

2019 Local Conservation Where People and Nature Thrive

The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota

The following are highlights from 2019 that were made possible because of you, our contributors. Many, many great projects were completed this past year by your local Nature Conservancy chapter. The following are some that we thought might be of particular interest to you. Enjoy!

FRESHWATER

The Farmer in the Dell

Working with partners, we have officially kicked-off the first project focused on defining return on investment for both farmers and the environment on farm lands in the headwaters of the Mississippi River. The group is called the Headwaters Agriculture Sustainability Partnership (HASP). It is just one of several public/private partnerships that we have created to provide guidance in how to incentivize conservation and supply chain sustainability.



A Home Run!

Mississippi Headwaters Partnership: In 2010, TNC wrote a grant proposal that resulted in the development of a protection priority analysis of the upper 400 miles of the Mississippi River. This analysis helped The Mississippi Headwaters Board, a joint powers board representing central MN counties, rollout Phase I of an action plan. To date, the plan has exceeded its acreage goals by 200%. Phase I has protected 1,802 acres and 13 miles of the Mississippi River, bringing us even closer to our goal of preserving clean drinking water for millions of Minnesotans.



Rivers of the Driftless: A Key Piece of Property Purchased

This year, TNC acquired a 900-acre property in southeastern Minnesota that will be transferred to the Minnesota DNR as a new Wildlife Management Area in the Root River Watershed. The property includes over three miles of trout stream frontage. Work has begun to prepare the site for transfer, including sealing wells and removing fence. Ecological restoration is already underway to revive the site's wetlands.

Our lives are reflected in the landscapes.

The vast majority of contributions to The Nature Conservancy's work comes from committed and caring people. For this, we are exceedingly grateful. To learn more about the many giving options available (real estate, gifts that generate income, personal property, IRAs, and more), please visit our "Gift and Estate Planning" page on www.nature.org.

FORESTS

Managing Diversity and Resilience in our Forests

Through our annual audit, TNC preserve areas in northeast MN were certified as sustainably managed forest lands by the Forest Stewardship Council. This means that we are managing our forests in ways that respect indigenous rights, ensure environmental and social benefits, and conserve important biodiversity.



Our love of birds unites us

Birds don't follow state lines! So why should we? TNC in Minnesota collaborated with other Conservancy chapters to create a new web feature that includes: highlights of birding in the region, a photo slideshow of Great Lakes birds, and a map that showcases birding opportunities at TNC preserves. Almost 9,000 people have already visited the main web page: nature.org/greatlakesbirds.

First-of-its-Kind Map

Forest Restorations and Resilience Mapping Project: TNC's project team completed a first draft priority map for new forest restoration. This groundbreaking analysis, combining resilience, biodiversity, and current forest condition, is the first of its kind in Minnesota and will help the forestry team prioritize its work to maximize impact where it matters most.



Forest Restoration in Northeast Minnesota: Trees, Trees, Trees

Thanks to donors, TNC planted 535,000 trees on approximately 2,000 acres in spring 2019. (A total of 4 million have been planted within the past few years!) In the North Shore watershed area, this involved cutting brush and planting long-lived conifer tree species along 10 miles of trout streams. This is important because big forests provide much-needed shade to keep trout streams cold and clear, protecting an important Minnesota pastime and economic engine for our future.

Drone Technology: A Better View from the Air

We are literally getting our forest restoration work "off the ground". Last summer, TNC hired Alex Rosenflanz, an expert on drone mapping, for a summer position to produce high-resolution maps and aerial video for our Riparian Forest Resilience Project. Alex, in turn, has trained Duluth staff to put this technology to work on our future Forest and Science Programs.

AGRICULTURE

Study: "Cover Crops, Trees Key to Fighting Climate Change"

According to a study published in the journal *Science Advances*, TNC's own ecologist Joe Fargione looked at natural ways in which different land use could mitigate climate change. In Minnesota, the #1 and #2 ways were through the use of cover crops and reforestation (converting non-forest land back into forest). Whereas in North and South Dakota, avoiding conversion of carbon-sequestering grasslands offsets CO2 emissions while offering additional benefits like flood mitigation and holding soils in place (avoiding dust bowl conditions). According to TNC science assessments, our Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota chapter has some of the nation's greatest potential for implementing nature-based solutions to curb climate change – second only to Texas.



MARKETING

Favorable Press Gets the Word Out

The Nature Conservancy released a report on the business case for protecting and restoring the Mississippi River in March 2019, which subsequently generated more than 60 media placements including a Star Tribune front page news article, as well as related coverage in the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal, Minnesota Public Radio, Brainerd Dispatch and the St. Cloud Times.

The report, issued by The Nature Conservancy, Ecolab Inc, and McKinsey Co, analyzed the benefits and costs of improving the Mississippi River's water quality. The report makes the case that preserving or restoring just a small fraction of land in the Mississippi River Headwaters upriver of the Twin Cities—about 208,000 acres out of roughly 13 million—would have substantial benefits for residents, businesses and the environment. One notable in the report: "Spend \$400 million to \$600 million now to protect the Mississippi River or \$2.7 billion later to restore what was lost."



A Glimpse into History

For anyone who missed it, the chapter produced a video celebrating The Nature Conservancy's 60th anniversary in Minnesota in late 2018. It includes interviews with current and former TNC leaders about the organization's successes and the current focus on solving the world's biggest conservation challenges. You can now find the video on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/DcexhB5Rldg>.

PARTNERSHIPS



Star Tribune (May 2019) "Conservation Corps leans in with a little sweat and a lot of service"

The Conservation Corps, an AmeriCorps agency, partners with roughly 300 groups and agencies, including The Nature Conservancy. The vast majority of projects are done on public lands. Last spring 240 young adults worked to improve the region's environment in a variety of programs in both urban and wilderness settings, including our own Whitney Preserve in the Black Hills of South Dakota

SCIENCE

Seeds of the Future

TNC was awarded \$278,270 by the Wildlife Conservation Society to promote climate-informed planning for grassland restoration. With it, we are testing whether mixing source populations of seeds to increase genetic variability can improve the success of native plant populations over time and under altered conditions.



Our Mississippi Our Future is now live. Facebook, Twitter & Instagram accounts were created to accompany it. To become an advocate for clean water in the Mississippi Headwaters, follow us and sign up to receive emails from the Our Mississippi Our Future Team:

www.ourmississippiourfuture.org



@OurMississippiOurFuture



@Our_Mississippi



@OurMississippiOurFuture

GRASSLANDS

Firefighters for Conservation



Fire offers many benefits to our grasslands. Prescribed fire increases biodiversity, maintains habitat and prevents more destructive fires. But we will simply never have enough burn crew staff to cover all the prairie acres that could benefit from prescribed fires. That's why TNC's Joe Blastick and partners in South Dakota have engaged Volunteer Fire Departments in the Prairie Coteau landscape. With their help, 22 trainings have been held since 2015 for over 300 participants, and an additional 2,000 to 2,500 acres have been burned each of the past few years.

The Pride of the Prairie

Despite being one of our greatest ecological assets, prairie landscapes' rapid decline across Minnesota and the Dakotas has been startling. During this past spring and early summer, TNC's Prairie Recovery Program team improved grassland habitat on more than 17,000 acres of public lands. Since inception, the program has initiated restoration and improvement efforts on more than 125,000 acres and has permanently protected 7,000 acres of grasslands. This protection is critical to saving declining species like the Dakota skipper butterfly and meadowlark.

LAND PROTECTION

Star Tribune (April 2019) "Landowners in Minnesota and elsewhere are creating a movement"

The article cited The Nature Conservancy as one of the nonprofits collaborating to provide ongoing time and money for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Developed in 1987, the private lands habitat program works with landowners to restore wetlands and grasslands. Its easement program extends conservation practices into perpetuity by making one-time payments to landowners.

Win, Win, Win in South Dakota

580 acres located along Bitter Lake in Day County, South Dakota were donated by The Nature Conservancy to the South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, in accordance with the wishes of the former landowners. Joe Blastick, TNC's Prairie Coteau conservation manager was quoted, "It was an incredibly generous gift to the Conservancy and we're thrilled that we've been able to find it such a great home."



ADVOCACY

We Never Tire of Explaining Priorities

Seven trustees joined TNC staff to attend 13 meetings with Minnesota state legislators as well as the Governor's office to discuss priorities related to the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funds and TNC's Our Mississippi Our Future water protection advocacy program. Educating lawmakers about the Conservancy's key conservation objectives is essential to building a world where people and nature thrive together.



On the Federal Stage, A Huge Achievement in Land Conservation

TNC and partners successfully advocated for, and finally passed, a permanent reauthorization for the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the context of a huge public lands package that passed the U.S. Senate. The federal government's Land and Water Conservation Fund is fed by royalties from offshore oil and gas revenue. Since its creation in 1964, it has provided about \$250 million for scores of projects including the Boundary Waters, the Chippewa and Superior national forests, the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.