

St. Croix National Scenic Riverway

Wisconsin, Minnesota

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Comprehensive River Management Plan: Newsletter Update



From the Superintendent

Hello!

I'm Craig Hansen, superintendent of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (the Riverway). I'm excited to invite you to help shape the future of the Riverway. Your input and engagement are critical for preserving and enhancing this special place.

The National Park Service (NPS) is currently developing a comprehensive river management plan (the plan), which will guide how we manage the Riverway now and in the future.

The plan is still being developed, and we need your feedback to make it the best it can be. The National Park Service previously held five in-person listening sessions and offered an opportunity to submit online comments in the summer of 2023.

Thank you to those who have already taken the time to engage and offer input. The NPS team has discussed all comments and, in many cases, incorporated them directly into the draft concepts shared in this newsletter.

We are now starting our second round of public comment and look forward to hosting several in-person public meetings. We hope to hear from you, whether in person or online. This won't be your last opportunity to comment, as there will be one final opportunity for public comments before the plan is completed in 2025.

For public meeting information and an online comment form, see the link and QR code at the end of this newsletter. Thank you for your interest and support!

Best regards,

Craig Hansen, Superintendent

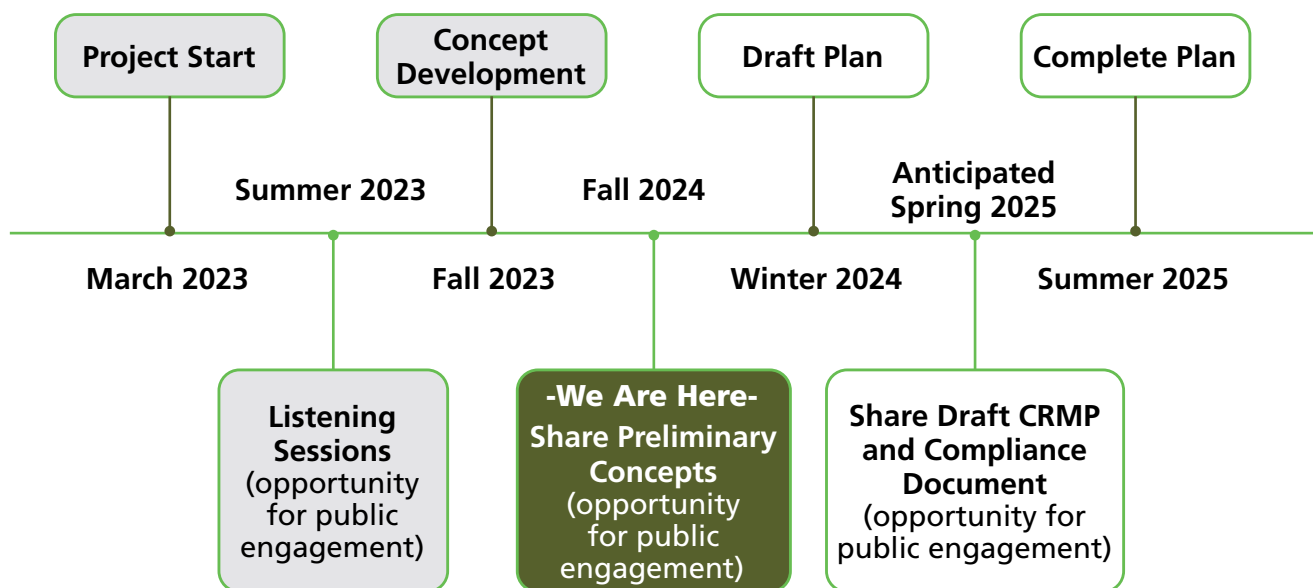
November 2024

What Is a Comprehensive River Management Plan and Why Is It Needed?

The comprehensive river management plan is a framework that guides the long-term stewardship and protection of designated wild and scenic riverways. This plan will provide a roadmap to protect the resources and experiences that make the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway special.

- **Building on the past** – The plan will build on the 1998 *Upper St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers General Management Plan* and the 2001 *Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway Cooperative Management Plan*, updating and carrying forward existing guidelines as needed. The plan does not replace either plan but rather provides specific guidance for NPS lands on the Riverway.
- **Protecting resources** – The plan will provide a clear and organized approach to managing the Riverway, with a focus on protecting its natural and cultural resources from new and ongoing threats.
- **Ensuring sustainable recreation** – The plan will help the National Park Service enhance visitor experiences, manage recreational activities, and oversee facility development, all while ensuring these efforts align with the unique characteristics of the Riverway.
- **Strengthening relationships** – The plan will emphasize the importance of honoring and respecting Tribal nations’ rights and cultural traditions. The plan also aims to build strong partnerships with diverse communities, partner organizations, and other land management agencies.
- **Planning for the future** – With updated guidelines, the plan sets user capacities, monitoring needs, and accessibility goals to enhance visitor experiences while protecting this cherished Riverway.

