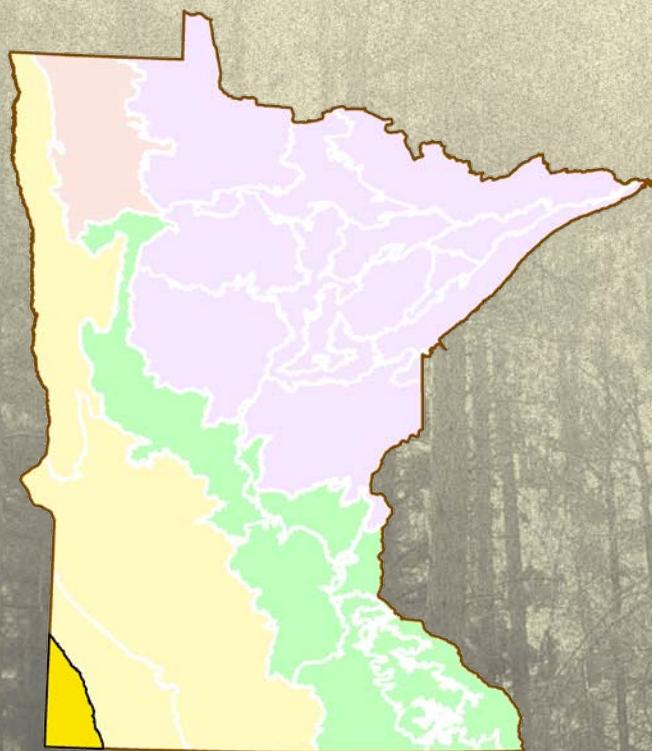


# TOMORROW'S HABITAT

FOR THE  
WILD & RARE

AN ACTION PLAN FOR MINNESOTA WILDLIFE

## INNER COTEAU SUBSECTION PROFILE



MINNESOTA'S COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION STRATEGY



# Inner Coteau

## SUBSECTION OVERVIEW

The Inner Coteau Subsection is located in the extreme southwest corner of Minnesota and includes parts of southeastern South Dakota and northwestern Iowa. This high plain lies west of Buffalo Ridge, which is the western boundary of the Coteau Moraines Subsection. This subsection contains several rivers, including the Rock and Redwood, but very few lakes. Before settlement by people of European descent, prairie covered virtually all of this landscape, and wet prairies were scattered throughout. Fires were common and critical to maintaining native prairie.

Agriculture is the predominant land use here, and its expansion and intensification have resulted in water quality and water quantity concerns. Nitrates, phosphates, and pesticides are present in the shallow aquifers. Very few remnants of prairie and wetlands remain, and their conservation is a major concern. Gravel and boulder mining occurs in this subsection, particularly on ridges of prairie and grasslands where large-scale wind-power production is expanding.

## SPECIES IN GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

**78 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)** are known or predicted to occur within the Inner Coteau. These SGCN include 33 species that are federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern. The table, SGCN by Taxonomic Group, displays by taxonomic group the number of SGCN that occur in the subsection, as well as the percentage of the total SGCN set represented by each taxon. For example, 10 mammal SGCN are known or predicted to occur in the Inner Coteau, approximately 46% of all mammal SGCN in the state.

### SGCN BY TAXONOMIC GROUP

Taxa	# of SGCN	Percentage of SGCN Set by Taxon	Examples of SGCN
Amphibians	2	33.3	Northern cricket frog
Birds	39	40.2	Grasshopper sparrow
Fish	3	6.4	Topeka shiner
Insects	10	17.9	Regal fritillary
Mammals	10	45.5	Western harvest mouse
Mollusks	7	17.9	Creek heelsplitter
Reptiles	5	29.4	Lined snake
Spiders	2	25.0	<i>H. texanus</i>

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

### Topeka shiner (*Notropis topeka*)

**Distribution** Extremely limited distribution in small streams of the Missouri River drainage in Pipestone, Rock, and Nobles counties.

**Abundance** Rare throughout its midwestern range, there are pockets of good stream habitat in SW MN, primarily on private farmlands.

**Legal Status** Federal list-Endangered; state list-Special Concern.

**Comments** This species is now benefiting from investment of the federal Landowner Incentive Program, a state-administered voluntary program that provides funding to private landowners to implement habitat management projects benefiting “at-risk” species.



