



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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

Dear Friends,

North and south, summer and winter, natural and built spaces...our world is full of opposites, juxtapositions, and contrasts. Contrast, especially in nature, can be immensely beautiful: a bright red winter cardinal standing on fresh, white snow; the full moon suspended in a cold, black night sky.

While contrast can create beauty it can also create tension—heroes and villains, young and old. This plot device literally drives action and storylines in books and movies. Similar tensions are alive and well at the Minnesota Land Trust, specifically the tensions between old and new, and stability and change.

On one hand, we strive to be entrepreneurial and embrace new partnerships, ideas, and technologies. This agility is crucial for ensuring that the very definition of “conservation” evolves and is relevant to more Minnesotans.

On the other hand, we take the long view with our promise to protect and defend our conservation investments far into the future. This commitment—the “forever” part of our mission— acknowledges that conservation requires an intentional and sustained effort over time to be successful.

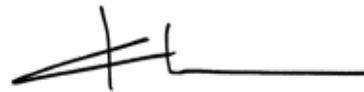
This tension is healthy. And it probably isn’t really a tension at all. In fact, I would argue that just like any organism, the long-term success of the Land Trust will require the use of *adaptation* as a strategy to ensure *durability*. Another word for this might be “resilience.” And resilience is required for us to persist into the future and fulfill our commitments.

Take, for instance, the *innovative idea* to build an intentional community for outdoor recreation nonprofits, private businesses, advocates, enthusiasts, and land managers. That idea became the Duluth Area Outdoor Alliance (DAOA), and its work is to focus efforts and resources toward collective goals that benefit the greater community. This group of passionate outdoor stewards—which the Land Trust helped establish—helps make our conservation mission more durable.

We can also look at the recent success of achieving 75% protection of the Kabekona Lake watershed in northern Minnesota. This achievement is the result of a *sustained effort* over 10 years by the Land Trust and our partners, and it’s helped us reach an important milestone that will help preserve Minnesota’s large gamefish populations for decades to come.

One thing that has become clear about the Minnesota Land Trust in the past year is that our community of staff, volunteers, and supporters has grown. How we co-create the future of conservation will be essential to the future of Minnesota, including its landscape, waters, wildlife, people, and identity.

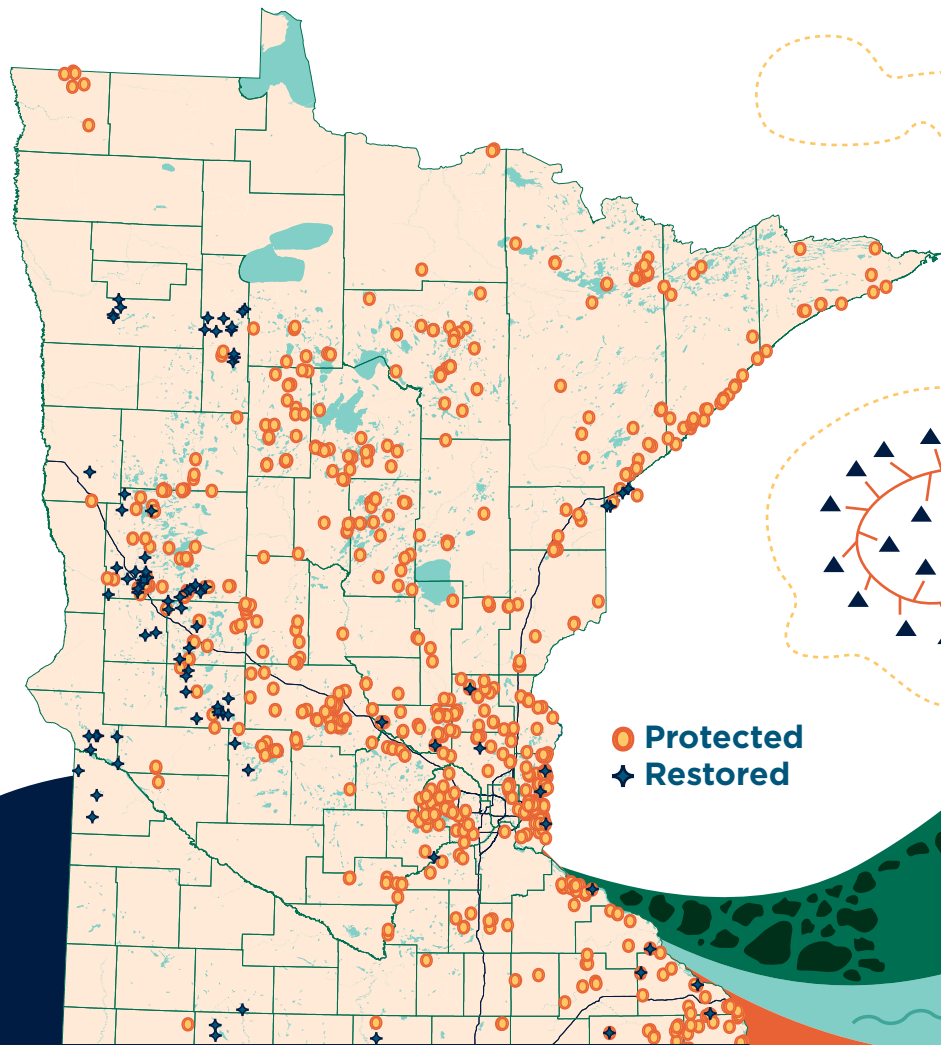
Thank you for all you do to make conservation more relevant, thoughtful, and resilient as we continue this work and journey together.



Kris Larson
CEO



*Middle and right cover photos by Paul Raymaker.
Right photo: Minnesota Land Trust CEO Kris Larson.*



○ Protected
◆ Restored

NATURE ACCESS:**21**CAMPS & NATURE
CENTERS PROTECTED**5,268**
ACRES**51%****HABITAT CONNECTION:**51% of properties are located
1/4 mile or less from other
protected lands**73%****WATER PROTECTION:**73% of properties are
located 1/4 mile or less
from a river or lake**166K****CARBON STORAGE:**166,000 metric tons of
stored carbon in protected
properties added in 2023,
offsetting annual carbon
emissions of 135,400 cars**OUR IMPACT****79,421**

Acres Protected

7,447

Acres Restored

495Shoreline Miles
Preserved

Preserving the Minnesota places that matter most today and for future generations.

The common loon feeds on tullibee and requires cold, deep, freshwater lakes to thrive. Photo by Rebecca Field.

A Year of Major Conservation Milestones

Statewide Conservation Coverage Attained

In 2023, the Land Trust made significant protection gains in southwest Minnesota, fulfilling the goal and promise of being a *statewide* conservation organization. As a result of closing three contiguous conservation easements totaling 300 acres, we've built a habitat complex of remnant and restored prairie in Nobles County in excess of 700 acres. These lands connect two separate state Wildlife Management Areas, filter surface water, and buffer the Little Rock River, home to the federally listed Topeka shiner. With these projects, the Land Trust is well positioned for more beneficial partnerships and future restoration projects in the region.

Working Together for Habitat Health—The Minnesota Land Trust & Hennepin County

The Land Trust presented our 2023 Partner of the Year award to Hennepin County at the annual Treasured Places awards ceremony. Since 2018, we've partnered with Hennepin County to dramatically expand land protection and restoration within Minnesota's most populous county through the creation of a more holistic land protection and restoration strategy. This strategy has yielded six times the habitat outcomes in the last five years compared to the previous decade, with many more milestones yet to come.

Supporting Minnesota's Large Gamefish—75% of Kabekona Lake Watershed Protected

With the help of our partners, the Land Trust reached a major protection goal in 2023 when we protected 75% of the Kabekona Lake watershed. As a designated Tullibee Refuge Lake in Hubbard County, Kabekona Lake is deep and cold enough to continue to support tullibee (aka cisco) despite the effects of climate change. Protecting at least 75% of the natural lands within the lake's watershed helps ensure the lake remains sufficiently cold and oxygenated to support this sensitive species—a primary food source for lake trout and walleye—and preserves outstanding angling in Minnesota's northern lakes.



PROTECTED IN 2023



46%
Forest & Woodland

24%
Wetlands

20%
Grassland
& Prairie

10%
Other

Partnering with property owners and other conservation agencies to rehabilitate protected lands and waters.



An excavator removes drain tile to restore a wetland basin in Otter Tail County.
Photo by Emilia Kenow.

