

CONSERVATION **AGENDA**

MINNESOTA DNR'S 10-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2025

2022 Mid-Plan Update

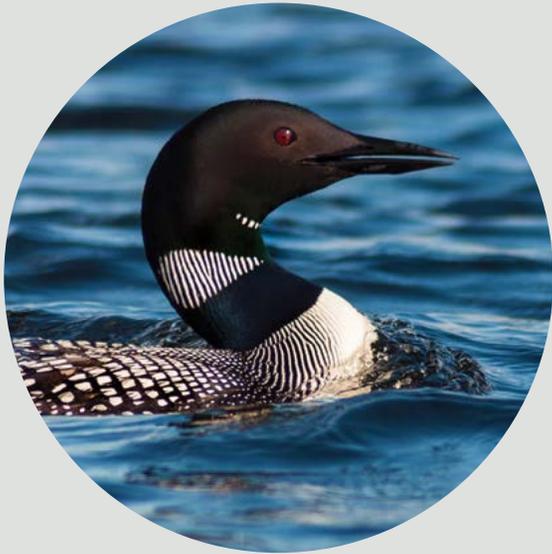
Blue Mounds State Park,
Luverne, Minnesota

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DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

Upper Falls, Gooseberry
Falls State Park, Minnesota



Minnesota DNR Leadership Message



Minnesota's state bird is the common loon. Minnesota has more common loons than any other state, except Alaska.

Minnesota's abundant, diverse and healthy natural resources define our state and make it an incredible place to live. That doesn't happen by accident; it requires commitment and collaboration across a diverse and broad range of Minnesotans. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is fully committed to its mission to work 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.

With changing trends and values around the use of natural resources and pressures like climate change, the DNR must ensure that our goals and strategies are timely and aligned with the state's short- and long-term needs. This mid-plan update to our 2015-2025 Conservation Agenda builds on the core work highlighted in the 2015 agenda: conserving the state's natural resources; providing outdoor recreation opportunities; supporting commercial uses of natural resources; and operational excellence. This update also incorporates the DNR's current strategic priorities.

The DNR must proactively address and manage ongoing and emerging critical natural resource issues facing Minnesota. Land use change, invasive species spread, and a changing climate all create challenges to maintaining the diversity and quality of our natural resources. As well, more Minnesotans than ever before are enjoying outdoor opportunities—in different ways than in the past.

Our strategic goals and strategies best position the DNR to address the changing conditions in our natural environment and economy as well as the changing needs of Minnesotans to connect to the outdoors. The DNR's approach ensures we can protect and manage our natural resources in ways that benefit the environment and economy and serve the diverse needs of Minnesota and Minnesotans.

Together, we can protect, conserve, and manage our extraordinary natural resources for this and future generations.

—DNR Commissioner's Office

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The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is to work 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.

Introduction

DNR's 10-year Conservation Agenda helps lead long-term DNR decision making, including policy development, program implementation, and budget management. This mid-plan update of the 2015-2025 Agenda maintains the core elements of the original plan, and refocuses the DNR for the next several years to build off existing momentum and address emerging challenges and opportunities.

The plan includes four broad goals. The first three goals focus on conserving the state's natural resources, providing outdoor recreation opportunities, and supporting commercial uses of natural resources. The fourth goal, operational excellence, focuses on ensuring that the internal workings of the department provide high quality services to Minnesotans. This document does not describe all details of DNR's efforts, but highlights trends informing the goals and key strategies aimed towards accomplishing these goals.

For additional information on how the DNR is accomplishing its goals, and conservations targets used to measure and communicate progress, please visit mndnr.gov/conservationagenda.



Itasca Wilderness Sanctuary Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) protects rare species, geological features and native plant communities in north-central Minnesota. Minnesota's natural resources face increasing demands and pressures from growing populations, climate change and invasive species. Conservation efforts help ensure the health of waters and lands.



Sugarloaf Point SNA,
Cook County, Minnesota

GOAL 1

Minnesota's waters, natural lands, and diverse fish and wildlife habitats are conserved and enhanced.

Minnesota is known for its water, forests, prairies, and wildlife. Not only does our state boast a diversity of natural lands, plants, and animals, many of these natural resources have remained in relatively high quality. As such, the quality of Minnesota's natural resources is inextricably linked to our quality of life. We must address multiple pressures—land use change, invasive species spread, pollution, and a changing climate—to sustain the places and experiences we value.



A conservation officer completes a boat inspection to reduce the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species.