Photo by Konrad Schmidt

### Quick facts

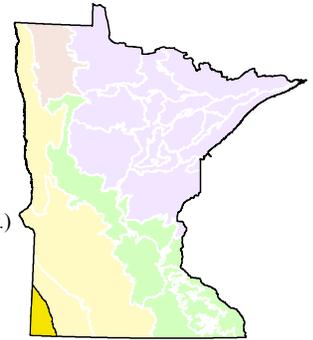
Acres: 776,757 (1.4% of state)

#### Ownership

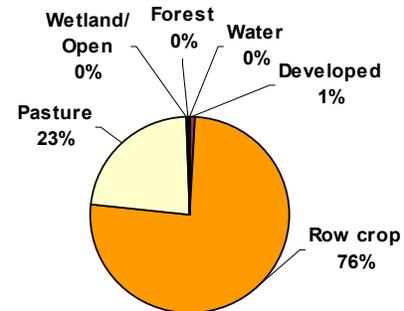
Public	Private	Tribal
0.9%	99.1%	0.0%

#### Population density (people/sq. mi.)

Current	Change (2000-2010)
25.3	-0.7



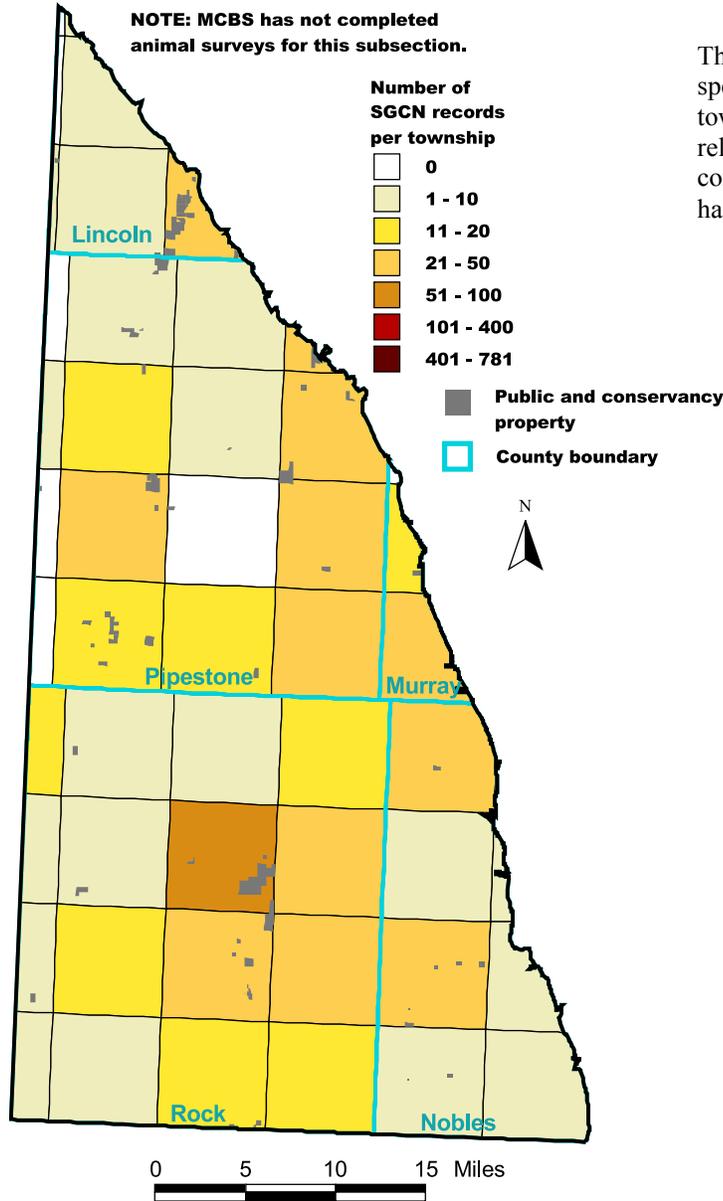
### Current Land Use/Land Cover



### HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Inner Coteau contains some excellent tracts of remaining native prairie interspersed with wetlands and streams, which provide habitat for Swainson’s hawks, short-eared owls, dickcissels, bobolinks, upland sandpipers, plains topminnows, Richardson’s ground squirrels and a variety of ducks.
- Rivers, streams and associated wetlands provide some of the few refuges remaining for Blanding’s turtles in this area of the state.
- In addition to several records of Western foxsnakes, this subsection contains the only documented site with lined snakes in the state.
- Areas important for SGCN include Blue Mounds and Split Rock Creek SPs; Pipestone National Monument, Prairie Coteau, and Compass Prairie SNAs; Altona, Terrace, and Burke WMAs; and Nature Conservancy lands. Public and private lands form key corridors along Buffalo Ridge.

