

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

RECORD OF DECISION

**In the Matter of the Determination of
the Need for an Environmental
Impact Statement for the Cedar
Creek Stream Restoration Project,
Isanti County, Minnesota**

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS, AND ORDER

FINDINGS OF FACT

Project Description

1. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the University of Minnesota (UMN) propose to conduct a stream re-meander project at Cedar Creek located approximately 3.8 miles southeast of Isanti, Isanti County, Minnesota to address ditching and degraded in-stream habitat to restore the ecological and hydrologic functions of the creek and adjacent floodplain. The project will include reconnecting the creek to historic meanders in the floodplain, installing riffles for grade control, installing woody material for instream habitat, and restoring native riparian vegetation. The project area occurs within the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve and will be funded through a mixture of public and private funds, including a Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) grant awarded to TNC in collaboration with the Anoka Sandplain Partnership. The Cummins Foundation will also provide funding, and the University of Minnesota will provide access to the site and conduct monitoring and assessment support.
2. The proposed project area is located along a roughly 8,700-foot section of Cedar Creek. The project area begins west of Xylite St NE and south of 261st Ave NE. The project occurs entirely within the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. This is land owned and managed by the UMN in cooperation with the Minnesota Academy of Science.
3. Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve is a 2,200-hectare experimental ecological reserve operated by UMN. Cedar Creek contains the confluence of three distinct North American biomes (Coniferous Forest, Deciduous Forest, and Grassland). The Cedar Creek Natural Area was established in 1942 and was designated a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service in 1975. Currently, it is home to one of eleven US Long Term Ecological Research sites selected by the National Science Foundation.
4. The project will include excavation along the historic meanders to reconnect the creek with the floodplain (approximately 1-3 feet of cut depending on existing channel depths), reconnection of several cutoff oxbow channels, selective tree and shrub harvest for site

access and meander connections, and installation of ditch plugs to redirect flow into the restored meanders. The proposed reconnection of historic meanders within the project area will increase the length of Cedar Creek by approximately 4,150 feet and will benefit the stream by reducing and attenuating flood flows and restoring habitat for aquatic biota. Phase 1 will include excavation along the historic meanders and temporary soil stock piling near the proposed ditch plugs. The meanders will be left offline for one year to allow vegetation to become established on the stream banks. Phase 2 will include plugging the ditch using the soils derived from Phase 1 to redirect flows into the restored creek channel, and the existing ditched channel will be abandoned. Over time, it is expected the old ditch would slowly fill in with sediment and organic matter and become an emergent marsh.

Procedural History

5. Pursuant to *Minnesota Rules* 4410.4300, subpart 1, an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) must be prepared for projects that meet or exceed the threshold defined in any of the subparts 2-37. The proposed project exceeds the threshold defined under *Minnesota Rules* 4410.4300, Subp. 26, regarding stream diversion work. The project would reconnect historic stream meanders to restore the pattern and profile of the creek and improve instream habitat for aquatic biota. The project would also increase the length of the creek and re-wet peat soils adjacent to the creek to restore native vegetation and improve water quality of the creek and downstream resources. Because this proposed work affects more than 500 feet of natural watercourse, completion of an EAW was required.
6. Pursuant to *Minnesota Rules* 4410.4300, subpart 26, the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) is either the local governmental unit (LGU) or the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR acted as RGU for this project.
7. The DNR prepared an EAW for the proposed project, pursuant to *Minnesota Rules* 4410.1400.
8. The EAW is incorporated by reference into this Record of Decision on the Determination of Need for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
9. The DNR requested and was granted a 15-day extension for making a decision on the need for an EIS as provided under the provision of *Minnesota Rules* 4410.1700 Subp. 2.b.

Public Comment Period

10. The EAW was filed with the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) and a notice of its availability was published in the *EQB Monitor* on February 24th, 2026. A copy of the EAW was sent to all people on the EQB Distribution List, to those persons known by DNR to be interested in the proposed project, and to those persons requesting a copy. A statewide press release announcing the availability of the EAW was sent to newspapers and radio and

television stations. Copies of the EAW were distributed to the DNR Central Region Headquarters, the DNR Library located at DNR's Central Office, the Hennepin County-Minneapolis Central Public Library, and the North Central Public Library. The EAW was also made available to the public via posting on DNR's website. *See Minnesota Rules 4410.1500.*

11. The 30-day EAW public review and comment period began February 24th, 2026, and ended March 26th, 2026, pursuant to *Minnesota Rules* 4410.1600. The opportunity was provided to submit written comments on the EAW to the DNR by U.S. mail or electronically.
12. During the 30-day EAW public review and comment period, the DNR received three written comments from agencies or individuals. These comments were deemed non-substantive as all comments only expressed support for the project generally.

