

HENNEPIN COUNTY

Preserving Legacy

Conserving your land for future generations



Summer 2022



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Thank you



Welcome to the inaugural edition of Preserving Legacy!

This publication is for Hennepin County residents who own property that is protected by a conservation easement. Included are updates on conservation programming, connections to resources, and new opportunities to get involved. We hope the information provided will help support your conservation goals, build connections to your easement and conservation community, and facilitate a deeper understanding of how conservation benefits everyone in Hennepin County.

INTRODUCTION TO NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP



Common loon

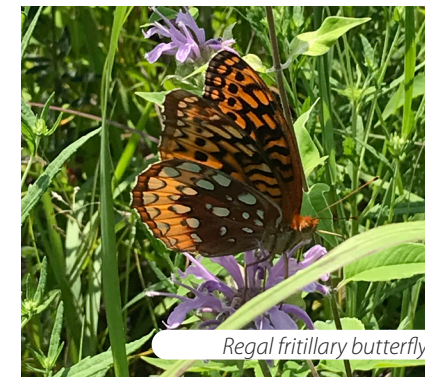
Natural resources in Hennepin County are diverse



Blanding's turtle



Cerulean warbler



Regal fritillary butterfly



Pileated woodpecker

Hennepin County is home to a wide diversity of natural areas, including unique forest ecosystems, prairies, oak savanna, wetlands, streams, and lakes.

The natural areas in the county support:

- Over 350 species of migratory and breeding birds like loons and woodpeckers
- Over 20 rare invertebrate species like the regal fritillary butterfly, rusty patched bumblebee, and several freshwater mussels
- Over 30 rare wildlife species including Blanding's turtles and cerulean warblers
- Many rare plants such as kitten tails and orchids



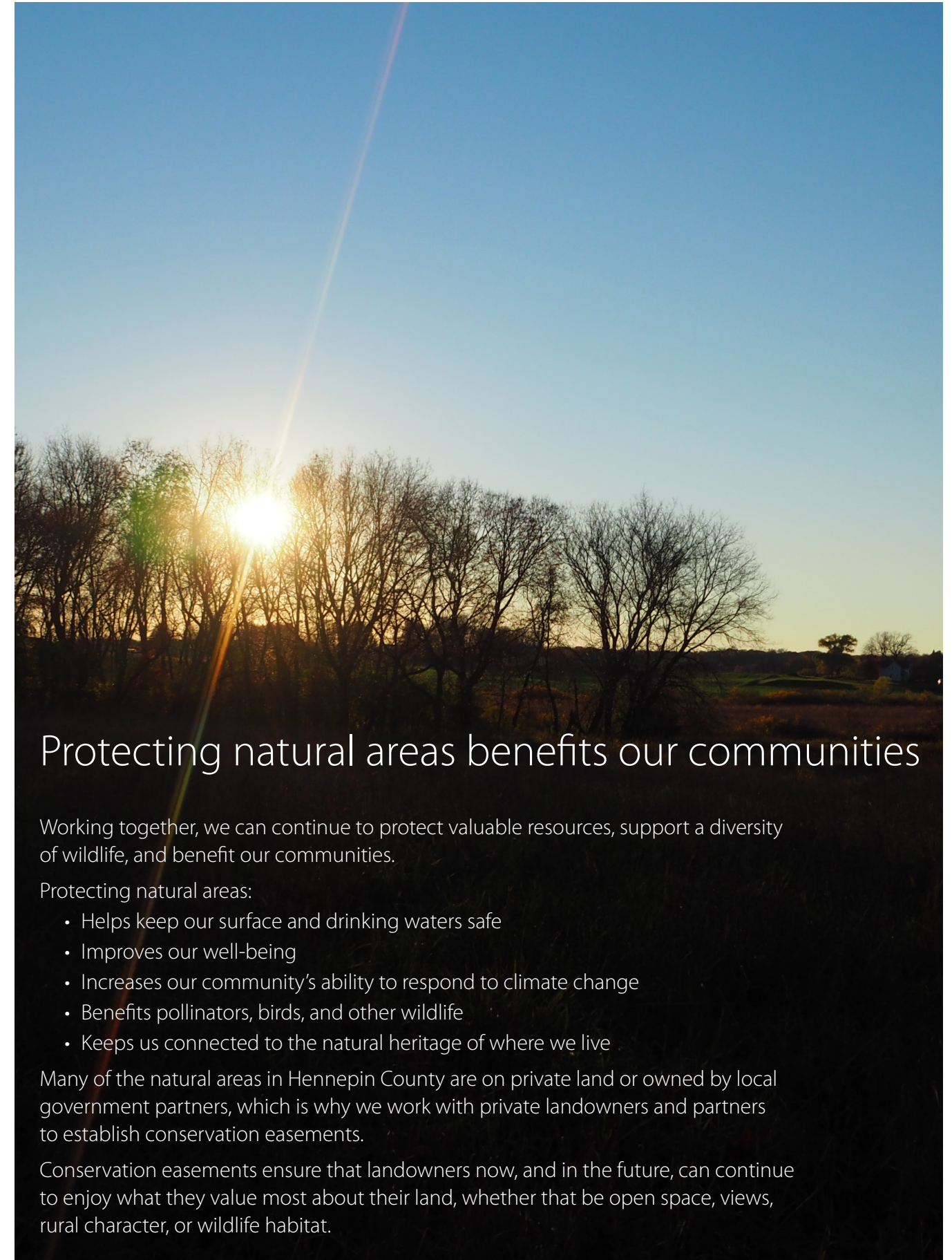
Changing land use means an urgency to protect natural spaces

