

# Conservation Impact Report

Your Audubon Minnesota  
dollars make a difference

July 2016 - June 2017



  
**Audubon**  
MINNESOTA





Great Blue Heron

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Cover: Belted Kingfisher

## WHY BIRDS?

Bird conservation is at the core of our efforts. We focus on birds and their habitats through science, education, advocacy, and on-the-ground restoration.

Why birds? Birds are in nearly every ecosystem on the planet. They are pollinators, seed dispersers, predators, and prey. Within the network of connections that makes up an ecosystem, birds are uniquely positioned to act as an environmental mirror for the health of land and water. That means what's good for birds is good for entire ecosystems, including people. If we have to choose how to focus our time, energy, and resources in the face of ever-growing conservation challenges, starting with birds makes a lot of sense.

**We focus on birds because it's smart conservation for the state we love. Your support saves Minnesota birds.**



## WITH YOUR HELP

Dear Friends,

You are the reason we saved birds through our achievements this past year. In this Conservation Impact Report, you'll see the progress that we have made as a result of your contributions. We truly cannot thank you enough for your support.

Together, we are restoring important habitat. We are advancing local, state, and federal laws that make sense. We are instilling a conservation ethic in our youth.

We have accomplished so much already and we are well-positioned for future impact. Thanks to your help, we can renew the ongoing commitment to protect Minnesota's waterbirds, songbirds, and other migratory birds that need our help.

After all, everyone benefits from a legacy of healthy lands and waters.

Thank you,

**Debbie Reynolds**  
Audubon Minnesota  
Board Chair

- ◀ **A boy holds the American White Pelican he crafted. In May 2017, he and more than 500 other Twin Cities students gathered to display art creations they made after learning about Minnesota's birds, the habitat they need, and what the students can do to help.**



A group of students jump in celebration after helping to spread nine acres of St. Croix Prep property with native wildflower seeds.



## KIDS IN CONSERVATION

Your support is helping to ensure that conservation is part of foundational education for kids in Minnesota. Audubon Minnesota strives to inspire positive change in the world by working with the next generation. When we invest in our kids, we are investing in the future of our natural resources.

**Audubon Minnesota engaged 1,700 K-12 students in conservation education and activities this year.** Kids from across the state picked prairie seeds, planted native wildflowers, learned about the importance of clean water, and discovered how to help birds in a changing climate.

- This spring, hundreds of schoolchildren learned that birds need clean water and native habitat to survive. Through a series of in-classroom sessions, Audubon Minnesota taught kids the importance of clean water throughout the Mississippi River watershed using a combination of environmental education and arts learning activities. Students also learned how to take action and reduce the impacts of climate change.
- More than 1,100 students helped to seed and plant native plants on nine acres of school property. St. Croix Preparatory Academy in Stillwater joined with Audubon Minnesota and a host of community partners to engage the students, prepare the land, spread prairie seeds, and celebrate native plants as a resource for birds, bees, and butterflies. The restored prairie will act as an outdoor classroom for thousands of students at St. Croix Prep for many years to come.
- Urban teens were inspired by Minnesota's birds and created a Mississippi Flyway mural in Minneapolis. Audubon Minnesota showed young artists pictures of our state's waterbirds and talked about what the birds need to thrive, including native plants. They also talked about reducing the amount of pollution and trash swept into city storm drains. The mural shows how Twin Cities' residents can help keep our water clean for birds, people, and entire ecosystems. The mural is located on a busy intersection where thousands of people will see it as they pass by and visit nearby businesses each year.



## RIVER CONSERVATION

Today, the Mississippi River and its floodplain forests are a narrow sliver of habitat in a sea of agriculture and urban development. In some areas, up to 80% of the original forests have been lost. For Audubon scientists, the threat to birds along the river due to environmental degradation is clear and urgent.

Your support helps us to improve the ecological health of the Mississippi River. Audubon Minnesota is working with government entities, community organizations, universities, and volunteers to make major strides in restoring habitat.

