



2026 Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative Grant Award Recipients and Project Descriptions

For the 2026 fiscal grant season we had some significant changes. The program budget doubled to a total value of \$200,000. The program is funded by The Deer Range Improvement Program (DRIP) funds, which are generated from deer hunting license sales. Additionally, applicants could apply for up to \$25,000 for an individual grant with a required match of 25%.

This season we had 20 applications, and 14 new projects were approved. The total request for grant funds was \$418,328.38. In total, this year we will authorize the grant expenditure of \$199,711.65 of DRIP funds for the projects in Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Iron, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Mackinac, and Marquette Counties.

This is the 18th year of The Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHIP) grant program. With this year's crop of grants, the Wildlife Division (WLD) will have been awarded 176 grants totaling \$1,495,390.81 in DRIP funds. Participating partners have contributed \$1,095,459.39 in match to all these projects thereby expanding the scope and scale of their positive habitat and community effects.

The purpose of this initiative is to develop a collaborative approach to deer habitat improvement on private landownership across the Upper Peninsula. There are three primary goals for this initiative. All projects should address these fundamental goals to be considered for funding:

- Produce on-the-ground *deer* habitat (summer and/or winter range) improvements in the Upper Peninsula that address resource needs.
- Establish and promote partnerships between the DNR, sportsmen's organizations, and other partners.
- Showcase these cooperative projects through a coordinated public outreach effort, highlighting the relationship between the DNR and partners while educating the public on the benefits of habitat improvements made through the grant.

Initiative funding is from an annual Deer Range Improvement Program (DRIP) fund appropriation. Public Act 106 of 1971 created the DRIP fund, whereby \$1.50 from every deer hunting license sold statewide is allocated into a restricted fund to be exclusively used for the improvement and maintenance of habitat for deer, acquisition of land for deer management, and the payment in lieu of taxes on purchased lands.

The maximum allowable limit for deer habitat improvement grants is \$25,000.00 with the minimum at \$5,000.00. The required partner cost share for approved projects is 25% of the total project cost.

Funded projects include:

Iron-Baraga Conservation District:

Iron Baraga Conservation District (IBCD) has been approved for \$25,000.00 for the “Iron Baraga Conservation District 2026 Deer Habitat Project.”

This project enhances deer wintering habitat across Private Lands and School Forests and lands in Iron and Baraga Counties. This grant will provide seedlings and trees to landowners at a significantly reduced cost, allowing them to implement habitat improvement immediately.

This project aims to enhance deer wintering habitats in local school forests and public-use spaces. Brock VanOss, the Forest Park School District (FPSD) Forester, is dedicated to planting as much vegetation as possible with students within the boundaries of the John Force Forest and other FPSD forest properties. The KBIC Community College and Forest are also eager to plant this year. The Iron Baraga Conservation District (IBCD) will continue its efforts to reach out to all schools with forest properties in Iron and Baraga County, encouraging their participation as well. The IBCD has included the Tap Root Community Farm and Food Forest in their proposal, as they assisted with completing the 2024 and 2025 grants and are eager to continue collaborating.

As part of their “practices available to landowners” the IBCD will provide several habitat(s) share options to eligible landowners. Habitat shares that eligible / selected landowners can participate in will incorporate several tree planting strategies.

- **Option #1:** Oak Version – large scale mixed planting. This option includes a small-scale hard mast mixed habitat planting comprised of oaks and tree protectors along with a mixture of wildlife fruit and nut habitat seedlings. It includes 5 large oaks with fencing & T-posts, 25 conifer plugs, and 25 count mixture of wildlife shrubs.
- **Option #2:** Oak Version – bareroot oak and mixed planting. Landowners will plant: 20 oaks with NRCS grade protectors & bamboo 25 conifer plugs 25 count mixture of wildlife shrubs.
- **Option #3:** Hemlock Version- transplants and mixed plantings. Landowners will Plant: 20 hemlocks with NRCS grade protectors & bamboo, 25 conifer plugs, 25

count mixture of wildlife shrubs. This is a small-scale mixed habitat planting variation for moist soil types consisting of hemlock plugs and tree protectors along with a mixture of wildlife fruit and nut habitat seedlings.

