



St. Croix River, Seven Islands, mile 95.6
©DAN ROTH

Corridors of Convergence

Habitat transitions enrich life’s diversity

Solitude in natural settings—rare so close to a major metropolitan area—can still be found throughout St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The St. Croix and Namekagon rivers create a corridor where all manner of things—past, present, and timeless—converge. Scenery shifts as geological zones shift, as prairie and forests meet and mix, and as rivers and streams water the life-rich riparian zones lining their banks. Riverway waters are healthy, still home to all their historically recorded mussel species. Because its many values are so important to our quality of life, this Riverway was among the first protected by Congress under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968.

Recreation gradually shifts as the character of the rivers changes. Human-powered canoeing is popular on the Namekagon and northernmost St. Croix, but motorized boating, houseboating and sailboating are popular on down the Riverway. Traditional lands of the Ojibwe meet the lands of the Dakota (Sioux) here, and now Indian ways—hunting, fishing, river travel, or just enjoying the natural world—have become popular forms of outdoor recreation throughout these corridors of convergence.



Beaver dam on the St. Croix
©GARY ALAN NELSON



Quiet backwaters
©GREG RYAN - SALLY BEYER



Sunset on snowfall
©GARY ALAN NELSON

Worthy Waters

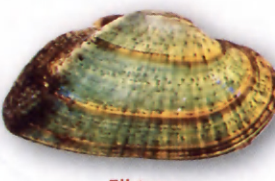
All 40 native mussel species are still present

These Riverway waters are remarkably healthy compared to others in this region. This adds immeasurably to the Riverway’s attraction for people who love the outdoors and makes it imperative that we protect the Riverway. The nation’s most threatened class of organisms is freshwater mussels. The federal government lists 23 percent of the nation’s 304 native mussel species as threatened or endangered. Problems facing these bi-valve mollusks are dredging, dams, fish-kills, sediment run-off from development, and invasive (non-native) species like the zebra mussel. The Riverway is still home to all 40 of its

recorded native mussels. This attests to healthy waters—and to the lack of major development along the rivers—despite how many mussels are in trouble. The Higgins eye and winged mapleleaf mussels are endangered, and several others are listed as species of concern by states. Mussels can’t escape problems—many move only a few feet in a lifetime. They lie on waterway bottoms, filtering water for food organisms. Growing pressure for development, especially south of the St. Croix Falls hydroelectric dam, is a grave threat to the future of the Riverway’s unusually intact assemblage of mussels.



Winged maple leaf



Elktoe



Butterfly



Creek heelsplitter
©MUSSELS COURTESY ILLINOIS NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY

Past and Present

People and the Rivers

People have adapted to the character of this river country for thousands of years. Native people invented the birch bark canoe, a wonder of environmental adaptation. They gathered wild rice, fished, hunted, and made maple sugar for local needs.

But starting 330 years ago, we began to adapt the river to us. Beaver were depleted. Fish and other wildlife were exploited for food and recreation. Dams changed rivers and fisheries. Forests built Midwest cities. Then, 50 years ago, a new ethic of land and water conservation came into play.

10,000 Years Ago Ojibwe and Dakota

The Riverway’s rock canyons were carved at the end of the ice ages as huge glacial lakes’ natural dams broke, and torrential floodwaters burst downstream.

The Dakota (Sioux) and the Ojibwe (Chippewa) peoples called this land home. Both cultures moved west with the passage of time. The Ojibwe still live in the

valley today, and the Dakota live nearby.



Berry season trip
WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY #41463



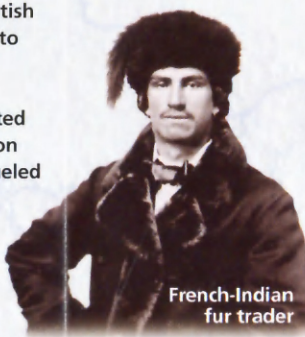
Gathering wild rice
WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY #34567

The Fur Trade

Indians trapped beaver and other animals for trade with French and later English fur companies. The fur trade was criss-crossing the continent while British colonies still clung to the Atlantic coast.

