

HENNEPIN COUNTY

Preserving Legacy

Conserving your land for future generations

Fall 2024



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Thank you



Welcome to the second edition of Preserving Legacy!

This publication is for Hennepin County residents who own property protected by a conservation easement. Included are updates on conservation programming, connections to resources, and new opportunities to get involved.

Our aim is to support your conservation goals, strengthen your connection to your easement and the conservation community, and enhance your understanding of how conservation efforts benefit everyone in Hennepin County.

LAND AND WATER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



The habitat we restore and protect through our work is located in the original home of Indigenous Peoples who have stewarded, hunted, fished, harvested, and held ceremonies in partnership with this land for thousands of years.

As part of our commitment to address the legacy of genocide and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples, Hennepin County acknowledges that the magnificent land and vibrant waterways from which our institutions benefit are located upon the cultural, spiritual, and indigenous homeland of the Dakota Oyate. We acknowledge the ancient Dakota name Mnisota Mokoce, or the Land of Misty Waters, as a term of endearment descriptive of the innumerable lakes and rivers within their homeland. In this realm, the Dakota evolved as a sovereign nation; a sovereignty that predates that of the United States and remains today.

Today, Hennepin County institutions continue to benefit from unfavorable treaties, military campaigns, and settler colonialism, which encouraged white newcomers to settle and colonize Dakota territory.

Hennepin County acknowledges the capacity for today's county institutions to work more closely and reparatively with the Dakota people, whose homeland we occupy; the Ojibwe and HoChunk peoples, whose traditional homelands border the Dakota homeland in northern and southern Minnesota; and all First Nation Peoples who currently live in or interact and associate with the county in a broader context. This reparative work includes creating transformative partnerships and alliances, convening conversations to explore new possibilities, increasing engagement and consultation, organizing events and workshops on Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues, and looking at the potential for developing land and water-based projects together.

INTRODUCTION TO CONSERVATION



Natural resources in Hennepin County are diverse

Hennepin County boasts a remarkable variety of natural resources, including unique forest ecosystems, prairies, oak savannas, wetlands, streams, and lakes.

These natural areas, including your conservation easement, support:

- Populations of the endangered rusty-patched bumble bee, the Minnesota state bee
- Over 120 species of greatest conservation need, including 55 species that are federally or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern
- Over 350 species of migratory and breeding birds such as common loons and pileated woodpeckers
- Over 20 rare invertebrate species such as the regal fritillary butterfly 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