Environmental Effects

13. Based upon the information contained in the EAW and received as public comments, the DNR has identified the following potential environmental effects associated with the project:
 - a) **Land use.** This topic was addressed under EAW Items 6b and 10. The project is compatible with the nearby land use and rural setting of the area. The proposed project will restore stream sinuosity and enhance native vegetation within the stream corridor, improve water quality, and expand fish and wildlife habitat which parallels goals of the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. The project would also provide opportunities for scientific research. Although the entire creek corridor is within a FEMA floodplain, no structures or fill would be added that might change the flood elevations within or upstream of the project area.
 - b) **Soils and topography.** This topic was addressed under EAW Items 6b and 11. The proposed project would have a temporary adverse effect on the soils in the area where earth moving alterations are conducted. This adverse effect would only last for the duration of project construction. The topography of the floodplain within the project area is relatively flat and contains a deep layer of muck and mucky peat. These soils are susceptible to erosion during flood events considering the ditched condition of the creek and lack of meanders to reduce flood energy. To limit further erosion within the project area, the proposed project includes reconnecting approximately 4,150 linear feet of historic channel to the creek and excavating approximately 5,000 cubic yards of soil from the meandering channel to reconnect the creek to the meanders. The excavated soil is proposed to be placed in the old ditch to create channel plugs for the meanders and to restore wetland habitat in the ditch. The soil would be seeded with a native wetland seed mix with erosion control blankets or weed-free straw mulch placed over the surface of the soil to prevent surface erosion.

- c) **Water Resources.** This topic was addressed under EAW Items 6b and 12. Surface water and water quality would experience short-term temporary impacts during construction. This would be limited in geographic extent to the direct project area and immediately downstream. Wetland habitats would be enhanced following the completion of the project as the abandoned ditch left behind would be allowed to develop into wetland once meanders are reconnected. No impacts to groundwater or stormwater discharge are anticipated during the construction phase of this project. Ecological function of wetlands should be improved following project completion.
- d) **Contamination/Hazardous Materials/Wastes.** This topic was addressed under EAW Items 6b and 13. No onsite contamination has been documented in the area. Construction of the project would not require long-term storage of hazardous materials. Any waste generated from the project such as waste materials from installation of temporary erosion control best management practices (BMPs) (e.g., packaging materials) and food container refuse would be removed from the project site by the contractor once the project is completed.
- e) **Habitat.** This topic was addressed under EAW Items 6b and 14. The project would have a temporary negative impact on aquatic habitat, which would generally be limited to the extent of project construction activities. Disturbance from construction activities would be limited through BMPs. After completion of the project, aquatic habitat would be improved with creation/restoration of deep lentic habitat that would be utilized by fishes and other aquatic organisms. This area would provide substantially more aquatic habitat diversity than what is currently present in the project area. Additionally, native seeding would increase the diversity and extent of native vegetation within the project site, and invasive species identified in the project area would be addressed through long-term targeted vegetation management.
- f) **Fish, wildlife, plant communities, and rare features.** This topic was addressed under EAW Items 6b and 14. The project would have temporary minor adverse impacts to wildlife due to an increased level of noise and human activity during construction; this area would generally be limited to the project area and immediate surroundings. Fish and other aquatic organisms would experience minor temporary negative impacts due to construction activities (installation of channel plugs and targeted removal of trees and shrubs near the streambed). Plant communities in the floodplain forest area would be disrupted by earth moving activities but will be replaced with a more diverse native species mix (seeding and natural regeneration) following construction. Rare features and listed species would be protected by avoiding project construction activities in their vicinities. Following completion, a permanent beneficial impact to all species is expected due to restoration of habitats in the area to support diverse species. Multiple mitigation strategies are outlined in more detail in the EAW.

- g) **Visual, air, greenhouse gas emissions, noise and traffic qualities.** These topics were addressed under EAW Items 6b, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20. All of these would experience minor temporary adverse impacts due to construction activities. The geographic extent of these effects would be limited to the project area and its immediate surroundings, and the impacts would last for the duration of construction activities.
- h) **Cumulative Potential Effects.** This topic was addressed under EAW Item 21. The proposed project has been identified to have temporary, limited and minor negative environmental effects to soils and topography; water resources; aquatic habitat; fish, wildlife, plant communities, and rare features; visual impacts; air impacts; and traffic. Any potential negative effects due to the proposed project are limited to the duration of active construction activities. No other projects were identified during the cumulative potential effects analysis that would result in cumulative potential effects on land use, soils, topography, water resources, habitat, fish and wildlife, rare features, or visual, air or traffic qualities. The project would have a permanent positive impact on land use, water resources, aquatic and wetland habitat, wildlife, and visual impacts due to the net increase in these features following the completion of the proposed stream restoration work.

