

Minnesota's Scientific & Natural Areas
by Tim Johnson



A stunning winter snapshot of Butterwort Cliffs Scientific and Natural Area on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Learn more about this natural area here: www.mndnr.gov/snassna01045

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Did you know that the Minnesota DNR manages at least 160 Scientific and Natural Areas, almost all of which are open to the public? According to the DNR, “Scientific & Natural Areas (SNA’s) preserve natural features and rare resources of exceptional scientific and educational value.” But did you also know that there has been an attempt by the DNR Commissioner to relax protections for many of these areas without considering input from all stake holders? Motivations for this move include an attempt to influence additional funding recommendations to support SNA management from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (which has heavy representation from our hunting and trapping community).

Our Breckenridge Chapter has been supporting a group of citizens pushing back to make sure any changes in management are carefully considered lest they undermine the original purpose in preserving the special areas. 90% of the SNA land is already open to hunting but the other 10% has been closed due to potential conflicts between hunting practices and conservation of particular threatened species. For the time being, probably through 2015, our pressure has moved elected officials to [halt these proposed changes](#). But we expect there to be a resumption of attempts after that to open more SNA’s to activities that could threaten the protections the current rules provide.

Members of the Breckenridge Chapter of the Izaak Walton League (Dick Brown, Larry Kennebeck, & Tim Johnson) are working with other citizens filing with the State of Minnesota to incorporate a group known as Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas. The purposes of this 501(c)(3) charitable organization are:

- A. Advocate for the protection, management, and perpetuation of Minnesota’s Scientific and Natural Areas in an undisturbed natural state, including but not limited to the native plant and animal species and communities, fossils, and natural formations that illustrate geological processes;
- B. Promote the establishment of additional Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas, to be administered specifically for scientific and educational purposes;
- C. Promote the scientific study and educational use of plant and animal communities and other aspects of ecology, natural history, and conservation within Minnesota’s Scientific and Natural Areas; and
- D. Educate Minnesotans, including policy-makers, about all aspects of Minnesota’s Scientific and Natural Areas.

Hopefully, our efforts will ensure that a hard look will be taken at any future proposals for SNA management changes to ensure that the original reasons for their protection are adhered to. The DNR has a [good website](#) dedicated to helping citizens understand and find the SNA’s. They also have a nice [Facebook page](#) dedicated to the SNA’s. The DNR says: “You’re invited to visit Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs) throughout the year. Enjoy the undisturbed natural quality of these sites. Hiking, bird-watching, nature photography, snowshoeing or other activities that do not disturb natural conditions are allowed. Most SNA’s do not have trails or other facilities and none have restrooms, so come prepared. Some sites have interpretive kiosks to introduce you to key features.”