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*Media contacts:* *Doug Schultz**, Walker area fisheries supervisor, 218-547-1683;* *Bob Karls**, Northern Waters Land Trust board chair, 612-850-3811;* *Jennifer O’Neil**, Leech Lake Association board member, 218-839-6825.*

**DNR works with partners to add critical shoreline habitat to Miller’s Bay AMA on Leech Lake**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Northern Waters Land Trust, Leech Lake Association, and the Twin Cities Chapter of Muskies, Inc., Hugh C. Becker Grant Committee recently partnered to purchase 5.25 acres with 1,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline as an addition to the existing Miller’s Bay Aquatic Management Area in Miller Bay on Leech Lake.

The acquisition consists of two separate but concurrent purchases by the DNR and NWLT of four continuous parcels that protect important fish and wildlife habitats.

“The undeveloped shoreline includes riparian and submerged vegetation and wild rice that support critical muskellunge spawning and nursery habitat,” said Doug Schultz, DNR Walker area fisheries supervisor. “The purchase includes an upland portion comprised of an old growth hardwood forest important for its ecological, scientific, educational and aesthetic values.”

The DNR finalized the purchase of two of the four parcels in April 2022 with $125,000 in funding from Reinvest in Minnesota Critical Habitat Match Program. This program is funded by the Critical Habitat Conservation License Plate Program, which matches cash or land donation values. NWLT received a $283,520 Conservation Partners Legacy grant from the Outdoor Heritage Fund in 2020 to pursue the additional two parcels and transferred ownership to the DNR for management.

The Outdoor Heritage Fund was created after voters approved the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in November 2008, increasing the state sales tax by three-eighths of 1 percent. The fund receives one-third of the sales tax dollars, which may only be spent to restore, protect and enhance wetlands, prairies, forest and habitat for game fish and wildlife.

“Protecting habitat on Leech Lake and in Miller Bay has been a priority for our organization since 2012,” NWLT Board Chair Bob Karls said. “We are privileged to work with landowners and partners who value the importance of preserving land to protect the habitat and water quality of Leech Lake.”

The Leech Lake Association strongly supported this acquisition and contributed $10,000 toward its completion. NWLT also received an additional $3,500 in private donations, and $18,000 in grants from the Hugh C. Becker Foundation awarded by the Twin Cities Chapter of Muskies, Inc. specifically for this project. The project was also supported by the Cass County Board of Commissioners and the Pine Lake Township Board.

“It’s exciting and gratifying to see critical habitat like this protected,” said Jennifer O’Neil with the Leech Lake Association. “We are pleased to partner with the DNR and NWLT on such a significant conservation project.”

AMAs may be established to protect, develop, and manage lakes, rivers, streams, and adjacent wetlands and lands that are critical for fish and other aquatic life, for water quality, and for their intrinsic biological value, public fishing, or other compatible outdoor recreational uses. The newly acquired AMA parcels added to Miller’s Bay AMA will be designated “restricted use,” meaning hunting and trapping are prohibited activities due to the proximity of the parcels to occupied year-round homes.

Background about Miller Bay and its role as an important muskie habitat area is available in a past [Minnesota Conservation Volunteer story](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/issues/2014/may-jun/muskie.html) (mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine/issues/2014/may-jun/muskie.html). For more information on AMAs, visit the DNR’s [AMA finder](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/amas/index.html) (mndnr.gov/AMAs).

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