14. The following permits and approvals are or may be needed for the project:

Unit of Government	Type of Application	Status
Isanti County	Floodplain Permit/No-Rise Certificate	To Be Applied For
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Joint Permit Application (404 or 401)	To Be Applied For
Department of Natural Resources	Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) Permit	To Be Applied For
Department of Natural Resources	Water Appropriation Permit	To Be Applied For, If Needed
Department of Natural Resources	Public Waters Work Permit	To Be Applied For
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction Stormwater (CSW) Permit	To Be Applied For
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	401 Water Quality Certification	To Be Applied For, If Needed
State Historic Preservation Office	Archeological or Historic Features/ Properties	To Be Reviewed During Permitting Process

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Minnesota Environmental Review Program Rules, *Minnesota Rules*, chapter 4410.1700, subparts 6 and 7 set forth the following standards and criteria, to which the effects of a project are to be compared, to determine whether it has the potential for significant environmental effects.

In deciding whether a project has the potential for significant environmental effects, the following factors shall be considered:

- a. type, extent, and reversibility of environmental effects;*
 - b. cumulative potential effects of related or anticipated future projects;*
 - c. extent to which the environmental effects are subject to mitigation by on-going regulatory authority; and*
 - d. the extent to which environmental effects can be anticipated and controlled as a result of other environmental studies undertaken by agencies or the project proposer, including other EISs.*
2. Type, extent, and reversibility of environmental effects

Based on the Findings of Fact above, the DNR concludes that the following potential environmental impacts, as described in Findings of Fact paragraph 13 will be either limited in extent, temporary, or reversible:

- a. Land use
- b. Soils and topography
- c. Water resources
- d. Contamination/Hazardous materials/Wastes
- e. Habitat
- f. Fish, wildlife, plant communities, and rare features
- g. Visual impacts
- h. Air quality impacts
- i. Greenhouse gas emissions
- j. Traffic

Based on the Findings of Fact above, the DNR concludes the following potential environmental effects of the project, as described in Findings of Fact paragraph 13, would be beneficial:

Habitat, land use, water resources and wildlife and plant community improvements would result from restoration of the aquatic and wetland habitat. The proposed project would result in increased quality and variety of aquatic and wetland habitat. It would also have a beneficial impact on land use throughout the project area, due to restoration of natural inundation patterns, an addition or increase in landscape appropriate habitats, and reduced erosion potential.

3. Cumulative potential effects of related or anticipated future projects.

There are no known planned or anticipated future projects that would result in cumulative adverse potential effects on land use, soils and topography, water resources, habitat, wildlife, visual impacts, air quality impacts, greenhouse gas emissions, or traffic.

4. Extent to which environmental effects are subject to mitigation by on-going public regulatory authority.

Based on the information in the EAW and Findings of Fact above, the DNR has determined that the following environmental effects, as described in Findings of Fact paragraph 13, are subject to mitigation by ongoing public regulatory authority:

- a. Physical impacts on water resources are subject to regulatory authority by the DNR Public Waters Work permit and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)'s NPDES/SDS General Construction Stormwater Permit (CSW).
- b. Project-related impacts to soil erosion, sedimentation, and topography from construction-related activity are subject to regulatory authority by the MPCA's NPDES/SDS CSW.
- c. Land use impacts are subject to floodplain permits/no-rise certificate issued by Isanti County.

When applying standards and criteria used in the determination of the need for an environmental impact statement, the DNR finds that the project is subject to regulatory authority through the Minnesota public waters rules to sufficiently mitigate potential environmental effects on water resources through measures identified in the EAW that are specific and reasonably expected to occur.

5. Extent to which environmental effects can be anticipated and controlled as a result of other environmental studies undertaken by public agencies or the project proposer, or other EISs.

No additional environmental studies will be undertaken by public agencies or the project proposer. No other EISs are warranted in areas near the project site.

6. The DNR has prepared EAWs for other wetland and aquatic habitat restoration projects engaged in by the project proposer that have similar environmental effects. These include the Knowlton Creek EAW, the South Branch Wild Rice River EAW, the Reno Bottoms EAW, and the Mud Lake Habitat Restoration EAW. The DNR has fulfilled all the procedural requirements of law and rule applicable to determining the need for an environmental impact statement on the proposed Cedar Creek Stream Restoration Project.

7. Based on consideration of the criteria and factors specified in the Minnesota Environmental Review Program Rules (*Minnesota Rules*, chapter 4410.1700, subpart 6 and 7) to determine whether a project has the potential for significant environmental effects, and on the Findings

and Record in this matter, the DNR determines that the proposed Cedar Creek Stream Restoration Project does not have the potential for significant environmental effects.

ORDER

Based on the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions:

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources determines that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the Cedar Creek Stream Restoration Project Isanti County, Minnesota.

Any Findings that might properly be termed Conclusions and any Conclusions that might properly be termed Findings are hereby adopted as such.

Dated this 29th day of April, 2026.

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Smith
Assistant Commissioner