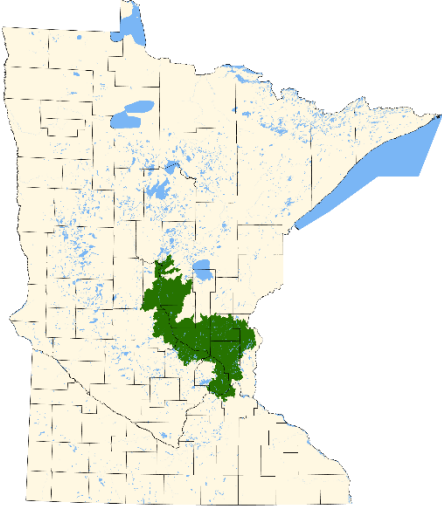
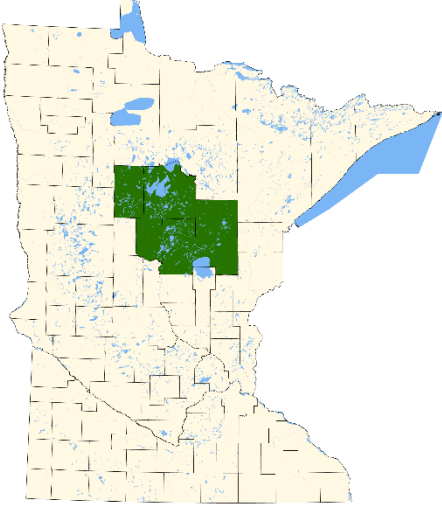
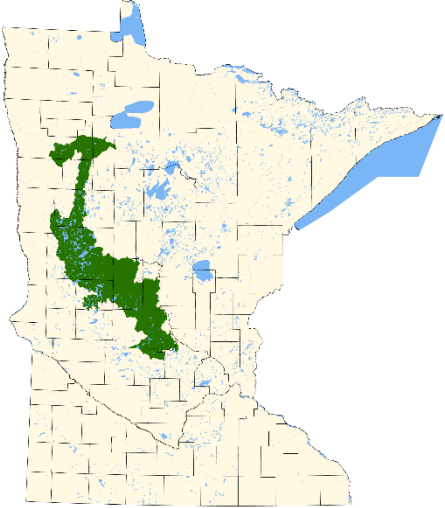
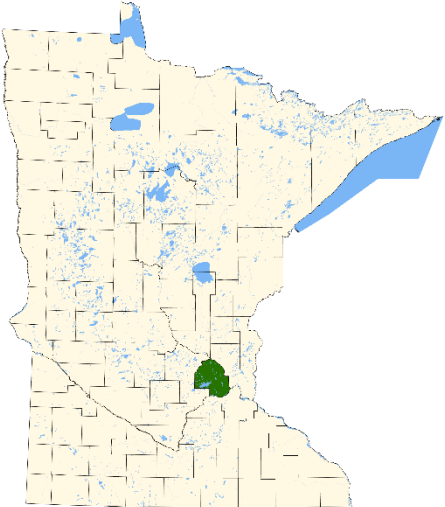
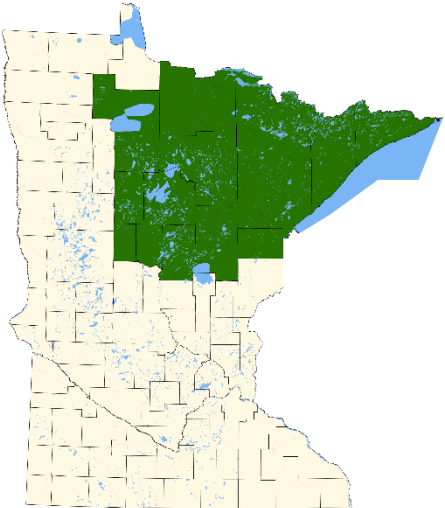
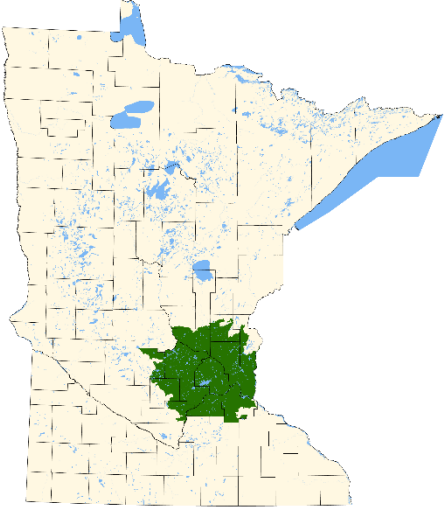
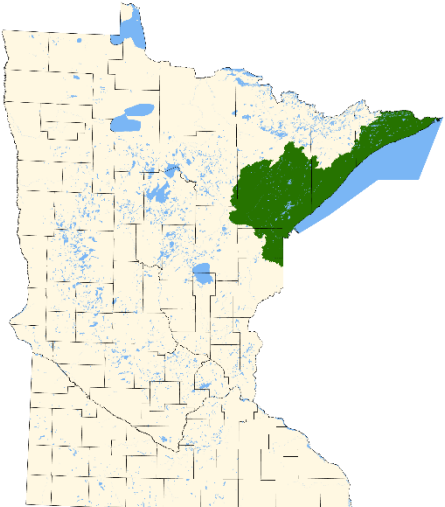
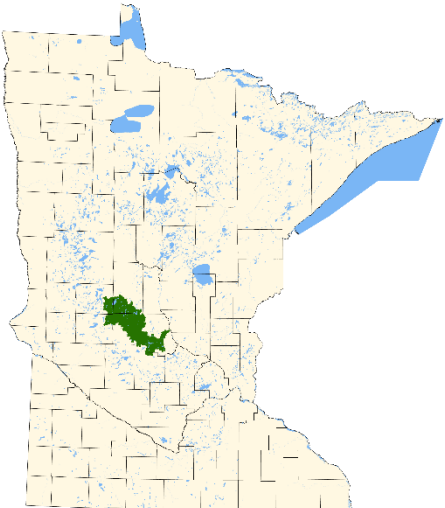