- **Option #4:** Conifer Cover – conifer plugs & mixed wildlife planting landowners will plant: 250 conifer plugs and 25 count mixture of wildlife shrubs.
- **Option #5:** Small-Scale Deer Orchard - landowners will plant: 5 malus trees, 25 assorted conifer plugs, 25 assorted hardwood seedlings, and 25 count mixture of wildlife shrubs. Landowners can select a small-scale deer orchard comprised of standard size malus trees along with a mixture of wildlife fruit and nut habitat seedlings. Landowners may provide additional fencing and tree protectors if they wish.
- **Option #6:** Large-Scale Deer Orchard - landowners will plant: 10 malus trees, 25 assorted conifer plugs, 25 assorted hardwood seedlings, and 25 count mixture of wildlife shrubs.

Eligible landowners can purchase a fixed cost per habitat share and will be required to provide the physical labor to implement the practice. Site characteristics such as proximity to DWC polygon location, canopy density, forest composition, and suitability of soil types will be some of the determining factors in finding ideal candidates.

Additionally, this project aims to enhance deer wintering habitats in local school forest areas and public use spaces through special partner projects and earth day celebrations. Brock VanOss, the Forest Park School District Forester, is leading the project coordination on the John Force Forest and other Forest Park School District's properties. The Iron Baraga Conservation District students will continue their efforts to reach out to all schools with forest properties in Iron and Baraga County, encouraging their participation as well. Supplies will be divided between partnering schools based on the number of students participating and site composition. Planting spuds will be made available to the students, teachers, and staff who will implement the project.

- The KBIC Community College & Forest: The necessary planting materials will be provided to the students, teachers, and staff involved in the project. Provided shared planting supplies will include: 30 standard malus trees, 250 count mixture of wildlife shrubs, 25 large wildlife shrubs, 900 mixed plugs, 400 mixed hardwood seedlings, and 5 planting bars 5 shovels.
- The IBCD will partner with Tap Root Community Farm Food Forest to plant 20 hemlock transplants, 20 standard fruit trees with fencing and T-posts, 250 count mixture of wildlife shrubs, 75 large wildlife shrubs, 100 mixed hardwood, 100 mixed conifer plugs, 5 planting bars, and 5 shovels.

The IBCD staff, along with the Iron Baraga FAP Forester, will reach out to qualified landowner partners through various channels. The IBCD staff will provide all participating landowners with planting guides and instructions.

Straits Area Sportsmen's Club:

The Straits Area Sportsmen's Club (SASC) has been approved for **\$15,000.00** for a project to continue to partner with the US Forest Service St. Ignace Ranger District.

The SASC is planning a three-part project to improve the suitability of upland habitat for deer and associated wildlife species in Mackinac County by mechanical wildlife opening maintenance of 11 acres to reduce woody encroachment and enhance cool season grasses and forbs to serve as deer forage opportunities. The second part proposes planting soft mass fruiting shrubs (hawthorn) along the edge of the wildlife opening to provide improved foraging opportunities for deer, ruffed grouse, and associated wildlife species. SASC will provide cash match of \$2,500 to purchase soft mass native fruiting shrubs. The third part of the project is to enhance deer foraging opportunities in deer yard area south of Brevort Lake (Forest Service prescribed burn of 97 acres) as in-kind match. US Forest Service in-kind match is for a wildlife biologist and wildlife technician time for project consultation, planning, and contract layout. Additionally, the \$20,000 cost for the implementation of the prescribed fire (97 acres) brings will be part of the in-kind match. All the projects' sites are on the Saint Ignace Ranger District Hiawatha National Forest. These areas are accessible to the public for hunting. This project will benefit deer, turkeys, bears, grouse, and other wildlife species.

