



MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES 2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is pleased to share its annual list of natural resources management, conservation, and outdoor recreation accomplishments. We are proud of the progress we've made working with Minnesotans to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life. These accomplishments are attributable to the exceptional work of DNR staff as well as the contributions of many partners and Minnesotans who help make the work possible, from non-profits and private individuals and groups to partners at all levels of government: local, state, national, Tribal and international. Together, our work conserves natural resources for future generations, provides unforgettable outdoor experiences, and benefits Minnesota's environment, economy and communities.

Many Minnesotans will directly see their work or favorite outdoor activity or place reflected in the 2025 accomplishments below, which are categorized under the four goals outlined in the DNR's Conservation Agenda. These goals are: Natural Resources Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resources Economy, and Operational Excellence. However, this list is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it illustrates the scope, breadth and depth of the DNR's work over the last year. We are proud of the many ways our work intersects with the lives of every Minnesotan and mindful of the responsibility that comes with the privilege of doing that work.

We invite you to stay up to date on DNR work by signing up for one of our topic-specific email lists, exploring opportunities on: engage.dnr.state.mn.us/, Facebook: facebook.com/MinnesotaDNR, Instagram: instagram.com/minnesotadnr/, LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/mndnr, X: x.com/mndnr, YouTube: youtube.com/user/MinnesotaDNR/featured.

GOAL 1: MINNESOTA'S WATERS, NATURAL LANDS, AND DIVERSE FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITATS ARE CONSERVED AND ENHANCED.

PERMANENTLY PROTECTING NEARLY 16,000 ACRES OF FOREST LAND

This fall, the DNR finalized its largest land acquisition in recent history, resulting in the permanent protection of nearly 16,000 acres of forested land across a 10-county area in northern Minnesota. The acquisition is the culmination of two separate efforts made possible in partnership with The Conservation Fund, Northern Waters Land Trust, and multiple Minnesota counties. In one transaction, with funding from the Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund, the DNR collaborated with NWLT and counties to strategically select 10,675 acres within Aitkin, Becker, Carlton, Cass, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Itasca, Koochiching and Wadena counties. These lands will expand existing wildlife management areas, scientific and natural areas, and state forests. In the second transaction, the DNR acquired 5,120 acres in St. Louis County using Reinvest in Minnesota dollars. These lands will expand and consolidate ownership in existing state forests, creating larger, contiguous blocks of DNR-managed land.

RESTORING AND TRANSFORMING THE ST. LOUIS RIVER ESTUARY

2025 marked completion of a four-year, \$10 million project to transform Perch Lake in the St. Louis River estuary, an internationally significant freshwater estuary. Extensive degradation throughout the estuary led to its designation in 1987 as a Great Lakes "Area of Concern" and the area became the focus of multiple state, federal and Tribal restoration projects. Once a shallow bay in the estuary, Perch Lake's connection to the river had been impacted by a railroad and U.S. Highway 23. With no water moving between the larger estuary and the lake, the loss of connectivity resulted in low oxygen levels, heavy sedimentation, and limited access for fish and wildlife. Funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund, and delivered in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Land Trust, and the City of Duluth, the project has transformed Perch Lake from a degraded bay into a thriving part of the estuary for fish, wildlife and people. The removal of 72,000 cubic yards of sediment and restoration of 31 acres of open water and coastal wetland has vastly improved habitat. A new pedestrian bridge and the installation of a culvert under the highway that allows for the passage of fish, wildlife and small boats has opened the area for more people to enjoy the water and surrounding nature.

ADVANCING RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2025, the DNR made strides in implementing climate-resilient infrastructure on state lands in multiple locations, strengthening public safety, recreational opportunities and natural resource management. For example, at Tettegouche State Park, a flood-damaged bridge over the High Falls was replaced with a new pedestrian bridge that opened in late November. Built with fiberglass polymer and elevated five feet above the original structure, the new bridge is designed to better withstand the higher and more frequent flood events that are part of Minnesota's climate future. The DNR also completed repair projects that were necessary after flooding in 2024 triggered a federal disaster declaration in northern Minnesota. Forest road repairs in Hibbing and Two Harbors included installing larger culverts and bridges to increase hydraulic capacity and climate resilience in the face of more frequent extreme weather events.