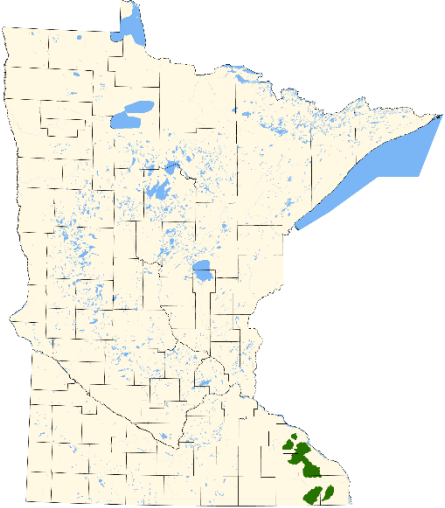
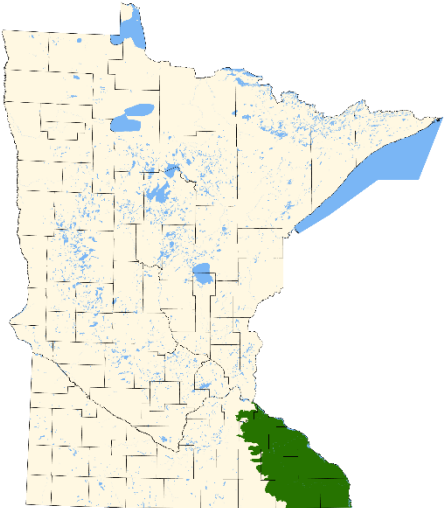
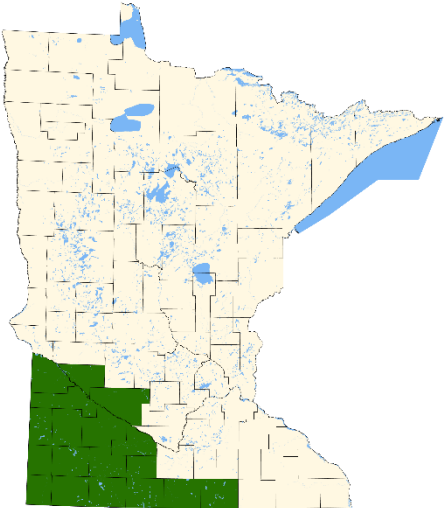


