

2024 Strategic Planning Listening Sessions

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What are the biggest threats or needs related to Minnesota's environment or natural resources?

Responses:

- Difficult if funding is only restricted to public lands, need to be able to work on private lands. As parcels get smaller with divisions, it is more challenging to protect the natural resources and the environment.
- Protect larger blocks of land.
- Dwindling collaboration between the organizations and entities working on varying environmental and natural resource issues.
- Translators for the public ... science, awesome environmental education, research, and practical sustainable initiatives.
- Misinformation that may overemphasize impacts but not benefit of recreation.
- Need to get the next generation of kids into the outdoors. Since the pandemic, the amount of time spent outdoors has decreased dramatically. Help fund kids to get outside - especially for multiple-day immersive experiences. A lot of kids don't have the ability to go to national parks or their family cabin, etc.
- Biggest need is citizen participation - been in a lot of situations where we have important issues or needs, but we need more engagement and participation.
- Cultivating the passion and culture of stewardship from young people.
- How to address climate change and through education, technology, and outreach.
- Support the education side of addressing climate change by getting youth outdoors.
- Help youth connect with nature so that they are engaged and want to participate and support natural resources and the environment.
- Plant life and education around agriculture. PFAS exposure. Would like to see integrative, active environmental education.
- Misinformation regarding water and clean water. Industry threatens this and related things like wild rice and fishing.
- Mining close to the Boundary Waters, accurate information, people on both sides toss things at the other and there is nobody in the middle clarifying.
- Pollinators, reminding people not to mess with their lawns until above 50 degrees for a week straight.
- Wild animals coming into city limits. Would like to see a ban on buying bait to hunt bears.
- Unwillingness of the public to actively participate...1) awareness, 2) knowledge, 3) skills to, 4) action.
- More attention to urban areas that have fewer trees. Gardening /agricultural projects that combine fun and learning and food benefit. Plant more diverse trees in urban, more barren areas. Lead-pipe replacement. Environmental justice.
- Protection strategy for lakes. Reward people for doing the right thing, similar to SFIA, help people do it on their own. Funding for lake associations and empower them. Educate people on what is beneath the lake and how to protect it.
- Realtors only interested in sales. Lack of knowledge on how to be good stewards. Work with more realtors. They want to do the right thing but don't know how. Better education for realtors and lake associations.
- Federal government environmental protections and efforts and the potential to lose protections based on different administrations in the future. The EPA could be eliminated.
- Climate change is a big issue and how are we going to address this and all the issues.
- A huge threat is that the surge of funding to address climate and environmental issues will fail to have the desired impact due to fragmentation and a lack of a strategic framework around which to align many projects

and research. That will make it difficult to get more money in the future. LCCMR could use its influence to create the strategic framework.

