



United States Department of Agriculture

## JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

# A Little Goes a Long Way

### LAKE SUPERIOR LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP



Lake Superior

## GOALS



Lake Superior



Kirtland's Warbler

By surface area, Lake Superior is the largest freshwater lake in the world and by many measures, the healthiest of the Great Lakes. The southern areas of the Lake Superior basin are heavily forested, with some land used for dairy, beef, fruit and vegetable production. The conversion of forest land to agriculture and the impacts of development are causing issues. Unique trout species found in area streams need clean water to thrive—but too much soil is washing into waterways. Habitat for enchanting and elusive birds like golden-winged warblers, Kirtland's warblers and sharp-tailed grouse is lost when forests are cut down. To improve the lake and surrounding forests, a wide range of partners, including local Native American tribes, supported this Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP) project, employing diverse strategies, from restoring wetlands to boosting pollinator habitat.



**Coordinate landowner outreach:** Established a collaboration of organizations working to coordinate

landowner outreach, that resulted in more than 450 conservation practices being applied on private lands. These practices are cost-shared with landowners.

**Improve jack pine forest:** Endangered



Kirtland's warblers nest in open, grassy areas in young jack pine forests with open grassy areas. The Wisconsin

Department of Natural Resources led a project to establish new jack pine forests in the sand barrens of Bayfield County to improve habitat for the birds. The first successful Kirtland's warbler nest was confirmed here in 2016.

**Improve water quality:** More than 40



miles of stream corridor were treated to reduce nutrient runoff from farms and pastures. Thirteen stream

crossings were upgraded and one dam was removed to improve water quality and enable better passage for prized species, such as brook trout.

### PROJECT IMPACT

# 500%

FUNDING INCREASE

Momentum resulting from the Joint Chiefs' project led to a 500 percent increase in local private landowners receiving cost-share funding. Through USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, public and private investments have improved water quality and wildlife habitat for the entire area.

Total awarded through the JCLRP from 2014-2016: \$1.5 million

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.



Volunteers planting native grasses. © Todd Norwood/Red Cliff Treaty Natural Resources

Given its name, Spirit Island seems like the ideal location for partnerships to grow—and that’s exactly what happened as part of the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership project in northern Wisconsin.

Located at the top of the Bayfield Peninsula on the shores of Lake Superior, this small island is an important part of the Red Cliff Band (RCB) of the Lake Superior Chippewa reservation. It has been eroding for years. “Not only did erosion and sedimentation present potential threats to wildlife habitat and wild rice, it also raised concern about the longevity of the island,” said Chad Abel, a division administrator for the Red Cliff Band.

A partnership between the RCB and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grew as agency conservation and engineering experts were invited to assess the situation. They concluded that a lack of vegetation was leading to unstable bank conditions and erosion. The partners worked through challenges, leading to greater creativity and collaboration. For example, NRCS proposed using heavy machinery to reshape some areas of streambank, but RCB leaders were concerned the equipment would damage fragile tribal lands. The partners worked together to come up with a less aggressive strategy: use hand labor to construct wetlands that absorb water and energy created during rain events. The work included planting species native to the island. Volunteers from a nearby high school and members of the RCB of Lake Superior Chippewa, planted more than 12,000 plants along the shore.

Partners report the plants are thriving, but that’s not the only measure of success. For NRCS District Conservationist Gary Haughn, the most important outcome was stronger partnerships. “With community support, the protection needed to preserve Spirit Island’s sacred importance was possible,” he said. “This is a great cultural gain for present and future generations.”



Greater Tussock Sedge © Adobestock

## Key Partners

American Forest Foundation  
Ashland County Land and Water Conservation  
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe  
Bad River Watershed Association  
Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department  
Bayfield Regional Conservancy  
Northland College  
Red Cliff Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources