

# Spring Review

2022



MINNESOTA  
LAND TRUST

Osprey Wilds

Sax-Zim Bog

St. Croix Watershed

# Minnesota Land Trust

The Minnesota Land Trust protects and restores Minnesota's most vital natural lands to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences, and scenic beauty for generations to come.



## **Focus conservation work**

on priority geographic regions as defined by the unique and valuable features characteristic of each area.



## **Prioritize protection**

and restoration in climate change resilient lands, including areas that promote species biodiversity and habitat defragmentation.



## **Build strategic partnerships**

to amplify conservation impact, including working with city, county, regional, state and federal agencies, local tribes, private landowners, and other non-profit groups.



## **Center people**

in our work by fostering a culture of nature engagement and appreciation, including working closely with camps, Environmental Learning Centers, and nature centers to reach future land stewards.

## Your help is needed. Will you give a gift today?

The stories featured here wouldn't be possible without the generosity of caring, conservation-minded supporters whose gifts help fund this work across the state. Become a part of the story by giving a gift today.

To make a donation, call 651-647-9590, visit our website at [mnland.org/donate](https://mnland.org/donate), scan the QR code at right with your mobile device, or send us your gift with the enclosed envelope.



## Photos in This Publication

Thank you to everyone who provided photos for use in this publication.

### **Front Cover:**

Kids explore a creek with nets at Osprey Wilds ELC | provided by Osprey Wilds ELC

### **Facing Page:**

Tamarack forest aerial view | provided by Sparky Stensaas/Friends of Sax-Zim Bog

### **Osprey Wilds:**

Pond at Osprey Wilds' Blacklock Campus | provided by Craig Blacklock

An AmeriCorps volunteer holds radishes grown at Osprey Wilds | provided by Osprey Wilds

Chicken of the Woods fungus | provided by Osprey Wilds

Sun shines through a sugar maple forest | provided by Osprey Wilds

Grindstone Lake and shoreline | provided by Gordon Dietzman

### **Sax-Zim Bog:**

A Great Gray owl on the hunt | provided by Paul Raymaker

Red and yellow willow stems in spring | provided by Sparky Stensaas/Friends of Sax-Zim Bog

Russula mushrooms in Winterberry bog | provided by Sparky Stensaas/Friends of Sax-Zim Bog

Evening Grosbeak | provided by Sparky Stensaas/Friends of Sax-Zim Bog

Sandhill cranes in Sax-Zim meadow | provided by Sparky Stensaas/Friends of Sax-Zim Bogs

### **St. Croix River Watershed:**

St. Croix River at Interstate Park, Wisconsin | provided by Aaron J. Hill

Honeybee on an Aster at the protected property

Spring-fed pond at the protected property

### **Planned Giving:**

Terry Klepinski and grandchildren | provided by Terry Klepinski



## Mní Šota

The Dakota words that *Minnesota* was derived from are either “Mní Šota” or “Mní Sota.” In the šota pronunciation (with a soft “s”), the phrase means cloudy or smoky waters, referring to how fog sits on the water at certain times of the year. In the sota pronunciation, as used in the name *Minnesota*, the phrase means clear water, specifically, water so clear and still it reflects the sky.



**Sax-Zim Bog** - This region is the ancestral homeland of the Ojibwe, who continue to hunt, fish, forage, and live nearby, including as part of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Nah-gah-chi-wa-nong) and the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa (Zagaakwaandagowiniwag).

**Osprey Wilds & The Lower St. Croix River** - This region is the ancestral homeland of the Ojibwe. The present day Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (Misi-zaaga'iganiing) are located near Mille Lacs Lake; however, their homelands extend east to the St. Croix River and north to Rice Lake and Sandy Lake.

**Lower St. Croix River** - Dating back at least 10,000 years, this region is the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Dakota people, including the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. Evidence of human activities in the area include burial mounds, campsites, quarries, wild rice processing areas, and rock art.

## LSOHC Funding for Conservation in Minnesota

The three Minnesota Land Trust conservation projects featured in this publication wouldn't have been possible without funding from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature and recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC).

### **St. Croix Watershed Research Station**

Funding for the Science Museum's St. Croix River Watershed Research Station property 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.

### **Sax-Zim Bog**

Funding for the privately owned property adjacent to Sax-Zim Bog was provided through the Critical Shoreland Habitat Program – Phase V (grant number 145622). The purpose of this grant is to acquire permanent conservation easements along rivers and lakes in Minnesota's northern forest region.

