

SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

In a year marked by tremendous challenges, the University made **significant progress** on sustainability and redoubled its efforts through a new **sustainability commitment** in the **Systemwide Strategic Plan, MPact 2025**.

2020-2021



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to Discover[®]

Crookston Duluth Morris Rochester Twin Cities

Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

Sustainability is about more than the environment. The well-being of people and communities is central to the work of sustainability, and data shows that people of color and the poor are more likely to be subject to environmental harms. The crises of the past year prompted students, faculty, and staff to center equity, inclusion, and anti-racism in their sustainability work.

SELSustain: Indigeneity, Community, and Sustainability



Each spring, the sustainability Student Engagement Leadership Forum (SELSustain) brings students together from across University of Minnesota campuses to talk about sustainability and their shared interests. This year's event, hosted virtually by the University of Minnesota Crookston, invited students and the general University community to learn about indigenous identity, community, and sustainability. [Learn more](#)

Morris Intercultural Sustainability Leadership (ISLe) program



UMN Morris launched the Morris Intercultural Sustainability Leadership (ISLe) program with funding from the Institute on the Environment during their first round of diversity, equity, and inclusion grant funding. The ISLe program creates a unique opportunity for a diverse group of student interns to engage directly in discussion with diverse sustainability leaders from across Minnesota, explore sustainability in their own communities, and share their experiences with others. [Learn more](#)

Centering Justice and Equity in Sustainability



UMN Duluth student Kaija Schlangen has been expanding the scope of what sustainability is by diving into the complex, intersectional issues of equity and justice. Through in-depth research and analysis, Kaija is helping others make the connections between societal inequities and planetary impacts. Kaija's work is truly shifting sustainability at UMD from an environmental/nature focus to a people focus, with the understanding that increasing equity and justice is the key to a sustainable future. [Learn more](#)

IonE Researchers Shed Light on Food Insecurity in Minneapolis



Researchers at the Institute on the Environment (IonE) shed light on food insecurity in Minneapolis neighborhoods after civil unrest led many stores to close. The team mapped changes in how far people had to travel to reach the closest grocery store and when the City of Minneapolis requested that the researchers also map locations of food shelves and markets, they found that food pop-ups declined by half and the intensity of food demand nearly doubled between June-September 2020. By quickly creating maps showing newly-formed food deserts, the IonE team helped city planners and others to distribute food and supplies. [Learn more](#)

Climate Change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified the need for significant, sustained, and urgent emissions reductions by 2030 to avert the worst effects of global warming. Since 2008 the University has been a signatory to the Climate Leadership Commitments, is actively working to reduce emissions from campus to zero, and is advancing climate protection through its research, teaching, and outreach.

Morris Makes Progress Toward Carbon Neutrality



The University of Minnesota Morris partnered with Ever-Green Energy on the Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality Program, leading to the development of a carbon neutrality plan for campus heating. Interns from UMN Morris and the Muenster University of Applied Sciences were involved, providing meaningful learning experiences for the students and invaluable insights to the planning process. The planning effort explored how the University of Minnesota Morris could deliver cost-competitive energy, improve energy resilience and sustainability through utilization of local resources, identify a path to eliminating fossil fuel, and contribute to the campus' goal of complete carbon neutrality. [Learn more](#)

Climate-Smart Trees



Average temperatures in northeast Minnesota are rising, and the summer growing season is becoming sporadic. UMN Duluth, U of M Extension's Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, and a network of farmers have joined forces to plant climate-smart trees, increasing the genetic diversity of species and growing seedlings adapted to warmer climates can help protect ecosystems from changing conditions. [Learn more](#)

University Employees Appointed to Governor's Climate Council



Governor Tim Walz appointed University of Minnesota Law Professor Alexandra Klass and Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI) Associate Director and Senior Scientist Lucinda Johnson to the Governor's Advisory Council on Climate Change. The Council will work to identify innovative policies and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resiliency. [Learn more](#)

Midwest Climate Summit



If the 12 states that comprise the Midwest were a country, they would be the fifth-largest greenhouse gas emitting nation on the planet. In 2020, the University joined 20 other partner institutions from higher education, government, the non-profit community, and the private sector to host the Midwest Climate Summit. The Summit was a five-part virtual event to expand climate knowledge, accelerate climate action, and catalyze new partnerships that deepen expertise and develop a Midwestern response to the climate crisis. The University of Minnesota continues to work with the partner institutions to build on the success of the Summit. [Learn more](#)

Water is one of Minnesota's most precious resources and is sacred to indigenous communities across the state. Unfortunately, many water resources, including those in Minnesota, are imperiled. Through operational improvements in campus facilities, scholarship, and engagement, we are advancing water stewardship across the state and beyond.