Eastern tailed-blue butterfly



Arrowhead flower



Rusty-patched bumble bee



Painted turtle



Giant swallowtail



American toad



American goldfinch

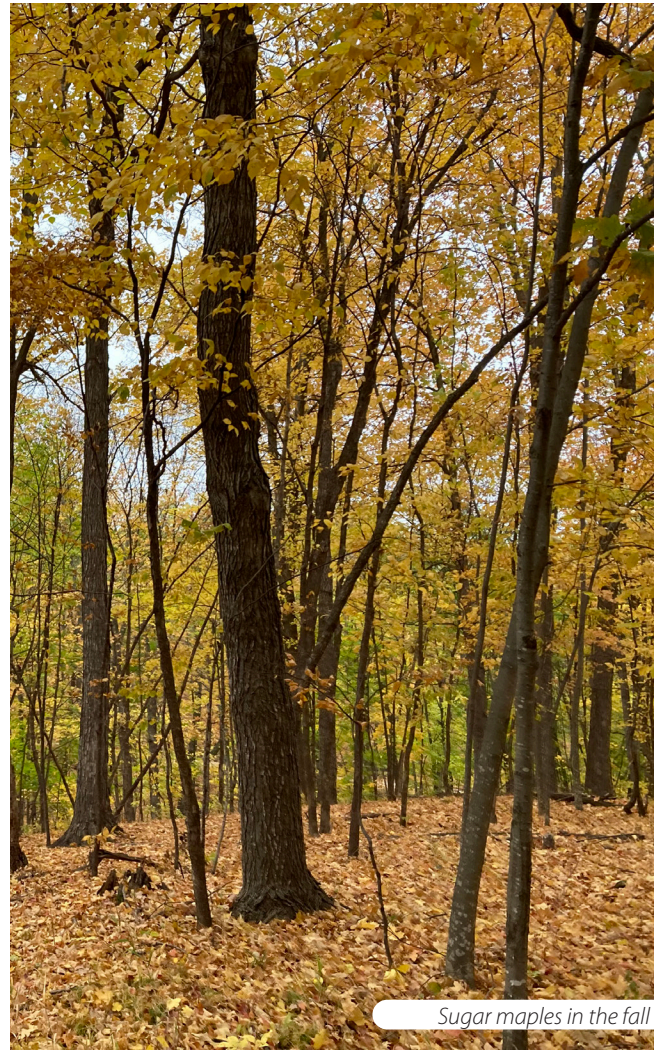


Bee balm

Changing land use means an urgency to protect natural spaces

Over the past four decades, land use has transformed significantly. In the 1980s, western Hennepin County was characterized by small farms amidst large, wooded areas, oak savannas, prairies, and wetlands. However, development pressure has led to the loss of many of these natural areas throughout the county. As the population around the Twin Cities continues to grow, it is critical to preserve habitat in this ecologically important region for local wildlife and migrating birds.

Hennepin County is committed to planting 1 million trees by 2030 and acquiring 6,000 acres of conservation easements by 2040. Over the last five years, we have planted more than 16,500 trees on conservation easements in collaboration with partners across the county and improved habitat on nearly 320 acres of land. While we have made significant strides toward our ambitious land protection goals, there is still more work to do.



Sugar maples in the fall



Protecting natural areas benefits our communities

You are part of a community safeguarding valuable resources, supporting diverse wildlife, and enhancing our community's well-being.

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.

Your commitment to protecting your land makes a difference!



Tree planting on a conservation easement in Independence

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 over 1,100 acres of conservation easements across 60 different easements. We are working with landowners across Hennepin County to establish over 240 more acres in the next year.

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. Hennepin County implements this Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources 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.

Over the past five years, Hennepin County has greatly expanded and accelerated the work of establishing conservation easements by partnering with a nonprofit organization, the Minnesota Land Trust, to secure funding through the state's Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Since 2018, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust have been awarded over \$9.3 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, making possible the addition of more than 360 acres of conservation easements as well as funding restoration projects on protected land.

All of the land protected in Hennepin County – from the first RIM easements in the 1980s to the easements established in 2024 – contribute to keeping Hennepin County safe and healthy for generations to come.



