**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**
**Division of Ecological & Water Resources**
**500 Lafayette Road, Box 25**
**St. Paul, MN 55155-4025**

February 20, 2024
**Correspondence # MCE 2023-00890**

Angela Durand
Merjent, Inc.

RE: Natural Heritage Review of the proposed **Minnesota Energy Connection Project - Purple Route,** Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Lyon, Meeker, Renville, Sherburne, Stearns, Wright, Yellow Medicine County

Dear Angela Durand,

As requested, the Minnesota Natural Heritage Information System has been reviewed to determine if the proposed project has the potential to impact any rare species or other significant natural features. Based on the project details provided with the request, the following rare features may be impacted by the proposed project:

*Ecologically Significant Areas*

- A calcareous fen, **Gennessee** 21 (Fen ID 25251), has been documented within five miles of the proposed project (T119N R33W Section 21). A calcareous fen is a rare and distinctive peat-accumulating wetland that is legally protected in Minnesota. The Wetlands Conservation Act (WCA), authorized by Minnesota Statutes, section 103G.223, states that calcareous fens may not be filled, drained, or otherwise degraded, wholly or partially, by any activity, except as provided for in a management plan approved by the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources. Many of the unique characteristics of calcareous fens result from the upwelling of groundwater through calcareous substrates. Because of this dependence on groundwater hydrology, calcareous fens can be affected by nearby activities or even those several miles away. For more information regarding calcareous fens, please see the Calcareous Fen Fact Sheet. To minimize stormwater impacts, please refer to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's General Principles for Erosion Prevention and Sediment Control in the Minnesota Stormwater Manual. Please note that calcareous fens are "Special Waters" and a buffer zone may be required.

  Calcareous fens may be impacted by activities within the fen, activities that affect surface water flows (e.g., stormwater flow, erosion), or activities that affect groundwater hydrology (e.g.,

groundwater pumping, contamination, discharge, or excavation). **To ensure compliance under WCA, please contact the Calcareous Fen Program Coordinator, Keylor Andrews** (Keylor.Andrews@state.mn.us).

- The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) has identified **1** Site of *High* and **19** Sites of *Moderate* Biodiversity Significance in the vicinity of the proposed project. Sites of Biodiversity Significance have varying levels of native biodiversity and are ranked based on the relative significance of this biodiversity at a statewide level. Sites ranked as *High* contain very good quality occurrences of the rarest species, high quality examples of the rare native plant communities, and/or important functional landscapes. Sites ranked as *Moderate* contain occurrences of rare species and/or moderately disturbed native plant communities, and/or landscapes that have a strong potential for recovery. **Please see your MCE-generated Conservation Planning Report for a comprehensive list of MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance (attached).**

  There are **25** MN DNR Native Plant Communities (NPCs) within 330 feet of the proposed project. Of these 1 is **critically imperiled** (S1), 13 are **imperiled** (S2), and 1 is **vulnerable to extirpation** (S3) in Minnesota. **Please see your MCE-generated Conservation Planning Report for a comprehensive list of Native Plant Communities in your proposed project area (attached).**

  Activities in road rights-of-way (ROW) can negatively affect adjacent native plant communities, especially through the introduction of invasive plant species. As such, disturbance near these ecologically significant areas should be minimized. Actions to minimize disturbance may include, but are not limited to, the following recommendations:

  - As much as possible, operate within already-disturbed areas.
  - Confine construction activities to the opposite side of the road from MBS Sites and rare NPCs (S1-S3). If this is not feasible, confine construction activities to the existing road rights-of-way.
  - Retain a buffer between proposed activities and both MBS Sites and rare NPCs (S1-S3).
  - Minimize vehicular disturbance in the area (allow only vehicles necessary for the proposed work).
  - Do not park equipment or stockpile supplies in the area.
  - Do not place spoil within MBS Sites or other sensitive areas.
  - If possible, conduct the work under frozen ground conditions.
  - Inspect and clean all equipment prior to bringing it to the site to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species.
  - Use effective erosion prevention and sediment control measures.

- Revegetate disturbed soil with native species suitable to the local habitat as soon after construction as possible.
- Use only weed-free mulches, topsoils, and seed mixes. Of particular concern is birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and crown vetch (*Coronilla varia*), two invasive species that are sold commercially and are problematic in prairies and disturbed open areas, such as roadsides.

**Construction in streambeds, lakes, and wetlands should be avoided whenever possible**. We recommend either changing the cable alignment to avoid such areas, employing directional boring techniques to install cable under the area, or attaching the cable to roadway bridges passing over such areas. Additional actions to minimize disturbance may include, but are not limited to, the following recommendations:

- Work in watercourses should be conducted during low flow whenever possible.
- If possible, conduct the work under frozen ground conditions.
- Wetland basins, lake beds, and stream/riverbeds should be restored to preconstruction contours. The work should not promote wetland drainage.
- Appropriate wildlife friendly erosion control measures, such as fabric, straw bales, mulch, and silt fences should be used to prevent sedimentation of adjacent wetlands, lakes, or watercourses.
- Impacts to existing vegetation should be kept to a minimum. Disturbed soil areas should be reseeded with native species suitable to the local habitat immediately upon project completion.

The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) considered the area surrounding the proposed project for a Site of Biodiversity Significance. There are **19 areas** that were determined to be ***Below*** the minimum biodiversity threshold for statewide significance. This area, however, may have conservation value at the local level as habitat for native plants and animals, corridors for animal movements, buffers surrounding higher quality natural areas, or as areas with high potential for restoration of native habitat. **As such, indirect impacts from surface runoff or the spread of invasive species should be considered during project design and implementation.**

MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance and DNR Native Plant Communities can be viewed using the Explore page in Minnesota Conservation Explorer or their GIS shapefiles can be downloaded from the MN Geospatial Commons. Please contact the NH Review Team if you need assistance accessing the data. Reference the MBS Site Biodiversity Significance and Native Plant Community websites for information on interpreting the data. To receive a list of MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance and DNR Native Plant Communities in the vicinity of your project, create a

Conservation Planning Report using the Explore Tab in Minnesota Conservation Explorer. **I have attached a Conservation Planning Report to this review.**

- If the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) is applicable to this project, please note that wetlands within rare (S1-S3) Native Plant Communities (NPC) may qualify as "Rare Natural Communities" under this Act. Minnesota Rules, part 8420.0515, subpart 3 states that a wetland replacement plan for activities that modify a rare natural community must be denied if the local government unit determines the proposed activities will permanently adversely affect the natural community. If the proposed project includes a wetland replacement plan under WCA, please contact your DNR Regional Ecologist for further evaluation. For technical guidance on Rare Natural Communities, please visit WCA Program Guidance and Information.

*State-listed Species*

- Sullivant's milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*) and waterhyssop (*Bacopa rotundifolia*), both state-listed threatened plant species, and small white lady's slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*), a plant species of special concern, have been documented in the project vicinity. **To avoid impacting state protected plants, all native prairie habitats and all rock outcrop habitats must be avoided.** If avoidance is not feasible, a botanical survey will be needed. Please see your MCE-generated Conservation Planning Report for a comprehensive list of prairie and rock outcrop habitats in the vicinity of the proposed project (attached).

  Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. Surveys must be conducted by a qualified surveyor and follow the standards contained in the Rare Species Survey Process and Rare Plant Guidance. Visit the Natural Heritage Review page for a list of certified surveyors and more information on this process. Project planning should take into account that any botanical survey needs to be conducted during the appropriate time of the year, which may be limited. Please consult with the NH Review Team at Reports.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00890 if you have any questions regarding this process.

- Blanding's turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*), a state-listed threatened species, have been documented in the vicinity of the proposed project. Blanding's turtles use upland areas up to and over a mile distant from wetlands, waterbodies, and watercourses. Uplands are used for nesting, basking, periods of dormancy, and traveling between wetlands. Factors believed to contribute to the decline of this species include collisions with vehicles, wetland drainage and degradation, and the development of upland habitat. Any added mortality can be detrimental to populations of Blanding's turtles, as these turtles have a low reproduction rate that depends upon a high survival rate to maintain population levels.

This project has the potential to impact this rare turtle through direct fatalities and habitat disturbance/destruction due to excavation, fill, and other construction activities associated with the project. Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. As such, **the following avoidance measures are required**:

- Avoid wetland and aquatic impacts during hibernation season, between September 15th and April 15th, if the area is suitable for hibernation.
- Erosion and sediment control should be limited to wildlife friendly erosion control to avoid the inadvertent take of Blanding's turtles.
- Hydro-mulch products should not contain any materials with synthetic (plastic) fiber additives, as the fibers can re-suspend and flow into waterbodies.
- Construction areas, especially aquatic or wetland areas, should be thoroughly checked for turtles before the use of heavy equipment or any ground disturbance.
    - The Blanding's turtle flyer must be given to all contractors working in the area.
    - Monitor for turtles during construction. Report any sightings to Reports.NHIS@state.mn.us; please include date, observer, location, and photograph of the Blanding's turtle.
    - Holes that have been left unattended for prolonged periods should be checked for Blanding's turtles before being filled.
    - If turtles are in imminent danger, they must be moved by hand out of harm's way, otherwise they are to be left undisturbed. Directions on how to move turtles safely can be found here: Helping Turtles Across the Road.
- If the above avoidance measures are not feasible, please contact Review.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00890 as further action may be needed.

For additional information, see the Blanding's turtle fact sheet, which describes the habitat use and life history of this species. The fact sheet also provides two lists of recommendations for avoiding and minimizing impacts to this rare turtle. **Please refer to both lists of recommendations and apply those that are relevant to your project.**

- Black sandshell (*Ligumia recta*), a state-listed mussel species of special concern, has been documented in the Mississippi River in the project vicinity. Creek heelsplitter (*Lasmigona compressa*), a state-listed mussel species of special concern, has been documented in the Clearwater River in the project vicinity. Mudpuppy (*Necturus maculosus*), a state-listed salamander species of special concern, has been documented in the Minnesota River in the

project vicinity. These species are vulnerable to deterioration in water quality, particularly increased siltation. Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. **Therefore, it is important that stringent erosion prevention and sediment control practices are maintained throughout the duration of the project to prevent adverse debris and material from impacting downstream populations.** As per proposed project details, waterbodies will be spanned, and no work is proposed within the water. If project details change and work within water is proposed, please contact the NH Review team at Review.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00890 as rare species surveys may be needed.

- The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) tracks bat roost trees and hibernacula plus some acoustic data, but this information is not exhaustive. Even if there are no bat records listed nearby, all seven of Minnesota's bats, including the federally endangered northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), can be found throughout Minnesota. During the active season (approximately April-November) bats roost underneath bark, in cavities, or in crevices of both live and dead trees. Tree removal can negatively impact bats by destroying roosting habitat, especially during the pup rearing season when females are forming maternity roosting colonies and the pups cannot yet fly. To minimize these impacts, **the DNR recommends that tree removal be avoided from June 1 through August 15.**

- Please visit the DNR Rare Species Guide for more information on the habitat use of these species and recommended measures to avoid or minimize impacts.

*Federally Protected Species*

- To ensure compliance with federal law, conduct a federal regulatory review using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) online Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool.

*Environmental Review and Permitting*

- Please include a copy of this letter and the MCE-generated Final Project Report in any state or local license or permit application. Please note that measures to avoid or minimize disturbance to the above rare features may be included as restrictions or conditions in any required permits or licenses.

The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS), a collection of databases that contains information about Minnesota's rare natural features, is maintained by the Division of Ecological and Water Resources, Department of Natural Resources. The NHIS is continually updated as new information becomes available, and is the most complete source of data on Minnesota's rare or otherwise significant species, native plant communities, and other natural features. However, the NHIS is not an exhaustive inventory and thus does not represent all of the occurrences of rare features within the state. Therefore,

ecologically significant features for which we have no records may exist within the project area. If additional information becomes available regarding rare features in the vicinity of the project, further review may be necessary.

For environmental review purposes, **the results of this Natural Heritage Review are valid for one year**; the results are only valid for the project location and project description provided with the request. If project details change or the project has not occurred within one year, please resubmit the project for review within one year of initiating project activities.

The Natural Heritage Review does not constitute project approval by the Department of Natural Resources. Instead, it identifies issues regarding known occurrences of rare features and potential impacts to these rare features. Visit the Natural Heritage Review website for additional information regarding this process, survey guidance, and other related information. For information on the environmental review process or other natural resource concerns, you may contact your DNR Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist.

Thank you for consulting us on this matter and for your interest in preserving Minnesota's rare natural resources.

Sincerely,

Molly Barrett

Molly Barrett
Natural Heritage Review Specialist
Molly.Barrett@state.mn.us

Cc: Melissa Collins, Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist, Region 3 (Central)
Cc: Haley Byron, Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist, Region 4 (South)
Cc: Amanda Weise, Regional Ecologist, Region 3 (Central)
Cc: Megan Benage, Regional Ecologist, Region 4 (South)
Cc: Keylor Andrews, Calcareous Fen Program Coordinator
Cc: Jennie Skancke, Wetlands Program Coordinator
Cc: Cynthia Warzecha, Energy Projects Review

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Conservation Planning Report: MCE-2023-00890

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**This document is intended for planning purposes only** for the area of interest defined by the user. The report identifies ecologically significant areas documented within the defined area of interest plus any additional search distance indicated below. These ecologically significant areas can be viewed in the Explore Tab of the Minnesota Conservation Explorer. Please visit MN Geospatial Commons for downloadable GIS data.

**This document does not meet the criteria for a Natural Heritage Review.** If a Natural Heritage Review is needed, please define an Area of Interest in the Explore Tab and click on the Natural Heritage Review option.