Marquette County Conservation District:

The Marquette County Conservation District (MCCD) has been approved for a **\$14,993.00** grant to improve / maintain previous DHIPI project sites. Since 2017, the MCCD has implemented multiple Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative grants in previous years. A majority of these sites are publicly accessible and well-used, and feature signage explaining the source of the funding. In the interest of maintaining these habitat improvement investments, MCCD intends to upkeep these sites so that the wildlife and public can keep seeing, using, and benefitting from this grant program. They will focus on two sites this year that were implemented 5 plus years ago with DHIPI funding. Both sites are owned and managed by Lyme Timber, a longtime collaborator of MCCD's DHIPI grants over the years.

The first site is from 2019, and it included invasive treatment, mechanical site preparation, and planting conservation cover. Due to heavy use by the public (the North Country Trail runs adjacent to it) and the prolific weeds that were present the first time around, it is time to re-prep and seed (using a Pheasants Forever seed mix) the site to

ensure that quality wildlife food is present for the deer and other wildlife. The second site is from 2021 and featured the same initial treatment. Both sites are due for maintenance, as encroaching weeds have degraded the quality of available forage. Between the two sites we plan to improve 5 acres of conservation cover. This will require site preparation beforehand. We also plan to plant 35 potted white oaks across the sites to provide hard mast for the deer as they mature and each of the trees will be protected to help ensure survival.

U.P. Whitetails Association Inc., “Deadhorse Project” with Cannon Forestry:

The DNR has approved **\$13,631.00** for the “Deadhorse” habitat improvement project in Delta County on lands owned by Robert Bosk. U.P. Whitetails Association Inc. (UPWTA), Al Ettenhofer has sponsored this project. The property is in Delta County and is 600 acres in size. The primary objective of this project is to improve the conditions for wildlife during the summer and spring break out periods. Currently, the area features minimal active agriculture and several abandoned fields. Providing high-quality browse, is critical for supporting the local wildlife, particularly deer that travel to and from their yarding locations. This property is managed according to a comprehensive forest management plan developed collaboratively by Upper Michigan Land Management and the landowner. Additionally, the land is enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), reinforcing its commitment to sustainable practices.

The initiative will be carried out across four distinct sites, covering a combined total of 8 acres. Located within the Whitefish River basin, these sites are part of one of the Upper Peninsula’s historic and significant deer yards. The project will involve disking, seeding, and fertilizing the designated sites. A specialized wildlife seed mixture will be used, consisting of oats, white ladino clover, red clover, alfalfa, and chicory. The clovers, known for their resilience, offer an excellent source of protein. Chicory will be inter-planted with the clovers due to its deep tap root system, which allows it to withstand hot and dry summer conditions. Oats will primarily serve as a nurse crop supporting the other planted seeds during their first growing season. Work is to be completed by Cannon Forestry. The UPWTA will offset 10% of total project cost.

U.P. Whitetails Association Inc., “Wheeling’s Pasture Project” with Cannon Forestry:

The DNR has approved **\$5,507.00** for your “Wheeling’s Pasture” habitat improvement project in Delta County, 40 acres owned by Harold Coplan. The U.P. Whitetails Association Inc. (UPWTA), Al Ettenhofer has sponsored this project. The property is in

Delta County. The proposed project will include one site totaling 3 acres. The primary objective is to provide optimal hunting opportunities for disabled hunters by improving the actual acreage of land designated for these activities. The landowner has generously allowed the Wheeling Sportsman, in partnership with the Bay De Noc Gobblers Association, to offer private hunting experiences. This collaborative initiative involves the Bay De Noc Gobblers and other contributors, who volunteer their time to create special opportunities for veterans and individuals with disabilities of all ages. By making the outdoors more accessible, this program plays a crucial role in preserving and continuing longstanding hunting traditions.

This area is a traditional migrating route used heavily by deer migrating to and from yards. Located within the Whitefish River basin, these sites are part of one of the Upper Peninsula's historic and significant deer yards. These outbreak fields are a critical supplement allowing deer higher nutritional browse when their resources have been depleted. Sites will be disced, seeded, fertilized, and planted with a mix of oats, white ladino clover, red clover, alfalfa, and chicory. Chicory is a good plant to inter-plant along with clovers as it has a long tap root system and holds strong during very hot dry conditions during summer months. Oats will primarily serve as a nurse crop supporting the other planted seeds during their first growing season. Adjacent ownership surrounding this property consists of industrial private, open to public lands, and Hiawatha National Forest. The UPWTA will offset 10% of total project cost.

