

INTRODUCTION

This document is the *Final Comprehensive Management Plan* (CMP) for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The comprehensive management plan provides guidance for managing the corridor for the next 10-15 years. The plan provides a policy framework for coordinated efforts to protect and interpret the nationally significant resources of the corridor and for analyzing other federal, state, or local plans and individual actions in the area. Except for NPS development, the plan does not address site-specific issues. A final comprehensive management plan/environmental impact statement was released to the public in December 1994 and the secretary of the interior approved the plan and a record of decision was issued in 1995.

The MNRRA legislation specifies that the commission may modify the plan after it is finalized and approved, subject to review by the governor and approval by the secretary, if the commission determines that a modification is necessary. Because this plan is intended to provide a comprehensive policy framework and considering the extensive public involvement that occurred during the preparation of this document, it is expected that frequent amendments will not be needed. Any modification will be subject to all applicable state and federal open meeting laws and regulations. A copy of the legislation is included in appendix A.

Project History

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is one of the newer areas in the national park system. The 72-mile-long corridor was created by Congress in 1988 to (1) protect, preserve, and enhance nationally significant resources in the Mississippi River corridor through the Twin Cities metropolitan area, (2) coordinate government programs in the corridor, and (3) provide a management framework to assist the state of Minnesota and its units of local government in the development and implementation of integrated resource management programs for the corridor to ensure orderly public and private development in the area.

Also by congressional directive, the secretary of the interior has appointed the 22-member Mississippi River Coordinating Commission to assist federal, state, and local authorities in developing and implementing an integrated plan for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Members of the commission represent local governments, state and federal agencies, commercial navigation, and the general public (representing a variety of interests).

Congress directed the commission as a coordinator and advisory organization to

assist the secretary, the state of Minnesota, and local units of government in developing policies and programs for:

1. the preservation and enhancement of the environmental values of the area
2. enhanced public outdoor recreation opportunities in the area
3. the conservation and protection of the scenic, historical, cultural, natural, and scientific values of the area
4. the commercial use of the area and its related natural resources, consistent with the protection of the values for which the area was established as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

The Park Service and the commission will coordinate with others to prepare more detailed strategies and work to implement the plan for the corridor. This will include a broad spectrum of partners, including state and regional agencies, local governments, interested organizations, and the private sector.

As the Mississippi River flows through the Twin Cities metropolitan area, it changes dramatically in character from natural areas to intense commercial and industrial use and back again. Travelers on the river see woodlands, parklands, factories, barges, residences, farms, historic buildings, bridges, wildlife habitat, and the skylines of two large cities. The extensive natural vegetated shoreline is unusual for an urban area. The historic resources are also very impressive considering the dynamic growth and development in the region. Located near the confluence of three major ecoregions (Great Plains, central hardwood forest, and northern pine forest), the river valley contains diverse flora and fauna, including many rare, threatened, and endangered species. In addition, the Mississippi flyway is a critical migration corridor for some 40% of the nation's migrating waterfowl.

For more than a century the Mississippi has been a working river. It is an important commercial artery and for many years has produced hydropower. The Twin Cities developed because of their proximity to the river. The many significant cultural resources in the corridor are a testament to the historic influence of the waterway. In 1892 Congress authorized maintenance of a four-foot-deep navigation channel, and since 1940 the federal government has maintained a nine-foot-deep channel through the cities. The working river is important to the economy of the entire upper Midwest.

The river corridor remains a remarkably natural retreat in the midst of a major metropolitan area, due largely to the efforts of committed citizens and local government efforts over the years. One of the first was that of Horace Cleveland, who planned an extensive, linked park system focusing on the river, streams, and lakes. This provided the framework that is still used today to provide open space along the river and to connect the streams and lakes to the river. In recent years the river has benefitted from a growing public recognition of the value of this resource. Open space, recreation, and entertainment improvements are drawing people back to its banks in greater numbers. For about 20 years the state of Minnesota has

required special efforts to regulate land use in the corridor and to protect its resources, and in 1988 Congress established the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and directed a joint federal, state, and local program to coordinate efforts to preserve important natural, cultural, and economic values in the corridor and to guide growth and development.

Dramatic improvements have been made to the riverfront, and public open space has increased throughout the corridor. However, in spite of the excellent efforts of individual cities, there is a general lack of coordination in the corridor. Most cities are adequately protecting the most sensitive natural and cultural resources, but a few are not. Some, because of existing development and land use controls or financial constraints, are unable to protect sensitive resources. Recreational traffic on the river has increased significantly, fish have been contaminated, water quality does not meet standards, and corridor lands have been developed at a rapid pace. Some communities are promoting industrial development along the riverfront, while others are attempting to preserve the river corridor for parks and recreation. This lack of a common vision for the river and coordinated action is a long-standing problem that this plan seeks to correct.

