



MINNESOTA
LAND TRUST

MID-YEAR REVIEW
SPRING 2021



PHOTO: ROGER STRAND

Duck, Duck, WOOD Duck



REBECCA FIELD

PRAIRIE POTHOLE DAY

You're invited to the **38th Annual Prairie Pothole Day** on September 11, 2021 (contingent upon Covid protocols). Enjoy a day of activities at Roger's Stoney Ridge property and see his wood duck houses firsthand! Check mnland.org for updates.

Editor's note: Dr. Roger Strand is a wood duck enthusiast and has been learning and sharing about his experiences for many years. He is a trustee and frequent educator at the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center near his home. In 2003 and in 2007, Roger and his wife, Kay, placed conservation easements on their property.

MANAGING FOR WOOD DUCKS AT STONEY RIDGE FARM BY ROGER STRAND

I am honored to be asked to share stories and lessons learned about managing for wood ducks on our property that is protected by the Minnesota Land Trust in Kandiyohi County.

My wood duck experience actually began in 1952, when my dad, Orrin Strand, purchased an 80-acre parcel of forested land that surrounded a 23-acre lake, known to locals as Stoney Lake. We lived in Minneapolis, where I was a junior in high school. Dad, a life-long duck hunter, was born in 1899 to Norwegian immigrant parents four miles west of Stoney. He bought it for his beloved children and grandchildren, so they "would always have a place to hunt ducks."

The steep ridge, rising abruptly along the south shoreline of Stoney, is known by geologists as a glacial *moraine*. It extends through the two-mile length of our 400-acre Land Trust property, and way beyond in both directions. It was already mapped as a forested moraine when the first Europeans found their way here — important to our story because wood ducks nest in old hollow trees, and have always been a common duck on Stoney Lake.

[ORRIN STRAND] BOUGHT [THE LAND] FOR HIS BELOVED CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN, SO THEY "WOULD ALWAYS HAVE A PLACE TO HUNT DUCKS."

In 1952, wood duck populations were plummeting. A long history of market hunting, and the ongoing cutting of old growth forests, were factors. Hunters were encouraged to put up wood duck boxes. I built my first box at home and drove out to Stoney on an April weekend to put it up. I hung the box on a tree (like everyone else.) Two months later, with school out, I returned, opened the box lid and saw this image: A gray squirrel with her litter in the box, a dead hen wood duck was curled up against the front wall.

The squirrel had killed the hen to protect her litter. The squirrel exited the box. I removed the hen and left the litter. A month later I drove back out, found the squirrels gone, took down the box and chalked up **Wood Duck Lesson #1:** Never put the box on a tree. You might get lucky, but it's next to impossible to predator-proof a tree to prevent squirrel, mink and racoon access (I've tried!)

A great alternative is the "Best Practices" pole-mounted box. The edge of the 3-foot diameter sheet metal predator guard is 3-1/2 feet from the level ground. The side-opening door allows walk-up monitoring and safe

checking of the nest by children using just a footstool. Ideally, choose a site near a wooded area and close to a clean wetland with a strong aquatic insect population. The egg-laying hen requires a diet rich in calcium.

2020 was the 23rd year I've been monitoring wood duck hens with miniature cameras mounted in the ceiling of several boxes. The cameras have a microphone, allowing me to listen to the hen as she starts talking to her eggs, which results in a synchronous hatch — the eggs that have been laid over the course of a couple weeks all hatch within an hour or two of each other thanks to communications from the hen!