U.P. Whitetails Association Inc., “Paul’s Paradise Project” with Cannon Forestry:

The DNR has approved **\$5,653.00** for your “Paul’s Paradise” habitat improvement project in Delta County, 120 acres owned by Paul Pineau. The U.P. Whitetails Association Inc. (UPWTA), Al Ettenhofer has sponsored a project on landowner Paul Pineau’s land, and the project is titled “Paul’s Paradise”. The property is in Delta County. The primary objective of this project is to improve the conditions for wildlife during the summer and spring break periods. Currently, the area features minimal active agriculture and several abandoned fields. Providing high-quality browse, is critical for supporting the local wildlife, particularly deer that travel to and from their yarding locations. This property is managed according to a comprehensive forest management plan developed collaboratively by Upper Michigan Land Management and the landowner. Additionally, the land is enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), reinforcing its commitment to sustainable practices. The initiative will be carried out on one distinct site, covering a total of 3 acres. Located within the Whitefish River basin, these sites are part of one of the Upper Peninsula’s historic and significant deer yards.

The project will involve disking, seeding, and fertilizing the designated sites. A specialized wildlife seed mixture will be used, consisting of oats, white ladino clover, red clover, alfalfa, and chicory. The clovers, known for their resilience, offer an excellent source of protein. Chicory will be inter-planted with the clovers due to its deep tap root system, which allows it to withstand hot and dry summer conditions. Oats will primarily serve as a nurse crop supporting the other planted seeds during their first growing season. The UPWTA will offset 10% of total project cost.

U.P. Whitetails Association Inc., “Legume Green Project” with Cannon Forestry:

The DNR has approved **\$8,958.00** for your “**Legume green**” habitat improvement project in Delta County, 160 acres owned by Shawn Cannon. U.P. Whitetails Association Inc. (UPWTA), Al Ettenhofer has sponsored a project on landowner Shawn Cannon’s, and the project is titled “Legume green”. The proposed project will include four sites totaling 5.25 acres. This area is a traditional migrating route used heavily by deer migrating to and from yards. Located within the Whitefish River basin, these sites are part of one of the Upper Peninsula’s historic and significant deer yards. These outbreak fields are a critical supplement allowing deer higher nutritional browse when their resources have been depleted. Sites will be disced, seeded, fertilized, and planted with a mix of oats, white ladino clover, red clover, alfalfa, and chicory. Chicory is a good plant to inter-plant along with clovers as it has a long tap root system and holds strong during very hot dry conditions during summer months. Oats will primarily serve as a nurse crop supporting the other planted seeds during their first growing season. Adjacent ownership surrounding this property consists of industrial private, open to public lands, and state of Michigan. The UPWTA will offset 10% of total project cost.

U.P. Whitetails Association Inc., “Camp Westerberg Project” with Cannon Forestry:

The DNR has approved **\$5,506.00** for your “Camp Westerberg” habitat improvement project in Delta County, 80 acres owned by Charles Westerberg. The U.P. Whitetails Association Inc. (UPWTA), Al Ettenhofer has sponsored a project on landowner Charles Westerberg’s land, and the project is titled “Camp Westerberg”. The property is in Delta County. The proposed project will encompass four distinct sites, covering a total of 3.0 acres. This property is managed according to a comprehensive forest management plan developed collaboratively by Cannon Forestry and the landowner. Additionally, the land is enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), reinforcing its commitment to sustainable practices. The property is situated within the “Dead Horse North Perkis” wintering complex. Over the

past decade, the area has seen an increase in migrating deer moving eastward, a shift attributed to recent logging activities. These larger conifer and hardwood harvests have likely influenced deer movement as they seek improved cover and browse. As a result, the region now supports a higher deer population, which could greatly benefit from additional habitat enhancements, particularly through a large spring break-up planting.

