiences for the entire community—at a time when science, scientific learning, and equitable access to STEM and STEM careers are more important than ever. For more information, [visit smm.org](http://visit.smm.org).