

MINNESOTA'S TREASURES,
PRESERVED FOREVER.



MINNESOTA LAND TRUST
MID-YEAR REVIEW
MAY 2015

CONSERVATION IN MINNESOTA'S NORTHERN REGION

BLANDING'S TURTLE HABITAT CONSERVED

A new conservation project is nestled in a unique area of Becker County where more opportunities to preserve natural lands remain. In fact, Becker County has identified this area as a Natural Resource Priority Area in their comprehensive plan.

Most of the conserved acreage consists of wetlands that are home to the Blanding's turtle, a threatened species in Minnesota.

The project, pictured at left, also includes over 2,800 feet of shoreline which will help contribute to the water quality and fishery habitat of Height of Land Lake.

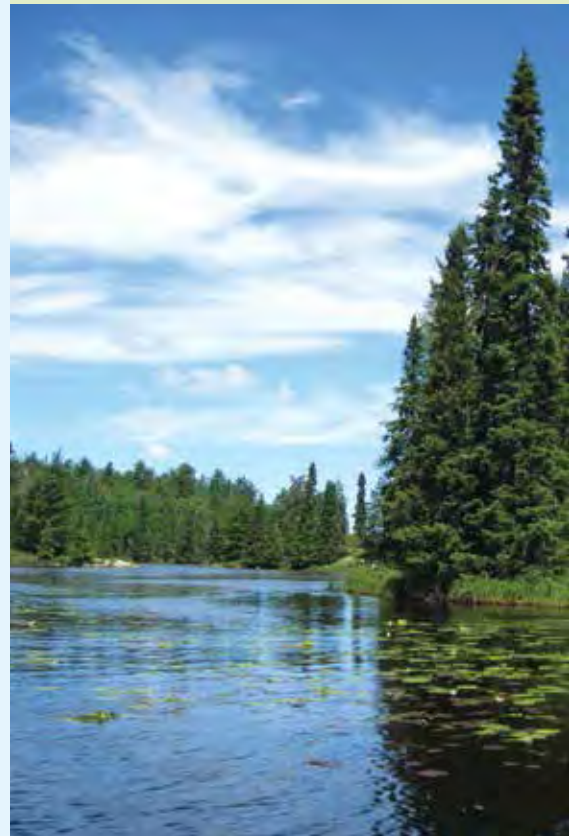
WILDERNESS LANDS REMAIN WILD FOREVER

For nearly 25 years, we've been permanently preserving private lands that serve as gateways to wilderness areas in Northern Minnesota. Because these lands are particularly vulnerable to development, we are thrilled to add this Elbow Lake parcel just a short paddle from the Boundary Waters in St. Louis County.

The land's granite outcroppings emblematic of the Canadian Shield include over 4,320 feet of shoreline along Elbow Lake, preserving important fish habitat.

The forests, a mix of pine, spruce and birch, support a large array of wildlife species, including gray wolf, pine marten, black bear, boreal owls, great gray owls, boreal chickadees, and bald eagles.

Funding for this and the Height of Land project was provided by members of the Minnesota Land Trust, and from the Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and approved by the Minnesota Legislature.





FITZ FITZGERALD

A GENEROUS GIFT OF LAND

Jerry Martin spent his boyhood summers learning to fish on Minnesota’s northern lakes. Over time, he realized that the landscapes of his youth were rapidly disappearing.

Grassy, natural shoreline transformed to groomed beach. Roads cut through forested land. Expanses of majestic forest were logged or divided into smaller rural lots.



As an adult, Jerry began to pursue land purchases with an eye for old growth forest, high quality bulrush beds and stands of beautiful old white and red pine. Jerry’s intention was to preserve the natural attributes of the land for future generations, and notified the Minnesota Land Trust that he wished to make a gift of the land.

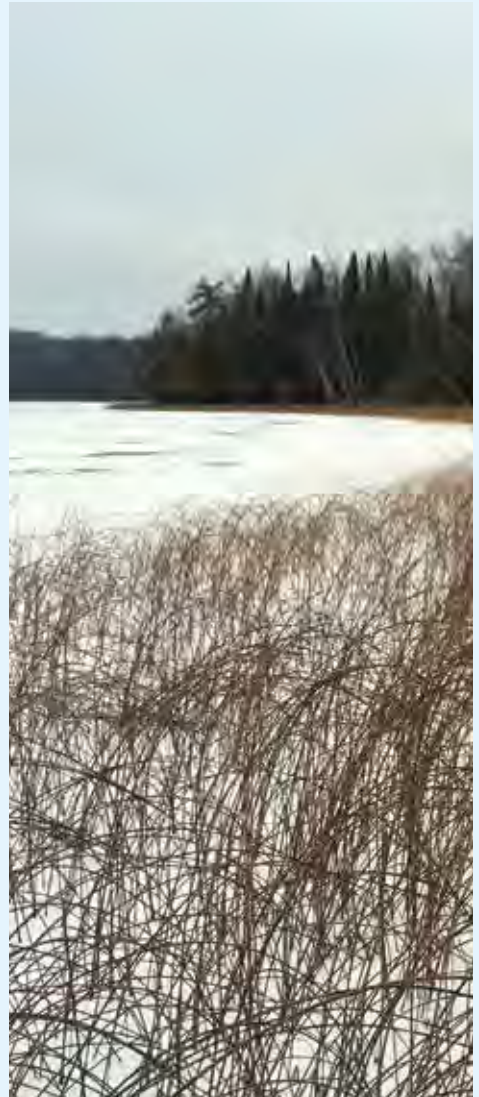
This land included five parcels in Itasca County that total over 400 acres. It’s significant for many reasons. Because much of the land borders state and national forest, it effectively increases the habitat value of those tracts.

