

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WORKING TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Like many across our city and state, at Conservation Minnesota we are grieving the killing of George Floyd. This was a tragic example of how racism wreaks havoc on our shared humanity. **We stand with those calling for justice, accountability, and change.**

For over a year, our staff and board have been working to understand how racism, discrimination, and poverty have played a role in conservation history, leading to decisions that have left many communities with concentrated health risks and pollution, most often communities of color.

The toll of this pollution has been clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when conditions linked to air pollution like asthma have caused higher death rates. During the pandemic, people have also found that simple things many of us take for granted, like **taking a walk and spending time in nature, are critically important to our health and well-being.** Yet even **this privilege is not equally available** to every person living in Minnesota. This is unacceptable.

Conservation Minnesota is launching **a new strategic plan aimed at helping make sure a person's skin color or zip code are not determining factors of their environment, health, safety, or opportunity** to share in all Minnesota has to offer. Our hope is that working toward a shared vision of clean air, clean water, clean energy, and safe access to the outdoors for every community can also highlight our shared humanity and help bring people together.

We don't have all the answers. But we are committed to be part of the solution.

Sincerely,



Paul Austin
Executive Director

FROM THE FIELD TEAM: KEELY CERVANTES

GARDENING CORNER

Many Minnesotans are reconnecting with our local food systems during the pandemic and have begun growing gardens again. As a former farmer, I'm sharing with you **one of my favorite things about our four seasons: growing food!**

Even as summer seems to finally be here to stay, and you've got your tomatoes slowly creeping taller, it's already time to start thinking about fall planting. **Prolonging the season takes some planning**, but the reward of an autumn bounty after the summer nights wane is worth it.

Midsummer planting of quick-maturing and frost-tolerant crops is key—fall plants take longer to mature as the days become shorter and the nights cooler. In Minnesota, **fall plants should go into the ground about mid-August**, roughly 8 to 10 weeks before October's first hard frost. Add a few days to the seed packets' "days to maturity" to make sure they will be mature enough to tolerate frost. Replace your earlier plantings that have gone to seed with quick-maturing fall vegetables, such as beets, radishes, and winter squash—my favorite. **Good frost-tolerant crops include brassicas like kale, broccoli, and kohlrabi**—these need to be started indoors several weeks before midsummer planting or simply picked up at the local garden store. Other perfect **vegetables for crisp, fall evening meals are carrots, scallions, turnips, and spinach.**

In the meantime, enjoy the fruits of your spring labor and eat as many tomatoes as you can before the fleeting summer days fade.



Keely Cervantes
East Metro
Regional Manager



MOVING TOWARD A CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

Coal plant communities in the transition to clean energy

Earlier this spring, **Great River Energy**—which provides electricity to 28 rural electric co-ops in Minnesota—**announced they would close their only remaining coal plant several years early.** The energy will be replaced mostly with new wind farms, including four in Minnesota. The closure will reduce Great River's carbon emissions by 95% over their 2005 benchmarks.

The Coal Creek Station plant, located in North Dakota, receives coal from an adjacent mine. Yet even without coal transportation costs, the plant is no longer economical to operate. Wind, solar, and innovative energy storage continue to decrease in cost, driving energy companies' plans to decarbonize.

This closure highlights the need for smart policies to assist communities and power plant employees as we transition to clean energy. This year, **Conservation Minnesota worked with legislators and affected communities** to establish Community Transition Grants which will **support economic development in communities facing retirement of fossil fuel plants.**

As Minnesota's remaining coal plants are closed, Conservation Minnesota will work to ensure local communities aren't left behind as we transition to affordable clean energy.

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES FROM TOXIC TCE

Local community action matters. This year's legislative ban on Trichloroethylene (TCE) is a perfect example. Early in 2019, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) discovered that for many years **a manufacturer in White Bear Township released TCE into the air at unsafe levels.** Community members were outraged and began to organize, working to ban the chemical through legislative action.

TCE is a dangerous industrial chemical that is a known carcinogen and developmental toxin. Long term exposure damages the kidneys, liver, and immune system. It is a threat to communities when spilled or released into the air or water. Groundwater contamination can pollute drinking water and create toxic soil vapors that seep into homes and buildings.

Last year, several bills were introduced to phase out the use of TCE. Although both the House and Senate passed their own bills, they could not agree on the details and ultimately no bill became law. This year, community groups and Conservation Minnesota continued work with key legislators, including Sen. Chamberlain, Sen. Wiger, Rep. Wazlawik and Rep. Fisher.

Earlier this spring, both **the House and the Senate voted on the same bill to ban TCE, and Governor Walz signed it into law.**

To see how individual legislators voted on this bill and other important conservation bills, visit our newly updated website at conservationminnesota.org/voting-records.

The work of Conservation Minnesota is guided by your values and priorities. We listen to Minnesotans and focus on solving the conservation problems that matter most to you.

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