GOAL 1

The following strategies guide targeted actions related to Goal 1:

- **Conserve natural areas.** Retain natural areas and working lands containing important habitats, especially habitats in jeopardy, such as native prairies, wetlands, shallow lakes, and shorelines. Connect fragments of high-quality habitat. Conserve endangered, threatened, rare, declining and vulnerable species.
- **Mitigate and adapt to the changing climate.** Identify and implement policies and practices that enhance climate change resiliency. Ensure climate strategies are informed by best available science and engagement with communities and conservation partners.
- **Manage lands and waters effectively and adaptively.** Foster healthy habitats and create resiliency in Minnesota's habitats to allow species to adapt to change. Monitor and fine-tune management actions. Prevent and slow the spread of invasive species.
- **Identify natural resources most in need of protection and management.** Give priority to places facing the pressures of land use change, pollution, climate change and invasive species.
- **Restore degraded habitats.** Restore the integrity of degraded lakes, wetlands, rivers, grasslands, and forests.
- **Monitor and fine-tune management actions.** Track and continually improve the effectiveness of our conservation work.



Pelican Lake shoreline restoration, Crow Wing County, Minnesota



White-tailed deer, Sturgeon River State Forest, Minnesota

Four key trends informing Goal 1 strategies:

1. Minnesota is known for its abundant water, but this precious resource is not unlimited and increasing demands for use, as well as water quality degradation, are impacting the long-term sustainability of our water.
2. Invasive species are spreading, threatening native species and adversely affecting both recreation and natural resource dependent businesses.
3. Prairie, grassland, and wetland habitats are declining, negatively impacting native species and water resources.
4. Conservation and community organizations and federal, state, local, and tribal governments each have unique tools, constituencies, and capacities, increasing the opportunity to coordinate across organizations.



In Minnesota, grasslands range from sparsely vegetated sand dunes and vast fields of big bluestem up to 8 feet tall, to wet meadows and shortgrass prairies high on river bluffs. Habitat maintenance and restoration are essential for supporting water resources and native species.

**Birding, Fort Snelling State Park
St. Paul, Minnesota**



GOAL 2

Minnesota's outdoor recreation opportunities meet the needs of new and existing participants so all benefit from nature.

Minnesota consistently ranks among one of the top states in which to live, and a key factor is our healthy natural environment with abundant parks, natural lands, and high-quality recreation opportunities. All Minnesotans should be able to access and enjoy the benefits of natural areas and outdoor time. We are challenged, however, to maintain basic operations at many state recreation facilities. Demand is increasing for new and enriched outdoor experiences. Innovative targeted strategies will provide support to help connect families with nature and active outdoor experiences.



Many Minnesotans have strong hunting traditions. A commitment to species and habitat conservation will ensure quality hunting for future generations.

GOAL 2

The following strategies guide targeted actions related to Goal 2:

- **Evaluate the effectiveness of DNR outreach** and adjust programs and facilities accordingly.
- **Develop and promote outdoor programs and activities for people of all backgrounds and diverse interests.** Especially work to provide services for families with children, ethnically and culturally diverse communities, women, youth, and young adults who have an interest in outdoor activities.
- **Expand our capacity to get more Minnesotans outdoors** by working with our partners to use innovative strategies and tools, such as online programming, digital applications, and self-led activities.
- **Maintain and enhance Minnesota's outdoor recreation system.** Ensure high-quality, easy-to-access and safe recreational opportunities for long-standing and new participants.

