

Title: **Strategic Aquatic Habitat Conservation Opportunities for Minnesota Lakes**

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Abstract: Minnesota lakes are a prominent feature on our landscape and in many ways embody our state's rich outdoor heritage. And yet, land use change and other human actions have compromised the ecological integrity of many Minnesota lakes and threaten to degrade many more. Because water quality and physical habitat conditions directly impact the quality and diversity of fish populations, the Section of Fisheries is in the process of developing a strategic habitat conservation plan to ensure that we can continue to fulfill our mission to conserve and manage aquatic resources and associated fish populations for long-term ecological, economic, and recreational benefits to the citizens of Minnesota. We developed a framework to categorize lake condition and to assess risk of habitat degradation. This presentation will demonstrate the use of this framework with emphasis on watershed stress as it affects water quality habitat for managed fish lakes in the state. We identify broad, landscape-scale water quality habitat protection and restoration opportunities. These statewide habitat management opportunities are useful for focusing habitat programmatic delivery, creating synergies with conservation partner programs, and for guiding allocation decisions given limited resources of staff and project dollars.