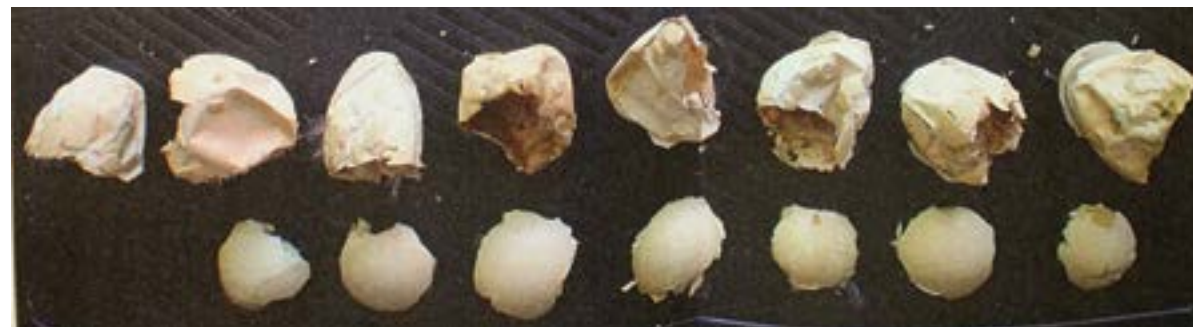
After hatching, the next day is "Jump Day!" The ducklings have had a chance to gain their strength and dry out their feathers. While on the ground, the hen starts calling the ducklings out of the box. One by one they take the leap! Much like the Minnesota Land Trust is dedicated to their mission of protecting wildlife habitat, the wood duck hen is dedicated to her mission of corralling her hungry ducklings safely to the water for their first meal.

Check out www.woodducksociety.com to learn more about the Best Practices box.

A "tardy jumper" leaped a little too late to follow the hen and its broodmates to the lake. Roger helped it along!



Jump Day!
Can you find three ducklings? (One is on the ground to the right of the hen, one is in midair and one is at the hole!)



Each duckling carves out their own "trap door" (cap). A membrane (amniotic sac) surrounds each duckling while in the egg. When the duckling pushes the cap open and crawls out, the hen eats the shell pieces, to recycle her own calcium.



ROGER STRAND

“THIS REPRESENTS THE LARGEST SINGLE PROTECTION DEAL IN THE HISTORY OF THE MINNESOTA LAND TRUST.”

**— KRIS LARSON,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

PROTECTING OUR NORTHERN FORESTS

Minnesota’s iconic boreal forests have shaped our state’s history, culture, and — you might say — even our DNA. Those vast stands of soaring conifers, lakes, and bogs figure prominently into many of the tales Minnesotans like to tell — whether memories of ancient lands, the crunch of pine needles along serpentine paths, that quick inhale when you spot a moose, or even those black flies massed in swarms that defy imagination — it’s all there in our North Woods and it’s all worthy of a good story.

Our North Woods span an area twice the size of the state of Rhode Island and provide habitat for important northern species, clean water for our major rivers and lakes, and a climate sink that captures carbon dioxide helping to mitigate the effects of a changing climate.

Millions of acres of northern forests were once owned by logging and paper companies. These companies valued their business resources and kept these huge tracts knitted together and well-managed. When PotlatchDeltic Corporation, based in Spokane, made the decision to pull out of Minnesota and put more than 200,000 acres of industrial forest lands on the market, it presented an immediate challenge to the environmental community to work together to keep huge tracts of the forest unbroken.

The Minnesota Forest Resources Council identified fragmenting former industrial forest lands as the primary threat to the ecological and economic health of Minnesota’s forests. “Once land is sold off to a hundred different parties, it is nearly impossible to manage the incredible forest ecosystems native to northern Minnesota,” explains Daryl Peterson, the Land Trust’s Director of Restoration Programs.

So, when the Minnesota Land Trust had a chance to play a role in saving huge swaths of these forests from development, it knew it needed to act. With the help of The Conservation Fund, the Land Trust purchased a whopping 4,379 acres of forest lands from PotlatchDeltic and transferred all to Saint Louis County, who will manage the tracts, as a whole, forever and keep them open to the public. A grant from the Outdoor Heritage Fund funded the transaction and a permanent recorded notice of restrictions limits what can be done with the property.

By the Land Trust’s accounting, the project is mammoth. “This represents the largest single protection deal in the history of the Minnesota Land Trust,” says Kris Larson, Executive Director. The deal closed in February 2021.

