DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DNR in Steele County

Breakdown of county land types

- Rice Lake State Park
- 20 Miles of Straight River Water Trail
- 1 Scientific and Natural Area
- 2 Authorized State Trails
- 3 Fishing Piers
- 11 Wildlife Management Areas
- 202 Miles Grant-in-Aid Snowmobile Trails
- 69 acres Walk-In-Access
- 6 Fulltime DNR Employees
- 5 part-time DNR Employees

Natural Resources Lands

Public Lands, managed by DNR

- 2019 Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)—$50,435
- School Trust Fund Payments—$393,788
- State Land Managed by DNR— 2304 Acres; 0.84 % of County Land Base

Successes

Increasing land sustainability, improving wildlife habitat and water quality, and introducing new recreation

- DNR Forestry provides cost-share funding for two private woodland projects and technical assistance to five additional owners in 2020. City of Owatonna receives $50,000 DNR grant to fight Emerald Ash Borer spread.
- DNR Wildlife works with local partners MN Pheasants, Inc. Steele Co. Chapter to receive grants for restoring 35 acres of prairie on WMAs. DNR partners with Trust for Public Land and Pheasants Forever on acquisitions and habitat plantings starting this year to provide additional outdoor recreation opportunity and flood reducing perennial vegetation.
- An average of 66,883 people visit Rice Lake State Park each year with an estimated local economic impact of $1,875,409 annually.
- DNR staffs a booth each year at the SCFF with guest appearances by Smokey Bear, stocks live fish for the IKES display tanks and provides information on a wide variety of topics, including the I Can Camp! program.

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- DNR, SWCD and local landowners worked together to complete a bank stabilization project to protect nine homes along the Straight River in Medford.

Opportunities

Land management activities support DNR's goals for natural resource land conservation, and economic and recreational development

- Flooding continues to be a problem in portions of Owatonna and portions of the Straight River. These would benefit from additional mitigation. Flood mitigation is available through the DNR's flood mitigation program in St. Paul. Interested homeowners can contact Pat Lynch at 651-259-5691 for more details. Flood preparation can be enhanced with the placement of river gauges in the appropriate up-stream locations, such as the Straight River.

- Both Oak Wilt and Emerald Ash Borer are present in the county. DNR Forestry is working with a Forest Health Specialist to bring management option information to landowners.

- Steele County livestock operations are currently about 40% in compliance with water appropriation permitting. This is something that the DNR has been working closely with county feedlot officers, producers, and growers on to bring all operations into compliance with 103G. Guidance from Steele County leaders to producers would also be a positive thing to help bring livestock operations into compliance. For more information contact Todd Piepho, DNR area hydrologist at 507-421-1991.

- Lake restoration projects are greatly hampered and benefits reduced by increased quantity and very poor quality of water coming into the lakes from uplands and common carp access. Application of land use best practices such as reduced impervious surfaces, increased wetland restorations, carp exclusion structures and cover cropping will benefit lake conditions for people and habitat.

Figure 1 Rice Lake State Park trail.

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