



Midwest
Landscape
Initiative

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2025-'26



WHO WE ARE

The Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) is a collaboration of fish and wildlife organizations that identifies shared conservation priorities to develop solutions for healthy, functioning ecosystems in the Midwest.

The Midwest Landscape Initiative was started in 2018 by the state directors belonging to the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and leadership of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regions that intersect with the Midwest region. It includes leadership from the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative Research Units as well.

OUR VISION

Healthy lands and waters across the Midwest for the wellbeing of people and nature.

OUR MISSION

Fostering community to catalyze conservation solutions together.



FIND US ONLINE
MLIMidwest.org

OUR IMPACT

So far, the Midwest Landscape Initiative user support has **IMPACTED:**

\$72M
in project funding



800
river miles



118,000
acres across 11 states



35

completed projects;
12 MORE are in the works

42

partners involved in
completed projects

Our community involves more than
150 PEOPLE from more than
50 organizations

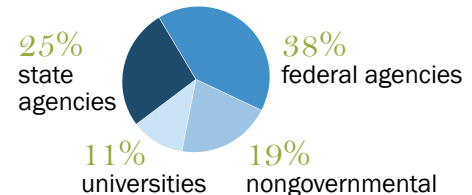
800+

people viewed webinars,
including the Blueprint
expansion to Great Lakes,
State-led Grasslands
Initiatives, and Science &
Research needs.



Recordings
of these webinars
are available at
MLMidwest.org.

PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS



ON-THE-GROUND PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY MLI



SCAN

[View the interactive StoryMap](#)
highlighting our work.

- 1 Enhancing aquatic habitat in the Upper Minnesota River watershed
- 2 Advancing collaboration in the Northern Hardwood Forest biome
- 3 Protecting cold water lakes in Michigan's Upper Peninsula
- 4 Connecting protected lands in Northeast Michigan
- 5 Supporting a natural resource condition assessment
- 6 Conserving tallgrass prairie across the Midwest
- 7 Supporting prioritization and planning efforts in Iowa
- 8 Conserving Iowa's forests
- 9 Promoting nature-based solutions in wetlands
- 10 Expanding protected coastal areas
- 11 Prioritizing restoration in the Shoal Creek watershed
- 12 Restoring and managing bottomland hardwood in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley
- 13 Supporting tri-state regional planning efforts
- 14 Protecting forests across Appalachian Ohio

COLLABORATION READINESS

The MLI community will continue to serve as a forum for those taking conservation action across the Midwest to collaborate in a proactive manner. MLI provides space for those responsible for putting conservation on the ground to connect with strategic thinkers in the region. Staff are available to help support your work by guiding grant proposals, informing conservation decisions and connecting with others across the region. We support collaborative grant proposals for the jointly identified regional conservation priorities (e.g., grasslands, aquatic connectivity, and forests). Through the development and use of shared objectives and outcomes, partners are pursuing funding opportunities to benefit strategic, landscape scale conservation activities across the Midwest.

CASE STUDY

Supporting 'Collaboration Readiness' in the Northern Forest

The MLI has been working to increase collaboration and collective problem-solving among federal, state, and tribal natural resource agencies in the Northern Forest ecoregion through available Inflation Reduction Act funding.

In 2024, we worked with MAFWA/NEAFWA states in the Northern Forest geography to make shared decisions on the best allocation of Inflation Reduction Act funds to improve climate resiliency. The process, proposals, and final funding decisions were all handcrafted by the participating state agencies. We continue to provide project support and grant management to awarded proposals to ensure:

- (1) they are successful for their local communities, and
- (2) they are a part of a broader, landscape-scale funding strategy.

In addition, in 2025-2026, we have provided coordination support to the Hemiboreal Decision Support Project, a landscape-scale collaboration led by five Tribal Nations in the 1836 Treaty Area (Bay Mills Indian Community, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians; coordinated through the Center for Cooperative Ecological Resilience). This project is supported by the Northern Forest Inflation Reduction Act effort, and is bringing together the five leading Tribal Nations, Michigan DNR, NPS, USFS, and USFWS to co-develop an interagency adaptive management framework to co-steward Hemiboreal forest ecosystems in Michigan.