**Audubon Minnesota planted more than 44,000 trees in the Upper Mississippi River floodplain, including more than 2,000 large potted trees.**

Our work is helping to implement the Upper Mississippi River Systemic Forest Stewardship Plan. The plan influences the management of 300,000 acres of floodplain forest to improve water quality and enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife. Floodplain forests are found along river and stream corridors that contain a diversity of plants that can survive repeated and extensive flooding.

We are able to restore important places for birds by planting native tree species such as Cottonwood, Silver Maple, and Swamp-white Oak and removing invasive plants like Reed Canary Grass.

Through our work, we are also improving the effectiveness of floodplain forest restoration. Management of any floodplain is difficult at best, but we are addressing complex issues and advancing the science of restoration.

With our partners, we are restoring river water levels and constructing projects that improve habitat and water quality. These projects will encourage growth of aquatic plants that are an important food source for migrating waterfowl and help to improve water quality.

Audubon Minnesota also advocates for policy changes and provides support and technical assistance to partners that will result in the restoration of islands and backwaters that provide important bird habitat within the Upper Mississippi River.

**River restoration efforts benefit birds like Prothonotary Warblers, Cerulean Warblers, Red-shouldered Hawks, Bald Eagles, and many other species that rely on healthy river and wetland habitat to survive.** ▶



Prothonotary Warbler

## RIVER CONSERVATION OUTREACH

Audubon Minnesota connects people of all ages to river conservation through education and on-the-ground conservation projects. Changing the hearts and minds of Minnesotans in order to protect and safeguard our water resources is an important component of our work.

Currently, 40% of Minnesota's lakes and rivers do not meet basic water quality standards. If we hope to balance the needs of birds, people, and economies, we must engage Minnesotans in implementing solutions to clean and protect our waterways.

One third of Minnesotans are wildlife-watchers and by offering volunteer activities, we ensure that nature-lovers can engage in hands-on conservation. Our volunteers take part in opportunities that highlight the importance of river ecosystems with a special focus on birds.

Community volunteers and AmeriCorps members play a big role in restoring floodplain forest along rivers and streams that pour into the Mississippi River. These dedicated individuals not only help to expand our capacity, but they also learn by doing. Volunteers learn how these restoration efforts can make a significant difference and through their experience, they leave more informed about how to improve water quality and bird habitat.

In addition to volunteer trainings and events, we have also built relationships with elected officials by informing them about the need to increase habitat and reduce threats to birds. Read more on page 17, under Policy Informed by Science.



**Aveda's 2017 Earth Month campaign** generated tremendous support for Audubon Minnesota's clean water work. The Aveda Corporation, its employees, and the Aveda network, continually contribute their enthusiasm, time, and generous financial contributions to support clean water projects that benefit both birds and people.



◀ **This newly-planted tree seedling may not look like much, but it's part of an important floodplain forest next to the Mississippi River. Floodplain forests provide important habitat for birds and flood protection for nearby towns and cities. These forests also help improve water quality by filtering excess pollutants and sediment from our water.**





# PRAIRIE AND GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

Audubon Minnesota’s work in grasslands and prairies improves water quality by protecting and restoring habitat. Even as birds face a host of challenges, our accomplishments ensure that Minnesota continues to be a stronghold in a changing climate.

