



# *Department of Natural Resources Fact Sheet*



## **2008 CAPITAL BUDGET Wildlife Area Acquisition and Improvement Governor's Recommendation: \$10,000,000**

### **It is needed because**

Minnesota has one of the finest systems of publicly-owned Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in the country, with 1,412 units totaling more than 1.2 million acres. These areas protect important wildlife habitat, support productive wildlife populations, and provide opportunities for current and future generations to hunt, fish, trap, and share our natural heritage. WMAs are important for conserving surface water, preserving unique vegetation, and enhancing natural beauty and open space. WMAs also provide economic benefits. According to the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching generate \$4.3 billion each year in Minnesota.

WMAs will play an increasingly important role in Minnesota's conservation future, serving as a refuge for wildlife, as a place for people to enjoy the outdoors, and as a network of high-quality protected lands in a rapidly changing landscape. WMAs are critical for preventing the loss of wildlife and plant species due to climate change. Acquiring new WMAs and expanding current ones will help maintain species in future decades by allowing animals and plants to migrate in response to change.

Also, approximately 80,000 acres of land under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Minnesota were converted last year. In 2008, it is estimated the state will lose an additional 100,000-120,000 CRP acres. By 2010, CRP contracts will have expired on a total of 600,000 acres of land (about one-third of the 1.8 million acres currently enrolled in the program), with re-enrollment a possibility, but not a guarantee. Maintaining Minnesota's reputation for supporting healthy wildlife populations and excellent hunting opportunities, and providing an outstanding quality of life requires making investments in the state's conservation future, especially given these challenges.

This request also supports Minnesota Climate Change Advisory Group priority AFW-2: Land Use Management Approaches for Protection and Enrichment of Soil Carbon.

### **Major project elements**

This funding will accelerate the strategic acquisition and improvement of Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), consistent with a Citizen's Advisory Committee Report recommending the accelerated acquisition of 210,500 acres of new WMAs within the next 10 years to meet the long-range needs for wildlife habitat, wildlife population management, and hunter access in the state. Specifically, this funding will provide for the following:

#### WMA acquisition (\$9,500,000)\*:

- ◆ Acquire new lands for WMAs through direct purchase from willing landowners, and
- ◆ Partnerships will allow leverage to acquire additional lands for WMAs.

#### WMA improvements (\$500,000)\*:

- ◆ Restore wildlife habitat on newly acquired WMAs, and
- ◆ Develop and improve public access and user facilities for existing WMAs.

\*The amount of funding that will be used for development and restoration depends on the type of land that is purchased and the existing condition of the land. For example, land held in CRP will already have appropriate cover and the only initial development may be a parking lot. In other cases, the land may need full restoration. It is estimated that about \$500,000 will be utilized for initial site development on WMAs.

### **Priority-setting**

Priorities for WMA acquisition are established for the goal of increasing waterfowl production and hunter harvest in Minnesota's prairie pothole region:

- ◆ High-quality habitat complexes (prairie wetland, shallow lake, and grassland complexes);
- ◆ Acquisitions greater than 200 acres in size; and
- ◆ Acquisitions that already have some protection through existing state or federal ownership, conservation easements, or farm conservation programs.

Strategic investments – through targeted acquisitions and collaborative partnerships – provide the important habitat complexes needed to sustain productive wildlife populations, support working lands, and improve public access to recreation lands.

### **Project locations**

Project locations are determined through opportunities that arise in the identified high-priority focus areas.

### **Key measures and outcomes**

A high-quality system of Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) provides for the enjoyment and appreciation of Minnesota's natural heritage by current and future generations through:

- ◆ Enhanced habitat protection and management supporting productive wildlife populations;
- ◆ Increased access to hunting, trapping, and wildlife-watching activities; and
- ◆ Improved water quality and soil conservation.

This will be accomplished by:

- ◆ Acquisition of approximately 3,400 acres for WMAs through direct purchase from willing landowners;
- ◆ Acquisition of 3,400 acres for WMAs through key partnerships;
- ◆ Restoration of prairie/grasslands, open/brush lands, and wetlands to support wildlife populations on newly acquired WMAs; and
- ◆ Development of user facilities, access roads, and trails in WMAs.

### **For further information contact:**

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