



FRESHWATER

CLEAN WATER FROM HEALTHY LANDS

Freshwater is teamed up with several land trusts on a regional approach to improving water quality around the Great Lakes, through an innovative project propelled by the Great Lakes Protection Fund. A primary goal is to restore select croplands to perennial vegetation, which reduces runoff and erosion while trapping carbon in the soil. Using state-of-the-art watershed modeling paired with local insights, our team selects high priority lands for conservation. These lands are then permanently protected with funding generated by individuals and businesses who live and work in the region.



Learn more at greaterlakespromise.org.

FEBRUARY PHENOLOGY

Jim Gilbert's Nature Notes

First week of February

Usually thousands of ice-fishing houses dot Minnesota and Wisconsin lakes, which are covered by ice about two feet thick. Pairs of trumpeter swans stand on pond and lake ice, claiming territories. House finches and northern cardinals sing, red-bellied woodpeckers are vocal and ring-necked pheasants are crowing. These are early spring sounds. Gray squirrels may use wood duck nesting boxes as safe sleeping places; often several squirrels are in one box. Coyote mating season is beginning.

February 7, 2024: This was the eleventh day of 50 degrees in the Twin Cities since December 1; there was no snow on the landscape here and miles beyond.

Second week of February

Red oak leaves, which have been attached since last growing season, are now falling – a subtle spring sign. Each year the Sun is high enough in its path that by February 11, greenhouses start to be hot and humid on sunny days from about 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. To keep early plantings going in greenhouses, heat is needed when the Sun isn't providing the warmth. We also notice that cars and other vehicles parked in the sunlight warm up, as do three-season porches.

A Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness winter trip takes much preparation and skill. Probably less than 3 percent of warm season visitors try a winter BWCA adventure. A frozen season visit on skis and snowshoes offers solitude and raw beauty, ravens overhead, animal tracks in the snow, pristine lakes and forests, and a dark sky for star gazing.

February 12, 2024: Common snowdrops began blooming in a University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum forest garden.

Third week of February

All of the tree squirrels – fox, flying, red and gray – have started their mating season. More raccoons are moving about the landscape. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, raccoons usually den-up in early winter and remain inactive for several weeks.

By mid-February, motorists in the southern half of the state often see flocks of small grayish-brown horned larks along roadsides and in fields. These first-of-the-spring bird migrants usually gather in groups of three to 20 birds that flip up as a car passes.

More than 200 wintering bald eagles may be counted along the Mississippi River between Red Wing and Winona. Meanwhile, timber wolves in northeastern Minnesota may have begun to mate, and they howl with increasing frequency.

Fourth week of February

It's time to prune apple and oak trees, and grape vines, and to plant begonia and geranium seeds indoors. The long bright, arching golden-yellow twigs of weeping willows glow on the landscape.

Black bear cubs, now about a month old and weighing less than three pounds, nestle close to their sleeping mothers. Migrating American crows are returning to northern Minnesota.

Late February 2024: A number of very early lake ice-outs in Minnesota included: East Chain Lake and Iowa Lake in Martin County on February 23, Lake Hendricks in Lincoln County on February 25 and Wells Lake at Faribault on February 28.

February 29, 2024: No snow on the landscape and a high of 59 degrees in the Twin Cities. Last day this year for ice boat sailing on Lake Waconia. This concluded the warmest meteorological winter (December through February) on record for the Twin Cities and area, and much of Minnesota.

LOOK FOR ...



First active eastern chipmunk seen (Carver County):

2024	Mar. 9
2023	Feb. 9
2022	Mar. 2
2021	Feb. 23
2020	Mar. 1
2019	Mar. 8
2018	Mar. 1
2017	Feb. 21
2016	Feb. 25
2015	Feb. 22



DENISE STROBEL | RED SQUIRREL | BLOOMINGTON, MN

