



2022 ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVERVIEW

Throughout 2022, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources made strong progress toward fulfilling our mission, as well as the goals and priorities outlined in [our strategic plan](#). Below is a high-level overview of key accomplishments in several strategic priority areas. This is by no means comprehensive, but these examples illustrate some of the many ways in which the DNR works with Minnesotans to fulfill our 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 email lists](#), exploring opportunities on our [Engage with DNR](#) public engagement platform, or by following us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

ADDRESS CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES PROACTIVELY

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

In 2022, the DNR continued to work aggressively to manage chronic wasting disease (CWD) by implementing new strategies, expanding partnerships, and working with hunters to conduct disease surveillance. One new management strategy in 2022 was the use of mail-in kits for CWD testing. These kits allowed participating hunters throughout the state to collect their own CWD samples and mail them in to be tested. The DNR also expanded its partner sampling program, which allows hunters to work with local taxidermists to collect CWD samples. This year's network of more than 80 taxidermist partners encompassed the entire state. When it came to the management of captive white-tailed deer, conservation officers inspected more than 90 facilities. Sixty-one of those were inspected in conjunction with the Board of Animal Health as part of our concurrent management authority.

RED RIVER BASIN STURGEON RESTORATION

In May 2022, DNR fisheries staff recorded the [first verified lake sturgeon spawning event](#) in the Red River Basin in more than 100 years. Between 1880 and 1930, lake sturgeon were extirpated in the Red River Basin by overfishing, habitat fragmentation, and declines in habitat quality. In 1997 the Minnesota DNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, White Earth Nation, Red Lake DNR, Rainy River First Nations, North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Canadian partner agencies began a lake sturgeon reintroduction program, including habitat enhancements and fish stocking. The habitat work was funded, in part, through the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment passed by Minnesotans in 2008. The 2022 spawning event marks a major milestone as DNR and partner agencies work toward the final restoration goal of reestablishing self-sustaining lake sturgeon populations in the Red River Basin.

ST. LOUIS RIVER AREA OF CONCERN

The DNR, in collaboration with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Wisconsin DNR, achieved a significant milestone in the St. Louis River Area of Concern (AOC). The estuary in the Duluth/Superior area is the confluence of the St. Louis River with Lake Superior and the largest freshwater estuary in North America. Over the past 100 years, a legacy of historic commercial uses of the estuary disrupted and altered natural habitats. The DNR and its partners worked with interested groups and residents to develop a set of management actions to address the legacy contamination and degraded habitat. These included piping plover and common tern habitat restoration, and surveys and studies to show the area's improved capacity to support healthy fish and wildlife populations. As a result, those populations are no longer designated as impaired. This is the fourth impairment removed for the St. Louis River AOC. The DNR anticipates addressing the remaining impairments by 2030, which could then lead to the area being removed from the list of most polluted sites on the Great Lakes.

CENTER FOR AQUATIC MOLLUSKS PROGRAM

Freshwater mussels play an important role in the health of Minnesota waters because they filter the water and are particularly sensitive to ecosystem changes. Because of this, mussels can provide an early warning of water quality or habitat concerns. The mussel propagation efforts at our Lake City Center for Aquatic Mollusks Program serve a dual purpose of restoring populations of rare species and restoring the ecosystem services that mussels provide. The longstanding program demonstrates our commitment to habitat and species restoration efforts across Minnesota. The DNR's mussel program is one of the few programs nationwide that survey and monitor populations, complete research to better understand mussel life history and propagation techniques, and actively restore mussel species in multiple watersheds.

GOOSE PRAIRIE MARSH PROJECT

Construction is underway on the Goose Prairie Marsh Enhancement Project, which will provide water level management of a 200-acre shallow lake within the Goose Prairie Wildlife Management Area in Clay County. The goals of the project are to improve wetland wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and reduce the risk of downstream flooding. The project includes the installation of a water control structure, raising a township road, and repairing and realigning a county ditch. The new water control structure will provide for periodic, temporary water level drawdowns, which are a common management tool used to mimic droughts that are less frequent under current hydrologic conditions. The Wild Rice Watershed District and the DNR have been cooperatively planning this project since 2013.

MINNESOTA CONSERVATION EXPLORER

The Minnesota Conservation Explorer (MCE) is an online tool that greatly enhances access to the DNR's biological data. The new MCE tool provides access to spatial data about biological resources that allows users to develop conservation reports in a specific area of interest. It also allows for Natural Heritage Review screening for real-time response to project requests and the ability for DNR biologists to focus on projects that are most likely to impact rare resources. Additionally, it provides more frequent updates for non-public data distribution to individuals who have a license from the DNR to receive such data.

CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE OUTDOORS

IMPROVEMENTS AND ADDITIONS TO MINNESOTA'S TRAIL SYSTEM

Among many improvements in 2022 to Minnesota's outdoor recreation opportunities were expansions of two iconic trail systems. Additions to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail, which runs along the shore of Lake Superior, included a spectacular trail bridge over the Fall River gorge and a 3.6-mile paved bike trail connecting the Cut Face Creek wayside to Grand Marais. The DNR also completed new trails and a trailhead at Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area, home of world-class mountain biking. The new trailhead includes a picnic shelter, an outlook at the nearby mine pit lake, bike washing facilities, map and registration kiosks, and area lighting for use in the winter.

OUTDOOR RECREATION SAFETY

The DNR endeavors to connect people to the outdoors, and help them recreate safely, regardless of the activity they participate in. One way in which we do this is by providing safety training and messages to countless Minnesotans each year. To date, DNR's Enforcement Division and our volunteer instructors have certified more than 1.5 million students in firearms safety. Due to concern about people putting themselves in dangerous situations by swimming in fast-moving waters, the DNR's Enforcement, Ecological and Water Resources, and Parks and Trails divisions worked with county rescue teams to produce a swift-water rescue video. The video provides consistency of training across the DNR and ensures staff members and volunteers have the tools they need respond when someone needs to be rescued. When the weather turns cold, the challenges are different but no less important. In response to increased numbers of people recreating on the ice, the Enforcement Division created a new ice safety coordinator position and hired a full-time staff person to fill the role.

MINNESOTA MINERALS EDUCATION WORKSHOP

The Lands and Minerals Division received the 2022 Minerals Education Coalition Partnership Appreciation award from the Society for Mining, Metallurgy, & Exploration. This national award recognized the DNR's work to coordinate and develop curriculum for the annual Minnesota Minerals Education Workshop, a three-day immersive experience for K-12 educators to learn more about Minnesota's geologic history and mineral resources. Together with geologists, academics, and industry professionals, DNR staff equip teachers with skills and knowledge to further earth sciences education in Minnesota.

HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF HUNTING AND FISHING TRADITIONS TO MINNESOTA'S ECONOMY

The longtime traditions of the Governor's fishing, pheasant, and deer hunting openers continued in 2022. The openers are a collaborative effort between the DNR, Governor's Office, Explore Minnesota, and host communities to highlight hunting and fishing's many benefits to the economy and people of Minnesota. Celebrations kicked off in May with the Governor's Fishing Opener in multiple locations, including the Chippewa National Forest region and Leech Lake Reservation. Events included Take a Mom Fishing, State of Fishing Summit hosted by MN-FISH, and official opening day fishing on Lake Winnibigoshish. In October, the rich opportunities for pheasant hunting in southern Minnesota were the focus of the 10th Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener in Worthington. The event featured a dedication of the Ransom Ridge Wildlife Management Area, a listening session involving diverse members of the community, media tours, a community food truck "flocking," and, of course, pheasant hunting. November marked the Governor's Deer Opener, which included a deer management listening session, deer hunters' reception, and a special hunt on public lands in Three River's Elm Creek Park Reserve.

ENHANCE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The DNR's update to Minnesota's Wolf Management Plan incorporates the diverse views of Minnesotans and guides the state's approach to wolf conservation for the next 10 years. This multi-year effort included extensive engagement and outreach over the course of the updated plan's development. From its conception, the diverse viewpoints of Minnesotans were incorporated using a variety of strategies, including a survey of Minnesotans' attitudes toward wolves, wolf advisory and technical committees, extensive tribal engagement, as well as public open houses, webinars, and online comment opportunities. The project team used DNR's digital engagement platform, [Engage with DNR](#), to broaden opportunities for feedback and create a virtual destination for Minnesotans throughout the state to participate in the public input phase. The DNR received more than 4,500 separate comment submissions that conveyed diverse attitudes regarding wolf management. All of these efforts culminate in the updated [Wolf Management Plan](#), finalized in December 2022.

COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE HOURS

The DNR Commissioners' Office continued to host live and in-person Office Hours in 2022. Each monthly, hour-long event focused on a timely and relevant natural resource, conservation, or outdoor recreation topic. This year's events included topics such as 2022 legislative priorities, investing in Minnesota's outdoor resources, the importance of volunteers, accessibility to the outdoors, and DNR's role in managing our water resources. The sessions began with a brief statement by the commissioner followed by an open forum in which participants could ask questions, offer comments and perspectives, and engage in dialogue with DNR leadership. [Commissioners' Office Hours](#) will continue in 2023 and cover a variety of topics.

OUTREACH EVENTS

The DNR participated in numerous outreach events in 2022, including a significant presence at Farmfest, the Steele County Free Fair, Game Fair, and the Minnesota State Fair. DNR staff and leadership spent time listening to constituents, responding to questions, and engaging in meaningful dialogue. Recognizing the diversity of event attendees, the DNR offered materials in languages other than English. More than 300,000 people attended the Steele County Fair and Farmfest, and nearly half-a-million people visited DNR's grounds at the State Fair.

