



January 25, 2021

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
CABLE CONNECTOR TRAIL  
ST. CROIX NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAY**

**BACKGROUND**

The National Park Service (NPS) has completed a comprehensive planning effort in St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (Riverway) and has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to analyze potential impacts. The Cable Connector Trail EA is in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended.

This finding of no significant impact (FONSI) and its associated EA constitutes the record of the environmental impact analysis and decision-making process. The NPS will implement the selected alternative (proposed action) to develop a multi-use trail to enhance visitor experience and safety while protecting natural and cultural resources; accommodate different types of trail use, including hiking and biking; and reduce maintenance by using sustainable trail construction techniques and minimizing park infrastructure; and provide connectivity through the Riverway in a region with numerous trails and open lands, allowing for legal access through the park unit to other trail networks. The proposed action was selected after careful analysis of resources and visitor impacts, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and review of public comments.

This document records (1) a finding of no significant impact as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969; (2) a finding of no effect to federally listed species or their habitat as required by the Endangered Species Act, Section 7; and (3) a finding of no effect as required by the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106, as it relates to the development of the Cable Connector Trail. In accordance with 36 CFR § 4.30 (NPS Bicycle Rule), the National Park Service will promulgate a bicycle rule to implement this project for the proposed multi-use trail. This FONSI is available on the National Park Service Planning, Environmental and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/cabletrail>.

**PURPOSE AND NEED FOR FEDERAL ACTION**

The NPS proposed action is to construct a 0.25-mile natural surface, multi-use trail connection from the end of a segment of Chequamegon Area Mountain Bike Association's (CAMBA) Wild River Trail on a former railroad grade near the Town of Cable, Wisconsin connecting to Parker Road. The trail would be open for hiking, trail running, mountain bike and e-bike use in the summer, and silent sports such as fat-tire bicycling, snowshoeing, and possibly cross-country skiing in the winter. It would be the first trail at the Riverway open to bike use and would also facilitate the use of non-National Park Service trails nearby.

The purposes of taking action are to reestablish a connection in a local trail system in order to ensure appropriate recreational opportunities in the Riverway, to facilitate use of the trail system in the Riverway and on adjacent lands, and to promote the health and well-being of visitors to the Riverway.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

Two alternatives were analyzed: a no action alternative (alternative 1), and one action alternative (alternative 2). These alternatives are described below.

### **Alternative 1 (No-Action)**

No new trails or facilities would be developed on federal lands in the project area under the no-action alternative. Visitors would continue to access public lands but would not have the opportunity to connect to other trails in this location. Bicycle use would remain prohibited on all park trails under the no-action alternative.

### **Alternative 2 (NPS Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative)**

Under alternative 2, a 0.25-mile natural surface, multi-use trail connection would be built from the end of a segment of CAMBA's Wild River Trail on a former railroad grade near the Town of Cable, Wisconsin connecting to Parker Road. The trail would be built on NPS property. A multi-use, natural surface trail (mineral soil) of a gentle grade, not exceeding 5%, would be constructed for hiking, biking (including road, mountain, and e-bikes), and trail running during the spring, summer and fall; and during winter months, fat-tire bicycling, snowshoeing, and possibly cross country skiing. No equestrian or other motorized uses would be permitted, except for authorized vehicles used for trail maintenance, emergency services and NPS-permitted special events. The trail would provide a critical link to adjoining trails and would serve an important role providing connectivity for several local trail running and biking events that start or finish in the Cable area. The trail would not be accessible per the legal standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act/Architectural Barriers Act (ADA/ABA). However, the intent of the trail is to provide a flat, "easy" trail that would be accessible for a wide range of pedestrian and bicycle users. Project-specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Project Design Criteria (PDC), found in Table 4 in the EA, are considered integral and required elements of this alternative.

### **Selected Alternative**

The NPS has selected alternative 2 as described and analyzed in the environmental assessment for implementation. Alternative 2 better meets the purpose and need of the project— it will allow local residents and visitors legal access in and across park lands and reestablish a connection in a local trail system. Alternative 2 would ensure appropriate recreational opportunities in the Riverway, facilitate use of the trail system in the Riverway and on adjacent lands, and promote the health and well-being of visitors to the Riverway.

