

Welcome to Nature As We Age

Connecting People, Place and Purpose
September 25, 2026

Lake Superior College,
Commons Room M255



*“Let nature be
your teacher.”*

- William Wordsworth

*“All flourishing
is mutual.”*

- Robin Wall Kimmerer,
Braiding Sweetgrass



Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging Land Acknowledgement

As we support our mission to help older adults maintain their highest level of independence, we do this while being respectful of the space we are being welcomed into by indigenous people. We strive to deepen our understanding of the multiple ways in which people see and understand land and acknowledge the Indigenous people who have relationships with this land. We also acknowledge the decades of historical trauma, loss and grief experienced by Indigenous people.

It is our promise to not only recognize these truths but also take action to show support of our Indigenous elders, neighbors and friends, and understand our place within the past, present and future of this land. We know this is just one step in recognizing and honoring the sovereignty of Tribal Nations.

Thank You to Our Sponsors!



Thank You to Our Table Participants



University for Seniors



Planning Team

Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging (AAAA): Jess Langer, Rebecca Sash, Brenda Shafer-Pellinen, Erica Stark

Duluth Age-Friendly: Georgia Lane, Malcolm Rose

Northland Foundation: Taylor Holm, Zane Bail

Nature As We Age: Joelle Hoeft, Consultant

Agenda & Overview of The Day

9:00-9:30 AM	Registration and Community Connection
9:30-9:45 AM	Welcome and Overview of the Day
9:45-10:10 AM	Nature As We Age - Field Scan Overview
10:10-10:30 AM	Impromptu Networking Activity
10:30-11:30 AM	Keynote Presentation - Larry Weber, Naturalist
11:30-11:45 AM	Networking Break
11:45 AM-12:30 PM	Lunch and Affinity Networking
12:30-1:45 PM	Regional Panel and Discussion on Age-Inclusive Nature-Based Programs
1:45-2:15 PM	Collective Action Activity: “1-2-4-All” Brainstorming Session
2:15-2:30 PM	Reflections, Closing & Evaluation
2:30-3:30 PM	Optional activities

Why We're Here Today

Attendees will gain knowledge, practical tools, and collaborative connections to:

- Explore how nature supports physical, mental, and social well-being
- Listen to the experiences and wisdom of older adults in our region
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships that bridge aging, health, parks, recreation, and volunteer efforts
- Co-create a shared vision and actionable opportunities through nature as we age

Age-Friendly Definition (WHO)

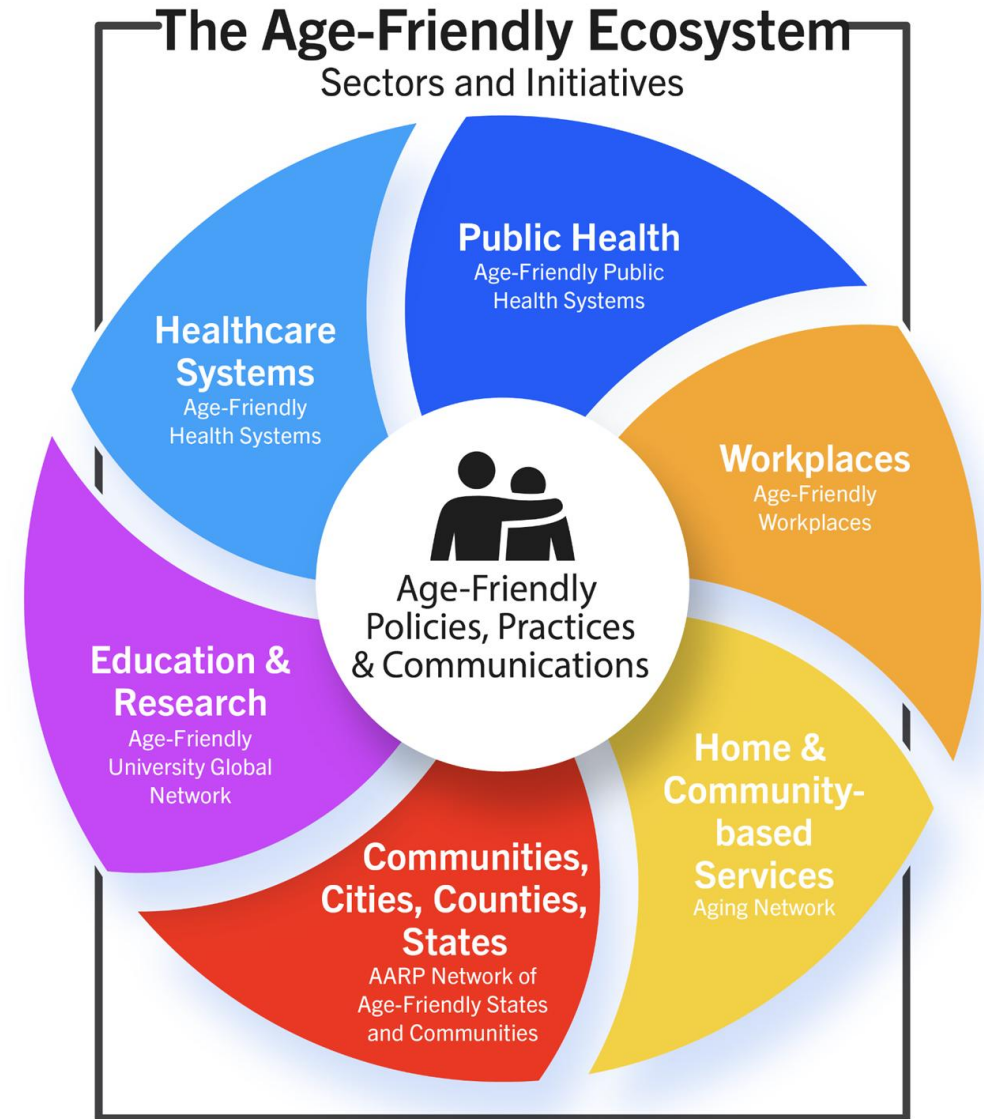
“An age-friendly community is one where people of all ages and abilities can live safely, stay healthy, and take part fully in community life as they grow older. Following the World Health Organization's framework, it focuses on eight areas of daily life, from housing and transportation to social connection and respect”