Strengthening Partnerships & Climate Resiliency

Making Headway in the St. Louis River Estuary Ecosystem

After six years of planning, organizing, and collaborating with more than 70 people in more than 30 partner organizations, the Land Trust reached the implementation stage of the *Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership* in 2023. The partnership provides a much-needed intentional organizational structure to facilitate collaboration and amplify our work within the St. Louis River ecosystem by pursuing integrated environmental, economic, and community health goals.

Working with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in a New Way

In 2023, the Land Trust reorganized our partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, expanding it beyond the prairie pothole region. This expansion will result in technical expertise and capacity to implement projects in the Twin Cities metro, southeast, and northwest regions of the state. We're also continuing to increase our efforts in the critical prairie pothole region. The Land Trust is currently collaborating on 32 active projects concerning 2,800 acres across eight of our conservation program areas spanning the state.

First Climate Adaptation Restoration Project Complete

This year, we completed our first climate adaptation restoration project with our partners Community Action Duluth, the City of Duluth, and the U.S. Forest Service. The initiative included planting 45,000 tree and shrub seedlings in the understory on 54 acres of ash-dominated riparian forest along the St. Louis River Estuary that is at risk for emerald ash borer. The new trees include a diverse mix of native tree species that are better suited to the warmer conditions increasingly common in northern Minnesota, including red maple, silver maple, and bur oak.



7,447
Total restoration
acres completed

119

Total restoration
projects

\$14M

More than \$14 million in
public funds have been
secured for this work

Building meaningful connections to nature and each other.

Breaking New Trail in 2023

The Duluth Area Outdoor Alliance & Great Lakes Outdoor Summit

At the end of October, the Duluth Area Outdoor Alliance (DAOA) held a conference in Duluth, MN, which attracted over 200 outdoor recreation enthusiasts, professionals, and advocates from across the state. As a founding member of the DAOA, the Land Trust was instrumental in planning, acquiring funds for, and executing this successful event.

The DAOA is a collaboration between nonprofits, land managers, and outdoor recreation advocates, educators, and adventurers. It facilitates the sharing of funds and knowledge between organizations and promotes collaboration to build and maintain the infrastructure needed to get more people outdoors.

The DAOA has a statewide impact. It serves as a model and directly helps equip leaders with the knowledge and resources they need to advance outdoor engagement and infrastructure in their own communities through events like the Summit.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Affinity Events

In 2023, the Land Trust began exploring a new initiative with the working title, “Meet Minnesota.” Its goal is to connect individuals to the natural landscape through immersive, kinship-centered, educational outdoor programs. Participants may visit a part of Minnesota for the first time or explore a familiar place from a new perspective.

Two Meet Minnesota pilot field trips took place in the fall of 2023 in partnership with BIPOC Outdoors Twin Ports. These affinity events provided BIPOC participants with a welcoming space to learn from BIPOC experts.

The first event took place at Maji ya Chai Land Sanctuary near Two Harbors, MN, where Dudley Edmondson led the group as they explored the beautiful landscape and spotted birds in migration. The second event, led by Ameera Khan, had participants identifying, foraging, and feasting on fungi while enjoying the natural beauty of Jay Cooke State Park.

Participants identify mushrooms during a BIPOC Outdoors Twin Ports & Minnesota Land Trust BIPOC affinity group hike and foraging event in November. Photo by Sam Armacost.

24

24 community outreach and supporter engagement events in 2023

10,425 acres



10,425 acres of public lands protected by conservation easements



Fulfilling the Land Trust's protected forever promise through perpetual conservation stewardship.

Protected Forever is a Promise Kept

Protected Forever. They aren't just words on a boundary marker sign. They're a commitment from the Land Trust to landowners with protected properties, the surrounding community, *and the land itself*. They are also a legal promise because all Land Trust easements are perpetual. That means once a conservation easement has been recorded, the protections remain in effect no matter who owns the property. Forever.

We deliver on these promises through the work of the Stewardship Department. As the Protection team secures newly protected properties, the Stewardship team manages this ever-growing number of commitments. This includes running an annual easement monitoring program with the help of dedicated volunteers, assisting landowners with questions, approvals, and property transfers, and working with landowners to address concerns on their lands. But at its heart, the work is really about the people.

