



# Foundation Document Overview

## Missouri National Recreational River

### Nebraska and South Dakota



#### Contact Information

For more information about the *Missouri National Recreational River Foundation Document*, contact: [mnrr\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:mnrr_superintendent@nps.gov) or (605) 665-0209 or write to: Superintendent, 508 East 2nd Street, Yankton, SD 57078

## Purpose



*The purpose of the MISSOURI NATIONAL RECREATIONAL RIVER is to collaboratively work with multiple stakeholders to preserve and protect the natural, cultural, and recreational values of the last unchannelized and unimpounded segments of North America's longest river along the South Dakota and Nebraska border.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Missouri National Recreational River resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

1. The Missouri National Recreational River is one of the more prominent places in the United States where two contrasting geologic landscapes come together. The ancient sea sediments of the Cretaceous period, such as the chalkstone bluffs, and the glacially altered terrain of the Pleistocene, are clearly visible.
2. The Missouri National Recreational River protects one of the last remnant examples in the nation of a dynamic channel habitat in a large river system. It contains a mosaic of sandbars, backwaters, islands, side channels, and riparian cottonwood forests that were historically found throughout the Missouri River corridor.
3. The Missouri National Recreational River serves as a crossroads for a long and rich human history, past and present, from early American Indians to European American exploration, western steamboat commerce, and expansion to the West. The number and variety of prehistoric and historic resources, including prehistoric villages, steamboat wrecks, and Fort Randall, attest to the long history of human use.
4. The Missouri National Recreational River provides a multitude of recreational opportunities that are regionally significant and are enriched by the variety of access points, land-based trails, and a national water trail. The ever-changing river provides visitors the unique opportunity to frequently re-explore the park.
5. The Missouri National Recreational River provides rare and exceptional vistas of expansive river valleys, impressive geologic features, and a wide, braided river channel with sandbars, snags, and islands.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- Cultural Values
- Ecological Values
- Fish and Wildlife Values
- Free-Flowing Condition and Water Quality Values
- Geological Values
- Recreational Values
- Scenic Values



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Ecosystem/Free-Flowing River. Whereas the Missouri River was once a wild, meandering force for change cutting through the heart of America, the Missouri National Recreational River now protects rare stretches of this national treasure, which creates a landscape for healthy biodiversity, for the uplifting and inspiration of humanity, and to provide unique opportunities for the study of river dynamics and the resulting diverse habitats.
- Recreation. A network of interdependent partners provides a broad backdrop for a diversity of nature- and water-based activities that promote opportunities for visitors to escape daily life and engage in solitary, contemplative, and/or social recreational experiences at a variety of skill levels that will inspire, refresh, and invigorate them.
- Fish and Wildlife. The diversity of both abundant and rare species found at Missouri National Recreational River reflects the river's complex ecosystems. These ecosystems are important not only for their biologic survival and ours, but also provide opportunities for research, recreation, appreciation, and lifelong learning not available elsewhere.
- Culture. In addition to its rich, multilayered 10,000 years of human history, the Missouri National Recreational River region is a living example of the ways in which people continue to struggle to balance the legal and cultural rights of individuals and communities with their impacts on the river's natural processes. It also provides us with a place of reflection to consider where we ourselves stand in this delicate balance.

# Description

The Missouri River begins at the juncture of three tributaries at Three Forks, Montana, and flows southeast for 2,341 miles before joining the Mississippi River a few miles north of St. Louis, Missouri. It is the longest river in North America. The river is harnessed in its upper and middle reaches by a series of six multipurpose dams and reservoirs, and in its lower reaches it has been channelized for navigational purposes.

The Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) consists of two units separated by Lewis and Clark Lake, a reservoir managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with shoreline recreational facilities owned and operated by the States of South Dakota and Nebraska. The 39-Mile District runs downriver from just below Fort Randall Dam near Pickstown to Running Water, South Dakota, above the reservoir. It also includes the last 8 miles of Verdigris Creek (also spelled Verdigris) and the lower 20 miles of the Niobrara River where they join, then flow into the main stem of the Missouri River. The 59-Mile District extends from just below Gavins Point Dam near Yankton, South Dakota, downriver to Ponca State Park in Nebraska. The Missouri National Recreational River is managed by the National Park Service in cooperation with other partnership agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. While the authorized boundary for the Missouri National Recreational River includes 69,124 total acres on both the Nebraska and South Dakota sides of the river, the National Park Service currently owns relatively little land along the river (1,101 acres). Thus, management of this nationally significant resource is very much a collaborative partnership effort.

While influenced by controlled releases from Fort Randall and Gavins Point Dams, the Missouri National Recreational River remains in a generally free-flowing condition. The 59-Mile District contains a wide, meandering channel, shifting sandbars, secondary channels, and some of the last remaining forested floodplain and floodplain wetland habitats on the Missouri River. The 39-Mile District is influenced by controlled releases from Fort Randall Dam for power generation known as “power peaking.” Forested chalkstone bluffs adjacent to gently rolling to flat agricultural bottomland mark both the Nebraska and South Dakota shorelines.

Visitors to the Missouri National Recreational River encounter many of the wide variety of recreational activities and heritage experiences that are available between Ponca State Park and Fort Randall Dam. From one end to the other, there are almost 50 different locations on or along the river that provide opportunities for recreation and interpretation, from popular, heavily used venues, such as Riverside Park in Yankton, South Dakota, to those less well known, such as the Old Baldy overlook in Boyd County, Nebraska. In total, MNRR partners

operate seven different visitor or welcome centers along or near the river. These partners and facilities include the Missouri National Recreational River Resource and Education Center, in Ponca State Park, which is itself managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; the Yankton Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center; the nonprofit Corps of Discovery Welcome Center; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Lewis and Clark Visitor Center near Gavins Point Dam; the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks’ Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area; the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Niobrara State Park; and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Fort Randall Dam Visitor Center.