WHO, Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide, 2007.





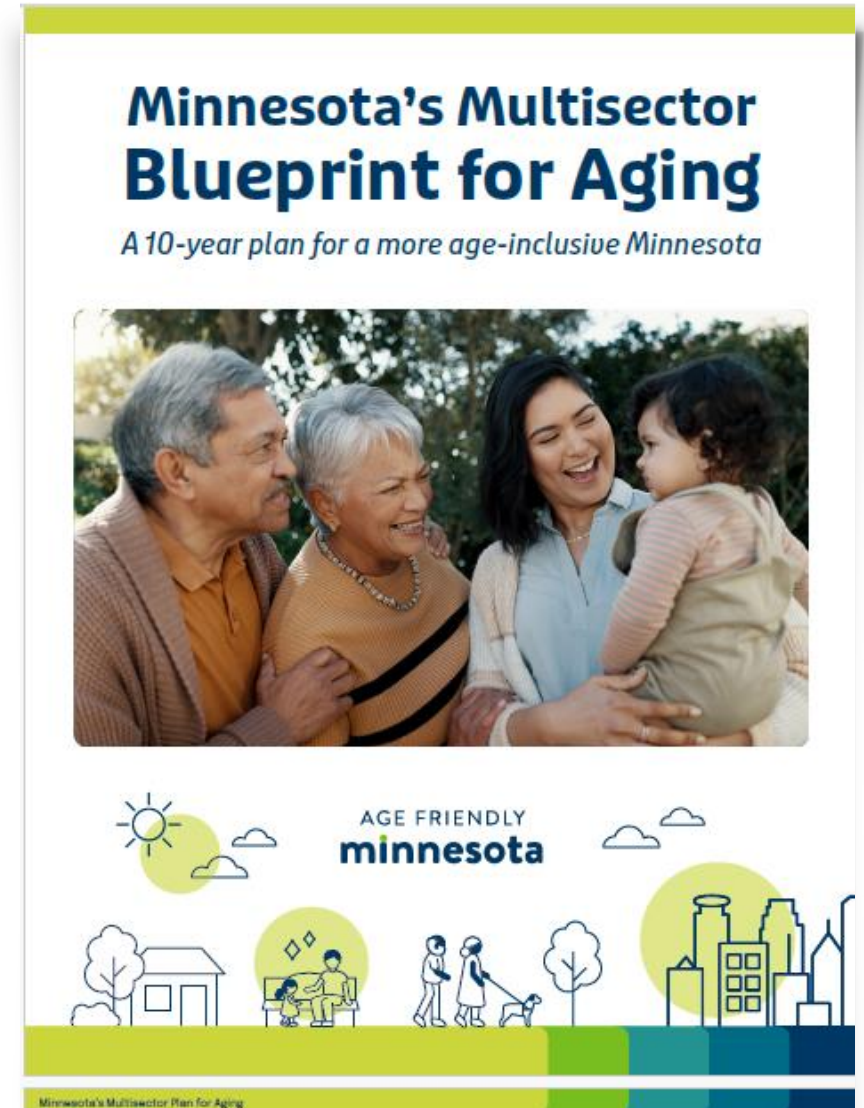
Age-Friendly Communities
Are Livable for
People of All Ages
aarp.org/livable



Blueprint for Aging / Age Friendly Minnesota



Lisa Edstrom
Director, Age Friendly Minnesota



Nature As We Age Initiative



Age Friendly Minnesota Community Grants

This work is supported by a state of Minnesota Age-Friendly Minnesota community grant, which invests in local efforts to make Minnesota a better place to grow older and is designed around AARP's 8 domains of livability.