GUIDING THE FUTURE OF MAJOR UNIT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

In June, the Roseau River Wildlife Management Area master plan was completed, the last of seven new master plans for Minnesota's largest WMAs. The updated master plans are the culmination of several years of planning and public engagement and are used to guide management of the "major unit" WMAs. Those units stretch from Red Lake WMA in the northwest, to Carlos Avery WMA in the Twin Cities metro area, and to Whitewater WMA in the southeast. WMAs represent an important part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation and conservation landscape. With a variety of wildlife and waterfowl, there are abundant opportunities for hunters, trappers and wildlife watchers. Given the interest in and use of these areas, public-facing plans allow people to understand management goals and provide an element of transparency. The plans include management goals, objectives and strategies for each WMA for a 10-year period. With completion of the seven major unit plans, approximately 40 percent of Minnesota's WMA acreage now have a current management plan. Looking forward, DNR will develop a statewide plan, with landscape-level subcomponents, that will cover the smaller WMAs.

FACILITATING AND INSPIRING CONSERVATION ACTIONS ACROSS THE STATE

The DNR completed Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2025-2035: Conserving Habitats and Biodiversity in 2025. The plan updates the state's prior wildlife action plan and is designed to guide, facilitate and inspire conservation actions that sustain the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's biodiversity. The plan focuses on rare, declining or vulnerable wildlife species and their habitats and identifies ways all Minnesotans can help conserve these special species and habitats. In addition to staff from across DNR, a coalition of partners including Tribal representatives, conservation organizations, government agencies, academics and educators participated in the plan revision process. Altogether, more than 250 people contributed to the effort.

COMPLETING THE INSTALLATION OF THE ECOLOGICAL MONITORING NETWORK

In 2025, the DNR's Minnesota Biological Survey program completed the installation of the Ecological Monitoring Network. The EMN was conceived more than 10 years ago and is designed to detect ecological changes within wetlands, prairies and forests in response to multiple stressors including climate change, invasive species, loss of pollinators, and changes in how we use our land and water resources. The network now contains 544 monitoring plots throughout the state, with more than 152,310 individual plant records. Developed in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, the University of Minnesota and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, information from the EMN will support a wide variety of natural resource conservation, management, policy and land-use decisions throughout Minnesota. Financial support of \$2.3 million was provided through three grants from Minnesota's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

GOAL 2: MINNESOTA'S OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES MEET THE NEEDS OF NEW AND EXISTING PARTICIPANTS SO ALL BENEFIT FROM NATURE.

ENHANCING OUTDOOR CONNECTIONS THROUGH THE GET OUT MORE (MODERNIZE OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES) INITIATIVE

Minnesotans and visitors continue to experience the transformative benefits of the multi-year, \$150 million Get Out MORE (Modernize Outdoor Recreation Experiences) initiative launched in 2023. The projects described below – some complete, others in progress – are helping the DNR better serve current outdoor enthusiasts, connect even more people to the outdoors, and ensure future generations will also benefit from time spent in Minnesota's unparalleled natural places.

- The track chair program added 10 new chairs, which expanded the program to 24 state parks and recreation areas so it's easier for people with limited mobility to explore natural-surface trails.
- For the state's wildlife management areas, the DNR purchased 21 new hunting blinds and five hydraulic hunting blind trailers to provide a much-needed upgrade to accessible special hunt offerings.
- Adaptive equipment such as beach mats, color-assist glasses, and handcycles are being phased in at state parks and recreation areas statewide.
- After extensive renovations and new construction at William O'Brien State Park, the Walter F. Mondale Day Use Area and the Riverway Campground reopened in May with upgrades that include new campsites, restrooms, shower facilities and an accessible canoe launch. This project was funded by Get Out MORE and state bonding dollars.
- The early design process for the comprehensive modernization at Minneopa State Park, near Mankato, is underway. Improvements under consideration include an improved entry plaza, reconfiguration of the campground to align with modern design standards, added group camping options, and upgrades to electric service at campsites including electric vehicle chargers at select campsites.
- Upgrades at the Madison Lake public water access in Blue Earth County, which re-opened in April, include new ramps, docks, solar lighting, an aquatic invasive species inspection and removal area, and stormwater controls.
- Work at the public water access on Lower Hay Lake in Crow Wing County included replacement of the parking surface and facility entrance road, expansion of vehicle/trailer parking stalls, replacement of two concrete launch ramps, and designated lanes for aquatic invasive species management.
- In St. Louis County, construction began at the Crane Lake public water access, with assistance from the community of Crane Lake. The PWA will re-open in 2026 with a large, paved parking lot containing 39 vehicle/trailer parking spaces and nine single vehicle parking stalls, designated accessible parking stalls, and designated travel lanes designed to improve user access and safety.

