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**Land Protected Forever in Partnership with Polar Explorer Ann Bancroft**

The Minnesota Land Trust, Washington County, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and two landowners, including polar explorer Ann Bancroft, have successfully closed on a land conservation partnership project that permanently protects approximately 118 acres over two properties in the Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District in May Township. Bancroft, now the properties' sole titleholder, will steward the land to maintain its ecological health and natural beauty.

Every year in Minnesota, thousands of acres of natural habitat are developed and subdivided. This reduces habitat available for many of Minnesota's forest, wetland, and grassland wildlife species and can lead to increased runoff into rivers, lakes, and streams. Such fragmentation of deciduous hardwood forests is a significant threat to Minnesota's forest wildlife. To ensure these ecosystems' long-term existence, the integrity of large tracts of contiguous lands must be preserved. This project, which protects two undeveloped land parcels that neighbor other natural areas, helps to keep habitats intact.

"One of the easiest decisions I've ever made was to put this land in a conservation easement to conserve it forever so that future generations can benefit. It would be a tragedy if this land were developed. I hope this inspires other Minnesotans to do this with their property. I couldn't have done this alone. It was wonderful to work with the Minnesota Land Trust and Washington County," Bancroft said.

**Natural Features**

The newly protected properties are adjacent to the new County Conservation Area and the Big Marine Regional Park Reserve. They are approximately one mile northwest of the Manitou Fund property and Wilder Forest.

The protected land is a Regionally Significant Ecological Area as identified by the DNR, ranking at the highest level. The DNR has noted endangered, threatened, and special concern species on or within one mile of the properties. The properties' open and natural character provides scenic views to be enjoyed by the public from May Avenue North.

"County residents care a lot about protecting the county's surface waters, aquifers, natural features and wildlife. Once again, we see a landowner lead the way in assuring identified high-quality areas and corridors connecting them are permanently protected for current and future generations. The county applauds their effort and the legacy this is leaving," said Washington County Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1.

### **How It Happened**

In the project's first stage, the Minnesota Land Trust placed a conservation easement over 39 acres owned by Bancroft in May Township, applying funding from the Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

In the second stage, Washington County placed a 79-acre conservation easement on property held by another landowner. The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a Land and Water Legacy Program (LWLP) contribution to complete this stage of the project. The DNR's Scenic and Natural Areas program also contributed grant funds.

Immediately thereafter, Bancroft purchased the underlying fee title to those 79 acres. Bancroft will provide ongoing stewardship of both properties, totaling 118 acres.

"Ann has been an amazing leader in so many realms throughout her life, so it's particularly meaningful to see her take a conservation leadership role by protecting her property and stewarding it in a way that will benefit wildlife populations, climate change, and future generations of Minnesotans," said Kris Larson, Minnesota Land Trust CEO.

### **Background**

The Minnesota Land Trust is a non-profit organization whose mission is to protect and restore Minnesota's most vital natural lands to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences, and scenic beauty for generations to come. The organization has completed nearly 700 conservation projects statewide, permanently protecting more than 74,500 acres of natural and scenic land and more than 450 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 to protect its conservation values. Landowners continue to own and enjoy the land. Once created, the conservation easement is binding on all future owners of the property. More information on Minnesota Land Trust can be found at [www.mnland.org](http://www.mnland.org).

This conservation easement was made possible by 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) and the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources and facilitated by the DNR Scenic and Natural Areas grant program. 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.



Photo: Ann Bancroft