Round 1 (2023): \$2.8 million to 90 grantees

Round 2 (2025): \$1.3 million to 35 grantees

Age Friendly Communities 8 Livability Domains

- An Age-Friendly community is one that enables all residents to thrive and every age and life stage.
- **Outdoor spaces, including nature, is an important component**
- There are challenges and opportunities to making nature accessible for people as they age.



**Communication
and Information**



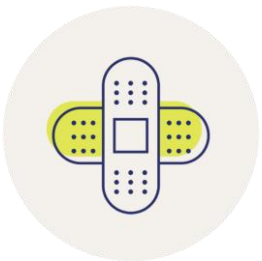
**Social
Participation**



Housing



**Outdoor Spaces
and Buildings**



**Health Services and
Community Supports**



**Civic Participation
and Employment**



**Respect and
Social Inclusion**



Transportation

A Field Scan of Older Adults and Nature in MN 2024

- 100+ page online resource with links to additional resources
- Informed by a statewide survey (N=130+), key informant interviews (N=38), and research
- Examines statewide needs, opportunities, gaps, strengths, and challenges regarding accessing and belonging in nature as we age, with statewide recommendations



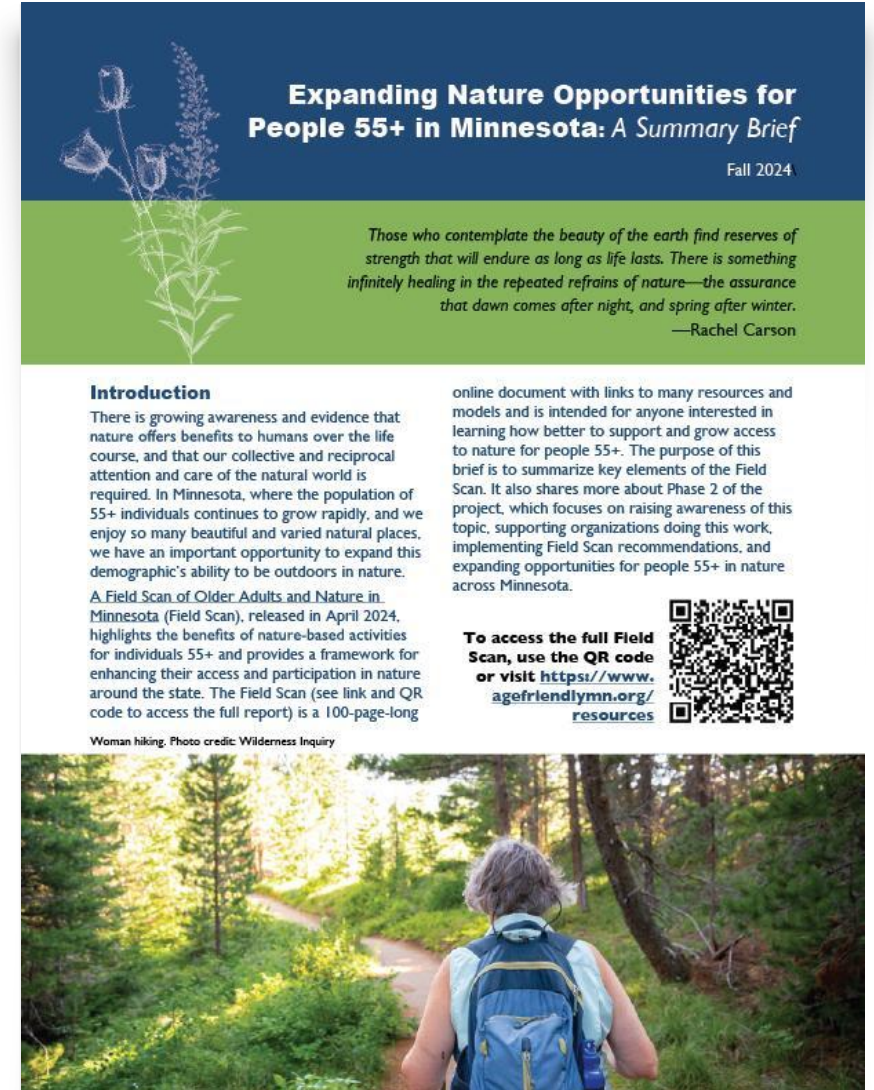
**A FIELD SCAN
OF OLDER ADULTS
AND NATURE IN
MINNESOTA**

April 2024

Field Scan Summary Brief

Expanding Opportunities for People 55+ in MN

- Summarizes key elements of the comprehensive Field Scan
- Smaller file size, can be emailed and printed
- Selection of models from around the state
- Updates on Phase 2 field building work (underway – grant ends 12/31/26)





