

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Cordelia Pierson, 651-917-1876
Executive Director

MINNESOTA ENVIRONMENTAL FUND GRANTS
\$176,000 TO PROTECT LAKE SUPERIOR WATER, NATURAL AREAS

St. Paul, Minnesota – For the first time in its 25 years, the nonprofit Minnesota Environmental Fund (MEF) is granting a total of \$176,000 to four of its member organizations to protect the clean water and natural resources of the Lake Superior watershed. These funds were awarded to MEF in a community service settlement agreement as recommended by the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Minnesota, and are intended to address and provide justice for environmental degradation in Lake Superior.

Since 1991, people in Minnesota have been donating to the Minnesota Environmental Fund through their workplaces. MEF then distributes these funds to more than 20 environmental nonprofits, protecting, conserving and restoring Minnesota’s environment.

“When the United States Attorney’s Office needed an experienced partner to distribute these funds to strong environmental nonprofits working within the Lake Superior watershed, the Minnesota Environmental Fund was ready with effective member groups and great projects,” said Cordelia Pierson, Executive Director of MEF.

“The United States Attorney’s Office is gratified that this criminal penalty is being used by the Minnesota Environmental Fund to counteract the harm identified through the prosecution of an environmental crime occurring in the Great Lakes,” noted John Kokkinen, Assistant United States Attorney at the Department of Justice in Minneapolis.

Each of the four recipients, North American Water Office, Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota, The Nature Conservancy, and The Trust for Public Land, will be working over the next year on these land restoration projects. The projects include planting over 2,500 wild fruit plants in collaboration with local Native American tribes, acquiring and restoring high priority land for Minnesota State Parks, restoring the ecological balance of 250 acres of forests along key rivers, and protecting priority land in the Lake Superior watershed.

“These grants showcase the power of our vision – working together to shape a sustainable and just future for Minnesota’s environment,” Christina Hausman, President of MEF. “Because people support MEF at work, MEF was able to act quickly to ensure these grants protected Lake Superior. We are deeply grateful for this long-term support from the people living near Lake Superior, the recommendation of the US Attorney’s Office, and our members leading these Lake Superior projects.”

The City of Duluth, the University of MN-Duluth, the State of Minnesota, and federal agencies are all workplaces in the Lake Superior area that offer giving to the Minnesota Environmental Fund. Employees can choose to give through payroll giving with each payroll or a one-time gift.

About MEF:

The Minnesota Environmental Fund engages workplaces and individuals to support leading nonprofit organizations that protect, conserve and restore Minnesota’s environment. In 2015, the Fund raised \$511,000 at more than 100 workplaces across Minnesota, reaching more than 200,000 employees and supporting over 20 organizations.

For more information about the Minnesota Environmental Fund, its environmental partners, and workplace giving for Minnesota’s environment, please visit us on the web at www.mnenvirofund.org

About the Projects:

Wild Fruit and Berry Project, Restoration: \$44,000
North American Water Office (NAWO)

Wild fruit and berries are essential foods for wildlife and for Indigenous Peoples, nutritionally and ceremonially. The traditional indigenous diet was highly varied, including wild game, wild rice, the three sisters (corn/beans/squash), wild fruits and berries, and gathered herbs, plants and medicines.

“This generous award to the North American Water Office enables us to improve water quality and address environmental, healthy food, cultural, and social issues at the same time,” noted Lea Foushee, Environmental Justice Director of NAWO.

NAWO will be collaborating with two tribes on wild fruit and berry restoration projects, one in Carlton County with the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, and the other in Cook County with the Grand Portage Chippewa (Ojibwe). The Wild Fruit and Berry Project will plant over 2500 shrubs and trees, from black raspberries to wild plums, significantly expanding the availability of these fresh, healthy foods to community members in Fond du Lac and Grand Portage. The Tribes will collaborate with NAWO on recruiting and training people to plant and care for the wild fruits and berries, and will own and maintain the plantings and equipment.

“I am honored that we were chosen to receive the funds that will allow us to provide the Community with a fresh source for berries as part of our locally grown food initiative,” said Paula Schaeffbauer, Health Services Director, Grand Portage Reservation.

North Shore State Park Protection Fund, Acquisition: \$50,000 Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota

The North Shore State Park Protection Fund will help the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota (P&TC) complete one or two of the highest priority acquisition and habitat restoration projects at state parks on Lake Superior.

P&TC has protected extensive stretches of Lake Superior shoreline, resulting in nearly 4,700 acres being added to our eight beloved North Shore state parks. These critical natural ecosystems of the Lake Superior basin include wetlands, springs, trout streams and shorelines that are vital to our water.

Before protecting lands within our state parks, PTC must restore habitat – often the single biggest obstacle to adding critical lands to our state parks on the North Shore. The North Shore State Park Protection Fund will support this critical restoration, leverage matching funds, and provide for the permanent protection of these natural areas, a gift for generations to come.

“This grant allows us to continue building on our past successes with adding valuable land to Minnesota’s North Shore State Parks,” said Brett Feldman, executive director of Parks & Trails Council. “We believe this new project will eventually become a treasured part of our state parks system for generations to come.”

Sustaining Forests and Freshwater in the Lake Superior Watershed, Restoration: \$32,000 The Nature Conservancy

Healthy forests and the integrity of freshwater ecosystems are intimately linked in northern Minnesota. As northern forests in the Lake Superior watershed transition from a boreal to a temperate climate, conserving upland forest habitats is even more critical for protecting our freshwater streams and Lake Superior itself. Degrading forests and loss of forest land both decrease freshwater infiltration into groundwater and streams, and contribute to greater run-off and flows that hurt water quality. Restoring forest health will improve both forest resilience and watershed health across the region.

This project will support the Nature Conservancy (TNC) treating 250 acres of riparian forests in sub-watersheds of Lake Superior to enhance forest diversity, resilience, and water quality protection values. Treatments will include restoring long-lived conifers such as white spruce, white cedar and white pine;

planting red oak and yellow birch trees; protecting them from deer browse; and clearing brush so that trees will have enough light to get established. Pending approval of other grant applications, this grant from the Minnesota Environmental Fund could leverage up to \$600,000 of matching and complementary funds, allowing TNC to treat 2500 additional acres in the Lake Superior Watershed, and over the next ten years, a total of 30,000 acres of forest in the region. The proposed restoration project is part of TNC's ongoing commitment to developing comprehensive climate change adaptation strategies that focus on conserving key forest functions in a rapidly changing climate.

“Healthy and diverse forests are critical in protecting clean water in our rivers, streams and in Lake Superior, not to mention providing clean air, wildlife habitat, recreation and a host of other benefits on the North Shore. We are grateful for this Minnesota Environmental Fund grant and excited about the opportunity it provides to continue our work to restore and diversify forests in the Lake Superior region,” said Jim Manolis, Nature Conservancy Forest Conservation Program Director.

Northwoods – Critical Shoreline Protection: \$50,000
The Trust for Public Land

Protecting forested land guards and improves the water quality of our rivers and lakes in the Lake Superior watershed; protects forests that store carbon; and provides exceptional recreational opportunities for people of the region. However, lands along these rivers and lakes are in high demand for residential and second home development.

The Trust for Public Land's Critical Shoreline Protection grant will help acquire and conserve at-risk shoreline, preventing it from being sold for private development.

“Our critical shoreline protection work is emblematic of our mission to protect land for people to enjoy. The Trust for Public Land is delighted to be able to help protect the waters of the Lake Superior watershed and make it easier for people to enjoy this cherished resource,” said Susan Schmidt, The Trust for Public Land Minnesota State Director.

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