With beaver depleted and the high-fashion beaver hats that fueled

the fur trade replaced by silk hats, Americans next looked to the vast forests in this region for income.



French-Indian fur trader
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Logging’s Heyday

Try to imagine these rivers choked with vast quantities of logs. Remnants of dams that today’s paddlers portage around once backed up water for seasonal log drives. Sometimes huge logjams required dynamite to unjam them. A logjam in the narrow Dalles area in 1883 lasted 57 days. But the

forests that seemed endless were soon cut over, and methods of logging changed. The St. Croix saw its last log drive in 1914.



Logjam on the St. Croix River, 1886
WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY #2364

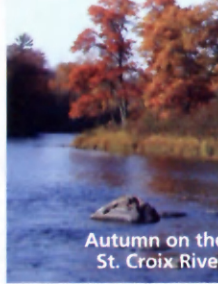
From Exploitation to Recreation and Preservation

Post-World War II prosperity created a rush for natural resources. Returning soldiers and their families desired new homes and cars. Prosperity and more free time sparked a rush to build new cabins along the river.

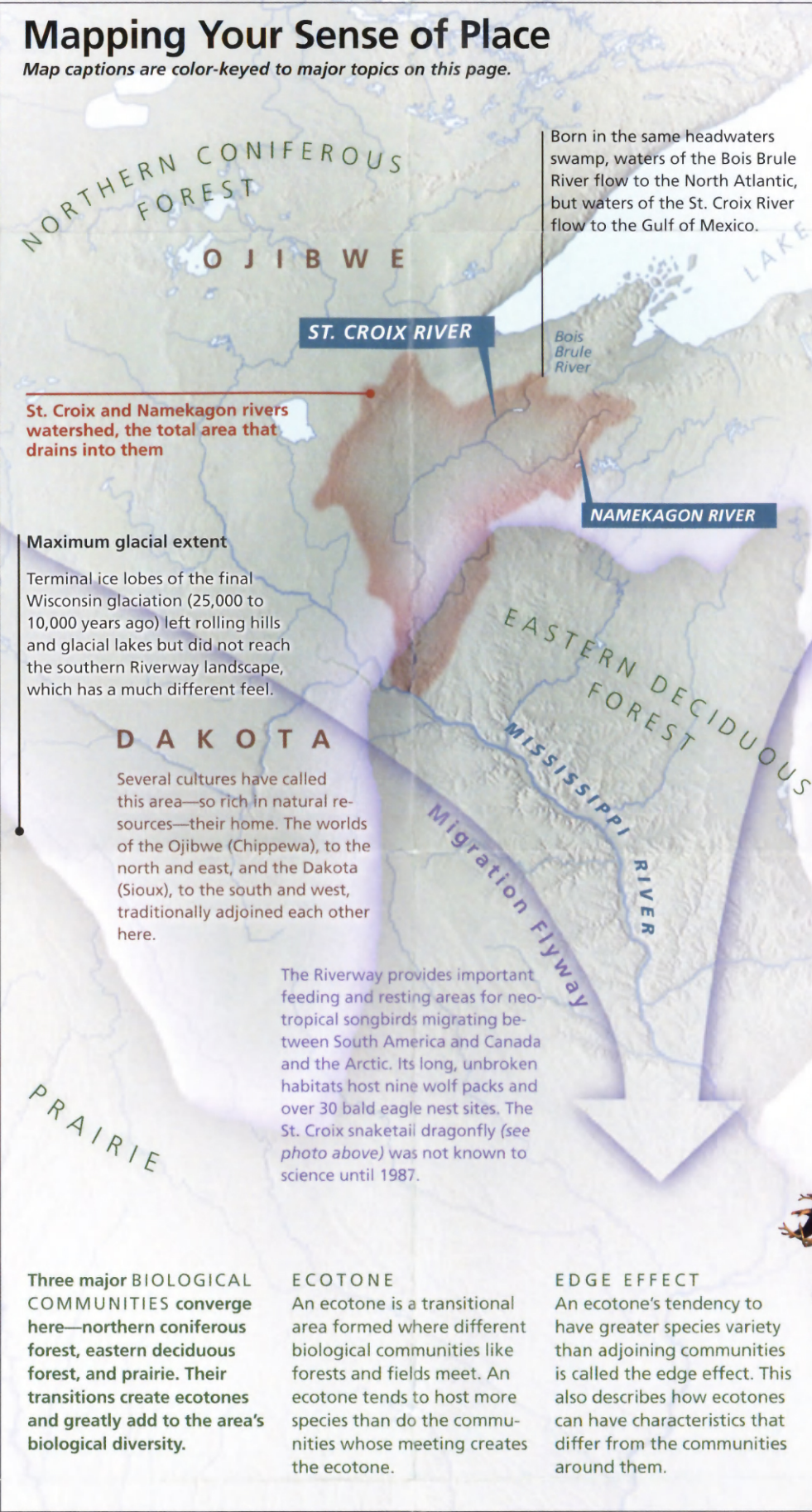
Sewage from the cabins and existing towns began to degrade the St. Croix. Nationally, factory wastes combined with sewage left many American rivers unfit for recreation.