The Nature Resource Center

Is a place to view and share a growing collection of resources, including

- Nature publications
- Videos and webinars
- Survey summaries
- Assessing connections to nature and more



**Scan code or visit Age-Friendly
Minnesota Nature Resource Center**
www.agefriendlymn.org/nature

Webinars, Presentations & Convenings

Nature As We Age Webinars (2025)

Showcasing models, and diving deeper on specific topics:

- Bridging Generations: Connecting through nature–recording and slides
- Nature Access for Older Adults with Specific Needs (Dementia, Parkinson's, and Vision Loss)–recording and slides
- Discovering Purpose, Meaning, and Creativity Through Nature as We Age–recording and slides



Older Adults Demographics (Minnesota)

- Minnesota's older adult population 65+ is growing ~ 1 million people
- 90% of Minnesota older adults live independently
- Out-state more rural areas are aging faster than the Twin Cities
- Older adults have more disabilities, which tend to increase with age
- Older adults are engaged in their communities

Source: *Minnesota Compass (a project of Wilder Research), 2022*



Nature's Benefits for Older Adults

- **Physical Health:** increased fitness, improved immunity, improved bone health, pain management, longevity
- **Mental Health, Cognition, Vitality:** stress reduction, enhanced mood and energy, cognitive benefits
- **Social and Emotional Well-Being:** purpose and fulfillment, enhanced relationships and community building, reduced feelings of isolation, stronger intergenerational bonds, environmental stewardship, sense of awe/appreciation of beauty



Potential Barriers to Consider for Older Adults in Nature

- Mobility challenges
- Decreased stamina
- Vision
- Hearing
- Access to bathrooms
- Cognitive impairment
- Feeling unsafe or fearful in nature
- Fear of judgement from others
- Limited awareness
- Language
- Social isolation
- Lack of diversity and inclusion
- Ageism
- Transportation
- Costs
- Challenging terrain and uneven surfaces
- Weather
- Winter
- Air quality

What We Want in Nature As We Age

- Physical health and well-being
- Mental well-being
- Social interaction
- Connection with the environment
- Recreation and leisure
- Spiritual connection and restoration
- Preservation and conservation
- Sensory enjoyment
- Purpose
- Lifelong learning



Interests in Nature Vary For Older Adults

Loppet Foundation/Theodore Wirth Park input from North Minneapolis older adults.

Two Sample Responses:

“I want the fresh air, sun, exercise, vitamin D, sunset/sunrises, wildlife, and exploring our waters.”

“Summer burns my skin. Winter hurts my bones.”



Nature As We Age Initiative

Key Learnings



Nature As We Age –10 Takeaways

1. Be aware of and resist pervasive ageism
2. Address transportation
3. Ask older adults what is meaningful to them
4. Social connections in nature are foundational
5. Engage diverse partners and market/outreach broadly
6. Ensure accessibility, including bathrooms in all seasons
7. Take it outdoors/bring it indoors
8. Stories are a must
9. Intergenerational connections and conservation = powerful motivators
10. How best to support caregivers?



Steve Kotvis—Restoration at Cedar Lake

“Every day I get to be outside and practice restoration, I give thanks for the fresh air I get to breathe inside the wonderful woods. The chirping of birds, the breeze blowing through the trees, and the lapping of waters...all are nature's beautiful soundtrack.”

— Steve Kotvis

Source: Steve's blog: ecorestoration.weebly.com



Jim and Mary: Forces of Nature–Habitat Makers



Joelle Hoeft, Nature As We Age

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*“What do we wish for? To be whole.
To be complete. Wildness reminds us
what it means to be human, what we
are connected to rather than what we
are separate from.”*

