



## 2021 ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVERVIEW

Throughout 2021, the Department of Natural Resources made important progress toward the mission, goals, and priorities outlined in our [strategic plan](#). We are proud to offer this high-level overview of key accomplishments in several priority areas. This is not a comprehensive list of DNR achievements in 2021, but rather a representative overview. As with any such list, there is much equally important work that is not included.

We hope these examples illustrate some of the many ways in which the DNR works on behalf of all Minnesotans to fulfill the Department's mission 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. You can stay up-to-date on the DNR's work by signing up for one of our [topic-specific emails lists](#), [exploring opportunities on our public engagement platform](#), or by following us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).

# CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE OUTDOORS

Minnesota's great outdoor spaces have been invaluable for children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. More people have been spending more time in and on our lakes, state parks, forests, trails, wildlife areas, and scientific and natural areas, a welcome and exciting development on which we will seek to build. The DNR connects Minnesotans to the outdoors in meaningful ways that contribute to human health, prosperity and quality of life, and build stewardship for our special places and shared natural resources.



## **MINNESOTA OUTDOORS SKILLS AND STEWARDSHIP SERIES**

The DNR's outdoor programming has evolved in many ways to take advantage of new technology and meet the various challenges presented by COVID-19 restrictions. One example is the ongoing Minnesota Outdoors Skills and Stewardship Series (MOSSS), which offers free, weekly webinars so people can engage in real-time with DNR staff and guest speakers on topics such as fly fishing, foraging for spring edibles, deer hunting, health benefits of being outdoors, and more. Participants range from those who are new to hunting or fishing, to long-time outdoor enthusiasts who want to expand their interest areas, to experienced participants who also share their knowledge with viewers.



## **STATE PARK VEHICLE PERMITS FOR TRIBAL MEMBERS**

The DNR successfully worked to change state law so that members of the 11 federally recognized tribes within Minnesota's borders will have free access to each of Minnesota's 75 state parks and recreation areas. The DNR coordinated with all tribes to ensure a welcoming and effective approach to implementing this change. This collaborative approach ensures open access for tribal members to their ancestral lands and strengthens the DNR's relationship with our tribal partners.



## **STATE PARKS LIBRARY PASS PROGRAM**

The DNR worked with more than 70 libraries located in lower income communities throughout the state to offer a program through which library patrons can check out a state parks pass, allowing free access to state parks and recreation areas for families and individuals who could not otherwise afford a permit. In the first six months of this program, more than 1,500 people checked out the free passes.

# ENHANCE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The DNR engages with the public to ensure we consider all Minnesotans in providing services and making decisions by better understanding their interests and building trust.



## ENGAGE WITH DNR

The DNR officially launched its new [digital public engagement platform](#) to give Minnesotans another way to participate in discussions, offer feedback, and make comments on agency projects and decisions that are meaningful to them. This platform builds on the many other [public engagement opportunities](#) the DNR offers throughout the year.



## COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE HOURS

Live, online Commissioner's Office Hours events have provided a new way for Minnesotans to meet with and hear from the DNR's senior leadership during a year when in-person meetings remained less common. Each monthly event focuses on a timely and relevant natural resource, conservation, or outdoor recreation topic. The sessions begin with a brief statement by the Commissioner; the rest of the hour is then used as an open forum for participants to ask questions and engage in dialogue with DNR leadership. We are excited to continue and build on this new format.



## FISHING AND HUNTING OPENERS

We have reimagined our hunting and fishing openers, partly of necessity in response to COVID-19 protocols but also in a quest to keep the events fresh and relevant. The redesigned events have created more intimate engagement opportunities. The 2021 Governor's Fishing Opener was hosted by Otter Tail County, which highlighted its more than 1,100 lakes, offering plenty of space and plenty of fish. The Pheasant Opener weekend in Kandiyohi County started with a conservation tour and a roundtable conversation, including more than three dozen people from 14 agencies and organizations participating. In November, Governor Walz joined a Pine County landowner for the deer opener and then visited one of DNR's 87 CWD sampling stations.

# EXPAND DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

DNR enhances our ability to serve all Minnesotans by cultivating a workforce that reflects and embraces the diversity of Minnesota’s population, and ensures our programs, resources, and decision-making processes serve Minnesota’s diverse population.



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In 2021, the [Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers program](#) served three cohorts for a combined total of 45 participants. IDEC is a unique college-to-careers pathway program for underrepresented college students majoring in science, technology, engineering and math. Among the benefits of the IDEC program are opportunities for paid experience, hands-on work to build skills and knowledge in the environmental field, and professional connections and development. The IDEC program assists fellows in becoming more competitive job applicants after graduation.



## HUNTING AND FISHING REGULATIONS TRANSLATED

People who speak Hmong, Karen, Somali or Spanish can now access Minnesota’s hunting and fishing regulations in their language. The DNR translated the Minnesota Fishing and Hunting and Trapping regulations booklets, the deer permit area map, and the Minnesota Waterfowl Hunting Regulations booklets, into the four languages, other than English, that are most commonly spoken in Minnesota households. [The translated booklets are available in digital format on the DNR website](#) and in print at locations where they are likely to be in demand, including some DNR offices, license vendors, and Minnesota state parks.