Land use in Hennepin County has changed a lot over the past four decades. In the 1980s, western Hennepin County had a lot of small farms intermixed with large, wooded areas, oak savannas, prairies, and wetlands. Development pressure has led to the loss of natural areas throughout the county.

Western Hennepin County is now an area of transition with a mix of new houses on big lots, hobby farms, traditional row cropping operations, grazing land, and old farmsteads. This transition presents both a sense of urgency and opportunity. There is an opportunity to protect the last, best remaining natural areas in the county, but the next 10 to 20 years are critical for protecting these areas before the land is developed and the remnant habitats are lost forever.



Tallgrass prairie



Protecting natural areas benefits our communities

Working together, we can continue to protect valuable resources, support a diversity of wildlife, and benefit our communities.

Protecting natural areas:

- Helps keep our surface and drinking waters safe
- Improves our well-being
- Increases our community's ability to respond to climate change
- Benefits pollinators, birds, and other wildlife
- Keeps us connected to the natural heritage of where we live

Many of the natural areas in Hennepin County are on private land or owned by local government partners, which is why we work with private landowners and partners to establish conservation easements.

Conservation easements ensure that landowners now, and in the future, can continue to enjoy what they value most about their land, whether that be open space, views, rural character, or wildlife habitat.

A tradition of land protection

Hennepin County along with partners like the Minnesota Land Trust, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, cities, Three Rivers Park District, and private landowners have already established nearly 1,000 acres of conservation easements across nearly 60 different easements, protecting habitat areas forever.

Over 350 acres of these permanently protected areas were established through the Reinvest in Minnesota Reserve (RIM) easement program. RIM, which started in 1986, focuses on protecting soil, water, and wildlife by permanently protecting and restoring wetlands and surrounding habitats on sensitive or marginal agricultural lands. RIM is administered by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Hennepin County implements the program locally by conducting easement inspections and working with landowners to improve habitat.

The first RIM easements in the county were established in 1987 to protect wetland and buffer habitat. The legacy of land and water protection that started with these initial projects continues to provide benefits to the wildlife and people of Hennepin County. The landowners who chose to embark on this effort are local conservation leaders. Their land is an important component of keeping Hennepin County safe and healthy for generations to come.



Stand of aspen trees

New opportunities for conservation

Hennepin County, in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust, was awarded funding to establish conservation easements through the State of Minnesota's Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment funding.