- At the Crystal Springs Hatchery, design work began to replace and modernize failing 1930s infrastructure, ensuring continued trout production and improved biosecurity.
- At the New London Hatchery, construction started on a new water supply line, which will maximize water flow and reduce safety hazards.
- At Minnesota's largest cool-water hatchery in Waterville, design work is underway for a project that includes construction of a modern facility to increase production and enhance biosecurity.
- Work is complete on 17 shore fishing projects and another four are in construction and expected to be complete by the end of 2025.
- Construction began at Lake Calhoun in Spicer to replace aging dams with rock arch rapids in partnership with the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District. This project will reconnect 7.5 miles of fish and mussel habitat, improve recreation, and reduce the risk of dam failure.
- On the Pomme de Terre River, three outdated dams are being converted to rock arch rapids, reconnecting 53 miles of habitat while enhancing safety and angling opportunities.

PROTECTING MINNESOTA'S ANGLERS, HUNTERS AND OTHER OUTDOOR RECREATIONALISTS

Minnesotans enjoy the outdoors in a wide variety of ways, from close-to-home hunting and fishing trips to multi-day excursions into the wilderness to camp, paddle, and simply unplug from everyday life. Most people who leave home return safely with nothing but positive memories — and perhaps something they've harvested or foraged — but sometimes people get into situations ranging from dangerous to life-threatening. DNR conservation officers, including pilots and K9 handlers, are trained and equipped to respond to such incidents. In 2025, 13 conservation officers received recognition for their lifesaving efforts, which is above the 10-year average. Among the individuals they played an important role in saving: a man who collapsed while hunting with his sons and grandson; multiple duck hunters whose boats capsized in cold water; and a man who became stuck on a trail and spent the night on the ground because he couldn't get back into his vehicle.

REDUCING WATERCRAFT-RELATED FATALITIES TO HISTORIC LOWS

As of late November 2025, seven individuals had died in boating related fatalities in Minnesota. While even one fatality is too many, 2025 marks a historic low and comes on the heels of two years of previous historic lows. The marked decline in fatalities has occurred despite the state's waterways becoming busier and the number of registered watercraft in Minnesota continuing to increase. In recent years, the DNR has focused on creating messaging aimed at increasing life jacket use and decreasing drug/alcohol use on watercraft. Conservation officers and other DNR staff in the field also work one-on-one with people to raise awareness and increase adoption of water-safety best practices. In addition, the number of people who have earned their watercraft operator's permit more than doubled from fiscal years 2022-23 to fiscal years 2024-25, in part due to legislation that increased the number of people required to obtain boating-safety certification.

GOAL 3: MINNESOTA'S NATURAL RESOURCES CONTRIBUTE TO STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE JOB MARKETS, ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES.

DELIVERING \$11 MILLION IN COMMUNITY TREE GRANTS TO PLANT, MAINTAIN AND PROTECT TREES ACROSS THE STATE

The DNR opened another round of Urban and Community Forestry grants in August 2025, offering a historic \$11 million in grant funding to help communities plant, maintain and protect trees across the state. Funded by the state, these Community Tree Planting and ReLeaf grants support local efforts to recover from emerald ash borer, increase species diversity and build long-term urban forestry capacity. The request for grant proposals received a strong response from Minnesota communities, demonstrating a commitment to creating healthier, more resilient urban and community forests across Minnesota. The Community Tree Planting grant program received more than 50 applications requesting more than \$11 million for projects focused on removing hazardous trees, planting trees and restoring community canopy. The ReLeaf grant program drew even greater interest, with nearly 120 applicants requesting over \$23 million for inventories, planting, maintenance, education and other efforts to improve urban forest health. Awards will be announced in 2026, after agreements with recipients are finalized.

