



Minnesota: Upper Mississippi Headwaters Restoration

The Partners

The partnership consortium, led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Forest Service (FS), will include state and local agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Association of Conservation Districts, University of Minnesota, Soil and Water Conservation Districts for Aitkin, Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Hubbard and Itasca Counties, The Nature Conservancy, American Bird Conservancy and Cooperative Weed Management Area and the Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership, among others as needed. Much of the project boundary is within the reservation boundaries of the Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe (LLBO) and there are also opportunities to work with the Red Lake and White Earth Bands of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.



The Project

Minnesota takes great pride and responsibility in protecting the source of the mighty Mississippi River, a watershed that covers half of the US. The headwaters area is used for timber production, agriculture, recreation, and as a primary drinking water source. In July of 2012 much of this area was subject to a large wind event that severely damaged the forest, wildlife habitat, infrastructure and recreational activities. Although much salvage and cleanup is complete, there is still a need for reforestation, hazardous fuels reduction, and non-native invasive species (NNIS) control as well as long term protection and management of the headwaters ecosystem.

This joint project will initially focus on the restoration and reforestation needs of tribal, private, and public lands as a result of the 2012 wind storm. The recovery will allow us to recreate a resilient forest that will support the diverse use of the landscape. One on-going project is the replacement of the Knutson Dam on Cass Lake to maintain water levels while simultaneously restoring aquatic organism passage between the Lake Winnibigoshish and Cass Lake systems. A new project will improve wildlife habitat for the golden-winged warbler, an imperiled migratory species in northern Minnesota. Work on private lands will include conservation planning and implementation of



conservation practices designed to treat water quality, wildfire, and wildlife habitat resource concerns such as brush management, windbreak and shelterbelt establishment, tree and shrub establishment, forest stand improvement, and early successional wildlife habitat establishment.

The Benefits of Additional Resources

On Forest Service land, salvage and cleanup has been completed on the most severely damaged blowdown stands. However, additional funds would complete hazardous fuels treatment, reforestation, and NNIS control on the remaining untreated sites in the project area. On private and tribal lands, much initial work is still needed in order to reduce hazardous fuel loads and replant disturbed areas. Additional targeted funding for conservation on private lands will encourage landowners in the project area to participate in conservation programs and subsequently result in increased acres of conservation applied. Coordinated USFS and NRCS assistance on Tribal lands could increase the ability of Tribal land managers to implement conservation activities as well. On all lands, both in and outside of the blowdown, additional diversification planting will help increase landscape scale resilience to this and future potential disturbance events.

The Measure of Success

The success of the project will be measured by the number of joint acres that are treated and replanted from the blowdown areas, improvements to wildlife habitat, including habitat of imperiled species, and improvements to water quality. It is anticipated that by working together in this partnership, we will also help foster better communication and relationships that will lead to additional landscape scale conservation projects.

