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Contact information:

Walter Abramson
Director of Development & Communications
Minnesota Land Trust
1-651-647-9590
wabramson@mnland.org



Legacy Amendment funds help protect island in Burntside Lake near Ely

September 16, 2011 -- Duluth, Minnesota – The Minnesota Land Trust announced today that it has permanently protected a highly visible and well-known island in Burntside Lake near Ely, Minnesota. The conservation project was made possible by combining a donated conservation easement from the island’s owners along with funds provided by the Outdoor Heritage Fund, created when Minnesota voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008.

“I want people to be able to enjoy the lake as I have”, said landowner Dr. Carl Smith, who has owned the island since 1978. “I grew up in New York City but had many great outdoor experiences in the Adirondacks and in Maine. After settling in St. Louis where my wife and I raised our family, we wanted to find a summer place where we could have similar experiences to the ones I had in Maine – and northern Minnesota was a lot closer to Missouri than Maine”.

Anglers have been casting their lures along the rocky shoreline of Miller Island for generations. A local boat tour stops at one end of the island to let visitors admire a pair of eagles that return each year to nest in a tall pine. “I think the island should be named ‘Eagle Island’” says Smith, adding “Most people know this as the island with the eagles”. The conservation easement guarantees that the rocky shoreline will remain healthy for fish and the island’s forested interior will remain wild.

According to Kris Larson, executive director of the non-profit Minnesota Land Trust, “This is an ideal use of the Outdoor Heritage Fund and a bargain for conservation. The project provides the public with a number of benefits in addition to the preservation of healthy fish habitat. Miller Island is one of many islands that provide Burntside with its much-loved scenic identity. Protect the islands and you preserve that classic wilderness feel that people long to experience”.

The Land Trust has been active in the Burntside Lake area for several years and has protected seven other properties on the lake including Listening Point, the historic and inspirational home of wilderness advocate Sigurd F. Olson. Larson adds: “It’s one of the great gems of Minnesota lakes, serving as an entry point to the Boundary Waters as well as a source of drinking water for the City of Ely”. The Land Trust was awarded an Outdoor Heritage Fund grant by the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) last year in order to protect more of the natural shoreline like that found on Burntside. The nearly 14-acre Miller Island property has more than 4400 feet of shoreline and lies within a complex of other protected lands, enhancing the habitat values for wildlife and recreational benefits to visitors and residents.

For Smith, the days of tending his flower garden on the island will have to wait until next year. He and his wife will return to wait out the winter in St. Louis. “We’ll be eager to return again next spring, just as soon as the ice is out”. His decision to protect the island is now part of the legacy he leaves to his children and to the people who enjoy this classic sky-blue lake.

The Minnesota Land Trust is a membership-based non-profit organization. Its mission is to permanently protect Minnesota’s natural and scenic heritage through public and private partnerships. The organization is funded by individual members and through grants from a variety of private and public sources and operates statewide through regional offices in Duluth, Ely, Red Wing and St. Paul. The organization has completed 425 conservation projects permanently protecting more than 38,000 acres of natural and scenic land and over 820,000 feet of fragile shoreline statewide.

The Outdoor Heritage Fund is one of four funds created by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment and provides funding to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forest and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife. The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) was established by the legislature to provide annual recommendations on how the Outdoor Heritage Funds should be used.

More information can be found online at .mnland.org.

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