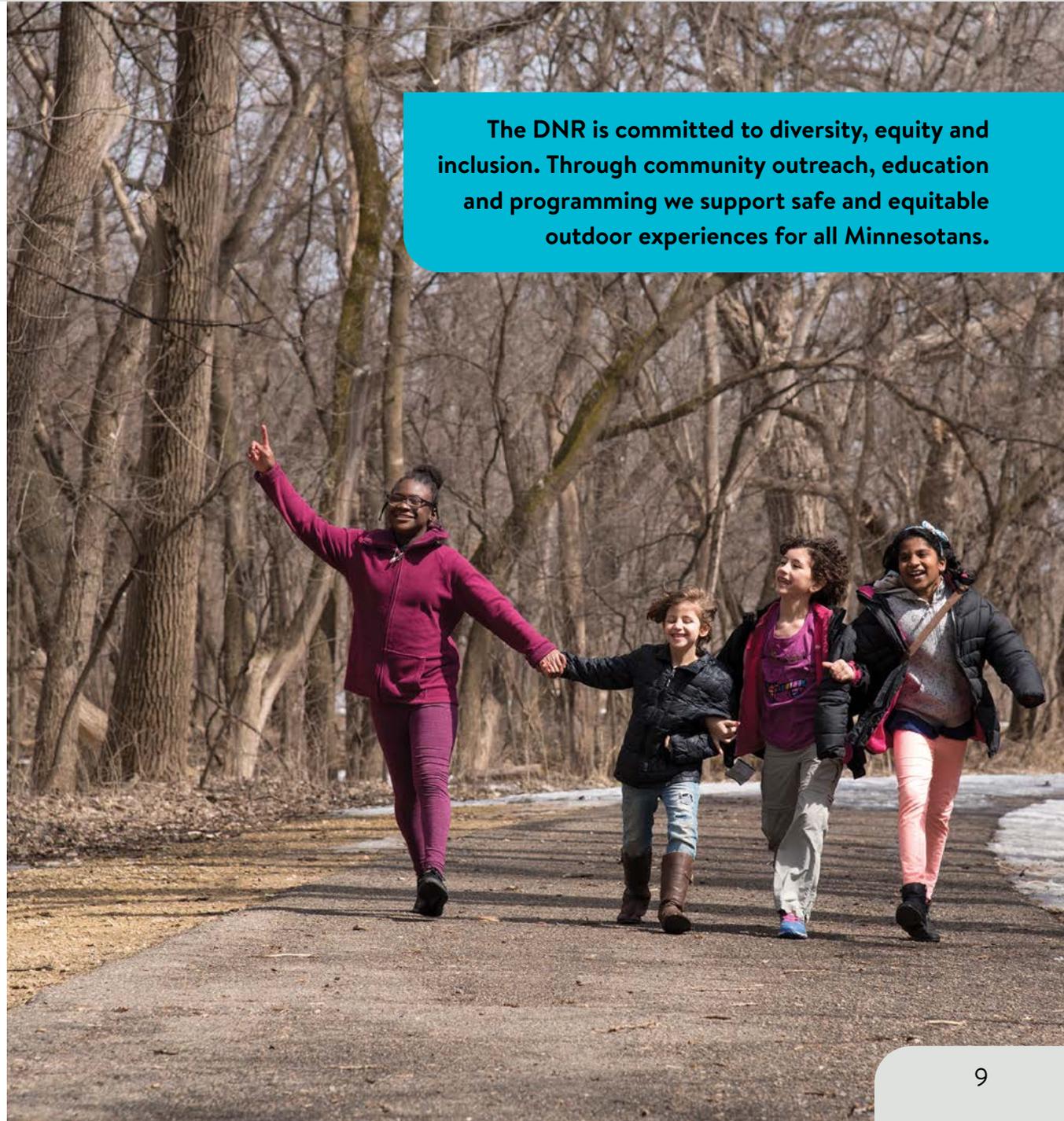


We welcome people with disabilities to the outdoors in many ways, including by providing accessible camping facilities, hunting areas, and fishing piers.

Four key trends informing Goal 2 strategies:

1. Participation in outdoor recreation is evolving, with changes in user demographics and some uses declining and others emerging or increasing.
2. Use of public outdoor spaces has been increasing, with people seeking both mental and physical health benefits of nature.
3. Demands on outdoor recreation infrastructure are increasing and changing, while funds for maintenance and upgrades are not keeping pace.
4. Minnesotans enjoy the outdoors in a wide range of ways, some of which can be difficult to accommodate in close proximity to other users or sensitive resources.

The DNR is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion. Through community outreach, education and programming we support safe and equitable outdoor experiences for all Minnesotans.



Natural resource tourism enables communities throughout Minnesota to thrive.
Main Street, Crosby, Minnesota.



GOAL 3

Minnesota's natural resources contribute to strong and sustainable job markets, economies, and communities.

Minnesota's lands and waters define our state and are a major reason people choose to live, work, and play here. Sound natural resource-based economic development will ensure our state's competitive advantage. We have been successful in the past at growing a vibrant economy and protecting the land and water that make Minnesota among the nation's leaders in quality of life measures.



Thermally modified wood has been heated in absence of oxygen through a controlled process that chemically restructures the wood to increase its durability. This wood has been used to make park benches and movie props.

