



KABEKONA WATERSHED

A Success Story



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Authors:

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 - Northern Waters Land Trust
- **Luther Nervig**
 - Kabekona Lake Foundation & Association

Researchers:

- **Pete Jacobson**
 - Retired - Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- **Tim Cross**
 - Retired - Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



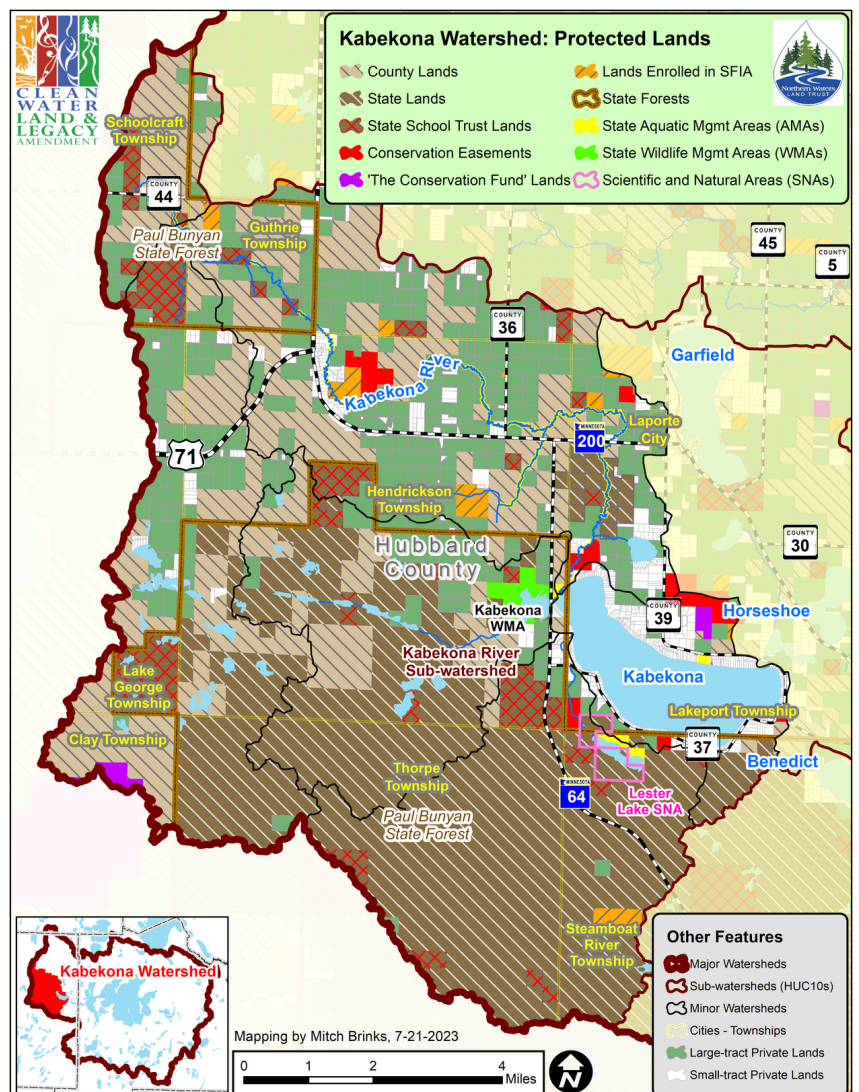
THE STORY OF KABEKONA LAKE AND ITS WATERSHED



This is the story of a northern cold-water lake in Minnesota, the conservation and protection of its watershed, the commitment and perseverance of a lake association, partners and landowners and financial support of State of Minnesota Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment Funds.

Kabekona Lake is a cold-water lake in Hubbard County with a surface area of 2,252 acres, a maximum depth of 133 feet and about ten miles of shoreline. The lake is spring fed and receives inflow from Kabekona River, Gulch Creek and Sucker Brook. Kabekona Lake flows out through three smaller lakes and into Kabekona Bay of Leech Lake.

Kabekona Lake is considered a “refuge lake” for tullibee (aka cisco), a preferred forage fish of walleye, northern pike, muskellunge and lake trout. Tullibee require cold, well oxygenated waters, a condition most common in lakes with deep water and healthy watersheds. Refuge lakes have the best chance to sustain conditions for cold-water habitat and species unique in northern Minnesota.