University of Minnesota Launches Water Network



The recently launched UMN Water Network aims to help researchers from across the University system share their expertise and collaborate on water-related research. The UMN Water Network provides a central place for graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, faculty, and staff to access communication tools, virtual gatherings, working groups, and recently published research.

[Learn more](#)

University of Minnesota Contributes to State Water Plan



This fall, Minnesota's Environmental Quality Board (EQB) released its 2020 State Water Plan, a comprehensive, long-term strategy for managing and preserving Minnesota's water resources by establishing a framework that aligns state and local agencies and legislative priorities, programs, and actions. Data collected by Institute on the Environment staff and affiliates on future changes in water quality and quantity, as well as Minnesotan values and attitudes about water resources, contributed to the plan. [Learn more](#)

Grant to Address Great Lakes Water Levels, Climate



The University of Minnesota Duluth has received a \$500,000 Research Coordination Network grant awarded by the National Science Foundation. The initiative, called the Climate and Governance Variability in the Great Lakes Project, will help address pressing questions about the nature of climate-driven variability on Great Lakes shorelines; the connection between natural variability and social change; and the relationship between one of the world's largest fresh water sources and the social-ecological system on its shores. [Learn more](#)

We Are Water Initiative



The University of Minnesota Morris led the West Central MN We Are Water Initiative, a partnership with collaborators from across the region, including the Stevens Soil and Water Conservation District and CURE (Clean Up the River Environment). The partnership brought the We Are Water traveling exhibit and Why Treaties Matter exhibit to the Morrison Gallery in fall 2020 for several months. A [video series](#) created on campus explains the themes of each part of the exhibit. [Learn more](#)

Life on Land

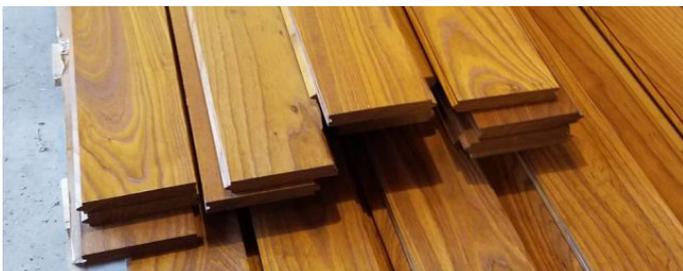
Sustainable use of and relationship with terrestrial ecosystems is critical to our future prosperity. The Earth's biodiversity is declining at an alarming rate, agriculture has significant land use and emissions impacts, and human encroachment on wild areas can be a factor in zoonotic diseases. The University is partnering with businesses and communities to develop and deploy solutions to these challenges.

Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions Produced by Minnesota's Agriculture



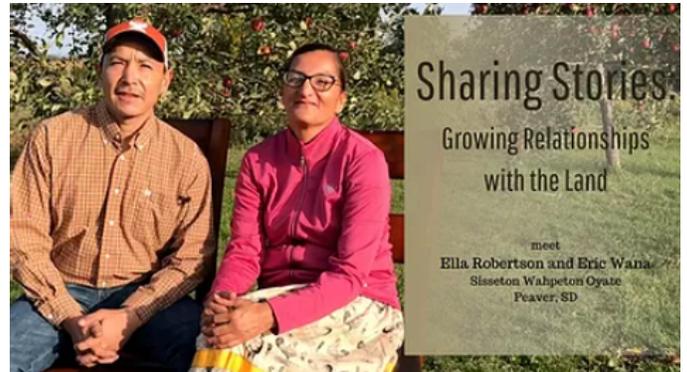
In fall 2020, the Institute on the Environment (IonE) set out to support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions produced by Minnesota's agriculture, forestry, and other land use sector (AFOLU) with a virtual, five-part Agricultural Climate Solutions Workshop. The unique format of the workshop promoted collaboration amongst a diverse group of stakeholders and IonE affiliates. Participants self-organized to develop collaborative projects that will help move the dial on GHG emissions. [Learn more](#)

Sustainable Reuse of Ash Trees



As the invasive emerald ash borer species threatens and kills trees, it can be a challenge for towns and cities to find sustainable ways to repurpose processed ash wood. The University of Minnesota Extension Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership worked with a local business owner to demonstrate the benefits of repurposing the wood. They built a parklet in downtown Rochester to benefit the entire community, putting the wood to good use and saving the resources needed for standard removal and treatment. [Learn more](#)

Sharing Stories: Growing Relationships with the Land



The University of Minnesota Morris worked with partners to develop a new webinar series, called Sharing Stories: Growing Relationships with the Land. Amplifying the voices of people in the region - especially women, Native Americans, and youth - the series features people who have unique relationships with the land, are working on regenerative agriculture, and are building lives and livelihoods grounded in the places they live. [Learn more](#)

MBold



Agriculture is a major driver of greenhouse gas emissions, but it also has potential to drive climate solutions. MBOLD is working to improve soil health on agricultural land and make Minnesota a leader in soil health by developing systems that enable farmers to adopt soil health principles profitably. University of Minnesota President Gabel serves as the CEO Champion for MBOLD's Soil Health and Water Stewardship initiative, leading the University through partnerships with Minnesota agriculture companies and communities. [Learn more](#)

STUDENT VOICE

As demonstrated in the examples above, many students are pursuing degrees, conducting research, and participating in projects related to sustainability. They are also deeply passionate about sustainability and are using their collective voice to champion swifter and bolder action on and off campus.