Unfragmented old growth forest is a rare resource in an area that has been significantly logged or split up into smaller rural development plots. And it’s important because it provides forest interior habitat for pileated woodpeckers, grey wolf, marten and other creatures that need that type of habitat to flourish.

The properties also include over three miles of undeveloped shoreline which contributes to fish populations that require undisturbed shoreline for spawning and raising their young.

And now, Jerry has transferred the ownership of his land to Minnesota Land Trust, secure in the knowledge that his land will be preserved into perpetuity to benefit wildlife habitat and water quality.

In addition, Jerry has made a generous monetary gift to support the costs of perpetual stewardship for this project.





“IMPLEMENTING A FUNCTIONAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR PRIVATELY-OWNED WORKING LANDS REPRESENTS WHAT WE BELIEVE IS THE VERY BEST STRATEGY TO PERMANENTLY ADDRESS THE MOST DEVASTATING HABITAT CONVERSION IN OUR GENERATION.”

**—KRIS LARSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MINNESOTA LAND TRUST**



CONSERVATION GRAZING: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ENHANCE HABITAT

Over the last 150 years, western Minnesota has seen unprecedented landscape changes. Today, less than 1% of Minnesota's native prairie habitat remains. Of that, only one-third is permanently protected.

To compound the problem, one million acres of Minnesota grassland enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program will expire in the next five years, leaving an uncertain future ahead for wildlife habitat.

In fact, a recently-released University of Wisconsin study carefully inventoried recently converted land and found that between 2008 and 2012 nearly 400 square miles of Minnesota's land was converted into row crops. Minnesota converted more wetlands (25,000 acres) than any other state.

"Implementing a functional conservation strategy for privately-owned working lands represents what we believe is the very best strategy to permanently address the most devastating habitat conversion in our generation," stated Minnesota Land Trust Executive Director, Kris Larson.

The Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with The Conservation Fund and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and with funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, is piloting a program that uses conservation easements to help stem the loss of grasslands and provide wildlife benefits while allowing livestock producers to maintain their herds.

This pilot program works with conservation-minded owners of working grasslands, like Jess and Tammy Berge.

The Berges recently conserved their 284 acre land located in Pope County as part of a Conservation Grazing system that will ensure that viable, robust and diverse grasslands are maintained.

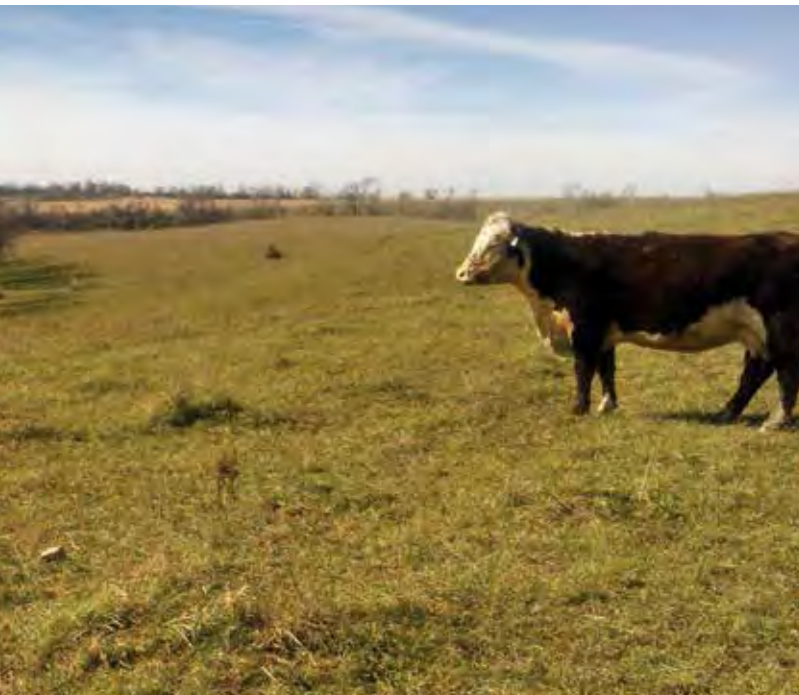
Managing an appropriate number of cattle to rotationally graze large areas of grassland allows them to mimic the role that bison played in bygone centuries, disturbing native plant communities just enough to ensure their health and prevent the spread of invasive species.

