

Public Lands In-Depth

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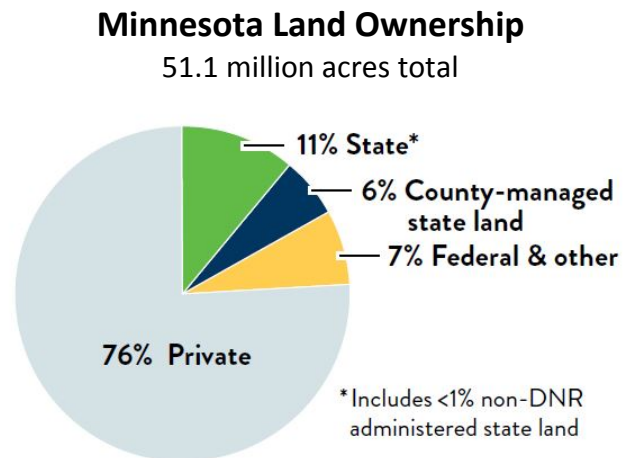
*This document is a comprehensive collection of data and information about Minnesota's public lands, focusing on the state lands managed by the DNR. It details their extent, history, and the recreational, economic and environmental benefits they provide. It includes a list of selected sources. **Learn more:** mndnr.gov/publiclands*

Public lands overview

About 24 percent of Minnesota's lands are public lands – more than 12 million acres of state, federal and county lands managed on behalf of citizens.

The DNR manages 5.6 million acres of state lands, about 11 percent of Minnesota's total land area, or roughly 1 acre per person.

Minnesota counties manage 2.8 million acres of state lands, about 6 percent of Minnesota's total land area. These lands came into state ownership through forfeiture for non-payment of the general property tax.



Minnesota's public lands provide recreational, economic and environmental benefits.

DNR manages 5.6 million acres of state lands

Public lands and facilities managed by the DNR include:

- 59 state forests, school trust acres, and other forested lands covering 4.2 million acres.
- More than 1,800 wildlife management areas covering 1.3 million acres.
- 66 state parks, nine state recreation areas and nine state waysides, totaling 234,500 acres.
- 166 scientific and natural areas covering 192,000 acres.
- 700 aquatic management areas covering 46,000 acres.

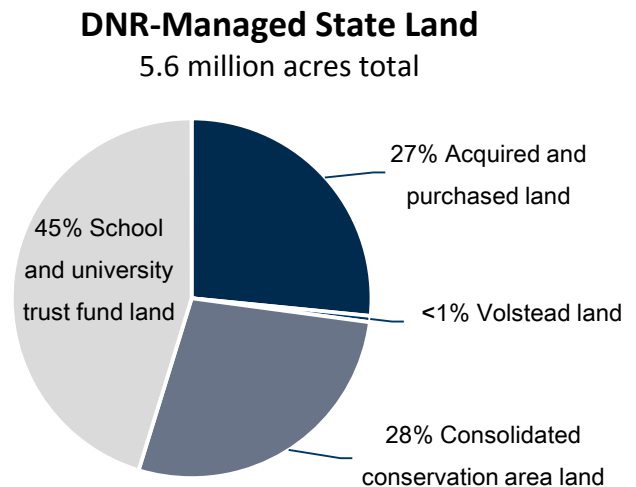
Public lands can be reached via trails and public water access sites managed by the DNR:

- 1,500 miles of state trails, 23,800 miles of grants-in-aid trails (1,800 off-highway vehicle, 700 ski, and 21,300 snowmobile), and 4,100 miles of hiking, biking, horse and motorized trails within state parks, state recreation areas and state forests.
- Approximately 1,700 public water access sites.

The majority of DNR-managed land was inherited decades ago.

About 45 percent of DNR lands are **school trust fund lands**.

- The DNR manages 2.5 million acres of school trust lands. The U.S. Congress granted the state 8 million acres of school trust lands, swamp lands, and internal improvement lands during the mid-1800s; 2.5 million acres remain.
- Income from school trust lands, generated primarily by mineral royalties, timber and land sales, are deposited in the Permanent School Fund (PSF). Interest and dividends generated by the PSF's principal are used to support the annual budgets of all school districts in the state.
- School trust lands are 5 percent of Minnesota's total land area.