- Terry Tempest Williams

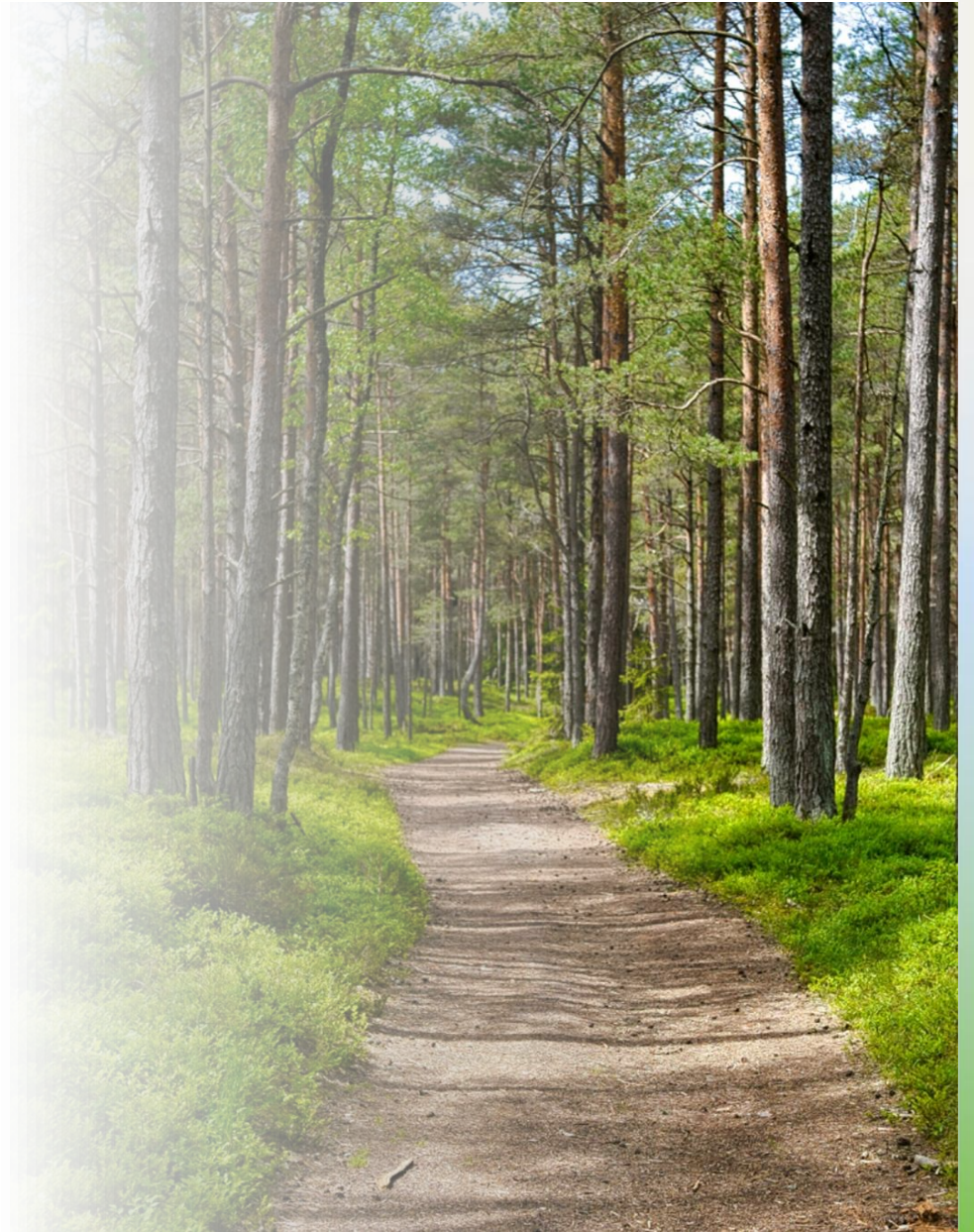


Networking Activity

Discussion question:

What do you hope to give and receive (knowledge sharing, inspiration, practical tips, etc.) from this group today?

What challenge or barrier do you see and bring to this gathering related to enjoying the benefits of nature as we age? Do you have ideas for solutions?



Keynote Speaker: Larry Weber



Networking and Lunch

11:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

Visit Tables and Network

11:45 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Lunch and Affinity Networking

11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Story Collective Room is open
as a quiet space.



Lunch Table Topics & Hosts (11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.)

Table Topic 1 - Transportation & Practical Accessibility Solutions (Gavin Bukovich)

Table Topic 2 - Winter Access (Kirsten Cruikshank)

Table Topic 3 - Intergenerational Connections in Nature (Taylor Holm)

Table Topic 4 - Age-Inclusive Planning, Advocacy, & Partnerships (Rebecca Sash)

Table Topic 5 - Health Promotion & Nature (Lisa Porthan)

Table Topic 6 - Purpose & Creativity Through Nature (Georgia Lane)

Table Topic 7 - Volunteer Opportunities (Zoey Leege & Kirsten Ryden)

Table Topic 8 - Caregivers & Nature (Joelle Hoeft)

Table Topic 9 - Open conversation (no host)

