



Members of the MLI Steering and Technical committees.

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR
2023-'24



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. Geological Survey Cooperative Research Unit as well.

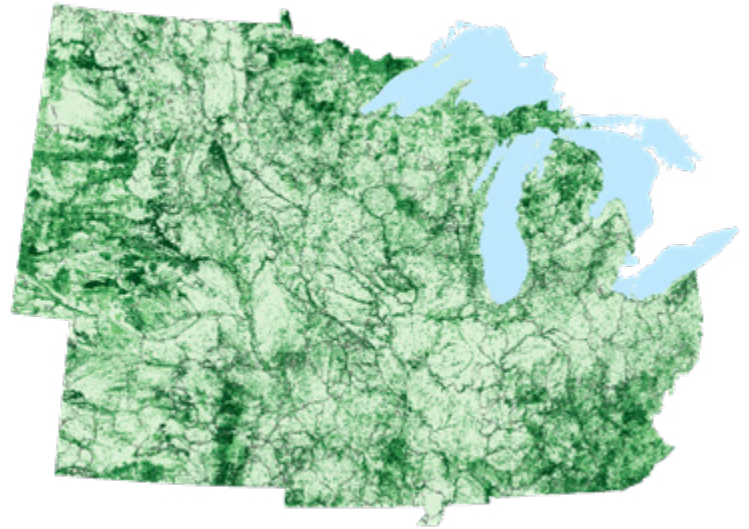
OUR WORK

At-Risk Species

MLI teams continue to use the Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list and related data to prioritize efforts to conserve and/or improve listing outcomes for at-risk species. This regional SGCN list has been used to focus and support two successful grant-funded projects in the region.

The At-Risk Species Working Group piloted the development of rapid data assessments for select Midwest species on the National Listing Workplan to facilitate better coordination prior to the development of Species Status Assessments. This working group has also developed priority conservation action recommendations for selected taxa groups of high concern in the Midwest region.

The MLI also supported the initiation of a new group called the Midwest Pollinator Conservation Team. This group functions as a sub-team of the At-Risk Species Working Group and will serve as a regular forum for collaborative work on at-risk, data deficient, and listed native insect pollinators and their habitats in the MAFWA region.



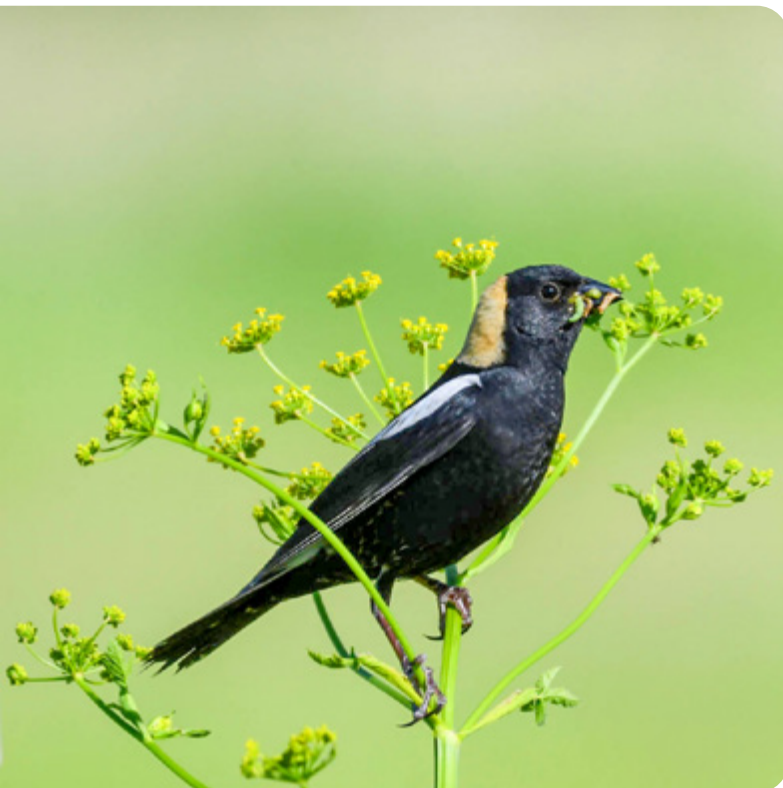
Midwest Conservation Blueprint

The Habitat Working Group oversees the development and application of the Midwest Conservation Blueprint, a base map of priority lands and waters for conservation across the Midwest. The blueprint prioritization was created using more than 20 cross-cutting societal and environmental values (i.e., indicators), including biodiversity, access to drinking water, and public recreation, among many others.

More than 50 individuals and 12 organizations worked together to develop the blueprint. 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. So far, the blueprint has been used to secure more than \$15 million dollars of funding that will impact approximately 800 miles of streams and 30,000 acres of tallgrass prairie. See more about how the blueprint is being used in a case study on page 3.

The blueprint is housed on an ArcGIS Hub site and public comments are being considered to improve the priorities and data sets that inform the blueprint. Next year, we will begin the inclusion of waters of the Great Lakes to the blueprint. You can learn more about the blueprint, the underlying data, and provide comments on the MLI website.

Several webinars also were held last year, including a five-month series, on how to use the blueprint. Recordings of these webinars are available on our website. In 2023, nearly 700 people from 58 organizations viewed them. Primary participants were staff from state agencies (47%), federal agencies (36%) and non-governmental organizations (10%).



