



CONNECTED WATERS AND PEOPLE

Spring Review 2023

Safe Metro Area Drinking
Water Starts in the Sauk

Protecting Northern
Waters & Walleye

A Century Old Farm's
Greatest Yield Yet

Below the surface, the clean water of the
St. Louis River Estuary. Photo: Paul Raymaker.



In This Publication

Thanks to everyone who provided photos that were used in this publication. Credited photos include:

Cover: St. Louis River Estuary—*Paul Raymaker*

This page: Painted turtle—*Kristina Geiger*; Kayaker—*Bryan Hanse*; Pitcher plant—*Haley Golz*

Protecting Minnesota's Watersheds: A child fishes on the shoreline of a Boundary Waters lake—*Hansi Johnson*;
Trumpeter swan—*Roslynn Long*

Safe Metro Area Drinking Water Starts in the Sauk: Sauk River—*Wayne Ostlie*

Protecting Northern Waters & Walleye: Pancake Lake and wooded shoreline in northern Minnesota—*Minnesota Land Trust*

A Century Old Farm's Greatest Yield Yet: Before photo (inset) and after photo depicting restoration of prairie and wetlands on a Pine City property—*Haley Golz*

Leaving a Legacy—A Planned Gift Makes a Difference: Link Lake (also known as Lynx Lake)—*Minnesota Land Trust*;
Jacob Fillion and Mary Killeen—*Jacob Fillion and Mary Killeen*

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Minnesota's Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Thank you to Minnesota's soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs). These local government organizations can be an important link between private landowners and the Minnesota Land Trust. We're grateful for the exceptional and steadfast partnerships we have with many of the 89 SWCDs that span the state and look forward to further engagement towards our shared goals of protecting Minnesota's water and supporting private landowners.



LSOHC Funding for Conservation in Minnesota

The four 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).

Safe Metro Area Drinking Water Starts in the Sauk

Funding for the acquisition of this easement was provided through the Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration program.

Protecting Northern Waters & Walleye

Funding for the acquisition of this easement was provided through the Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes program.

A Century Old Farm's Greatest Yield Yet

Funding for the acquisition of this easement was provided through the St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration program.

Leaving a Legacy—A Planned Gift Makes a Difference

Funding for the completion of the easement was provided through the Critical Shoreland Protection Program and the Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Partnership grant.



The Minnesota Land Trust — What We Do

The Minnesota Land Trust promotes natural climate solutions through the conservation and restoration of Minnesota's most vital and resilient natural lands and shoreline. We permanently protect ecosystems, including aquatic habitats, and their environmental services, and preserve the opportunity for meaningful and immersive outdoor experiences today and for future generations.

Protecting Minnesota's Waters—Our Impact

Minnesota is one of the fastest warming states in the U.S. Climate change imperils native species and disrupts ecological processes both on land and in aquatic habitats. It has also resulted in longer periods of drought punctuated by severe precipitation events that wash excess sediment and agricultural chemicals into waterways. But the Minnesota Land Trust is making a difference for Minnesota's waters.

WETLANDS AND WATER
ARE A TOP
CONSERVATION PRIORITY

35%

of the total acres that the Minnesota Land Trust protected in 2022 are comprised of water and wetlands.

PERMANENTLY PROTECT
SENSITIVE SHORELINE
& AQUATIC HABITAT

87%

of our protected properties are located 1,000 feet or less from a river or lake. To date, we've protected over 470 miles of shoreline.

SHORELINE, LAKES AND
WETLANDS RESTORATION

32

ongoing restoration projects to date with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and 9 in the St. Louis River Estuary, where we've been restoring the river since 2010.

Environmental Conservation Needs Your Support—Please Give Today!

The work featured in this publication wouldn't be possible without the generosity of caring, conservation-minded supporters whose gifts are amplified because of the Land Trust's ability to secure public funding and private landowner donations.

