BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES

Habitat Friendly Utilities Project Stories

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe "*Resilient Roots: Enhancing Native Vegetation Along Powerline Corridors and Solar Sites*"

DATE 4/15/2025

Location: Leech Lake Reservation
Project Partners: The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, BWSR, ROW Agencies in Leech Lake Reservation such as TC Energy, Enbridge, MN DOT, Beltrami Electrical Cooperative, Great River Energy, Paul Bunyan Communications, Arvig, Ottertail Power, Lake County Power, and cell tower operators.
Project Co-Benefits: Pollinator habitat, native vegetation, controlling invasive species, stormwater management, landscape resiliency

Introduction

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe "Resilient Roots: Enhancing Native Vegetation Along Powerline Corridors and Solar Sites" Project will focus on establishing native vegetation and controlling invasive species in existing solar sites and right of way areas, building collaboration with partners through meetings, outreach, and a summit, and assessing right of ways to plan future management activities. This collaborative project with funding provided by BWSR is a partnership between at least six organizations, such as TC Energy, Enbridge, MN DOT, counties, townships, Beltrami Electrical Cooperative, Great River Energy, Paul Bunyan Communications, Arvig, Ottertail Power, Lake Country Power, and cell tower operators.

Project Establishment and Management

Resilient Roots aims for control of invasive species and establishment of native vegetation occurring over approximately six acres through non-chemical methods. These methods will be assessed for their effectiveness over a five-year plan. Project outcomes include the establishment of diverse native vegetation that provides much needed habitat for wildlife. Other benefits of the work will include stormwater management, carbon sequestration, continuity of pollinator habitat, and landscape resiliency. The project will also develop ecosystems that buffer against extreme weather and provide

habitats for migrating species. Projects will be prioritized to benefit species such as the rusty-patched bumble bee and monarch butterflies, as well as species that have been shown to be migrating outside their normal range. The work will utilize innovative technologies like the WeedTechnic machine and support local seed collection. Management practices will promote nature-based solutions to support environmental sustainability.

Partner collaboration will strengthen planning efforts and outreach to the community through newsletters, online surveys, webinars, and informational sessions to keep partners informed and engaged. The planned summit will coincide with Climate Resiliency Workshops being organized by multiple divisions from Leech Lake. The team is fixed to bring together people in the community to speak about climate change observations and will include keynote speakers from leading conservation and utility organizations as well as sessions for knowledge sharing; moreover, networking opportunities to build relationships among partners. This work will help increase awareness across organizations to support native vegetation establishment.

Key Project Lessons

Through the utility corridor assessment effort, approximately 25 acres of existing pipeline corridor will be assessed by staff to determine needs for invasive species control and opportunities for native vegetation establishment. Projects will be prioritized to benefit species such as the rusty-patched bumble bee and monarch butterflies, as well as proximity to valuable pollinator sites and prioritize linking these areas. The effort will quantify the number of wetlands supported by utility projects and document impacts on water quality. There will also be an emphasis on expanding and linking habitats to support biodiversity. Outcomes of the assessment will involve a GIS map showing key information related to wetlands, invasive plants, and opportunities for enhancing native vegetation and supporting wildlife species. Key lessons learned will be added to this document as the project progresses.

For more Information:

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