SGCN ELEMENT OCCURRENCES BY TOWNSHIP



This map depicts the number of validated records of species in greatest conservation need since 1990 per township and public land/conservancy land. It suggests relationships between known SGCN occurrences and conservation management lands. Please note that MCBS has not begun rare animal surveys in this subsection.

Sources: MN DNR Natural Heritage database, MN DNR County Biological Survey (MCBS), MN DNR Statewide Mussel Survey, MN DNR Fisheries Fish database. Areas with no MCBS animal surveys may have had mussel and fish surveys, as well as reports of other species occurrences recorded in the MN DNR Natural Heritage database.

SPECIES PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The species problem analysis provides information on the factors influencing the vulnerability or decline of SGCN that are known or predicted to occur in the subsection. The table lists the nine problems, or factors, used in the analysis, and the percentage of SGCN in the subsection for which each factor influences species vulnerability or decline. The results of the species problem analysis indicate that habitat loss and degradation in the subsection are the most significant challenges facing SGCN populations.

NOTE: The inverse of the percentages for each problem does not necessarily represent the percentage of SGCN for which the factor is not a problem, but instead may indicate that there is not sufficient information available to determine the level of influence the factor has on SGCN in the subsection.

Problem	Percentage of SGCN in the Subsection for Which This Is a Problem
Habitat Loss in MN	88
Habitat Degradation in MN	92
Habitat Loss/Degradation Outside of MN	28
Invasive Species and Competition	28
Pollution	36
Social Tolerance/Persecution/Exploitation	19
Disease	4
Food Source Limitations	6
Other	23

# Inner Coteau

## KEY HABITATS - For Species in Greatest Conservation Need

The CWCS identified key habitats for SGCN within the subsection using a combination of five analyses, labeled A-E below. The table depicts the five analyses, and under which analyses the key habitats qualified. To qualify as a key habitat for the subsection, the habitat had to meet the criteria used in at least one of the five analyses, as specified in the descriptions to the right of the table. The graphs below depict results from four (A-D) of the five analyses used in determining key habitats. Those habitats that meet the criteria are highlighted in **RED** in the graph for that analysis. Those habitats that do not meet the criteria are shaded in **GOLD**. Analysis E is not represented by a graph; the results of this analysis are presented as a list of key rivers/streams in Appendix I. For a more detailed explanation of the five analyses used, see [Chapter 7, Methods and Analyses](#).

KEY HABITATS	ANALYSIS				
	A	B	C	D	E
<a href="#">Prairie</a>	X	X	X		
<a href="#">Wetland-Nonforest</a>		X	X		
<a href="#">River-Headwater to Large</a>					X

### Description of Analyses

**A: Terrestrial habitat use analysis** - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of 1890s or 1990s landcover and are modeled to have the most SGCN using them based on a z-test with  $p < 0.01$ .

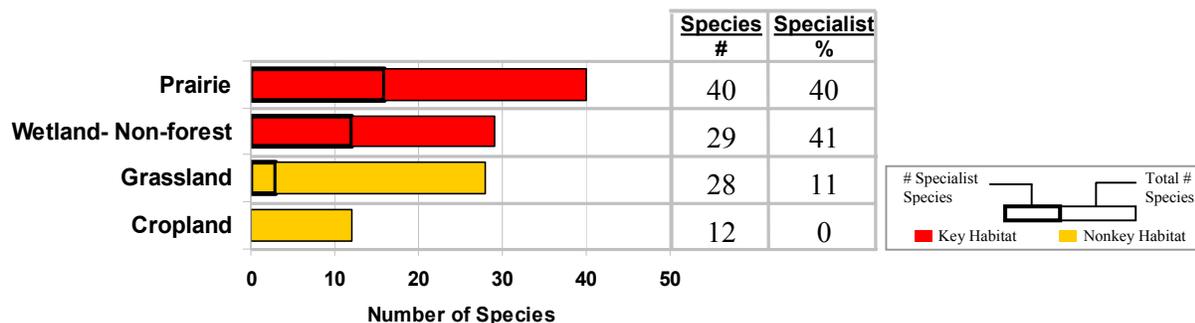
**B: Specialist terrestrial habitat use analysis** - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of 1890s or 1990s landcover and have more than 15 species, 20% of which use 2 or fewer habitats (specialist species).