The land that drains rainfall and snowmelt into a lake is called a “watershed”. Kabekona Lake’s watershed is 97 square miles (62,000 acres) just a little smaller than an area the size of St. Paul and Minneapolis combined (133 square miles).

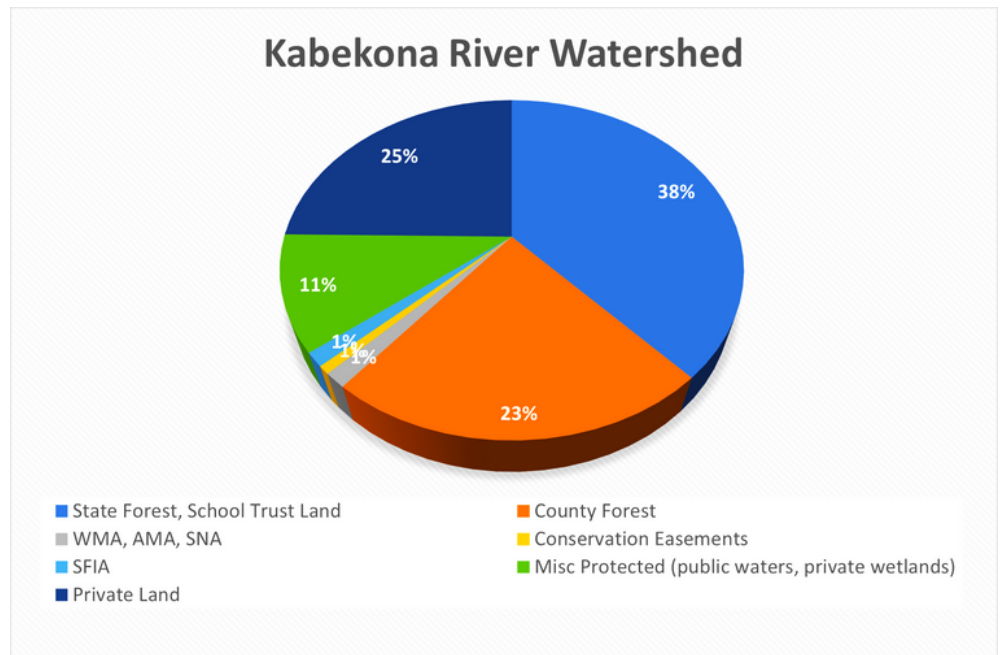
The Story of Kabekona Lake and Its Watershed



A decade ago in 2013, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) described a new way of considering how to protect water quality and habitat in the Fish Habitat Plan; A Strategic Guidance Document. The concept is simple yet challenging – “watersheds with at least 75% of their area in protected status are reasonably protected from future disturbances at the watershed level.” This goal became an important benchmark as agencies and nonprofit conservation organizations sought funding to protect these unique cold-water lakes and their watersheds in northern Minnesota.

In 2012 DNR Fisheries Research scientists, Pete Jacobson and Tim Cross, reported that 64% of Kabekona Lake’s watershed was protected. In the ensuing eleven years, partners worked together using public and private funds to protect an additional 11% of the watershed. Today this Watershed has achieved 75% protection through these collaborative efforts. This was accomplished in two ways - by conservation organizations purchasing lands for public ownership using public and private funds and through conservation easements which private landowners placed on their land permanently restricting development or land conversion.

The extensive State and County Forests in the Kabekona Lake Watershed provide the majority of the protected lands. State Forests total 23,620 acres (38%) and County Forests total 13,996 acres (23%). Keeping forest lands forested and connecting these undeveloped lands provides a resilient landscape in a changing landscape.



DNR Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas (AMA) and Scientific Natural Areas total 862 acres (1.4%). Conservation easements and SFIA agreements account for 1,267 acres (2.0%).

The Story of Kabekona Lake and Its Watershed

There are now 461 acres protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust and DNR Forests for the Future within the Kabekona Lake Watershed. The Minnesota Land Trust and DNR used Outdoor Heritage Funds to purchase these easements. Some landowners have donated a portion or the entire value of the easement.

Lands have been purchased for public management with public and private funding including the following projects.