**This document does not include known occurrences of state-listed or federally listed species.**

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## MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance

*Search distance = 330 feet*

Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) Sites of Biodiversity Significance are areas with varying levels of native biodiversity that may contain high quality native plant communities, rare plants, rare animals, and/or animal aggregations. A Biodiversity Significance Rank is assigned on the basis of the number of rare species, the quality of the native plant communities, size of the site, and context within the landscape. MBS Sites are ranked Outstanding, High, or Moderate. Areas ranked as Below were found to be disturbed and are retained in the layer as negative data. These areas do not meet the minimum biodiversity threshold for statewide significance but may have conservation value at the local level as habitat for native plants and animals, corridors for animal movements, buffers surrounding higher quality natural areas, or as areas with high potential for restoration of native habitat. The DNR recommends avoidance of MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance ranked High or Outstanding.

Wetlands within MBS Sites of Outstanding or High Biodiversity Significance may be considered Rare Natural Communities under the Wetland Conservation Act. For technical guidance on Rare Natural Communities, please visit WCA Program Guidance and Information.

For more information please visit MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance.

The following MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance are within the search area:

| MBS Site Name | Biodiversity Significance | Status |
|---|---|---|
| CITY CEMETERY | Moderate | final |
| CLARA CITY TO RAYMOND RAILROAD PRAIRIE | Moderate | final |
| Clifton 7 (Clifton WMA) | Below | final |
| Custer 3- 10 | High | final |
| Custer 4 9 | Moderate | final |
| Custer 8 | Moderate | final |
| Custer 15 | Moderate | final |
| Deutz WMA plus | Below | final |
| EAST CLEAR LAKE 33 | Below | final |
| FAIRHAVEN 24 | Below | final |
| Fairview 12 | Below | final |
| Fairview 13 - 14 | Below | final |
| Fairview 13 | Below | final |
| Forest Prairie 5 | Below | final |
| Gennessee 4 | Below | final |

| MBS Site Name | Biodiversity Significance | Status |
|---|---|---|
| Gennessee 5 | Below | final |
| Harvey 7 | Below | final |
| Lake Marshall 26 | Below | final |
| Lake Marshall 33 - 34 | Moderate | final |
| Manannah 11 | Below | final |
| Manannah 28 | Moderate | final |
| MAYNARD RAILROAD PRAIRIE | Moderate | final |
| Rolling Hills WMA plus | Below | final |
| Sandnes 23 | Moderate | final |
| Sodus 3-4 | Below | final |
| Sodus 3 | Moderate | final |
| Sodus 4 SE | Below | final |
| Sodus 4- 9 | Moderate | final |
| Sodus 8 - 9 | Moderate | final |
| Sodus 8 | Moderate | final |
| Sodus 10 | Below | final |
| Sodus 21 plus | Below | final |
| Sodus 21 plus | Moderate | final |
| Sodus 31-32 | Below | final |
| Sodus 32 | Below | final |
| Sodus 33 | Moderate | final |
| Stony Run 25 | Moderate | final |
| Stony Run E. 29 | Moderate | final |
| TJOSVOLD-MINSAAS HILL PRAIRIE | Moderate | final |
| Unnamed: 86068 | Moderate | final |
| White WMA | Moderate | final |

# DNR Native Plant Communities

*Search distance = 330 feet*

A native plant community is a group of native plants that interact with each other and with their environment in ways not greatly altered by modern human activity or by introduced organisms. These groups of native plant species form recognizable units, such as oak savannas, pine forests, or marshes, that tend to repeat over space and time. Native plant communities are classified and described by considering vegetation, hydrology, landforms, soils, and natural disturbance regimes.

DNR Native Plant Community types and subtypes are given a Conservation Status Rank that reflects the relative rarity and endangerment of the community type in Minnesota. Conservation Status Ranks range from S1 (critically imperiled) to S5 (secure, common, widespread, and abundant). Native plant communities with a Conservation Status Rank of S1 through S3 are considered rare in the state. The DNR recommends avoidance of rare native plant communities.

Wetland native plant communities with a conservation status rank of S1 through S3 may also be considered Rare Natural Communities under the Wetland Conservation Act. For technical guidance on Rare Natural Communities, please visit WCA Program Guidance and Information.

DNR Native Plant Communities may be given a Condition Rank that reflects the degree of ecological integrity of a specific occurrence of a native plant community. The Condition Rank is based on species composition, vegetation structure, ecological processes and functions, level of human disturbance, presence of exotic species, and other factors. Condition Ranks range from A-rank (excellent ecological integrity) to D-rank (poor ecological integrity. A Condition Rank of NR means Not Ranked and a Condition Rank of MULTI mean multiple ranks are present because the record is a native plant community complex.

For more information please visit Minnesota's Native Plant Communities.

The following DNR Native Plant Communities are within the search area:

| MBS Site Name | NPC Code | Native Plant Community Classification | Conservation Status Rank | Number of Communities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CLARA CITY TO RAYMOND RAILROAD PRAIRIE | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Custer 4 9 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Custer 8 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Custer 15 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Lake Marshall 33 - 34 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 4 |
| Manannah 28 | MHs38b | Basswood - Bur Oak - (Green Ash) Forest | S3 | 1 |
| MAYNARD RAILROAD PRAIRIE | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Sandnes 23 | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Sodus 3 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 3 |
| Sodus 4- 9 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Sodus 8 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Sodus 21 plus | PWL_CX | Prairie Wetland Complex | (S1, S2, S3) | 1 |
| Sodus 21 plus | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Sodus 33 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 2 |
| Stony Run 25 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Stony Run E. 29 | ROs12a1 | Crystalline Bedrock Outcrop (Prairie), Minnesota River Subtype | S2 | 2 |
| TJOSVOLD-MINSAAS HILL PRAIRIE | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| White WMA | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |

# Calcareous Fens

*Search distance = 5 miles*

A calcareous fen is a rare and distinctive peat-accumulating wetland that is legally protected in Minnesota under the Wetland Conservation Act (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 103G.223). Many of the unique characteristics of calcareous fens result from the upwelling of groundwater through calcareous substrates. Because of this dependence on groundwater hydrology, calcareous fens can be affected by nearby activities or even those several miles away. For more information regarding calcareous fens, please see the Calcareous Fen Fact Sheet or review the List of Known Calcareous Fens.

The following Calcareous Fens are within the search area:

| Fen Site Name | Fen ID | TRS |
|---|---|---|
| Gennessee 21 | 25243 | 119N033W - 21 |

# DNR Old Growth Stands

*Search distance = 330 feet*

Old-growth forests are natural forests that have developed over a long period of time, generally at least 120 years, without experiencing severe, stand-replacing disturbances such as fires, windstorms, or logging. Old-growth forests are a unique, nearly vanished piece of Minnesota's history and ecology; less than 4% of Minnesota's old-growth forests remain. The DNR recommends avoidance of all DNR Old Growth Stands. The following DNR Old Growth Stands have been documented within the search area.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# MN Prairie Conservation Plan

*Search distance = 330 feet*

The Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, a twenty-five year strategy for accelerating prairie conservation in the state, identifies Core Areas, Corridors, and Corridor Complexes as areas to focus conservation efforts. The Plan's strategies include protection, enhancement, and restoration of grassland and wetland habitat. To meet the Plan's goals, approaches within Core Areas will need to include restoration and approaches within Corridors will need to include conservation of grassland habitat which can provide stepping stones between larger Core Areas.