**C: Terrestrial habitat change analysis** - terrestrial habitats that represent more than 5% of the 1890s landcover and have declined by more than 50% in the 1990s landcover. For wetlands this change was based on an analysis done by Anderson & Craig in *Growing Energy Crops on Minnesota's Wetlands: The Land Use Perspective* (1984).

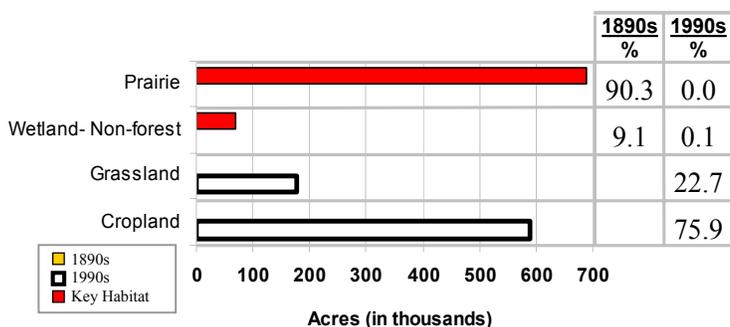
**D: Aquatic habitat use analysis** - lake or stream habitats that have the most SGCN use based on a z-test with  $p < 0.01$  of all subsections.

**E: The Nature Conservancy/SGCN occurrence analysis** - stream reaches identified in the Areas of Aquatic Biodiversity Significance in the four TNC Ecoregional Assessments and reaches with high SGCN occurrences (see [Appendix I](#) for list of stream reaches).

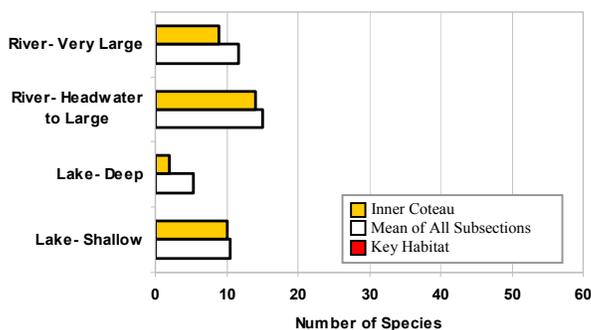
### A/B – Terrestrial Habitat Use/Specialist Terrestrial Habitat Use