### **Preliminary Actions Considered but Dismissed**

The planning team did not consider additional alternatives or actions as the purpose and need are straightforward and resource impacts were deemed minimal.

## **WHY THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

As defined in CFR 40 Section 1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

- 1. Impacts that may have both beneficial and adverse aspects in which on balance may be beneficial, but that may still have significant adverse impacts that require analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement.**

No significant impacts to resources were identified that would require analysis in an environmental impact statement. Whether taken individually or as a whole, the impacts of the selected alternative do not reach the level of a significant effect because most adverse impacts associated with implementation would be temporary and would occur during the Cable Connector Trail construction or during occasional maintenance activities. The overall beneficial impact to visitor experience and resource management will be long term. Best management practices and project design criteria identified in Table 4 of the environmental assessment would further minimize any potential non-significant adverse impacts. Additional details on impacts to resources can be found in the environmental assessment.

- 2. The degree to which public health and safety are impacted.**

Under the proposed action, there would be additional ways for visitors to experience the park. Due to the nature of mountain biking, there is an increased risk of injury on the trails, with the potential of severe injury if a biker is not using an appropriate helmet. The addition of biking on the trails may result in more visitors in the area and on the trails. There is a potential for risk of injury to visitors, by adding the recreational use of mountain biking on park trails. Given the width and flat, “easy” grade of the multi-use trail, user conflict between cyclists and hikers is not expected. Visitors are expected to self-manage their risk, but some injuries may occur, as in other areas of the Riverway.

- 3. Impacts to any unique characteristics of the area (proximity to historic or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, wetlands or floodplains, etc.).**

There will be no significant impacts on unique characteristics of the area. Specific mitigation measures will ensure that unique characteristics such as historic and natural resources of the park are protected. No prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas will be impacted.

- 4. The degree to which impacts are likely to be highly controversial.**

Throughout the plan development process, no identified environmental impacts have been deemed highly controversial. During consultation with affiliated tribes and bands, the SHPO, and during public comment periods, there were no substantive concerns expressed about the proposed action. The trail construction described in the EA is

common on public lands throughout the nation, and their effects are well understood and not controversial.

- 5. The degree to which the potential impacts are highly uncertain or involve unique and unknown risks.**

The selected alternative does not involve highly uncertain effects on the human environment or involve unique or unknown risks. The trail construction described in the EA is common on public lands throughout the nation, and its effects are well understood and not controversial.

- 6. Whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

The selected alternative does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed actions in the Cable Connector Trail EA would not set a precedent for future actions that could have significant impacts because there have been no significant impacts identified as a potential result of the proposed actions.

- 7. Whether the action is related to other actions that may have individual insignificant impacts but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or breaking it down into smaller counterparts.**

The environmental assessment concluded that implementing the selected alternative would result in net beneficial impacts for visitor experience and no long-term adverse effects on special status species. Actions in this plan would not contribute impacts that would individually or cumulatively result in greater adverse impacts than other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions.

- 8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect historic properties in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other significant scientific, archeological, or cultural resources.**

Field surveys for cultural resources were completed in summer 2020. The results of this archeological investigation indicate that Cable Connector Trail construction and bollard installation will not adversely impact important archeological resources. No additional archeological work is recommended in advance of Cable Connector Trail construction going forward as proposed, assuming compliance with the Section 106 review process (NPS 2020). The NPS determined that No Historic Properties would be Affected by this undertaking and consulted with the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800. The SHPO concurred with the federal agency's finding of no effect on September 15, 2020. Project-specific BMPs and PDC have been included in the EA in Table 4 in the event that unanticipated historic or archeologic resources are discovered during construction of the proposed trail.

- 9. The degree to which an action may adversely affect Endangered or Threatened species or its habitat.**

The National Park Service reviewed US Fish and Wildlife data to analyze the effects of the proposed action on the four federally listed species that may be present within the Cable Connector Trail planning area. One federally listed species (northern long-eared bat) found in the park may be impacted by the proposed action. Three other federally listed species are found in Bayfield County, WI and may be present in the park, but would not be affected by the proposed action (Canada lynx, gray wolf, and Fassett's locoweed).