The project will involve disking, seeding, and fertilizing the designated sites. A specialized wildlife seed mixture will be used, consisting of oats, white ladino clover, red clover, alfalfa, and chicory. The clovers, known for their resilience, offer an excellent source of protein. Chicory will be inter-planted with the clovers due to its deep tap root system, which allows it to withstand hot and dry summer conditions. Oats will primarily serve as a nurse crop supporting the other planted seeds during their first growing season. The UPWTA will offset 10% of total project cost.

Gogebic Conservation District, “Enhanced early spring forage near Gogebic County Deer Wintering Complexes (DWC) through continued partnership”:

The DNR has approved **\$23,421.10** for the “Enhanced early spring forage near Gogebic County Deer Wintering Complexes (DWC) through continued partnership” in Gogebic County. All sites are owned by Gogebic County and open to the public.

Previously, through a long-established partnership between the Gogebic Conservation District (GCD), the Gogebic County Forestry and Parks Commission, and the Michigan DNR, previously closed logging roads and landings had been tilled and planted with perennial spring forage consisting of a hardy clover mix. Periodic mowing increases the productivity of the clover so that it may continue to provide a source of nutrition in early spring. Several miles of decommissioned logging roads will be tilled and planted with a perennial spring forage mix within the Devils Creek – Chaney Lake DWC. Previously planted areas on Gogebic County Forest land around the Little Girls Point DWC that require mowing to maintain productivity will be treated. This includes 11.75 miles of previously tilled/seeded decommissioned logging roads and 4 acres of wildlife openings created through past DHIPI grant funding. The GCD estimates 25.4 acres to be mowed for this portion of the project. Previously planted areas in the Gogebic County Forest land around the Devils Creek – Chaney Lake DWC require mowing. This includes 23.97 miles of tilled/seeded decommissioned logging roads and 5 acres of wildlife openings created through past DHIPI grant funding. The GCD estimates approximately 48.63 acres to be mowed for this portion of the project. Within the Devils Creek – Chaney Lake DWC, GCD also propose to close off, cultivate, and seed (with a high-quality perennial seed mixture) 0.4 miles of decommissioned timber sale access road, as well

as a 2-acre wildlife opening. Harvested in 2025-2026, the 198-acre timber sale will provide browse in the form of hardwood regeneration and pockets of hemlock for thermal cover. Additionally, the cultivation and seeding of another 2-acre opening created in the DWC by a 15-acre site salvage in the fall of 2025 is proposed. Additionally, Gogebic County Forest land that was impacted by severe straight-line winds in the summer of 2025 and was salvage harvested in the fall. These habitat areas, totaling 38 acres, are now devoid of trees, which previously acted as important winter yarding habitat for white-tailed deer. The GCD will plant a mix of coniferous tree species, including eastern hemlock, northern white-cedar, and white pine, as well as oak species, at 170 trees per acre to restore these gaps in the canopy within the Devils Creek – Chaney Lake DWC. The GCD will solicit bids for the mowing, and the county forester will provide oversight of projects and be responsible for all the planning and communications in the field, with professional staff time counted as match. Gogebic County Forestry and Parks will provide staff time and cover costs associated with seed bed preparation, site closure, and seeding.

Alger Conservation District, “Alger County deer habitat initiative”:

The DNR has approved **\$24,987.69** for your “Alger County deer habitat initiative”. The DNR has also approved your two-year timeline for implementing this project. The Alger County Conservation District (ACD) for a proposal titled "Alger County Deer Habitat Initiative", in Alger County, Rock River Township. The ACD proposes to work on several properties with multiple partners including Grand Marias Sportsman's Club, Burt Township Schools, NRCS, and other community partners.