Virginia spring beauty

New opportunities for conservation

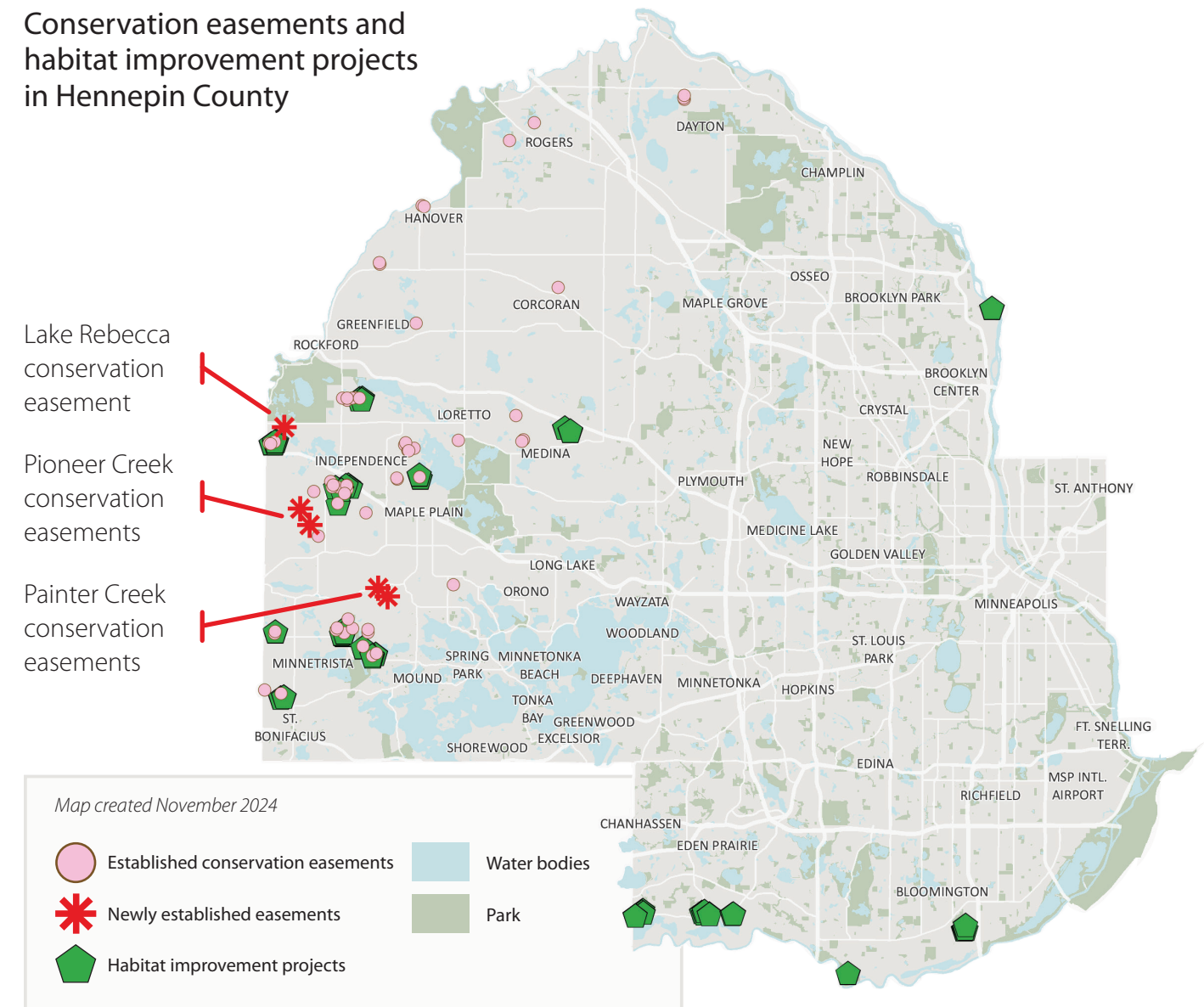
With the state funding, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust can:

- Compensate landowners for establishing conservation easements, helping to offset any reduction in property value. Significant tax deductions may also be available to those 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 know a neighbor who might be interested, we'd love to hear from you! We are also seeking to work with landowners who have existing easements on habitat improvement projects.

Contact Severin Seifert at severin.seifert@hennepin.us or 612-494-3234 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 Land and Water Supervisor
Kristine.Maurer@hennepin.us

Kristine manages the Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program and helps landowners and partners meet their conservation goals. She holds Masters' 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 Masters 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 visits 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
Matt.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 Masters 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.



Tiara Burton

Hennepin County Environmentalist
Tiara.Burton@hennepin.us

Tiara helps monitor for wildlife on protected easements and natural areas, supports habitat improvement activities, and is involved in outreach and education. She has a degree from Boston University in Biology with a focus on Ecology and Conservation and has a background in field research in ecology and prescribed fire, as well as an environmental education background in marine science and experiential learning.



Severin Seifert

Hennepin County Land Conservationist
Severin.Seifert@hennepin.us

Severin is a native ecosystem restorationist who specializes in prairie installation and management. With over five years of experience managing native ecosystems, Severin has installed and maintained hundreds of native plant communities throughout Minnesota. Currently, Severin works with landowners in Hennepin County to permanently protect and restore natural areas through establishing conservation easements.