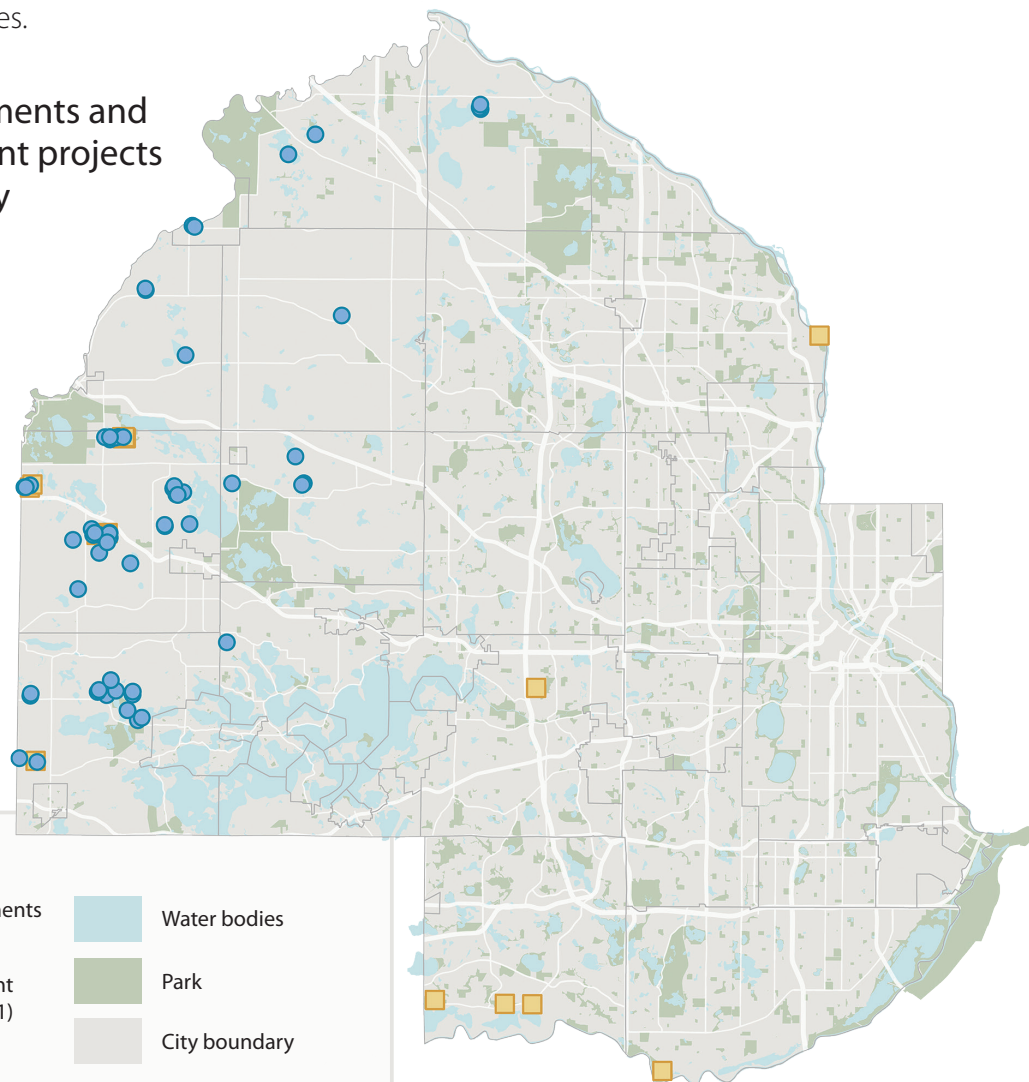
With this funding, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust can:

- Compensate landowners for establishing a conservation easement. This will help offset reduction in property value related to easement establishment. Significant tax deductions may be available to landowners who choose to forgo full compensation.
- Provide funding for habitat restoration and natural resources enhancement projects on protected properties.

If you have additional land you would like to protect with a conservation easement or have a neighbor who might be interested, we'd love to hear from you! We will also be seeking to work with landowners who have existing easements to do habitat improvement projects.

Contact Kristine Maurer at kristine.maurer@hennepin.us or 612-348-6570 to start the conversation about protecting additional land or improving habitat on your existing easement.

Conservation easements and habitat improvement projects in Hennepin County



MEET OUR TEAM

Kristine Maurer

Hennepin County Senior Conservation and Natural Resource Ecologist

Kristine.Maurer@hennepin.us



Kristine manages the Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program and helps landowners and partners meet their conservation goals. She holds Master's degrees

in natural resource ecology and environmental science from Iowa State University. Kristine has worked in the natural resource field for eight years, and her work has taken her to Iowa, Texas, Oklahoma, California, and across Minnesota. Kristine first fell in love with ecology as a kid while catching butterflies and canoeing in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. She loves aquatic plants and insects, bogs, and spring ephemerals.

Nicole Witzel

Hennepin County Wildlife Biologist

Nicole.Witzel@hennepin.us



Nicole has always loved wildlife, starting with the frogs, turtles, snakes, and ducks in the pond in her parent's backyard in Anoka County. Her passion for wildlife and conservation resulted

in three majors and a Master's degree from Tennessee State University as well as several state and federal wildlife-based internships. Though she is well-versed in all wildlife, reptiles and amphibians remain her favorites, with birds as a close second. Nicole will be visiting conservation easement landowners throughout the summer to find out what's living on your properties.