CASE STUDY



Photo courtesy
Upper Minnesota River Watershed District

USING THE BLUEPRINT

The Upper Minnesota River Watershed District was awarded \$3.3 million as a National Fish Passage Project from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Along with six other partnering organizations, the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and South Dakota Game Fish and Parks have been heavily involved. The project area, just upstream of Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge, includes traditional fish spearing grounds where the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate identified barriers to be removed, and the major public recreation area of Big Stone Lake. In total, the project covers an impressive 756,480 acres, removes two barriers, and opens 780 miles of upstream tributaries to the Minnesota River.

With the work happening at the intersection of Minnesota and South Dakota, the Midwest Landscape Initiative was a natural collaborator. In this case, the initiative worked with the project partners to provide a magnified frame of the Midwest Conservation Blueprint, which specified the levels of conservation priority at the project's geographic location and an analysis to indicate how this project would support human and natural communities in the Midwest.

OUR WORK (CONTINUED)

SWAP Coordination

The Midwest SWAPs and Landscapes team is working to improve regional collaboration around State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) and Species of Greatest Conservation Need through development of regional best practices, databases, and data tools. This team is developing dashboard data viewing tools for the Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need data as well as information on species, habitats, threats, and conservation actions contained within SWAPs across the region. Additional work of this team includes development of shared lexicons for key SWAP elements, including a regional data product that crosswalks state specific habitat classification systems used in each SWAP to a shared regional habitat map and classification scheme.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

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.

LEARN MORE

Our website serves as a public-facing informational resource about the MLI and its mission, people, and projects. The website also features news updates, as well as links to relevant external news articles.



FIND US ONLINE
MLIMidwest.org

OUR VISION

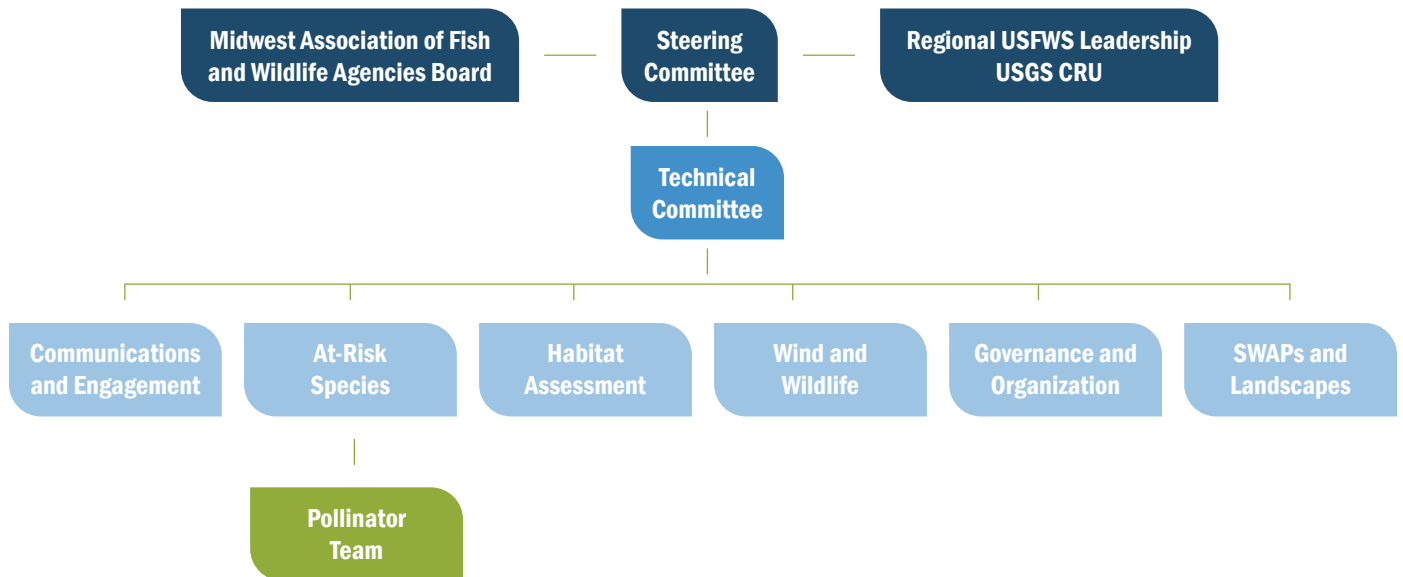
A thriving landscape of healthy lands and waters supporting wildlife, fish, and plants, embraced by all who live, work, and recreate in the Midwest.

OUR GOALS

By 2030, our goals are to achieve:

- A 10% increase in the health and connectedness of Midwest lands and waters, including conservation of intact landscapes as well as restoration and enhancement of degraded landscapes.
- Sustainable populations of wildlife, fish, and plant species.
- An increase in the relevance of nature and the practice of pro-conservation and outdoor recreation behaviors of those who live, work, and recreate in the Midwest.

MLI STRUCTURE



HOW WE OPERATE

Our organizational structure includes a steering committee that provides overall leadership and access to resources and capacity; a technical committee that recommends priorities, provides technical guidance and coordination; and several working groups and teams that provide specialized technical resources and coordination for specific priorities and oversight of product development. Our staff are dedicated to bringing to life the vision, ideas and products developed by our members and partners.

JOIN THE EFFORT

Participation in MLI is open to any interested individual, is voluntary and is strategic. 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. Additionally, feel free to contact MLI staff directly.