Carly Aulicky

Minnesota Land Trust Conservation Program Manager
Caulicky@mnland.org

Carly Aulicky is a Conservation Program Manager with the Minnesota Land Trust, where she helps landowners with conservation easements and works to preserve natural areas in the Twin Cities. Prior to joining the Minnesota Land Trust, Carly studied avian ecology in the tropics of Costa Rica and the prairies of Kansas and then worked in prairie conservation in Texas. In her free time, Carly enjoys wildlife photography and exploring nature at the speed of botany with her spouse and dog.



Lydia Fermanich

Minnesota Land Trust Land Protection Coordinator
lfermanich@mnland.org

Lydia works with landowners to protect important natural habitats and open space in the Twin Cities. Prior to joining the Minnesota Land Trust, she worked at nonprofits focused on sustainable agriculture and energy efficiency. When not working, you can find Lydia exploring new biking and cross-country ski trails around Minnesota or binge-watching the British game show Taskmaster.

HABITAT HIGHLIGHTS



Northern leopard frog

Wetlands

One of the most unique and critical ecosystems in Minnesota are wetlands. Despite their name, wetlands can vary from wet to dry. Because of these fluctuations in moisture, wetlands have unique vegetation and functions.



What makes a wetland?

Kidneys for the land

Wetlands are incredible filters! They help keep our recreational lakes swimmable and our drinking water clean. As surface and groundwater flow through wetlands, plants and other features of the wetland help to settle and absorb pollutants before they reach streams, rivers, and lakes.

Funky soils and adaptable plants

Wetland soils have special features only found in areas that are frequently saturated with water. Wetland soils can exhibit yellow, red, or orange

coloring and can even be green or blue due to changes in water levels. Wetland plants are hydrophytic, meaning they can survive in both wet and dry soils. Some plants have developed adaptations, like hollow stems that act like a straw to get oxygen.

Is it wet or dry?

Some wetlands are temporary and only saturated with water for short periods of time. Other wetlands may be inundated with water for most or all the year. Can you find the wetland in the photo above?

Why are wetlands important?

Wetlands benefit both the surrounding land and people, including:

- Preventing flooding by serving as a reservoir for excess stormwater runoff
- Replenishing and purifying groundwater reserves
- Fostering rich biodiversity and pollinator habitat
- Preventing erosion by stabilizing shorelines
- Offering recreational opportunities such as birding, paddling, and wildlife viewing

Wetlands are highly valued ecosystems that are federally protected in Minnesota by the 1991 Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). Hennepin County enforces this legislation locally by preventing a net loss of wetlands, regulating their drainage or filling, and mandating the replacement of any lost wetlands. Wetlands are one of the critical habitats preserved through Hennepin County's work to establish 6,000 acres of conservation easements.

How have changing rain patterns affected wetland hydrology?

Minnesota is experiencing changes in precipitation patterns, timing, and amounts each year. Initially, 2024 was on track to be Minnesota's wettest year since 1895. However, drought conditions have persisted across the state through the fall.

In contrast, the past several summers have seen periods of drought, with 2021 marking Minnesota's most severe drought in over 30 years. While drought conditions can strain lakes and streams, there is evidence that wetlands benefit from periods of occasional dryness.

When sediments that are normally saturated with water are exposed to air, oxygen is reintroduced to the soil. This helps break down organic matter, release nutrients, and allow seeds that have lain dormant in the soil to germinate.

While wetlands are resilient to many environmental changes such as changing precipitation, human disturbance, and soil erosion, there is still much to be learned about the long-term impact a changing climate will have on our wetlands.

County staff work with partners and private landowners to restore these systems. So far, we have restored over 80 acres of wetland through the Habitat Conservation Program. Connect with our team if you want to know more about wetlands and opportunities for restoration.