Planning Timeline



Definitions

Management areas – Specific areas within the Riverway, each with defined goals that help guide decisions about resource protection and recreational use.

Management concepts – Two distinct approaches for managing the Riverway, each offering a pathway to fulfill the Riverway’s mission. The final approach may combine elements from both concepts.

Management strategies – Proposed actions the National Park Service could take to achieve the approaches outlined in the “Management Concepts” section and within the management areas.

Management areas are used to guide decision-making for the Riverway. Guidance from the 2001 *Cooperative Management Plan* will be carried forward for management of the Lower St. Croix River. The following Land and Water Management Areas reflect plan updates, which only apply to the federally managed areas of the Riverway. The updated management areas for the federally managed areas of the Riverway are listed below, along with their desired conditions (qualities the National Park Service will aim to achieve in each area).

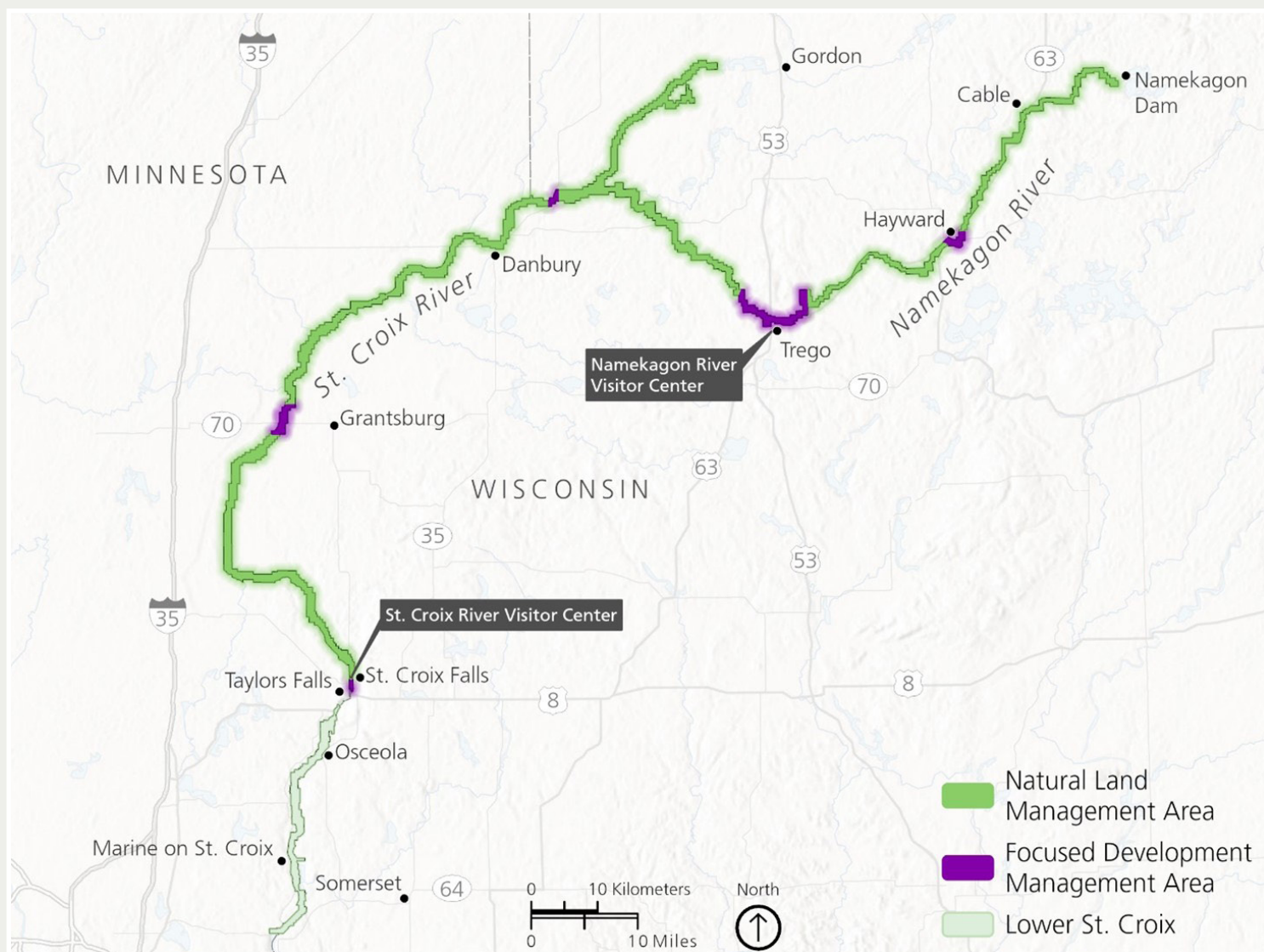
Land Management Areas: Upper St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers

- » Natural Land Management Area
 - Visitors experience a natural setting with minimal signs of development.
 - Facilities like landings and campsites blend into the landscape.
 - Abundant opportunities exist for quiet solitude and outdoor activities.
- » Focused Development Management Area
 - Thoughtfully planned development blends into the environment.
 - The area has a higher concentration of facilities than Natural Land Management Area.
 - A lively atmosphere with more people and activities exists while maintaining harmony with nature.

Land Management Areas: Lower St. Croix River (from 2001 *Cooperative Management Plan*). Note: The following areas are not included on the map below.

- » Small Town Historic Management Area
 - Visitors experience a developed area that maintains a historic character.
 - Encounters with other people are common.
 - Noise levels are moderate, and crowds are minimal.
- » Conservation Management Area
 - The shoreline is undisturbed by the few visible signs of development.
 - Recreational support facilities are small and limited in number.
 - Abundant opportunities exist for fishing and wildlife viewing.
- » Rural Residential Management Area
 - Visitors experience a feeling of being on a river in a sparsely developed landscape.
 - Visitors no longer encounter large concentrations of development or people.
 - Abundant opportunities exist for fishing and wildlife viewing.





Land Management Areas

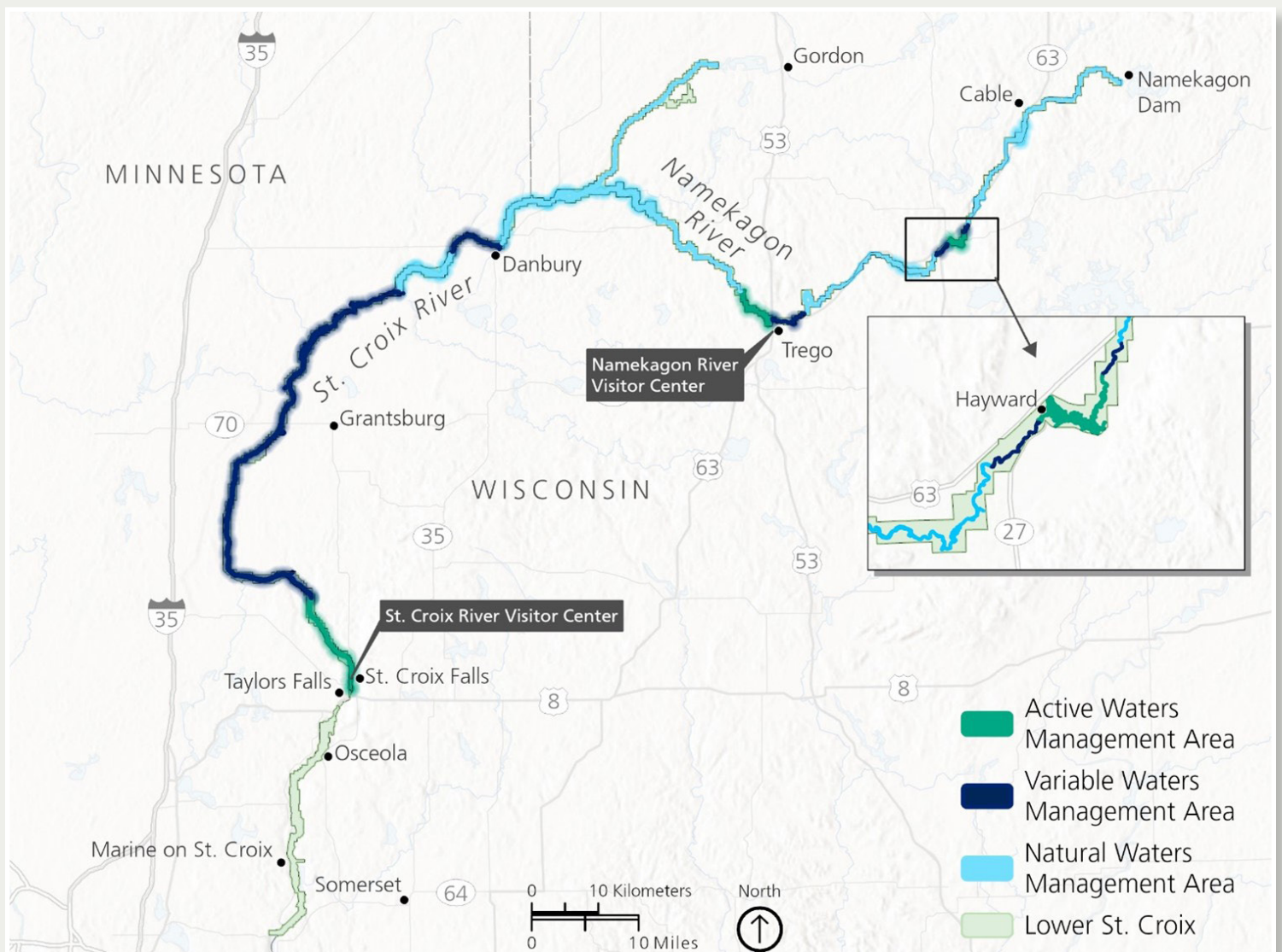
Water Management Areas: Upper St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers

- » Active Waters Management Area
 - The area has a moderate presence of people and mostly slow-moving motorized boats.
 - Visitors can expect noise from others and nearby activities—this area is not very quiet.
 - The area accommodates both motorized and nonmotorized recreational activities.
- » Variable Waters Management Area
 - Generally, few visitors are engaging in low-impact activities.
 - Activities include walking, paddling, and some slow motorboating.
 - Noise levels and solitude vary; the area is busier during peak times.
- » Natural Waters Management Area
 - Visitors enjoy peace, quiet, and solitude.
 - The area has low noise levels, with few other visitors or boats.
 - The area has great wildlife viewing and excellent fishing.

Water Management Areas: Lower St. Croix River (from 2001 *Cooperative Management Plan*). Note: The following areas are not included on the map below.

- » Active Social Recreation Management Area
 - The visitor experience varies between peak and nonpeak times.
 - During peak times, large numbers of people and watercraft are present.
 - During nonpeak times, moderate opportunities exist for solitude.
- » Moderate Recreation Management Area
 - Visitors encounter a moderate number of people and watercraft.
 - Boat speeds may be strictly controlled in certain places.
 - Noise levels are moderate. Abundant opportunities exist for fishing.
- » Natural Waters Management Area
 - There is a low number of both users and watercraft and maximum opportunities for solitude.
 - Noise levels are consistently low.
- » Quiet Waters Management Area
 - Experiences vary between peak and nonpeak times.
 - Watercraft speeds are kept low to preserve the river's tranquil quality.
 - Noise levels are consistently low.