- Much longer term thinking and projects.
- Fractured habitat, 2) short-term (only 5-10 year) policies. How do we truly build and manage habitat, corridors, and water for lasting, positive impact and sustainability? Especially in light of global climate change?
- Need to address the biodiversity side of things and how to address the ecology and restoration side.
- Use of marginal farmland and developments to create habitat in areas that are not actively being used.
- Overall fragmentation of environmental projects, which ultimately results in less impact. However, fragmentation could also be considered beneficial because it allows for a greater diversity of work.
- Chemicals that we put down on the road during winter, including salt. Kills amphibians, animals on food chain, etc.
- Climate change: ability to buffer our natural resources, think about resilience, and find ways to preserve what we have for future generations.
- Renewable energy, consumption.
- How do we connect all these issues, addressing all the waste, the circularity of resources, and not treating the environment badly?
- Need to address waste.
- Water is really important to us. However, we don't know if Line 3 affected Otter Trail. There was a puncture of an aqueduct near Park Rapids and that could affect us, and this is threatening.
- Air quality feels like a threat, particularly for those living close to a freeway. Air quality impacts the ability to be outside. Industrial centers are affecting the air quality.
- Climate change is affecting the environment and the environmental systems. Close the equity gap when it comes to different communities accessing spaces.
- Equity issues, biome diversity, agricultural concerns, and best practices development and how it affects the water. Environmental justice when it comes to air quality and water quality.
- Chloride is in the water. In Detroit Lakes, we are proud of our new ultra filtration water reclamation facility. This facility is the only MBR system that is capable of removing the phosphorus level to .06 mg/L biologically. This is great, but we have a low chloride limit in our NPDES permit. We know chloride levels are rising in MN lakes and rivers, and want to be able to meet this limit (230 mg/L). We have applied for a grant to pilot a new water processor followed by new reverse osmosis filter. This processor (molecular grinder) removes the charge and creates a neutral water, even breaking the PFOS and PFAS compounds. The RO unit then removes the chloride and other compounds creating H₂O. The reduction of these elements and compounds will have a great benefit to our water and natural resources.
- More trees, cleaner water.
- Habitat loss & climate change.
- Development, housing, etc.
- CO₂ emission. Emissions from Minnesota's homes and industry facilities have risen 14% due to the continued use of oil and natural gas - GHG emissions in MN 2005-2020.
- Need to involve tribal communities more please! Tribal members guaranteed seat on LCCMR.
- Biggest threats: 1) Continuing extractive resources that are not adequately regulated to protect our environment; 2) lack of resources to address results of over logging and mining, pollution of air and water, education of youth and public about issues; 3) encouragement of young people to get off screens and get

outside; 4) investor owned utility and other corporate lobbying against climate resiliency measures and a just transition to a fossil free economy.

- Climate change is the threat. Adaption and supporting ecosystem services through planting natives that feed the system is the biggest need.
- Willingness to take action.
- I'm very concerned about water quality, the effects of climate change, and the accessibility & sustainability of our energy sources and grid.
- Aquatic invasive species.
- Development and destruction of habitat (for whatever reason).
- Not using the natural resources properly. Forever chemicals are threatening our and wildlife's lives.
- Climate change impacts like extreme weather events, changing grow zones, etc.
- Climate change & drought.
- Changing climate, reduction of fresh food available, environmental justice inequities.
- Wildlife diseases are an emerging threat. Modern agriculture is having a huge negative effect on our environment. Persistent chemicals in manufacturing and agriculture. Air quality/pollution from agriculture and manufacturing. Buildings and build environment impacts. Biodiversity is threatened.
- Groundwater. Educate public about where their water comes from and what they can do to protect it.
- Water pollution, toxic chemicals leeching into drinking waters wells that water food. Air pollution - breathable air needed. Cancer - causing threats in environment and natural resources.
- Exploitation of land and resources as population grows. Stay ahead with good management. More and more land is becoming private and not great stewardship. Help private landowners be better stewards of their land.
- Motorized access, e.g., ATVs. ATVs getting bigger and wider, cause damages to ditches, roadways. Misuse is an issue; ATVs off-trail. Better marketing of good, proper use. Recreation is important but it is a challenge to balance motorized recreation with other uses.
- Better multi-use management for competing uses.
- Concentrate recreational activities in certain areas where people without land can recreate. Keep funding parks and recreation areas where people without land can recreate.
- Corporations buying up large amounts of lands as investment.
- Vacation rentals on the lakeshore increasing impact on the lakes. Owners are not there a lot of the year; can't be good stewards if they aren't there, don't know how to take care of the lake. Need to understand that they play a role and have a responsibility to be good stewards of the land that attracted them here in the first place. People are buying sensitive lakeshore lands and don't know how to take care of it.
- Balance between people and the environment is getting harder. "Not in my backyard."
- Create a pride in the environment and NR and local area.
- Agricultural side. Trying to get biggest bang for the buck. They will do it if it is profitable, including anything that will help environment and natural resources. More benefits for doing the right thing - incentives.

What do we need to do to address the threats facing Minnesota's environment and natural resources?