Several major planning efforts tried to address these problems in the past. The first was the Mississippi River Critical Area program, authorized by state law and initiated by the governor's executive order in 1976. The program involved 20 cities, the University of Minnesota, and four townships along the river. Each community was required to complete and implement a plan to preserve the river's resources (such as riverbanks, bluffs, wetlands, and vegetation), address barge fleeting (parking areas for barges — see glossary), define land use, and provide for open space and trails. The plans and implementation efforts varied, ranging from aggressive land acquisition and trail construction to plans designed to meet the minimum requirements of the legislation. There were a number of problems, including lack of funding for coordination and monitoring, lack of implementation, the uneven quality of plans and implementation, and minimal enforcement. This comprehensive management plan borrows heavily from the best of these plans, while adding some new ideas to protect and restore resources.

In 1980, in response to continuing concern about the fate of the river, the Metropolitan River Corridors Study Commission was created by Congress to recommend ways to protect and manage the resource values of the three rivers in the metropolitan area. This study analyzed the management of the Mississippi River and found it lacking in both consistency and coordination. The 1986 study report provided the basis for many of the management policies in this plan. While the study commission found that much work, thought, and expense had already gone into preserving, protecting, and enhancing the river's resources, it also found that a more concerted effort was needed to provide an overall vision for the river and to protect it. As a result of the study commission's efforts and those of many dedicated citizens, Congress created the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area as a unit of the

national park system in 1988.

The 1988 legislation for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area directs that a comprehensive management plan (CMP) be prepared for the corridor. Certain mandated elements are required to be in the plan (see appendix A). The NPS enabling legislation and NPS *Management Policies* require that a general management plan (GMP) be prepared for all units of the national park system. This comprehensive management plan will serve as the general management plan for the national river and recreation area. This document was prepared according to legislative directives, the Interior *Departmental Manual*, and NPS policies and guidelines. The procedures for developing and approving the plan were derived from all these sources.

The MNRRA legislation and management plan fit into an extensive array of existing federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies. These include federal law authorizing navigation improvements, federal and state regulations requiring permits for activities in the river, state critical area, shoreland, wetland, and floodplain protection requirements, and numerous local plans and zoning ordinances controlling land use in the corridor. Details on the extent of this framework and the consistency of this plan with other plans in the area are contained in the Plan Implementation section of this document and in appendix I.

Issues Addressed in this Plan

A number of issues were identified by the commission, the National Park Service, and the public during the scoping phase for this plan. Details of the scoping process are included in the Development of the Plan section. Most of the issues had been recognized for many years. This list covers only those problems that seem to be most appropriately addressed in a comprehensive plan, based on guidance provided by legislative direction and NPS policy. This is a brief introduction to the issues that are more thoroughly addressed in the body of the document.

- There is a need for a corridorwide vision for the river — one that all units of local government endorse and actively implement. The final plan should provide that vision, produced through a partnership of government agencies, the public, and the commission.
- There is a need for a consistent and comprehensive management strategy for the corridor. The legislation clearly establishes the concept of partnership management with additional coordination and using existing state and local programs, but it allows some leeway in implementation. The 1988 legislation also allows flexibility in the role of the National Park Service in managing the corridor. This was a major issue during the planning process. While there was general agreement that the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is not a traditional unit of the national park system, there could be a stronger federal presence or management could rely more on existing authorities, state

agencies, and local governments.