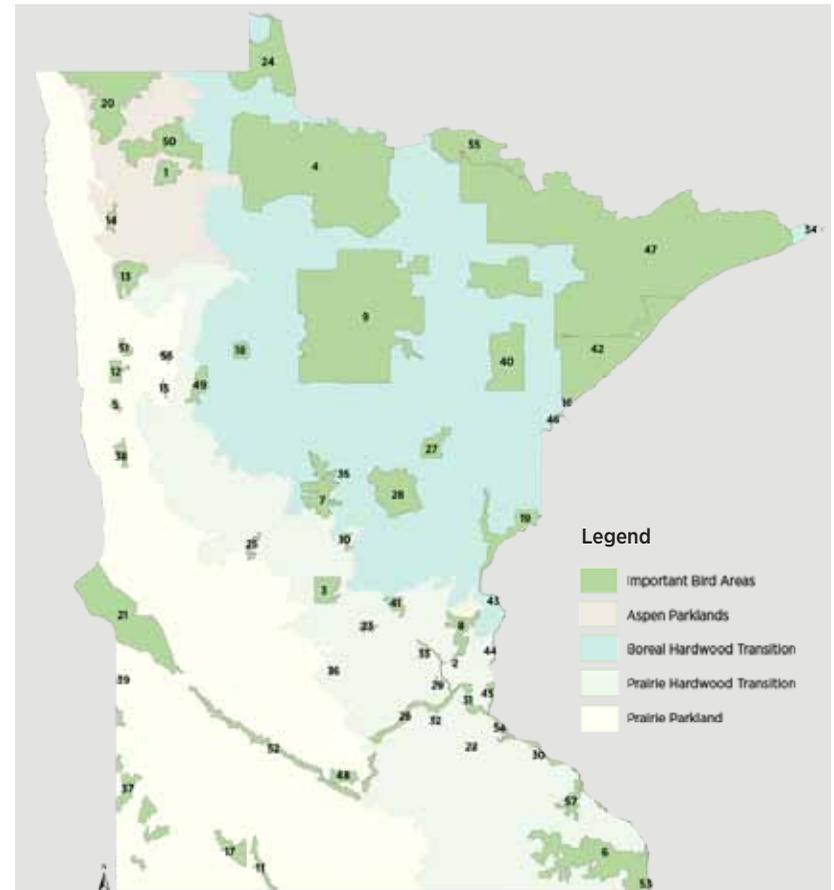
We are collaborating with private landowners to conserve and restore land in the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands of northwest Minnesota. This work is laying the foundation for a program that encourages landowners to protect outstanding bird habitat. Habitat will be protected through conservation easements that are a cost-effective way to protect land. In Minnesota, more than 75% of land is privately owned, which is why it is so important to find fair-market approaches to conserving private lands.

This past spring, Audubon Minnesota completed the statewide Marshbird Survey. Thanks to thirty-seven dedicated volunteers, who spent more than 1,500 hours surveying wetlands throughout Minnesota, we collected valuable data about Yellow Rails and five other secretive marshbirds. The data collected will shed light on the population trends and distribution of these elusive birds that need healthy wetlands. As a result, public land managers will be better equipped to make smart wetland-management decisions.

In addition to these achievements, we provide our unique expertise as part of the Prairie Plan Working Group, which comprises 10 conservation partners working toward the implementation of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Our work in northwest Minnesota is based on our commitment to implementing the Prairie Plan. The Plan provides a 25-year strategy to accelerate prairie and wetland conservation in the prairie region of Minnesota with ambitious goals:

- 1) Protect the remaining 108,875 acres of currently unprotected native prairie.
- 2) Restore approximately 350,000 acres of functioning prairie.
- 3) Enhance over 850,000 acres of existing grassland and wetland habitat.

**Our Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are how we prioritize our on-the-ground conservation projects. We have identified 57 IBAs throughout Minnesota that help us determine the most effective ways to direct our resources. Your support ensures that this science-based approach is used to guide conservation of the most essential habitats for birds.**