Regional Panel & Discussion on Age-Inclusive Nature-Based Programs



Today's Additional Presenters



Taylor Holm, Northland Foundation AGE to age

Wendy Larrivy, UMD University for Seniors

Charlie Miller, Superior Hiking Trail Association

Carol Christenson, Master Gardener's Houseplants for Seniors

Rebeka Ndosi, Maji ya Chai Land Sanctuary

Lisa Porthan, Northwoods Partners



Contact Information: Taylor Holm

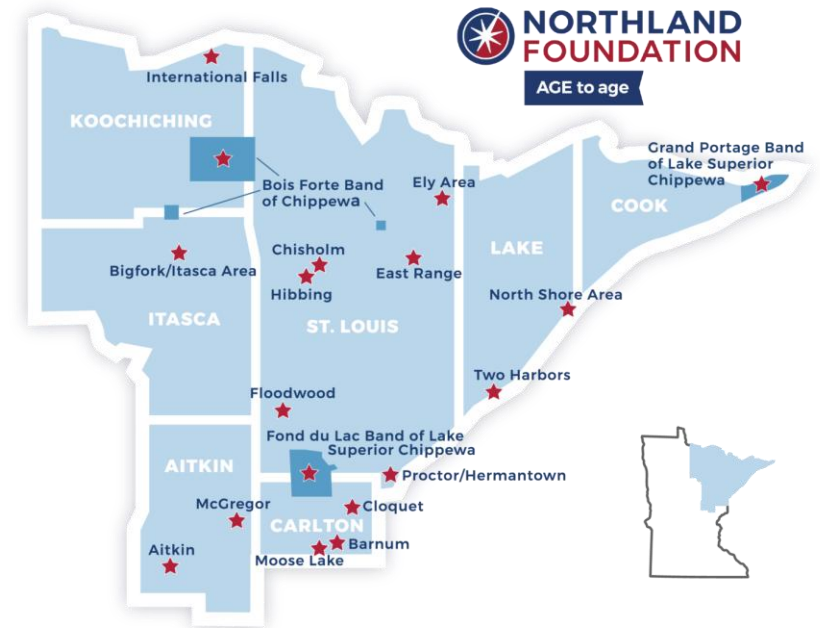
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northlandfdn.org/programs-supports/age-to-age/



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University for Seniors

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH
Driven to Discover™



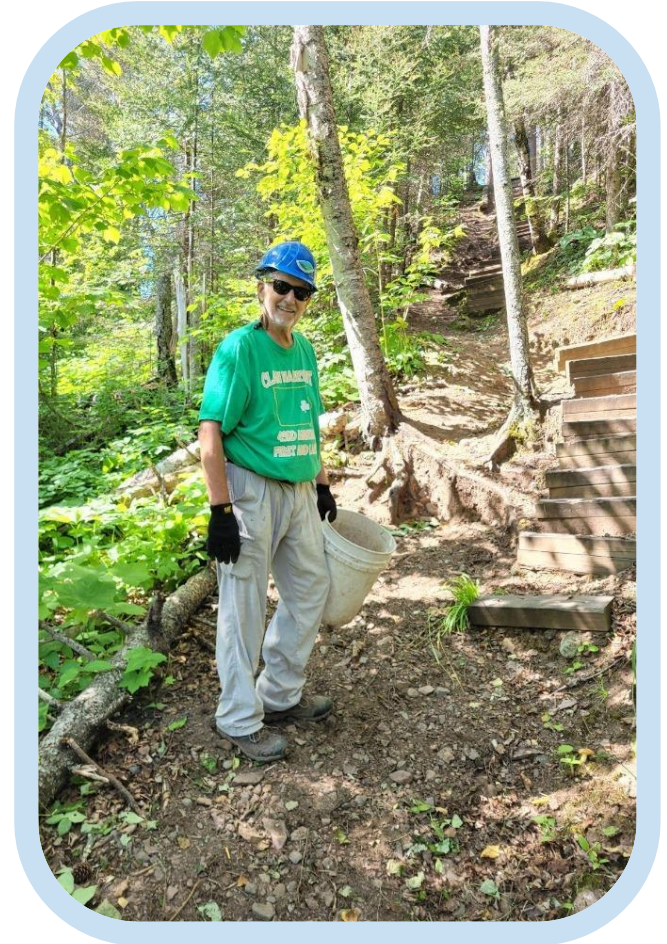
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Volunteer & Education Manager

volunteer@superiorhiking.org

info@superiorhiking.org

Visit: superiorhiking.org



Houseplants for Seniors Bringing Nature Indoors in St Louis County

St. Louis County Master Gardener Program:

Carol Christenson, St. Louis County Master
Gardener

clchrist01@gmail.com

Houseplants for Seniors video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtw5s96DgQ8



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION



Contact Information: Rebeka Ndosi

Founder, Keeper of the Vision

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Maji ya Chai Land Sanctuary
mni sota makece/land where
the water is so clear it
reflects the sky



