



United States Department of Agriculture

JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Protecting Headwaters, Growing Partnerships

UPPER MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS RESTORATION PROJECT



MINNESOTA



The Mississippi River at the site of the Knutson Dam removal.

The Chippewa National Forest boundary encompasses about 1.6 million acres of public, tribal and private land in northern Minnesota, including 660,000 acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service. This expansive landscape has many points of pride. Established in 1908, it was the first national forest, east of the Mississippi River, and holds more lakes and wetlands than any other national forest. It sits at a virtual crossroads of natural systems. Prairies spread to the west while coniferous forests of pine, spruce and balsam fir reach to the north. Hardwood forests of aspen, birch and maple extend to the east and the south, and all are traversed by streams and creeks that feed the Mississippi River. More than 150 pairs of bald eagles live in the Chippewa National Forest, making it home to the largest breeding population of the species in the lower 48 states. Caring for this expansive area, which is critical to the health of the river and the local economy, requires coordinated management.

A 2012 windstorm that severely damaged more than 200,000 acres of forest, the threat of invasive species and the need to protect watersheds made this Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership project area an ideal location to use a variety of restoration techniques in the water and on the land.

Upper Mississippi Headwaters Restoration Project

GOALS



Bald Eagle



Improve wildlife habitat: The Joint Chiefs' funding enabled restoration efforts on 250 acres and tree plantings on 760 acres of national forest land, enhancing habitat for wildlife.

Improve water quality and ecological health: This partnership helped strengthen relationships and increase coordination with stakeholders.

In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, an ongoing assessment



of streamside habitat within the headwaters of the Mississippi River was initiated, which will guide future restoration efforts to improve water quality and ecological health.

PROJECT IMPACT

\$700,000+ INVESTED

Joint Chiefs' funding supported the removal of an obsolete dam on the Mississippi River that caused erosion and impeded migration for walleye, greater redhorse and other culturally significant fish species. The Leech Lake of the Ojibwe, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Otter Tail Power and others contributed more than half of the project's \$1.3 million cost.

Total awarded through JCLRP from 2014-2016: \$980,000

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.

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.



Crew member removes invasive plants. © Leech Lake Division of Resource Management

The phrase “menace to society” isn’t often applied to plants, but for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO), invasive wild parsnip is public enemy number one. The sap of this benign-looking plant—which doesn’t occur naturally in Minnesota—can cause skin it contacts to burn in the presence of sunlight.

Leech Lake Reservation lies almost entirely within the boundary of the Chippewa National Forest, and when wild parsnip was found creeping onto playgrounds and churchyards, staff from the tribal resource management division and the U.S. Forest Service realized they had a shared problem. “This partnership made a lot of sense,” said Katie Zlonis, the LLBO’s botany program manager. She works with crews of technicians, which include local Native American community members, who were hired through the Joint Chiefs’ project to remove wild parsnip and other invasive plants. “This project has employed the local workforce, and two people have moved into permanent positions,” said Zlonis.

Steve Mortensen is the Fish, Wildlife and Plant Resources program director for the tribe. In his view, increased collaboration between agencies and the LLBO is critical, and the relationships developed during this project will carry forward. “If you have an invasive on one side of the road, you aren’t accomplishing much unless you deal with it on both sides. We were able to cross boundaries and accomplish more, together.”

Funding from the Joint Chiefs helped leverage additional dollars from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other agencies to lead hikes and develop materials to help residents identify invasives that when uncontrolled, can choke out plants that are culturally significant for food and medicine. Zlonis said, “It is very rewarding to see the positive impact of protecting the resources that these communities nestled within the forest depend on.”



Wild parsnip © Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Key Partners

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Otter Tail Power
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service