Matt Stasica

Hennepin County Land Conservationist and County Agricultural Inspector

Matthew.Stasica@hennepin.us

Matt specializes in restoring and enhancing wetlands, managing and improving prairie habitats and oak savannas, and working with landowners to accomplish other restoration and habitat enhancement goals. He also works to control the spread of plants that pose risks to human health, the economy, and habitats. Matt completed his Master's degree at North Dakota State University and has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minnesota Waterfowl Association, and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

Kristina Geiger

Minnesota Land Trust Associate Director of Land Protection

Kgeiger@mnland.org



Kristina has worked with the Minnesota Land Trust for nine years and is a valued partner in conservation programming in Hennepin County. She works with landowners

to navigate the journey to conservation easement establishment and works across the Twin Cities to protect important habitat.

At right: reforestation at conservation easement in Independence

CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROJECT FEATURES

"It feels good to know you've contributed to protecting nature in perpetuity," says Joseph, a landowner from Independence, on the process of establishing a conservation easement. "I have a general interest in wildlife, and if I have an opportunity to give back like this, it's a win-win for all of us."



Conservation easement project feature: Protected habitat corridor in Independence

This 13-acre conservation easement contains old-growth maple-basswood forest, a tamarack bog, wetlands, and grasslands. These types of habitat are important to species in greatest need of protection, including monarchs and other unique wildlife.



Prairie restoration cover crop

Easement establishment completes a protected corridor

This conservation easement in Independence lies just east of Lake Rebecca Park Reserve in an area rich with lakes and wetlands. The 13-acre easement, established in 2018, completed a corridor of protected habitat between Lake Rebecca Regional Park and Lake Sarah.

This corridor includes six separate easements covering 38 acres established one-by-one over the last 30 years. This series of adjacent easements demonstrates a long-term commitment, with the help of private landowners, to build habitat complexes and create connectivity.

Restoring forest and prairie habitat

After the easement was established, 1,200 trees were planted on three and a half acres through a reforestation project. In addition, two acres of former farm field was planted with native flowers and grasses to restore upland tallgrass prairie.

The prairie and forest restoration will provide improved habitat for pollinators, birds, and mammals as well as intercept nearly 2.5 million gallons of rainfall annually.

The reforestation was completed in partnership with the landowner, Hennepin County, Three Rivers Park District, and the Conservation Corps of Minnesota.

A time-lapse video of the reforestation project is available to watch at hennepin.us/land-protection.



New growth at reforestation project

Conservation easement project feature: Little Long Lake area

Little Long Lake in Minnetrista consistently has the best water quality in the metro area. Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust have been working with landowners to protect and restore habitats adjacent to Little Long Lake to ensure the lake remains ideal for fishing and swimming forever.

The easement projects completed and in progress connect habitat between Little Long Lake and Dutch Lake and are also located adjacent to park areas owned by Three River Park District and the Boy's and Girl's Club Voyager Camp. These protected areas encompass legacy big woods, sedge meadows, ephemeral streams, forest wetlands, tamarack bogs and fens, and striking topography. These areas are vitally important to migratory songbirds, bats, and amphibians.



Many of the easement projects in this corridor would not have happened if not for the initiative of a core group of neighbors who came together with county staff to establish several conservation easements in this important wildlife corridor.

Conservation easement project feature: Minnesota and Mississippi River Valley

Hennepin County, the City of Eden Prairie, the Metropolitan Airports Commission, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been partnering to improve habitat in three zones along the Minnesota River Valley corridor. These three zones are nestled within a large, intact habitat corridor encompassing the last remaining native bluff prairie in Hennepin County. This corridor includes several City of Eden Prairie conservation areas and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Partners have worked together to remove woody invasive species, conduct prescribed burns, collaborate on seed collection and storage, and try creative solutions to improve soil health. This work has led to improved habitat for many rare species of plants and wildlife, like kitten tails and the federally endangered rusty patched bumblebee.



PLANT HIGHLIGHTS

In this section, we feature a native plant you'd want to cultivate and non-native plant you should focus on avoiding or eliminating. Ensuring your land supports a diversity of native plant species will help attract native wildlife to your property.

✓ Native: Cup plant

Preferred habitat: The cup plant is native to prairies and wet margins throughout the eastern part of the United States and Canada. The cup plant prefers wet or moist soils, though it is somewhat drought resistant.