GOAL 3

The following strategies guide targeted actions related to Goal 3:

- **Manage for healthy, productive forests.** Ensure Minnesota's forests continue to provide a full range of values, including a sustainable supply of wood resources, outdoor recreation and tourism, wildlife, biodiversity, and clean water.
- **Develop and manage mineral resources responsibly.** Ensure mineral exploration and mining are environmentally sound and benefit the state's job markets, economies, and communities.
- **Sustain healthy watersheds and groundwater supplies.** Manage for clean, abundant water and flood protection as essential foundations of industry, agriculture, and community growth and development, as well as recreation.
- **Support and grow Minnesota's nature-based tourism economy.** Create and maintain exceptional outdoor recreation experiences to create jobs, support local economies, and reduce health costs.
- **Manage school trust fund lands effectively and sustainably.** Provide revenue for Minnesota schools using fiscally responsible and sound natural resource management principles for oversight of school trust fund lands.



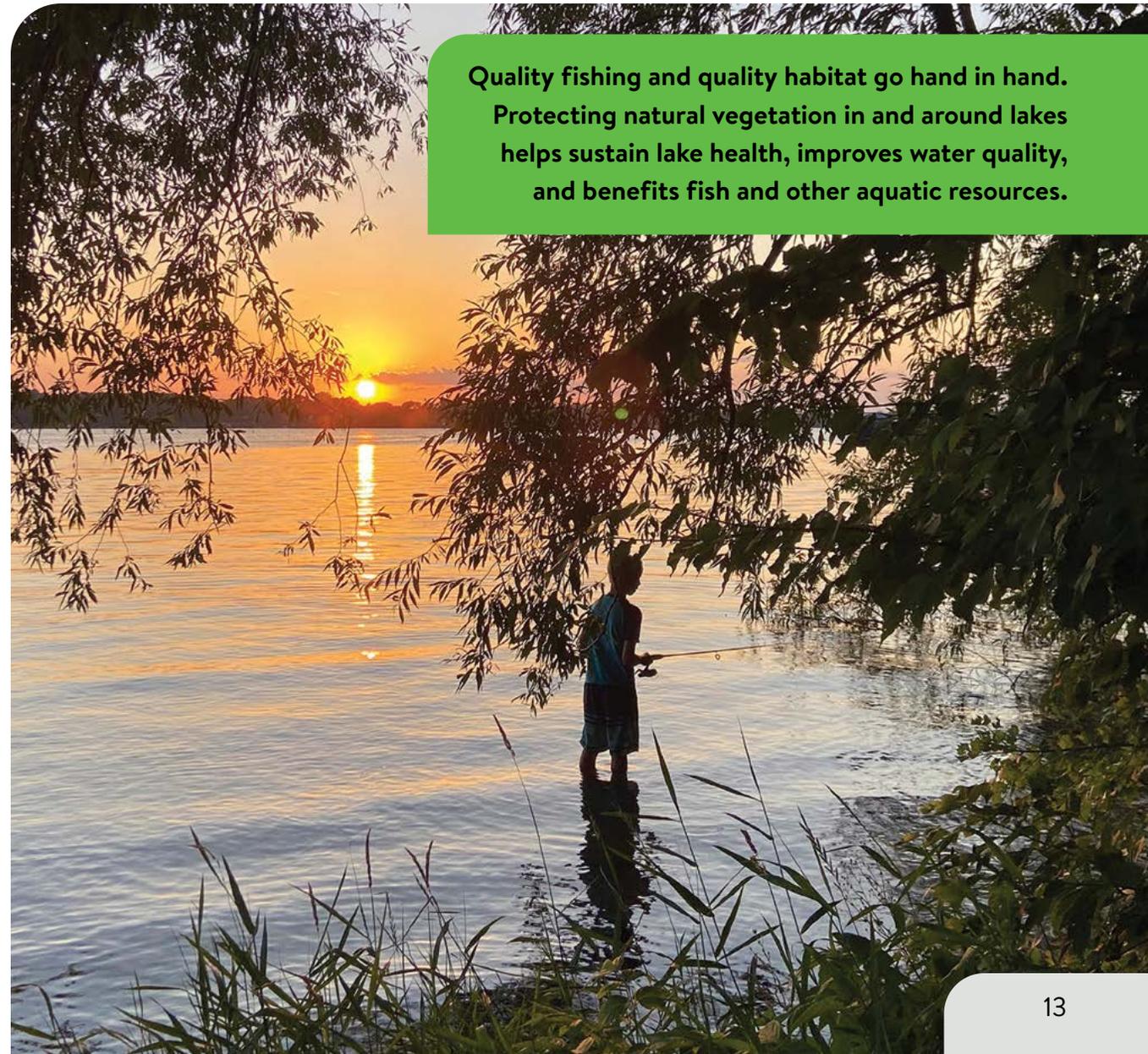
Logging delivery,
Cloquet, Minnesota



Active mine,
Iron Range, Minnesota

Four key trends informing Goal 3 strategies:

1. The forest products industry is responding to changing climatic conditions and consumer demand with adaptive management and creative wood-product uses.
2. The School Trust has emerging opportunities for new revenue but may lack the ability to make the necessary investments in its asset base.
3. Public investment in conservation and outdoor recreation is transforming local economies through increased tourism, new residents and businesses, improved tax revenues, and health care savings.
4. Water quality and water quantity are increasingly limiting factors for current and future economic activities and community needs.