Maple-basswood forests

Maple-basswood forests are common in southeastern and south-central Minnesota, though their development in this region is relatively recent. These forests help keep our air and water clean and provide essential habitat for migratory and nesting songbirds like warblers, amphibians like blue spotted salamanders, and mammals like bats and foxes.

Thousands of years ago, this area of Minnesota was dominated by prairies that experienced frequent wildfires. Some fires were naturally occurring while others were set intentionally by American Indian tribes as a way to rejuvenate the prairie. Approximately 4,000 years ago, Minnesota began experiencing a cooler and wetter climate. Fires became less frequent in this new climate, and small stands of native trees began to expand their range. This expansion of trees into former grasslands created the maple-basswood forests we see today. According to data from the original land survey in the late 1800s, maple-basswood forests covered over 153,000 acres, nearly half the area of Hennepin County.

These forests are dominated by mature trees that prevent light from reaching the forest floor. Flowers and grasses have adapted to survive in these dark conditions by growing in the early spring before the canopy trees produce leaves. Many herbaceous species found in maple-basswood forests can capture most of their yearly resources and produce seed before early June.

Tree saplings and shrubs can also be found scattered throughout the forest floor. These sub-canopy trees and shrubs persist by growing extremely slowly until a mature tree dies and light becomes available. After this happens, tree seedlings and shrubs grow quickly to take advantage of the rare opening in the canopy.

The soils of maple-basswood forests are very productive and many were clear-cut for farming. By 1988, only 6.2% of the original forest remained. Deforestation for development, invasive species like earthworms and buckthorn, and climate change continue to threaten the health and abundance of our forests.



Cutleaf toothwort



Maidenhair fern



Sugar maples

How to help forests in Hennepin County

- Watch for pest-impacted and diseased trees, including those infected by emerald ash borer and oak wilt. Impacted trees might show early leaf discoloration or holes, spots, or loss of bark. If you have questions or concerns about a tree, contact a forester at trees@hennepin.us.
- Keep firewood local to help stop the spread of pests and diseases.
- Leave dead or decaying standing or downed trees if they are not a safety hazard. These trees are important to a healthy forest and provide habitat for insects, birds, and other wildlife. Decaying trees cycle nutrients back to the soil, allow the canopy to regenerate, and serve as nurse logs for young plants.
- Help maintain native species diversity by removing non-indigenous plants like buckthorn and planting native trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses.
- Look for signs of erosion, especially on sloped areas or along trails. Areas with new scouring or sedimentation can be early signs of erosion. Avoid using heavy equipment and ATVs on wet soils.
- Prevent the spread of earthworms by not dumping bait in the woods or shoreline. Earthworms disrupt forest soil and leaf litter that is necessary to support spring flowers and young trees. There are no native earthworms in Minnesota.
- Take a tour of your woods with a Hennepin County naturalist to learn more about your special place!

We're here to help! Hennepin County staff can help answer questions about trees and forests, improve plant diversity, address erosion issues, and work with you to develop a woodland stewardship or management plan.

PROJECT FEATURES



Bloomington Central Park habitat restoration

Hennepin County and the City of Bloomington took advantage of the mild winter of 2023 to 2024 to start a restoration and enhancement project at the city's Central Park. Despite its location in the heart of a large suburb, the park has a variety of ecosystems, including a wet meadow, dry oak savannas, and Nine Mile Creek. The project will enhance over 7 acres of forest and about 3.5 acres of oak savanna.

The first step in the project was removing invasive or diseased trees and plants. This included removing buckthorn, honeysuckle, and green ash over the winter and treating for garlic mustard in the spring. Additional treatment to prevent regrowth of buckthorn or honeysuckle is planned for this fall. Removing the ash trees infested with emerald ash borer provided an opportunity to reforest the park with a greater diversity of tree species. The city and county are developing a planting plan for spring 2025. Prior to the planting next year, the park was seeded with a grass and cover crop seed mix to provide ground cover during the 2024 growing season.

Once the reforestation is complete, ongoing maintenance and management will protect these initial investments and help shape this park into a resilient ecosystem.