Once acquired from PotlatchDeltic, the Land Trust immediately transferred the acres to Saint Louis County. “The lands transferred to Saint Louis County by the Minnesota Land Trust through the Northern Forest Habitat Conservation Project grant are truly special and will benefit the residents and citizens of the county and the state of Minnesota,” says Jason Meyer, Deputy Director of Forest Resources at the Saint Louis County Land and Minerals Department. “The 4,379 acres acquired consist of large, contiguous blocks of northern forests which will be permanently maintained by the county for sustainable forestry, wildlife habitat, water quality, and will be available to the public for outdoor recreation.”

Spread across four areas in Saint Louis County, the acres were identified after a lengthy process with project partners. The Land Trust was fortunate to be able to work with The Conservation Fund who has honed a good working relationship with PotlatchDeltic over the years. “We’ve worked with PotlatchDeltic since 2013 to protect working forestlands that support northern Minnesota’s long tradition of timber production and outdoor recreation,” said Kim Berns-Melhus, Minnesota state director of The Conservation Fund. “With this transaction and others underway, including our 72,000-acre Minnesota’s Heritage Forest, this partnership has been the catalyst to conserve more than 200,000 acres in the state of Minnesota for various conservation purposes, including forestry jobs, protection of important habitats and public access.”



PotlatchDeltic agrees. “This sale is another favorable outcome for Minnesotans that is related to our close working relationship with The Conservation Fund,” said Bill DeReu, Vice President of Real Estate for PotlatchDeltic. “This property is ideal for conservation and working forest protection.”

Case in point: One of the largest tracts that the Land Trust purchased lies north of both the Saint Louis River and the Fond du Lac Reservation. It is home to abundant wildlife. Fond du Lac’s trail cameras at the newly protected properties have captured photos of not only gray wolves but also bears and their cubs, white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, skunks,

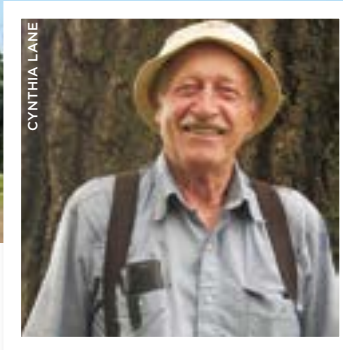
wild turkeys, and a few unidentified critters who presented their butt-only profiles to the cameras. They looked wild and were certainly in a hurry.

Underscoring the importance of this land, the 1854 Treaty Authority recently collaborated with the Fond du Lac Band to monitor the survival of gray wolf pups born in dens at and near the Reservation. That study documented an incredible 85% survival rate in 2020. At least one of those dens was within the area that the Land Trust purchased and transferred to the County.

“Yeah, it’s good country,” comments Mike Schrage, Wildlife Biologist for the Fond du Lac Resource Management Division.

Yeah, we all agree.

WITH THE HELP OF THE CONSERVATION FUND, THE LAND TRUST PURCHASED 4,379 ACRES OF FOREST LANDS FROM POTLATCHDELTAIC AND TRANSFERRED ALL TO SAINT LOUIS COUNTY, WHO WILL MANAGE THE TRACTS, AS A WHOLE, FOREVER AND KEEP THEM OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.



Restoring wetlands and prairies

TO HEAR DAVE ODENDAHL TELL IT, the family farm is more than fields of row crops — it has been a sustainable home for generations of his family.

And what a home it is! First farmed in 1920, the Odendahl farm has been in Dave’s family for over a century. Dave grew up farming the fields and raising livestock, however, the farm began to get a serious conservation makeover more than a decade ago when he started working with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to restore numerous wetlands across the property. A lifelong conservationist, Dave also installed 26 wood duck houses that now dot the landscape.

Restoration continues to this day. Thanks to Dave’s efforts and the work of the Minnesota Land Trust in partnership with the USFWS, this unique property is becoming even better habitat for those cherished wood ducks, as well as species like the trumpeter swan, whose range has dwindled over the past century. The 150-acre “farm” has become a wildlife haven that is improving every year.

“Dave has had a conservation mindset throughout his life and career,” said John Riens of the USFWS. “We’ve done a number of wetland restoration and prairie enhancements and are currently restoring three more wetlands on the property.”