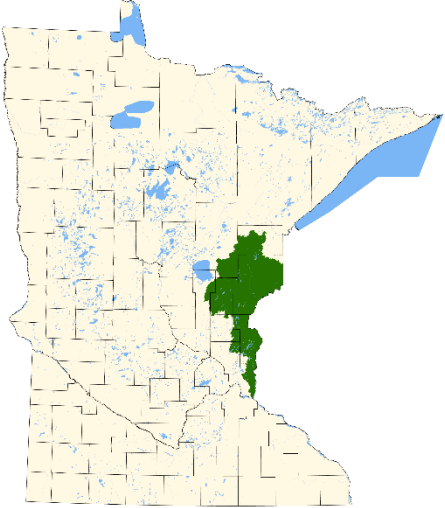
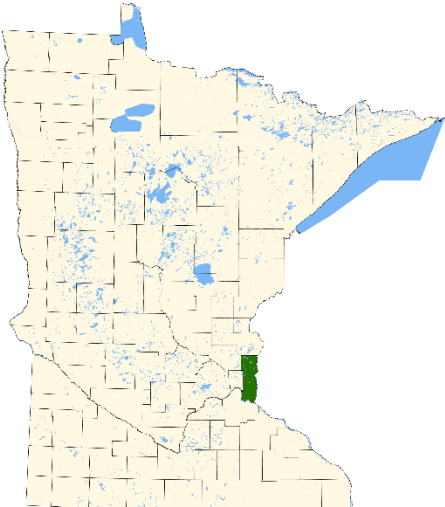
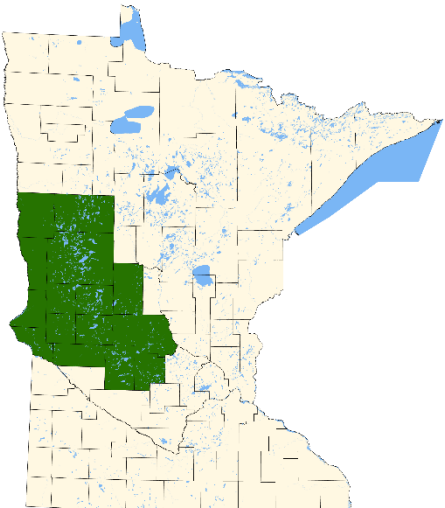
FY2024 Conservation Easement Programs Funded through the Outdoor Heritage Fund

Program	Geography	Program Description
Anoka Sand Plain Partnership		<p>The Anoka Sand Plain serves as a refuge for many globally unique and imperiled species and plant communities, including roughly one-third of Minnesota’s listed rare plant and animals. Some 72,000 acres of the ecoregion are ranked as Outstanding or High for biodiversity by the Minnesota Biological Survey.</p> <p>The Minnesota Land Trust’s conservation easement program furthers the goals of the Anoka Sand Plain Partnership by protecting the rich tapestry of ecological systems and their associated biota occurring here, and the ecological services and high-quality recreational and engagement opportunities they provide.</p>
Fisheries Habitat Protection Program		<p>Fisheries research has shown that healthy watersheds with intact forests are fundamental to sustaining good fish habitat over the long term; achieving a 75% protection threshold within a lake’s watershed ensures a highly resilient and healthy lake ecosystem.</p> <p>The Minnesota Land Trust’s conservation easement program complements the fee acquisition work of the Northern Waters Land Trust in working towards this 75% protection threshold for watersheds associated with 15 priority tullibee (cisco) “refuge lakes” located in Hubbard, Crow Wing, Cass, and Aitkin counties. Many of these are Minnesota’s premier recreational lakes.</p>

<p>Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program</p>		<p>The Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program is focused on the protection of remaining high-quality forest systems and their associated biota within the Hardwood Hills ecological section of west-central Minnesota. Over 60 percent of forests in the Hardwood Hills have been lost to conversion over the past century, with lakeshore development and growth along the I-94 corridor posing significant threats.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, in collaboration with Saint John’s University, focuses its conservation easements on the protection of key forest and wetland complexes identified within Minnesota’s Wildlife Action Network.</p>
<p>Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program</p>		<p>Hennepin County is home to deciduous forests, oak savannas, prairies, rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands of many types. The Met Council estimates open space in Hennepin County will decline by 14,000 acres by 2040, resulting in immediate consequences for SGCN which rely on these critical habitats.</p> <p>During 2020-2040, Hennepin County plans to protect 6,000 acres of the best remaining natural areas and the restorable corridors. Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with Hennepin County, brings the experience of its land protection and legal team to bear in achieving the County’s protection goals.</p>
<p>Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance</p>		<p>Minnesota’s highest quality lakes – Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance – represent the “best of the best” aquatic and shoreland habitat and are characterized by exceptional fisheries and high aquatic plant richness/quality, and possess populations of imperiled plant and lake bird species. Numerous plans have identified the protection of these habitats as a conservation priority for Minnesota. Development and land use pose significant threats to these resources.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust and partner Northern Waters Land Trust are working to protect 34 of the highest quality Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance using conservation easements and fee title acquisition.</p>