## #MYMNOOUTDOORADVENTURE CAMPAIGN

The DNR launched [#MyMNOOutdoorAdventure](#), a unique social media campaign to encourage more representation of diversity, equity, and inclusion on Minnesota’s public lands and waters. The campaign invites Minnesotans of diverse backgrounds to share their stories and pictures about the outdoor activities they love. The DNR features these stories, and accompanying photos, on our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter channels and also on our website.

# ADDRESS CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES PROACTIVELY

DNR seeks to sustain our lands and waters by preparing for coming challenges and addressing ongoing and emerging critical natural resource issues facing Minnesotans and our ecological systems.



## **DROUGHT**

Minnesota experienced severe drought in 2021, affecting communities, natural resources, agriculture, industry, public utilities, and tourism. As the drought intensified in July, DNR implemented a number of measures laid out in the [Statewide Drought Plan](#), including convening the multi-agency State Drought Task Force directing public water suppliers to reduce water use, and temporarily suspending or modifying some lower priority water appropriations in response to low stream flow conditions. The DNR also worked with homeowners to evaluate and assist in resolving “out of water” situations. The DNR’s climatologists collaborated with national experts, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to monitor trends and ensure the information needed to manage the situation.



## **WILDFIRE RESPONSE**

2021 was one of the most challenging and significant wildfire years in decades, with five times more summer wildfires than average. The DNR and our Minnesota Incident Command System (MNICS) partners worked hard to keep people safe and minimize structure damage and loss. The largest fire of the season, the Greenwood Fire in northeast Minnesota, required 529 personnel, burned for 48 days, and burned more than 26,700 acres. Working with our federal, tribal, and local government partners, we implemented burning restrictions and aggressive wildfire prevention outreach and social media efforts to prevent even more wildfire starts. Minnesota ended the season without serious injuries or loss of life. This is due in large part to the dedicated staff who worked tirelessly and the wildfire response preparedness offered through our MNICS partnership.



### **CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE**

The DNR continued its aggressive approach to monitoring and managing chronic wasting disease in the state's wild deer population. In 2021, the legislature established a new law which gave the DNR concurrent authority, alongside the Board of Animal Health, to regulate the state's farmed white-tailed deer population. Twice in 2021, the agency enacted an emergency rule restricting the movement of farmed white-tailed deer; once following the discovery of CWD-positive deer that were illegally disposed by a Beltrami County farm and again after news that a CWD-positive farm in Wisconsin shipped 387 farmed white-tailed deer to farms in seven states, including Minnesota. Additionally, during deer hunting season, the DNR set up 87 sampling stations in the state's mandatory and voluntary CWD sampling areas. The DNR continues to use every tool at our disposal to reduce the spread of CWD and protect our wild white-tailed deer, including continued testing and monitoring, special hunts and deer feeding bans.



### **ST. LOUIS RIVER RESTORATION INITIATIVE**

In 2021, the DNR's St. Louis River Restoration Initiative completed three large projects to restore degraded fish and wildlife habitat in the St. Louis River estuary under the Great Lakes Area of Concern Program. In total, the three projects restored approximately 238 acres of habitat. At Interstate Island, the DNR restored critical habitat for the Common Tern that had been under threat from rising water levels. Grassy Point, the former site of turn-of-the-century sawmills, was restored by removing legacy wood waste from the water and restoring shallow sheltered bay habitat. At Kingsbury Bay, the DNR restored coastal marsh habitat by dredging decades of accumulated sediment and removing monocultures of invasive plants. These three projects took multiple years and many partners to develop and implement.



### **INVASIVE CARP MANAGEMENT**

The DNR led two intensive invasive carp removal efforts in Pool 8 of the Upper Mississippi River near La Crescent, Minnesota. The removal efforts used the innovative Modified Unified Method, which combines netting and herding techniques to drive and concentrate invasive carp from a large area of water into a small zone for removal. The DNR conducted this work in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The effort focused on Pool 8 because numerous invasive carp were discovered there as well as areas downstream. The goal is to remove invasive carp, curb the potential for invasive carp reproduction, and prevent their establishment in Minnesota and Wisconsin waters.



### **MARSH LAKE HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

Years of planning, engagement, design and construction bore fruit as lake levels remained lowered on Marsh Lake south of Appleton through the summer of 2021, protecting and strengthening emergent vegetation established in 2020. Drawdowns and dry conditions improve habitat and water quality by consolidating sediments on the lake bottom while allowing vegetation above and below the water to reestablish. Marsh Lake is a 5,000-acre reservoir along the Minnesota River and is an important nesting area and key migration point for hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese, as well as one of the most important rookeries for American white pelicans. This was a collaborative management decision reached by the DNR, the Upper Minnesota River Watershed District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

# MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The DNR conserves and manages the state’s natural and cultural resources to address climate change in order to enhance ecosystem, infrastructure, and community resilience and ensure a healthy and equitable future for current and future generations of Minnesotans.