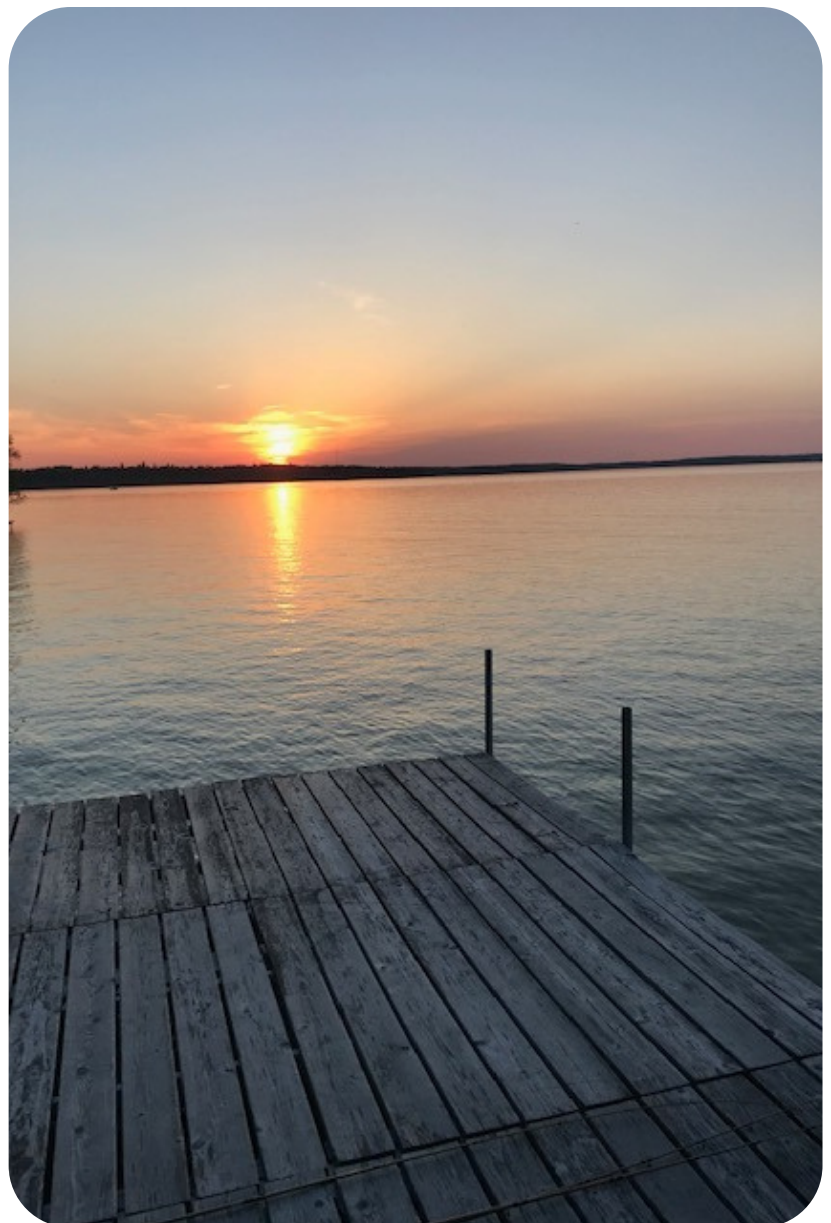
- 2 acres sold in 1995 to DNR for the Kabekona Lake AMA by the Kabekona Lake Foundation.
- 27 acres on Kabekona Lake and 1,500 feet of the Kabekona River purchased in 2006 for the DNR AMA by NWLT using public funds and private funds raised by the Kabekona Lake Foundation.
- 320 acres purchased in 2010 for the DNR Lester Lake Scientific Natural Area by the Trust for Public Land using Outdoor Heritage Funds and private funds raised by the Kabekona Lake Foundation.
- 120 acres purchased in 2010 for the DNR Lester Lake Aquatic Management Area by the Trust for Public Land using Outdoor Heritage Funds and private funds raised by the Kabekona Lake Foundation.



