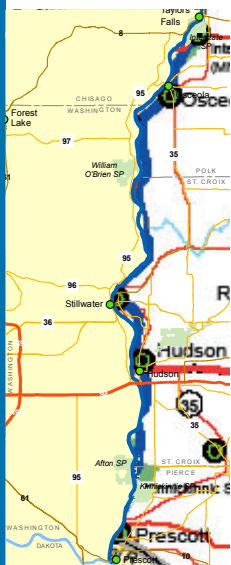


Lower St. Croix River: A National Wild and Scenic Treasure

Wild
and
Scenic
Lower
St. Croix
River

Why was the St. Croix designated a wild and scenic river?



Lower St. Croix River (in blue).

Interest in protecting rivers for their wild and scenic qualities began in the 1950s when construction started on the controversial Glen Canyon dam on the Colorado River. Completed in 1963, the dam created Lake Powell and flooded a spectacularly scenic portion of the river upstream of the Grand Canyon. About that time, Northern States Power (NSP) proposed construction of two power plants on the St. Croix River. A citizen-based group, "Save the St. Croix," sought but failed to block the first power plant, which started operating in 1968. In the end, NSP built just one plant and donated 25,000 acres of upper St. Croix riverfront to Minnesota and Wisconsin.

With national interest stirred in protecting scenic rivers, Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964 and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968. The latter act provided immediate protection for eight rivers deemed nationally significant, including the upper St. Croix River (above Taylors Falls). The act also provided a process to add additional rivers and identified 27 rivers to be studied. In 1972, the lower St. Croix River became the tenth river segment in the federal wild and scenic rivers system. The 52-mile segment from Taylors Falls to the confluence with the Mississippi River was designated a recreational riverway. The National Park Service manages the river above Taylors Falls, while Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the National Park Service cooperatively manage the lower segment. The St. Croix is Minnesota's only river in the federal wild and scenic rivers system.

Today, only 165 rivers in the United States are protected by the federal wild and scenic river designation. That number represents just $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1 percent of the rivers in our country; more than half of the designated rivers are located in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. The presence of the St. Croix River on this exclusive list is special and significant.

In 1972, Minnesota enacted the Lower St. Croix Wild and Scenic River Act to protect the river and its values. Under this act, the state developed rules incorporating standards for minimum lot size, setback from water and bluff lines, and approved land uses, as well as specific strategies to maintain the unique values of the river. The land use regulations are administered through local zoning ordinances.

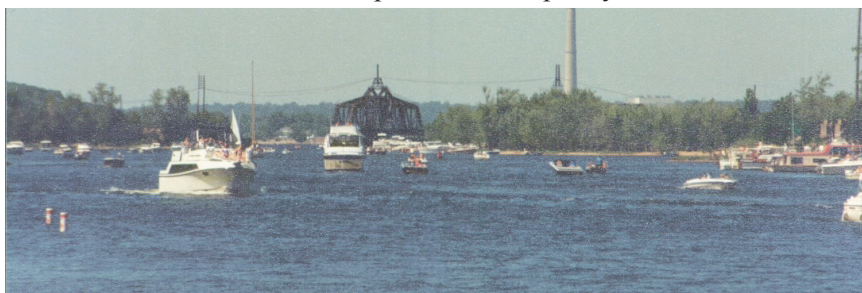


Scenic easements, zoning, and standards help preserve the scenic views of the St. Croix riverway.

How is the St. Croix River protected?

Property owners along the St. Croix are the primary stewards of the river. They are vital to protecting the resources of the St. Croix today and for future generations. Protection is accomplished by stewardship efforts and compliance with federal, state, and local requirements. Property owners, stakeholders, and conservation organizations have collaborated with government agencies to preserve the riverway's values.

State standards and local zoning. The St. Croix riverway is protected by a combination of standards, zoning, and easements. The land along the St. Croix is classified as urban or rural, and the state developed dimensional standards for each district to preserve natural views from the water, control erosion, and protect water quality. These standards are administered through local zoning ordinances and include lot size and width, structure setbacks and height, and sanitary system requirements (see diagrams and table, page 2). Maximum structure height is 35 feet for structures conforming to standards, and impervious surfaces are limited to 20 percent of a lot, including roof, sidewalk, driveways, patios, and decks. The color of new or remodeled structures must be earth tones or summer vegetation tones.



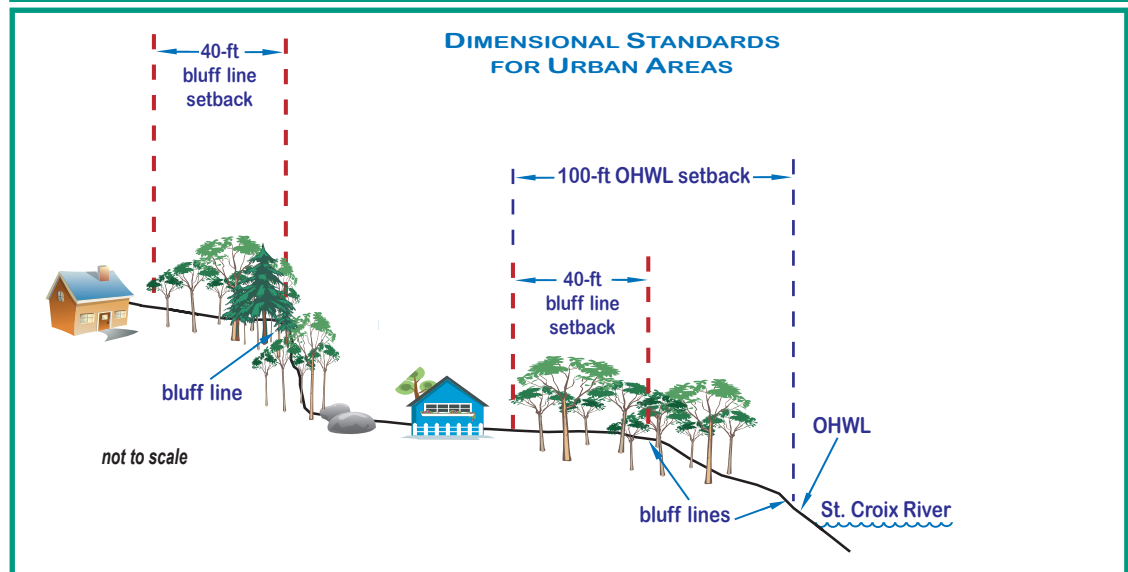
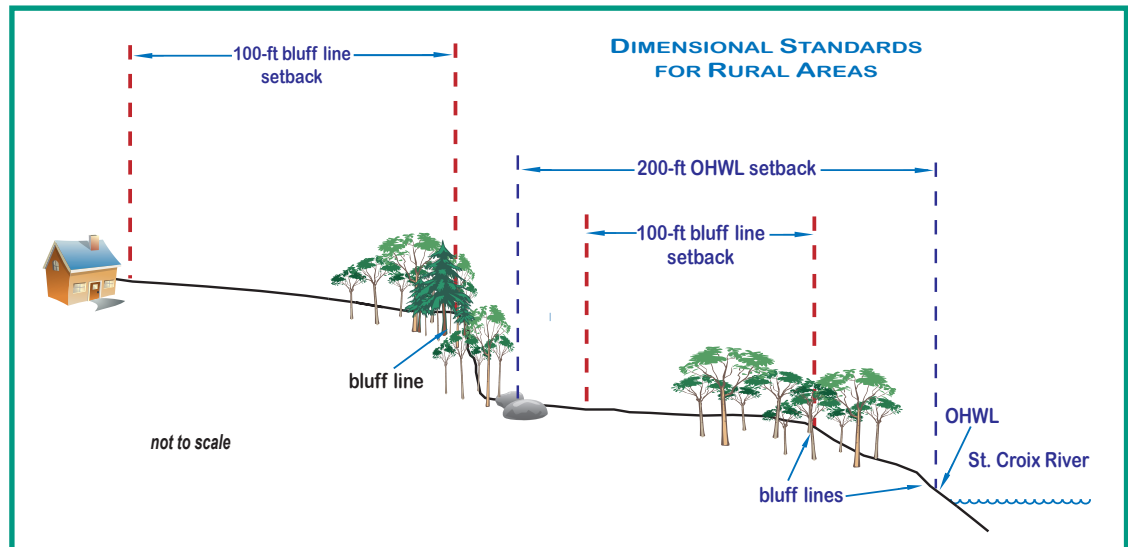
Management on segments of the St. Croix includes no-wake zones to lessen wave damage to shores and banks and to minimize congestion.

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Local zoning ordinances also require permits for alterations to the natural landscape such as grading and filling and cutting vegetation. These activities are restricted within setback areas and on slopes greater than 12 percent. Existing vegetation must be maintained to screen structures from view on the river, which preserves the scenic qualities important to the river's designation.

Since much of the St. Croix's shoreline is already developed, most of the pressure involves redevelopment proposals to expand or raze and reconstruct existing structures. Before starting on any project, landowners, developers, or prospective homebuyers should check with the local government to ensure that all local riverway standards and permit requirements are met. Generally, reconstruction or expansion of any existing structure is limited if it does not meet current setback standards to protect slopes and the natural appearance of the river. A variance from the local government may be needed and it may or may not be granted.

Scenic easements. The National Park Service holds most of the scenic easements on private land in the riverway. Landowners or prospective homebuyers should be aware of any easements on their land because proposed redevelopment projects must comply with the terms of those easements.



Dimensional standards for setbacks from ordinary high-water level (OHWL) and bluff lines in rural (top) and urban (bottom) districts along the St. Croix River. The OHWL setback in a rural district is greater than in an urban district. As a result of these setback protections, this depiction shows available space for one homesite in the rural district and two in the urban district. The box below cites some other standards intended to preserve the qualities of the St. Croix.

Other dimensional standards	Rural district	Urban district
Minimum lot size	2.5 acres	1 acre (20,000 sq ft if sewered)
Minimum water frontage	200 feet	150 feet (100 feet if sewered)
Minimum lot width at building line	200 feet	150 feet (100 feet if sewered)
Maximum structure height	35 feet	35 feet
Maximum area of impervious surface	20 percent	20 percent
Minimum setback, vegetation cutting area	200 ft from OHWL 40 ft from bluff line	100 ft from OHWL 40 ft from bluff line
Minimum setback, sewage system	200 ft from OHWL 40 ft from bluff line	100 ft from OHWL 40 ft from bluff line

Contact Information



DNR Waters in St. Paul: 500 Lafayette Road, Box 32, St. Paul, MN 55155-4032, (651) 259-5700
State Wild and Scenic Rivers information at DNR Waters website: <http://mndnr.gov/waters>

National Wild and Scenic Rivers information: www.rivers.gov
Lower St. Croix River National Scenic Riverway at National Park Service: www.nps.gov/sacn
Saint Croix National Park in Saint Croix Falls, WI: (715) 483-3284