Responses:

- Optimize results by coordinating Minnesota's efforts and financial allocations with those of the federal government. There is federal funding going to certain projects, and it would be strategic for Minnesota to think about those projects when allocating. Maximize impact. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, which means dollars can go further. How could LCCMR lead to greater impact in combination with the federal dollars available? How could investments LCCMR makes have greater impact with the federal dollars?
- Increased cooperative management of invasive and habitat data capture technology.
- Less "reinventing of the wheel" because there is stronger information exchange between those working in the field on what works and what doesn't.
- Working across interests.
- Need to break down silos to think holistically - addressing multiple issues with one project.
- Building community when everything is so fragmented and fractured. Bring people together around climate change.
- Connect the fragments; 2) Connect organizations doing very similar things; 3) connections to place...You can't protect what you don't know and love.
- Greater partnership between organizations like the Nature Conservancy, nature centers, tribal communities, zoos, Voyageurs, etc. = cross-state solutions.
- Make sure that information and data is more effectively shared between different types of government entities. Additionally, it was noted that funded research should result in substantive outcomes/conclusions which can be shared with government entities who have the ability to take actionable steps.
- Community engagement. Getting people to care about their environment. Would lead to a more resilient future.
- LCCMR funded projects are picked up by government entities after LCCMR funding ends. LCCMR funding should be an avenue to getting work acknowledged by those governmental entities who have the power to make substantive change.
- Legislators need to be educated on environmental and natural resource issues. Ideally, they should know who to turn to for expertise and also be concerned with making substantive improvements.
- Environmental engagement - master naturalists, environmental learning centers.
- Public education and engagement.
- Develop programs to get people outside. Don't just give them a book or watch a movie/look at it from a trail. Need to go out in it, feel it, smell it, touch it, and get to know it.
- Find a way to encourage people to be more connected and feel more responsible and understand action environment.
- Action learning in environmental education. Engaging people in existing repair projects, particularly things that often don't get funded because they're messy and complex.
- Environmental education and engagement that is outdoors. Seeing more black and brown people, people with disabilities at those outdoor recreation places. Now, there are fantastic outdoor recreation programs, but we see a lot of white, able-bodied individuals. We need more diverse people participating and leading.
- Based on experience, recreational opportunities are a good way to engage people. Recreation is a positive step. People are often happier outside. Work with Itasca tour ski/bike/run and see a good mixture of people from different thoughts, political perspectives, etc. If have a neighborhood get together. Allowing people the

chance to meet in a non-charged atmosphere: everyone is going for a ski, bike ride. Seen success in local communities where have many sides of fence. Better than dragging people to tour solid waste facilities.