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- 13 acres purchased in 2019 for the DNR Kabekona Lake AMA by the Northern Waters Land Trust using Outdoor Heritage Funds and private funds raised by the Kabekona Lake Foundation.
- 72 acres purchased in 2022 for Hubbard County Forests by Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District (Northern Waters Land Trust) using Outdoor Heritage Funds with a significant contribution from the landowner. The Conservation Fund sold the property for well below market value.
- 2,529 acres purchased in 2023 for DNR State Forests by Trust for Public Land using Outdoor Heritage Funds with a significant contribution from the landowner. The Conservation Fund sold the property for well below market value. Approximately 136 acres of the “Sheep Ranch” property in Clay Township is in the Kabekona Lake Watershed.

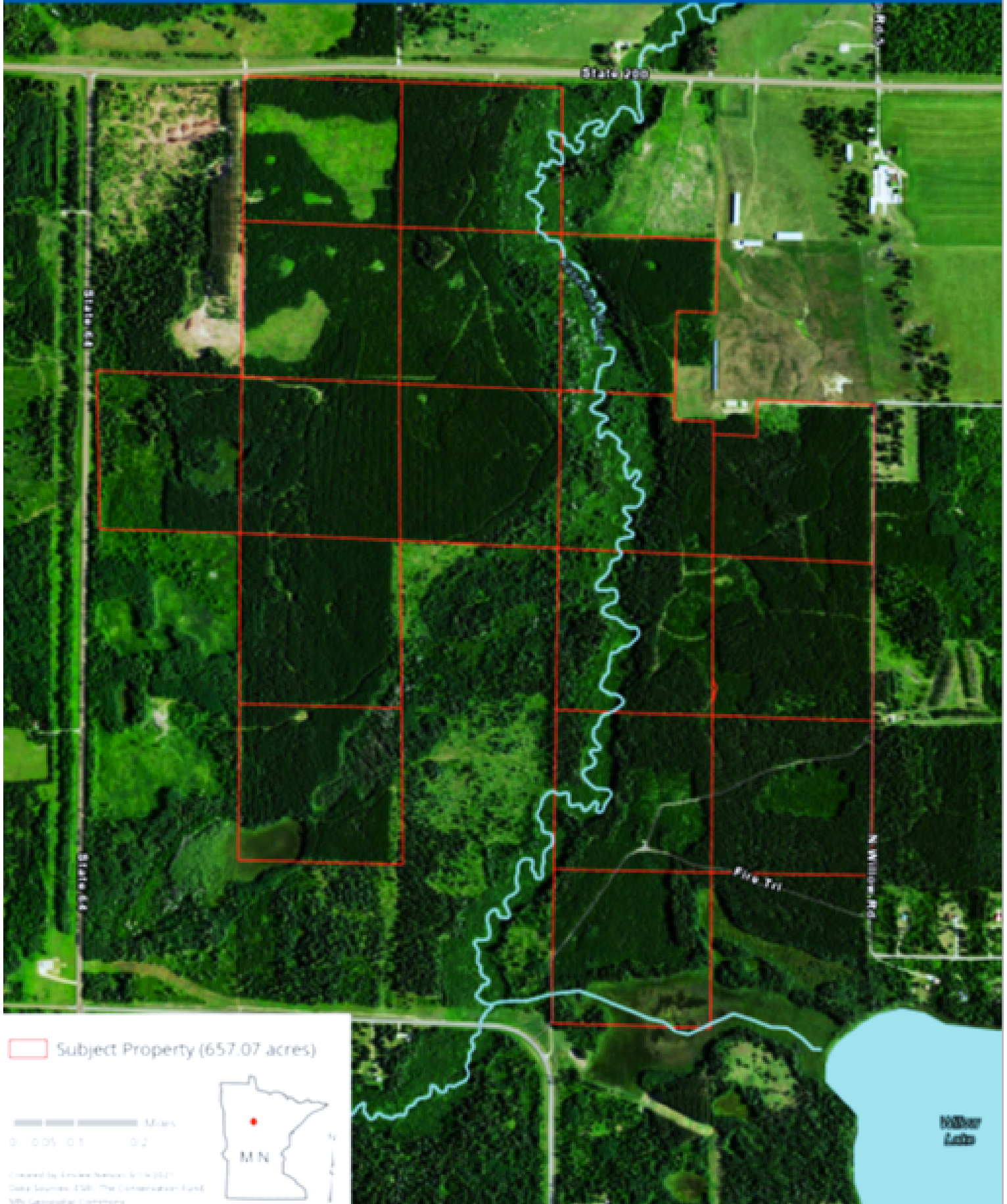


- 657 acres most recently purchased in 2023 for DNR State Forests by the Northern Waters Land Trust using Outdoor Heritage Funds with a significant contribution from the landowner (see map). The Conservation Fund sold the property for well below market value. An extensive portion of the Kabekona River, approximately 1.6 miles, runs through this property.

