

A brief history of state-managed lands

Most of the land that is now Minnesota was ceded to the U.S. by Ojibwe and Dakota people over 30 years (1837-1867). These treaties are part of a larger picture that affected indigenous people and land in what is now Minnesota.

Many of the public lands we enjoy today were granted to the state by the federal government, and a small portion were acquired through state legislation or purchase. Much of the land acquired from the early federal land grants were sold. Today, the state land portfolio looks much different and smaller.

School Trust & Indemnity Lands, 1857

Current acreage: 967,700

Original acreage: 2.995 million

Just prior to statehood, sections 16 and 36 of each public land survey was set aside for the maintenance of public schools. About two-thirds of the original lands were sold to raise revenues to build and operate schools. Today, much of the remaining school trust lands are located in northeastern Minnesota where they are managed for timber, leases, and mineral and aggregate extraction. Revenues are deposited in the Permanent School Trust Fund to provide a continued source of funding for K-12 education.

School Trust Lands - Swamp Lands, 1860

Current acreage: 1.546 million

Original acreage: 4.7 million

Swamp lands and lands overflowed with water were granted to the state by Congress with the intent of draining them to create farmlands. The state granted many of these lands to the railroads and gave smaller land grants to other private and public purposes. Today, the remaining lands are managed with School Trust Lands to generate funds for public education.

Internal Improvement - School Trust Lands, 1866

Current acreage: 6,510

Original acreage: 500,000

Federal law granted new states a half a million acres of land to be used for internal improvements. Almost all of Minnesota's internal improvement lands were sold and the revenue used to liquidate state railroad bonds and fund railroad construction. Money from the sale of these lands was deposited into a permanent fund that eventually merged with the Permanent School Trust Fund. Today these lands are managed as School Trust Lands.

University Trust Lands, 1870

Current acreage: 25,840

Original acreage: 92,160

Prior to statehood, the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Minnesota secured a federal land grant to establish the University of Minnesota. In 1870, a second federal land grant gave the state 144 sections of land for the use and support of the state university. About two-thirds of the original 92,160 acres were sold or given away, and the remaining acres are managed by the DNR to provide income to the Permanent University Trust Fund.

Itasca State Park, 1892

Current acreage: 32,000

Original acreage: 7,000

The original acreage of Itasca State Park was granted to the state by the federal government with the stipulation that they be used exclusively and permanently for park purposes. Today, the park totals more than 32,000 acres including a 2,000 acre wilderness sanctuary.

Burntside State Forest, 1904

Current acreage: 74,815

Original acreage: 19,989

Congress granted land considered to be lower quality to create the Burntside State Forest. Deed restrictions specify that the lands and revenue can only be used for forestry purposes. Today, more than 80 percent of it is within the boundaries of the Superior National Forest, and some portion is within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) where it cannot be managed.

Tax-forfeited lands, 1926-1950

Current acreage: 2.825 million

Original acreage: 9.4 million

During the early half of the 20th century, tax-forfeited lands were transferred to state ownership when landowners defaulted on general property taxes. Most of these forfeitures occurred in northern and central Minnesota after the Great Depression and Dust Bowl eras. Today, counties mostly manage the surface and timber interest of tax-forfeited lands, while DNR has oversight of some timber sales, leasing activities and sales of the land.

Consolidated Conservation Lands, 1930s

Current acreage: 1.55 million

Original acreage: 1.9 million

Consolidated conservation area lands were transferred to state ownership through tax forfeiture, often when drainage projects in the 1920s and '30s failed to turn wetlands into farmlands. Counties initially assumed debt for the delinquent drainage bonds until state laws transferred the debt and the title of the forfeited lands to the state. So-called "Con-Con" lands are located in Aitkin, Beltrami, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen, Marshall and Roseau counties.

Land Utilization Project (LUP), 1940

Current acreage: 20,400

Original acreage: 86,065

As part of the New Deal, the federal government purchased 200,000 acres of unproductive agriculture lands in Minnesota. The state leases back some of these lands and others were permanently granted to the state. These leased and granted lands are managed by the state for wildlife, forestry and other conservation purposes.

Volstead Lands, 1961

Current acreage: 31,500

Original acreage: 33,221

The state Legislature appropriated funds to purchase Volstead Lands from the federal government. These lands carried unpaid county liens for drainage ditches that were intended to make the land suitable for farming, but were not successful. Revenue from Volstead Lands is divided - 50 percent to the county to compensate for unpaid ditch liens - and 50 percent to the state general fund to compensate for the cost of purchasing the land.

Acquired Lands

Current acreage: 1,492,838

Acquired lands make up 27 percent of the state's land portfolio and are made up of lands that were gifted from private owners or organizations or governmental entities, purchased to meet specific management or habitat needs, or otherwise conveyed to the state.