If you are interested in working with the county to improve your habitat, contact Matt Stasica at matt.stasica@hennepin.us or 612-348-4659 to start the conversation.



Painter Creek conservation easements

Conservation easements established by Hennepin County in 2024 will permanently protect nearly 60 acres of critical habitat from development and habitat degradation.

The property, located near Minnetrista in western Hennepin County, boasts a diversity of native plant communities and wildlife habitat, including an upland oak forest, grassland with an intermittent stream, and wetlands. The easement is also home to a variety of native wildlife, including several species of greatest conservation need such as sedge wrens and northern harriers.

This conservation easement adds to the extensive matrix of over 4,100 acres of permanently protected areas already established in western Hennepin County. The landowners are excited to enhance the conservation value of the protected property by improving maple-basswood forest communities, removing invasive species like buckthorn and reed canary grass, and enhancing the wetlands.



Sedge wren



Cattails and willows



Leafcutter bee on swamp milkweed



“Creating a conservation easement on our property has allowed us to preserve the natural surroundings while still being able to enjoy the benefits of land ownership,” says Shane, the landowner of the Painter Creek conservation easements. “It has been our lifelong dream to purchase acreage in the countryside, establish our forever home, and preserve the beautiful surroundings forever. We are proud to know that future generations will be able to benefit from our actions.”

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: Wild bergamot ("bee balm")**

Preferred habitat: Wild bergamot is native to sunny, dry fields and prairies throughout the United States. It prefers moderately moist or wet soils but is tolerant to droughts.

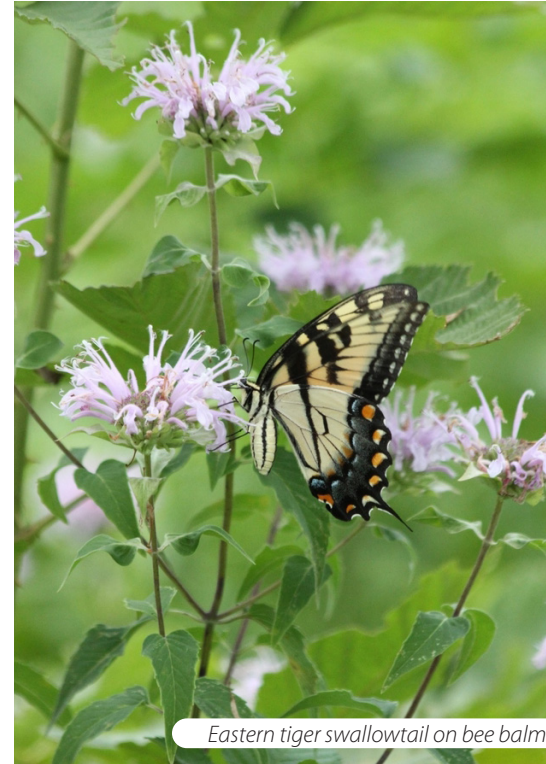
Description: The most distinctive part of wild bergamot is its cluster of purple or pink tubular flowers with tufts of white hairs on the tips. The petals are held in place by calyxes that are also tubular. Wild bergamot has toothed leaves with a hairy underside and opposite attachment. The stems are square, tend to be a reddish-brown color, and can have various amounts of tiny hairs traveling up the stem. Another notable feature: wild bergamot is in the mint family, so it has an incredibly aromatic minty or oregano-like smell.

Spread: Wild bergamot is a wonderful addition to gardens. It establishes reliably through seed and spreads underground through rhizomes, tending to form circular clumps as it spreads.

Ecological benefit: Wild bergamot, also known as bee balm, is a great source of seed for songbirds and nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, native flies, and hummingbirds. Its roots can help stabilize shorelines and streambanks. It also has many uses for people, including to make tea, treat respiratory illnesses and skin infections, and as an ingredient in mouthwash. Its fragrant leaves can be used similarly to oregano, and its oils are good for lotions and soaps. With such versatility, it's no wonder this plant is a favorite among gardeners!