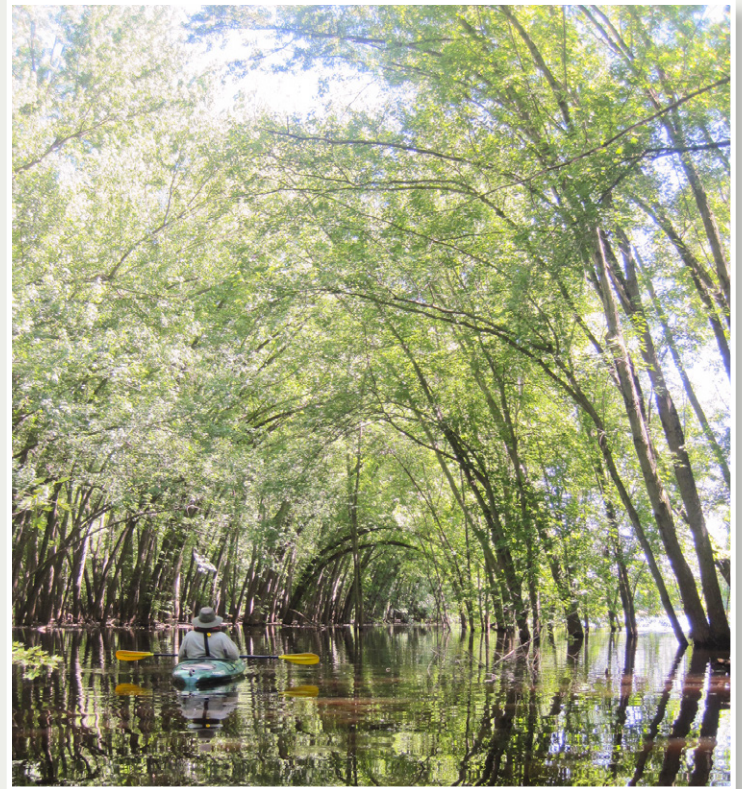
Water Management Areas

Park staff are considering two management concepts, or distinct approaches for managing the Riverway. Each offers a pathway to fulfill the Riverway's mission. The final approach may combine elements from both concepts.

Concept A

In this management concept, low-impact, river-focused recreation is the emphasis. Visitors are offered opportunities to connect with nature and the recreational experience that a pristine river provides. Visitor use management and facility management would provide a higher level of protection and enhancement for park resources, including the river's outstandingly remarkable values, by encouraging smaller group sizes, distributing and separating campsites throughout the river corridor, and changes to landings and access points.

- **Camping** – After evaluating existing campsites to identify management actions needed to meet desired conditions, the National Park Service would manage campsites to maintain fewer visual intrusions, a serene visitor experience, and a pristine riverine environment. If Riverway staff were considering adding additional campsites, they may consider removing others.
- **Landings** – The National Park Service would manage the number and design of landings and river access points to blend into the pristine river environment and natural conditions.
- **Winter use** – The National Park Service would maintain the existing opportunities for winter use activities.



Concept B

In this management concept, a range of recreation opportunities would be available, including social experiences and finding solitude in certain locations of the Riverway. The National Park Service would provide new or improved access and facilities for a diversity of river-based recreational activities while still protecting park resources, including the river's outstandingly remarkable values.

- **Camping** – After evaluating existing campsites to identify the management actions needed to meet desired conditions, the National Park Service would expand camping opportunities throughout the Riverway to enhance recreational opportunities.
- **Landings** – The National Park Service would maintain and potentially improve landings throughout the Riverway to enhance the recreational experience. Site planning may be completed for individual landings.
- **Winter use** – The National Park Service would explore additional opportunities for winter use activities (e.g., snowshoeing, cross-country skiing).

The National Park Service is exploring the following management strategies for long-term management of the Riverway based on the feedback received during the 2023 public listening sessions.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration are core to the Riverway. The following strategies have been drafted for the plan, but the National Park Service is open to further suggestions for collaboration. Let's work together to develop these further and explore new ways to build and enhance our partnerships!

- Continue to work with the Wild Rivers Conservancy of the St. Croix and Namekagon to achieve Riverway goals.
- Support River Ambassadors and other volunteers in Riverway stewardship with support from partners like the Wild Rivers Conservancy.
- Establish and strengthen relationships with local school districts for K-12 education programming and opportunities.
- Explore partnership opportunities to open additional river access points or enhance existing points on non-NPS lands.
- Continue existing partnerships with other local, state, and federal agencies and establish new partnerships where feasible.

Camping Management

- Implement a reservation system and associated fee for all NPS-owned and managed sites via Recreation.gov.
- Introduce camping “zones” for visitors to book, allowing the flexibility to choose a campsite within the zone upon arrival.



Boating Guidelines

Implementing changes to boat speeds, horsepower limits, and areas for motorized travel could decrease the risk of accidents and visitor conflicts.

- **Namekagon River** (excluding flowages): No-wake zones, horsepower limits, and/or restrictions on motorized travel
- **Upper St. Croix River** (Riverside to Gordon): No-wake zones, horsepower limits, and/or restrictions on motorized travel
- **Lower St. Croix River** (within 100 feet of shoreline from Taylors Falls to Arcola Sand Bars): No-wake zones

Crowding and Visitor Experience

- Keep current operations, but evaluate new commercial services and expand areas of use for existing commercial services.
- Explore options at boat landings to separate commercial and noncommercial use, when feasible, to improve visitor experience and safety.

Hunting and Fishing

- Coordinate with the Wisconsin and Minnesota Departments of Natural Resources to ensure a collaborative approach to fisheries and wildlife management and regulations across state and federally managed lands and waters.