EXPAND DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

ALL-TERRAIN TRACK CHAIRS INTRODUCED AT MINNESOTA STATE PARKS

Visitors with mobility challenges now have access to track chairs at five state parks across Minnesota. Track chairs are all-terrain, electric powered chairs that can be used on designated trails within the parks. The all-terrain track chair program was launched to address accessibility barriers that some park visitors experience. The chairs can help visitors explore areas of the state parks in new ways, often on trails that are not accessible for regular wheelchairs or other mobility-assisted devices. Research shows that spending time in nature provides significant health and wellness benefits, and providing adaptive equipment is critical to ensuring all park visitors have access to these outdoor opportunities.

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH HYDROLOGY

Bridging the gap between cultures when it comes to natural resource management issues is challenging and necessary work. The DNR continued a concerted effort to coordinate with tribal nations on proposed projects of interest to them. As just one example from 2022, DNR hydrology staff worked with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, the Red Lake Nation and the White Earth Nation to develop and implement enhanced communication and coordination processes for water permits. The goal is to better assure that water appropriation and public water permits protect both natural resources and culturally significant sites and values. This effective coordination and collaboration cultivated meaningful relationships, resulting in more informed regulatory decision and models collaboration.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION AT ST. CROIX STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER

Following years of planning and development, the Walter F. Mondale Visitor Center at St. Croix State Park reopened in June to reveal larger-than-life sculptures, wall art, and digital media. DNR staff collaborated with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and others from the beginning of the project to reflect the importance of place in people's lives and tell inclusive stories that are representative of more people and experiences. The exhibits meet National Park Service guidelines for accessible interpretive exhibits and were designed to be accessible to people with cognitive, physical, visual and hearing disabilities. The interpretive exhibit includes audio description that allows visitors to easily interact with and move around the exhibit. There are also tactile exhibits with braille descriptions. The text descriptions are written in plain language and were tested for young readers and people with cognitive disabilities. All parts of the exhibits are approachable to visitors in wheelchairs.

FIRST DNR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COORDINATOR

DNR's Forestry Division recently hired an environmental justice coordinator, one of a small cohort of Tree Equity Specialists across the country. This position is building relationships with marginalized communities to advance their tree canopy equity goals, guide DNR resources to support shared community forestry priorities, and identify gaps in workforce development programs to increase opportunities for underrepresented populations in forestry careers. In addition to benefiting Minnesotans, this work will inform national best practices on intentional community engagement.

MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

STATEWIDE CLIMATE ACTION FRAMEWORK

Addressing climate change presents Minnesota with a historic opportunity to strengthen our economy, improve our health, and create a more equitable Minnesota. To guide Minnesota's work to mitigate and adapt to climate change, the Minnesota [Climate Action Framework](#) was completed in 2022. One feature of the Framework is the recognition that Minnesota's varied landscapes—including state-managed public lands—are an essential part of capturing and storing carbon to mitigate climate change. The Framework also highlights the importance of sustainable land and water management, habitat restoration, and protecting species diversity to promote climate resiliency and adaptation. This reinforces the value of the DNR's past and current work to 1) proactively manage DNR-administered lands for climate mitigation; 2) enhance the health and resiliency of state lands, waters, fisheries and wildlife populations and infrastructure to climate impacts; and 3) understand and communicate information about climate change and its impacts to the public and resource managers alike to inform their actions.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT TO PROTECT MINNESOTA'S MOOSE POPULATION

Moose are an iconic species in Minnesota, with particular importance to the Tribal Nations in northeastern Minnesota. Moose are also significantly at risk. In fact, Minnesota's moose population has declined about 50% over the past 20 years due to a host of overlapping issues, including climate change. The DNR has been working to understand and stop this decline for more than two decades. In 2022, this effort received a significant boost in the form of a \$400,000 competitive "America the Beautiful" grant awarded to the DNR. The grant will fund a collaboration among the DNR and tribal, federal, state, local and non-governmental partners to identify and overcome challenges facing large-scale moose habitat restoration in northeastern Minnesota. Large-scale habitat management ensures moose populations have the resources required to thrive, including cover to shelter from summer heat and young forests with adequate food.

STREAM HABITAT RESTORATION

In 2022, DNR increased work to restore aquatic connectivity at the watershed scale to improve fish passage and give fish access to critical cold-water habitat in a changing climate. As one example, DNR replaced an undersized culvert on a tributary to Hockamin Creek in Lake County. The design and implementation of the culvert replacement also took into account the increased frequency and timing of flooding. Replacing the undersized culvert will help sustain robust fish populations given increasing temperatures and reduce the likelihood of major damage to the culvert during more frequent high precipitation events.

