

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
**AN APPROACH  
THAT WORKS**

The goal was made clear to me when I interviewed for the job. This organization would commit to bringing Minnesotans together across political parties, regions, and backgrounds to protect the lakes, lands, and outdoor experiences that make life in our state so special. What wasn't clear was how.



**Paul Austin**  
Executive Director

I remember being so excited. After years in government and politics, where so many focus on sowing division and blame, I was hungry for the challenge to show that we could accomplish more by working together and focusing on the Minnesota we all want for future generations. It was time for a new approach.

Today, I can report with confidence that our approach is working. As Conservation Minnesota marks its 20th anniversary, we are excited to spend some time over the next year celebrating successes and envisioning all we can accomplish together going forward. **This milestone is a celebration of you.**

You have helped build this organization to realize our shared goals of clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment for all. Because of you, Conservation Minnesota now serves a unique and essential role. **We're transforming Minnesotans' longstanding culture of love for our Great Outdoors and turning it into action that delivers public support, political leadership, and policy solutions to ensure a sustainable future.**

Thank you for making the last 20 years of wins possible. I look forward to continuing our work together!

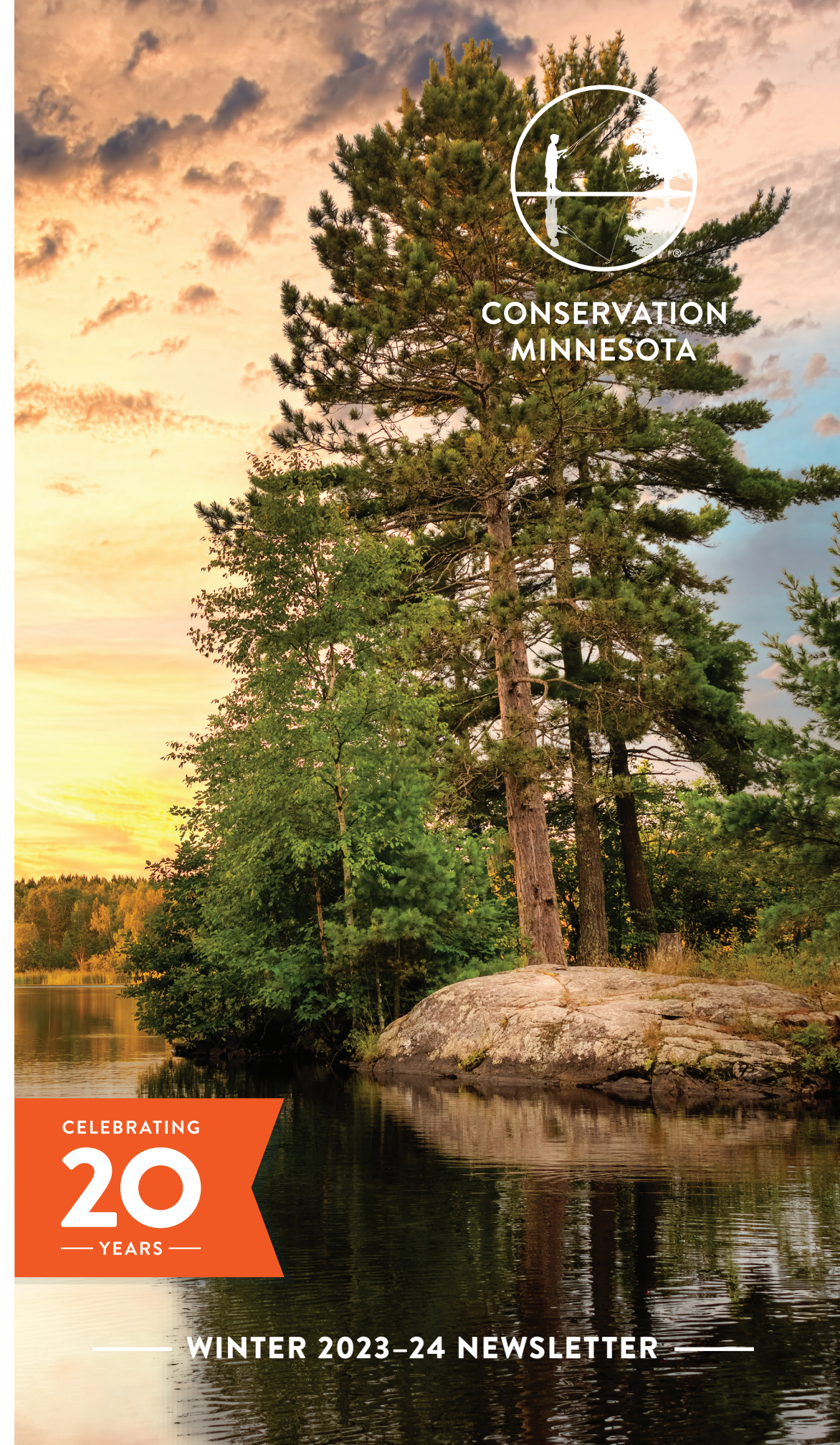
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The work of Conservation Minnesota is guided by your values and priorities. We listen to Minnesotans and focus on solving the conservation problems that matter most to you.