While the wetlands are being restored, the Minnesota Land Trust is also managing 33 acres of prairie restoration using a multi-season approach. Seeding happens in the fall and prescribed burning and ditch plug construction are done in the spring. According to Haley Golz, restoration program manager at the Land Trust, “The fun part about this project is working with Dave who is smart, thoughtful about the process, and actively engaged. He has been conducting burns on the property over the years, and at age 75, he plans to help with this spring’s burn too.”

“PROJECTS LIKE THE ODENDAHL FARM RESTORATION REALLY UNDERLINE THE IMPACT LOCAL FAMILIES CAN HAVE ON THE OVERALL NATURAL HEALTH OF THEIR COMMUNITIES.”

— **HALEY GOLZ, MANAGER, MINNESOTA LAND TRUST RESTORATION PROGRAM**

Upon completion of the project, what was once fields of row crops between the farmhouse and Rock Lake, will be continuous wildlife habitat. A mix of prairie fields, with species like Wild Lupine, Prairie Phlox, and Obedient plant; wetlands with species like Swamp Milkweed and Lake Sedge; and the wooded esker near the lake will provide habitat to a multitude of species that require different types of ecosystems to thrive.

“Projects like the Odendahl farm restoration really underline the impact local families can have on the overall natural health of their communities,” said Haley. “Without Dave’s dedication and love for this place, we wouldn’t be able to connect these parcels for the benefit of wildlife and people.”

For Dave, restoring the waters and land that his family have relied on for over a century is a way to give back to the region he has called home for decades. What’s more, Dave wants to protect the land in its natural state forever, so he worked with the Minnesota Land Trust to place a permanent conservation easement on the property in 2020. The conservation easement and the restoration efforts go hand-in-glove with Dave’s ethics and the Land Trust’s goals.

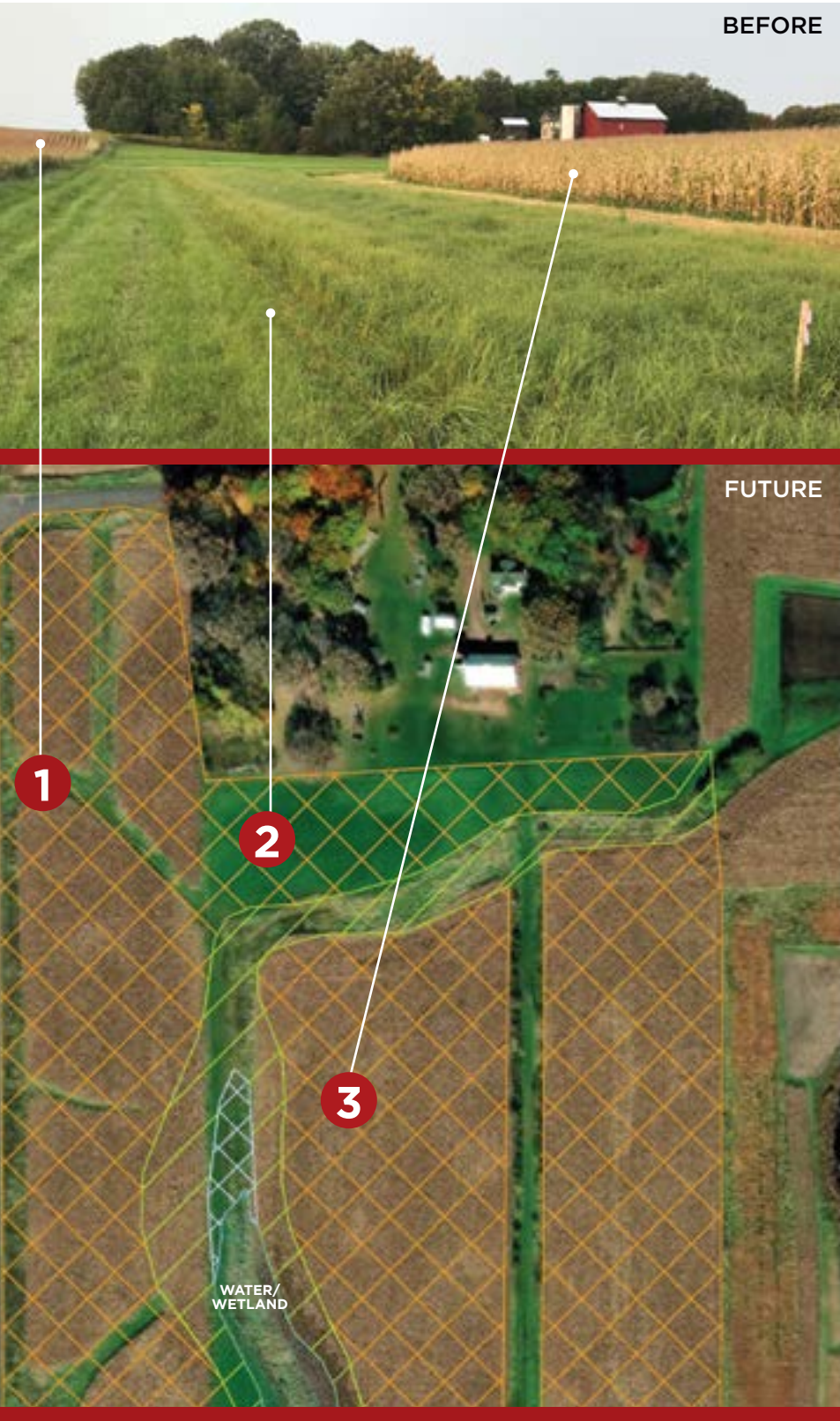
“This has been the perfect home for me. I can roam the hills, do a little hunting, go down to the lake and go fishing,” says Dave. “And I’ll be helped now with the Land Trust here.” And with his property now contributing to cleaning our waters, storing carbon, and providing rich wildlife habitat, Dave is helping all of us with his conservation spirit.