MANAGING MINERAL RESOURCES FOR COUNTIES, TOWNSHIPS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The DNR manages approximately 12 million acres of the state's mineral resources, including ferrous and nonferrous minerals, peat and dimension stone. As a result of mineral leasing and rentals for parcels, state mineral leases managed by the DNR generated more than \$19 million in revenue in fiscal year 2025. The type of state land that is leased for mineral development determines where the revenue goes. Most revenue is distributed between the state's permanent school and university funds, which provide income for K-12 and higher education in Minnesota. Revenue from tax-forfeited mineral rights provide funding for the county or township where the tax-forfeited property is located. Minnesota supplies over 80 percent of the iron ore used to produce iron and steel in North America.

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE THROUGH A NEW TRAIL CENTER AND EXTENSION

This year, the community around Glendalough State Park celebrated a significant addition to the park: a new trail center and extension of Sunset Trail. More than just facilities, these projects strengthen the connections between the park and the surrounding community. The Sunset Trail now provides a paved link from Highway 16 directly into the park, connecting seamlessly with the 12-mile Glendalough Trail that ties the park to the city of Battle Lake. This extension makes it easier for residents to bike into the park and for visitors to explore the town, fostering recreation, tourism and community pride. The trail center enhances this experience with bike rentals, restrooms, accessible parking, and a meeting space for up to 40 people, supporting year-round gatherings and educational programs. The project was made possible through a collaboration between the DNR and the Glendalough Park Partners, the park's non-profit friends' group. Funding came from a mix of state bonding, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund, a Federal Recreational Trail Program grant and private contributions through the Glendalough Park Partners.

GOAL 4: DNR DEMONSTRATES OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICE TO MINNESOTANS.

MANAGING EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO MAJOR WILDFIRES

In the spring of 2025, extreme heat and gusty winds created dangerous fire conditions across northern Minnesota, ultimately burning nearly 30,000 acres. DNR wildland firefighters in partnership with other agencies quickly responded to the season's largest incidents: the Camp House, Jenkins Creek, and Munger Shaw fires. While the damage was significant, the quick and coordinated actions of emergency responders helped avert additional impacts to life and property. This effectiveness stems from year-round relationship-building, training, and planning efforts that help ensure responders know and trust one another before they need to respond to an emergency situation.

The DNR demonstrates a sustained commitment to coordination with the Minnesota Incident Command System, the Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact, National Weather Service, local fire departments, and the Department of Public Safety to enable rapid resource mobilization when conditions escalate. As one example of this collaboration, during a six-day period in 2025, the DNR and MNICS partners elevated public warnings, deployed additional crews and aircraft, and responded to 161 wildfires across the state. Their quick, sustained action prevented loss of life and significantly reduced potential impacts to homes, infrastructure and natural resources.

These partnerships continue to support affected communities as cleanup and rebuilding efforts move forward.

MANAGING EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY AFTER HISTORIC WINDSTORM

In June 2025, Minnesota experienced one of the most severe wind events in its recorded history. Waves of intense thunderstorms caused widespread and catastrophic damage in Beltrami, Hubbard, Clearwater and Cass counties, as well as on Tribal lands. The extreme winds snapped, uprooted and damaged more than 9 million trees; damaged roofs and buildings; downed power and transmission lines; and caused widespread secondary damage. The DNR played a central role in the multi-county rapid response and recovery by managing storm-damaged timber, reducing fuel hazards, and beginning long-term forest recovery. DNR staff also worked to address damage at Lake Bemidji and Lake Itasca state parks so impacted areas could safely reopen to the public in a timely manner. Throughout this challenging situation, the DNR along with local, county, statewide and Tribal partners, demonstrated strong coordination, technical expertise and a commitment to public safety.