### C – Terrestrial Habitat Change



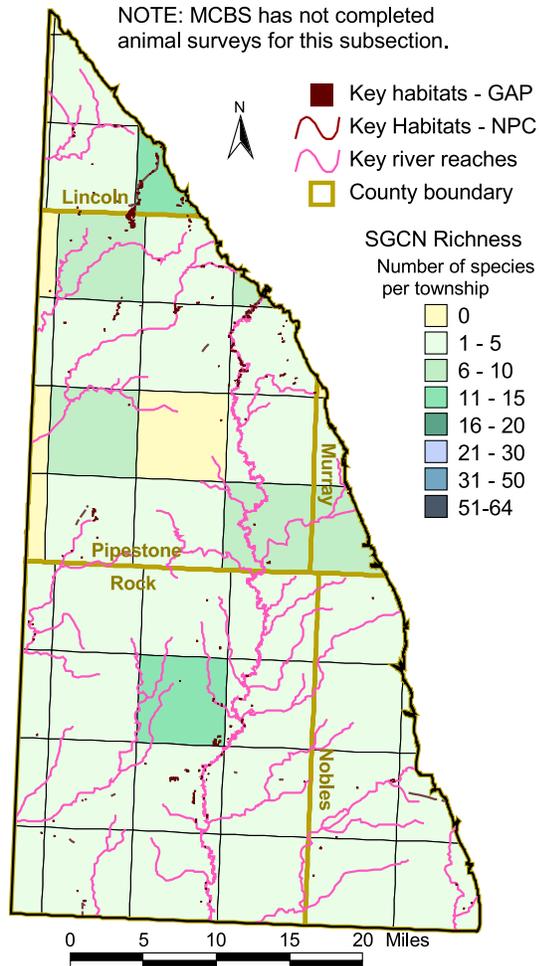
### D – Aquatic Habitat Use



### E – The Nature Conservancy/SGCN Occurrence

To reference the key rivers and streams for the subsection, see [Appendix I](#).

**DISTRIBUTION OF KEY HABITATS AND SPECIES RICHNESS BY TOWNSHIP**



This map depicts key habitats and the number of species of SGCN per township based on the sources listed below. It suggests there is often a relationship between key habitats and species richness (i.e., the variety of species of SGCN in a township).

- Sources:
- Major River Centerline Traces in Minnesota, 1984
  - MCBS Railroad Rights-of-Way Prairies
  - MN DNR 24K Rivers and Streams, 2005
  - MN DNR Fish database, 2005
  - MN DNR Natural Heritage database, 2005
  - MN DNR Statewide Mussel Survey, 2005
  - MN GAP Landcover, 1993
  - The Nature Conservancy Rivers and Streams combined dataset, 2005

For more information on how this map was constructed, please see the [Subsection Profile Overview in Chapter 5](#).

**SUBSECTION HABITAT PERCENTAGES AND HABITAT USE BY SGCN TAXA**

This table presents information on the percentages for each habitat in the subsection (showing changes in coverage between the mid- to late 1800s and the 1990s), as well as habitat use by SGCN taxonomic group. Habitats are listed in ranked order for percent coverage within the subsection in the 1990s. Key habitats for the subsection (as identified on previous page) are listed in **BOLD**. SGCN habitat use is broken down by taxonomic group, with a total number of species for all taxonomic groups listed at the far right of the table.

HABITAT	Percentage of Subsection (1890s)	Percentage of Subsection (1990s)	SGCN BY TAXONOMIC GROUP							Total Number of Species	
			Amphibians	Birds	Fish	Insects	Mammals	Mollusks	Reptiles		Spiders
Cropland	N/A	75.9		6			5		1	12	
Grassland	N/A	22.7		14			10		4	28	
Developed	N/A	0.9		4			3			7	
Forest-Upland Deciduous (Hardwood)	0.0	0.2		5			3		1	9	
<b>Wetland-Nonforest</b>	9.1	0.1	1	24			2		2	29	
Shrub/Woodland-Upland	0.1	0.1		11		2	7		2	22	
Lake-Shallow	N/A	0.1		8					2	10	
Forest-Lowland Deciduous	0.6	0.0		6			1		1	8	
<b>Prairie</b>	90.3	0.0		14		10	10		4	2	40
Shoreline-dunes-cliff/talus	N/A	N/A	1	9			3			13	
Shrub-Lowland	N/A	N/A		11			3		1	15	
<b>River-Headwater to Large</b>	N/A	N/A	1	1	3			7	2	14	
River-Very Large	N/A	N/A	2					5	2	9	

N/A: Insufficient data available to determine percent coverage within subsection. We have no data to indicate the existence of cropland, grassland, or developed land prior to settlement by people of European descent, although these land uses likely did occur at very low levels. NOTE: 0.0 indicates less than 0.05 percent coverage.

## Ten-Year Goals, Management Challenges, Strategies, and Priority Conservation Actions

### Goal I: Stabilize and increase SGCN populations

*Management Challenge 1 – There has been significant loss and degradation of SGCN habitat*