The following MN Prairie Conservation Plan Designations are within the search area:

- Core Area: Upper Minn. R. Valley
- Corridor: Altamont Moraine
- Corridor Complex: Garvin WPA

# Important Bird Areas

*Search distance = 1 mile*

Important Bird Areas, identified by Audubon Minnesota in partnership with the DNR, are part of an international conservation effort aimed at conserving globally important bird habitats. They are voluntary and non-regulatory, but the designation demonstrates the significant ecological value of the area.

The following Important Birds Areas are within the search area:

- Lake Maria State Park - Henry Larson County Forest
- Upper Minnesota River Valley IBA

# Lakes of Biological Significance

*Search distance = 330 feet*

Lakes of Biological Significance are high quality lakes as determined by the aquatic plant, fish, bird, or amphibian communities present within the lake. To be included in this layer, a lake only needs to meet the criteria for one of these four community types. The lake is assigned a biological significance of Outstanding, High, or Moderate based on the community with the highest quality.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# USFWS Habitat Conservation Plans

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a mechanism for compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act for a given set of activities and protected species. An HCP is required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of an application for an incidental take permit (ITP). The ITP allows the permit holder to proceed with activities covered in the HCP that could result in the unintentional take of federally listed species.

Lakes States Forest Management Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (Bat HCP): (search distance = 0; within area of interest only) This HCP was created to provide flexibility to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to manage forests while addressing federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) regulations related to federally threatened and endangered bat species. The Bat HCP covers three bat species within Minnesota: northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, and tricolored bat. This report is intended to help non-federal, non-DNR landowners evaluate their potential eligibility for the Landowner Enrollment Program of the Bat HCP (For DNR-administered land, DNR staff should refer to the Bat HCP Implementation Policy).

Landowner Enrollment Program – DNR's incidental take permit may be extended through the Landowner Enrollment Program (LEP) to eligible non-federal landowners who conduct forest management activities. Landowners may be eligible to enroll in the LEP if they are a county land administrator, own more than 10,000 acres, or own land that overlaps a Bat HCP feature. The results below indicate if the defined area of interest overlaps a Bat HCP feature. For more information on how to enroll in the LEP, please visit the Landowner Enrollment Program (LEP).

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No Bat HCP features were found within the area of interest. Landowners are only eligible to apply for the Landowner Enrollment Program if they are a county land administrator or they own more than 10,000 acres.

# USFWS Regulatory Layers

To ensure compliance with federal law, conduct a federal regulatory review using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) online Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool. This report is not a substitution for a Section 7 review.

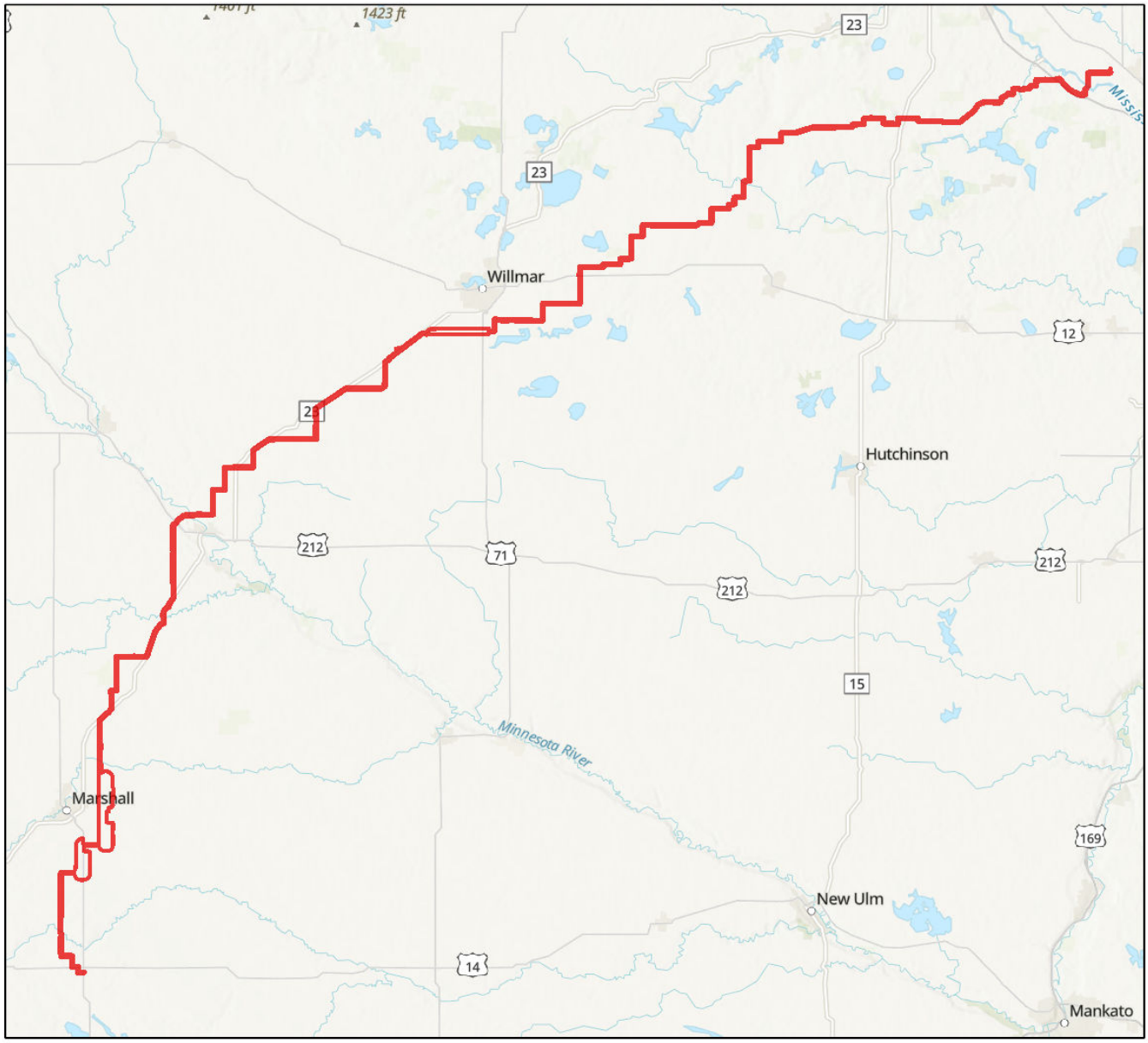
For informational purposes only, this tool currently checks the following USFWS Regulatory Layers:

Rusty Patched Bumblebee High Potential Zones: (*search distance = 0; within area of interest only*) The rusty patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*), federally listed as endangered, is likely to be present in suitable habitat within the high potential zones. From April through October this species uses underground nests in upland grasslands, shrublands, and forest edges, and forages where nectar and pollen are available. From October through April the species overwinters under tree litter in upland forests and woodlands. The rusty patched bumble bee may be impacted by a variety of land management activities including, but not limited to, prescribed fire, tree-removal, haying, grazing, herbicide use, pesticide use, land-clearing, soil disturbance or compaction, or use of non-native bees. The USFWS RPBB guidance provides guidance on avoiding impacts to rusty patched bumble bee and a key for determining if actions are likely to affect the species; the determination key can be found in the appendix. Please visit the USFWS Rusty Patched Bumble Bee Map for the most current locations of High Potential Zones.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# MCE-2023-00890

## Conservation Planning Map




N
W E
S

0 5 10 20 30 40 Miles

Area of Interest


Size (acres): 27,954.98

County(s): Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Lyon, Meeker +

Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, USFWS
Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USFWS
Esri, USGS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**
**Division of Ecological & Water Resources**
**500 Lafayette Road, Box 25**
**St. Paul, MN 55155-4025**

February 20, 2024
**Correspondence # MCE-2023-00889**

Angela Durand
Merjent, Inc.