Maji ya Chai
LAND SANCTUARY

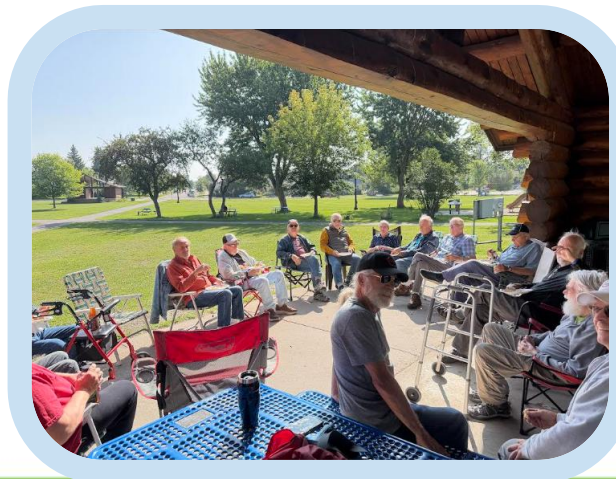
Contact Information: Lisa Porthan

**Executive Director
Caregiver Consultant**

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Northeast Regional Panel

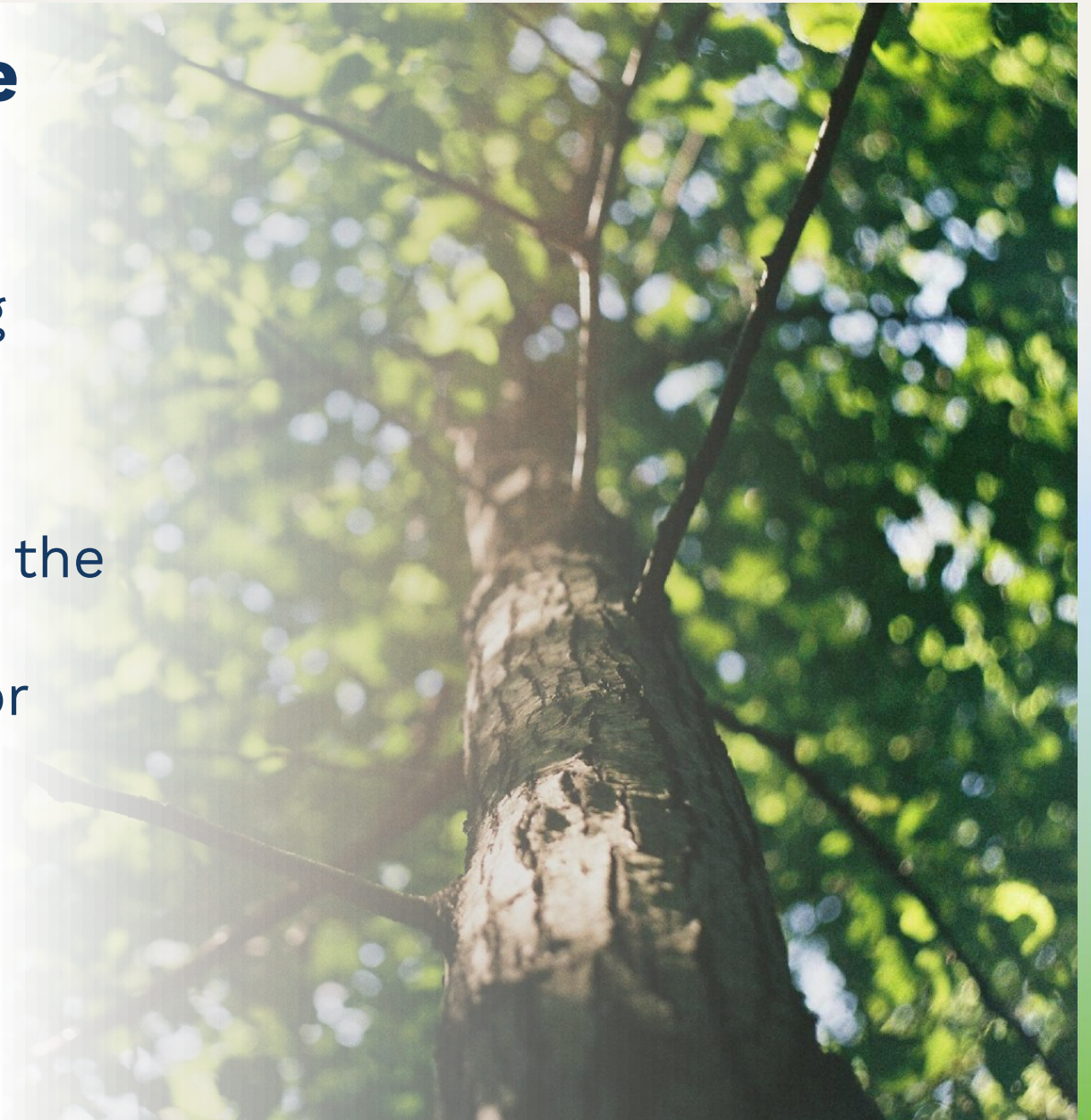
Discussion / Q&A



Collective Action Exercise (Liberating Structures)

Activity: "1-2-4-All" Brainstorming Session

Prompt: "What is one thing our organization/community can do in the next six months to make our local natural spaces more welcoming for older adults, people with different abilities, or other marginalized groups? What partnerships and resources exist or are needed to achieve this work?"



