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Land purchase expands Sakatah Wildlife Management Area

By The Trust for Public Land and Clean River Partners
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The Trust for Public Land staff explore some of the 165 acres of land donated to the Sakatah Wildlife Management Area. (Courtesy of DJ Forbes)

The Sakatah Wildlife Management Area has expanded by 165 acres. The Trust for Public Land purchased former farmland that has been added to the publicly accessible wildlife management area in Morristown.

Part of the Cannon River Watershed, this property offers important wetland, forest, and grassland wildlife habitat and recreational areas.

The Trust for Public Land purchased the property utilizing the Outdoor Heritage Fund and conveyed ownership to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The DNR will manage the property to be used for public recreation and wildlife management. It will be open for hiking, fishing, hunting and other outdoor pursuits.

“Protecting and expanding access to the Sakatah Wildlife Management Area not only increases habitat for migratory birds and other sensitive species, but opens up additional access to outdoor recreational activities for nearby neighbors and folks within an hour’s drive of the Twin Cities,” said DJ Forbes, project manager for The Trust for Public Land. “Close-to-home access to nature is so important to mental and physical health, and this additional acreage will ensure that many more Minnesotans can enjoy those benefits.”

Originally the Wahpekute, a forest Dakota people, had a village on the Cannon River along the south edge of what is now Morristown. In 1854, this land was part of a 480-acre tract of land acquired by Andrew Storer. Three generations of the Chapman family began farming the land in 1872 until around the 1960s. Then in 1970, a nephew of the Chapmans’ and his wife, Millard and Fern Meyers, purchased the 310-acre farm and woods from the Chapman estate.

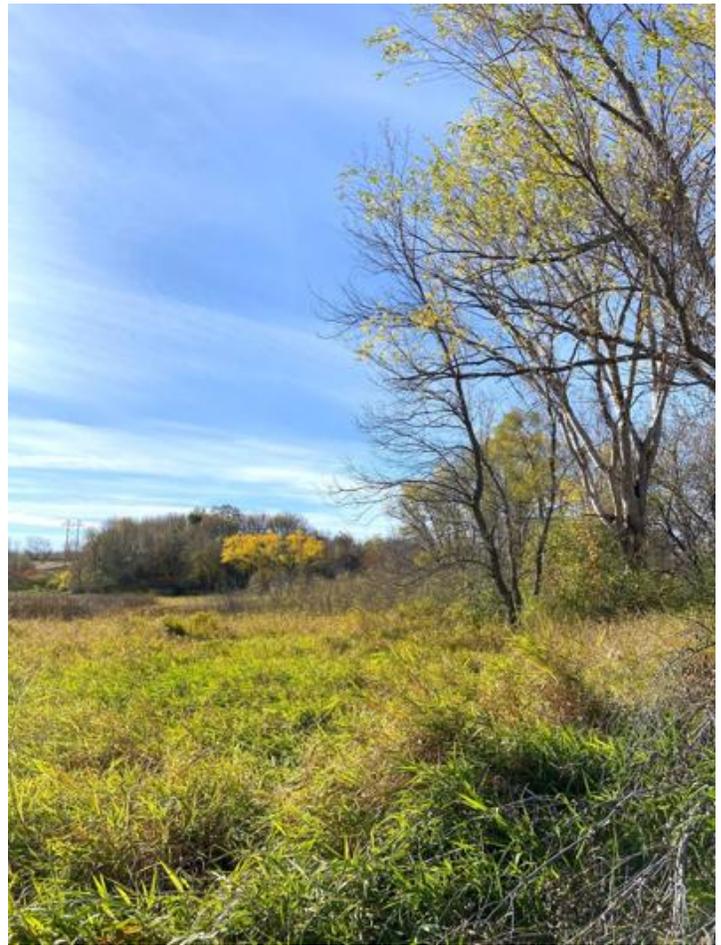
The three Meyers sisters inherited the 165 acres of cropland. Adhering the goals of their father “to keep the land in our family and maintain its natural beauty, wildlife habitat and historical significance,” they decided to turn to The Trust for Public Land.

They said in a statement: “Our family looks forward to seeing the results of having the cropland and surrounding grassland and wetland area restored and protected. Our hope is for an overall improvement in the Cannon River Watershed and to see people from nearby communities, church groups, maybe campers staying at our brothers’ campgrounds, and students from nearby schools and colleges join Great River Greening in the work of restoring this land. The restoration can be a learning opportunity for us all as we connect with other people and with nature.”

The Cannon River Watershed is an area where less than 5% of its land is publicly accessible and less than 20% of the landscape remains as natural habitat. The Trust for Public Land, with support from donors and outreach assistance from Clean River Partners, has now completed over 15 land protection projects protecting over 2,700 acres in the watershed.

“What makes this story unique is that private landowners, public and nonprofit organizations cooperated to make this important land protection become reality,” said Alan Kraus, Clean River Partners conservation program manager.

“The opportunity to protect and restore these 165 acres of land along the Cannon River is only possible because of the commitment the Meyers family has for the wellbeing of future generations, and the foresight by Minnesotans to support the Outdoor Heritage Fund which protects and preserves our open spaces and provides greater access to the outdoors,” said Kristi Pursell, executive director of Clean River Partners.



Former farmland will be restored to its natural state and managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for wildlife and public recreation. (Courtesy of DJ Forbes)