About 28 percent of DNR lands are **consolidated conservation area lands**.

- The DNR manages 1.55 million acres of consolidated conservation area lands that came into state ownership through tax forfeiture in the 1920s and 1930s. Income generated from DNR natural resource management on these lands is split evenly with the county.
- Consolidated conservation area lands are 3 percent of Minnesota's total land area.

About 27 percent of DNR lands were **acquired** through purchase, county board action, or gifts.

Strategic land asset management

The DNR regularly evaluates the state's land holdings and looks for ways to improve habitat, conservation, and recreation. The agency strives to reduce land management costs and find efficiencies.

Local government aid: Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) is a form of local government aid paid for tax-exempt natural resources land.

- Each year, the state Department of Revenue distributes about \$30 million in PILT payments to counties. Those payments are further distributed to townships and local school districts according to state law.
- For fiscal year 2017, the state paid approximately \$35.7 million in payments to counties on 8.5 million acres of state lands. This is almost \$6 per person.
- The Office of Legislative Auditor concluded in 2010 that PILT payments from DNR-acquired lands exceeded the combined county and township property taxes on similar private land in 90 percent or more counties.
- 2013 legislation increased PILT payments to counties by 15.5 percent.
- Wildlife management areas (WMAs) have been making PILT payments since 1945.

- All other DNR natural resource lands and county-managed tax-forfeited lands have been making PILT payments since 1980.
- In 2017, county payments ranged from \$17,762 for Red Lake County to \$3.075 million for St. Louis County.
- Counties with consolidated conservation lands receive a PILT payment on them. Additionally, if any consolidated conservation lands have timber sales, mineral leases, or are sold, the county receives 50 percent of the revenue.

Public lands provide many benefits

Recreational

The majority of Minnesotans (82 percent) consider outdoor recreation to be either very or moderately important to their lives.

- Participation
 - 1.7 million anglers, hunters and trappers.
 - 826,000 registered boats.
 - 192,000 registered snowmobiles and 300,000 registered all-terrain vehicles (ATV's).
 - 10 million state park and recreation area visitors.
 - 509,000 people per year travel to public lands and other places in Minnesota to watch wildlife.
- Economic impact
 - \$725 million per year is generated by hunting through direct expenditures in the state.
 - 80 percent of Minnesota's 557,000 licensed hunters hunt deer.
 - In the forested areas of northern Minnesota, 27 percent hunt only public land. In southwestern and southeastern Minnesota, more than 6 percent of deer hunters hunt only public land; more than half (54 percent) spend some time on public land.
 - \$621 million per year is generated by wildlife watching through direct expenditures in the state.
 - Trail users spent \$3.3 billion, contributed \$2.8 million in local taxes, which accounted for 43,000 jobs in 2008.
 - State park visitors spend \$231 million annually on trip-related expenses, such as food, lodging, and transportation.
 - State park campers spend approximately \$40 per person per day on average. Nearly \$28 of which is on expenses beyond payments in state parks.
 - \$2.4 billion per year is generated by fishing through direct expenditures in the state.

Timber production

- Each year, the DNR offers 870,000 cords of wood for sale from DNR-administered forest lands. This provides 30 percent of Minnesota's wood fiber for the forest industry.
- The gross revenue of timber harvested off School Trust Fund lands was \$11.8 million in fiscal year 2018.
- Total gross timber revenue from all DNR-administered lands was \$21.5 million in fiscal year 2018.

- DNR-managed forest lands produced \$1.6 billion in primary forest products and related sales in 2016. This is \$62 in product sales value for every \$1 spent on state land forest management.
- About 5 million acres of state administered forest lands are certified “well managed” by the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, including 2.5 million acres of school trust lands.
- The forest products industry is Minnesota’s 5th largest manufacturing sector by employment. It generates \$17.6 billion in economic impact, 64,000 jobs and \$458 million in state and local taxes.