- Better education/discussion about the impacts of development.
- Teaching and role-modeling local actions that create positive, repeatable outcomes to address environmental challenges/threats.
- Public involvement. Offer opportunities for all ages to get involved. Continue to fund the Clean Water Fund.
- Science! Solutions that are climate smart. Native Habitat! Education to engage the next generation in our natural world.
- Get people to care.
- Expanding funding availability beyond public and perpetually protected land to help conservations organizations have a positive impact on privately owned habitats.
- A lot of land protections have gone unmanaged. A lot of land has gone unprotected. Agencies are spread too thin and maybe there is not enough funding for them.
- Invest in solutions-oriented research...should be: 1) strategic and prioritized; 2) coordinated; 3) community engaged; 4) evaluated and improved.
- Basic research. Easy to use environmental practices. Implementation assessment and evaluation. Long term assessments. Climate adaptation.
- Fund pilot programs to limit salt on sidewalks/roads. Study how this is already done in Norway and Austria. For example, larger diameter sand is used, thereby greatly reducing salt in waterways, lakes, etc. This can be done!
- Layering of activities and education. Hard to determine the category of funding when applying for LCCMR grants. Youth gardening programs partnering with parks.
- Learn the technique and tools about "strategy management at scale." Help fund the co-creation of changes to have impact, not just picking project. Encourage universities to adopt "strategy-aligned research" to improve how the research contributes to impact. Alignment and information management is needed. Just evaluating individual projects is not sufficient to improve impact and have value delivered.
- Really need to move to clean energy resources, so that climate will not keep on warming.
- Agricultural system is big opportunity - incentivizing pasture process, building soil fertility, grass systems, etc.
- Would love to see more non-motorized protections. Need truly wild places, dark skies, vast tracts of wilderness.
- Seeing a big move back to nature and addressing food needs and land protection needs.
- Is there a way to integrate food systems with ecology? This should be more seamless.
- Local communities need to be engaged in management and integration of food and ecology.
- Even if agencies want to do better, they need funds and resources to do so.
- "Lawns to Legumes" everywhere - finding hero species and problems and use them to bring people into the space of natural resources and the environment.
- Resilient farming methods, converting big ag to resilient acreage.
- Protect the resources that MN already has, protecting green spaces.
- Have small towns/rural communities be given an allotment to grow certain vegetables.
- Move forward with new technology to remove chloride, sulfur, PFAS, PFOAs. Bauer water processor followed by new reverse osmosis filters.
- Nature Center in St. Cloud and outreach for wildlife rehabilitation.
- Public land survey system (PLSS). 315,000 corners, tied to the land and water, legal division of the land.

- For reducing CO2 emissions: CO2 separation from industrial factories/processes and power plants, CO2 capture, CO2 sequestration.
- Advocate for a carbon border adjustment or products.
- Investing in technology that moves materials up the waste hierarchy. This helps address greenhouse gases.
- Shift some of the trust fund investment from Wall Street in a fund to charitable capital (via Venn Foundation) to de-risk smart environmental projects that are not quite financially viable.
- Fully leverage federal efforts like the American Climate Corps (AmeriCorps) to catalyze our state efforts.
- Stop burning fossil fuels.
- Allowing permeable synthetic turf to be installed MN residences in order to minimize water waste/consumption. There are alternatives that do not use rubber in fill.
- New approaches and novel technology to provide alternative solutions by using renewable and sustainable services. Government support is critical too!
- We need to protect our water from salt contamination by providing liability protection for salt applicators, like New Hampshire is doing.
- Invest in new and innovative technology and methods to combat climate change and mitigate its impact on our environment.
- Investment board invests the capital of the fund responsibly: no fossil fuels or funds invested in those.
- Need for permeable paths, trails, and surfaces.

What is your future vision for Minnesota's environment and natural resources? What would success look like?

Responses:

- More land acquisition
- More metro projects. Significant need. Serve far more people.
- Individual environmental projects are all working together towards an identified "big picture." There is unity in determining goals and vision and then also in striving to meet that.
- Shift away from a competitive funding process to a collaborative funding process. Rather than it being a "winner take all system," a funder should encourage entities working on similar issues to work together on a project and then be funded together. Such a funding process encourages collaboration and allows discrete issues to simultaneously also be put into a "bigger picture." By shifting from a competitive process to a collaborative process, so many organizations or communities that already want to work on similar issues can work together and get funded together, sharing what they create, rather than only funding a few.
- Involvement of a lot of people both in urban and rural areas, so that both urban and rural environments are addressed equally.
- Divisiveness prevents progress.
- Success is greater facilitated partnership between and with environmental organizations. How do we build prairie corridors together across the state, for example.
- Think "T.E.K": Traditional Ecological Knowledge - incorporate into decision process of all ecological work.
- Natural spaces have been transformed over time to have more native species and be ecologically health. This change alone isn't sufficient. Ensure that the human communities are able to witness and see this change happen. Being connected to the process of restoring habitat allows people to be more connected to nature - hopefully encouraging them to care for their environment and the natural resources around them.
- Our communities would be more knowledgeable and, in turn, more connected to the natural spaces surrounding them.
- Environmental and natural resource success stories could be used to help bring people together across the political divide. Proof of meaningful success that is welcomed by communities could actually decrease partisanship. MN could be an example for the greater U.S.
- More kids getting outside.
- Community engagement - where people are engaged and we are equally addressing urban and rural needs.
- Participant has been on projects that have had 6 or 7 years of work. She has been impressed with watching a park go from being a buckthorn forest to having an understory to supporting wildlife and birds. Then, people are connected to those spaces and use those spaces, allowing them to see that change over time. Maybe more of those people become more interested in natural resources overall because they have seen those changes and what it looks like to have Minnesota make not only physical changes in their environment but to have communities more knowledgeable and invested in that space. Physical change in a space and its people is good progress.
- Students used to have to go to the planetarium, a landfill, a water treatment plant, and do outdoor activities. Students are not required to do these things anymore.
- Creating stewards for water, wildlife, and habitat for the future.
- All plantings should be done by first asking, "How many invertebrates does this tree/shrub/forb support?" (Data is readily available.) Only flora supporting the highest number of native insects should be planted.