Description: Cup plants have lance-shaped leaves with pointed tips, a serrated edge, and a rough surface texture. The most distinctive feature and namesake of the plant comes from the large, stiff leaves that merge together around the stem, forming a cup that can hold rainwater. The yellow petals of the flowers form a ray around brown stamens, like a small sunflower. These plants grow to seven feet tall and five feet wide.

Spread: This plant is popular in restoration seed mixes and is common in native gardens. It propagates from seed and spreads readily through rhizomes.

Ecological benefit: The cup plant provides important ecological benefits. Its cupped leaves provide a water source for birds like hummingbirds, insects, and amphibians. The hollow stems provide perches for birds and winter shelter for many species of native bees. The flowers are a good source of pollen and nectar for butterflies, bees, and flies. It creates soil conditions that are beneficial for other plants and holds topsoil in place with its deep network of roots and rhizomes.

Management options: If you already have cup plants and want more, help them spread by collecting mature seeds from the seed head in September and October and scattering them in the fall or early spring. Send us an email if you have questions about habitat improvement options on your conservation easement or if you'd like to see more native plants like the incredible cup plant.



✗ Non-native: Japanese barberry

Preferred habitat: This plant is found along the edges of forests, along roads, and in old fields. It is highly adaptable and deer resistant, making it very successful as an invasive species.

Description: Japanese barberry is a thorny shrub that can grow to be six feet tall or more. Leaves are up to one inch long and shaped like a tiny paddle. The leaves can range in color from green to purple during the summer, becoming orange in the fall. The flowers of this plant are yellow and occur in clusters. The berries are egg-shaped and vibrant red, ripening in the middle of summer and often persisting through the winter.

Origin: Japan and eastern Asia

Spread: This shrub was introduced for landscaping due to the interesting color of its leaves and its showy red berries. Birds, which eat the fruit, can spread it to new areas. It can also spread by clonal shoots that readily resprout when cut. They grow vigorously, with seedlings able to reach a height of up to four feet within a year.

Ecological threat: This plant is particularly harmful because it changes soil chemistry to make the area more favorable for other barberry plants and less appealing for native plants. The spines of the barberry also prevent deer browsing. A severe invasion of these plants can create dense, thorny thickets that are difficult to move through and block the sun from native species.

Management options: Japanese barberry is a Restricted Noxious Weed. If you see Japanese barberry on your property or have questions about managing or removing this noxious weed, please contact Matt Stasica, Land Conservationist and County Agricultural Inspector with Hennepin County, at Matthew.Stasica@hennepin.us.

Legal status: Restricted

Propagation and sale of the following cultivars are prohibited in Minnesota. Transportation is only allowed when in compliance with Minnesota Statute 18.82. Although Restricted Noxious Weeds are not required to be controlled or eradicated by law, landowners are strongly encouraged to manage these invasive plants on their properties in order to reduce spread.