STRENGTHENING UNDERSTANDING ABOUT TRIBAL LANDS, CULTURE, RELATIONS AND SOVEREIGNTY

The Minnesota DNR's Tribal Relations Office developed and launched DNR's first-ever agency-specific Tribal Relations Training, reaching more than 350 staff statewide in its inaugural year. The training focuses on the 11 Ojibwe and Dakota nations that share geography with Minnesota and covers topics like Tribal history and culture, legal and treaty matters, communication, coordination and consultation best practices, and natural resource issues. The sessions provide a unique opportunity for staff to deepen their understanding of Tribal sovereignty and strengthen relationships with Tribal governments. The long-term goal is to ensure every DNR employee has the opportunity to participate and build stronger, more respectful partnerships with the Tribal nations we work with.

PRIORITIZING SAFETY AND MANAGING RISK IN THE WORKPLACE

The DNR continues to advance a strong culture of safety, and this year's significant achievements reflect the benefits of sustained effort over many years. In 2025, the DNR Safety Team received the Excellence in Health and Safety Award at the 2025 Minnesota Safety and Risk Conference, recognizing outstanding leadership and a proactive, agency-wide approach to ensuring every employee goes home safe and healthy each day. One example of this commitment is seen in the DNR Lands and Minerals division's commendable safety performance. In fiscal year 2025 (and as of November 2025), LAM has recorded no lost work time incidents. To demonstrate the scale of this achievement, the division's land survey unit logged more than 7,500 field hours — often in environments with multiple hazards such as in and along roadways, deep woods, rugged terrain and swamps — with zero lost-time injuries.

LEADING ON A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION

In 2025, the DNR advanced its commitment to sustainability and innovation in fleet management. The agency completed installation of electric vehicle chargers at strategic locations across the state, supporting a multi-year EV Implementation Strategic Plan. The Division of Parks and Trails' battery electric vehicle pilot program earned a 2025 Sustainability Award from the State of Minnesota's Enterprise Sustainability Team for reduced fleet fossil fuel consumption. These efforts contributed to DNR's national recognition as one of the "Top 100 Best Fleets in America" by the National Association of Fleet Administrators, moving up to #78 from last year's debut at #97. This work builds on DNR's longstanding efforts such as replacing gasoline engines with more efficient diesel engines, robust lifecycles replacements, and hybrid vehicle adoption. Together, these actions demonstrate DNR's leadership in reducing fossil fuel use, expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, and setting a statewide example of sustainable fleet management.

EXPANDING K9 UNIT TEAMS TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS IN PROTECTING PEOPLE, NATURAL RESOURCES

In 2025, the DNR trained and certified four new dog-handler teams, bringing the statewide total to eight teams with skills ranging from aquatic invasive species detection to fish and game detection, evidence recovery to finding missing people. In addition to developing and delivering the first Peace Officer Standards and Training Board-certified conservation law enforcement K9 handler course in the Midwest, the K9 unit teams:

- Responded to more than 120 calls for service.
- Located four missing individuals, including a 4-year-old child with autism.
- Conducted 1,075 AIS-related detections on boats and water equipment.
- Attended 78 public relations events, including four days at the Minnesota State Fair, to promote safety, discuss stewardship while recreating outdoors, and explain the unique capabilities and role of the K9 Unit.
- Assisted federal, local, state and Tribal agencies across the state in locating evidence for cases involving homicide and other crimes.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC THROUGH OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

In 2025, the DNR continued to strengthen its public outreach and customer service to ensure responsiveness and that the Minnesotans we serve are active partners in our work. The DNR Information Center was open to assist the public via phone or email six days per week, and information consultants answered nearly 85,000 questions from the public this year. There were more than 2,000 additional visits (a 5 percent increase over the previous year) to the Engage with DNR platform, where people can share perspectives on high-profile projects. On social media, followers on the DNR's main Facebook and Instagram accounts grew by over 20 percent, with increased link clicks to DNR resources. The media are another important way the DNR reaches the public, and in 2025 the DNR issued nearly 300 news releases and advisories, and staff responded to more than 2,000 media inquiries. At the Minnesota State Fair, visitors were treated to new and refreshed exhibits and visual displays, including illustrations of accessibility improvements on public lands and waters and an interactive wildfire prevention display with Smokey Bear. There was also record support for the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer Magazine, which earned nearly \$2.2 million in revenue and won a regional writing award for its feature "At the Bend in the River."

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