



TALLGRASS ASPEN PARKLAND IS HOME TO THREATENED SPECIES IN NORTHWESTERN MINNESOTA



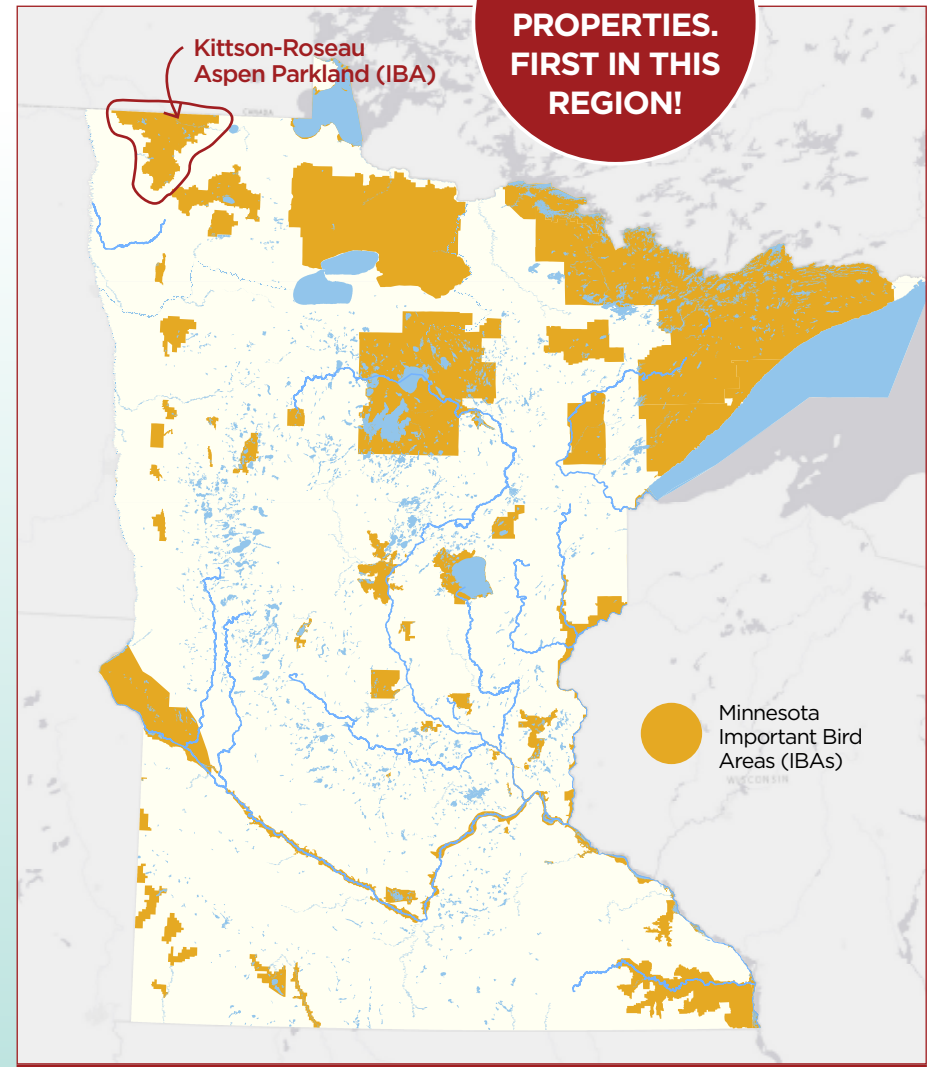
Wilson's Phalarope

MINNESOTA IS KEY FOR RESIDENT AND MIGRATORY BIRDS ALIKE!



A CLOSER LOOK

NEWLY PROTECTED PROPERTIES. FIRST IN THIS REGION!



Important Bird Areas (IBAs) contain some of the best remaining prairies, wetlands, and forests in Minnesota and represent the essential life-support system for the state's rich bird life. Minnesota IBAs are also part of the Mississippi Flyway that hosts over 325 bird species on their journey between northern breeding grounds and southern wintering areas.



