

Final
Cooperative Management Plan
Environmental Impact Statement

Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
Minnesota - Wisconsin



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This *Final Cooperative Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* presents and analyzes six alternatives, including the preferred alternative, for a cooperative management plan for the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The purpose of the plan is to provide a general direction for managing the area for the next 15 to 20 years. The Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources are co-lead agencies with the National Park Service in the preparation of this plan.

Six alternatives for land and water use management were considered. The **preferred alternative** would maintain long stretches of the lower riverway's natural and rural landscape, while allowing limited, planned development in communities that would be consistent with the historic character of the communities; it would protect and enhance the diverse recreational uses found in the riverway. **Alternative A** would also maintain long stretches of the natural and rural landscape; however, a slightly greater proportion of the lower riverway would encompass town landscapes; recreational use would intensify. **Alternative B** would stress maintaining the visual landscape, while maintaining the diversity of water recreational experience. The overall level of recreational use would be allowed to increase slightly, although segments of the river would be designated for specific uses. **Alternative C** would essentially be the same as alternative B, except there would be a freeze on recreational use levels. **Alternative D** would emphasize resource protection, development visible from the river would be reduced even in towns, and recreational use would be reduced. The natural qualities of the riverway would be promoted and restored, with an emphasis on promoting quieter, slower, and less intrusive experiences. **Alternative E**, the no-action alternative, would maintain existing land use and recreational use patterns, following the 1976 *Master Plan* and the Lower St. Croix Management Commission's policy resolutions. Policy resolutions would be used to address new issues that arose.

In general, all alternatives would maintain long stretches of the lower riverway's natural and cultural landscape, and riverway users would continue to find opportunities for a variety of recreational experiences. There would be an overall benefit to natural and cultural resources under the preferred alternative. Riverway user conflicts would be reduced, although there would be more restrictions. Alternative A would provide greater opportunities for more people, but the area would be more crowded and noisier. Impacts on natural and cultural resources would increase. The impacts of alternatives B and C would essentially be the same except that C would limit numbers of people. Alternative D would have the least effect on resources because of its emphasis on resource protection and reduction in recreational use. Under alternative E existing policies and management direction would continue.

In addition to the alternatives, five options were considered for the management structure of the riverway. These options would provide a direction for determining agencies' roles and responsibilities for policy development and land and water use management. The primary difference would be that under the **preferred option** and **option 1** minor adjustments would be made in policy development and land and water use management. Under **options 2 and 3** new management boards for land use management and a water patrol would be established, and the Lower St. Croix Management Commission would be expanded. **Option 4** would continue the existing management structure for policy direction and land and water use management. The impacts vary with regard to administrative responsibilities and cost.

The *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* was available for public review from September 17, 1999 to November 30, 1999; comments and responses on the draft document are reprinted in this final document. The *Final Environmental Impact Statement* has been revised to reflect substantive comments and concerns received during the comment period, and the text has been refined and clarified where necessary. This final document will be on public review for 30 days; if no major comments are received during this period, a record of decision, indicating which alternative has been selected as the approved plan, will be signed. Comments should be addressed to the Superintendent, Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, P.O. Box 728, St. Croix Falls, WI 52024-0708, or call (715) 483-3284, or email SACN_Superintendent@nps.gov.

SUMMARY

The Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, which extends 52 miles from St. Croix Falls/Taylor Falls to the confluence with the Mississippi River at Prescott/Point Douglas, is jointly managed by the National Park Service (NPS), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). Many changes have occurred in the St. Croix Valley since the original riverway *Master Plan* was developed by the three managing agencies in 1976. Recognizing that the *Master Plan* was dated, the managing agencies agreed to jointly develop a cooperative management plan for the lower riverway.

The joint plan has been adopted by the federal and state river managing agencies after an adequate analysis of the benefits, environmental impacts, and costs of alternative courses of action and a thorough consideration of public input.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This Lower St. Croix River *Cooperative Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* will provide a general direction for managing the area for the next 15 to 20 years, while meeting the following purposes of the lower riverway:

- Preserve and protect (and restore and enhance where appropriate) the riverway's ecological integrity, its unimpounded condition, its natural and scenic resources, and its significant historic resources
- Accommodate a diverse range of recreational opportunities that do not detract from the exceptional natural, historic, scenic, and aesthetic resources
- Provide an environment that allows the opportunity for peace and solitude

- Provide an opportunity for the education and study of the geologic, historic, ecological, and aesthetic values to further enhance stewardship of the river.

The Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is *significant* for the following reasons:

- The riverway is an exceptional combination of high-quality natural and cultural resources, and scenic, aesthetic, and recreational values.
- These resources and values exist in a distinctive river valley setting with a strong regional identity and character.
- These resources and values exist within the expanding Twin Cities metropolitan area.

These purpose and significance statements cannot be supported by continuing to implement the 1976 *Master Plan*; inadequacies of the current management approach require a new direction.

OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES

To be eligible for inclusion in the national wild and scenic rivers system a river or its immediate environment must possess one or more of the following outstandingly remarkable values: scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or others that are similar in nature.

The Lower St Croix was designated for its outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, and geologic values.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives in this plan describe different concepts or visions for the future. A number of common management directions and associated strategies would be implemented under all alternatives. A preferred alternative and four other alternatives for managing land and water in the lower riverway are presented along with a no-action alternative, which describes how the lower riverway is currently managed and would be managed in the future if no changes occurred. A public workshop was held using a caucus/negotiation process to develop the preferred alternative. Most elements of the plan were agreed upon at the caucus, but a few were forwarded to the Lower St. Croix Management Commission for decision.

A set of options, including a preferred option, is also presented that identifies different organizational structures for future management of the lower riverway. Any option could be combined with any land and water use management alternative.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

Some elements of future riverway management will occur no matter what alternative strategy for management is selected. Topics include government coordination and cooperation, land use management, American Indian treaty rights, riverway stewardship, natural resources management, management of hunting, fishing, and trapping, recreational use management, and interpretation.

LAND AND WATER USE ALTERNATIVES

This *Cooperative Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* presents and evaluates six alternatives.

The **preferred alternative** would emphasize protecting and enhancing the riverway's diverse character. It would maintain long stretches of the lower riverway's natural and rural landscape, while allowing limited, planned, development in communities that would be consistent with the historic character of the communities. Riverway users would continue to find opportunities to engage in a wide range of recreational experiences. The emphasis would be on maintaining and enhancing the diverse landscape character and the diverse water-based recreational opportunities.

Alternative A would provide for more development and more recreational activity than the preferred alternative. Managing agencies would seek to maintain long stretches of the lower riverway's natural and rural landscape, while allowing limited, planned development within the boundary that was consistent with the historic character of the riverway's communities. However, under alternative A, a slightly greater proportion of the lower riverway would encompass town landscapes, allowing greater opportunities for development within or adjacent to riverway towns. Additional residential development would also occur in rural areas. Riverway users would continue to find an array of recreational opportunities, including increased opportunities for more social activity on parts of the river, but unlike the preferred alternative, no efforts would be made to regulate user activities if they were not causing significant damage to the resource or posing safety hazards to others.

Alternative B would stress maintaining the current landscape character within the riverway boundary and maintaining the diversity of water recreational experiences as much as possible. However, the overall level of recreational use would be allowed to increase but some use would be reallocated and separated. New development would be more limited than alternative A and slightly more limited than the preferred alternative.

Alternative C would achieve the same conditions as alternative B — views of the lands within the boundary and the diversity of river recreational experiences would be maintained. The major difference from other alternatives would be that the strategy used to maintain the diversity of recreational experience would be to freeze the growth of recreational use.

Alternative D would promote and restore the natural qualities of the lower riverway " the predominance of natural features over modern developments would increase. Natural landscapes would be restored where feasible, and managing agencies would strive to make the landscape appear more natural than it is now. Emphasis would be placed on promoting quieter, slower, and less intrusive experiences that would not disturb others. Overall recreational use would be reduced.

Alternative E, the no-action alternative, provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. The managing agencies would continue to manage the lower riverway as they have in the past. The agencies would continue to follow the 1976 *Master Plan* (with some changes based on current management practices) and the Lower St. Croix Management Commission's policy resolution. Management would focus on maintaining existing land use and recreational use patterns and would react to recreational use as they have in the past. Rural residential development would be allowed to a greater degree than all of the alternatives except alternative A. Policy resolution would be used to address new issues that arose.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The potential consequences of the six alternatives on scenic resources, natural resources, cultural resources, recreational use, and the socioeconomic environment were evaluated. In general, the **preferred alternative** would allow limited private

development in rural areas and enhanced management of recreational use. Protection of scenic resources would be improved compared to the no-action alternative. Limited localized impacts on natural resources would occur in connection with residential development (e.g., soil and vegetation disturbance and disruption of wildlife), but these impacts would be less than under the no-action alternative. Protection of cultural resources would be improved. Recreational diversity would be enhanced and the resource impacts of recreational use would be reduced compared to the no action alternative. Conflicts between recreational users and landowners would be reduced. There would be negligible impacts on the regional economy.