Quality fishing and quality habitat go hand in hand. Protecting natural vegetation in and around lakes helps sustain lake health, improves water quality, and benefits fish and other aquatic resources.

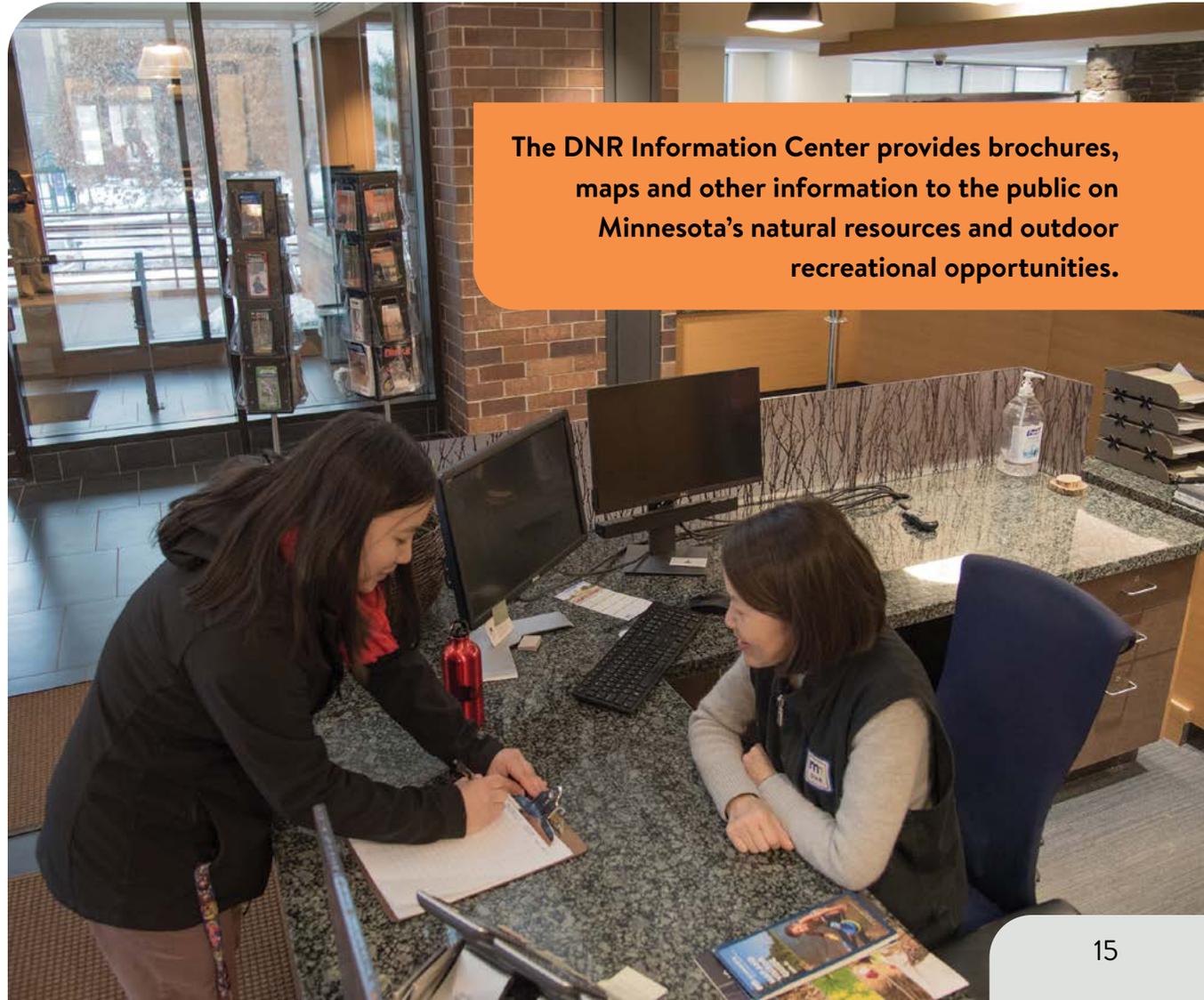
DNR foresters promote woodland stewardship and provide technical assistance to woodland owners by answering questions about their woods and helping them find the right programs to meet their woodland goals.