RE: Natural Heritage Review of the proposed **Minnesota Energy Connection Project - Blue Route**, Kandiyohi, Lyon, Meeker, Redwood, Renville, Sherburne, Stearns County

Dear Angela Durand,

As requested, the Minnesota Natural Heritage Information System has been reviewed to determine if the proposed project has the potential to impact any rare species or other significant natural features. Based on the project details provided with the request, the following rare features may be impacted by the proposed project:

*Ecologically Significant Areas*

- The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) has identified **8** Sites of *Moderate* Biodiversity Significance in the vicinity of the proposed project. Sites of Biodiversity Significance have varying levels of native biodiversity and are ranked based on the relative significance of this biodiversity at a statewide level. Sites ranked as *Moderate* contain occurrences of rare species and/or moderately disturbed native plant communities, and/or landscapes that have a strong potential for recovery. **Please see your MCE-generated Conservation Planning Report for a comprehensive list of MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance (attached).**

  There are **21** MN DNR Native Plant Communities (NPCs) within 330 feet of the proposed project. Of these 1 is **critically imperiled** (S1), 17 are **imperiled** (S2), and 3 are **vulnerable to extirpation** (S3) in Minnesota. **Please see your MCE-generated Conservation Planning Report for a comprehensive list of Native Plant Communities in your proposed project area (attached).**

  Activities in road rights-of-way (ROW) can negatively affect adjacent native plant communities, especially through the introduction of invasive plant species. As such, disturbance near these ecologically significant areas should be minimized. Actions to minimize disturbance may include, but are not limited to, the following recommendations:

- As much as possible, operate within already-disturbed areas.
- Confine construction activities to the opposite side of the road from MBS Sites and rare NPCs (S1-S3). If this is not feasible, confine construction activities to the existing road rights-of-way.
- Retain a buffer between proposed activities and both MBS Sites and rare NPCs (S1-S3).
- Minimize vehicular disturbance in the area (allow only vehicles necessary for the proposed work).
- Do not park equipment or stockpile supplies in the area.
- Do not place spoil within MBS Sites or other sensitive areas.
- If possible, conduct the work under frozen ground conditions.
- Inspect and clean all equipment prior to bringing it to the site to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species.
- Use effective erosion prevention and sediment control measures.
- Revegetate disturbed soil with native species suitable to the local habitat as soon after construction as possible.
- Use only weed-free mulches, topsoils, and seed mixes. Of particular concern is birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and crown vetch (*Coronilla varia*), two invasive species that are sold commercially and are problematic in prairies and disturbed open areas, such as roadsides.

**Construction in streambeds, lakes, and wetlands should be avoided whenever possible**. We recommend either changing the cable alignment to avoid such areas, employing directional boring techniques to install cable under the area, or attaching the cable to roadway bridges passing over such areas. Additional actions to minimize disturbance may include, but are not limited to, the following recommendations:

- Work in watercourses should be conducted during low flow whenever possible.
- If possible, conduct the work under frozen ground conditions.
- Wetland basins, lake beds, and stream/riverbeds should be restored to preconstruction contours. The work should not promote wetland drainage.
- Appropriate wildlife friendly erosion control measures, such as fabric, straw bales, mulch, and silt fences should be used to prevent sedimentation of adjacent wetlands, lakes, or watercourses.

- Impacts to existing vegetation should be kept to a minimum. Disturbed soil areas should be reseeded with native species suitable to the local habitat immediately upon project completion.

The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) considered the area surrounding the proposed project for a Site of Biodiversity Significance. There are **12 areas** that were determined to be ***Below*** the minimum biodiversity threshold for statewide significance. This area, however, may have conservation value at the local level as habitat for native plants and animals, corridors for animal movements, buffers surrounding higher quality natural areas, or as areas with high potential for restoration of native habitat. **As such, indirect impacts from surface runoff or the spread of invasive species should be considered during project design and implementation.**

MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance and DNR Native Plant Communities can be viewed using the Explore page in Minnesota Conservation Explorer or their GIS shapefiles can be downloaded from the MN Geospatial Commons. Please contact the NH Review Team if you need assistance accessing the data. Reference the MBS Site Biodiversity Significance and Native Plant Community websites for information on interpreting the data. To receive a list of MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance and DNR Native Plant Communities in the vicinity of your project, create a Conservation Planning Report using the Explore Tab in Minnesota Conservation Explorer. **I have attached a Conservation Planning Report to this review.**

- If the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) is applicable to this project, please note that wetlands within rare (S1-S3) Native Plant Communities (NPC) may qualify as "Rare Natural Communities" under this Act. Minnesota Rules, part 8420.0515, subpart 3 states that a wetland replacement plan for activities that modify a rare natural community must be denied if the local government unit determines the proposed activities will permanently adversely affect the natural community. If the proposed project includes a wetland replacement plan under WCA, please contact your DNR Regional Ecologist for further evaluation. For technical guidance on Rare Natural Communities, please visit WCA Program Guidance and Information.

*State-listed Species*

- Henslow's sparrows (*Centronyx henslowii*), a state-listed endangered bird species, have been documented in the vicinity of the proposed project. Suitable nesting habitat for this species includes uncultivated and unmowed grasslands and old fields with standing, dead vegetation, and a substantial litter layer. Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. As such, initial disturbance in these areas should not occur during their breeding season, between May 15th and July 15th. **If avoidance during breeding season is not feasible, areas that will be disturbed that contain suitable nesting habitat will need to be surveyed for active nests prior to any project**

**disturbance.** Surveys must follow the standards contained in the Rare Species Survey Process. Visit the Natural Heritage Review page for a list of certified surveyors and more information on this process. Please consult with the NH Review Team at Reports.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00889 if you have any questions regarding this process.

- Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*), a state-listed endangered tree species, has been documented in the project vicinity. Most populations of this species in Minnesota are located in mature, mesic hardwood forests. This species is very susceptible to a lethal fungal disease called butternut canker (*Sirococcus clavigignenti-juglandacearum*). Nearly all of Minnesota's butternut populations are dead or dying from the fungus, triggering the protected status of this tree within the state. As this species has been documented in the vicinity of the proposed project, **a qualified surveyor is required to conduct a botanical survey of any trees in the proposed project area that are proposed to be removed.**

  Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. Surveys must be conducted by a qualified surveyor and follow the standards contained in the Rare Species Survey Process and Rare Plant Guidance. Visit the Natural Heritage Review page for a list of certified surveyors and more information on this process. Project planning should take into account that any botanical survey needs to be conducted during the appropriate time of the year, which may be limited. Please consult with the NH Review Team at Reports.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00889 if you have any questions regarding this process.