Minnesota should adopt this strategic thinking process, thereby leading and influencing to county and city level. Education, education! Iowa does this.

- Model of good progress.
- Where do we want to be, and what does it look like, and when was it historically? Goal setting.
- A future that works for everyone and not a "blanket approach".
- Be less polarized. Many complex projects are not funded.
- Stop salt altogether - make salt illegal.
- Monarch migration.
- Carbon neutral state - sequestering more carbon than we're emitting.
- Holding or reducing the number of impaired waterways in Minnesota.
- Restored habitat corridors.
- Finding solutions that have positive feedback loops with multiple benefits.
- Reduction of fear and anxiety about our ecological future and confidence that we can address problems and a sense of hope for the future.
- Something we have made progress on is the Mississippi River. As a kid, it was very dirty and smelly in the 1960s. The EPA has worked on it and now it is pretty good, but we need to keep educating legislators about that history. It's important to get the word out about issues such as the lead in tackle and bullets and how that affects our water.
- Support Lake County (and others). Demonstration forest outside of Two Harbors.
- Embracing indigenous wisdom of natural resource management. Healthy air, soil, and water. Healthy ecosystems = healthy people.
- Research that 1) promotes adaptation and mitigation of climate crisis, and 2) addresses wealth inequality. Fund projects in cities, heat islands, park deserts, barren no canopy streets.
- A diverse environment that is resilient to changing climate. Diversity is strength. Outcomes needed and need to be monitored.
- More trees. Cleaner water.
- Strategies to minimize water waste (i.e., watering lawns). We need alternatives.
- Clean water. Circular economy with no waste or environmental contamination. Natural, harmonious habitats for humans and animals.
- Access to forests, access to clean water - affordable. Success would be people willing to raise their taxes to pay for natural resource protection.
- With people realizing and emphasizing the issues more. I believe we can start from regulations for prevention. Have alternative plans to rescue the environment.
- Kids with more outdoor experiences.
- Minnesota should have tangible, accessible, and impactful ways to protect our environment and natural resources (e.g., readily accessible tools/programs to participate in as businesses and citizens, AmeriCorps opportunities, volunteer opportunities). Anxiety about climate change can be paralyzing, and we must find ways to help Minnesotans feel there are things they can do to protect our state's environment. We need ways to work together to build our resilience.
- Good and sustainable policies and appropriations and other funding and support.
- Solutions to water pollution, air pollution, and cancer.
- Landscapes.