*Strategy I A – Identify key SGCN habitats and focus management efforts on them*

#### Priority Conservation Actions to Maintain, Enhance, and Protect the Key Habitats

1. **Native prairie habitats**, actions include:
  - a. Manage invasive species
  - b. Use prescribed fire and other practices to maintain prairie
  - c. Manage grasslands adjacent to native prairie to enhance SGCN habitat
  - d. Encourage prairie restoration efforts
  - e. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations
2. **Nonforested wetlands**, actions include:
  - a. Enforce the Wetlands Conservation Act
  - b. Manage habitats adjacent to wetlands to enhance SGCN values
  - c. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations
3. **Stream habitats**, actions include:
  - a. Maintain good water quality, hydrology, geomorphology, and connectivity in priority stream reaches
  - b. Maintain and enhance riparian areas along priority stream reaches
  - c. Provide technical assistance and protection opportunities to interested individuals and organizations

*Management Challenge 2 – Some SGCN populations require specific management actions*

*Strategy I B – Manage federal and state listed species effectively*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Specific SGCN

1. Implement existing federal recovery plans
2. Develop and implement additional recovery plans
3. Provide technical assistance to managers, officials, and interested individuals related to listed species
4. Enforce federal and state endangered species laws, as well as other wildlife laws and regulations

*Strategy I C – Manage emerging issues affecting specific SGCN populations*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Specific SGCN

1. Work with partners to effectively address emerging issues affecting SGCN populations
2. Enforce federal and state wildlife laws and regulations

### Goal II: Improve knowledge about SGCN

*Management Challenge 1 – More information about SGCN and SGCN management is needed*

*Strategy II A – Survey SGCN populations and habitats*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Surveys

1. Survey SGCN populations within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Continue MCBS rare animal surveys
  - b. Survey SGCN populations related to key habitats
  - c. Survey wildlife taxa underrepresented by MCBS animal surveys
2. Survey SGCN habitats within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Assess the amount and quality of key habitats and map their locations

*Strategy II B – Research populations, habitats, and human attitudes/activities*

#### Priority Conservation Actions for Research

1. Research important aspects of species populations within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Better understand the life history and habitat requirements of important SGCN
2. Research important aspects of SGCN habitats within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Identify best management practices for maintaining and enhancing key habitats
  - b. Identify important patterns and distributions of key habitats to better support SGCN populations
  - c. Identify important functional components within key habitats to support specific SGCN
  - d. Explore important, emerging SGCN habitat management issues

## **Priority Conservation Actions for Research (continued)**

3. Research important aspects of people's understanding of SGCN within the subsection, actions include:
  - a. Identify people's attitudes and values regarding SGCN
  - b. Identify places and ways people can enjoy and appreciate SGCN

### *Strategy II C – Monitor long-term changes in SGCN populations and habitats*

#### **Priority Conservation Actions for Monitoring**

1. Monitor long-term trends in SGCN populations, actions include:
  - a. Continue existing population monitoring activities
  - b. Develop additional monitoring activities for specific SGCN populations
2. Monitor long-term trends in SGCN habitats, actions include:
  - a. Develop long-term monitoring activities for important SGCN habitats

### *Strategy II D – Create performance measures and maintain information systems*

#### **Priority Conservation Actions for Performance Measures and Information Systems**

1. Create and use performance measures, actions include:
  - a. Develop partner-specific performance measures within the subsection
  - b. Develop project-specific performance measures for SWG-funded projects
  - c. Actively incorporate monitoring and performance measure information to enhance adaptive management
2. Maintain and update information management systems

## **Goal III: Enhance people's appreciation and enjoyment of SGCN**

### *Management Challenge 1 – Need for greater appreciation of SGCN by people*

#### *Strategy III A – Develop outreach and recreation actions*

#### **Priority Conservation Actions for Outreach and Recreation**

1. Create new information and communicate with people to enhance their appreciation of SGCN
2. Create opportunities for people to appropriately enjoy SGCN-based recreation

# *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*

## How to use this subsection profile

### **Intended audience: Natural resource professionals and interested stakeholders**

- \* Identify how the priority conservation actions and key habitats intersect and inform your current and future priorities.
- \* Using your additional insights and local knowledge, “step-down” the priority conservation actions into more detailed actions and practical on-ground tasks.
- \* Use it to understand species in greatest conservation need priorities and tell a story about the subsection (its history, biology, ecology, demography) to other natural resource professionals, managers, decision makers and land owners.
- \* Visit our website, or give us a call, and tell us how you’re using it, how others are using it, and ideas that “step-down” the priority conservation actions.

### **Website:**

[www.dnr.state.mn.us/cwcs](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/cwcs)

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