Management options: This species reliably starts from seeds, so is relatively easy to establish. It blooms from June to August, with the seed heads ripening about two months after blooming. Once the flowerhead turns dark brown, the smooth brown seeds are ready for harvesting.

If you have any questions about planting this species on your property or if you'd like more information about beneficial native plants, email Tiara.Burton@hennepin.us.



✗ **Non-Indigenous: Crown vetch**

Origin: Crown vetch is native to central and eastern Europe. It was introduced to the United States as a groundcover, cover crop, and slope stabilizer. It is now found across the United States, including in most counties in Minnesota.

Preferred habitat: Crown vetch prefers prairies, fields, woodland edges, ditches, and roadsides that are open with full sun. It is drought tolerant and can thrive in a variety of soil types, making it a highly adaptable, non-native plant.

Description: Crown vetch is a legume, meaning it belongs to the same family as clovers and peas. It has long, trailing stems that can be fibrous and difficult to break. The leaves are dark green with 15 to 25 pairs of oval-shaped leaflets on each leaf segment. The flowers resemble crowns, ranging from white to purple, and form clusters at the ends of the leaf axils. Crown vetch blooms from May to August, with dry, brown seed pods forming after they bloom. When touched, these seed pods break into segments with a seed in each segment. When it is dense, the plant can look like a tangled mat on top of other vegetation.

Spread: Crown vetch spreads through its seeds, which it produces and scatters prolifically. It also has rhizomes, which are roots that spread underground and can sprout new plants. This makes it difficult to get rid of.

Ecological threat: Crown vetch outcompetes and crowds out, shades out, or smothers other vegetation by forming dense mats.

Management options: Once established, crown vetch is difficult to control. For successful removal, infestation sites need to be monitored for several years and treated multiple times. Mowing before seeds are formed and dispersed can be an effective way to slow the spread. This must be done regularly for multiple years and in addition to another control method. Large infestations can be controlled through spot-spraying with a foliar herbicide application.

Legal status: Restricted

Propagation and sale of restricted plants 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.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING

Using biological monitoring to track ecosystem health

Biological monitoring evaluates the health of ecosystems by studying animals and plants within those environments. By monitoring how plant and animal communities change over time, we can measure our successes and tailor conservation management efforts to create healthier ecosystems that are home to a diversity of species and resilient to climate change.

In 2022, the county started biological monitoring efforts on seven county properties and conservation easements. The initial year of data collection was vital to inventorying the species present in the county and establishing a baseline of which species are using permanently protected lands. This data will be used to inform our habitat restoration and management decisions in the future.

Through our biological monitoring program, we are better able to:

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



Annual monitoring reveals positive impacts of habitat improvement projects

This year through our monitoring efforts we observed a species of orchid coming back into forest areas cleared of invasive buckthorn. It is exciting to see the forest recovering and native seeds regenerating again!



What plants and animals call Hennepin County home?

Since biological monitoring began in 2022, Hennepin County staff have observed and documented 626 total species living in the county. This includes birds, reptiles, amphibians, small and large mammals, butterflies, dragonflies, pollinators, and plants, specifically:

- 376 species of plants
- 7 species of amphibian
- 11 species of bees
- 129 species of birds
- 32 species of butterfly
- 1 species of crayfish
- 37 species of dragonflies
- 10 species of fish
- 19 species of mammals
- 4 species of reptiles