As polluted rivers became more common, clean and free-flowing rivers became a national ideal. In 1968 the Wild and Scenic Rivers

Act became law, and it created a national system for protecting rivers. This was one of the first riverways so designated.



Autumn on the St. Croix River
NPS



River Recreations

Shoreline primitive camping par excellence

Creating the Riverway in 1968 signaled a shift in thinking about the rivers. For 330 years they had been harvested, exploited, and manipulated. Now we treasure the Riverway more for scenic beauty, recreation, and wildlife habitat. The rivers are so diverse that they offer a great variety of recreation: canoeing, inner-tubing, fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and primitive shoreline camping (see map on the other side). Your challenge may be to define what type of recreation you seek. Once you do that the park staff, website, and river-section leaflets can point you to the spots best suited to your needs.

Trout fishing is popular on the Namekagon River and the northernmost St. Croix River. The rivers’ environs here are generally more wild than those below St. Croix Falls, but you can find solitude throughout the Riverway.

Below St. Croix Falls, the Riverway’s setting mixes forested areas with suburban landscapes. There it offers motorboating, houseboating, sailboating, and water skiing opportunities. State parks along the rivers in Minnesota and Wisconsin offer developed campgrounds, picnic areas, beaches, and hiking trails.



Fly fishing near camp
NPS



Kayaking in rapids
NPS



Birding on a nature trail
©DIANE L. TESSAGLIA-HYMES/CSLO

A Wealth of Habitats

Unfragmented forests are crucial for wildlife

The Riverway’s protected north-south corridor forms a refuge of nearly unbroken shoreline wildlife habitats. Glacial actions created diverse landscapes of rolling hills and glacial lakes and diverse river bottoms. (See glacial maximum on map at left.) Carved by glaciers, exposed bedrock where the river flows fast is great habitat for darters, stoneflies, and pistolgrip mussels. Where glaciers deposited 100-foot-thick sediments, the river is slow and deep—perfect for paddlefish and common map turtles. The last glaciers did not

bulldoze areas in the south. Add to this landscape streamside areas, with seasonal floods and ground waters, and the result is diverse plant and animal habitats. The Riverway’s open waters, marshlands, and wooded bottom lands and bluffs offer excellent birding. Great blue heron rookeries are vital nesting sites. A few kingfishers dive for fish here all year. Neotropical songbirds* like redstarts, other warblers, and wrens (below) migrate through, often at night, and many nest here in summer.



