

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **TACKLING TRASH LOCALLY**

In conversations across the state, people raise concerns about recycling and waste. It makes sense. We confront garbage and recycling issues right in our homes, and they remind us each day of our environmental impact. Local governments are burdened with our ballooning trash problem—today, **40% of trash is packaging waste**, and global plastic production is expected to double in the next 20 years.



**Paul Austin**  
Executive Director

Fortunately, this legislative session, we made significant strides to address the problem. **Passage of the Packaging Waste & Cost Reduction Act makes Minnesota just the 5th state in the nation to enact packaging requirements for manufacturers.** All packaging sold in our state must be reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2032. Manufacturers will pay to help offset or eliminate the recycling costs our local municipalities charge residents. Other policies include tackling waste from plastic boat wrap, phasing out mercury light bulbs, and funding an anaerobic digester to manage food and yard waste. Learn more about this year's session on our website. →



I'm proud of our hard-fought role in making the Packaging Act a reality. Leaders have shared that messages from our statewide network, the trust we've built with the public, and our partnerships with Minnesota counties overcame industry opposition and power.

As we continue to look back over our organization's 20 years, the Packaging Act illustrates how **building an organization to advocate effectively must start locally.** So, we have focused this newsletter on our **Community Steward program**, one way we connect with people and places across Minnesota.

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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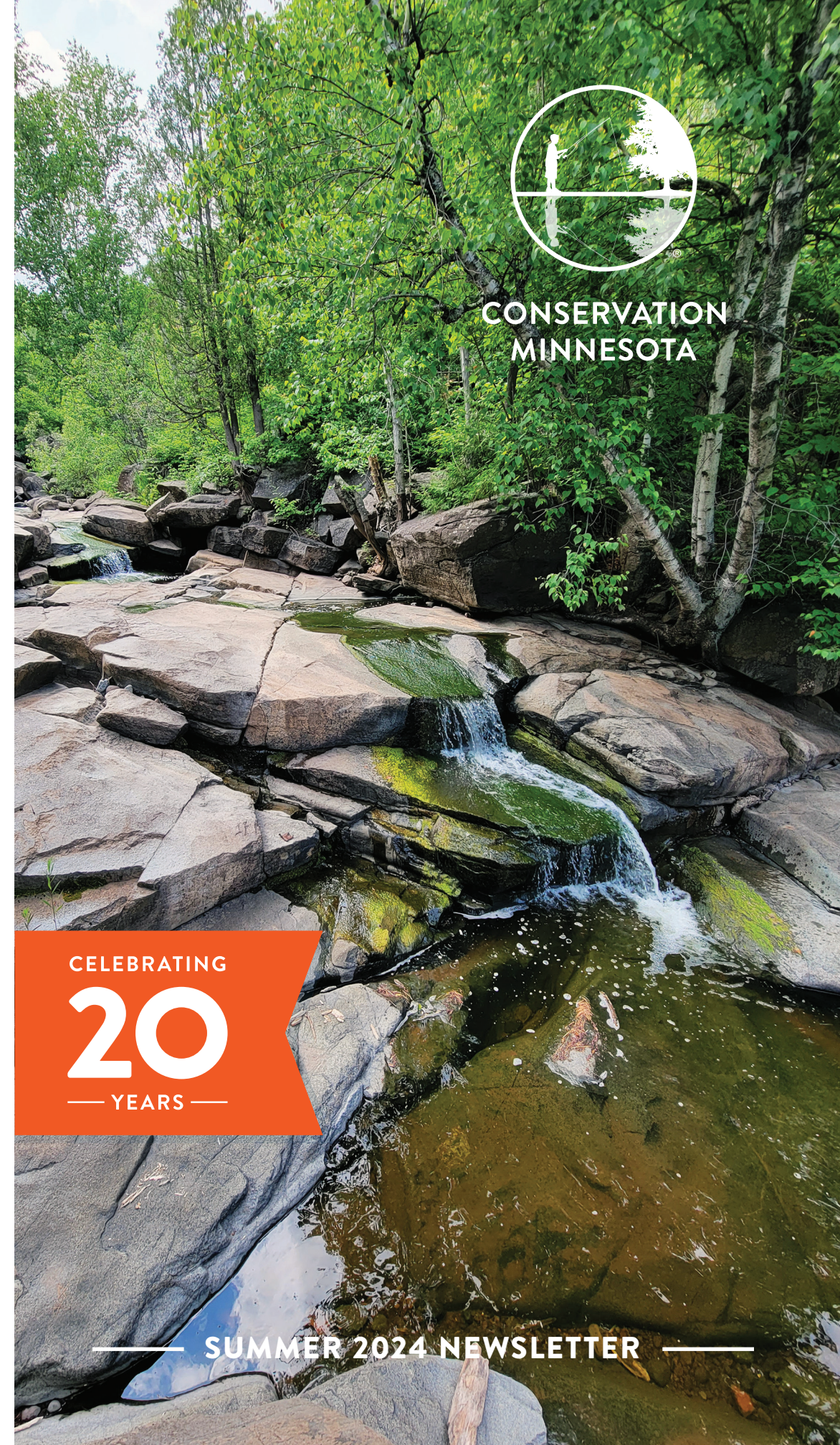