Pat Anderson and Alex Wardwell

Walking through the property of Greg and Crystal Peterson in northern Kittson County, it's not unusual to flush a sharp-tailed grouse. The sudden explosion of sound as the bird bursts out of the underbrush is a startling but welcome sign, as habitat for this species has slowly disappeared over the years. Sharp-tailed grouse used to be plentiful in Minnesota, but are now relegated to the northwestern and north central part of the state. The chance to help birds and other wildlife populations rebound convinced Greg and Crystal to protect their land with an easement through the Minnesota Land Trust.

The Petersons learned about the opportunity thanks to Audubon Minnesota, which has partnered with the Land Trust to protect some of the most significant bird habitat in our state—areas that are designated as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). By working together, the Land Trust is able to use Audubon's expertise to prioritize the protection of the most vital lands for birds to make sure each easement has the largest possible conservation impact.

The Minnesota Land Trust has to date protected nearly 9,000 acres through 240 conservation easements located in

IBAs throughout Minnesota, demonstrating a long-standing commitment to protecting bird habitats. This partnership with Audubon Minnesota helps accelerate the pace of protection in the northwestern prairie areas. "Protecting these high quality habitats within IBAs is absolutely critical to the future of Minnesota's bird and wildlife populations," said Alex Wardwell, restoration specialist for Audubon Minnesota.

A key focus of the partnership has been to use protected private lands to bridge the gaps between public lands, thereby creating larger habitat blocks for birds and wildlife in the IBA. While almost one quarter of the land in Kittson County is managed by the DNR, much of this ownership is fragmented, putting additional stress on birds that live there. Minnesota Land Trust Program Manager Pat Anderson, who

helped the Petersons protect their property emphasizes, "Protecting private lands through permanent conservation easements expands the existing conserved area while allowing landowners to enjoy and use their land as they always have."

The property of Bruce Paine and Jason and Janet Smude is one such connecting property. When their neighbor protected his land which abuts a DNR Wildlife Management Area, they recognized the

importance of protecting their 160 acres to increase the conserved area into a much larger whole. With an easement on their land completed this summer, they helped substantially grow the protected complex. In fact, the Land Trust has protected nearly 2,000 acres in the area in less than six months thanks to partnerships with Audubon Minnesota, the Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy and others, along with sup-

port from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) and Minnesota Legislature.

Beyond the birds, the remaining grassland habitat in Kittson County is also of importance because it provides habitat for some of the few remaining elk herds in the state. With 79 elk counted in the last Minnesota DNR survey, every acre of habitat counts. Preserving natural grasslands and wetlands in this region can also relieve some of the conflicts that arise when elk browse cultivated lands.

These private lands represent a critical component to the landscape of Minnesota. With more than 75% of the state in private ownership, the participation of these landowners is absolutely essential to our goals of clean water, abundant wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty.

And so are partnerships with conservation entities like Audubon Minnesota and others. Thanks to these relationships and the stewardship of the landowners who have protected their properties, birds like ruffed and sharp-tailed grouse, and American bittern all have more areas to call home. With 57 IBAs covering over 11 million acres across the state, there's still a lot of important bird habitat to protect!



Ruffed Grouse

DAVID L. TIESZEN



Horned Grebe



Marbled Godwit



Sandhill Cranes

STAFF UPDATES

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

AMIE SCHILLER



Our new stewardship associate, Amie, has a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Biology, and has worked for state and federal conservation organizations. When not in the office, she's hiking, fly-fishing, or taking photos of Minnesota's flora and fauna.

JOE SULLIVAN



Manager of Strategic Relations for the Center for Energy and Environment, Joe works with policy makers, regulators, utilities, energy advocates, and other key stakeholders to advance energy efficiency and clean energy in Minnesota.

PAT COLLINS



Pat Collins has taken a sabbatical from the Land Trust to join the MN DNR as their St. Louis River Restoration Consultant. We wish him well, and eagerly await his return to the Land Trust family at the end of his assignment!