GET INVOLVED

Biological monitoring



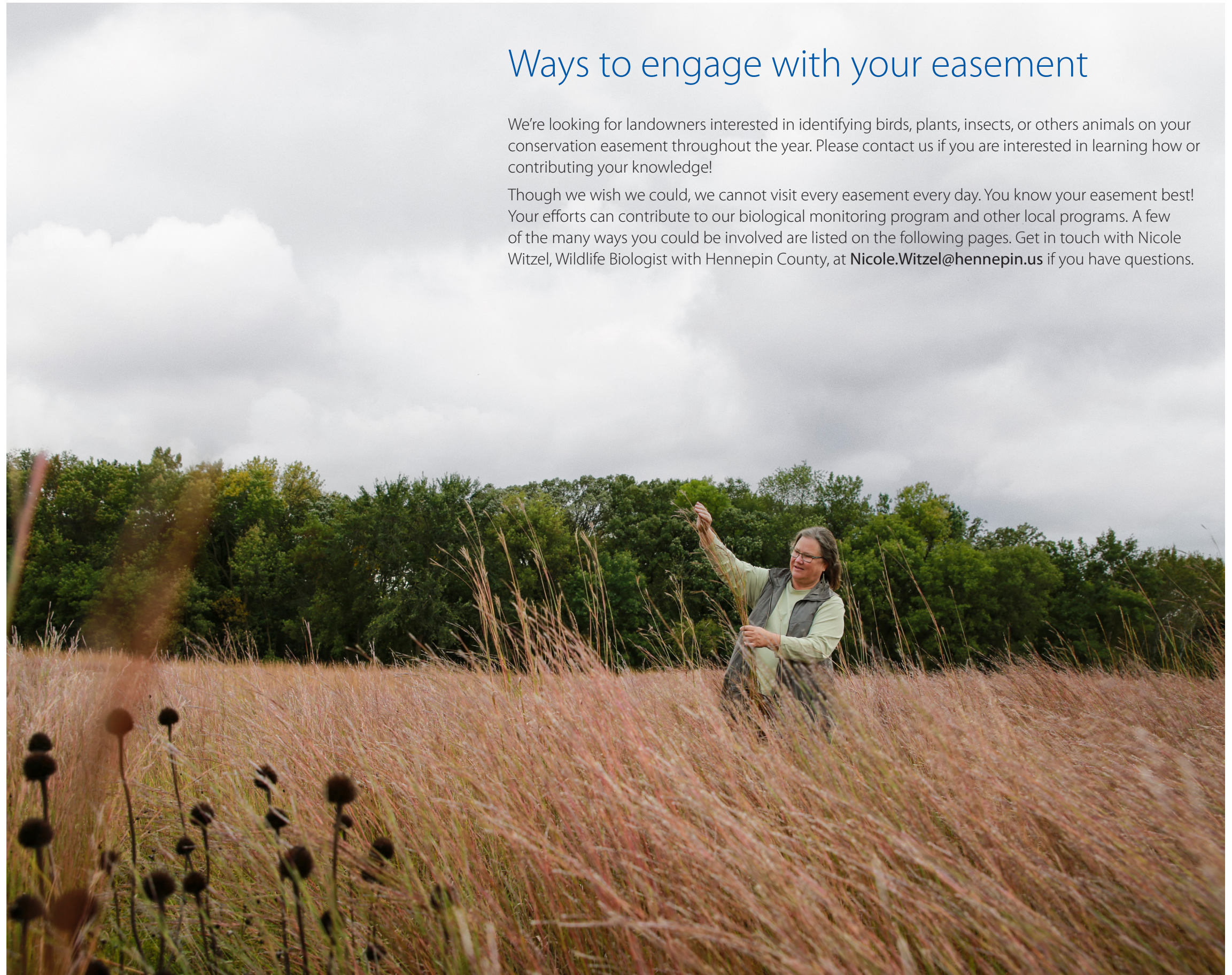
Hennepin County has been hard at work protecting habitat for 40 years, and now we want to know who's been using it! This year, we're testing out a monitoring program designed to help us understand the plants and critters that call your easements home. By learning more, we'll be better able to:

- Identify potential habitat improvement projects and address habitat problems earlier
- Inform future priorities and resource allocation
- Evaluate the success of investments
- Contribute to local and national monitoring efforts
- Connect with you about cool and unique species using protected habitat

Ways to engage with your easement

We're looking for landowners interested in identifying birds, plants, insects, or other animals on your conservation easement throughout the year. Please contact us if you are interested in learning how or contributing your knowledge!

Though we wish we could, we cannot visit every easement every day. You know your easement best! Your efforts can contribute to our biological monitoring program and other local programs. A few of the many ways you could be involved are listed on the following pages. Get in touch with Nicole Witzel, Wildlife Biologist with Hennepin County, at Nicole.Witzel@hennepin.us if you have questions.





Eastern red bat



Common yellowthroat



Bat house



Bat and bird houses

Support and report wildlife

Bird, owl, and bat houses

Provide a home for songbirds, owls, and bats on your property! Many of our easement landowners are doing an excellent job keeping nesting and foraging habitat, such as dead trees, brush piles, and logs, on their property. However, high-quality habitat and nesting sites are limited in the county, and our winged friends could use a helping hand!

- Make your own houses: Contact us for tips and plans on how to make the perfect home for birds or bats.
- Get a house for free: The county has a variety of bird and bat houses available to conservation easement holders at no cost. Simply contact us with your interest.
- Share what you see: Please keep us posted on what animals you see using the houses so that we can keep track of both species and nest success.

Trail cameras

Do you have trail cameras on your property? If you do and you capture some fun images of wildlife, we would be delighted to see them! As you go through your photos, save any that have wildlife in them and send them our way. We'll use these images to track wildlife occurrences as part of our biological monitoring program.

Don't have a trail camera but want to participate? Let us know! We are exploring the opportunity for easement landowners to borrow trail cameras from the county to assist with biological monitoring.