- |                                           |                                                       |                                          |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1 Agassiz NWR                             | 20 Kittson-Roseau Aspen Parkland                      | 37 Prairie Coteau Complex                |
| 2 AHATS-Rice Creek                        | 21 Lac Qui Parle - Big Stone                          | 38 Rothsay Prairie                       |
| 3 Avon Hills                              | 22 Lake Byllesby                                      | 39 Salt Lake                             |
| 4 Big Bog                                 | 23 Lake Maria State Park - Henry Larson County Forest | 40 Sax-Zim Bog                           |
| 5 Bluestem Prairie-Buffalo River          | 24 Lake of the Woods                                  | 41 Sherburne NWR                         |
| 6 Blufflands-Root River                   | 25 Lake Osakis                                        | 42 South-Central North Shore             |
| 7 Camp Ripley-Pillsbury-Lake Alexander    | 26 Lower MN River Valley                              | 43 St. Croix-Wild River S.P.             |
| 8 Carlos Avery                            | 27 McGregor                                           | 44 St. Croix Bluffs                      |
| 9 Chippewa Plains                         | 28 Mille Lacs                                         | 45 St. Croix Lake                        |
| 10 Crane Meadows NWR - Rice Skunk Complex | 29 Minneapolis Chain of Lakes                         | 46 St. Louis River Estuary               |
| 11 Des Moines River                       | 30 Mississippi River-Lake Pepin                       | 47 Superior National Forest              |
| 12 Felton Prairie                         | 31 Mississippi River Twin Cities                      | 48 Swan Lake                             |
| 13 Glacial Ridge                          | 32 Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve                       | 49 Tamarac NWR                           |
| 14 Goose Lake Swamp                       | 33 North Metro Mississippi River                      | 50 Thief Lake                            |
| 15 Hamden Slough NWR                      | 34 North Shore Peregrine Falcon Eyries                | 51 Twin Valley-Neal Prairie              |
| 16 Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve              | 35 Northland Arboretum                                | 52 Upper MN River Valley                 |
| 17 Heron Lake                             | 36 Pigeon Lake                                        | 53 Upper Mississippi NWR                 |
| 18 Itasca State Park                      |                                                       | 54 Vermillion Bottoms-Lower Cannon River |
| 19 Kettle River Banning State Park        |                                                       | 55 Voyageurs Kabetogama                  |
|                                           |                                                       | 56 Waubun Marsh                          |
|                                           |                                                       | 57 Whitewater Valleys                    |



## URBAN CONSERVATION

Birds don't focus on city or state boundary lines. Migratory birds are almost constantly on the move and they are most concerned with finding the food, water, and shelter they need to thrive and survive. Science tells us that healthy habitat in cities and towns provides crucial resources for birds, especially as they migrate in spring and fall. Your support helps us to drive solutions that address the biggest threats to birds, including in urban spaces.

**Audubon Minnesota added two new Bird Cities.** Our Bird City Minnesota program works to increase habitat, reduce threats, and engage citizens by recognizing cities that take action to create great places for birds to feed, live, and nest. St. Paul and Bemidji joined Hastings as official Bird Cities, all of which are implementing bird-friendly solutions in their cities. By recognizing these actions, we are identifying solutions that can be implemented in other communities, and at the same time, giving birds a chance to thrive alongside their human neighbors.

For example, Bemidji and its partners are working with retailers to promote native plants in landscaping projects to benefit birds, pollinators, and water quality. Bemidji is also reducing bird-window collisions, promoting renewable energy and efficiency standards for city buildings, and promoting non-toxic alternatives to lead ammunition, which poisons many bird species.

Thanks to ongoing support from the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund, we look forward to expanding Bird City Minnesota and having many more cities join the flock.

**Our Lights Out program recognizes buildings for helping to reduce bird-window collisions.** Most birds migrate at night and can become disoriented and driven to exhaustion by lighted structures in their flight path. Fatalities from nighttime window strikes or falling victim to predators while recuperating, are a major source of bird mortality. In addition to saving birds, building owners and managers are reducing their energy consumption and saving money by following bird-friendly practices.

We are grateful to all participating buildings for their leadership in saving birds and energy. See a full list of Lights Out buildings on page 21.