MULTI-SEASON APPROACH

- 1 FALL 2020 - NATIVE PRAIRIE SEEDING
- 2 SPRING 2021 - PLUG DITCH. AREA WILL NATURALLY FILL IN AS A WETLAND
- 3 FALL 2021 - NATIVE PRAIRIE SEEDING

ODENDAHL PROPERTY SEED MIXES



PLANNED GIVING



Tom Anderson and Nancy Conger live in rural North Branch and are fortunate to reside in the house of Tom’s great-great grandfather, built in the late 1800s.

We believe that the greatest legacy we can leave our children and grandchildren is protected wild lands. That is the reason that we are leaving part of our estate to the Minnesota Land Trust.

We feel fortunate to live in a state noted for its ecological diversity. The easiest way to maintain the biological integrity of our natural areas is to protect them in perpetuity. Our state’s human population is growing and there is continual pressure to develop more land for commercial and residential growth.

A key priority in our charitable giving is to save these wild lands. Preserving the natural world protects those systems that allow us all to survive — and thrive. We cannot take free ecological services such as clean air and water for granted.

Including the Minnesota Land Trust in your estate plans is a great way to support conservation. Visit www.mnland.org/plannedgiving or call us at 651-647-9590.



MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

2356 University Ave. W #240
Saint Paul, MN 55114

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

10th ANNUAL Minnesota Made

A benefit to support Minnesota's Great Outdoors



Please join us

**June 3
7:00 pm**

for a virtual event

Preshow at 6:45 pm
Music by Michael Monroe

Online auction opens
May 30

Purchase "Party Packs"
in advance and
register at
mnland.org/mnmade

OUR NEWEST TEAM MEMBER!

KATELIN GOEBEL,
LAND PROTECTION
ASSOCIATE



Katelin grew up in rural central Minnesota and comes to us after working on wildlife research throughout the state, from studying pheasants in Minnesota's prairies to wood turtles in our northern forests. She earned a M.S. in Wildlife Ecology & Management from the University of Minnesota.

> Our Saint Paul and Duluth offices are staffed with variable hours. Please call in advance if you would like to visit.

DESIGN BY BARBARA PEDERSON

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

www.mnland.org | 651-647-9590 | Toll Free: 1-877-MLT-LAND

2356 University Ave. W #240 | Saint Paul, MN 55114
394 South Lake Ave. #404 | Duluth, MN 55802

EMAIL US AT: MNLAND@MNLAND.ORG