Biomonitoring email

You are always welcome to email photos of wildlife and descriptions to Nicole Witzel, Wildlife Biologist with Hennepin County, at Nicole.Witzel@hennepin.us. Animals, plants, tracks, scat, scrapes - you name it, we would love to see it! Be sure to note the date, time, and place that the photo was taken. Please also note whether we can share these photos or post them on our Hennepin County website, social media, or other conservation platforms.

Engage in community monitoring programs

Water quality monitoring

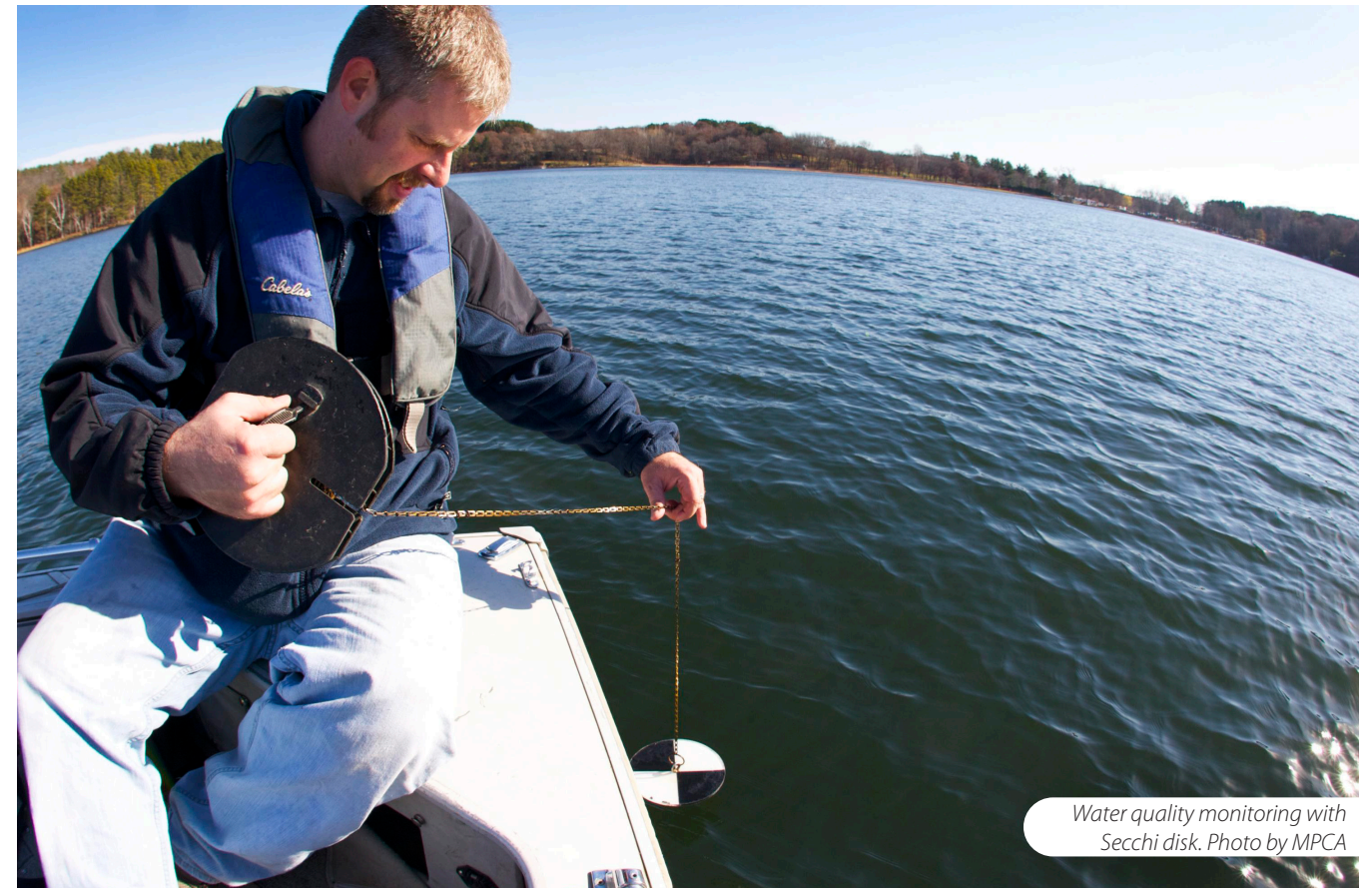
The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) manages a water quality monitoring program comprised of over 1,400 volunteers who measure the clarity of lakes and streams, which the MPCA uses to make decisions on watershed protection and restoration. No prior experience is necessary, but you do need access to a boat, canoe, or kayak for lakes. Stream monitors can access their sites from streambanks or bridge crossings. Sign up and get involved at: pca.state.mn.us/water/citizen-water-monitoring.

