

## **DNR did much to improve habitat, engage citizens in 2014**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources made significant headway in 2014 in improving the state's natural resources and outdoor recreation, while engaging with thousands of citizens on important environmental decisions.

For example, the DNR launched a major habitat restoration project in the St. Louis River estuary, celebrated the designation of the state's 50th wildlife lake and worked to restore critical fish and bird habitat across the state.

The agency also launched several new digital tools, making it easier for citizens to get information about the outdoors, and opened several new trails and park facilities. The agency held more than 50 meetings to hear from people on everything from pheasant habitat to protection of groundwater.

“This kind of citizen engagement is critical to our work,” said DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr. “It’s also satisfying, at the end of the year, to report back to Minnesotans that we are making strides in increasing habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities.”

Among this year's highlights:

**Aquatic invasive species** – The DNR saw more citizen compliance with invasive species rules. Conservation officers noted 91 percent of people complied with rules during routine lakeside inspections (up from 86 percent in 2013) and 83 percent achieved compliance at roadside check stations (up from 79 percent in 2013). The agency used a new product called Zequanox, copper sulfate and potash, to prevent the spread of an early infestation of zebra mussels in Christmas Lake and worked on a zebra mussel control effort in Lake Independence. The DNR launched a major effort to collaborate with counties to curb the spread of aquatic invasive species. [www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquatic/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/aquatic/index.html)

**Invasive carp** – Minnesota’s congressional delegation promoted, and President Barack Obama signed, legislation that closes the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock to boat traffic, a move that will help keep invasive carp, such as bighead and silver carp, from reaching other important waters north of the Twin Cities. The closure was a key component of Gov. Mark Dayton’s 2011 invasive carp action plan. The DNR also continued an intensive monitoring program for invasive carp on the Mississippi River. The agency took major steps to install barriers to ensure the fish do not get a toehold in southwestern Minnesota through rivers and streams connecting to the Upper Des Moines watershed, where carp have been found.

[www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasive-carp/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasive-carp/index.html)

**St. Louis estuary cleanup** – The DNR began a major habitat restoration project at Radio Tower Bay to restore 30 acres of shallow, sheltered bay habitat by dredging and removing 85,000 cubic yards of woody debris left behind by historic sawmill operations. Federal and local funds, as well as Legacy Amendment funds, are being used to improve water quality and degraded fish habitat in the world’s busiest freshwater port that was polluted with lumber mill sawdust and contaminants.

[www.mndnr.gov/river150](http://www.mndnr.gov/river150)

**Long-eared bat** – DNR staff worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the northern long-eared bat and its impending federal listing as an endangered or threatened species. The bat is being heavily impacted by white-nose syndrome disease around the nation. Based on current biological information, Minnesota, along with several other states where the bat is found, is supporting a threatened designation to allow forest management to continue for the long-term benefit of all forest-dwelling wildlife, including the bat.

**Public access and land management** – The DNR permanently acquired about 7,700 acres of industrial forest lands in northern Minnesota from the Potlatch Corp. Also, two land exchanges between the DNR, the

Conservation Fund and St. Louis County will result in restoration of about 24,000 acres of heavily ditched wetlands at the Sax-Zim bog in northern Minnesota. The transaction will further preserve the area renowned as a critical birding site and provide the School Trust Fund with more productive forest lands.

**Minerals management** – Rentals and royalties from state mineral leases, mainly derived from iron ore production, generated record revenue of \$74 million in fiscal year 2014, surpassing the previous record of \$51 million in 2012. The 2014 total included over \$53 million in royalties paid to the School Trust Fund. Permits to mine and water appropriation permits were issued for 12 mining projects, including a 483-acre expansion of U.S. Steel’s Minntac facility near Mountain Iron. For these permits, 83 percent met or beat the 150-day permitting goal set in state statute.