Collaboration with Sovereign Tribal Nations

- Work with Tribal nations that hold reserved treaty rights to ensure that Tribal subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering rights within the Riverway are accessible and properly exercised.
- Recognize treaty rights and work with Tribal nations, individual bands, and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission to honor these rights and address mutual interests.
- Consult with representatives of affiliated Tribal nations to identify significant cultural sites and ensure accurate interpretation.

Water Quality and Hydrological Processes

- Evaluate groundwater and contaminants in the Riverway.
- Add more water-level gauges and coordinate with other agencies to provide real-time stream flow data.
- Monitor algal blooms in the Riverway and share health and safety information with visitors.
- Support shoreline restoration based on monitoring results.



Native Flora and Fauna

- Monitor the habitats and populations of keystone and vulnerable species, using this data to develop strategies such as managed relocation and assisted migration to support declining populations and climate resiliency.
- Integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge, including prescribed fire, into the management of fire-adapted habitats.
- Develop an inventory of cold-water springs and collaborate with partners on their restoration.

Mitigating Impacts from Resource Stressors

- Regularly assess and update restrictions related to invasive species like zebra mussels, purple loosestrife, and Eurasian watermilfoil.
- Provide mobile aquatic invasive species decontamination units or decontamination opportunities at river access points.
- Create a strategy to address external impacts on the Riverway, such as mining or development expansion.
- Collect and use soundscape data for soundscape management.

Historic Cabins and Cultural Resources

- Explore options to rehabilitate, interpret, and/or lease historic cabins owned by the National Park Service.
- Consult with the State Historic Preservation Office and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers on relevant projects and activities.

NPS Land Protection

- Conduct land surveys to support NPS boundary maintenance, signage, and landowner engagement.
- Continue the scenic easement monitoring program.

Facilities and Infrastructure Improvements

- Develop a sign plan to enhance visitor understanding of regulations and laws.
- Install signage at all NPS-managed campsites to indicate campsite type and river mile.
- Use buoys or other water markers to clearly communicate regulations with visitors.
- Identify priority areas for accessibility upgrades and incorporate enhanced accessibility into the new project design.

Messaging and Education for Visitors

- Update trip planning resources and increase accessibility on the park website.
- Provide times and areas where crowding might occur to support trip planning.
- Collaborate with partners and state agencies to develop clear and consistent messaging about landings, points of access, and regulations.
- Improve information on safety and best practices for visitors (including managing trash and human waste).



We Want to Hear From You!

Public engagement is an essential component of this study, and we welcome your feedback. Please consider the following questions when responding:

1. What are your thoughts about the descriptions and ideas the National Park Service has shared about the future of the Riverway?
2. Two management concepts are being proposed for how the National Park Service would manage NPS campsites, landings, trails, and facilities. What information do you think the planning team should consider when analyzing these ideas and strategies?
3. Under each management concept, the National Park Service is exploring changes to how camping is managed, including camping reservations and fees. What information do you think the planning team should consider when analyzing these ideas and strategies?

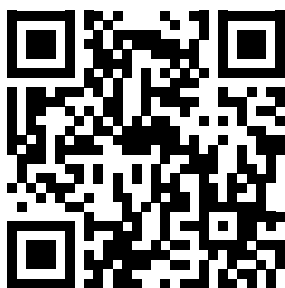
4. Under each management concept, the National Park Service is considering modifications to boating guidelines. What information do you think the planning team should consider when analyzing these ideas and strategies?
5. Based on your desired experiences at the Riverway, which of the management concepts and related strategies do you think best achieve your desired experiences and the purpose of the plan?



How to Comment

Online

Visit the project website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/sacnriverplan> or scan the QR code and click “Open for Comment” to access the public comment form and see the dates for commenting.



In-Person Meetings

Riverway staff will host four in-person meetings throughout the Riverway to present an update on the plan, gather feedback, and answer questions. Meeting dates, times, and locations are listed below, with more information at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/sacnriverplan>.

Wednesday, November 20

- **1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Department of Natural Resources Office**
810 W. Maple Street
Spooner, WI 54801
- **5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. – Holiday Inn Express**
15586 County Road B
Hayward, WI 54843

Thursday, November 21

- **1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Stillwater Public Library (Rooms A and B)**
224 3rd Street N.
Stillwater, MN 55082
- **5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. – St. Croix Falls Visitor Center**
401 N. Hamilton Street
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024

Please share this information with community members, colleagues, and families!