BRIDGET LEVIN



Co-Founder and Principal of Nametag International, Inc., a global brand strategy and naming firm based in the Twin Cities, Bridget serves on multiple environmental boards where she is focused on growth, innovation and enduring impact in the environment/sustainability sector.

VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR



When **Chuck and Betty Selander** started volunteering with the Minnesota Land Trust in 2010 to monitor conservation easements, Chuck was, in a sense, getting back to his roots. He graduated in the '60s with a degree in forest land management, though his work took him and Betty in another direction. They were missionaries for many years. They retired in 2009, and now spend part of their time walking fields, wetlands, and woodlands on behalf of the Land Trust. "I'm excited when we can be out there talking to landowners who share our goals to protect our resources," says Chuck. Betty echoes his passion, "I am so in awe of the beautiful countryside we get to walk together." With coffee, camera and binoculars in tow, they conduct as many as nine monitoring visits each year.

LANDOWNER OF THE YEAR



Mike Niziolek believes his passion for conservation is a blend of nature and nurture. A high school biology teacher, he has demonstrated his commitment to conservation through

involvement in many efforts, including running environmental education programs and helping the city of Elk River acquire parkland. For the past 20+ years, Mike has also worked to restore his own land — about 150 acres — near Elk River. He has been slowly and methodically transforming pastured land to oak savanna, tilled land to prairie, and ditches to wetlands.

"I still have lots more to do," he says, "but I'm happy that this land is protected forever for future generations."

PARTNER OF THE YEAR



The **Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program**, part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has certainly lived up to its name. Through a burgeoning relationship with the Land Trust, the program is playing a critical role in restoring natural habitat on private easement lands across the state. As the program's state coordinator, Sheldon Myerchin oversees nearly a dozen field biologists who work with landowners to restore wetlands and grasslands by encouraging natural hydrology, removing invasive species, planting native prairies and more. The partnership with the Land Trust is a win-win, as Sheldon sees it. "We both have a common mission to conserve land in Minnesota," he says. "By focusing on areas where we can collaborate, we can pool our resources and achieve more wildlife habitat protection and restoration."



MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

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Setting An Example

By Bryan Wood, Executive Director of the Audubon Center of the North Woods

Growing up under towering pines along the banks of the Mississippi River is a treat not many kids are afforded. I spent my days exploring the woods, building forts, finding owl pellets, and catching catfish off the dock. It was a glorious way to spend a childhood.

It all started in 1994 when my parents, Douglas and Kathy Wood, bought their dream home, a 1933 log cabin situated on five acres along the Mississippi north of Sartell on Pine Point. Shortly after we moved in, my parents learned that the last two undeveloped lots (totaling 12 acres) on Pine Point were for sale and would most certainly be developed. This rare pine-covered peninsula was too precious to let that happen, so they organized, held gatherings and asked neighbors to consider collectively buying the lots to preserve them forever. A pledge was made that the lots would be protected in perpetuity through the Minnesota Land Trust, and the neighbors would be able to walk through and enjoy the property. After many phone calls and house gatherings, the necessary funds were raised and the lots purchased. It was quite the



accomplishment.

Now these two lots at the tip of the peninsula remain pristine and undeveloped. Collectively, my parents have protected three prime properties of beautiful white and red pine forests that are home to gray and red fox, river otter, opossum, wild turkey, deer, great-horned owls, and many other residents. Bloodroot, hepatica, trout lilies, and Virginia waterleaf grace the forest floor every spring, and will continue to do so.

Being the Executive Director of the Audubon Center of the North Woods, a nonprofit environmental learning center near Sandstone, MN, and having children of my own has helped me realize the amazing feat my parents accomplished in preserving an important piece of wildness that I was able to enjoy growing up. They set a great example for me and for their neighbors to be responsible stewards of the land. These seventeen acres will remain wild for all generations of denizens and visitors to enjoy, whether they are furred, feathered, scaled, or clothed. It is an inspiring legacy of conservation and foresight.

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST
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MID-YEAR REVIEW | SEPTEMBER 2018

REBECCA FIELD



Partnering for the Birds