- Prairie bush clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*), a federally and state-listed threatened plant species, and small white lady's slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*), a plant species of special concern, have been documented in the project vicinity. **To avoid impacting state protected plants, all native prairie habitats and all rock outcrop habitats must be avoided.** If avoidance is not feasible, a botanical survey will be needed. Please see your MCE-generated Conservation Planning Report for a comprehensive list of prairie and rock outcrop habitats in the vicinity of the proposed project (attached).

  Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. Surveys must be conducted by a qualified surveyor and follow the standards contained in the Rare Species Survey Process and Rare Plant Guidance. Visit the Natural Heritage Review page for a list of certified surveyors and more information on this process. Project planning should take into account that any botanical survey needs to be conducted during the appropriate time of the year, which may be limited. Please consult with the NH Review Team at Reports.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00889 if you have any questions regarding this process.

- Blanding's turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*), a state-listed threatened species, have been documented in the vicinity of the proposed project. Blanding's turtles use upland areas up to and over a mile distant from wetlands, waterbodies, and watercourses. Uplands are used for nesting, basking, periods of dormancy, and traveling between wetlands. Factors believed to contribute to the decline of this species include collisions with vehicles, wetland drainage and degradation, and the development of upland habitat. Any added mortality can be detrimental to populations of Blanding's turtles, as these turtles have a low reproduction rate that depends upon a high survival rate to maintain population levels.

  This project has the potential to impact this rare turtle through direct fatalities and habitat disturbance/destruction due to excavation, fill, and other construction activities associated with the project. Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. As such, **the following avoidance measures are required**:

  - Avoid wetland and aquatic impacts during hibernation season, between September 15th and April 15th, if the area is suitable for hibernation.
  - Erosion and sediment control should be limited to wildlife friendly erosion control to avoid the inadvertent take of Blanding's turtles.
  - Hydro-mulch products should not contain any materials with synthetic (plastic) fiber additives, as the fibers can re-suspend and flow into waterbodies.
  - Construction areas, especially aquatic or wetland areas, should be thoroughly checked for turtles before the use of heavy equipment or any ground disturbance.
    - The Blanding's turtle flyer must be given to all contractors working in the area.
    - Monitor for turtles during construction. Report any sightings to Reports.NHIS@state.mn.us; please include date, observer, location, and photograph of the Blanding's turtle.
    - Holes that have been left unattended for prolonged periods should be checked for Blanding's turtles before being filled.
    - If turtles are in imminent danger, they must be moved by hand out of harm's way, otherwise they are to be left undisturbed. Directions on how to move turtles safely can be found here: Helping Turtles Across the Road.
  - If the above avoidance measures are not feasible, please contact Review.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00889 as further action may be needed.

For additional information, see the Blanding's turtle fact sheet, which describes the habitat use and life history of this species. The fact sheet also provides two lists of recommendations for avoiding and minimizing impacts to this rare turtle. **Please refer to both lists of recommendations and apply those that are relevant to your project.**

- Wartyback (*Pustulosa nodulata*) and mucket (*Actinonaias ligamentina*), both state-listed threatened mussels have been documented in the Minnesota River in the project vicinity. Black sandshell (*Ligumia recta*) and creek heelsplitter (*Lasmigona compressa*), both state-listed species of special concern, have been documented in the Mississippi River in the project vicinity. Additionally, creek heelsplitter was also documented in the Cottonwood River in the project vicinity. These species are vulnerable to deterioration in water quality, particularly increased siltation. Minnesota's Endangered Species Statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.0895) and associated Rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6212.1800 to 6212.2300 and 6134) prohibit the take of threatened or endangered species without a permit. **Therefore, it is important that stringent erosion prevention and sediment control practices are maintained throughout the duration of the project to prevent adverse debris and material from impacting downstream populations.** As per proposed project details, waterbodies will be spanned, and no work is proposed within the water. If project details change and work within water is proposed, please contact the NH Review team at Review.NHIS@state.mn.us with subject line MCE-2023-00889 as rare species surveys may be needed.

- The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) tracks bat roost trees and hibernacula plus some acoustic data, but this information is not exhaustive. Even if there are no bat records listed nearby, all seven of Minnesota's bats, including the federally endangered northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), can be found throughout Minnesota. During the active season (approximately April-November) bats roost underneath bark, in cavities, or in crevices of both live and dead trees. Tree removal can negatively impact bats by destroying roosting habitat, especially during the pup rearing season when females are forming maternity roosting colonies and the pups cannot yet fly. To minimize these impacts, **the DNR recommends that tree removal be avoided from June 1 through August 15.**

- Please visit the DNR Rare Species Guide for more information on the habitat use of these species and recommended measures to avoid or minimize impacts.

*Federally Protected Species*

- To ensure compliance with federal law, conduct a federal regulatory review using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) online Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool.

- As mentioned above, prairie bush clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*) is also federally listed as threatened.

*Environmental Review and Permitting*

- Please include a copy of this letter and the MCE-generated Final Project Report in any state or local license or permit application. Please note that measures to avoid or minimize disturbance to the above rare features may be included as restrictions or conditions in any required permits or licenses.

The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS), a collection of databases that contains information about Minnesota's rare natural features, is maintained by the Division of Ecological and Water Resources, Department of Natural Resources. The NHIS is continually updated as new information becomes available, and is the most complete source of data on Minnesota's rare or otherwise significant species, native plant communities, and other natural features. However, the NHIS is not an exhaustive inventory and thus does not represent all of the occurrences of rare features within the state. Therefore, ecologically significant features for which we have no records may exist within the project area. If additional information becomes available regarding rare features in the vicinity of the project, further review may be necessary.

For environmental review purposes, **the results of this Natural Heritage Review are valid for one year**; the results are only valid for the project location and project description provided with the request. If project details change or the project has not occurred within one year, please resubmit the project for review within one year of initiating project activities.

The Natural Heritage Review does not constitute project approval by the Department of Natural Resources. Instead, it identifies issues regarding known occurrences of rare features and potential impacts to these rare features. Visit the Natural Heritage Review website for additional information regarding this process, survey guidance, and other related information. For information on the environmental review process or other natural resource concerns, you may contact your DNR Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist.

Thank you for consulting us on this matter and for your interest in preserving Minnesota's rare natural resources.

Sincerely,

Molly Barrett

Molly Barrett
Natural Heritage Review Specialist
Molly.Barrett@state.mn.us

Cc: Melissa Collins, Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist, Region 3 (Central)
Cc: Haley Byron, Regional Environmental Assessment Ecologist, Region 4 (South)
Cc: Amanda Weise, Regional Ecologist, Region 3 (Central)

Cc: Megan Benage, Regional Ecologist, Region 4 (South)
Cc: Jennie Skancke, Wetlands Program Coordinator
Cc: Cynthia Warzecha, Energy Projects Review

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Conservation Planning Report: MCE-2023-00889

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**This document is intended for planning purposes only** for the area of interest defined by the user. The report identifies ecologically significant areas documented within the defined area of interest plus any additional search distance indicated below. These ecologically significant areas can be viewed in the Explore Tab of the Minnesota Conservation Explorer. Please visit MN Geospatial Commons for downloadable GIS data.