## CLIMATE MITIGATION

The DNR is a key member of the Governor’s Subcabinet on Climate, which is working to build a [Climate Action Framework](#) to help Minnesota reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. Minnesota’s public lands are critical to climate change mitigation, and DNR staff are working to harness this potential. For example, the DNR established an initial goal to achieve an additional five million tons of greenhouse gas emissions offset by expanding tree cover in Minnesota. To achieve this goal, an estimated 12 million seedlings must be planted on public and private land in Minnesota by 2025. As part of that effort, support from partners helped secure legislative funding to make vital improvements to maintain current seedling production at the State Forest Nursery. Additionally, the legislature provided \$2.6 million for communities and tribes to address the loss of ash due to emerald ash borer in 2021. Maintaining urban tree canopy is vital to combating the effects of climate change in our communities. Looking forward, and in consultation with partners, DNR has also developed a plan to ramp up seedling production at the nursery and incentivize landowners to plant trees.



## CLIMATE-INFORMED REFORESTATION ALONG LAKE SUPERIOR

In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, hundreds of acres of land across four Minnesota state parks were reforested with a mix of climate-adapted native species. In all, 100,000 seedlings were planted at Split Rock Lighthouse, Gooseberry Falls, Temperance River and Cascade River state parks. Seedlings included a mix of white pine, red oak, bur oak, yellow birch, white cedar and tamarack. Forests with more diverse tree species and ages are more resistant to insect and disease threats and host a broader variety of wildlife species. Trees on the landscape slow rainwater runoff and erosion, shade streams, and capture and store carbon to help slow climate change.

# MANAGE NATURAL RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT

DNR contributes to sustainable jobs and community prosperity, while ensuring strong environmental stewardship, by supporting economic uses and enjoyment of natural resources in Minnesota.



## MANAGING FORESTS FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Sustainable forestry is a cornerstone of the DNR’s natural resource management. Based on the recent sustainable timber harvest analysis, the timber harvest level from DNR-managed lands was set at 870,000 cords per year, plus an additional 30,000 cords of ash and tamarack for the first five years. This harvest level supports healthy forests, diverse wildlife habitat, clean water, and thousands of miles of recreational trails. In fiscal year 2021, DNR appraised and offered 895,000 cords of wood at public auction and 662,000 cords were harvested from DNR-managed lands by independent logging professionals. The DNR continues to supply about one-third of the wood used by all paper and sawmills in Minnesota. Logging businesses, mills, and other forest industry companies are an important part of vibrant, thriving local economies across the state.



## MINERAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

A key part of the DNR’s mission is to support a sustainable economy in the state. To that end, state mineral leases administered by the DNR brought in \$42.4 million in revenue in FY 2021, benefiting the state’s permanent school and university funds as well as local counties, cities, townships and school districts. Minnesota provides more than 80% of the iron ore used to make iron and steel in North America, and the United States Geological Service ranks Minnesota third in the nation for metallic mineral production. This past year, the state saw a significant increase in dimension stone mining and production used in countertops, floor tiles, monuments, and building veneers.



## PUBLIC LAND ACQUISITION FOR CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

The DNR manages 5.6 million acres of state land on behalf of Minnesotans and is continually working to improve its land portfolio to ensure it maximizes our ability to meet our mission. Through Strategic Land Asset Management (SLAM), DNR regularly evaluates its land holdings and looks for ways to improve habitat, conservation, and recreation. In FY 2021, the state’s public lands expanded by 2,900 acres of Wildlife Management Areas; 700 acres of Aquatic Management Areas; and more than 500 acres to State Forests. In what is one of the largest single acquisitions of 2021, the White Earth AMA in Becker County will protect more than 370 acres and 2.7 miles of shoreline. The landowner’s generous donation is valued at more than \$1 million.



### LAND SALE AUCTIONS

Land sale auctions are a critical part of the agency's efforts to actively manage public lands and improve the value of Minnesota's land holdings. The DNR conducted its first-ever online land auction in July. The pilot auction was a success on multiple fronts, including the sale of four of the five properties offered. On average, the parcels sold for 52% over their minimum bid price. The proceeds from the sales of School Trust Lands were deposited into the Permanent School Fund, benefiting school districts around the state.

## ENSURE DNR'S FINANCIAL VITALITY

The DNR funds our mission and key priorities, in the short and long term, through design and implementation of a seamless budget and financial management structure.



### FUTURE FUNDING FRAMEWORK

The DNR has embarked on a transformational effort, in collaboration with Minnesotans, to identify a new funding framework to ensure the DNR can serve new, returning, and long-time outdoor enthusiasts, and sustainably manage our natural resources for generations to come. Launching early this year, the project is building on the work, research, and expertise on natural resources funding that already exists among DNR staff. Additionally, the DNR recruited external advisors who represent a diversity of viewpoints and bring a cross-section of funding, conservation, and outdoor recreation experiences to this work. Through our [Engage with DNR public engagement site](#), Minnesotans are being asked to share their perspectives on this work and ask questions they have about the project. By the second half of 2022, we will have an actionable funding framework that is reflective of research, best practices, and diverse public input.

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FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT  
/ ENSURE DNR'S FINANCIAL VITALITY

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