Reflections, Closing, Evaluation, and Wrap-Up

2:30-3:30 Optional Activities

Option 1:

Visit Ecolibrium3's Urban Farm (waiver needed)

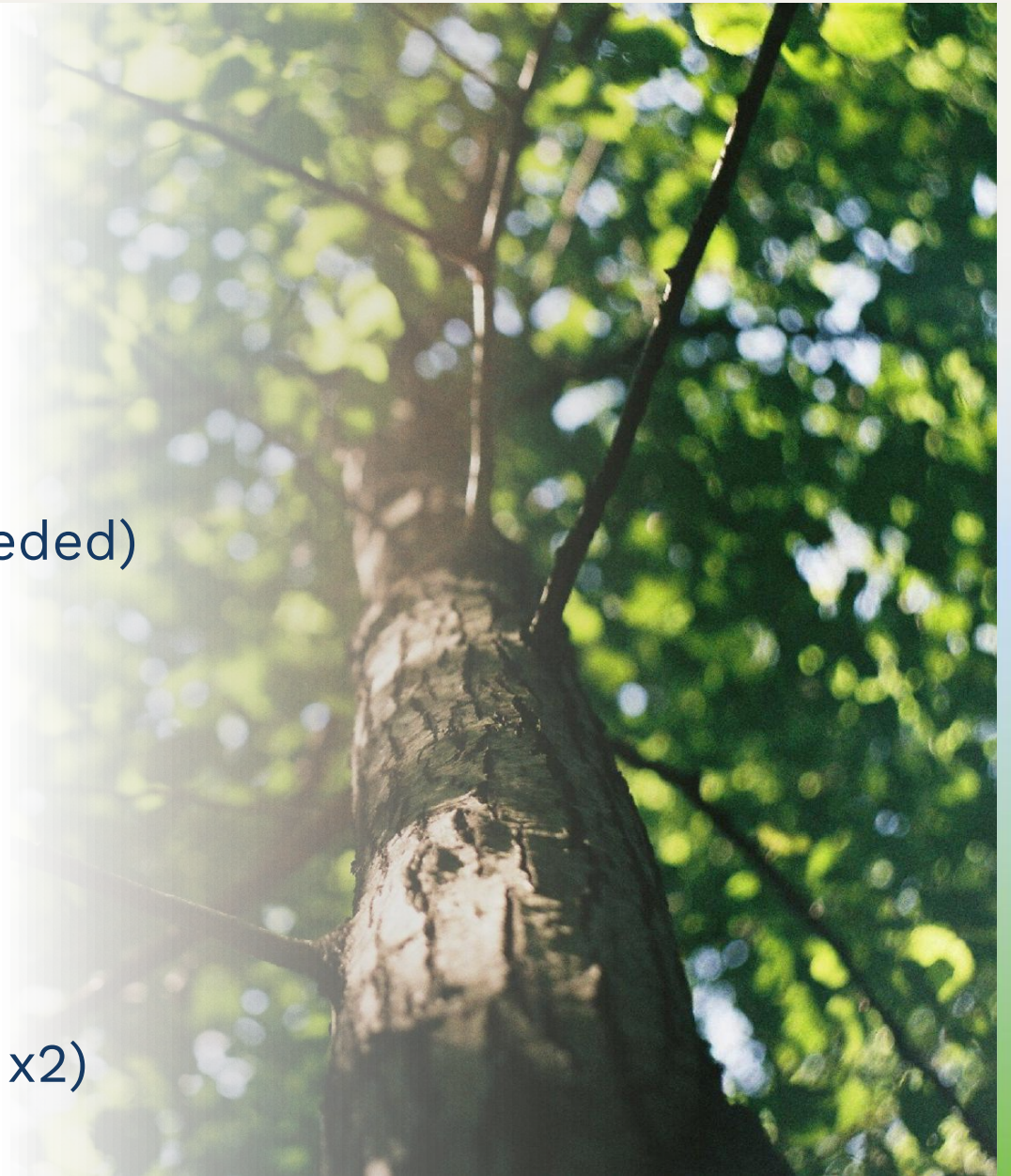
Option 2:

Guided Nature Walk with Larry Weber

Option 3:

Story Collection for the Minnesota Story
Collective

Option 4: DNR Track Chair (waiver needed x2)



**Thank you
for joining
us for
Nature
As We Age**