Indigo Bunting



## ADVOCATING FOR CONSERVATION

### **Audubon Members in Minnesota Protect Our Great Lakes**

The Great Lakes are five of America's greatest natural treasures. The 2017 federal budget plan had proposed slashing 97% of the funding used to protect and restore the lakes. Thousands of National Audubon members wrote their legislators to ask them to oppose this budget proposal, including Audubon members in Minnesota.

**We succeeded. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative will receive the full \$300 million for this fiscal year.**

Since 2010, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has funded over 2,000 projects that improve water quality, protect native wildlife, control invasive species, and clean up toxic pollutants that threaten our water supply. Cutting hundreds of millions of dollars from the budget would halt all of this important work, impacting not only our waters and wildlife, but the millions of people that call this region our home.

These numerous local projects add up to much greater regional impact for cleaner water, healthy habitat, and vibrant communities across the eight Great Lakes states.

Together, we can ensure that the Great Lakes continue to provide abundant clean water for the people and wildlife that depend on them.



## POLICY INFORMED BY SCIENCE

Audubon Minnesota informs lawmakers about legislation and policies that affect birds and their habitat because many issues that impact birds also impact people.

This year, we stood our ground on conservation issues and made valuable progress on issues that affect clean rivers, healthy habitat, and reducing carbon pollution.

We continue to work together as conservationists to address issues that impact everyone, regardless of political affiliation.



### **Water Action Day**

More than 700 Minnesotans, including many Audubon members, gathered at the Capitol in spring of 2017 to urge lawmakers to support clean water policies. We worked with a number of other coalition partners to make the Minnesota Environmental Partnership's Water Action Day a success.

### **Cleaning Up the Headwaters of Lake Superior**

The Legislature appropriated \$25 million for the cleanup of the St. Louis River Estuary – the headwaters of Lake Superior. This investment allows Minnesota to access \$47 million of federal support.

### **Solar Gardens with More Habitat for Birds and Pollinators**

Audubon Minnesota and our partners helped to pass legislation for native plants to be planted under and around solar panels on new developments. The guidelines included in the bill have incentivized 4,000 acres of solar sites to be planted with native wildflowers and grasses.



### **Funding for Habitat and Clean Water Initiatives**

Some lawmakers attempted to repeal or delay implementation of the state's law requiring vegetative buffer strips or alternative practices along lakes, rivers, streams, and public ditches. Audubon Minnesota and a coalition of conservation allies defeated attempts to weaken the buffer law.

## THANK YOU PARTNERS

Audubon Minnesota collaborates with partners to shape a healthy, vibrant future for all of us, including birds and wildlife. We are deeply grateful to everyone that supported our mission this fiscal year. Thank you for helping to protect Minnesota's birds and the habitats that support them.

A special thanks to all of the volunteers, citizen scientists, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and businesses that donated time and resources to our efforts. You make the accomplishments listed in this report possible.

### Conservation Partners

Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Minnesota Land Trust  
Natural Resources Research Institute – University of Minnesota  
University of Minnesota  
University of Wisconsin – La Crosse  
Upper Mississippi River Basin Association  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
US Fish & Wildlife Service



Clean Water Land and Legacy funding is used for Audubon Minnesota's Tallgrass Aspen Parklands program (p. 13). Legacy funds are also used for our Upper Mississippi River program project implementation, including site preparation, controlling invasive species, purchasing and planting trees, and post planting weed control.

Funding for Audubon Minnesota's Tallgrass Aspen Parklands program (p. 13) and Upper Mississippi River program (p. 9, 10) was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). The Trust Fund is a permanent fund constitutionally established by the citizens of Minnesota to assist in the protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.



Audubon Minnesota is a proud member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund.



Great Gray Owl

**Audubon Minnesota gratefully acknowledges our board members for their time, wisdom, and financial support. Their visionary guidance continually ensures we are a passionate and effective nonprofit organization.**

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#### **Thank You for Your Help: MNBirdAtlas.org**

The Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas is now available online!