Every \$1 donated generates \$9 of habitat conservation and restoration in Minnesota! To donate, call 651-647-9590, visit our website at mmland.org/donate, scan the QR code at right with your mobile device, or send us your gift with the enclosed envelope.





Connected Waters and People

“MNÍ WICHÓN” (WATER IS LIFE)—INDIGENOUS WATER PROTECTORS

If you're reading this article from just about anywhere in Minnesota, there's a high probability that you have access to clean drinking water in your home. Pour a glass of clear, cold water and take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate that this life-sustaining liquid is available at your fingertips.

We're surrounded by so much fresh water in Minnesota—more than any other state except Alaska—that it can be easy to forget that many of these water bodies are threatened. As of 2022, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) reported that 2,904 water bodies in Minnesota were impaired and 25% of lakes do not meet water quality standards for aquatic life and recreational use.

With half of the world's population confronting water scarcity by as early as 2025, ready access to fresh water

could become a problem for more Minnesotans, too.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), it's estimated that around 2 million Americans live without running water and basic indoor plumbing. Like the effects of climate change, those first and most seriously impacted are the most underserved and often multiply marginalized, including low-income people in rural areas, people of color, tribal communities, and immigrants.

Droughts and disasters such as wildfires have already forced communities to periodically endure water use restrictions. When drenching rains finally arrive and cause flooding, freshwater supplies are further imperiled. As these conditions persist because of climate change, more people will have trouble accessing enough safe, fresh water for



Water's pathways are consistent and recognizable throughout nature, connecting and nurturing all life on the planet. Rivers cross the continent, often forming river deltas as they enter the ocean (left).

Humans and other animals have over 60,000 miles of vessels, pathways that move blood and plasma—90% water—through our bodies (center).

Diving deep into the Earth and towering above it, trees perform transpiration, pulling water upward through roots towards branches and leaves (right).

drinking, cooking, and hygiene.

Despite the fact that water is flowing from our taps today, we're still impacted by the threats disrupting water supplies in other regions. Like the water of the world—connected through tributaries and the water cycle—the people of the world are connected through our mutual reliance on clean, fresh water that not only supports every system in the human body but comprises 60% of our bodies as well.

In many Indigenous belief systems, the interconnectedness goes even further. Water is viewed as a living being with its own life force, a spiritual entity with

whom we can enter a mutual relationship. Water is critical to spiritual practices and cultural identity within many Indigenous communities—especially for women who are traditionally considered to be caretakers of the water.

We're not separate from the water—it's the reality through a spiritual, geographic, or biological frame. The message is as clear as the water that flows out of Omashkoozo-zaaga'igan* or the water that found its way to the glass in front of you: "Water is life." When we protect water, we protect ourselves, each other, and all the interconnected life on this planet. 🌲

* This is the original Ojibwe name for Lake Itasca, which translates to Elk Lake. The name "Itasca" was invented by Henry Schoolcraft who was led to the lake by an Ojibwe guide named Ozaawindib in 1832 during an expedition to find the source of the Mississippi River. In addition to being a geographer, geologist, and ethnologist, Schoolcraft is notable for creating "faux-Native American" names for the places he visited. For Lake Itasca, he combined two Latin words: "veritas" (meaning truth) and "caput" (meaning head).

Threats to Minnesota's Clean Water

Pollution and waste products from extractive industries

The conversion of forest, prairies, and wetlands for agricultural use and residential development

Invasive species like zebra mussels that disrupt the natural ecology of lakes and rivers

Climate change related droughts interspersed with severe precipitation events, adding sediment and nutrients to waterways

Warmer winters, nights, and longer summers that disrupt ecological processes

Destruction & hardening of natural shoreline for commercial or residential use

Excess phosphorous & nitrates from agriculture, and chloride (road salt) from cities

Protecting Minnesota's Watersheds

Water performs important functions in our communities. Not only is it critical for drinking and public health, but people enjoy recreating in and around freshwater lakes, rivers, and streams as well. Healthy waters are teeming with diverse aquatic life, including plants, fish, amphibians, insects, waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife that are important in a balanced ecological system.