GOAL 4

DNR demonstrates operational excellence and continuous improvement in service to citizens.

Accomplishing our natural resource goals requires operational excellence. DNR must continually seek to improve efficiency and effectiveness on behalf of Minnesotans. Increasing efficiency alone cannot address today's conservation challenges that operate at a larger and more complex scale than in the past. Investing in our employees is crucial to maintain our ability to support core operations, be nimble in the face of new challenges, and recruit and retain tomorrow's workers. To succeed in a changing world, DNR staff must bring diverse perspectives, skills, and focus to their work.



The DNR Information Center provides brochures, maps and other information to the public on Minnesota's natural resources and outdoor recreational opportunities.

GOAL 4

The following strategies guide targeted actions related to Goal 4:

- **Commit to workforce development.**

Develop a workforce that is representative of all Minnesotans by enhancing a safe, respectful, and dynamic work environment to retain high-quality performers and continue to attract top talent.

- **Employ adaptive management practices.**

Practice adaptive management, learning as we go, to respond to rapid and long-term changes, new insights, and unanticipated events, while delivering safe, effective, and efficient work-processes.

- **Make smart investments to manage future operational costs.**

Invest in DNR's facilities and fleet to ensure safe and effective delivery of public services and efficient internal operations for the long term.

- **Reduce energy use and invest in renewable energy.**

Improve the efficiency of DNR facilities, vehicles, and equipment and increase our use of renewable energy in order to reduce our department's greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Enhance transparency.**

Provide easy and transparent access to information so the public can understand and participate in DNR's work.



Career pathway programs provide the DNR an opportunity to engage, train, and recruit diverse early career professionals into natural resource and environmental careers.

Four key trends informing Goal 4 strategies:

1. Solving challenging community and natural resource issues is increasingly a collaborative endeavor requiring strong partnerships.
2. Minnesota's demographics are changing, affecting DNR's workforce, demand for services, and public engagement expectations.
3. Funding conservation requires more creativity and flexibility than it has in the past as traditional revenue sources, such as user-based funding, are insufficient to cover the breadth of DNR's work.
4. Costs of doing business are rising, and the public's expectations for how we deliver services are changing. Customers expect more online resources and programming, in addition to traditional services.

2022 DNR Roundtable participants discuss fisheries, wildlife, ecological and water resource issues in Minnesota.



How DNR does its work

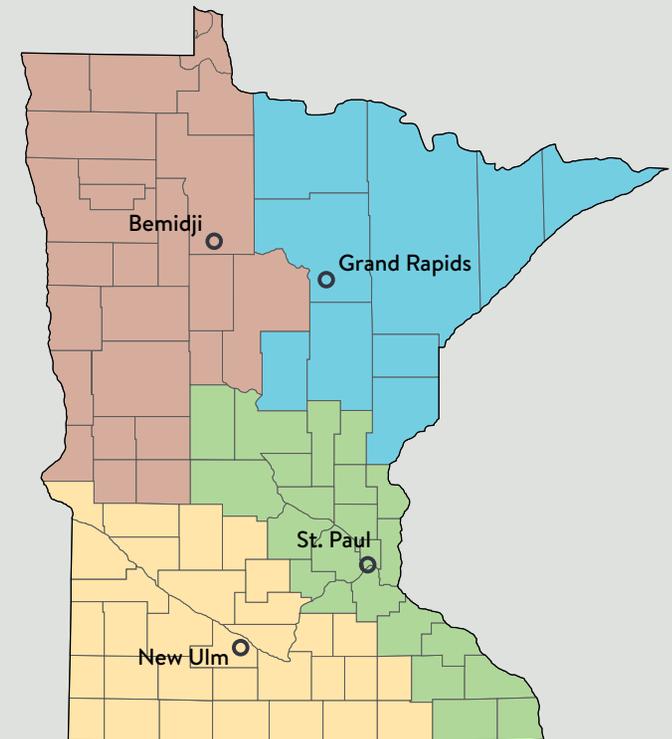
DNR conserves and manages the state's waters and natural lands, including forests, wetlands, and native prairies. We provide enriching public outdoor recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife-watching, camping, skiing, hiking, biking, motorized recreation, and conservation education for Minnesotans of all ages and backgrounds. The department provides economic opportunities in a manner consistent with sound natural resource conservation and management principles. We work with partners and the public to manage for a variety of interests and values.