The selected alternative would result in some adverse impacts to habitat and roosting sites for the northern long-eared bat but would not have more than minor impacts to the bat. Tree removal during trail construction and likely future hazard tree removal therefore may reduce the number and type of trees available for northern long-eared bat. Per the BMPs included in Table 4 in the EA, NPS staff shall train contractor and partners on identification of species of concern such as the northern long-eared bat, and provide guidelines on suitable plan of action should they be encountered. This impact is expected to be minimal because it would be localized to the trail and trail clearance corridor and would only constitute a small number of trees compared to the number of trees in and near the project area.

The assessment concluded that the proposed action “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect northern long-eared bats” and will have “no effect” on Canada lynx, gray wolf, or Fassett's locoweed. The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination on October 22, 2020.

**10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

The proposed actions do not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law or requirements. The NPS has complied with all Federal, State, and local laws with relevance to the selected alternative.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY CONSULTATION**

During preparation of the Cable Connector Trail EA, NPS staff consulted with federal and state agencies, tribes, interested and affected parties, and the general public. These activities are summarized in chapter 4 of the EA and are further detailed below.

**Public Involvement**

On September 22, 2020, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway released the Cable Connector Trail for public comment. Striving to reach a broad audience while maintaining health and safety practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, the park distributed announcements by e-mail to local, state, federal government officials and congressional contacts, key local contacts, and individuals who had previously expressed an interest in the planning process. The park announced the release of the plan via a press release on September 22, 2020 and posted an announcement on the park Facebook page on September 22, 2020 and again on October 13,

2020. The St. Croix River Association, the official nonprofit partner of the Riverway, posted an announcement on their Facebook page on September 22, 2020, October 6, 2020, and October 22, 2020, and sent an email to their constituents on October 1, 2020.

The public was asked to review the EA and share their comments for 30 days between September 22 and October 23, 2020 related to environmental analysis of the proposed action. No in-person public meetings were held in keeping with federal and/or state emergency orders and social distancing.

During public review, 35 correspondences were received through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website or by mail. One of the responses came from the Board of the Town of Cable, Wisconsin. Attachment A of this report summarizes public comments received during the public comment period and provides NPS responses to those public comments.

### **Wisconsin SHPO**

Field surveys for cultural resources were completed in summer 2020. The results of this archeological investigation indicate that Cable Connector Trail construction and bollard installation will not adversely impact important archeological resources. No additional archeological work is recommended in advance of Cable Connector Trail construction going forward as proposed, assuming compliance with the Section 106 review process (NPS 2020).

The NPS determined that No Historic Properties would be Affected by this undertaking and consulted with the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800. The SHPO concurred with the federal agency's finding of no effect on September 15, 2020. Project-specific BMPs and PDC have been included in Table 4 in the EA in the event that unanticipated historic or archeological resources are discovered during construction of the proposed trail.

### **Tribal Consultation**

On June 5, 2020, the NPS contacted 18 federally recognized American Indian Tribes listed in the EA, sharing information about the proposed undertaking and inviting them to consult on the project. Follow-up phone calls were placed to Tribes in June and July 2020. Of the 18 Tribal partners contacted, no Tribes expressed interest in consulting on the proposed undertaking.

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

The NPS planning team referenced the electronic list of federally listed plant and animal species, as generated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) system (<https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac>) for Bayfield County, WI. The National Park Service sent a letter dated October 20, 2020 to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to request concurrence with the determinations of effect presented in Chapter 3.2 of the Environmental Assessment.

In a response phone call and email dated October 22, 2020, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the National Park Service determination that the project “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), and would have no

effect on three other federally listed species (Canada lynx, gray wolf, and Fassett's locoweed) found in Bayfield County, WI.

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on review of the facts and analysis contained in the EA, the NPS has selected alternative 2, as described above, for implementation. The selected alternative does not constitute an action meeting the criteria that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on the human environment in accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Environmental impacts that could occur are limited in context and intensity, with general beneficial impacts to visitor use and experience, and possible minor effects on northern long-eared bat. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on these or other resources or values of the Riverway.

