Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportsmen and women are largely losing out on more than 300,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.*

These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the neighboring landowners and those with permission to cross private lands.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

*State walk-in access programs offer a valuable and widely celebrated tool for opening smaller and isolated parcels of landlocked lands to which it would be difficult or impractical to do so by any other means. Because most access agreements require perpetual renewal, however, they are not permanent—enrolled properties can change hands and/or drop out of a program—and thus were not factored into this analysis.

By the Numbers
Inaccessible Public Lands in Minnesota & Wisconsin

Minnesota

248 K
Total Landlocked Acres

18K
Landlocked Federal Acres

109K
Landlocked County & Municipal Acres

46 K
acres are adjacent to water.*

Wisconsin

55 K
Total Landlocked Acres

3K
Landlocked Federal Acres

24K
Landlocked County & Municipal Acres

16 K
acres are adjacent to water.*

"State walk-in access programs offer a valuable and widely celebrated tool for opening smaller and isolated parcels of landlocked lands to which it would be difficult or impractical to do so by any other means. Because most access agreements require perpetual renewal, however, they are not permanent—enrolled properties can change hands and/or drop out of a program—and thus were not factored into this analysis.

* While not all water adjacent lands are accessible by canoe or other watercraft because they might be swamplands or otherwise not suitable for boat access, some are.

To learn more about these figures, visit unlockingpubliclands.org

For more interaction contact:
Lisa Nichols, onX - access@onxmaps.com
Joel Webster, TRCP - jwebster@trcp.org

Cover photo by The Hunting Public
Public Lands in the Upper Midwest

In the media and in popular imagination, public lands are most closely associated with Western snoeckapped peaks managed by the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service or vast expanses of sagebrush prairie managed by the Bureau of Land Management. But there are also millions of acres of state, or vast expanses of sagebrush prairie managed by the Bureau of Land Management. To be sure, there’s a good reason for this: 92 percent of our 640 million acres of federally managed lands are located in the 12 Pacific Coast and Intermountain West states, including Alaska.

But there are public hunting and fishing opportunities in every U.S. state that play a critical role in our ability to recruit, retain, and reactivate license-buying sportsmen and women.

Places like the Superior National Forest in Minnesota offer as much of a chance to immerse oneself in adventure as any of the vast public lands in states farther west. But there are also millions of acres of state, county, and municipally managed lands that provide critical access for outdoor enthusiasts close to home.

These days, anyone with a smartphone can take advantage of the opportunities offered by these smaller public tracts. For a Midwestern hunter looking to hang a treestand for whitetails, set up an ambush for turkeys, or work a woodlot for grouse, access to an overlooked public parcel could be a game-changer. And easy access to a lake shore or riverbank might give a parent the only place where they’ll be able to teach their kids to fish for walleyes, pike, or smallmouth bass.

A lifelong passion for hunting or fishing—and the conservation funding raised by those license purchases—could hang in the balance.

Strategically unlocking as little as a few dozen inaccessible acres at a time could mean the difference between someone having a place to enjoy the outdoors and not. A lifelong passion for hunting or fishing—and the conservation funding raised by those license purchases—could hang in the balance.

Landlocked by History

As with other states in the West and Midwest, upon statehood the land base in Minnesota and Wisconsin was organized into six-by-six-mile squares known as townships. Each township was further divided into 36 individual one-mile-square (640-acre) sections.

Both states received land grants from the federal government, originally comprised of two sections within each township, which were to be used to support public schools. Following statehood, several subsequent conveyances of federal land were provided to Minnesota and Wisconsin to serve various purposes, such as to support additional state institutions, create state parks and forests, expand agriculture, and retile marginal or unproductive farmland during the Great Depression. Meanwhile, millions of acres reverted back to counties and the states due in part to tax forfeiture.

The result today is some of the most diverse public land holdings found anywhere in the nation and, unfortunately, a remnant patchwork of landlocked public lands.

Landlocked public lands are best made accessible through cooperative agreements with private landowners that result in land exchanges, acquisitions, and easements, but this critical work cannot be undertaken without funding. When it comes to opening inaccessible public lands, even small projects can offer big benefits. Here are three programs that support these efforts:

**Land and Water Conservation Fund**

The federal LWCF remains the most powerful tool available for establishing and expanding access to public lands and waters. And it just got more powerful, with the recent passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Fully funding the program at $900 million annually for wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation, including $27 billion that is dedicated to public access. Importantly, the LWCF is not just limited to federal projects—at least 40 percent of the program must be used for state-driven projects.