The DNR's work is rooted in natural resources management and environmental protection. Healthy natural systems are critical for thriving communities. By managing for the sustained health of natural resources, the DNR contributes to community health and economic opportunity. In this work, the agency is also committed to mitigating and adapting to climate change and enhancing the climate resiliency of natural systems and communities now and into the future.

The DNR is committed to providing all Minnesotans with equitable access to outdoor spaces and the benefits afforded by a healthy environment. In addition, the DNR is focused on attracting and retaining a workforce that reflects Minnesota's diversity.

The DNR is one department, working through seven divisions, organized into four geographical regions. The divisions each offer expertise to help achieve our mission, while the regions allow for in-depth local community knowledge and engagement. All divisions and regions work together under the same mission, goals, and priorities. Each division is described briefly below, with information representing its core work.

Minnesota DNR operates out of four regional offices that oversee programming and services locally.



LEGEND

- Northwest
- Northeast
- South
- Central

Ecological and Water Resources

The DNR Ecological and Water Resources Division helps realize a vision of healthy lands and waters throughout Minnesota by delivering integrated land and water resource conservation.

Consistent with DNR's mission, the division supports sustainable economic development, enhances rare wildlife and native plant populations, and protects aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems from the negative impacts of invasive species.

SERVICES PROVIDED

DNR's ecological and water resources work falls into three main areas:

- Conservation assistance and regulation
- Ecosystem management and protection
- Inventory, monitoring, and analysis



Enforcement

As the primary conservation law enforcement agency in Minnesota, the DNR Enforcement Division plays an important role in connecting people to the outdoors and conserving and enhancing Minnesota's natural resources by providing outreach, safety training, law enforcement, and emergency services throughout the state.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Our enforcement work spans four main areas:

- Fish and game education, protection and enforcement
- Recreational safety and enforcement
- Natural resource protection and enforcement
- Public safety



Forestry

The DNR Forestry Division aims to help sustain community wellbeing and quality of life by improving the productivity, health, diversity, accessibility, and use of forests. Healthy forests provide clean water, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and forest-related products.

The division also provides wildfire protection for 45.5 million acres of public and private land.

SERVICES PROVIDED

DNR achieves the state's forestry goals by:

- Wildfire prevention and response
- Leading forest management and policy development
- Providing technical assistance to communities and private landowners



Fish and Wildlife

The DNR Fish and Wildlife Division strives to sustain healthy populations of fish and wildlife, high quality recreational opportunities, and vibrant local economies. We manage fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. We facilitate use of these public resources, including fishing, hunting, and trapping, through skill building and other programs. We also serve people seeking hunting and fishing licenses and recreational vehicle registration and titling.

SERVICES PROVIDED

We organize our fish and wildlife work across four categories:

- Monitor and manage fish and wildlife populations
- Protect, restore, and enhance key fish and wildlife lands
- Connect people to the outdoors through hunting, fishing, and engagement
- Administer hunting and fishing licenses and recreational vehicle titles and registrations



Lands and Minerals

The DNR Lands and Minerals Division regulates mining to protect natural resources and the environment. This includes both currently operating and proposed mines, as well as the reclamation of mining areas for future use once mining is complete. The mineland reclamation activity promotes a healthy environment with sustainable use of natural resources and contributes to a strong natural resource-based economy.

The division's land management responsibilities include real estate services for the Department such as appraisals, title work, leasing, and sales. Land management also includes

oversight of school and university trust lands, which generate revenue by leasing surface lands and mineral rights. These funds go to public school districts throughout the state and the University of Minnesota and its students. In addition, the DNR manages minerals on tax-forfeited land, providing revenue to local school districts, counties, cities, and townships.

SERVICES PROVIDED

DNR lands and minerals falls in three areas of work:

- Mine permitting and reclamation
- Minerals management
- Real estate management



Operations Services

The Operations Services Division provides department-wide operational support and services for the DNR. The division's work spans a number of services that are more efficiently provided in a centralized manner.

SERVICES PROVIDED

The DNR's internal operations support includes:

- Budget management
- Human resources
- Facilities and asset management
- Vehicles and equipment
- Safety
- Communication and outreach
- Planning services



Parks and Trails

The DNR Parks and Trails Division aspires to provide unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love of the outdoors to current and future generations.

State parks and trails improve the lives of individuals, children and families by connecting them to nature, helping them to stay healthy and fit, strengthening local communities and economies, and conserving Minnesota's special places and resources.

Each year, the DNR serves millions of out-of-state visitors and Minnesotans alike. There is a state park, trail, recreation area, or forest campground within 30 miles of most people in the state.