Mitigating Bird Strikes



In spring 2020, the Minnesota Student Association (MSA), undergraduate student government on the Twin Cities campus, passed a resolution calling for University buildings to be retrofitted to help mitigate bird fatalities. In addition to the retrofiting, MSA championed a Lights Out for Birds campaign launched in spring 2021, highlighting the importance of turning off unnecessary interior lights so that birds are able to see their flight paths at night. [Learn more](#)

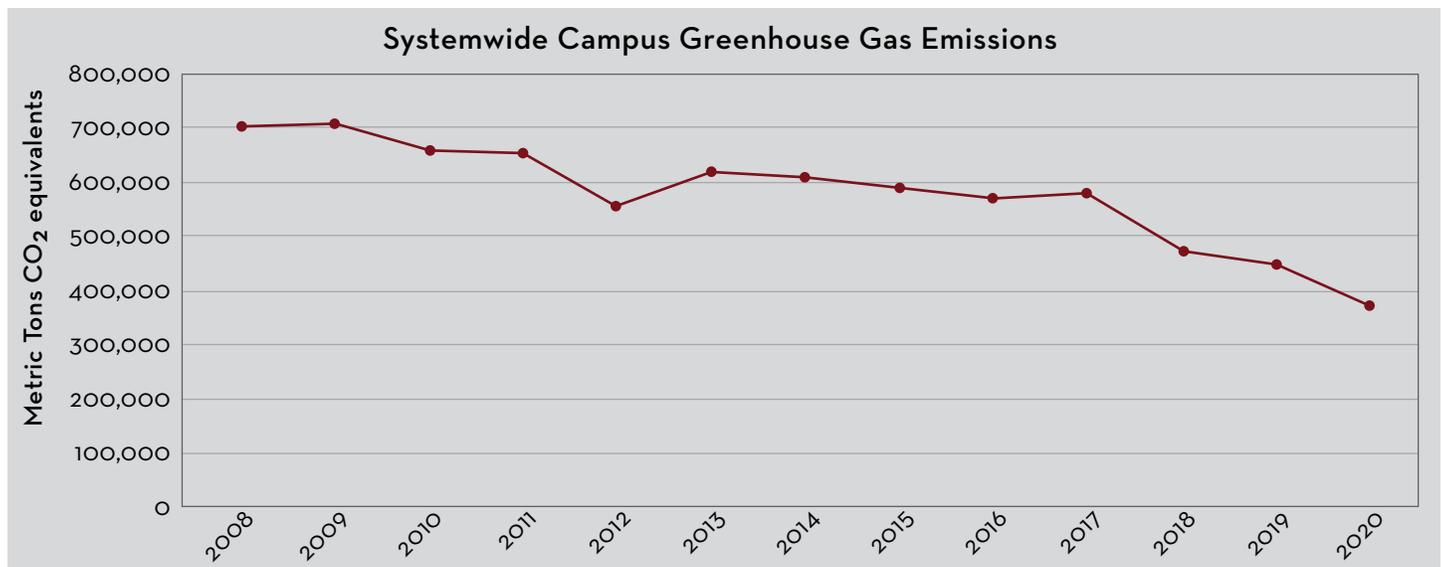
Climate Referendums



Over the past two years, students across the system have voted in favor of climate-related referendums calling on the University of Minnesota to take action on climate change. In a 2021 bill, an overwhelming majority of students voted for the University to disclose all investments and endowment holdings in fossil fuel companies. In 2020, students voted largely in favor of referendums urging the University to declare a climate emergency and divest from fossil fuels. [Learn more](#)

PROGRESS CARD

In 2015 the Board of Regents adopted a set of systemwide key performance indicators called the Progress Card. **Greenhouse gas emissions** on the University's five campuses was one of the measures on the card. The University set a goal of reducing total emissions from campus operations, commuting, and air travel 50% by the end of 2021. **Between 2008 and 2020 the campuses have collectively reduced emissions 45% and have a goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 or sooner.** The emissions reduction metric will be continued in the MPact 2025 measures.



LEARN MORE
ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY:

[Crookston](#) [Duluth](#) [Morris](#) [Rochester](#) [Twin Cities](#) [Institute on the Environment](#) [Extension/RSDP](#) [UMN Centers and Institutes](#)