Thanks to a number of dedicated partners and more than 800 volunteers who collected data, we have launched Minnesota's first Breeding Bird Atlas. This web-based tool contains impressive amounts of information about 249 bird species in Minnesota and their history, breeding habitats, population status, and conservation needs. The Atlas provides summaries of bird species documented in Minnesota during five summer seasons, from 2009-2013. Each summary includes maps and graphs depicting surveyed abundance across the state.

The Atlas will enable us to support local and state-wide conservation planning with current, science-based information.

*Birds are among the most visible indicators of the health of Minnesota ecosystems. The Atlas, documentation of bird species distribution across the Minnesota landscape, will serve as the baseline against which future observations can be compared and ecosystem health monitored.*

– Scott M. Lanyon, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education, University of Minnesota



**Red-headed Woodpecker**

# THANK YOU LIGHTS OUT PARTICIPANTS

Over 250 species of birds migrate through Minnesota each spring and fall. Many birds migrate at night and can be drawn off course by lighted structures in their flight path and are often killed or injured in collisions with buildings.

“Lights Out” can reduce these collisions! By turning off unnecessary lighting at night during spring and fall migration, building owners and managers can save birds, energy, and money.

Our thanks to the Building Owners and Managers Associations of Greater Minneapolis and Saint Paul for their assistance in reaching out to their membership about Lights Out and to the following participants for their commitment to helping migrating birds make safe passage through our urban landscapes.



Baltimore Oriole

## LIGHTS OUT BUILDING PARTICIPANTS

### BLAINE

Aveda Corporation

### BLOOMINGTON

HealthPartners  
Normandale Lake Office Park  
Reflections Condominiums

### GOLDEN VALLEY

The Colonnade  
General Mills

### MINNEAPOLIS

20, 100 and 111 Washington Square  
33 South Sixth St./City Center  
333 South Seventh Street Tower  
50 South 10th  
Ameriprise CSC Building  
Ameriprise Financial  
AT&T Tower  
Campbell Mithun Tower  
Canadian Pacific Plaza  
Capella Tower  
Carlyle Condominiums  
Fifth Street Towers - 100 & 150  
South Fifth Street  
Fifty South Sixth  
Grant Park Tower  
Hennepin County Central Library  
Hennepin County Government Center  
Hennepin County Health Services Building  
IDS Center  
International Centre  
LaSalle Plaza  
Marquette Plaza  
Mill Ruins Building  
Mill City Museum  
Oracle Centre  
PWC Plaza  
RBC Plaza  
River Parkway Place  
Riverplace

Thrivent Financial  
US Bancorp Center  
US Bank Plaza  
Wells Fargo Center

### MINNETONKA

301 & 401 Carlson Parkway  
601 Tower at Carlson Center  
Carlson Center East I

### PLYMOUTH

ATRIA Corporate Center  
One & Two Carlson Parkway

### ROCHESTER (MAYO CLINIC)

Gonda Building  
Guggenheim Building  
Hilton Building  
Mayo Building  
Siebens Building  
Stabile Building

### ROSEVILLE

Symantec

### ST. LOUIS PARK

MetroPoint

### ST. PAUL

Bremer Tower  
Ramsey County Government Center  
Ramsey County Library  
Saint Paul City Hall -  
Ramsey County Courthouse  
Securian Financial Group (400 Building)  
Securian Financial Group (401 Building)  
State of Minnesota Capitol Complex  
321 Grove (1&2)  
Administration Building  
Agriculture and Health Laboratory  
Andersen Building  
Bureau of Criminal Apprehension -  
Maryland  
Centennial Office Building  
Ford Building  
Freeman Office Building  
Judicial Center

Minnesota Governor's Residence  
Minnesota History Center  
Minnesota Senate Building  
Plant Power House and Shops Building  
Retirement Systems Building  
Stassen Building  
State Capitol Building  
State Office Building  
Transportation Building  
Veterans Service Building