BUILDING RESILIENT URBAN FORESTS

Urban forests play a critical role in increasing community resilience to climate change. DNR's Urban and Community Forestry Team works with local units of government across Minnesota to provide financial, technical, and educational assistance to communities and their residents. About 20 percent of Minnesota's community trees are ash, which will be lost to emerald ash borer (EAB) without sustained treatment. In 2022, \$4.1 million in grants was allocated to assist communities in managing ash for EAB on public land through public tree inventories, ash management plans, tree and stump removal and tree replacement focused on climate-adaptive species. Priority is given to grant applications from underserved communities.

WOODLAND STEWARDSHIP PLANS

The DNR now has more than 1 million acres of active, current [woodland stewardship plans](#). While it took several years to hit this mark, approximately 1,000 plans totaling 196,000 acres were registered as of 2022. To serve woodland owners, the DNR has bolstered connections and support for private consultant foresters, who have drafted more than 80 percent of these plans. A unique woodland stewardship plan is created for each landowner based on their management goals. It helps woodland owners understand what is in their woods, how to improve them, and when to do work to keep forests healthy and beautiful. Plans are written for woodland owners with 20 to 5,000 acres and are updated every 10 years.

RESPONDING TO WEATHER EXTREMES

Minnesota has always experienced dynamic and challenging weather, but all indications are that extreme events will become more frequent as our climate continues to change. In 2022, DNR staff department-wide responded to weather extremes, from storms and flooding to drought. Over the course of several weeks this spring, DNR deployed dozens of staff to support flood mitigation efforts in International Falls, including sandbagging around more than 100 homes, resorts, and other businesses. Staff also installed and monitored pumps and helped protect public sewer infrastructure and several miles of public roadways. Severe flooding also caused approximately 280 distinct points of damage on 70 state forest roads, affecting about 475 miles of road. Foresters quickly made critical repairs to reopen some roads to provide access to residents' homes and cabins. After an EF-2 tornado ripped through Forada, Minnesota, the DNR helped remove boatloads of debris from Maple Lake, including slabs of roof, chunks of buildings, docks and boat lifts. Over the summer and into fall, the 2022 drought brought abnormally dry to extremely dry conditions to large sections of Minnesota. In response, the DNR worked with the Statewide Drought Task Force and notified public water suppliers of the conditions, encouraging them to implement demand reduction and water conservation measures. In 2022 the DNR's State Climatology Office again analyzed hundreds of thousands of temperature and precipitation measurements across the state. With that information, along with data from cutting-edge climate models, DNR Climatology staff provided valuable public information through numerous media interviews, helping Minnesotans better understand our changing climate and what may come in the future.

MANAGE NATURAL RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT

STRATEGIC LAND ASSET MANAGEMENT

In FY 2022, the DNR's Strategic Land Asset Management program brought more than 4,400 acres into public land ownership, adding 3,100 acres to Wildlife Management Areas, 70 acres to Aquatic Management Areas, and more than 960 acres to State Forests. One of the largest acquisitions of 2022 was a 729-acre land donation from Trust for Public Land. The donated land stretches for 3 miles along the St. Croix River in Chisago County and will be managed by the DNR as part of the Chengwatana State Forest. The donated land includes forests, grassland, and several water bodies. In addition to acquisition, public land sales are a critical part of the DNR's efforts to actively manage the state's public lands to ensure all parcels are contributing to DNR's mission. In 2022, the DNR held three public land auctions in which eleven properties were sold, totaling 229 acres sold.

MINERAL RESOURCES

State mineral leases administered by the DNR brought \$47.7 million in revenue in fiscal year 2022, benefiting the state's permanent school and university funds as well as local communities and school districts. Minnesota provides more than 80 percent 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.

ENSURE DNR'S FINANCIAL VITALITY

4 THE OUTDOORS

After more than a year of research and public engagement, the DNR released the [4 The Outdoors report](#) in October of 2022. The report outlines a vision for the future of outdoor recreation and conservation in Minnesota and identifies four actions in four years that will lead to more sustainable funding to achieve this vision. The DNR will work with Minnesotans going forward to take collective action on the four action areas: optimize the use of current funding, explore the use and application of fees, increase opportunities for direct support, and secure stable and predictable base and operational funding. This is all in an effort to work toward a future that fully values and sustains conservation and outdoor recreation in the state.

STATEWIDE SERVICE HUB DELIVERY MODEL

The DNR's Operations Services Division implemented a Statewide Service Hub Delivery Model for Financial Operations. The move away from a geographically-based service model to a service-based model improves efficiency as well as consistency and compliance with financial laws and policies across the state. The new delivery model included the creation of seven service hubs: accounts payable, accounts receivable, regional services, procurement, professional/technical contracting, financial reporting, and the Operations Services Division business office.

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