

## Scientific and Natural Areas Timeline



1931 – Minnesota Department of Conservation is created.

1938 – Itasca Wilderness Sanctuary is established as an area for research and interpretation. It is the first site in Minnesota set aside for this purpose.

1939 – Conservationists Aldo Leopold and Walter Breckenridge discuss the need for a system to protect Minnesota’s significant and rare natural features. Leopold writes a letter to his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin, noting Minnesota’s effort to identify and preserve sites like this.

1951 – Wisconsin establishes a [State Natural Areas Program](#), the first of its kind in the U.S.

1958 – The Nature Conservancy, which has a system of identifying and conserving natural areas, establishes a [chapter in Minnesota](#).

1963 – The Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resource Commission is created (now called the [Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources](#), or LCCMR).

1966 – The [Commissioner’s Advisory Committee](#) (CAC) is established by Commissioner of Conservation, Clarence Prout. The 15 member committee of citizens first met on September 23, 1966, with the purpose of making recommendations on the creation and management of natural areas. This committee was the driving force behind the establishment of the Scientific and Natural Areas Program.

*The Commissioner’s Advisory Committee preamble:*

*“Scientific and Natural Areas’ are areas of land or water in public or private ownership which have been formally designated for preservation, protection, and management for the values inherent in their natural conditions. These values, which are for the public welfare, include use as living museums, sites for scientific study, areas for teaching of natural history and conservation, places of historic or prehistoric interest and scenic beauty, and habitats for rare and endangered species of plants and animals.”*

1966 – [The Conservation Volunteer](#), a department periodical, publishes an issue [dedicated to natural areas](#), featuring articles written by CAC members and other advocates, encouraging the establishment of a system for natural areas. Authors include: [Dr. L.B. Frenzel](#), [Dr. Max Partch](#), [U.W. “Judge” Hella](#), [Dr. Walter Breckenridge](#), [Dr. John Moyle](#), and [John Humke](#).

1967 – A bill to establish a system for designating Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA) is introduced in the Minnesota Legislature, but does not pass this session.

**1969 – May 16, The Minnesota Legislature *enacted a statute authorizing the creation of Scientific and Natural Areas.***

1970 – Project 80 begins. It is an effort to document and inventory all the state owned land in Minnesota, such as SNAs. CAC is asked to help in identifying these areas.

1970 – The SNA program is to proceed with a long-range plan, modeled after the Wisconsin plan for natural areas.

1971 – The Department of Conservation is renamed to the [Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR), to reflect its broadened responsibilities.

1972 – The DNR commissioner, Robert L. Herbst, issues a policy directive to place SNA establishment and management responsibilities into the division of Parks and Recreation. The directive also creates different classes of Scientific and Natural Areas: Research areas, educational areas, public use/interpretive areas, and rare species areas. All with varying allowed uses.

1973 – Basis and criteria for selection of SNAs adopted by CAC.

1973 – The Commissioner’s Advisory Committee makes a recommendation for the first areas that will become SNAs.

**1974 – The first SNA, [Rush Lake Island](#), is established on August 8, 1974, to preserve a heron rookery. This was Commissioner’s Scientific and Natural Areas order #1. [Purvis Lake-Ober Foundation SNA](#) is also designated the same day.**

1975 – The [Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Act](#) (A result of project 80) clarified and defined the qualification for SNA designation. Features that qualify a site for designation include: geological formations, fossil evidence, undisturbed plant communities, areas illustrating successional processes, habitat for rare species, relict flora and fauna, and seasonal havens for wildlife concentrations.

1975 – The Scientific and Natural Areas Program, and CAC, begin working more closely with the Nature Conservancy, developing leases for multiple Nature Conservancy natural areas.

1975 – The Nature Conservancy writes a letter recommending that the Scientific and Natural Areas Program have a fulltime coordinator and dedicated staff.

1977 – The DNR commissioner, Bill Nye, creates a [Natural Heritage program](#), in coordination with the Nature Conservancy. The Heritage Program was to do a biological assessment of current and proposed SNAs to determine their qualification as SNAs.