**Minnesota Leonard Magnus Outdoor Heritage Fund**

Established in 2008, this program empowers projects that protect, enhance, or restore prairies, wetlands, forests, or other habitat, and—when it meets those primary goals—for example, open or expand access to inaccessible wildlife management areas managed by Minnesota DNR’s Fish and Wildlife Division. Directing more than $100 million toward projects in 2020, the Outdoor Heritage Fund is a heavy hitter in support of conservation and access.

**Wisconsin Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program**

Established in 1989, this program exists to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation. With a budget of $86 million in 2019, Knowles Nelson is a major program that, among other things, can help unlock Wisconsin’s state parks, wildlife and fisheries areas and state natural areas. Knowles Nelson is set to expire in 2020 and will need to be renewed by the state legislature.
THE UPPER MIDWEST’S LANDLOCKED PUBLIC LANDS

Untapped Hunting and Fishing Opportunities in Minnesota and Wisconsin

A New Collaborative Analysis by onX and TRCP

While not all water adjacent lands are accessible by canoe or other watercraft because they might be swamplands or otherwise not suitable for boat access, some are. To learn more about these figures, visit unlockingpubliclands.org

**By the Numbers**

**Minnesota**

Total Landlocked Federal, State, and County & Municipal Acres: 248,000

Of those, 46,000 acres are adjacent to water.*

**Wisconsin**

Total Landlocked Federal, State, and County & Municipal Acres: 55,000

Of those, 16,000 acres are adjacent to water.*

For more information contact:

Lisa Nichols, onX - access@onxmaps.com
Joel Webster, TRCP - jwebster@trcp.org

Cover photo by Sam Soholt with The Hunting Public

Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership. But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportsmen and women are largely losing out on more than 300,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.* These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the neighboring landowners and those with permission to cross private lands.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

*State walk-in access programs offer a valuable and widely celebrated tool for opening smaller and isolated parcels of landlocked lands to which it would be difficult or impractical to do so by any other means. Because most access agreements require perpetual renewal, however, they are not permanent—enrolled properties can change hands and/or drop out of a program—and thus were not factored into this analysis.
Landlocked by History

As with other states in the West and Midwest, Minnesota and Wisconsin were organized into six counties in 1851, and the township was further divided into 36 sections, each section containing 1,296 acres.

Both states received land grants from the federal government, originally comprising two sections within each township, which were to be used to support public schools. Following statehood, several subsequent consequences of federal land were provided to Minnesota and Wisconsin to serve various purposes, such as to support additional state institutions, create state parks and forests, expand agriculture, and set aside marginal or unproductive farmlands during the Great Depression. Meanwhile, millions of acres reverted back to counties and the states due in part to tax forfeiture.

Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportmen and women are largely missing out on more than 200,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.*

These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportmen and women are largely missing out on more than 200,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.*

These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportmen and women are largely missing out on more than 200,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.*

These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportmen and women are largely missing out on more than 200,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.*

These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportmen and women are largely missing out on more than 200,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.*

These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the current owner.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.
Midwestern hunter looking to hang a by these smaller public tracts. For a take advantage of the opportunities offeredThese days, anyone with a smartphone can enthusiasts close to home.

But there are public hunting and fishing opportunities in every U.S. state that play a critical role in our ability to recruit, retain, and reactivate license-buying sportsmen and women.

Places like the Superior National Forest or smallmouth bass.

Strategically unlocking as little as a few acres of public land—land to meet management needs, generate revenue, protect vital fish and wildlife habitats, and provide access for sportmen and women.

There were also vast federal public lands set aside in the Northwoods in the early 20th century, including the Chippewa and Superior National Forests in Minnesota and the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Wisconsin.

Public Lands in the Upper Midwest

Landlocked by History

As with other states in the West and Midwest, upon statehood the land base in Minnesota and Wisconsin was organized into six-by-six-mile squares known as townships. Each township was further divided into 36 individual one-mile-square (640-acre) sections.