No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative impacts, or elements or precedence were identified. Implementation of the actions would not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared. A special regulation is also required before the Superintendent can authorize the use of bicycles the Cable Connector Trail, which is a new trail outside of a developed area of the park (36 CFR § 4.30). Promulgation of the special regulation is proceeding. The Cable Connector Trail EA will be implemented as soon as practical when the special regulation for bicycle use is in place, key agreements with CAMBA for construction and maintenance are in place, and funding becomes available.

Recommended: \_\_\_\_\_

Juliet L. Galonska, Superintendent  
St. Croix National Scenic Riverway

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Herbert C. Frost, Ph.D., Regional Director  
National Park Service, DOI Regions 3, 4, and 5

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

## **Attachment A: Response to Comments**

On September 22, 2020, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway released the Cable Connector Trail for public comment. Striving to reach a broad audience while maintaining health and safety practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, the park distributed announcements by e-mail to local, state, federal government officials and congressional contacts, key local contacts, and individuals who had previously expressed an interest in the planning process. The park announced the release of the plan via a press release on September 22, 2020 and posted an announcement on the park Facebook page on September 22, 2020 and again on October 13, 2020. The St. Croix River Association, the official nonprofit partner of the Riverway, posted an announcement on their Facebook page on September 22, 2020, October 6, 2020, and October 22, 2020, and sent an email to their constituents on October 1, 2020.

The public comment period was open for 30 days between September 22 and October 23, 2020. No in-person public meetings were held in keeping with federal and/or state emergency orders and social distancing.

35 correspondences were received through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website or by mail sent directly to the Riverway.

No comments suggested there were errors, minor technical edits, or technical revisions in the EA. Therefore, no errata have been included in this report. This report contains responses to substantive public comments on the plan. In some cases, the NPS chose to respond to some nonsubstantive comments received during the review period to help clarify aspects of the selected alternative.

The text below includes summaries of comments received during the public comment period and provides NPS response to those public comments. Specific comments on the plan are summarized below in concern statements and are followed by the NPS response to each of the concern statements.

These responses do not change the outcome of the impact analysis, nor do they affect the final decision documented in the Finding of No Significant Impact.

### **Support of and opposition to the proposed action**

More than two dozen commenters supported the trail connection for pedestrian and bicycle access. Reasons for support included a desire for family- and senior-friendly trails that are “easy” and flat, excitement about the ability to connect trail sections into a loop, and support for additional recreational opportunities that are in keeping with the Riverway’s values. Other supporters mentioned the beauty of the corridor and the need for a safe, off-road trail connection.

One commenter did not support the new trail connection for bicycle use in particular. The commenter supported pedestrian access on the Cable Connector Trail but expressed concern that bicycle use would ruin the tranquility of the area and felt that there are enough bicycle trails nearby. Another expressed concern that this undertaking would void the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.



**NPS Response:** The purposes of taking action are to reestablish a connection in a local trail system in order to ensure appropriate recreational opportunities in the Riverway, to facilitate use of the trail system in the Riverway and on adjacent lands, and to promote the health and well-being of visitors to the Riverway. The project also meets National Park Service and Riverway purposes and values for recreation, public health, and bicycle use. Bicycle use would be permitted under 36 CFR § 4.30 (the Bicycle Rule) following promulgation of a special rule. Additionally, this action is in compliance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the stated purpose and values of the Riverway, including recreational values. The action enhances recreation without negative impacts on the values for which the Riverway was designated as wild and scenic: free-flowing character, exceptional water quality, and the aquatic, riparian, recreational, cultural/historic, geologic, scenic, and aesthetic values present in the rivers.

### **Concern about impacts on northern long-eared bat habitat**

One commenter expressed concern that the construction of a trail connection will remove habitat for the northern long-eared bat, a species which is already experiencing stress due to white-nose syndrome. The commenter notes that due to human use on the trail connection, dead and hazard trees may need to be removed, further reducing possible bat habitat.

**NPS Response:** The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the NPS determination of effect under the Endangered Species Act that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, northern long-eared bat. The Riverway natural resources staff have included Best Management Practices and Project Design Criteria (see Table 4 of the EA) that will minimize tree removal during construction and for safety and maintenance. These include, but are not limited to, training NPS contractors and partners on bat identification, special precautions during nesting periods, and leaving dead trees and snags in place except where removal is necessary for safety.

### **Request for snowmobile and UTV/ATV use on Cable Connector Trail**

Several commentors requested the inclusion of snowmobiling as an authorized use on the proposed trail connection. The Town of Cable town board mentioned that snowmobiles are allowed on the Wild River Trail and will not be able to connect to Parker Road without using the new trail connection. Another commenter asked if this proposal includes authorized use of utility terrain (or task) vehicles and all-terrain vehicles (UTV/ATV).

**NPS Response:** The use of snowmobiles and UTV/ATV on the proposed Cable Connector Trail does not meet the purpose and need for the project, including allowing silent sports on the proposed trail. The intent of the new Cable Connector trail is to provide a safe and easy trail connection for pedestrians, cyclists, and other silent activities such as photography and wildlife viewing.

Snowmobiles and UTV/ATV will not be authorized on the Cable Connector Trail per the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) sections pertaining to the Riverway, as well as NPS Management Policies (see [https://www.nps.gov/policy/MP\\_2006.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/policy/MP_2006.pdf)), 8.2.3.1 Motorized Off-road Vehicle Use and 8.2.3.2 Snowmobiles.

The applicable CFR sections for the Riverway include:

36 CFR § 4.10 (a). Travel on park roads and designated routes. Operating a motor vehicle is prohibited except on park roads, in parking areas and on routes and areas designated for off-road motor vehicle use.

36 CFR § 2.18 (c). The use of snowmobiles is prohibited, except on designated routes and water surfaces that are used by motor vehicles or motorboats during other seasons. Routes and water surfaces designated for snowmobile use shall be promulgated as special regulations. Snowmobiles are prohibited except where designated and only when their use is consistent with the park's natural, cultural, scenic and aesthetic values, safety considerations, park management objectives, and will not disturb wildlife or damage park resources.

Snowmobiles may be operated only on routes designated in 36 CFR §7.9 (a) (Special Regulations, Areas of the National Park System) for St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

Snowmobile use is allowed on the frozen surface of the St. Croix River and on designated trails and river crossings in accordance with 36 CFR §7.9 (a) and 36 CFR 2.18 (c), and in accordance with applicable non-conflicting State and local laws and regulations, except:

- On the St. Croix River from the Highway 243 Bridge at Osceola, Wisconsin north to the Xcel (NSP) Hydroelectric Dam at St. Croix Falls/Taylor's Falls
- On the St. Croix River from the Highway 35 Bridge at Riverside north to the Gordon Dam
- Trego flowage, Pacwawong flowage, and Hayward Flowage
- Snowmobile use on the Namekagon River is prohibited except at designated river crossings
- Snowmobile speed within the park is 45 mph unless otherwise posted

Snowmobile use is permitted in the following areas on the frozen surface of the St. Croix River and Lake Hayward:

- Between Boomsite Landing and Highway 243 at Osceola Landing
- Between St. Croix Falls (north of the Xcel (NSP) Hydroelectric Dam) and Riverside Landing
- Snowmobile use is also permitted on the approved snowmobile trails that intersect on Lake Hayward

### **Land ownership, land tenure, access, and property rights**

Several commenters posed questions or concerns about adjacent properties, land tenure and ownership, access, and property rights. Some commenters asked about purchase agreements and maintenance responsibility on the railroad trestle. Others commented that some online and paper maps show different land ownership and requested clarification. One commenter

proposed opportunities for partnership with CAMBA for trail access across an adjacent property.

**NPS Response:** These questions are out of scope for this EA and FONSI and refer to lands outside of NPS ownership or jurisdiction. However, they are important questions and concerns that the Riverway staff are considering, and appreciate the commenters bringing these issues to staff's attention. The Riverway Superintendent is in communication with the commenters, partners, and public officials to clarify these questions and concerns. The National Park Service is one of several partners that own or manage land along the Wild River Trail, and CAMBA will have agreements with all landowners to allow use on the trail.