The first property is owned by Delbert Storms. This landowner participated in a 2023 DHIP grant previously planting 350 trees of various types, enhancing a wildlife corridor and two food plots using a DNR approved mix. The property has a certified forest management plan and is enrolled in the QFP program. Now they intend to establish connectivity of habitat features through additional tree plantings and additional old field food plot refurbishments. Hard and soft mast species, conifers, and wildlife shrubs are included. Species such as crab apple, American plum, hazelnut, red oak, white oak, black walnut, spruce, dogwood, and service berry. Necessary protection will be provided and installed. The ACD staff with equipment from the landowners will plant the nursery stock, install tree protection as needed, and spread the seed mix. An updated DHIP participant sign will be installed at the resident entrance.

The second site is owned by Jack Harmon. They have an NRCS conservation plan. here they plan to improve multiple wildlife corridors by planting wildlife shrubs, conifers, deciduous trees, and fruit trees. One open field in the north and one o the south portion of the property will be planted with soft and hard mast trees such as apple, American

plum, hazelnut, and other species. The parcel is adjacent to Hiawatha National Forest Lands. An updated DHIPI participant sign will be installed at the resident entrance.

The third site is owned by Burt Township School District and is a school forest. In 2025 they received a DHIPI grant to treat 520 acres with planting of 340 various trees species. This year they intend to treat remaining acreage further central and west on the property. Tree plantings will involve 300 conifers and deciduous trees, 200 shrubs, and 30 fruit trees. Additionally, a 40-acre tract will have a small wildlife trail (4' by 200 yards) worked up and planted to a rye mixture. Local cooperators and vendors have been lined up with necessary equipment. Necessary tree protection will be installed at all sites as needed following ACD planting guidance. They are seeking a two-year window to complete the projects, for the Burt Twp. school property phase of the overall project. They plan to actively incorporate the High Schools' students into the implementation of a project similar to last year. Overlapping the student school year schedule to provide opportunity to be actively involved on-the-ground is the reason for the two-year request. The ACD staff will work with landowners and contactors during site preparation, tree planting, wildlife openings, seedings and sign installation.

U.P. Whitetails of Dickinson County, “Chestnut planning on private land in Dickinson County”:

The DNR has approved **\$6,236.250** for your “Chestnut planning on private land in Dickinson County” in Dickinson County (Sites to be determined). The intent of this project with UP Whitetails (UPW) of Dickinson County is to provide a hard mast food resource throughout the county for white-tailed deer and other species. The project will use funds to plant Dunstan chestnut trees on private property in Dickinson County and update protection of previously planted trees and shrubs from prior grant projects. The UPW currently has 4-years of trees and shrubs planted through this grant and many of the individual stems are out growing their tree tubes. UPW will use the requested grant money to plant 100 more chestnuts to continue the growth of the program and supplement the hard mast resources in Dickinson County.

Ten landowners with 20+ acres in Dickinson County would receive 10 chestnuts each. This will be a continuation of the tree planting program UPW has run for 4- years. Trees to be planted will be saplings of 3 feet in height which have a higher survival probability compared to smaller size saplings. Dunstan chestnut trees will be sourced from a Florida nursery because no local Michigan nursery currently has chestnut trees of this variety in stock. Additionally, UPW is using Chestnut Hill Nursery because they strive to maintain the best genetics for chestnuts. American chestnut genetics are derived from the entire native chestnut range and are also mixed with Chinese chestnut to provide blight resistance. A total of 10 landowners will be drawn for tree planting to maintain a

reasonable workload as well as the ability to monitor success rate for each planting for years to come. This year UPW will revisit previous planting sites (2022-2025) to monitor survival and success. This will include repairing or improving deer fencing and protection of trees and shrubs as needed.

Sustainable Resources Institute, “Forest Park and North Dickinson School Forest winter cover enhancement projects”:

The DNR has approved **\$24,960.00** for the Sustainable Resources Institute (SRI), “Forest Park and North Dickinson School Forest winter cover enhancement projects”. Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. is planning to implement two related deer habitat enhancement projects within Upper Peninsula school forests. Both projects will establish long-lived conifer species within recently thinned northern hardwood stands to improve winter thermal cover and long-term forest diversity for deer and other wildlife. Plantings will occur within the Forest Park School Forest in Iron County and the North Dickinson School Forest in Dickinson County. Projects will be implemented under a coordinated effort led by Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. and involving the following partners: Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. for project leadership, coordination, implementation, grant administration, monitoring, outreach, and reporting. VanOss Forestry Services for forestry guidance, planting site identification, preparation of planting maps, and educational support during planting events. Participating in School Districts for student and staff volunteer participation through biology and environmental science classes.