The idea of rotational grazing will be familiar to those who read Michael Pollan's 2006 book *Omnivore's Dilemma*, which detailed the practice. The Berge's utilize a similar set-up of temporary fencing to graze their cattle in small paddocks according to a prescribed regimen dictated by site-specific circumstances.

The Berge's have been using rotational grazing methods for over three years and have already seen an improvement in their soil as well as positive wildlife outcomes. "We've already seen more waterfowl, and that's been noticed by area hunters," commented Jess Berge.

Located within the state-designated "Glacial Lakes Prairie Core Area," the Berge land is in a part of Minnesota that contains high concentrations of remaining native prairie and, with features of a functioning prairie system, is likely to succeed in achieving a healthy native grassland.

Their land also includes nearly 8,000 feet of shoreline, and is adjacent to the Larson Waterfowl Production Area. It's located less than three miles from four federal Waterfowl Production Areas and two state Wildlife Management Areas, creating a habitat complex that will benefit of variety of wildlife.



IMPORTANT ROOT RIVER HABITAT CONSERVED

NATURAL SHORELINES AND RIVER BLUFFS FOREVER

Minnesota Land Trust continues its commitment to land conservation in an area of the state that contains some of the greatest biodiversity, the blufflands of southeastern Minnesota.

Yet in this area so important for wildlife habitat and valued by residents and visitors alike, only 3% of the land is protected from development.

This is why the work of the Minnesota Land Trust, with its focus on permanent land conservation through private landowners, is important to this landscape.

One recent project in the Root River valley exemplifies this work. It adds to three nearby easements for a total of nearly 1,000 protected acres, and over 12,000 feet of shoreline along the Root River and its tributaries.

Conserving this land is significant because the dry prairie bedrock bluffs, large sand barrens and hardwood forest provide habitat for timber rattlesnake, a threatened species in Minnesota.

Joel and Audrey Johnson's land shares a boundary with the Vinegar Ridge Recreation Area, which effectively increases the impact of the habitat conservation.

In addition, paddlers and cyclists along this portion of the Root River will be able to admire the landscape's bluffs that will remain unblemished forever.



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A CHAMPION OF RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION

Jayne and Jim Gilmer are relative newcomers to southeastern Minnesota and have completely embraced the beauty and challenges of owning dry bluff prairie land. Buckthorn, red cedar and even Kentucky bluegrass have become targets of their efforts to restore the land to maximize wildlife and pollinator habitat.

The land includes dry bedrock cliffs, cold-water seeps, and other rare habitat including very important terrain for native reptiles. The Gilmers have noticed an increase in rattlesnakes in recent years, likely testament to the success of their efforts which include prescribed prairie and forest burns.

The project conserves the purity of over 3,300 feet of shoreline along Looney Creek, a state-designated trout stream that contains a naturally reproducing population of native brook trout and flows into the nearby Root River.

Both projects, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, were funded by the members of the Minnesota Land Trust and by generous support from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and are part of ongoing conservation efforts in the Root River watershed and greater blufflands regions.



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NEW FACES AT THE MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

Baseline Project Associate **Mark van der Linden** is working both in the field and in the office to update project information on some of the nearly 500 easements currently held by the Minnesota Land Trust. Mark worked for the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, and has worked for the Conservation Corps in Minnesota and Iowa. He earned a B.A. in Political Science from Coe College, and completed an intensive field course in ecology of the Upper Midwest at the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory.



As Program Manager for the Wetlands and Grasslands Programs, **Pat Anderson** is focusing on protecting crucial areas of prairies, grasslands and associated wetlands in western Minnesota. Pat served as Executive Director of Northern Prairies Land Trust in South Dakota and Nebraska, working with private landowners, conservation organizations and government agencies to design and implement a variety of conservation programs. He has a Law Degree from William Mitchell College of Law and a B.A. in Business and Economics from Gustavus Adolphus College.



Northern Minnesota's critical and sensitive shorelines will receive the attention of new Program Manager **Pat Collins**. Pat joins us after over 20 years with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, most recently as Regional Manager for the Division of Ecological and Water Resources in northeastern Minnesota. He earned undergraduate degrees in Biology and Teaching Life Science, and a Master of Science degree in Environmental Biology from the University of Minnesota.



In addition to managing day-to-day office operations, Administrative Associate **Beth Westerbach** contributes to the development and communications efforts of the Land Trust. Beth worked at a non-profit for nine years and prior to that her work experience spanned across several industries including manufacturing, legal information, and agriculture. She holds a degree in Plant Science from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and spent time in Nepal as a Peace Corp volunteer focusing on agriculture education.



FSC





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Walter Abramson | Director of Development
Pat Anderson | Program Manager: Wetlands & Grasslands
Nick Bancks | Conservation Associate
John Brosnan | Director of Land Protection
Pat Collins | Project Manager: Critical Shoreline
Barbara Farrell | Staff Paralegal
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