### **Osprey Wilds ELC**

Funding for the Osprey Wilds property was provided through the St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 1 and St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 2 grants.





# Osprey Wilds

PROTECTING LAND AND SEEDING THE CONSERVATIONISTS OF TOMORROW

**“Despite all the environmental and conservation work you do, unless you’ve taken the specific, legal steps to protect that land, just about anything can happen and it is potentially at risk. Unless it’s protected, it’s not really protected.”**

—BRYAN WOOD,  
OSPREY WILDS’ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## PROPERTY

### Location



460 acres land  
13,941 feet shore

- ✓ Forest
- ✓ Wetlands
- ✓ Grindstone Lake
- ✓ Restored Prairie



- Barred Owl
- Boreal Chorus Frog



- Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance
- Outstanding Lake of Biological Significance

**A**t the beginning of the year, Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center (ELC), previously “Audubon Center of the North Woods,” completed a Minnesota Land Trust conservation easement at their Sandstone campus, protecting approximately 460 acres from future development and degradation. The protected habitat includes thriving old-growth forests, native prairies, wetlands, cattail marshes and shoreline on Grindstone Lake, a Minnesota DNR recognized “lake of biological significance.”

The conservation benefits extend beyond the Osprey Wilds property. As a tributary to the Grindstone, Kettle, and St. Croix Rivers, protecting Grindstone Lake—one of the deepest, clearest and coldest lakes in the region—will help keep these other vital waterways healthy as well, which is a major conservation priority and impacts river communities like Stillwater, Hastings, Red Wing, and Winona.

But that was just the beginning. Also, this year, Osprey Wilds completed the acquisition of over 550 contiguous acres of previously protected land from the Blacklock Nature Sanctuary and Craig and Honey Blacklock, spanning Pine

and Carleton counties. The Blacklock campus includes beaver ponds, stands of white pine, balsam, and hardwood trees, several black spruce and tamarack bogs and shoreline on Little Moose Lake.

According to Bryan Wood, Executive Director at Osprey Wilds, the Blacklock campus will initially host community tours, day camp programs, and Hamline University graduate students this summer. Wood will be reaching out to the surrounding local communities in coming months to understand what type of access and programs are of interest so the campus can be an asset and resource in the community.

One thing is for sure – exposing more kids to nature experiences, and earlier in their development, is a top priority. The addition of the Blacklock campus means that Osprey Wilds ELC can expand day programming for the youngest participants, facilitating nature experiences for elementary school kids in Moose Lake, Willow River, Barnum and Cloquet. Protecting these natural landscapes with conservation easements means these spaces will still be here when today’s kindergartners are adults.

## Seeding the Conservationists of Tomorrow at ELCs

Exposing children to nature and providing meaningful nature experiences has never been more important. Today, around 86% of the U.S. population lives in a metro area and may lack access to nature, especially diverse, untouched habitats.

Data shows that adults who are introduced to the outdoors as children are more likely to participate in outdoor activities during adulthood. Yet kids have fewer opportunities to forge a relationship with the outdoors as they're getting outside less frequently than in the past. In 2012, kids averaged 87 outdoor recreation activities annually compared to just 71 in 2020. And outdoor experiences continue to be inequitable, with girls and women, and Hispanic, Asian and African Americans experiencing greater barriers to access.

Nature centers and ELCs provide critical nature exposure to kids at a formative time in their lives. This exposure can plant a seed of connection to nature that has the potential to grow into appreciation, and ultimately blossom into a conservation ethos when, as

an adult, they take up work on behalf of climate change, convert the yard of their first home to native prairie, or instill a love of nature in a child. If the land is still intact, they may even bring that child to the same natural place where the seed was first planted for them.



## Land isn't Really Protected Until it is

In addition to protecting the land for future generations and ensuring a legacy of conservation, another conservation easement benefit for Osprey Wilds is financial security. According to Wood, "Being able to help establish a more solid financial future and receive funds to put in reserve, address pressing facilities needs or put into investments – and we're doing all three of those things – really helped us see this as a can't-miss opportunity. It checked all the boxes for us."

Wood also had a prescient message for other camp and ELC directors and boards. Citing COVID-19 as an example, he noted that there is always the potential that unpredictable future events imperil a nature center or ELC. Osprey Wilds lost 91% of their earned income during the first full fiscal year of COVID-19,

but due to federal loan and grant programs, foundation and state grants, and generous donors, they have been able to keep both their property and organization intact, and in fact, grow their campus and improve their financial footing even as other ELCs were facing the prospect of having to close.



There are approximately 50 nature centers and environmental learning centers in the state of Minnesota today.





# Osprey Wilds

Over 15,000 people visit Osprey Wilds annually.

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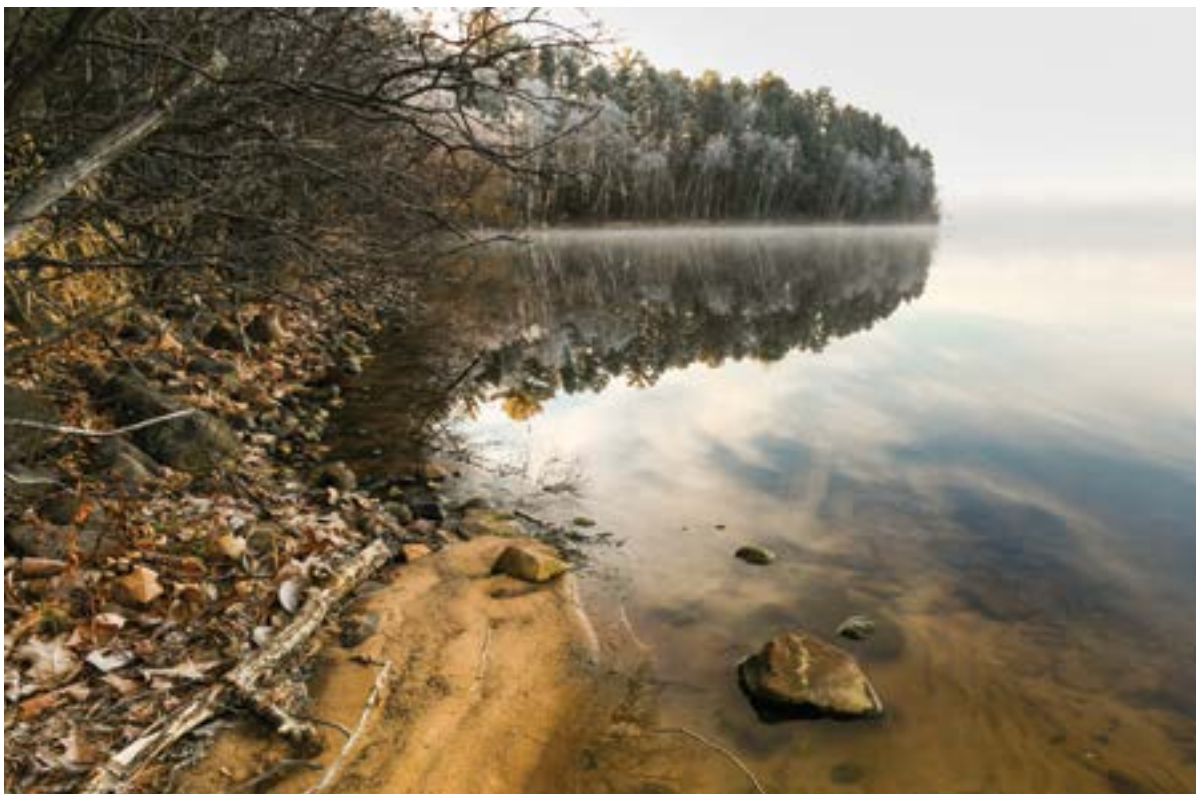
According to Wood, “Don’t assume it can’t happen. Despite all the environmental and conservation work you do, unless you’ve taken the specific, legal steps to protect that land, just about anything can happen and it is potentially at risk. Unless it’s protected, it’s not really protected.”

## Conservation Easements Build a More Certain Future

For nature centers and ELCs, it’s never too early to safeguard the future. That’s where

conservation easements, smart investing and planning come into play.

In a world of uncertainty, the conservation easement at Osprey Wilds helps make at least one thing clear – that this beautiful habitat of forests, prairies, wetlands, bogs, and shoreline will remain untouched for generations to come. It’s a significant legacy to leave for the surrounding community, including the kids whose first seeds of nature appreciation were planted there.



# Sax-Zim Bog

SPECTRAL SPECIES AND RARE RESOURCES IN NORTHERN MINNESOTA



Thousands of people visit northern Minnesota every year in search of “the phantom of the north.”

Sometimes called the “phantom of the north” or “gray ghost,” birders insist that *Strix nebulosa*, or the great gray owl, has an otherworldly ability to simply vanish into thin air.

Some people spend years trying to catch a glimpse of a great gray and describe their first time seeing one as a highly emotional experience.

Despite their elusiveness and ability to hide in plain sight, visitors to the Sax-Zim Bog in St. Louis County, Minnesota have better than average odds of spotting a great gray—in addition to over 240 other species of birds and owls—because of the unique mix of habitats not found anywhere else in the United States.

## A Bog Apart

The unique habitats are a result of the topography of the region, formed 10,000 years ago when the last glacier receded from

northern Minnesota, leaving behind two glacial lakes, Upham and Aitkin. These lakes formed the Cloquet, St. Louis, and upper Mississippi Rivers.

When the climate cooled and precipitation

increased some 5,000 years ago, conditions became right for the formation of boreal peatlands in the low-lying glacial lakebeds. Even today these areas remain relatively wet, poorly drained, populated with black spruce and tamarack stands, and rich with one of Minnesota’s most unique and valuable natural features... peatland.

## Protecting Peatlands

Minnesota has over 6 million acres of peatland covering more than 10% of the state, more than any other state in the lower forty-eight. Due to their mostly unaltered condition, these

peatlands are valuable for both scientific research and carbon sequestration. Compared to similar

**Owls are significant in many Indigenous religions and earth-based spiritual practices and are associated with clairvoyance, vision and insight. They can be both protective or a “bad” omen as they’re often associated with death.**

## PROPERTY

### Location



117 acres land  
2,732 feet shore

- ✓ Forest
- ✓ Peatlands
- ✓ St. Louis River



- Cape May Warbler
- Golden-Winged Warbler



# Sax-Zim Bog



To plan  
your visit to  
Sax-Zim bog  
visit [saxzim.org](http://saxzim.org)

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large peat formations in Siberia and Canada, Minnesota's northern patterned peatlands are accessible to researchers and free of underlying permafrost, which makes it possible to study the groundwater hydrology and drainage systems that help form them.

Minnesota's peatlands also play an important role in sequestering carbon, which is critical for slowing climate change. Globally, peatlands represent the largest natural carbon store, grounding more carbon than all other vegetation types in the world combined, and when disturbed, such as when mined for fuel or agriculture, large amounts of carbon are released.

Because of their carbon storing capability, scientists are actively working to understand the effects of climate change on peatlands and conservationists are prioritizing their preservation.

## Restoring Fragmented Habitat

In addition to the forested wetland that the great grays call home, the 300-square mile contiguous habitat in the Sax-Zim bog includes upland aspen and maple forests, pine stands, and meadows that support other bird and mammal species. Abundant populations of voles help attract owls



and other raptors like rough-legged hawks to the area.

The Bog is comprised of county, state, and privately-owned land, including 117 acres of private property with over 2,000 feet of undeveloped St. Louis River shoreline that was recently protected through a Minnesota Land Trust conservation easement.

According to the private landowners, "Contiguous habitat is critical for many



interesting species of birds and animals. Trails, driveways, home sites, split ownership, and other human activities fragment habitat for many species in serious decline, such as ground nesting birds. Putting the land under a strong conservation easement fits our long-term goals. We are very grateful for the opportunity to play a small part in preserving the natural character and wonders of this area for the future.”

The work of the Minnesota Land Trust to legally preserve private lands from future development through protection easements is critical to environmental conservation since approximately 76% of Minnesota land is privately owned.

Protecting tracts of adjacent lands, including both privately held properties and public lands that are under state or federal protection, increases the size and biodiversity of the overall habitat, making it more likely that plant and animal species can thrive in those areas.

As an impressive example of biodiversity in action, over 2,400 species of plants and animals have been officially identified and recorded at Sax-Zim Bog!

### Past as Prologue

The Minnesota Land Trust’s Lake Superior Conservation Area is rich with history, habitat,



lore, and wildlife. While we plan the legacy we wish to leave for future generations, we also learn and benefit from those areas of the state that have so far proven resistant to development. Sax-Zim Bog is one of those special places, where relatively untouched natural features provide habitat to an abundance of wildlife, including rare owls.

It’s critical that we continue to protect these unique and special places for hundreds of years to come to ensure that ecosystems remain as resilient as possible and able to help mitigate the effects of climate change, and so that future generations can experience their beauty.

Minnesota has more peatlands than any other state in the lower 48 at **over 6 million acres.**

Peatlands sequester more atmospheric carbon than all other ecosystems combined.