Project 1: Forest Park School Forest Winter Conifer Enhancement Project in Iron County. Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. (SRI) proposes to enhance winter deer habitat within the Forest Park School Forest through underplanting of long-lived conifer species, including white pine and northern white cedar seedlings. This property is currently managed under an active forest management plan. Project coordination and implementation will be led by Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. (SRI) in partnership with consulting and school forester Brock VanOss of VanOss Forestry Services. VanOss Forestry assisted with identifying suitable planting locations and preparing planting maps and will provide forestry expertise and educational support during the planting events. The proposed planting sites occur within northern hardwood stands that were recently thinned through silvicultural treatments. These harvests created areas of reduced stocking and small canopy openings where conifer establishment is appropriate. Due to limited natural regeneration of sugar maple within these stands, underplanting white pine and cedar will improve species diversity and provide long-term conifer cover within the understory. Planting locations were identified by Registered Forester Brock VanOss based on suitable microsites created by recent harvest

operations, and planting maps were prepared by VanOss Forestry Services. VanOss Forestry staff will assist during the planting day by providing forestry guidance and helping lead educational discussions with participating students about forest management, wildlife habitat, and tree planting techniques. Biology and environmental science students from Forest Park Schools will assist with tree planting activities as part of hands-on outdoor education.

The project will focus on expanding and reinforcing thermal cover within suitable forest stands by underplanting conifer species that are critical to overwintering deer survival. Hemlock and cedar are particularly important components of deer winter range due to their dense canopy structure, snow interception capability, and contribution to litterfall browsing. White pine provides additional structural diversity and long-term canopy development. Estimated planting quantity: 10,000 seedlings (5,000 white pine and 5,000 northern white cedar). Estimated treatment acreage: approximately 170-180 acres, depending on final layout and funding awarded. Specific planting locations are illustrated in the attached maps prepared by VanOss Forestry Services. White pine plantings are anticipated in spring 2026, with cedar planted in fall 2026 depending on nursery availability and site conditions. Alternatively, both species may be planted in fall 2026 if seedling delivery schedules require.

Project 2: North Dickinson School Forest Thermal Cover Expansion Project in Dickinson County. Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. (SRI) proposes to enhance winter deer habitat within the North Dickinson County School Forest through underplanting of long-lived conifer species including white pine and northern white cedar seedlings. This property is currently managed under an active forest management plan. Project coordination and implementation will be led by Sustainable Resources Institute, Inc. (SRI) in partnership with consulting and school Forester Brock VanOss of VanOss Forestry Services. VanOss Forestry assisted with identifying suitable planting locations and preparing planting maps and will provide forestry expertise and educational support during the planting events. The proposed planting sites occur within northern hardwood stands that were recently thinned through silvicultural treatments. These harvests created areas of reduced stocking and small canopy openings where conifer establishment is appropriate. Due to limited natural regeneration of sugar maple within these stands, underplanting white pine and cedar will improve species diversity and provide long-term conifer cover within the understory. Planting locations were identified by Registered Forester Brock VanOss based on suitable microsites created by recent harvest operations, and planting maps were prepared by VanOss Forestry Services. VanOss Forestry staff will assist during the planting day by providing forestry guidance and helping lead educational discussions with participating students about forest management, wildlife habitat, and tree planting techniques. Biology and

environmental science students from North Dickinson County School will assist with tree planting activities, part of hands-on outdoor education.