Monarch butterfly monitoring

Monarch Joint Venture uses volunteers to monitor monarch butterfly populations and habitat health. This program is rigorous and not for the faint of heart. Activities include surveying for milkweed, blooming plants, eggs, larvae, and adult monarchs and tracking parasitism and survival rates. Attend an online training session before you get started and find all the details and protocols at monarchjointventure.org/mjvprograms/science/immp/field-activities. Contact us so that we can help you get started!

Minnesota Master Naturalist program

Minnesota Master Naturalists are dedicated to conservation education and service within their communities. They promote awareness, understanding, and stewardship of our natural environment. If you enjoy hiking, bird watching, following tracks, or identifying wildflowers, consider becoming a Minnesota Master Naturalist! Learn more about the program and sign up for new course notifications at minnesotamasternaturalist.org.



Water quality monitoring with Secchi disk. Photo by MPCA



Monarch butterfly



Yellow-headed blackbird



Nuthatch



Mink

Join online conservation communities

For the bird lover: eBird

Do you enjoy bird watching? eBird is the best website for keeping track of your lists of species, and it can also help us keep track of what species are spending time in Hennepin County!

eBird has the capability to make birding checklists that allow you to keep track of the birds you've seen in your area and which birds are visiting over the seasons. As restoration work is completed, do you see more diversity in bird species? A different community? To share your bird checklists with us, edit your list and share with our username. We'd love to see what you're seeing through your binoculars!



Our username on eBird is Hennepin Biomonitoring.

For the generalist: iNaturalist

iNaturalist is a nature app that helps you identify the plants and animals around you. Thousands of experts around the world aid in identification of the species you come across. Download the app to your phone or create an account online at [inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org). Simply take a photo, upload it to the app or website, and tag the photo #HennepinBiomonitoring to help document the plants and animals in the county. In the "Projects" line, enter "Hennepin Biomonitoring." This will allow us to compile all observations in one place.

After you upload your photo, it will be identified and verified by experts and added to our database.



Our account for iNaturalist is named Hennepin Biomonitoring.

To report invasive species: EDDMapS

EDDMapS is excellent for reporting invasive species, whether aquatic or terrestrial, plant or animal. Visit the [eddmaps.org](https://www.eddmaps.org) website to explore species distribution maps and discover the species affecting your area so you can keep an eye out for them on your property. If you find an invasive species or something of concern, contact Matt Stasica at Matthew.Stasica@hennepin.us.

Additional opportunities to protect your land

Hennepin County has several other programs that provide funding and technical assistance to protect natural resources, improve water quality, and restore habitats.

Natural resources grants

Grants are available to landowners for projects that preserve and restore natural areas and reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment flowing into lakes, streams, and rivers. Learn more at hennepin.us/business/conservation/funding-assistance-natural-resources-projects.

Technical and financial assistance for agricultural and rural landowners

County staff provide technical and financial assistance for residents who wish to implement practices that reduce or prevent soil erosion and runoff. This includes initial site visits, cost-share

assistance for projects, and low-interest loans for major expenses such as equipment purchases, facility construction, or septic upgrades.

For more information, contact Kevin Ellis at Kevin.Ellis@hennepin.us or 612-382-3956.

Hennepin County spring tree sale

Each spring, Hennepin County sells seedling trees to property owners to restore and improve woodland areas and increase wildlife habitat.

The bareroot trees range in size from 6 inches to 2 feet tall. Trees can create shelterbelts, provide visual screens, and offer shade that increases home energy efficiency. Trees also protect water quality, prevent soil erosion, and improve wildlife habitat.

Learn more at hennepin.us/trees.



THANK YOU

Thank you for permanently protecting your land and preserving what you value. By being a steward of a conservation easement, you are leaving a legacy for future generations to enjoy. Your land has tremendous value to wildlife, offering critical habitat for birds, pollinators, and mammals and supporting a healthy environment with clean air and water. We know your land holds special meaning, so we extend our deepest thanks to you for keeping it protected for generations to come.



Contact us

Please reach out if you have any questions about this publication.

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hennepin.us/land-protection