

HA17 - Metro Big Rivers

Metro Big Rivers (MBR) Phase 14 will protect, restore and enhance 3,035 acres of wildlife habitat in the Metropolitan Urbanizing Area, with an emphasis on the Mississippi, Minnesota and St. Croix Rivers and their tributaries.

Metro Big Rivers is a proven, trusted partnership that gets results with Outdoor Heritage Funds for the LSOHC. MBR protects, connects and improves conservation lands in the metropolitan urbanizing area, expanding habitat for wildlife and Species of Greatest Conservation Need. MBR also creates and enhances opportunities for Twin Cities residents to connect with nature and wildlife near where they live.

Metro Big Rivers Phase 14 - 3,035 acres
Protect 1,417 acres • Restore / Enhance 1,618 acres

Outdoor Heritage Fund Request - \$16,113,600
Anticipated Leverage - \$1,709,700 (11%)

Metro Big Rivers exceeds goals and leverages OHF funds. Results to-date (through Phase 12):

- 8,920 acres complete + 2,000 in progress = 10,920 acres
- 110% of acreage goals achieved
- OHF funds leveraged 49% with \$15.4 million of other funds to-date

Why invest OHF funds in the Metro Urbanizing Area:

- Protect critical habitat and improve degraded habitat along and near the migratory flyways and tributaries in the metro area
- Protect significant habitat in the metro area from development
- Benefit wildlife and Species of Greatest Conservation Need
- Improve water quality and in-stream food availability
- Ensure Twin Cities metro residents have high-quality opportunities to connect with nature near where they live
- Introduce more people to nature-based activities like hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, hiking and paddling

Why trust and invest in Metro Big Rivers Phase 14:

- MBR achieves the LSOHC's goals in the Metropolitan Urbanizing Area
- MBR aggressively leverages OHF funds -- \$15.4 million to-date (49% of grant funds spent)
- By July 2024, MBR will have completed Phases 1-9, be almost done with Phase 10 and be well into Phases 11-13
- MBR has spent \$31.8 million and committed another \$2.2 million in OHF grants to-date. We have \$8.1 million left in current grants (excluding Phase 13 that just started).

Metro Big Rivers works with with public partners and landowners committed to conservation to achieve the priorities of the LSOHC for Outdoor Heritage Funds in the Metro Urbanizing Area.



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Metro Big Rivers Selected Accomplishments

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is restoring and enhancing prairie and forest habitat at the new William H. Houlton Conservation Area through MBR Phases 5, 7, 8 and 12. This 335-acre site at the confluence of the Elk River and Mississippi River was acquired by the Trust for Public Land with MBR Phases 2 and 3. FMR and volunteers have removed invasive woody and herbaceous plants from the floodplain and upland forest. The former agricultural fields and degraded grasslands have been restored to diverse native prairie through seeding, mowing and prescribed burns. Through evaluation of restoration techniques and how well wildlife is returning, FMR has found high success in the restoration efforts. A bird survey identified the endangered Henslow's sparrow and four other Species of Greatest Conservation Need: the dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow, LeConte's sparrow and sedge wren.



Great River Greening restored

88 acres of former agricultural land to diverse prairie and enhanced 7 acres of oak savanna through MBR Phase 6 at the planned Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park. Located in rural Scott County between St. Catherine and Lennon Lakes, the site has a mix of high quality native forests and wetlands, regionally significant wildlife habitat, beautiful scenery and outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation. The vision for the park reflects the history of the site, the community heritage of living off the land and a passion for outdoor recreation, conservation and nature exploration. The park is currently in the land acquisition and habitat restoration phase. Through numerous volunteer events hosted by GRG, community members assisted with habitat restoration and learned about the ecology and importance of the site.

The **Minnesota Valley Trust (MVT)** acquired 196 acres in Carver County for the Rapids Lake and San Francisco Units of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge with four OHF grants - MBR 5, 6, 7 & 8. These strategic acquisitions protected priority lands from residential development and created new opportunities for the public to engage in wildlife-based recreation, education and interpretation. MVT and FWS now are restoring the oak savannas and remnant prairies at each site, as well as converting former agricultural fields to high-quality prairies and wetlands. Restorations are being completed with MBR 7, MBR 9, Conservation Partners Legacy Grants and other funds.



Minnesota Land Trust protected with conservation easement the 84-acre Sand Creek (Norris) property in Scott County in November 2022 with MBR 9.

The conservation easement permanently protects forested bluffs, a perennial stream, and wet-mesic hardwood forest within the Sand Creek watershed, a tributary of the Minnesota River. The property is near an extensive complex of public natural areas along the Lower Minnesota River, including the 5,490-acre Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area and the 14,000-acre Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

The Trust for Public Land acquired in fee title 456 acres in July 2023 with three OHF grants - MBR 10, 11 & 12. This is the first of two acquisitions by TPL to protect 1,840 acres in northern Washington County and create the Keystone Woods WMA. TPL will close on Phase 2 (1,384 acres) in fall of 2023 with MBR 13. Washington County will

acquire another 760 acres adjacent to the WMA. Combined, this protects 2,600+ acres of habitat of high biodiversity significance for wildlife and significantly expands quality outdoor recreation and hunting opportunities for residents of the Twin Cities metro region.

Restoration / enhancement of the forest, prairie, and wetland habitats will begin in 2024 to increase ecological function and provide myriad benefits to wildlife, including the Blanding's turtle, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