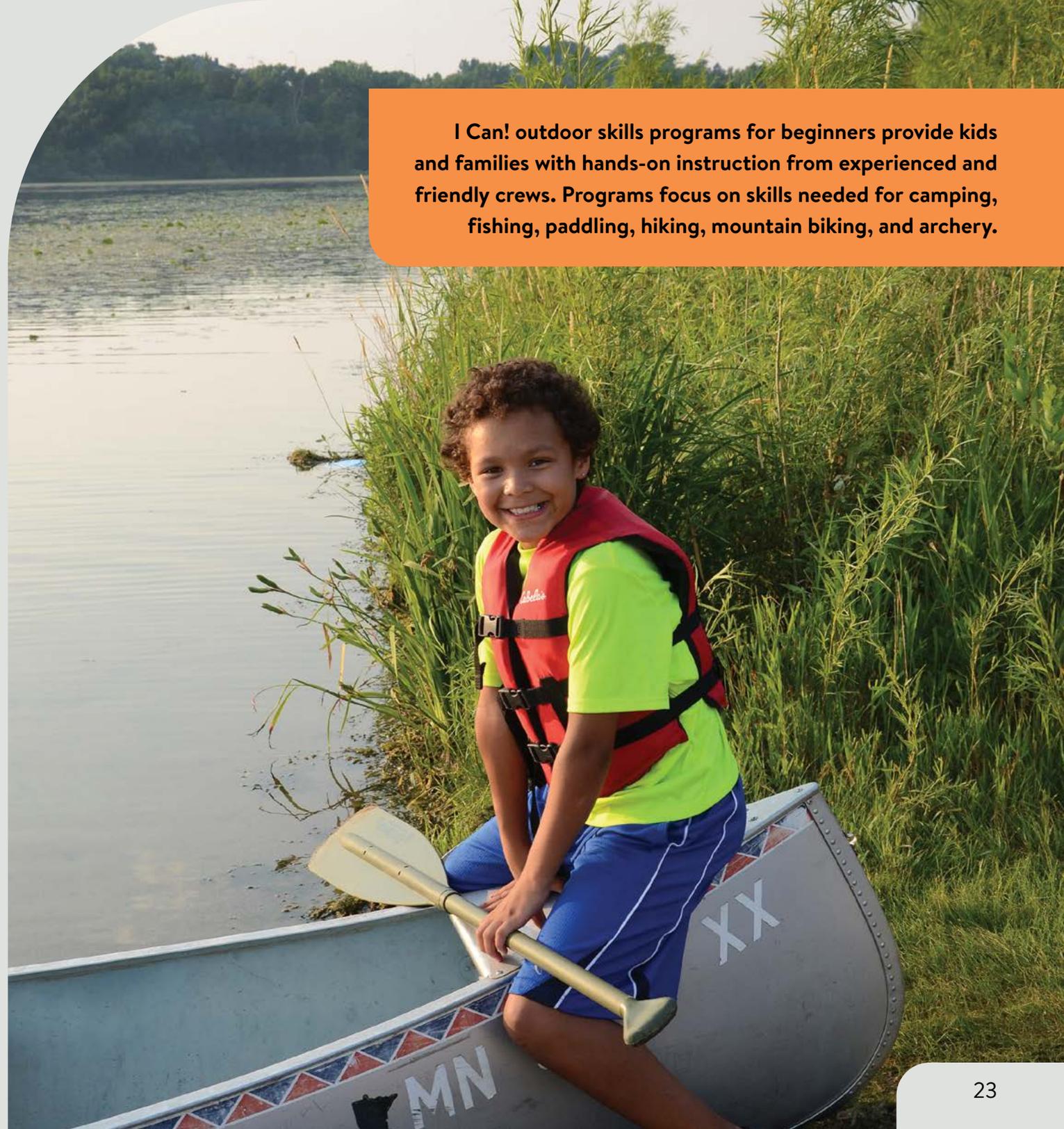
SERVICES PROVIDED

DNR's parks and trails work falls into three major categories:

- Develop and manage state parks, trails, recreation areas, forests and water recreation opportunities
- Work with outdoor recreation partners to provide a seamless outdoor recreation system at the local, regional, state and federal levels
- Deliver natural resources education and interpretive programming



I Can! outdoor skills programs for beginners provide kids and families with hands-on instruction from experienced and friendly crews. Programs focus on skills needed for camping, fishing, paddling, hiking, mountain biking, and archery.





500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040
888-646-6367 or 651-296-6157
mndnr.gov

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