**CONSERVATION  
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cover: Along the Superior  
Hiking Trail near Duluth



**CONSERVATION  
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CELEBRATING  
**20**  
— YEARS —

**SUMMER 2024 NEWSLETTER**

# ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

## Getting to Today

When a majority of Minnesotans voted for the Clean Water, Land, & Legacy Amendment in 2008, we realized that to advocate effectively, we needed to create a statewide network of supporters, partner organizations, and advocates that reflected the diversity and geography of the state's population. At the time over 80% of environmental nonprofit members lived within the Twin Cities metro area. Since then, we've built that network, and today, **our membership includes all 87 counties and more closely reflects the state's diversity.** This allows us to work with local governments across the state and strengthens our advocacy at the Capitol.

Over the years, our community work has supported a range of initiatives. In 2014, **we organized in Rochester, helping to rethink its energy future** and become the first city to set a 100% clean energy goal. **We created the only statewide sustainability commissions conference**, which allows volunteer commissioners and board members to network and learn about conservation and climate best practices. Coming out of the pandemic, **we launched our middle school youth program, Conservation Crew**, to support the next generation of conservation leaders.

- 1 Removing invasive buckthorn at M.B. Johnson Park in Moorhead with Ryan
- 2 Restoring the prairie at Chester Woods Park in Rochester through seed collection and re-seeding with Mary



Making terrariums and learning about ecosystems at Winona's Earth Fest with Anna

## Going Local with Community Stewards

Two years ago, in partnership with AmeriCorps, **we launched the Community Stewards program to bring Minnesotans together to learn about and solve conservation problems** within their community. Today, we have offices in Duluth, Bemidji, Moorhead, Saint Cloud, Rochester, and Winona.

The Stewards' on-the-ground organizing is having an impact and garnering attention in the communities they serve. In the last year alone, **Stewards have organized over 65 events and worked with over 2,000 people and nearly 350 organizations and businesses.**

**We created the Steward program to elevate and assist the amazing community work already happening in locations across our state.** Paul D. collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the local Wild Ones chapter to install a pollinator garden at Duluth's Thompson Hill rest stop. This project will serve as an educational platform for visitors, highlighting the importance of native plants and their roles in our ecosystem.

Each Community Steward brings their unique passions and interests to their work. In Duluth, Jaclyn shared her excitement for geology to spark an interest in the natural world for local Girl and Boy Scout troops. Kayla's love of reading led her to create an environmental book club, which brings together a diverse group in St. Cloud each month to discuss the environment and what they can do for the area.

- 3 At Mill Creek in Chatfield (near Rochester), monitoring water quality in streams and identifying microinvertebrates with Eve
- 4 Cleaning and stenciling storm drains with Bemidji State University students and Emma

Hagen has enjoyed assisting a community education program for English Language Learners in St. Cloud. He coordinated an outdoor scavenger hunt to teach the class about Minnesota's wild places and outdoor features. Through his connections, he helped over 100 students in the Reach Up Head Start program build bird feeders and identify some of our iconic bird species.




Getting out of the classroom and expanding vocabularies with Hagen



Workday at Izaak Walton wetlands in Rochester with Mary

Mary works alongside Quarry Hill Park's naturalist and the Weed Warriors in Rochester to remove invasive species. Through weekly sessions, Mary and the other volunteers have inspired each other.

The diversity of the Steward's projects underscores each community's uniqueness and highlights the program's collective impact across the state. We continue to be inspired by our Stewards and are grateful for their service. 

- 5 Learning about and enjoying climate conscious meals in Bemidji with Emma
- 6 Fishing on the Red River and learning about foraging mushrooms in Moorhead with Ryan



New Steward terms start in August. **APPLY ONLINE!**