KABEKONA RIVER COMPLEX

Kabekona Lake Complex - MN Heritage Forest
Hubbard County, Minnesota

CONSERVATION FUND



Subject Property (657.07 acres)

Miles
0 0.05 0.1 0.2



Created by: Andrew Nelson, 6/16/2021
Data Sources: ESRI, The Conservation Fund,
NHD, Geographical Coordinates

Hubbard
County

The Story of Kabekona Lake and Its Watershed



Does reaching the 75% protection level in the Watershed mean that our work is done?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! DNR recommends that a primary goal for the watersheds with 75% of its land permanently protected is to remain vigilant and maintain this protection. This means that land uses within the watershed such as agriculture, mining, and development are conducted in a manner that do not increase phosphorous levels in lakes, rivers and streams.

Phosphorous increases algae in the water which in turn decreases plant growth, water clarity and the recreational value of the lake.



We also need to protect lakes in the Watershed from stressors such as more severe and frequent rain events which flush phosphorous into streams and lakes. Streams and rivers are more likely to experience stream-bank erosion with these rain events. The Leech Lake River Comprehensive Water Management Plan provides a thorough overview of the threats and remedies for this larger Leech Lake River Watershed.

Where do we go from here? Partners need to continue to track potential important strategic land protection opportunities for the Kabekona Lake Watershed. Partners also need to continue to focus on reducing phosphorous entering the lake through traditional land uses and as a result of changing weather patterns.

North-central Minnesota is the focus of strategic conservation efforts by several nonprofit organizations and government agencies including Northern Waters Land Trust, Minnesota Land Trust, Trust for Public Lands, Mississippi Headwaters Board, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Department of Natural Resources, Board of Soil and Water Resources and County Land Departments and Environmental Services. The collaboration between these entities will continue as we work together and with landowners to ensure the protection of the water and land in this area.

The Story of Kabekona Lake and Its Watershed

Throughout the years and for every project, the Kabekona Lake Foundation (KLF) and the Kabekona Lake Association have been stalwart conservationists and partners. In 2010, KLF (Luther Nervig and others) led the effort to protect the Lester Lake property and contributed \$60,000 for the required match towards that project. KLF contributed \$40,000 for 2006 Kabekona Lake AMA addition and the full 10% match for the 2019 addition to the Kabekona AMA.



Critical to the protection efforts in Kabekona Lake Watershed and other northern watersheds for the past thirteen years is the Outdoor Heritage Fund which was created in 2008 when Minnesota voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution. These funds "may be spent only to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forest and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife."

The 1,318 acres purchased and protected as public lands in the Watershed since 2010 have all been funded in large part by the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Most of this land (865 acres) was recently purchased from The Conservation Fund, a nonprofit conservation organization, which purchased more than 72,000 acres of former PotlatchDeltic Corporation land in 2020 with the intent of providing time to permanently protect these important forest lands. And 461 acres of private land have been protected with conservation easements funded in part or whole with Outdoor Heritage Funds since the Legacy Amendment was authorized by the Citizens of Minnesota.

This "watershed event" of the Kabekona Lake Watershed reaching 75% protection would not have happened without the commitment, perseverance and support of each of these key partners - the Kabekona Lake Association and Foundation, agency and nonprofit partners, landowners and State of Minnesota Legacy Funds.