Safe and healthy water depends on healthy natural landscapes above aquifers and surrounding lakes, rivers and streams. Groundwater aquifers supply around 75% of Minnesotans' drinking water, making it critical that we preserve and restore more wetlands and prairie habitat to retain more water to re-supply aquifers.


Nearly one million residents in Minneapolis and St. Paul get their drinking water from the Mississippi River. Protecting and restoring watersheds as well as shoreline and wetlands is crucial to improve water filtering for the Mississippi River and its tributaries, which benefits people, fish, and wildlife.

Around 75% of all land in Minnesota is privately owned, which means that private landowners have both a greater opportunity and responsibility to protect, restore, and steward their properties. The Minnesota Land Trust has over 30 years of experience and is well positioned to help concerned landowners obtain conservation easements to protect natural landscapes, including existing wetlands and undeveloped shoreline on their properties.



Water & Wetland Protection Stories Across Minnesota

Because we're all connected through watersheds and waterways, we all benefit when committed landowners like Dave Odendahl and the Heurungs protect and restore shoreline, wetlands and prairie on their properties.



"It's so important to think of young people and leave them land that is natural. We saw this as a great opportunity to leave a positive legacy."

—HEURUNG FAMILY

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spring23-sauk](https://mnland.org/spring23-sauk)



Safe Metro Area Drinking Water Starts in the Sauk

Protecting the waters of the Mississippi River starts in Minnesota and includes tributaries like the Sauk River in west-central Minnesota. Unfortunately, large sections of the Sauk are classified as impaired by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), including the stretch that flows over the property that the Heurung family protected with a conservation easement earlier this year.

The Heurungs protected over 1,000 feet of Sauk River shoreline and added over 70 acres to a matrix of protected natural lands in a region that is dominated by agriculture, where shallow lakes are impaired by high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen. Over time, these nutrients can also leach through soil, impact groundwater, and produce toxins that are harmful to humans.

The property also includes a large, restored wetland

habitat that had previously been a ditch connecting nearby farm fields directly to the Sauk River, which have provided an unimpeded flow of agricultural nutrients and sediment during spring thaw and heavy rains. The restored wetland now buffers the Sauk River from pollutants and provides additional water storage on the landscape to prevent flooding, which is important to help mitigate the effect of increasing heavy precipitation events that are now commonplace due to climate change.

The wetland was also seeded with manoomin (wild rice) in 2021 and the beds are now starting to establish. Wild rice used to be prevalent in the Sauk River Watershed but has largely disappeared due to the loss of natural wetland habitat and traditional Indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices.

Protecting this property benefits metro area residents, those that recreate on the Sauk River (a state designated water trail), and future Minnesotans.

“Because of the landowners’ commitment to conservation, this habitat complex will be able to support wildlife and recreation for future generations even in the face of climate change.”

—RUURD SCHOOLDERMAN,
MINNESOTA LAND TRUST CONSERVATION PROGRAM MANAGER

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Protecting Northern Waters & Walleye

Minnesota is rich with freshwater resources and opportunities to recreate on lakes and waterways. Being able to safely swim, boat or fish in the water and occupy beaches and shoreline is another reason that protecting and restoring water health is so important, and it’s another way that water brings us together, often despite geographic or cultural differences.

Private landowners with forested properties play a crucial role in protecting Minnesota’s tullibee (and by extension, large gamefish populations) in northern Minnesota, a region of the state experiencing rapid commercial and private development. Here, there are around 650 tullibee-supporting lakes, more than in any other state in the contiguous U.S. The sensitive tullibee are considered an indicator species whose presence signals cold, oxygenated waters and a healthy aquatic ecosystem. They also function as a nutrient-rich

diet for big gamefish, including the much sought after walleye, northern pike, and muskie.

