

SPOTLIGHT

Restoring Wildlife Management Areas in the Cannon River Watershed

- [By ALAN KRAUS Special to the News](#)

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Great River Greening will soon work with the Minnesota DNR to seed a new forest just outside Faribault. (Photo courtesy of Great River Greening)

Imagine walking through our area forests without having to push through thick bushes of buckthorn. Imagine hiking through a prairie [without seeing](#) any six-foot-tall wild parsnip, an invasive plant that can give you severe rashes when you bump against it.

These are but a few of the goals that Great River Greening and the Minnesota DNR have for restoring four Wildlife Management Areas in the Cannon River Watershed. Wildlife management areas (WMAs) are part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system that have been established to protect lands and waters that have a high potential for wildlife production, public hunting, trapping, fishing, and other recreational activities.

[Great](#) River Greening will soon be working with the Minnesota DNR to seed a new forest in a new 200-acre Wildlife Management Area, Sunktokeca Creek WMA, located northeast of Faribault. The Trust for Public Land acquired the land for Sunktokeca Creek WMA with funding from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund and conveyed it to the Minnesota DNR to be managed as a WMA.

Restoration plans include reseeding croplands to prairie and forest cover and improving some of the existing woodlands to remove invasive species and improve wildlife habitat. The timber stand improvement project envisions harvesting the mostly low grade trees, like box elder, currently populating the 31-acre stand, and then reseeding with oaks and other high-quality hardwoods.

“As a recent addition, Sunktokeca Creek WMA offers a unique opportunity for early planning and implementing restoration that will last for generations to come,” said Jeanine Vorland, Minnesota DNR wildlife manager.

Becca Tucker, Great River Greening [project manager](#), agrees. “These trees will add much needed habitat for wildlife in a part of Minnesota which had been mainly forested in the past.”

This project is part of a larger effort by the Trust for Public Land, Great River Greening, the DNR and Cannon River Watershed Partnership to protect seasonally flooded wetlands, improve wildlife habitat, and open more outdoor recreation land to the public. Great River Greening, a St. Paul, MN based non-profit, has worked for over 20 years restoring land and water resources throughout Minnesota. With the help of local volunteers, their efforts to restore degraded forests and grasslands improves our outdoor recreation experiences, our economy and our drinking water. Vorland hopes to see the partnership with Great River Greening continue and also expand to other WMAs in the Cannon River Watershed.

Steve Hockett, Great River Greening director of conservation programs, said working with this partnership “gives GRG the opportunity to work across six counties in greater Minnesota, with a focus on habitat restoration, improvement to water quality, and public engagement.”

The new Sunktokeca WMA will be open to the public for hiking, hunting, and fishing. It will also provide much needed habitat for non-game wildlife, insect pollinators like bees and butterflies, and songbirds providing many opportunities for hikers, hunters, and anglers. Funding for this project is provided from the Outdoor Heritage Fund to restore, protect, and enhance Minnesota's wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife.

Alan Kraus is the Cannon River Watershed Partnership's conservation program manager.