Travelers Insurance  
US Bank Center  
Wells Fargo Place  
Wildier Center

### WABASHA

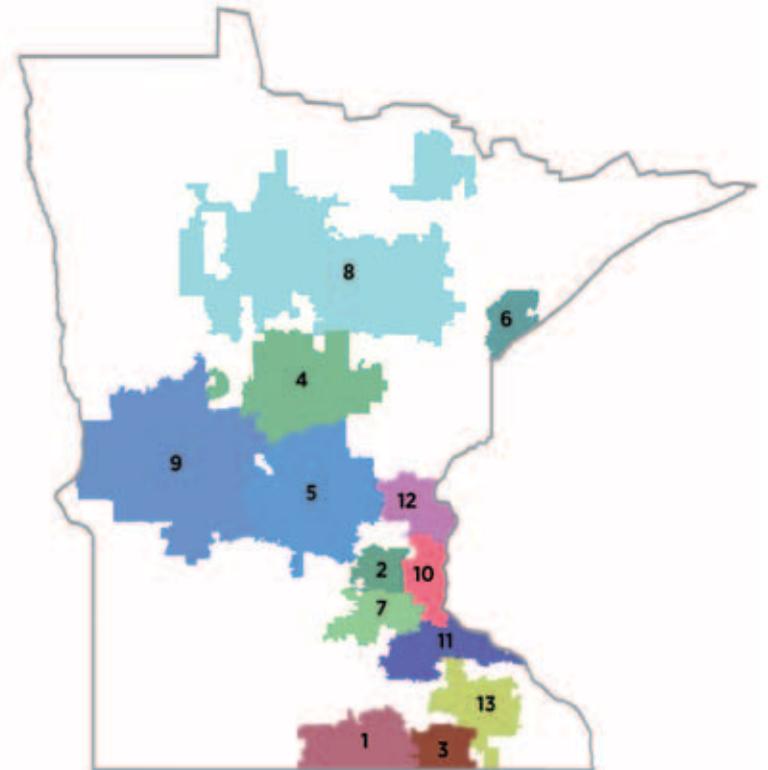
National Eagle Center

Please email us at [mnaudubon@audubon.org](mailto:mnaudubon@audubon.org) if you would like to add your building as a Lights Out participant.



## AUDUBON CHAPTERS IN MINNESOTA

- 1 Albert Lea Audubon Society
- 2 Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
- 3 Austin Audubon Society
- 4 Brainerd Lakes Area Audubon Society
- 5 Central Minnesota Audubon Society
- 6 Duluth Audubon Society
- 7 Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
- 8 Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society
- 9 Prairie Lakes Audubon Society
- 10 St. Paul Audubon Society
- 11 Upper Hiawatha Valley Audubon Society
- 12 Wild River Audubon Society
- 13 Zumbro Valley Audubon Society





## LOOKING AHEAD

One of Audubon Minnesota's strengths is our ability to transcend borders by having a birds-eye view of conservation. Everything we do in Minnesota fits into larger national efforts to conserve natural resources for future generations.

We owe it to our funders and supporters, as well as to birds, to manage all of our resources for the highest conservation return. In the spirit of that commitment, watch for updates about the following initiatives.

- Connecting youth to birds and clean water through in-classroom learning activities. At least 1,300 students will be inspired this coming year to make clean water choices that can result in real conservation impacts.
- Engaging communities around bird-friendly actions, including educating community members about the benefits of planting native flowers, trees, and grasses.
- Activating our network of chapters and members to advance and safeguard Minnesota's clean water, healthy habitat, and clean energy policies that help birds and people to thrive.
- Restoring the floodplain forests of the Upper Mississippi River watershed and developing conservation strategies that extend our impact throughout the flyway.
- Permanently protecting ecologically sensitive land along waterways in northwest Minnesota.



**Make a difference for  
Minnesota's birds.**

[mn.audubon.org/waystogive](http://mn.audubon.org/waystogive)



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