Open Comment

Responses:

- Use ENRTF to fund collaboration. Moreover, it should support the sharing of information generated through funded projects.
- Fund projects that are working on multi-solving strategies. Issues can and should be linked together. For example, food insecurity and nutrition issues (both social issues) should be linked with agricultural practices and restorative agriculture. Projects that think about linking social and environmental/natural resource issues together can help maximize impact.
- Creation of community support groups where people can bond.
- Need better communication and coordination with the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, Game & Fish, and LCCMR.
- Continue to find ways to get work done on private lands. Public won't support work on private lands - do it after ballot.
- Multiple participants expressed appreciation for LCCMR creating and allowing for virtual participation. They liked the ability to attend virtual listening sessions, such as this one, and the ability to virtually watch meetings. Participants expressed that they want to stay connected to the LCCMR's work and the more that materials are made available online and remote participation is allowed, the more they can do that.
- LCCMR funded projects need to ensure that they aren't only representing a few stakeholders in a community. Before projects are funded, they should have gone through thorough community outreach already, making sure to give a voice to traditionally unrepresented groups. Also need to make sure that projects are required to do proper permitting and environmental reviews. Often people do not want to do what is environmentally friendly because of the size and cost of doing so.
- I'd like to talk about your LCCMR stories project. I would love to blend strategy structure, opportunities, and data along with the stories.
- It helps for people to do something outdoors and have more people experiencing outdoors. The more people do so, there is a snowball effect of engagement and activity participants
- LCCMR has done a good job supporting projects related to pollinators, resource assessment, education, nitrate, hemp, and water quality
- LCCMR has helped inspire a lot of momentum on cover crops. Soil health is the future.
- Provide longer funding periods. One participant noted that "plants are slow" and wanted the LCCMR to recognize that certain types of projects simply take longer because of the nature of the work.
- Establish something similar to Conservation Legacy Grant.
- Grants have been crucial for recreation projects across the county.
- Often technology is used but there isn't always a way to implement that technology.
- This 5-minute video shares about using Strategy Mapping to address complex environmental issues in MN: <https://vimeo.com/913860410/24fd3e8465>.
- Participants expressly noted that they want a greater diversity of voices on who's doing the work. Specifically, participants wanted to make sure individuals and organizations who are typically "boxed out" of the space are able to be funded and be heard.
- Is there a way to get small projects we can get people started on? The more opportunities there are, it helps people take first steps, ultimately gaining new participants and supporters of the environment.

- Additional funding for strategy aligned research projects. This research focuses on impact rather than just the findings resulting in more questions. See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C3wT6Ynx1UFWIIsgIkMLiGHuGGSj8fC9/view>
- In Minnesota, we need to be thinking and addressing culverts under lake roads that don't have a buffer.
- More funding for non-game habitat prioritization.
- Participants felt that LCCMR has a user-friendly process that is approachable.
- One participant wanted to acknowledge how nice the portal has been, noting its good interface.
- There is a lot of funding wasted on specific invasive species, and it is just focused on removal and not the broader functioning of the ecosystem so that the invasive species doesn't come back
- As it relates to ENRTF investment, the fund should invest in green investments rather than just in an index fund. It should be invested in social/green funds.
- One pathway for impact investing is via MN's Venn Foundation.
- Getting the aging population out in nature is great to delay dementia and Alzheimer's Disease symptoms. People might take advantage of opportunities to experience nature to help improve their brain health. Connect dots between different issues to broaden support for protecting the environment.
- I can speak to the hurdles of getting kids to centers like Osprey Wilds and Eagle Bluff. Teacher burnout is huge right now so how can we support those lead teachers who do all the planning for the trip. Stipends for planning the trip in their free time will go along way to helping that. Also, many teachers are burned out planning the trip because they have to fundraise so much...for both the trip costs, the busing, the substitute teachers, etc. If we can reduce or eliminate those hurdles, we'd see more teachers championing these trips. Finally, many schools don't know there are centers that do overnight outdoor learning. We need a marketing push for teachers, administrators, and parents so they understand what the trip is and the plethora of benefits (physical, mental, emotional, etc.) that these trips have.
- This video talks about shifting investments into the charitable capital space. The example is for housing, but it could support many environmental topics: <https://vimeo.com/628782562>
- Trails - don't lose sight of non-motorized world, still important.
- Agriculture can have huge impact. Agriculture thing should be through federal farm bill.
- Public lands, public waters need to be managed.