MLI STRUCTURE

The MLI structure supports collaboration through a clear hierarchy connecting regional leadership, technical expertise, and specialized working groups. Leadership comes from the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Board, Regional Federal Agency Leadership, and the Steering Committee. The Technical Committee reports to this group and oversees five working groups: Communications and Engagement, At-Risk Species, Habitat Assessment, Grasslands, and SWAPs and Landscapes. A Pollinator Team operates under the At-Risk Species group to address emerging conservation needs.

JOIN THE EFFORT

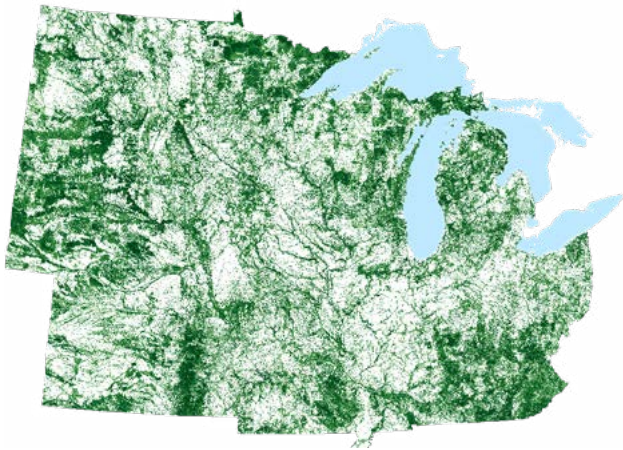
Participation in MLI is voluntary and strategic, and open to any interested individuals. The hope is for conservation partners at every level to value MLI's framework and products and become engaged with the collaboration. If your organization would like more information, please reach out to staff directly using the ['Contact Us' link](#) on the MLI website. We look forward to collaborating with you on future projects.

To stay up to date, you can [sign up for email updates](#) from the MLI.

OUR WORK

Midwest Pollinator Conservation Team

The Midwest Pollinator Conservation Team serves as a forum for collaborative work on native insect pollinators and engages with national and regional efforts to coordinate and magnify partners' work through shared resources. The team recently set up a speaker and discussion series to enhance members' knowledge of topics such as eDNA, ex situ butterfly conservation, camera trap species identification using AI software, and new technologies for habitat assessment.



Midwest Conservation Blueprint

The Habitat Working Group oversees the co-development and application of the Midwest Conservation Blueprint, a basemap of priority lands and waters for conservation across the Midwest, reflecting a diverse set of 20+ social and environmental values. It serves as an invitation to all those in the region to work in a more coordinated and collaborative way to amplify our individual efforts into a broader collective impact.

In March 2026, we released an updated blueprint based on public comments and expert review from the Habitat Working Group. The 2026 updates include improvements to our data and methodology, plus the addition of five new data sets.

Upcoming plans for the blueprint include expanding the blueprint prioritization into the nearshore waters of the Great Lakes. This process will be driven by feedback we received through a series of public webinars held throughout 2025, with a planned blueprint release in late 2027. You can learn more about the blueprint, the underlying data, and provide comments on the MLI website.

SWAP Coordination

Eleven of the thirteen states in the MLI geography submitted revised State Wildlife Actions Plans (SWAPs) in 2025 and 2026, representing 20 years of foundational documents for conservation of all species at the state level. MLI helped produce several resources over the past few years to support the states in their SWAP revision process. Now that states have submitted their new SWAP documents, MLI has reconvened the Midwest SWAPs and Landscapes Team to embark on projects that will aid in implementation and tracking of these new plans in the years to come.

Grasslands Working Group

Following the August meeting of the Steering and Technical Committees, staff were directed to establish a Midwest Grasslands Working Group. This new working group serves multiple purposes:

- To serve as a regular forum for collaborative work on grasslands conservation efforts in the MAFWA region
- To explore and formulate approaches that target activities identified in the Midwest Grasslands Summit Report
- To avoid duplication of existing efforts by aligning with and adding lift to current regional and international partnerships and planning efforts

This working group now meets monthly and is exploring ways to support state-level grassland initiatives and how to align messaging to articulate why functional Midwest grasslands are important.

The webinar that focused on state-level initiatives in October resulted in better integration of grassland initiatives across states and regions. Several attendees now join a multi-national, monthly “grassland coordinators” meeting led by the Central Grasslands Roadmap. We hope that several states in the MAFWA geography will serve as regional virtual nodes for the upcoming Central Grasslands Roadmap Summit in November.