Ensuring that habitats on protected properties remain healthy, diverse, and resilient in the face of climate change is a *team effort*. And landowners are doing inspiring work—restoring prairies, wetlands, and forests, addressing invasive species, using conservation grazing methods to maintain vital grasslands, creating climate-resilient management plans, and more.

Looking to 2024 and beyond, we're dedicated to further strengthening our partnership with landowners by connecting them to the resources they need to keep doing great work. Because strong landowner relationships are the foundation of sound conservation stewardship, and sound conservation stewardship means our *protected forever* promise is being kept.



Over 11,000 monitoring visits to date, resulting in more than 5 years of collective monitoring time

1.3M

Around 1.3 million acres have been monitored since 1991



First drone monitoring visit completed in spring 2023

730

730 sites monitored in 2023



Shalesa Johnson, Stewardship Coordinator, uses a drone to capture aerial footage at a protected property.

Balance Sheet for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2023

Assets	2023	2022
Cash, Pledges & Investments	\$15,559,714	\$14,355,969
Net Furniture & Equipment	\$287,888	\$19,105
Land Held for Resale/Conservation	\$163,260	\$163,260
Beneficial Interest in Real Property	\$811,200	\$811,200
Total Assets	\$16,822,062	\$15,349,534

Liabilities & Net Assets	2023	2022
Accounts Payable & Accrued Expenses	\$668,084	\$429,656
Other Liabilities	\$294,251	\$286,348
Net Assets	\$15,859,727	\$14,633,530
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$16,822,062	\$15,349,534

Fundraising & Revenue	
Charitable Support from Individuals	\$1,605,164
Charitable Support from Foundations, Corporations & Organizations	\$377,216
State of Minnesota: Conservation Easement Acquisition & Restoration Programs	\$15,005,357
Other Public Funding	\$1,617,354
Investment & Interest Income*	\$1,134,579
Other Revenue	\$50,152
Total Support & Revenue	\$19,789,822

*Includes Unrealized Gains (Loss)

Expense Allocation		
Program	\$17,255,362	93%
Fundraising	\$614,282	3%
Management	\$693,981	4%
Total Expenses	\$18,563,625	

The Minnesota Land Trust is committed to strong fiscal health and transparency.

This financial summary is based on a complete financial audit, which was conducted by Redpath and Company, Ltd. Their full report is available online at mnland.org/trust-transparency or by calling the Minnesota Land Trust at **651-647-9590**.

Staff List

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Aimee Broten

Paralegal

Sam Case

Associate Staff Attorney

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Director of Finance & Operations

Pat Collins

Conservation Program Manager

Jean Curtis-Neitz

Conservation Information Systems Associate

Lauren Ernt

Development Coordinator

Lydia Fermanich

Land Protection Coordinator

Tamika Gibson

Public Grants Manager

Haley Golz

Private Lands Restoration Program Manager

Leah Hall

Conservation Program Manager

Hansi Johnson

Director of Conservation Engagement

Shalesa Johnson

Stewardship Coordinator

Emilia Kenow

Restoration Program Manager

Chad Kingstrom

Conservation Program Manager

Sue Martinez

Operations Coordinator

Andrew Moe

Director of Conservation Stewardship

Lauren Nelson

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Wayne Ostlie

Director of Land Protection

Daryl Peterson

Director of Restoration Programs

Ned Phillips

Conservation Information Systems Manager

Amanda Platson

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Shannon Rose

Land Protection Coordinator

Amie Schiller

Stewardship Program Manager

Ruurd Schoolderman

Conservation Program Manager

Amy Schwarz

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Supporters

Use the QR code or go to

mnland.org/2023-annual-report

to view the names of supporters, including landowners, volunteers, donors, and individuals who have been lovingly memorialized with a gift to the Land Trust.



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Left photo: Participants spot birds during a BIPOC Outdoors Twin Ports & Minnesota Land Trust BIPOC affinity group birding event in October. Photo by Sam Armacost. Middle photo by Paul Raymaker. Right photo: Pollinator prairie located on part of a 161-acre protected property in southeast Minnesota. Photo by Katelin Goebel.



**Thank you for
making this year
a huge success!
Help protect
and restore
even more
land in 2024.**



We are grateful to our donors, partners, and the generous landowners who protect their land forever. Many of these projects would not be possible without funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature and recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and the Minnesota Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources.