

Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

STRATEGIC PLAN

FY 2008 – 2012

Mission

To protect and enhance the Mississippi River for present and future generations

Core Values

These are the values that guide our work:

Stewardship. The protection of the health of the Mississippi River is paramount.

National Heritage. Our shared natural and cultural heritage defines us as a nation and must be cared for and passed on for future generations.

Learning. We continually strive to learn more about the Mississippi River and inspire others to learn and value it.

Collaboration. We recognize that our goals will not be achieved without our community partners and that together we achieve more than any organization could achieve alone.

Economic Vitality. A healthy river is essential to a healthy economy.

Volunteerism. Direct engagement with the river through volunteerism is key to building personal and community responsibility for the river's future.

Ten-Year Vision

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (the Park) is the “Mississippi River’s National Park” and a centerpiece of the community. People feel a vital connection to the river; they are proud of the Park and want to protect it. Park visitors are welcomed and guided to enjoy the Mississippi River through a well-coordinated way-finding system and educational/interpretive programs. A National Park presence is prominent throughout the river corridor and its watershed.

The National Park is a leader in providing information about and access to the Mississippi River and serves as the go-to organization regarding river resources--natural, cultural and recreational. The Park’s leadership is demonstrated through the convening of partners and stakeholders, and collaboration is the key to success. The National Park and its partners serve as a model for regional, national and international efforts to take care of the river.

The Park leads the way in helping the region and nation understand, protect and enhance one of the world’s greatest rivers.

Five-Year Strategic Goals (FY 2008 – FY 2012)

The Big Ideas

Getting People to and on the River

We will be a leader in getting people to and on the river and providing opportunities for land and water based recreation. In partnership with others, we will create a range of opportunities for people to enjoy the river, including education and cultural programs, trails, boating experiences, and more. The programs of our Mississippi River Visitor Center at the Science Museum of Minnesota will be expanded to include partner satellite locations throughout the Park corridor. A new, comprehensive marketing plan will heighten visibility and position the river as a source of enjoyment, recreation and education for people who live in the region and beyond.

An Accelerated Focus on Water Quality

Rapid urban growth upstream of the metropolitan area has significantly increased threats to aquatic and human health from untreated or poorly treated sewage. We are uniquely positioned to lead work to improve water quality from a watershed perspective. In the

next five years, we will: (1) lead action to reduce fecal coliform bacteria contamination of the Mississippi River, (2) ensure that future development upstream of the metropolitan area does not limit the river's water quality, and (3) lead action to restore aquatic habitat downstream of Lock and Dam 1 (Ford Dam). We will work in partnership with others in the watershed to educate area residents and municipal officials and create major initiatives that will have a measurable, favorable impact on water quality.

Guiding Appropriate Land Use Decisions

We will be proactive on development issues affecting the river corridor. Consistent with the original intent of our enabling legislation and the Comprehensive Management Plan, we will work to ensure that land use decisions for development proposals will be based on a balance between resource protection, visitor use, and development needs in the corridor. We will work to create an appropriate framework for design and development in the corridor. We will become a source of information and recognized authority on development on the river. In partnership with the Mississippi River Fund, we will obtain federal funding for our grant program, as envisioned in the Park's enabling legislation.

Creating a Shared Understanding of our Place in American Culture

Much of the history and culture of the United States centers on the Mississippi River within the Park, and the river's history and historic sites are among the primary reasons Congress established this Park. These sites are pivotal to the stories of Dakota people, early explorers and settlers, U.S. military history, the development of agriculture in the river's vast watershed, and more. If our community understands and appreciates the significance of these historic places in their own lives and in our society, they will want to celebrate, protect and enhance them. Without that appreciation, these important sites will be threatened by inappropriate development and risk being lost.

Creating the Global Great Rivers Partnership

The National Park Service and the Mississippi River Fund will collaborate with the University of Minnesota, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the National Science Foundation, other federal agencies, and other organizations to establish a Global Great Rivers Partnership. The Partnership will model how multiple stakeholders can work together to manage the Mississippi River based on the best science and economic models that recognize the value of natural and cultural resources. The Partnership will utilize the expertise of the partners to share its knowledge and apply that model to other major rivers in the world, particularly those in densely populated areas.

Goals and Strategies

NATURAL RESOURCES: Preserve, protect and enhance the globally significant natural resources of the Park, including reintroduction of federally endangered species, protection of water quality vital to aquatic and human health, and assessing the impacts of climate change.

Why this goal is important:

Located at the crossroads of three continental biomes (prairie, boreal forest, hardwood forest), the Park contains many diverse plant and animal species. For some species, improved conditions make this an opportune time to reintroduce species lost due to prior human changes to the river environment. For other species, new risks are posed by changes in water quality and climate.

Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, mussels are the key indicator of river health. While there were once many species of mussels in the Mississippi River in this area, they have been virtually wiped out by pollution. With improvements in water quality in recent decades, mussels have begun to reappear in the river and one species--the federally endangered Higgins eye pearly mussel--has been successfully reintroduced. We are poised to introduce more endangered mussels, and to take other actions to restore aquatic habitat in downstream portions of the Park.

Rapid urban growth upstream of the metropolitan area has significantly increased threats to aquatic and human health from untreated or poorly treated sewage, poor shoreline protection and unregulated development. In addition, the effects of climate change on the plant and animal species in the park are yet to be determined. To accomplish all these tasks, we must increase public understanding of the unique values of natural resources in this corridor, and increase public understanding of new and emerging threats.

Strategies:

1. Lead efforts to restore aquatic habitat downstream of Lock and Dam # 1 (Ford Dam) and reintroduce endangered species.
2. Lead action to reduce fecal coliform bacteria contamination of the Mississippi River, *particularly* in the areas north of Minneapolis.
3. Ensure future development upstream of the Twin Cities (outside the Metropolitan Council's jurisdiction) does not further impair the river's water quality.
4. Complete inventories of flora and fauna within the Park and monitor the impact of climate change, habitat restoration work and other factors.

5. Designate three new National Natural Landmarks within the Park to increase public understanding of the unique nature of natural resources in the corridor.
6. Work with private landowners to encourage appropriate design and development in the corridor.

CULTURAL RESOURCES: Preserve, protect and enhance the area's cultural resources through greater public understanding of the significant role the Park's historic sites have played in American history and culture.

Why this goal is important:

The Park contains numerous nationally significant cultural resources, including: the focal point of key interactions between European settlers and American Indians (Historic Fort Snelling), the heart of the development of flour and lumber milling (St. Anthony Falls), the beginnings of the farmers cooperative movement in the United States (Head House and Sack House in St. Paul) and numerous other nationally significant but less known cultural sites. Three sites hold National Landmark designation: the Pillsbury A-Mill, Washburn-Crosby A-Mill, and Historic Fort Snelling.

As the primary agency charged with preserving, protecting and enhancing cultural resources in the corridor, we have identified several immediate opportunities where the Park can take a leadership role. Also, in view of the anticipated increase in population and development in the metropolitan area, we must work in partnership with others to systematically and thoroughly identify and prioritize the key cultural resources for future protection. We must enhance public understanding of the importance of these resources in order to enrich their lives and engage them as partners and advocates for adaptive re-use and preservation efforts.

Strategies:

1. Lead efforts to address two critical elements of Historic Fort Snelling:
 - (a) Protect and interpret Coldwater Spring, a source of water for Fort Snelling, and the surrounding land, which is federally owned, and
 - (b) Restore and adaptively reuse the Upper Post, which includes 28 buildings on property currently owned by the State of Minnesota.
2. Actively participate in efforts to adaptively reuse the Pillsbury A-Mill and Washburn Crosby complex.
3. Complete a comprehensive inventory of cultural resources within the Park and a preservation plan that identifies at-risk resources and prioritizes opportunities for future protection.

4. Involve American Indian people and their representatives in the Park's cultural resource management and interpretive planning.
5. Increase public engagement and understanding about the Park's nationally significant cultural resources.

LAND USE: Guide appropriate land use decisions that are sensitive to the river's natural, scenic and cultural values in the context of rapid urban growth and the increasing land values.

Why this goal is important:

With a rapidly growing metropolitan population and interest in development on the Mississippi riverfront, there is tremendous development pressure along the river. This threatens natural features, scenic landscapes, and important historic resources. The Park was created in part to address these development pressures and minimize negative impacts. The Park's local government grant program remains unfunded and Minnesota's Critical Area program has not been fully implemented. As local governments become more focused on the value of riverfront property, there is an opportunity to engage them in solutions that balance development with protection of natural and scenic resources and the desire to provide access to the river for public use and enjoyment.

Strategies:

1. Increase local government support for effective land use that preserves, protects and enhances the natural, cultural and scenic resources in the Park while providing for appropriate development. Serve as an information source on development issues in the corridor
2. Lead an effort to create an effective regulatory framework to guide development in the corridor consistent with the goal of protecting natural, cultural and scenic resources and providing land for public use and enjoyment.
3. Work with the Mississippi River Fund to obtain funding for the authorized local government grant program, which provides incentives to local governments to protect natural, cultural and scenic resources.

EDUCATION, INTERPRETATION AND VISITOR SERVICES: Enhance understanding and appreciation of the river through expanded education and interpretive programs for residents, visitors, students, and key decision makers.

Why this goal is important:

The Park has created a range of education and interpretive programs to develop public understanding and appreciation of the Park's resources and the larger Mississippi River system. The Park's efforts complement strong partner-run facilities and programs that provide many opportunities for the public to explore in depth the individual sites and stories within the Park. The river is a rich source of information and compelling stories about its natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources as well as the river's role as an economic powerhouse for the region. Despite the richness of the existing education and interpretive programming in the Park corridor, however, the river itself as a subject and venue for programming is underdeveloped. Many audiences, especially new immigrant groups, have yet to develop meaningful relationships to the river and its special places and stories. The Park is in a unique position to lead and coordinate partner efforts, identify and help fill in programming gaps, and help communicate a comprehensive story to existing and new audiences.

Strategies:

1. Provide direct experiences on and near the river with an emphasis on connecting individuals and communities to the Park.
2. Identify and develop satellite NPS visitor services at key partner locations throughout the Park.
3. Evaluate and expand the Park's K-12 education programs (e.g. "Big River Journey") to reach more students with classroom, on-the-water and riverbank experiences.
4. Involve more volunteers and interns in the Park to (a) participate in the research/learning that takes place in the Park, (b) enhance staff capacity to offer education and interpretive programs, and (c) enhance their own knowledge of the Park.
5. Create and deliver interpretive programs to support the Park's natural and cultural resources goals.
6. Support the Park's goal of effective land use in the corridor by developing information and education targeted to individuals, government officials, developers and others involved in land use.
7. Develop a comprehensive interpretive plan for the Park in coordination with partner interpretive planning.

RECREATION: Provide for increased recreation and enjoyment of the Park balanced with the need for resource protection.

Why this goal is important:

The Mississippi River is an increasing part of how our community thinks about and markets itself as a great place to live, work and visit. As our population grows, we will see increased demand for recreational and cultural opportunities. The Park, acting alone and in partnership with others, can address these needs by drawing more people to the river and providing more recreational opportunities and ways to experience the river. As the lead federal agency focused on preserving, protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of the river, we are able to balance the desire for recreation and enjoyment with the need for resource preservation.

Strategies:

1. Identify and develop locations for Ranger and volunteer-staffed recreational activities at our own sites, key partner parks and other visible and accessible locations.
2. Lead efforts to complete and mark a 72-mile recreational trail and open space system on both sides of the river and connect communities to the river for land and water recreation.
3. Identify and encourage the development of environmentally sustainable recreational infrastructure (e.g. trail heads, restrooms, boat launches) throughout the corridor to help create high quality, safe, year-round experiences both on land and water.
4. Help create and inspire outfitters to facilitate a range of recreational activities such as canoeing, biking, skiing, and fishing.
5. Develop a plan for recreational use of the river balancing use conflicts and resource protection.

GLOBAL GREAT RIVERS PARTNERSHIP: Lead efforts to create an international partnership dedicated to the preservation and management of the Mississippi River and other great rivers throughout the world.

Why this goal is important:

The National Park Service and the Mississippi River Fund will collaborate with the University of Minnesota, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the National Science Foundation, other federal agencies, and other organizations to establish a Global Great Rivers Partnership. The Partnership will model how multiple stakeholders can work together to manage the Mississippi River based on the best science and economic models that recognize the value of natural and cultural resources. The Partnership will utilize the expertise of the partners to share its knowledge and apply that model to other major rivers in the world, particularly those in densely populated areas.

Strategies:

1. Collaborate with the University of Minnesota and the National Science Foundation, and consult with other agencies and organizations to identify the scope of the partnership and a plan for establishing it.
2. Identify other partners and related institutions worldwide and invite potential collaborators in its formative stages.
3. Identify staff and facility needs.
4. Research and identify potential governmental and non-governmental funding sources.
5. Provide leadership for the proposed federal Mississippi River Special Resource Study (HR 2482.)

Five-Year Organizational Priorities

MISSISSIPPI RIVER FUND: Maximize the relationship between the Mississippi River Fund and the Park.

Why this priority is important:

The Mississippi River Fund was established by the National Park Foundation in 2002 to support the National Park Service's efforts on the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River Fund has the capacity to provide significant financial resources for the Park, providing a margin of excellence not otherwise attainable. Beyond financial resources, the Mississippi River Fund's strategic plan identifies numerous ways that it can be of assistance to the Park in areas such as community connections, advocacy, and public relations. The Park views the Mississippi River Fund as its closest partner and ally and will maximize this vitally important relationship.

Strategies:

1. Recognize the Mississippi River Fund as the primary charitable partner of the Park.
2. Position the Mississippi River Fund as the means by which individuals and organizations can support the Park's mission and programs. Provide recognition in publications and at program centers.
3. Work closely and regularly with the Mississippi River Fund to develop initiatives and projects that help fulfill the Park's mission and go beyond the yearly support of operations.
4. Work in partnership with the Fund to define and execute priorities for capacity building efforts (e.g. marketing, volunteer program development, etc.)

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: Provide for adequate staff, systems and facilities to implement the objectives and goals of this plan.

Why this priority is important:

In recent years, the Park has been challenged by resource limitations that have taken their toll on the Park's ability to be as proactive as it would like. In order to be successful with this plan, the Park must align the organization with the plan's goals and strategies and carefully allocate both existing and new resources. In many cases, the plan will require the Park's staff to perform new work and to work differently on current tasks. We are confident of our ability to do this transformative work given the dedication of the Park's staff and the participation of many staff in the creation of this plan.

Strategies:

1. Align the Park's staffing, organizational structure and systems with the goals and strategies in this plan and ensure that all parts of the organization operate as a cohesive whole.
2. Seek new resources to support this plan through the Mississippi River Fund, the Park's partners and the federal budget process.
3. Significantly increase capacity to recruit, train, manage and reward volunteers and provide them with a broader range of volunteer opportunities. Instill partnership skills in all staff.
4. Enhance our capacity to work more proactively with our partners.
5. Identify and implement new ways of using technology, including the website, to better serve the Park's visitors, students, government officials, and others.
6. Develop a Facilities Master Plan to provide for the Park's key education, visitor services, recreation and administrative facilities.

BRANDING, VISIBILITY AND MARKETING: Become widely recognized as the primary organization that preserves and enhances the river's nationally significant resources and that engages residents and visitors with the Mississippi River in partnership with others.

Why this priority is important:

Many metropolitan area residents have little or no knowledge that they live, work and commute within a unit of the National Park System. The federal role is complicated and the Park itself has no obvious boundaries. Creating a brand and visual identity for the Park helps citizens understand and appreciate this national treasure and the National Park Service's role in helping to protect it. By increasing awareness in the community, the Park can encourage river stewardship and increase National Park Service influence on issues surrounding water quality and land use.

Strategies:

1. Create a comprehensive, multi-year marketing plan to inform residents and visitors about river experiences and attract them to the river.
2. Create a new name and identity for the Park.
3. Implement a strong program to increase the Park's visibility, including the establishment of icons and special places throughout the Park.

4. Become recognized by local, state and federal organizations as the organization that preserves and enhances the Mississippi River's nationally significant resources.
5. Become recognized as a primary source for information on ways the general public can experience and enjoy the Mississippi River.