Metro Big Rivers Habitat Partnership		<p>The Metro Big Rivers Habitat Partnership works to protect, restore, and enhance priority wildlife habitat in the Metro Urbanizing Area, focusing on the Mississippi, Minnesota, and St. Croix Rivers and their tributaries. By expanding, connecting, and improving conservation lands, the Partnership benefits wildlife and Species in Greatest Conservation Need while expanding opportunities for wildlife-based recreation in the Metro.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, in collaboration with Minnesota Valley Trust, Great River Greening, Friends of the Mississippi River, and Trust for Public Land, furthers the goals of the Partnership through the protection of forests, wetlands, grasslands, and riparian lands through conservation easements.</p>
North Shore Coldwater Fisheries Program		<p>Lake Superior and its tributaries have some of the most important coldwater trout habitat in Minnesota, supporting brook and brown trout, salmon, and steelhead. This coldwater fishery is vulnerable to climate and landcover change as it is mostly surface water fed. Together, these factors may result in increased water temperature and flow regime changes that threaten support of coldwater fish species.</p> <p>Protection of shaded shorelines/headwaters wetlands is critical for maintaining the coldwater resources that support this fishery. Through targeted conservation easement projects, Minnesota Land Trust ensures resiliency of Lake Superior’s coldwater tributaries.</p>
Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Partnership		<p>The Sauk River Watershed is located in a rapidly growing region of Minnesota that has also experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade. This program addresses water quality concerns and permanently protects, restores, and enhances critical habitat within the watershed, creating vital habitat for waterfowl and populations of Species in Greatest Conservation Need.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with Sauk River Watershed District and Pheasants Forever, furthers the goals of the Partnership through the protection of high-quality habitats and restorable lands within priority areas of the watershed.</p>

<p>Southeast Minnesota Heritage Brook Trout Program</p>		<p>A small number of Southeast Minnesota’s coldwater streams support remnant populations of native brook trout unique to Southeast Minnesota; they have persisted for thousands of years. These “Heritage Brook Trout,” indigenous to this area and a Species in Greatest Conservation Need, face growing challenges from land conversion, parcelization, intensified agricultural practices, poor land management, and an increasingly wet and warm climate.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Minnesota Trout Unlimited and Trust for Public Land, is protecting key reaches of these designated Heritage Brook Trout streams to conserve these local populations of this species.</p>
<p>Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Program</p>		<p>The Southeast Blufflands is Minnesota’s most biodiverse region. More SGCN occur here than anywhere else in Minnesota; in addition, some 86 different native plant communities and 183 rare state-listed plants and animals are located within the Blufflands. Despite this biological richness, only 5% of the region has been protected to date.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and The Trust for Public Land, in partnership, are working to expand and connect large contiguous blocks of protected lands through conservation easements and fee acquisition, and restore the natural communities associated with them.</p>
<p>Southwest Minnesota Habitat Conservation Program</p>		<p>The plight of prairies and wetlands in southwest Minnesota is well-documented; less than 2% of native prairie remains and 90% of wetlands have been lost. Habitat loss and degradation threaten wildlife populations and contribute to the decline of the 116 SGCN that utilize the wetlands, streams and prairies across the region.</p> <p>The Minnesota Land Trust fills gaps in the Southwest Minnesota conservation framework by: 1) providing a flexible conservation easement tool to achieve conservation success where other easement programs cannot; and 2) targeting high priority areas in the State Wildlife Action Plan that are being underserved.</p>

St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program		<p>The St. Croix River watershed spans 7,760 square miles between Minnesota and Wisconsin, with the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway flowing through its heart. The watershed contains large areas of unique ecosystems and wildlife habitat, and is home to numerous rare and endangered species. More than 75% of the forest habitat in the watershed remains unprotected, and threats from development, fragmentation and conversion are substantial.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with Wild Rivers Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land, works to protect large intact upland and riparian forest patches, and habitats important to the 128 Species in Greatest Conservation Need occurring in the watershed.</p>
Washington County Habitat Protection and Restoration Program		<p>Washington County is home to some of the best remaining wildlife habitat in the Metro Urbanizing Area. The County is located along two significant migratory bird corridors and supports habitat for 149 documented SGCN and 50 state- or federal-listed species; three of the DNR's highest priority Metro trout streams occur here. Yet, these lands are vulnerable to habitat loss and degradation due to increasing development demands; only 7% of the County is currently protected.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with Washington County, protects critical wildlife habitat through conservation easement, focusing on the County's "Top Ten" priority conservation areas as identified by its Land and Water Legacy Program.</p>
Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program		<p>More than 50% of Minnesota's SGCN use wetlands during their life cycle. Most plans developed to guide conservation of Minnesota's wildlife cite the protection and restoration of the state's remaining wetlands as a top priority to achieve the State's conservation goals. Moreover, these plans cite conservation easements as one of the primary strategies to protect wetland and shallow lake habitat.</p> <p>Minnesota Land Trust targets its conservation easement acquisition on complexes of high-quality and restorable upland/wetland systems that complete gaps in existing public ownership, are of highest ecological value, and provide the greatest leverage to the state.</p>