**This document does not meet the criteria for a Natural Heritage Review.** If a Natural Heritage Review is needed, please define an Area of Interest in the Explore Tab and click on the Natural Heritage Review option.

**This document does not include known occurrences of state-listed or federally listed species.**

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## MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance

*Search distance = 330 feet*

Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) Sites of Biodiversity Significance are areas with varying levels of native biodiversity that may contain high quality native plant communities, rare plants, rare animals, and/or animal aggregations. A Biodiversity Significance Rank is assigned on the basis of the number of rare species, the quality of the native plant communities, size of the site, and context within the landscape. MBS Sites are ranked Outstanding, High, or Moderate. Areas ranked as Below were found to be disturbed and are retained in the layer as negative data. These areas do not meet the minimum biodiversity threshold for statewide significance but may have conservation value at the local level as habitat for native plants and animals, corridors for animal movements, buffers surrounding higher quality natural areas, or as areas with high potential for restoration of native habitat. The DNR recommends avoidance of MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance ranked High or Outstanding.

Wetlands within MBS Sites of Outstanding or High Biodiversity Significance may be considered Rare Natural Communities under the Wetland Conservation Act. For technical guidance on Rare Natural Communities, please visit WCA Program Guidance and Information.

For more information please visit MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance.

The following MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance are within the search area:

| MBS Site Name | Biodiversity Significance | Status |
|---|---|---|
| Amiret 11 plus | Below | final |
| Amiret 13 | Below | final |
| Amiret 16 | Moderate | final |
| Amiret 29 plus | Moderate | final |
| Amiret 32 | Moderate | final |
| BIRCH COOLEY S. 3 | Moderate | final |
| Daub's Lake WMA | Below | final |
| EAST CLEAR LAKE 30 | Below | final |
| Gales 14 North | Below | final |
| Gales 17 | Moderate | final |
| HECTOR - BIRD ISLAND RR-ROW | Moderate | final |
| LYNDEN 28 | Below | final |
| Manannah 24 SE | Below | final |
| Manannah 24 SW | Below | final |
| North Twin Lake | Below | final |

| MBS Site Name | Biodiversity Significance | Status |
|---|---|---|
| Sheridan 13, 24 | Below | final |
| Sherman 16 | Moderate | final |
| Sherman 17 | Below | final |
| WEST CLEAR LAKE 9 | Below | final |
| WEST CLEAR LAKE 25 | Moderate | final |

# DNR Native Plant Communities

*Search distance = 330 feet*

A native plant community is a group of native plants that interact with each other and with their environment in ways not greatly altered by modern human activity or by introduced organisms. These groups of native plant species form recognizable units, such as oak savannas, pine forests, or marshes, that tend to repeat over space and time. Native plant communities are classified and described by considering vegetation, hydrology, landforms, soils, and natural disturbance regimes.

DNR Native Plant Community types and subtypes are given a Conservation Status Rank that reflects the relative rarity and endangerment of the community type in Minnesota. Conservation Status Ranks range from S1 (critically imperiled) to S5 (secure, common, widespread, and abundant). Native plant communities with a Conservation Status Rank of S1 through S3 are considered rare in the state. The DNR recommends avoidance of rare native plant communities.

Wetland native plant communities with a conservation status rank of S1 through S3 may also be considered Rare Natural Communities under the Wetland Conservation Act. For technical guidance on Rare Natural Communities, please visit WCA Program Guidance and Information.

DNR Native Plant Communities may be given a Condition Rank that reflects the degree of ecological integrity of a specific occurrence of a native plant community. The Condition Rank is based on species composition, vegetation structure, ecological processes and functions, level of human disturbance, presence of exotic species, and other factors. Condition Ranks range from A-rank (excellent ecological integrity) to D-rank (poor ecological integrity. A Condition Rank of NR means Not Ranked and a Condition Rank of MULTI mean multiple ranks are present because the record is a native plant community complex.

For more information please visit Minnesota's Native Plant Communities.

The following DNR Native Plant Communities are within the search area:

| MBS Site Name | NPC Code | Native Plant Community Classification | Conservation Status Rank | Number of Communities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amiret 16 | PWL_CX | Prairie Wetland Complex | (S1, S2, S3) | 1 |
| Amiret 16 | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Amiret 29 plus | MHs38b | Basswood - Bur Oak - (Green Ash) Forest | S3 | 2 |
| Amiret 29 plus | MHs49 | Southern Wet-Mesic Hardwood Forest | (S2, S3) | 1 |
| Amiret 29 plus | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 8 |
| Amiret 29 plus | WMp73 | Prairie Wet Meadow/Carr | (S3) | 1 |
| Amiret 32 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 3 |
| BIRCH COOLEY S. 3 | UPs13d | Dry Hill Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Gales 17 | WPs54b | Wet Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| HECTOR - BIRD ISLAND RR-ROW | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |
| Sherman 16 | UPs23a | Mesic Prairie (Southern) | S2 | 1 |

# Calcareous Fens

*Search distance = 5 miles*

A calcareous fen is a rare and distinctive peat-accumulating wetland that is legally protected in Minnesota under the Wetland Conservation Act (*Minnesota Statutes*, section 103G.223). Many of the unique characteristics of calcareous fens result from the upwelling of groundwater through calcareous substrates. Because of this dependence on groundwater hydrology, calcareous fens can be affected by nearby activities or even those several miles away. For more information regarding calcareous fens, please see the Calcareous Fen Fact Sheet or review the List of Known Calcareous Fens.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# DNR Old Growth Stands

*Search distance = 330 feet*

Old-growth forests are natural forests that have developed over a long period of time, generally at least 120 years, without experiencing severe, stand-replacing disturbances such as fires, windstorms, or logging. Old-growth forests are a unique, nearly vanished piece of Minnesota's history and ecology; less than 4% of Minnesota's old-growth forests remain. The DNR recommends avoidance of all DNR Old Growth Stands. The following DNR Old Growth Stands have been documented within the search area.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# MN Prairie Conservation Plan

*Search distance = 330 feet*

The Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, a twenty-five year strategy for accelerating prairie conservation in the state, identifies Core Areas, Corridors, and Corridor Complexes as areas to focus conservation efforts. The Plan's strategies include protection, enhancement, and restoration of grassland and wetland habitat. To meet the Plan's goals, approaches within Core Areas will need to include restoration and approaches within Corridors will need to include conservation of grassland habitat which can provide stepping stones between larger Core Areas.

The following MN Prairie Conservation Plan Designations are within the search area:

- Core Area: Upper Minn. R. Valley
- Corridor: Altamont Moraine

# Important Bird Areas

*Search distance = 1 mile*

Important Bird Areas, identified by Audubon Minnesota in partnership with the DNR, are part of an international conservation effort aimed at conserving globally important bird habitats. They are voluntary and non-regulatory, but the designation demonstrates the significant ecological value of the area.