- As use of the river and adjacent land in the corridor grows, there is increasing potential for conflicts between uses.
- Barge transportation and fleeting is a well-established traditional use recognized in the MNRRRA legislation, the activities provide a major contribution to the metropolitan area economy, and adequate fleeting space is vital to the commercial navigation industry. Some people contend that the level of barge fleeting is excessive and that fleeting activities cause environmental impacts. Others contend that fleeting is not excessive and that greater environmental damage is caused by recreational watercraft. Barge fleeting has been a major issue identified by the public, and the MNRRRA act requires that the plan include a program that provides for the management of barge fleeting consistent with the findings and purposes of the legislation. Maintaining navigation improvements, such as the 9-foot channel, is also recognized in the legislation because it is critical to the commercial navigation industry, but it requires periodic dredging and a need for material placement sites in the corridor.
- The corridor includes many outstanding vistas, areas of scenic beauty, and tranquil places in the midst of a great urban area. These scenic and aesthetic resources could be adversely affected by extensive development, incompatible design, high speed roads, and poor land use practices.
- Unrestricted development on the slopes or near the edge of bluffs causes soil erosion and diminishes the quality of the view from the river or opposing overlooks. Residences are often built near the bluff line to take advantage of river views. Bluffs have also traditionally been used for underground storage in the Twin Cities area, which has some unavoidable impacts on the bluff face.
- Degradation of the natural shoreline appearance can be caused by unregulated development, erosion, adjacent roads, and other land use activities. However, some development along the shoreline in urban waterfront areas is appropriate.
- Indigenous vegetation along the shoreline, in wetlands, and along the bluffs is important to the visual character of the corridor and support of natural systems. Unrestricted development can strip vegetation if established regulations and guidelines are not followed.
- Preservation of cultural resources, including historic and ethnographic resources and prehistoric sites, is supported by many agencies and groups; however, new development or disuse has resulted in the loss of many important resources. The potential impacts of land use policies on cultural resources is a concern of the historic preservation community.
- Significant improvements have been made in wastewater treatment in the Twin Cities area. However, water quality is still a major concern. Issues range from toxic wastes to sedimentation. Fish are contaminated with heavy metals, contact recreation is not advised, and nonpoint source pollution is a chronic problem, especially in the lower part of the river corridor. The primary

nonpoint source pollution input is from agricultural runoff outside the corridor into the Minnesota River, which enters the Mississippi at Fort Snelling State Park about 5 miles upstream from downtown St. Paul. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is attempting to address the nonpoint problems on the Minnesota River, but it is a very complex issue that will take extensive time and funds to correct.

- Direct loss of habitat, especially aquatic habitat, has occurred because of competing interests and uses such as recreation and commercial development. Direct and indirect loss of wetlands has been due to ground water depletion and water diversion from wet areas.
- Considerable public land already exists, but the amount and distribution of open space needed to protect the river's resources and to provide for the corridor's many uses continues to be a major issue. As water quality improves, recreational facilities and open space along the river will increase in importance. There is also a question regarding who should manage additional open space in the corridor. Local park plans contain proposals to acquire additional land along the river. The National Park Service currently administers about 43 acres of federal land on several small islands and one upland parcel. These holdings are scattered throughout the MNRRA corridor. There are no current efforts to actively manage these areas. The amount of additional NPS-managed land in the corridor is a resolved in this plan.
- The MNRRA legislation listed the importance of economic resources along with other more traditionally cited national park system resources, and the plan must "recognize existing economic activities in the area and provide for their management." "Nationally significant economic resources" are not defined in the legislation. The act charges the commission with developing "policies and programs for the commercial utilization of the corridor consistent with the values for which the area was established." New development competes with existing activities for scarce land and access to the river, and it might adversely affect the preservation of existing economic resources in the corridor. The amount of new economic development in the corridor, types of uses, and locations for new commercial and industrial activities are addressed in the plan. New development needs are weighed along with natural, cultural, and economic resource protection needs. The challenge is to find a way to define and achieve balance and sustainability among natural, cultural, and economic resource preservation, visitor use needs, and new development activities.
- The impact of land and water use policies and open space acquisition on economic activities in the corridor is a major concern of some communities and members of the metro area business community.
- The interpretive program emphasis, the need for additional facilities, coordination of interpretation and visitor services, gaps in existing interpretive and environmental education programs, and the most appropriate service providers must be determined for the area.

It is recognized that transportation planning issues are very important to the growth and development in the corridor and protection of its natural, cultural, and economic resources. This was identified by many who commented during the public review period on the *Draft Comprehensive Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. It is beyond the scope of this plan to address major transportation questions such as the new airport issue or metropolitan area road improvement needs. However, the general visions, concepts, and policies could be used as a framework to analyze these issues, and the plan will serve as the basis for NPS review comments on transportation plans and proposals affecting the corridor.

Purposes and Visions for the Area

The following purpose and vision statements were developed early in the planning process to provide guidance for preparing the plan. They serve as a foundation for its implementation. They were developed by the Mississippi River Coordinating Commission with the assistance of work groups. These ideas form the basic goals and objectives on which the plan was based. They were subject to public review before conceptual alternatives and a draft proposal were developed. They were revised during the planning process to reflect public input and the direction provided by the commission. They are listed in the order that resources are listed in the act.

The purposes describe intent and are stated as broad goals to be accomplished. Visions are more specific objectives that describe how the corridor might appear if the purposes are achieved.

Purpose: Preserve, enhance, and interpret archeological, ethnographic, and historic resources.

Visions: (In the future we will see:)

The public has opportunities to learn about historic, ethnographic, and archeological resources in the corridor through interpretive and educational programs.

The significant historic, ethnographic, and archeological resources of the corridor are preserved and protected.