Both states received land grants from the federal government, originally comprised of two sections within each township, which were to be used to support public schools. Following statehood, several subsequent conveyances of federal land were provided to Minnesota and Wisconsin to serve various purposes, such as to support additional state institutions, create state parks and forests, expand agriculture, and retire marginal or unproductive farmland during the Great Depression. Meanwhile, millions of acres reverted back to counties and the states due in part to tax forfeiture.

Later, the Department of Natural Resources in each state began actively purchasing lands to meet management needs, generate revenue, protect vital fish and wildlife habitats, and provide access for sportmen and women.

The result today is some of the most diverse public land holdings found anywhere in the nation and, unfortunately, a remnant patchwork of landlocked public lands.

Solutions

Landlocked public lands are best made accessible through cooperative agreements with private landowners that result in land exchanges, acquisitions, and easements, but the critical work cannot be undertaken without funding. When it comes to opening inaccessible public lands, one small project can offer big benefits. Here are three programs that support these efforts:

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The federal LWCF remains the most powerful tool available for rewilding and expanding access to public lands and waters. And it just got more powerful, with the recent passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, fully funding the program in 2020 to help unlock some of America’s most stunning natural and outdoor recreation, including $27 million that will open and expand access. Importantly, the LWCF is not just focused on federal projects—at least 40 percent of the program must be used for state-driven projects.

Both Minnesota and Wisconsin have innovative state programs for conserving habitat and improving access that should serve as valuable models for other states looking to do the same.

Minnesota

Lands for Outdoor Heritage Fund

Established in 2008, this program empowers local governments to protect valuable natural resources, parks, or other habitat—and, when it meets those primary goals—can also be used to open or expand access to inaccessible public lands. Over time, this management area managed by Minnesota DNR’s East and West Parks Division. Spending more than $300 million toward projects in 2020, the Outdoor Heritage Fund is a heavy hitter in support of conservation and access.

Wisconsin

Polka Dot Patch of Wisconsin’s面积

Created in 1989, this program exists to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. With a budget of about $80 million annually, Polka Dot Patch is a major state-driven program that, among other things, can help unlock Wisconsin’s state parks, wildlife and fisheries areas and state natural areas. Knowles Nelson is set to expire in 2020 and will need to be reauthorized by the state legislature.
Public land access is foundational to America’s hunting and fishing traditions. It ensures that outdoor opportunities exist for all of us, regardless of our income, connections, or property ownership.

But in Minnesota and Wisconsin, sportsmen and women are largely losing out on more than 300,000 acres of public land where there is no permanent, legal access.* These local, state, and federal public lands are surrounded by private land with no public roads or trails to reach them. Landlocked parcels range in size from just a few acres to nearly 4,000 acres and—although they are, as a general rule, legally open to public hunting and fishing—guarantee access to no one except the neighboring landowners and those with permission to cross private lands.

Today, when time in the outdoors is more valuable than ever, unlocking public lands represents one of the most obvious and actionable ways to provide more opportunities for more people to enjoy the woods and waters of our country.

*State walk-in access programs offer a valuable and widely celebrated tool for opening smaller and isolated parcels of landlocked lands to which it would be difficult or impractical to do so by any other means. Because most access agreements require perpetual renewal, however, they are not permanent—enrolled properties can change hands and/or drop out of a program—and thus were not factored into this analysis.

By the Numbers

**Minnesota**

- **Total Landlocked Acres:** 248,000
- **Total Landlocked Federal, State, and County & Municipal Acres:** Of those, 46,000 acres are adjacent to water.*
- **Total Landlocked Federal Acres:** 18,000
- **Total Landlocked County & Municipal Acres:** 109,000
- **Total Landlocked State Acres:** 121,000

**Wisconsin**

- **Total Landlocked Acres:** 55,000
- **Total Landlocked Federal, State, and County & Municipal Acres:** Of those, 16,000 acres are adjacent to water.*
- **Total Landlocked Federal Acres:** 3,000
- **Total Landlocked County & Municipal Acres:** 24,000
- **Total Landlocked State Acres:** 28,000

*While not all water adjacent lands are accessible by canoe or other watercraft because they might be swampy or otherwise not suitable for boat access, some are.

To learn more about these figures, visit unlockingpubliclands.org

For more information contact:
Lisa Nichols, onX - access@onxmaps.com
Joel Webster, TRCP - jwebster@trcp.org

Cover photo by The Hunting Public