Exploring the Riverway

This map shows the entire Riverway. You will need river section maps for facilities, services, and navigation details not shown on this map. Find them at visitor centers shown below and other information sites or get them at www.nps.gov/sacn. Click on “Plan Your Visit” then “Brochures.”

Boaters and Paddlers All watercraft must be equipped with a USCG-approved lifesaving device for each person aboard. Children under age 13 must wear a properly fitted life jacket if vessels—including canoes, kayaks, and inner tubes—are moving. The National Park Service recommends that non-swimmers always wear a life jacket. Everyone should wear one in high-water conditions or when running rapids. Don’t overload your craft. If you capsize in fast water, stay upstream of your vessel. Don’t get caught between a swamped canoe and a rock or log! Boaters, watch your wake near canoes and your prop near swimmers.

Swimmers and Inner Tube Floaters Do not swim alone, at night, or in unfamiliar places. Jumping or diving from bridges is illegal. Swimming between Highway 8 and the public boat launch at Wisconsin Interstate Park is prohibited. Entering the river from shore in Minnesota Interstate Park to swim is prohibited. Watch children closely near water. There are no lifeguards or supervised beaches on the Riverway. Wear a lifesaving device when on an inner tube, float with others, and navigate rapids feet first.

Hikers Use caution at the Riverway’s high cliffs, and watch your footing near cliff edges. Parents, watch children closely near cliffs.

Fishing A fishing license is required on the Riverway; state regulations apply. On the Namekagon and northernmost 25 miles of the St. Croix, a Wisconsin license is required. Where the St. Croix River is the boundary between Minnesota and Wisconsin, a license from ei-

ther state is valid. State conservation officers and park rangers enforce regulations.

Fires and Firewood Build fires only in steel fire rings or grills. Dead and down wood may be collected for firewood except from islands. *Possession of firewood that originates over 50 miles from the Riverway is prohibited.* Fires must be out and ashes cold before you leave the area.

Lodging and Supplies Nearby communities offer lodging and supplies. Commercial operators offer canoe, kayak, and inner tube rentals. Fishing guide services exist for the Riverway. Check the Riverway website at right.

Facilities The St. Croix River Visitor Center and headquarters building in St. Croix Falls, Wis., are open year round. The Namekagon River Visitor Center at Trego, Wis., is open in summer. The Marshland Center,

on Highway 70 on the Minnesota side of the river, is open for group programs by reservation. There are several picnic areas on the Riverway. Earl Park Landing on the Namekagon near Trego and Osceola Landing near Osceola, Wis., on the St. Croix are the largest areas.

Fees There are no use fees for federally owned land or facilities. State parks charge entrance and camp fees. You may buy daily or annual state parks permits.

Private Property Private properties exist along the rivers. Respect landowners rights; do not disturb them.

Cultural and Natural Features Disturbing features like rock formations, Indian burial mounds, or remnants of historic structures is illegal. Picking wildflowers or picking up artifacts is prohibited. Do not disturb freshwater mussels or their empty shells. Gathering fruits, nuts, or plants for commercial purposes is illegal.

Special Water Use Regulations Special “Slow speed” and “Slow—No Wake” zones exist for boaters on the St. Croix River between the Excel hydroelectric dam and the Mississippi River. Personal watercraft, like Jet Skis, are prohibited north of Stillwater, Minn. A checkpoint at mile 28.5, the Soo Line High Bridge, prohibits upstream travel, to control spread of zebra mussels. In some zones water skiing is prohibited after noon on weekends and holidays from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend. Complete regulations are available at marinas and state parks. Regulations are posted on bulletin boards at Riverway access points.

Lyme Disease Deer ticks are prevalent and can carry Lyme disease. Check yourself daily for ticks. Take precautions and know the symptoms of infection.

More Information St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
401 North Hamilton Street
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024
715-483-2274
www.nps.gov/sacn

The National Park Service manages 227 miles of the Riverway. The National Park System includes over 390 park areas. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America’s communities visit www.nps.gov.