Archeological, ethnographic, and historic preservation and interpretation reflect the diversity of the people who have lived in the river corridor.

The MNRRA corridor is an exemplary role model for historic preservation and adaptive use of historic structures.

Preservation, enhancement, and interpretation actions respect the rights of private ownership and involve all parties (public and private) with responsibility for the resources.

All developments and programs are sensitive to the physical limitations of historic and archeological resources.

Purpose: Enhance opportunities for public outdoor recreation, education, and

| scenic enjoyment.

Visions:

Additional opportunities for recreational and educational experiences, including scenic enjoyment and quiet contemplation, are provided throughout the MNRRA corridor.

The corridor offers a broad range of recreational and educational experiences closely tied to the character of the resource and complementing other recreational opportunities in the metropolitan area.

A full range of recreational boating is provided while providing for user safety and minimizing crowding and conflicts with other uses.

Public use areas are easily accessible and safe.

Residents and visitors are able to traverse the entire length of the corridor by foot and bicycle.

Public access is provided to a range of natural and cultural resources in ways that do not damage resources or violate the rights of private landowners.

Recreational and educational opportunities provided in the corridor reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity and varying physical and financial abilities of residents and visitors.

Special features are identified, developed, and promoted as tourist destinations consistent with the protection of cultural, natural, and economic resources.

The MNRRA corridor includes a system of park lands connected by the river with a system of linear parks and other elements that facilitate public access to the river.

| **Purpose:** Preserve, enhance, and interpret natural resources.

Visions:

The public can learn about natural resources in the corridor through interpretive and educational programs.

Significant natural resources, such as native wildlife and plant diversity, in the corridor are preserved and enhanced.

All developments and programs are sensitive to the limitations of natural resources.

Significant natural resources that have been adversely impacted in the past are restored.

Preservation, enhancement, and interpretation respect the rights of private ownership and involve all parties, public and private, with responsibility for these resources.

The water quality in the river through the MNRRRA corridor meets state and federal standards and moves toward the fishable and swimmable goals as defined in federal and state law. It is a long-term vision of this plan that water quality in the corridor is as clean when it leaves the metropolitan area as when it enters.

Air quality in the corridor meets state and federal standards.

The value of the river as a public water supply is protected.

The role of the Mississippi River as a nationally significant natural ecosystem and migratory corridor for wildlife in the heart of the midcontinent is recognized.

Purpose: Provide for continued economic activity and development.

Visions:

The corridor continues to include multiple uses consistent with wise land use management principles.

Opportunities are provided for observation and interpretation of the Mississippi's role in the regional and national economy.

The role of the Mississippi River as a working river and as the heart of midcontinent navigation is recognized.

Protection and enhancement of the river corridor's natural and cultural resources are seen as positive elements in economic development strategies.

Economic development activities that take advantage of the corridor's attributes are encouraged in a manner that preserves, protects, and enhances the natural and cultural resources in the corridor.

Commercial and recreational river traffic are conducted to minimize conflicts with each other and with other uses.

Barge fleeting, a vital function of commercial navigation, is a recognized traditional use on the river and is conducted in a manner consistent with the purposes for which MNRRRA was established.

Purpose: Improve the public's understanding of the river and promote public

| stewardship of its resources.

Visions:

Regional residents, local governments, businesses, and industries share a strong sense of stewardship for the well-being of the corridor.

Activities in the MNRRA corridor support the interests of local communities in improving the public awareness of river resources.

The public is aware through coordinated interpretive programs of the national significance and status of corridor resources and their stewardship.

The public has an understanding and appreciation of the multiple uses and purposes of the river.

Opportunities are provided to learn about and experience corridor resources.

| **Purpose:** Recognize and strengthen people's relationships with the river as a dynamic part of our heritage, our quality of life, and our legacy for future generations.

Visions:

Metropolitan area citizens have a strong sense of identity with the three area rivers and their history.

The MNRRA corridor enriches the lives of metropolitan residents and visitors by enhancing regional, natural, cultural, and aesthetic resources and by contributing to regional socioeconomic growth.

The MNRRA corridor has an identity that connects it to the greater cultural, economic, political, and natural systems of the area.

The Mississippi is recognized as one of the world's largest river systems, as a significant historic and modern transportation corridor, and as a place that attracted human settlement.

Opportunities are provided for local residents and visitors to discover the Mississippi River and its stories.

Communities support the MNRRA plan and participate in the coordination of activities.

By identifying the most significant resources (using the list identified in the act), balancing and integrating the needs to protect those resources with other needs in the corridor, and using concepts and policies taken from the previous corridor plans, the goal is to bring management in all areas in the corridor to the same level of excellence. If this occurs, then the visions can be achieved.