

Habitat improvement project: steps and timeline

Partner organizations

The process of implementing a habitat improvement project on permanently protected lands takes a few months to a year. Establishment and long-term maintenance of the investment could last multiple years. The general progression and steps involved in a habitat improvement project are described below. These steps may occur in a slightly different order or timeline depending on the specific circumstances of each project.

Entities involved in a habitat improvement project

The main entities involved in a habitat improvement project are:

You, the partner organization ●

Partner organizations include cities, watershed management organizations or districts, state or federal agencies, tribes, or nonprofit entities with a conservation easement or fee-title ownership of conservation land and waters. Partner organizations can work with Hennepin County to improve habitat on conservation lands and waters they own or hold in perpetual easement and/or on behalf of a landowner or other partner organization that does. You will meet with Hennepin County to gather information and your project may involve review and approval by conservation easement holders or regulatory partners, such as the Minnesota Land Trust, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, or Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Hennepin County ●

Hennepin County is seeking to conduct habitat improvement projects on protected conservation properties. County staff will meet with you to gather initial information and offer support and guidance during the project. County staff will offer technical assistance and discuss opportunities for financial assistance to meet stewardship and conservation goals. Hennepin County staff can also help with management plan development, engagement and communication about the project, and biological monitoring before and after project implementation.

The Minnesota Land Trust and other conservation partners ●

The Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and other decision makers or conservation partners, including the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) may be involved in project review and approval. The Minnesota Land Trust and other partners may provide funding and additional technical support depending on whether they co-hold an easement where the project takes place. Involvement by different decision-making partners is project dependent.



Phase 1: Intake, feasibility, and project prioritization

This phase typically takes 1 to 4 months

1. Project identification and intake ●●●

Partners may contact Hennepin County staff directly or submit an online [intake form](#) to indicate interest in collaborating on a habitat improvement project. Partners may also be contacted by Hennepin County staff about potential collaboration. In all instances, partners must complete the intake form to describe their interest in a habitat improvement project. In the form, you will identify the goals of the project and the resources and limitations you may have in completing the project. The form should take less than an hour to complete. Hennepin County staff are available to answer any questions you may have.

2. Initial project review, field visit, and scoping ●●

Hennepin County staff will review the project intake form and connect with you to discuss the information you provided. County staff will also talk with you about what type and level of support you need to accomplish the project. Additionally, Hennepin County staff will coordinate a field visit with you and work with you to outline the project scope, timing, actions, and goals.

3. Project evaluation and prioritization ●

Hennepin County staff will use information from the intake form, conversations, field visits, and scoping efforts to review the feasibility of the project, identify habitat or water quality benefits of the project, and complete a project prioritization worksheet.

4. Present project to Technical Advisory Committee and finalize project selection ●●

Hennepin County staff will present the proposed project to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC is a group of technical experts including state and local conservation professionals who advise county staff on our habitat programming. The TAC will provide feedback and make a recommendation on the project. Based on this feedback, Hennepin County staff will adjust project scope and finalize a recommendation to county leaders.

Phase 2: Project scoping and approval

This phase typically takes 1 to 4 months

5. Draft habitat improvement plan ● ●

Hennepin County staff will develop a proposed habitat improvement plan for your project in consultation with the appropriate partners.

6. Finalize habitat improvement plan ● ● ●

Staff will review the habitat improvement plan with you and integrate feedback as needed. Hennepin County staff will use the habitat improvement plan to inform and finalize engineering and designs. For Minnesota Land Trust easements, an action plan will also be developed. This may need approval by appropriate partners, including authorized engineering signatory (if required).

7. Submit permits ● ●

Hennepin County will work with you to obtain any required permits.

8. Establish access agreements to the property ● ●

To complete your project, Hennepin County staff and contractors will need permission to access the project area. Hennepin County staff will discuss anticipated access needs, set expectations, and establish access agreements that are necessary to complete the project. We'll always let you know before accessing your property, even though we'll have these agreements in place.

Phase 3: Contracting and commitments

This phase typically takes 2 to 4 months.

9. Complete collaboration and biological monitoring pledges ● ●

You will work with the county to develop a biological monitoring plan, and review and sign a collaboration pledge for the project. You will also sign the project commitment form, which outlines the commitments to the implementation and maintenance of the project. If needed, the various partners will additionally develop and sign a partnership agreement (e.g., memorandum of understanding or similar).

10. Collect initial biological monitoring data ● ●

Hennepin County staff will work with you to complete pre-habitat-improvement monitoring efforts and collect initial biological monitoring data.

11. Bidding solicitation and contractor selection ● ●

Hennepin County staff will solicit and review bids for the proposed project. Once a contractor is selected, Hennepin County will coordinate with you to communicate when the contractor will do the project work.

Phase 4: Project management and ongoing commitments

This phase is ongoing

12. **Implement project and ensure contracted work is completed** ●
Hennepin County staff will work with contractors to ensure work is completed to the specifications of the project.
13. **Ongoing maintenance of habitat improvement investments** ● ●
Hennepin County staff and/or you will complete ongoing maintenance and management as denoted in the project commitment form.
14. **Ongoing biological monitoring to ensure long-term maintenance and project success** ● ●
Hennepin County staff and/or you will complete agreed upon biological monitoring to collect data, inform adaptive management, and ensure long-term maintenance and success of the investment.