The project will expand existing or developing thermal cover by establishing conifer seedlings within suitable microsites. Long-lived species such as hemlock and cedar are essential components of winter deer habitat, providing canopy density, snow interception, and shelter during periods of severe winter conditions. Planting locations were strategically selected near the Iron-Floodwood Deer Wintering Complex. Estimated planting quantity: 10,000 seedlings (5,000 white pine and 5,000 northern white cedar). Estimated treatment acreage: approximately 40 - 45 acres, depending on final layout and funding awarded. Specific planting locations are illustrated in the attached maps prepared by VanOss Forestry Services. White pine plantings are anticipated in spring 2026, with cedar planted in fall 2026 depending on nursery availability and site conditions. Alternatively, both species may be planted in fall 2026 if seedling delivery schedules require.

Chippewa Luce Mackinac Conservation District, “multiple landowners deer habitat improvement project”:

The DNR has approved **\$18,659.30** for the Chippewa Luce Mackinac Conservation District, “multiple landowners deer habitat improvement project”. Chippewa Luce Mackinac Conservation District (CLMCD) is planning to implement a Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative grant to improve deer habitat within and adjacent to two deer wintering complexes in the eastern UP, The Gogomain DWC and the Les Cheneaux DWC. Four private landowners with land totaling 464 acres either within the DWC’s or within 5 miles of them are partners. Three of the properties have legacy land use impacts from agriculture or Christmas tree farming and will benefit from reforestation and/or native grass and forb establishment. The total estimated acreage to be improved / treated is 15, including 6-acres of planted native grasses and forbs, and 9 acres of tree and shrub plantings. Site preparation on one of the sites will include removal of woody invasives species (scotch pine and non-native honeysuckle).

Materials to be used on the various project sites are: 50 potted large red oaks, 50 potted large white oaks, 100 oak plugs, 50 cedar plugs, 50 eastern white pine plugs, 70 bare root hazelnuts, 40 bareroot serviceberry, 40 bareroot red-osier dogwood, 6 acres of MI CRP recommended seed mix, 350 tree tubes and stakes, 450 mulch mats, and 4 partner signs. The CLMCD staff and district forester will coordinate implementation with landowners and provide planting guidance.

Starflower Ecological Alliance, “Tory’s woods deer habitat improvement project”:

The DNR has approved **\$7,200.00** for the Starflower Ecological Alliance, “Tory’s Woods Deer Habitat Improvement Project”. Starflower Ecological Alliance (SEA) proposes to implement a planting-based deer habitat improvement project on approximately 106 acres at Tory’s Woods Nature Preserve (Alger County). The project will strengthen winter habitat function by reinforcing existing thermal cover within forested wetland conifer habitat and increasing accessible winter forage and edge structure in adjacent aspen and hardwood patches that directly interface with the conifer wetland block. The proposed work is planting-only and will be implemented using low-impact methods, with plantings placed in existing micro-gaps, disturbance pockets, and edge bands, and with plant protection measures used as needed to support establishment.

The preserve contains four primary habitat patches that will be treated at a scale proportional to their occurrence within the project area: (1) a spruce–fir dominated forested wetland core with intermittent 0.1–0.5 acre natural disturbance pockets and abundant coarse woody debris (primary thermal refuge), (2) mature aspen with chokecherry understory and localized vernal pools (forage edge enhancement), (3) a spruce–aspen transition/ecotone with frequent disturbance along a subtle ridge edge (connector habitat), and (4) juvenile maple with intermittent spruce and a wet soil profile (edge structure and forage enhancement). Planting will prioritize clustered conifer infill on elevated microsites (for example hummocks, root mounds, and coarse woody debris) in and adjacent to disturbance pockets within the conifer wetland, and clustered browse and soft-mast shrub plantings in light pockets and edge bands along the conifer interface within the aspen and hardwood patches. Vernal pool basins and persistently saturated hollows will be avoided, and plantings will be confined to stable microsites to reduce mortality risk and maintain hydrological function.

Material needs for this planting-only habitat improvement project include native conifer (750) and shrub (550) seedlings, browse protection materials, basic planting and marking supplies, and simple project signage. The SEA will prioritize sourcing plant materials through the Marquette County Conservation District Annual Plant Sale and will supplement any unavailable species/quantities through Evergreen Nursery (Chatham, Michigan) to ensure local, regionally appropriate stock and timely delivery.