Landowners in Cass County, Minnesota, have permanently protected over 220 acres of undeveloped hardwood forest and wetlands surrounding Pancake Lake and a portion of Boy River, which helps preserve the water temperature, quality, and habitat in *seven tullibee lakes nearby*. In addition, the property is estimated to sequester about 39 metric tons of carbon per year, the equivalent of 30 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year.



According to Minnesota Land Trust Conservation Program Manager Ruurd Schoolderman, “In our line of work, it’s relatively rare to be able to permanently protect an entire lake. So, we were really excited and fortunate to have the opportunity to do that here. Because of the landowners’ commitment to conservation, this habitat complex will be able to support wildlife and recreation for future generations even in the face of climate change.”



“Projects like the Odendahl farm restoration really underline the impact local families can have on the overall natural health of their communities. Without Dave’s dedication and love for this place, we wouldn’t be able to connect these parcels for the benefit of wildlife and people.”

**—HALEY GOLZ, MINNESOTA LAND TRUST
RESTORATION PROGRAM MANAGER**

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A Century Old Farm’s Greatest Yield Yet

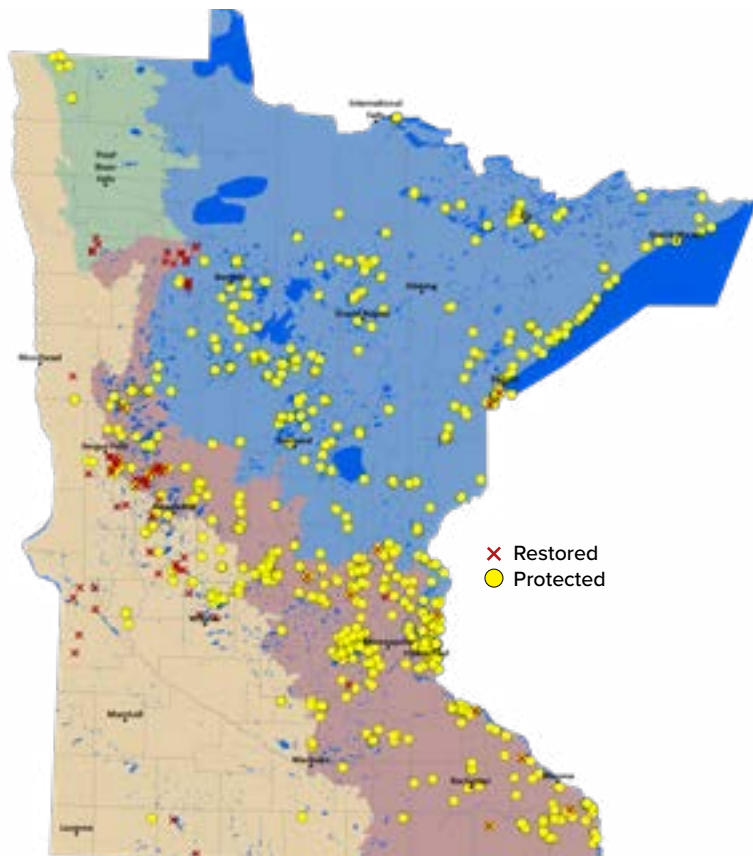
The 154-acre property includes the forested northern shore of Rock Lake and buffers the recreational fishing lake from a Walmart Supercenter, golf course, and two residential developments near Pine City, Minnesota. The easiest and likely most financially lucrative opportunity for retired farmer Dave Odendahl would have been to sell off his working lands to a real estate developer. The developer would subdivide the property to maximize profit on exclusive residential parcels on the golf course and along the Rock Lake shoreline—perhaps some more commercial development, a strip mall, and a coffee shop franchise.

The result would have been fragmented habitat, the loss of mature white pine and northern red oak trees, more localized pollution for the remaining habitat to filter, and a lot more impervious surface directing pollutants towards

the St. Croix and ultimately the Mississippi River. It would have also resulted in the loss of habitat for a number of species, including wood ducks and trumpeter swans. As a lifelong conservationist, Dave made a different choice and has worked to restore balance to the natural systems on the land by converting agricultural fields to prairie and restoring wetlands.