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**CONSERVATION  
MINNESOTA**



**CONSERVATION  
MINNESOTA**

CELEBRATING  
**20**  
— YEARS —

— **WINTER 2023-24 NEWSLETTER** —

CELEBRATING  
**20**  
— YEARS —

# CELEBRATING PROGRESS

We love sharing stories with you that illustrate how your support helps deliver results. In our 2023 summer and fall newsletters, it was exciting to highlight abundant examples of progress on cutting climate pollution, making every Minnesotan’s drinking water safe, restoring our waters and wildlife habitat, and more.

As we kick off the celebration of Conservation Minnesota’s 20th Anniversary, we are giving you a “peek under the hood” of how we make change happen. Luckily, the fuels that power this engine are all renewable: trust, community, and partnership.

## HOW WE MAKE CHANGE POSSIBLE

### Building Trust

Today, more people across Minnesota believe they can trust information from Conservation Minnesota than from any other nonprofit organization in our sector. In fact, **68% of people from small towns and rural areas say they can believe Conservation Minnesota when it comes to information about clean water, clean air, and other environmental issues.**

This is not an accident. **We work to clearly describe the problems facing Minnesota families and our natural resources without sensationalism and then propose common sense solutions that bring people together.** Whether we are reporting on the state conservation budget, informing people of their legislators’ recent votes, or educating the public about an emerging issue, we focus on information people can use to make their own decisions.

This role has become increasingly important as the media landscape has changed and many local news outlets have closed their doors. Conservation Minnesota has helped provide both transparency and accountability by informing hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans about their legislators’ votes and important issues for their community that haven’t received attention from major media outlets.



### Building Community

Our mission is to solve the conservation problems that are most important to Minnesotans—to you! So, we regularly ask Minnesotans around the state about a broad range of issues. Whether we are deciding on issues to advocate for at the state Legislature or working with community groups on local projects, our work is shaped by the feedback of individual Minnesotans like you.

In 2007, less than 25% of the members of environmental groups lived outside the Twin Cities. Conservation Minnesota set out to expand that number—and we found that **even though many Minnesotans don’t consider themselves traditional environmentalists, they care deeply about our lakes, rivers, land, and wildlife** and will say “yes” to opportunities to protect them. By engaging with and understanding the concerns of people in every region of our state, **Conservation Minnesota has enlisted the help of over 150,000 people** to achieve our mission. Today, **this community of action spans all of Minnesota’s 87 counties**, providing both the public support and the elected leadership that creates meaningful public policy for our Great Outdoors, communities, and health.

### Building Partnerships

Finding common ground drives our work. After all, in a democracy, change is only possible when enough people decide to do things differently. Even if we don’t agree on everything with our partners, **we look for places of shared agreement and shared values where we can move forward**—because that is often the key to finding solutions that reflect Minnesotans’ shared values.

Several of **our biggest wins were due to the partnerships we’ve built with a broad and diverse set of organizations** that include electric utilities, labor unions, the arts community, the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities, and environmental justice advocates.

Together, we’ve achieved an impactful list of policy victories that protect our water, air, and outdoors while benefiting the lives of all Minnesotans.




“Conservation Minnesota is so effective at the Capitol because they work well with both parties and build constructive alliances around practical solutions.”

—Speaker of the House, Melissa Hortman



## CONTINUING TO BUILD

Our **Community Stewards program** is a new way we are building trust, community, and new partnerships across Minnesota. The team of Community Stewards works to build relationships among neighbors and foster a deeper connection to nature. Working with community members, they help identify conservation issues affecting the area and bring stakeholders together to find solutions. **In the first half of 2023, Community Stewards brought over 500 people together to learn and work on local projects.** We created this program through a new partnership with ServeMinnesota. It has been so successful that we are now opening offices with Community Stewards in Duluth, Bemidji, Moorhead, St. Cloud, Rochester, and Winona.

The Community Stewards program is just one example of our approach in action. During 2024, we’ll continue to share more examples of our work together. 

*right:* Maplewood State Park, Pelican Rapids

*cover:* Sunrise near Grand Rapids