**1980 – *The Prairie Tax Credit Program is created in the Natural Heritage Program. It was later modified to become the [Prairie Tax Exemption Program](#).***

1981 – The Nature Conservancy loses funding for the Natural Heritage Program, so the DNR uses SNA funds to help and moves both programs to the Division of Wildlife to better coordinate together.

**1982 – *The SNA Program starts recognizing other public lands with exceptional natural features in the [Natural Areas Registry](#), and develops volunteer agreements with public land managers to manage and preserve these areas. The first two areas on the registry are [Spring Creek WMA](#) and [Felton WMA](#), both added in April 1982.***

1983 – The [Itasca Wilderness Sanctuary](#) is designated as an SNA on January 14, 1983.

1984 – The Role of the Commissioners Advisory Committee is expanded to provide recommendations to the Natural Heritage and Nongame programs.

1986 – Legislation under [Reinvest in Minnesota](#) contains a Critical Habitat Matching Account Provision. It provides state funds to match each dollar or dollar value of land donated. This funded the establishment of many new SNAs.

1987 – The [Minnesota Biological Survey](#) (it was then called the Minnesota County Biological Survey), partially funded by the Nature Conservancy, is created and begins work surveying the state's remaining forests, prairies, and wetlands. This information is important in finding new sites to establish as SNAs.

**1987 – *[Native Prairie Bank](#) conservation easements for private prairie lands are added to the SNA program.***

1988 – The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund is created, which originates from Minnesota State Lottery proceeds and investment income. Funding for projects is recommended by LCCMR. This provides funding for many SNA Program projects, as well as the Minnesota Biological Survey.

1988 – The Native Prairie Tax Exemption Program is moved from the Natural Heritage Program to the SNA Program.

1988 – “Prairie Day” on August 13<sup>th</sup> is established by the governor. The SNA Program coordinated yearly events.

1989 – The first Native Prairie Bank (50 acres in Wilkin county) was established on February 27, 1989.

1989 – The 50<sup>th</sup> SNA, [Osmundson Prairie](#) is designated on November 16, 1989. Eleven other sites are designated the same day.

1991 – 18 peatland SNAs are established by the [Wetland Conservation Act](#).

1994 – [Wabu Woods](#), the 100<sup>th</sup> SNA, is established on January 11, 1994. Five other SNAs are also established this day.

2005 – The 50<sup>th</sup> Native Prairie Bank (12 acres in Jackson county) was established on May 9, 2004.

2006 – Prairie Day events coordinated by the SNA Program are discontinued due to budget cuts.

2010 – The 150<sup>th</sup> SNA, [Chimney Rock SNA](#) is established on June 28, 2010. Lester Lake SNA is also designated the same day.

2012 – The 100<sup>th</sup> Native Prairie Bank (112 acres in Big Stone county) was established on June 15, 2012.

***2019 – [50th year of the Scientific and Natural Areas Program](#). As of January, there are 168 Scientific and Natural Areas protecting over 192,000 acres, 141 Native Prairie Bank easements protecting over 12,800 acres, and nearly 50 Natural Area Registry sites and numerous Native Prairie Tax Exemptions providing incentives to protect an additional nearly 20,000 acres.***

*A state scientific and natural area shall be established to protect and perpetuate in an undisturbed natural state those natural features which possess exceptional scientific or educational value. —[Minnesota Statute 86A.05, subdivision 5\(a\)](#)*

Sources: [Scientific and Natural Areas](#) website; [Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources](#) website; [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#) website (including archived versions from Archive.org); [The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota Facebook](#) Page; [Minnesota Biological Survey](#) website; the [Commissioner’s Advisory Committee](#) website; “[A Guide to Minnesota’s Scientific and Natural Areas](#)” book; “The Journey Begins” essay by Bob Djupstrom for Nature Notes 2019; SNA archives and files.