**Better fishing and fish habitat** – Anglers enjoyed remarkable fishing success on Upper Red Lake, harvesting nearly 230,000 pounds of walleye, the highest harvest recorded since the fishery re-opened in 2006. The fishing success is testament to strong collaborative efforts between the Red Lake Band of Chippewa and the DNR. DNR staff began lake sturgeon research on the Red River and continued population restoration in the Red River basin. Anglers who fish trout streams in southeastern Minnesota now have expanded opportunity to fish, and simpler regulations to follow.

**Aspen shortage addressed** – When lumber mills faced a shortage of aspen trees last summer, the DNR took action to offer for sale 52,000 cords of summer-accessible aspen to help with the shortage. The DNR’s response was completed in three weeks. The agency also granted emergency extensions on timber permits where severe winter conditions in 2013-2014 prevented timber harvesting.

**Wildlife successes** – A habitat conservation landmark was set when the DNR celebrated the creation of the state’s 50th designated wildlife lake.

Such a statutory designation enables the DNR to manage the lake's water level and surface use to benefit wildlife, especially waterfowl. Deer managers used public input to set new deer-season strategies for southeastern Minnesota and established a framework to set goals for 86 more deer permit areas during the next two years. On-going moose mortality research by DNR scientists continues to seek answers as to why the population of this iconic species is in significant decline.

**New facilities for outdoor enthusiasts and energy-saving efforts** – The DNR significantly upgraded a number of facilities around the state. A new visitor center opened at Tettegouche State Park, a new trailhead was built at Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area and an extension of the Brown's Creek State Trail was completed that connects downtown Stillwater to the Gateway State Trail. Also, a major harbor at Zippel Bay State Park on Lake of the Woods was constructed, in addition to a new water access at Pool 5 on the Mississippi River. Thirty public water access sites were also upgraded. The DNR expanded its wind and solar electric capacity by one third, meaning DNR renewable energy installations now produce \$58,000 worth of electricity. The agency hit a new benchmark for fuel economy of its light-vehicle fleet, saving the equivalent of 185,000 gallons of gasoline since 2011.

**Citizens have new digital tools** – The DNR launched new digital tools making it easier for citizens to get information. "Fish Minnesota" is a mobile-friendly website for easy-to-use fishing information. The agency's "ParkFinder" application makes it easier to plan trips and vacations to Minnesota state parks. A new, interactive geology tool called "What's Under Your House" allows users to zoom to any location in the state, or even enter their own address, and find information on different geologic formations. An online system called Minnesota Permitting and Reporting System (MPARS) simplifies the process for getting and paying for water permits. It allows individuals and organizations to go online and apply for work-in-public waters permits, dam safety permits, and water appropriation permits.

[www.mndnr.gov/mpars](http://www.mndnr.gov/mpars)

**Citizens had their say** – The DNR held more than 50 meetings across the state to gather input on everything from deer regulations to rules to protect the Mississippi River to pheasant and grassland habitat at the state’s first-ever Pheasant Summit. Early in 2014, more than 3,000 citizens participated in three public meetings on the proposed NorthMet copper-mining project. Last summer, more than a hundred citizens attended the “Mille Lacs: On the Road” meetings, where biologists explained the complex issues facing that lake’s walleye population. Citizen input helped the DNR make decisions on management and uses of scientific and natural areas (SNAs), elk populations in northwestern Minnesota and fish species such as northern pike and bass. DNR staff worked with citizens and stakeholders to begin development of three groundwater management areas in the state.

**More Minnesotans got outdoors** – Outdoor enthusiasts continue to flock to state parks and trails. For example, October overnight stays, year-round and one-day vehicle permit sales were up at state parks from the previous year by 11 percent, 24 percent and 42 percent, respectively. The “I Can!” skill-building series grew with new programs for mountain bikers, paddlers and stand-up paddleboarders. The DNR created a system plan for state parks, state trails, water recreation, and forest recreation areas to determine how future investments are made in those facilities. The DNR worked with Explore Minnesota Tourism and the National Park Service to hold the first Water Trails Tourism Summit. [www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/index.html)