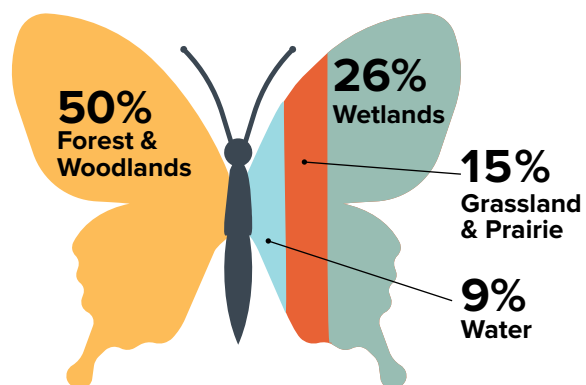
Dave’s property, along with three other conservation easements, protects 430 acres around Rock Lake, creating an even more ecologically significant matrix of connected habitat. It demonstrates that when individuals do their part on behalf of the environment it can inspire others, and together, big changes are possible! Community members motivated by seeing the farm’s transformation into a vibrant, living landscape are now exploring restoration options for their properties, and the Minnesota Land Trust will be commencing restoration work on the property on the south side of Rock Lake in the fall of 2023.

Minnesota Land Trust's Impact



**OUR PROTECTED PROPERTIES
AND RESTORATION SITES**

PROTECTED IN 2022



OUR IMPACT 1991–2022

75,113 Acres Protected	4,886 Acres Restored	460 Shoreline Miles
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What We Do

Habitat Defragmentation

51%

Properties located 1,000 feet or less from state or federally protected lands

Water Protection

87%

Properties are located 1,000 feet or less from a river or lake

Carbon Storage

143,325 TONS

Stored in Land Trust forests & woodlands in 2022, equal to annual emissions of 31,157 cars

Nature Engagement

36

Camps & nature centers protected, serving thousands of youth & adults

Leaving a Legacy

A PLANNED GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE



“We know that the Land Trust will always act in the best interest of the land and all it supports. We hope that our planned gift will stand as an example and encourage others to donate their property or other financial assets.”

—MARY KILLEEN

Mary Killeen and Jacob Fillion have generously included 135 acres of protected forest and wetlands in northern Minnesota in their planned giving to the Minnesota Land Trust.

The property is nestled between two beautiful lakes and is covered by forest dominated by young quaking aspen. It also includes mature sugar maples, northern red oaks, balsam fir trees, and a few stands of 113–146-year-old red and white pines. Mary’s maternal grandfather, Peter McGowan, first homesteaded the land in 1898, and in the late 1920s he and Mary’s uncle built a log cabin with timber harvested from the property.

The site has been the backdrop for precious family memories and milestones during the 125 years that it’s been a part of the family. Long summer days were spent sharing stories and laughing on the large deck of the cabin overlooking the quiet lake. Thousands of s’mores were eaten and the spectacular Aurora Borealis has been witnessed a handful of times.

Today, Mary and Jacob are the sole owners of the property after consolidating the interests from Mary’s

cousins. It was the first step towards protecting the land from subdivision. In 2018 they took another critical step, establishing a conservation easement permanently protecting the property. According to Mary, “The conservation easement has given us both assurance and comfort that the habitat and wildlife will always be protected.”

Last year they again demonstrated their commitment to conservation and their love of nature by making a planned gift of their protected land to the Minnesota Land Trust. “We know that the Land Trust will always act in the best interest of the land and all it supports. We hope that our planned gift will stand as an example and encourage others to donate their property or other financial assets,” says Jacob.

To learn more about the many ways you can leave a planned gift and instill a brighter future for generations to come, contact Jennifer Scholl, Director of Development and Communications at (651) 917-6289 or jscholl@mnland.org. 🌲



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