The following Important Birds Areas are within the search area:

- Upper Minnesota River Valley IBA

# Lakes of Biological Significance

*Search distance = 330 feet*

Lakes of Biological Significance are high quality lakes as determined by the aquatic plant, fish, bird, or amphibian communities present within the lake. To be included in this layer, a lake only needs to meet the criteria for one of these four community types. The lake is assigned a biological significance of Outstanding, High, or Moderate based on the community with the highest quality.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# USFWS Habitat Conservation Plans

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a mechanism for compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act for a given set of activities and protected species. An HCP is required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of an application for an incidental take permit (ITP). The ITP allows the permit holder to proceed with activities covered in the HCP that could result in the unintentional take of federally listed species.

Lakes States Forest Management Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (Bat HCP): (search distance = 0; within area of interest only) This HCP was created to provide flexibility to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to manage forests while addressing federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) regulations related to federally threatened and endangered bat species. The Bat HCP covers three bat species within Minnesota: northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, and tricolored bat. This report is intended to help non-federal, non-DNR landowners evaluate their potential eligibility for the Landowner Enrollment Program of the Bat HCP (For DNR-administered land, DNR staff should refer to the Bat HCP Implementation Policy).

Landowner Enrollment Program – DNR's incidental take permit may be extended through the Landowner Enrollment Program (LEP) to eligible non-federal landowners who conduct forest management activities. Landowners may be eligible to enroll in the LEP if they are a county land administrator, own more than 10,000 acres, or own land that overlaps a Bat HCP feature. The results below indicate if the defined area of interest overlaps a Bat HCP feature. For more information on how to enroll in the LEP, please visit the Landowner Enrollment Program (LEP).

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No Bat HCP features were found within the area of interest. Landowners are only eligible to apply for the Landowner Enrollment Program if they are a county land administrator or they own more than 10,000 acres.

# USFWS Regulatory Layers

To ensure compliance with federal law, conduct a federal regulatory review using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) online Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool. This report is not a substitution for a Section 7 review.

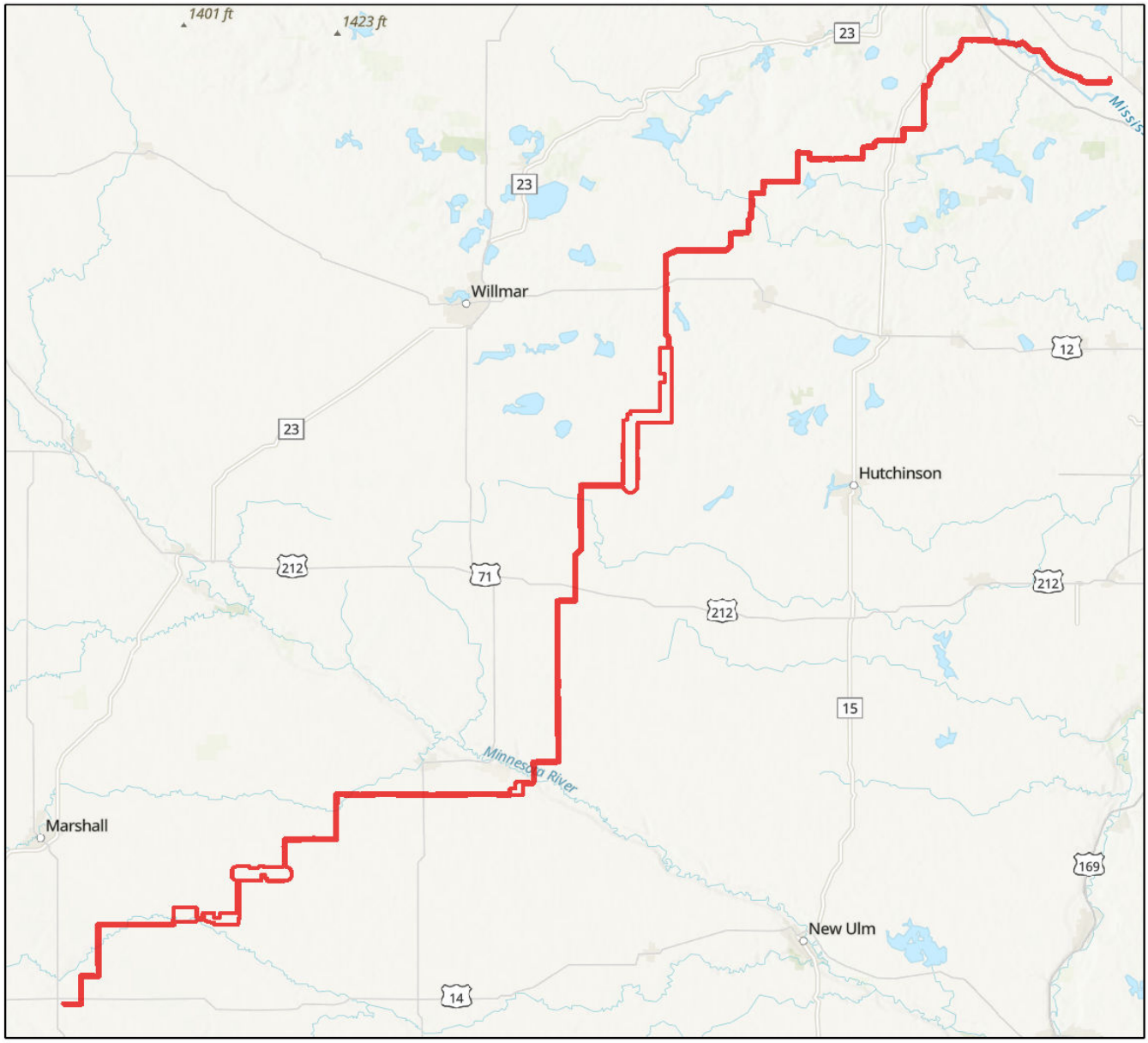
For informational purposes only, this tool currently checks the following USFWS Regulatory Layers:

Rusty Patched Bumblebee High Potential Zones: (*search distance = 0; within area of interest only*) The rusty patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*), federally listed as endangered, is likely to be present in suitable habitat within the high potential zones. From April through October this species uses underground nests in upland grasslands, shrublands, and forest edges, and forages where nectar and pollen are available. From October through April the species overwinters under tree litter in upland forests and woodlands. The rusty patched bumble bee may be impacted by a variety of land management activities including, but not limited to, prescribed fire, tree-removal, haying, grazing, herbicide use, pesticide use, land-clearing, soil disturbance or compaction, or use of non-native bees. The USFWS RPBB guidance provides guidance on avoiding impacts to rusty patched bumble bee and a key for determining if actions are likely to affect the species; the determination key can be found in the appendix. Please visit the USFWS Rusty Patched Bumble Bee Map for the most current locations of High Potential Zones.

**SEARCH RESULTS**: No features were found within the search area.

# MCE-2023-00889

## Conservation Planning Map





Size (acres): 35,799.84

County(s): Kandiyohi, Lyon, Meeker, Redwood +

Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, USFWS
Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USFWS
Esri, USGS