

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

As an eternal optimist, I'm choosing to reflect on the positive moments from 2020 and look to even brighter days in 2021. The past year highlights the need to look for places of agreement and common ground. And the Conservation Minnesota team is excited for the challenge.



Paul Austin
Executive Director

Once again this fall, we witnessed that almost every time voters get to decide, they collectively say yes to conservation and protecting their communities' health and vitality. Even with divisive elections around the state and country, local parks initiatives, like the one in Rochester, passed all over the country. This is important to note—conservation is a space where we all agree.

Looking back on the last year, I'm proud of our staff's work to educate voters and candidates. The work created a road map where elected officials can come together to protect our air and water, create healthier communities, and build prosperity as we work to recover from the pandemic. It will drive our work as the next legislative session begins in January. The work will be hard. It is no surprise that in this election, like almost every other in the past several decades, Minnesotans delivered two more years of divided state government. But that is no excuse for lawmakers to fail to deliver on critical conservation needs.

There are lots of opportunities to find common ground and make real progress in the year ahead. Our entire team looks forward to working together with you and our state's leaders to make it happen in 2021.

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.

conservationminnesota.org | 612.767.2444

1101 West River Parkway, Suite 250
Minneapolis, MN 55415

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WINTER 2020-21 NEWSLETTER



ROCHESTER VOTERS SUPPORT THEIR PARKS

Parks and greenspace have been important to so many during the pandemic. Minnesotans have always valued our parks and natural areas—time and time again, we have shown we’re willing to invest in these spaces. During the last economic downturn in 2008, Minnesotans across the state overwhelmingly voted in favor of increasing their sales tax to pass the Clean Water, Land, & Legacy Amendment. This November, **64% of Rochester voters supported a city referendum to protect water quality, natural areas, and park improvements.**

Now residents in the City of Health, and those who visit this vibrant community, will benefit from the **\$2 million in annual investments.** This investment is due in large part to the partnership between The Trust for Public Land (TPL)—the national leader in state and local funding referendums—and Conservation Minnesota. After working together on the successful 2018 parks referendum in Brooklyn Park, TPL staff and our field team reconvened to assess other communities seeking additional investment in their parks.

Rochester was a perfect candidate. The organizations worked with city officials to include the question on the November ballot. Southern Minnesota Regional Manager Anna Richey helped form the local Vote Yes on Parks committee to work along with Conservation Minnesota and TPL to educate voters about the referendum. In a year of very close races, the referendum’s success shows that **protecting our outdoors is something we can all agree on.**

right, Rochester’s **Soldiers Memorial Field Park**
below, Rochester’s **Silver Lake Park**



POWERING MINNESOTA’S ECONOMIC RECOVERY WITH CLEAN ENERGY

Recovering from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic will require innovative solutions and collective work. In May, the **Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and Department of Commerce asked Minnesota’s energy companies to create plans that reduce emissions and increase access to conservation and clean energy resources** while growing jobs and putting Minnesota’s economy on the rebound.

In June, Xcel Energy responded by proposing projects to create jobs and keep energy bills stable. The projects bring significant system benefits and speed Minnesota’s clean energy transition.

One such project is wind repowering. Xcel Energy has proposed rebuilding (or repowering) older wind farms with the latest, most efficient turbine technology. This would add more renewable energy on Xcel Energy’s system, saving customers money while creating much-needed jobs throughout the Upper Midwest. Xcel Energy estimates that upgrading the wind farms—seven of them in Minnesota and North Dakota—would create up to 700 local, union construction



jobs, in addition to the indirect jobs created and supported by suppliers.

Xcel Energy estimates its wind repowering projects will save customers \$160 million over the next 25 years. Xcel Energy has found more immediate ways to provide vital relief to its customers too. Businesses can apply for temporary discounts on their electric bills, and households struggling to keep up with bills can set up payment arrangements. While the pandemic continues to weigh on public health and the economy, clean energy can be part of the solution to helping all Minnesotans and our state recover.

MINNETONKA CREATES SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Over the past year, West Metro Regional Manager John Anderson has been working with a group of Minnetonka residents to create a sustainability commission for the city. **Thanks to the leadership and hard work of these local residents, the City Council voted in October to establish the commission.**

Cities are creating these commissions because they bring real value to their communities. **Commissions increase resident participation and community engagement and provide for long-term planning** on issues like energy, water quality, solid waste, and land use.