# St. Croix Watershed

WETLANDS ARE KEY TO KEEPING RIVERS AND LAKES HEALTHY

**“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.”**

—ADAM HEATHCOTE, SCIENCE MUSEUM OF MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF WATER AND CLIMATE CHANGE DIRECTOR

## PROPERTY

Location



129 acres land  
9,000 feet shore

- ✓ Tamarack Swamp
- ✓ Groundwater Spring
- ✓ St. Croix River
- ✓ Restored Prairie



- Belted Kingfisher
- Eastern Towhee
- Bay-breasted Warbler



- Site of High Biodiversity Significance
- Conservation Opportunity Area

**W**ashington County, the Science Museum of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Land Trust have permanently protected the land where the Science Museum’s St. Croix Watershed Research Station is located, near the city of Marine on St. Croix.

The land boasts a “boiling sand spring” and biodiverse native plant communities including cold-water wetlands, oak forests, restored prairie, and a clear, cold brook trout stream and undeveloped shoreline along the St. Croix River.

The conservation benefit cannot be overstated as the protected property is considered a climate-resilient site and builds on a broader network of protected lands that help reduce habitat fragmentation in the area. The protected lands nearby total around 7,585 acres in both Minnesota and Wisconsin.

## The Lower St. Croix Watershed

The Science Museum’s Watershed Research Station is located in the Lower St. Croix Watershed, which spans 585,735 acres in northwestern Wisconsin and east-central Minnesota. This watershed is unique because all of its streams flow directly into the St. Croix

River or Lake St. Croix. The drainage area of the watershed pushes water into the St. Croix River’s lower 52 miles, from Taylor’s Falls, Minnesota to Prescott, Wisconsin where the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers converge.

From there, the Mississippi River wends its way through another nine states, providing drinking water for tens of millions of people and habitat for hundreds of wildlife species, including birds migrating along the Mississippi Flyway, before it dumps into the Gulf of Mexico, making our impact here at the headwaters that much more critical.

Floodplain forests still border the St. Croix River, but this region contained many more forested wetlands prior to European settlement, when they were subsequently drained and converted to cropland. Land use in the Lower St. Croix Watershed today continues to be primarily agricultural, though development also encroaches on the area as the Twin Cities continues its “sprawl” north.

The primary water quality issue in this region is excess phosphorus pollution. Phosphorus is a common nutrient in commercial fertilizers and is present in manure and other organic waste. A quarter of Minnesota’s lakes, including Lake St. Croix, have high phosphorus levels and don’t



meet water quality standards for recreation.

Phosphorus feeds algae growth, which not only makes the water inhospitable to swimmers but also to fish, insects, other wildlife and plants. When phosphorus fuels toxic blue-green algae it can create downright dangerous conditions for people and dogs.



### Conserving and Restoring Wetlands Improves Water Quality

Two important strategies to reduce phosphorus levels in lakes and rivers include reducing runoff from hard surfaces like paved roads and sidewalks, and from agricultural fields, as well as preserving and restoring critical wetland habitats that help absorb and filter phosphorus-containing runoff as well as providing important habitat for wildlife.



The benefits of conserving the Science Museum's Watershed Research Station property extend beyond conservation. According to Minnesota Land Trust Executive Director Kris Larson, securing the conservation easement on this property, "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."



## Planned Giving

Terry Klepinski has spent all her life in Minnesota. In 2016 she began to think about what was important to her and her family, including the kind of legacy she wanted to leave behind. Terry knew she wanted to give back to the place she had grown to love, a place that evokes cherished memories and where she creates new memories with her grandchildren.

She is passionate about one of the most important ecosystems on the planet, those found in the prairie pothole region in northwestern Minnesota. "What could be more important than soil quality and clean water," commented Terry. Recently, Terry included the Minnesota Land Trust in her estate plans. She hopes that her gift will protect wetlands and grasslands for today and future generations and help undo damage that has been done to Minnesota's habitats.

**To learn more about planned giving and the Minnesota Land Trust, contact Jennifer Scholl, Director of Development and Communications at (651) 917-6289 or [jscholl@mnland.org](mailto:jscholl@mnland.org).**

### How to Reduce Phosphorus Pollution:

- Use no-phosphorus fertilizer in your yard or garden
- Mulch grass clippings back into the lawn or bag them
- Keep leaves, grass clippings and other organic matter out of the street
- Plant shoreline on your property with native, deep-rooted plants





## MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

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