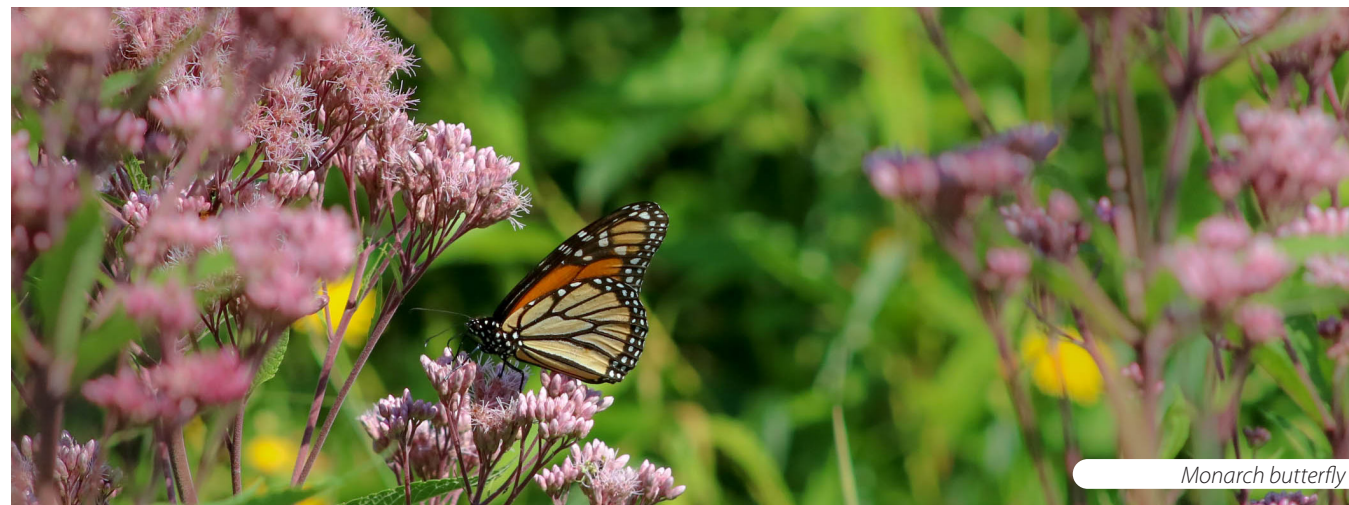
Several of the species observed, such as bobolinks and black-billed cuckoos, have been identified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as rare or declining in population. Staff also found the endangered Minnesota state bee, the rusty-patched bumble bee! Finding rare and endangered animals and plants on permanently protected land in the county is a huge success story for our conservation efforts.



Common snapping turtle



Golden-crowned kinglet



Monarch butterfly

GET INVOLVED



Ways to engage with your easement

Though we wish we could, we cannot visit every easement every day. Plus, you know your easement best! Your efforts can contribute to our biological monitoring program and other local programs.

We're looking for landowners interested in identifying birds, plants, insects, or other animals on your conservation easement throughout the year. A few of the many ways you could be involved are listed on the following pages.

Please contact Nicole Witzel, Hennepin County wildlife biologist, at Nicole.Witzel@hennepin.us if you have questions or are interested in contributing your knowledge!



Big brown bat under a wood violet



White-breasted nuthatch



Tiara Burton with a bat house



Nicole Witzel with a wood duck house, a nuthatch house, a screech owl house, and a bat house

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. Contact us to learn more.
- Share what you see: Let us know what animals you see using the houses so we can keep track of both species and nest success.

Trail cameras

Do you have trail cameras on your property? We would be delighted to see any fun or interesting images of wildlife you capture! 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 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

Amphibian and reptile survey

The amphibian and reptile survey of Minnesota was created to increase community participation in amphibian and reptile data collection, document turtle-road crossing and mortality hotspots especially for Blanding's turtles and wood turtles, and make data available to conservation and research organizations. Learn more and download the mobile app at mnherps.com.

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/imp/fieldactivities. Contact us so that we can help you get started!

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.



Blue-spotted salamander



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 of making 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.

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 eddmeps.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 conserve 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/conservation-funding.

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.

Lawns to Legumes

If you are interested in doing more for pollinators, especially in areas outside of your easement boundary, consider applying for Lawns to Legumes funding. This program helps landowners improve habitat for bees and other pollinators by providing financial assistance up to \$400 to install rain gardens and native plantings. Lawns to Legumes typically accepts applications twice per year. Learn more and apply at bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes.



Rusty-patched bumble bee

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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