Alternative A would allow more development in rural areas and increased recreational use. Residential construction would negatively impact scenic resources more than the other alternatives. Limited localized impacts on natural resources would occur in connection with residential development (e.g., soil and vegetation disturbance and disruption of wildlife); these impacts would be more than any other alternative. Protection of cultural resources would be improved compared to the no-action alternative, but not as much as the preferred alternative. Recreational diversity would not be enhanced and the resource impacts of recreational use would be greater than any other alternative. Conflicts between recreational users and landowners would increase. There would be negligible impacts on the economy.

Alternatives B and C would allow slightly less development in rural areas than the preferred alternative. Protection of scenic resources would be improved compared to the no-action alternative and slightly improved compared to the preferred alternative. Limited localized impacts on natural resources would occur in connection with residential development (e.g., soil and vegetation disturbance and disruption of wildlife); these impacts would be similar to but slightly less than the preferred alternative. Protection of cultural resources

would be improved compared to the no-action alternative and would be very similar to the preferred alternative. Recreational diversity would be enhanced and the resource impacts of recreational use would be reduced compared to the no-action alternative. Under alternative B there would be limited growth in recreational use, with impacts similar to the preferred alternative. Under alternative C there would be no growth in recreational use, so enhancement of recreational diversity, and the resource impacts of recreational use would be less than the preferred alternative. Conflicts between recreational users and landowners would be reduced, and more so under alternative C. Like alternative A, there would be negligible impacts on the regional economy.

Alternative D would allow less development in rural areas than the other alternatives. Protection of scenic resources would be improved compared to the other alternatives. Limited localized impacts on natural resources would occur in connection with residential development (soil and vegetation disturbance and disruption of wildlife); these impacts would be slightly less than the preferred alternative. Protection of cultural resources would be improved compared to the no-action alternative and would be similar to the preferred alternative. Recreational diversity would be significantly reduced; the resource impacts of recreational use would be reduced compared to all other alternatives. There would be negligible impacts on the regional economy. Some people would feel negative impacts from displaced recreational use, and some landowners would experience negative impacts because of development restrictions.

The no-action alternative, alternative E, would continue to allow development in rural areas in the same way as in the past 24 years. Protection of scenic resources would continue to slowly decline. Limited localized impacts on natural resources would occur in connection with residential development (e.g., soil and vegetation disturbance and disturbance of

wildlife); these impacts would be greater than the preferred alternative but less than alternative A. Protection of cultural resources would not improve. Recreational diversity would not be enhanced and resource impacts of recreational use would continue to increase. Conflicts between recreational users and landowners would continue to slowly increase. Like the action alternatives, there would be negligible impacts on the regional economy.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OPTIONS

Five options were developed for the lower riverway management structure. Each one would provide a direction for determining agencies' roles and responsibilities for policy development and land and water use management. In all cases, the state would review and comment on local zoning actions; the two state departments of natural resources and the National Park Service would participate in and provide staff support for the Lower St. Croix Management Commission; the three agencies would provide staff for on-water law enforcement, rescue, and related activities; the Park Service would provide staff for management of lands it owns north of Stillwater.

The **preferred option** would retain the management commission and include an additional nonvoting member from the newly created partnership team that would serve an advisory role. The Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission would continue in its administrative support and nonvoting advisory roles. Managing agencies would have no veto authority over a local government's decision on a conditional use permit, or subdivision; if there was disagreement, appeals could be made to the courts. Existing water use enforcement roles would continue. **Option 1** would also retain the management commission but would include a local government representative. The planning task force would be restructured and made permanent. It would

SUMMARY

assist in rules interpretation, mediation, and coordination for land management and/or water use management. **Options 2 and 3** would further expand the management commission and create a water patrol. **Option 2** would create a joint powers board for land use management, whereas **option 3** would create a riverway board to manage land use. **Option 4** would continue the existing management structure for policy direction and land and water use.

IMPACTS OF MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OPTIONS

The preferred option would create the least change from the current management approach. Option 1 would involve a minor change. Options 2 and 3 would involve the most change, with each establishing a new management board. There would be no change from the current management approach under option 4.

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