Mineral development

- Mineral leases from lands with state-owned mineral rights generate about \$36 million in revenue annually (average from the past ten years). School trust and university trust lands generated 89% of this revenue.
- Revenue generated on school trust lands is deposited into the Permanent School Fund, which has a current value of \$1.4 billion. Historically, approximately 80% of the revenue generated on school trust lands comes from mining and mineral exploration.
- In 2018, the Permanent School Fund distributed \$32.8 million to Minnesota’s K-12 school districts on a per-pupil basis.
- Each year, mining on state-managed university trust lands supports about 3,000 Iron Range Scholarships, awarded to Minnesota resident undergraduates at the four campuses of the University of Minnesota System (Twin Cities, Duluth, Crookston, and Morris). These scholarships were worth \$6.2 million in the 2017-18 academic year.

Environmental

Biological protection

- Most remaining large natural landscapes are publicly owned and are in this condition in large part because they are public.
- Many of the state’s best examples of rare and significant natural features (i.e. biodiversity hot spots) occur on public lands.
- 30 percent (or 75,000 acres) of the state’s native prairie are protected on state-managed public land.
- 69 percent (or 2.1 million acres) of the state’s mapped native plant communities are on public land.

Wildlife habitat, including rare species

- Minnesota’s public forests provide habitat for approximately 289 wildlife species and more than 20 game species.
- Minnesota’s public prairies and grasslands provide habitat for approximately 128 wildlife species.
- Public lands help keep species and plant communities from becoming rare. They provide important habitat for species that are declining or are facing serious threats that may cause them to decline.
- 49 rare species (of 577 rare species statewide) are known to occur only on public lands. One rare species only found on public lands in Minnesota is the Canada lynx.

- Minnesota has the highest nesting population of bald eagles and loons in the continental United States.

Pollinators

- Public lands provide critical habitat for pollinators, including the 33 species of butterflies, moths and bumblebees that are species in greatest conservation need.
- Minnesota has more than 400 species of native bees. Public lands provide researchers access to habitats throughout the state to complete the first update to the state native bee species list since 1919.

Resilient habitats

- Intact natural lands help buffer extreme weather impacts associated with changing climate, such as slowing water flow during floods.

Climate change mitigation (biological carbon storage)

- Minnesota peatlands and forests are particularly important reservoirs of carbon. Minnesota peatlands – which are of global conservation significance – store approximately 745 metric tons of carbon per acre.
- Minnesota forests store approximately 99 metric tons of carbon per acre.

Research on public lands

- Public lands, like scientific and natural areas (SNAs) and state forests, provide areas for research that advance our understanding of natural systems.
- Research conducted on public lands includes plant and animal surveys, rare species habitat requirements, and investigations of the effect of management practices on natural lands. For example, DNR researchers have used public lands to survey native bees. Since 2014, 82 percent of bee surveys have occurred on public lands.

Water quality, flood protection, groundwater protection

- 49 percent of the state's wetlands, lakes and rivers are on public land.
- Watersheds with abundant public land provide quality water for drinking, swimming and fishing, buffer the impacts of floods, and help protect groundwater.
- Public lands replenish groundwater supplies.
- Sound management of forested public lands surrounding the Mississippi River ensures clean drinking water for more than one million Minnesotans.

Public land for the future

Public support

Voter support for the constitutional amendment

- In 1988, 77 percent of Minnesota voters voted for the constitutional amendment to create the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund for "the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources."
- In 2008, 56 percent of Minnesota voters voted for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.
- In 2016, 76 percent of Minnesota voters believed that some funding from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment should be used to purchase land to protect water, land, and wildlife habitat.

User satisfaction

- 86 percent of WMA users support ongoing acquisition of these public lands that provide wildlife habitat and access to hunters, wildlife watchers and countless others.
- 63 percent of users also say that WMAs provide high-quality hunting experiences.
- WMA users report these public lands are very important to their recreation and Minnesota's quality of life.

Selected sources

Local government aid

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Recreational benefits

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Public land for the future

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