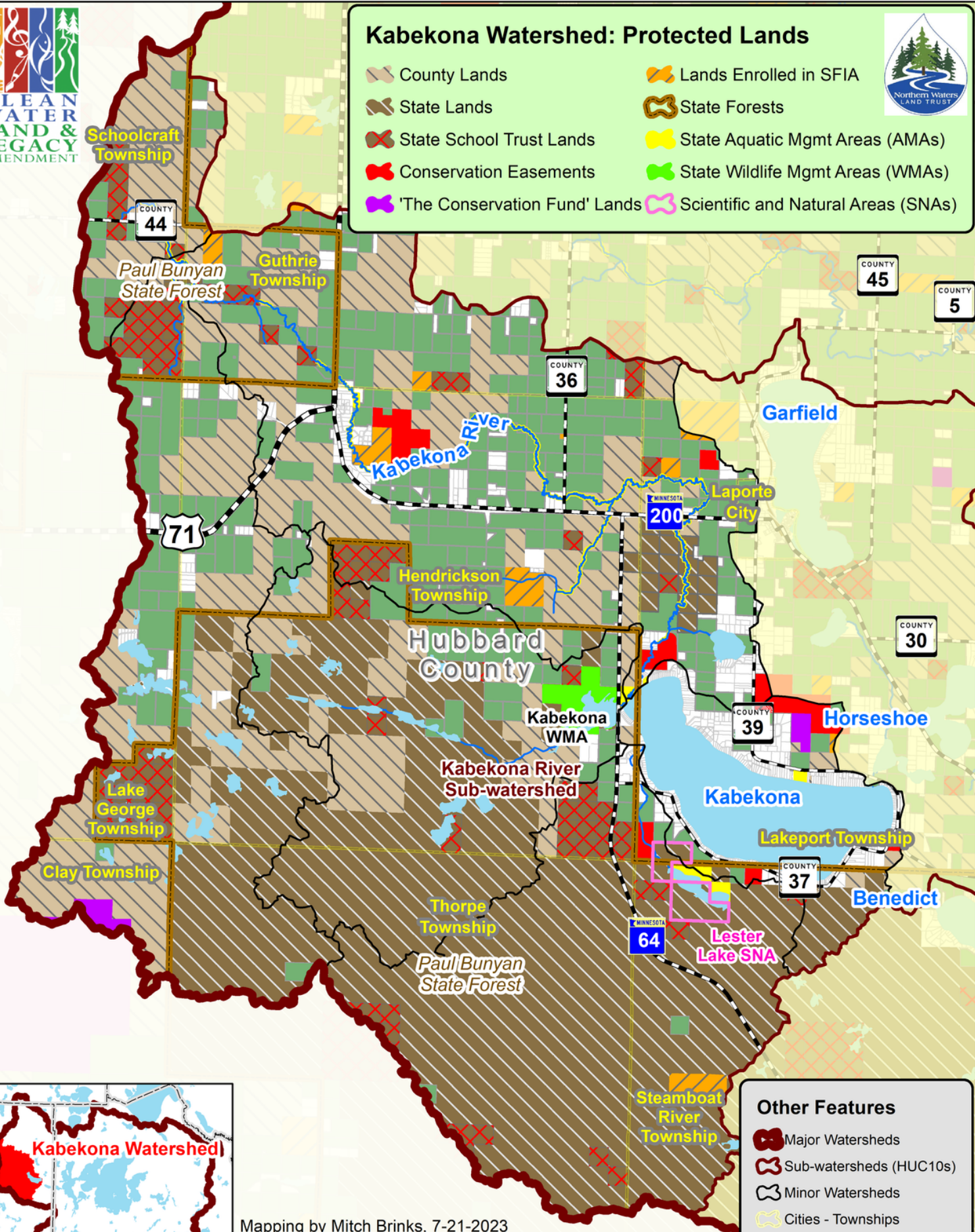
Thank you to all for your past and ongoing efforts!

KABEKONA LAKE WATERSHED MAP

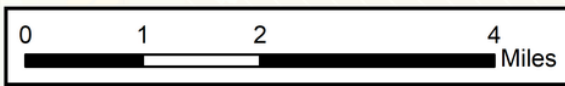


Kabekona Watershed: Protected Lands

County Lands	Lands Enrolled in SFIA
State Lands	State Forests
State School Trust Lands	State Aquatic Mgmt Areas (AMAs)
Conservation Easements	State Wildlife Mgmt Areas (WMAs)
'The Conservation Fund' Lands	Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs)



Mapping by Mitch Brinks, 7-21-2023



Other Features

- Major Watersheds
- Sub-watersheds (HUC10s)
- Minor Watersheds
- Cities - Townships
- Large-tract Private Lands
- Small-tract Private Lands



THE
CONSERVATION FUND



Kabeekona

WATERSHED PROTECTION



Kabekona Lake Conservation

