

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foundation Document Overview

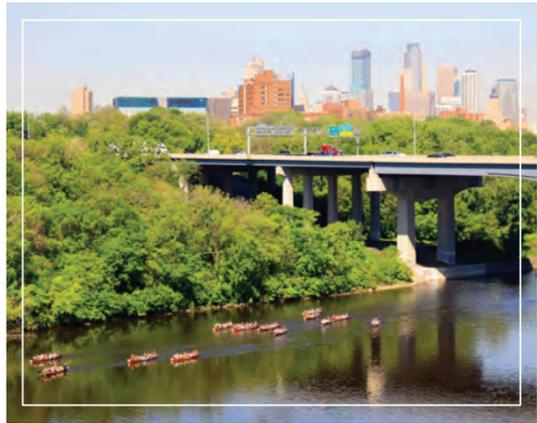
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Missouri



Contact Information
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Purpose



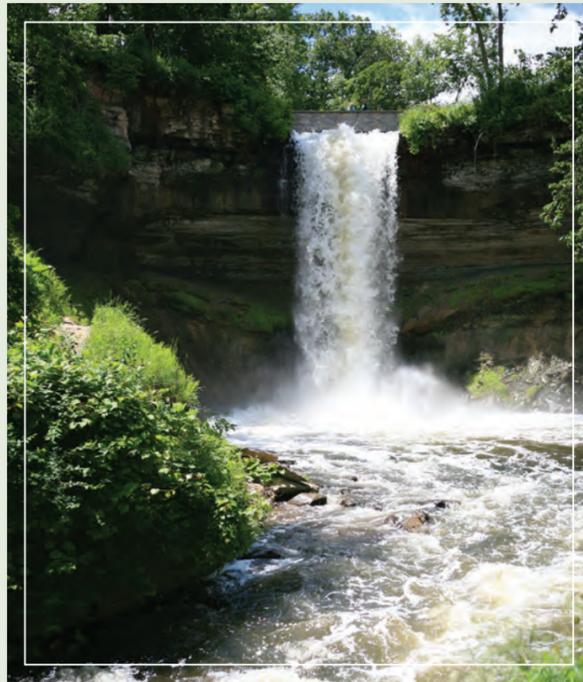
The purpose of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is to promote the protection, preservation, enhancement, and enjoyment of the nationally significant resources and values of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area through cooperative federal, state, and local comprehensive planning, management, and coordination.



Significance

Significance statements express why Mississippi National River and Recreation Area 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.

- The Mississippi River.
- Unique Character.
- St. Anthony Falls.
- Historical and Cultural Sites and Stories.
- Mississippi River Flyway.
- Scenic and Recreational Resources and Opportunities.
- Economic Resources.
- Paleontology.



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 and historic sites that owe their national significance to their presence along the Mississippi River.
- Economic resources supported by the Mississippi River in the national river and recreation area that are integral to the nation's economy.
- Collaborative relationships with governments, private sector organizations, nonprofits, schools, and individuals that help the park to achieve its purpose.
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems that provide for a rich and diverse assemblage of fish, mussels, macro-invertebrates, and other species, as well as the opportunity for scientific study.
- Healthy terrestrial ecosystems that provide for a rich and diverse assemblage of plants and animals, as well as the opportunity for scientific study.
- Birds that rely on the Mississippi River Flyway in the national river and recreation area to provide nesting, resting, and feeding habitat.
- Scenic views that allow people to experience the distinctive landscapes of the national river and recreation area.
- Outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences that connect visitors with the river and its natural places, its cultural and historic sites, and its scenic vistas.
- The presence of bluffs, caves, waterfalls, and fossil beds that demonstrate the unique geologic character of the Mississippi River in the national river and recreation area.
- Clean water that supports human use of the Mississippi River and vibrant ecosystems in the national river and recreation area.



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.

Entire River

The Mississippi is recognized globally as one of the world's great rivers. Within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area are landscapes, stories and resources that represent those of the entire river and that have awed and inspired people for centuries.

Geology

Powerful geologic forces over vast timeframes gave shape to the Mississippi in the national river and recreation area, providing for the distinctive character and geography of the Twin Cities area.

Cultures

The stories of human life along the Mississippi River have unfolded over 12,000 years and are intimately connected to the resources provided by the river. People of different cultures have interacted with each other—sometimes cooperatively, sometimes in conflict—as a result of common relationships to the river and its resources.

Economy

The Mississippi's economic value is broad, and its influence extends far from its shoreline. This economic value includes hydropower, navigation, scenery, recreation, natural resources, cultural resources, and municipal water supply. Economic activity has shaped the river historically and continues to do so today.

Ecology

The Mississippi River supports diverse ecosystems. Despite running through a large urban area and being intensively managed, the river is a place with many natural areas that are a refuge and home for wildlife.

Recreation and Scenery

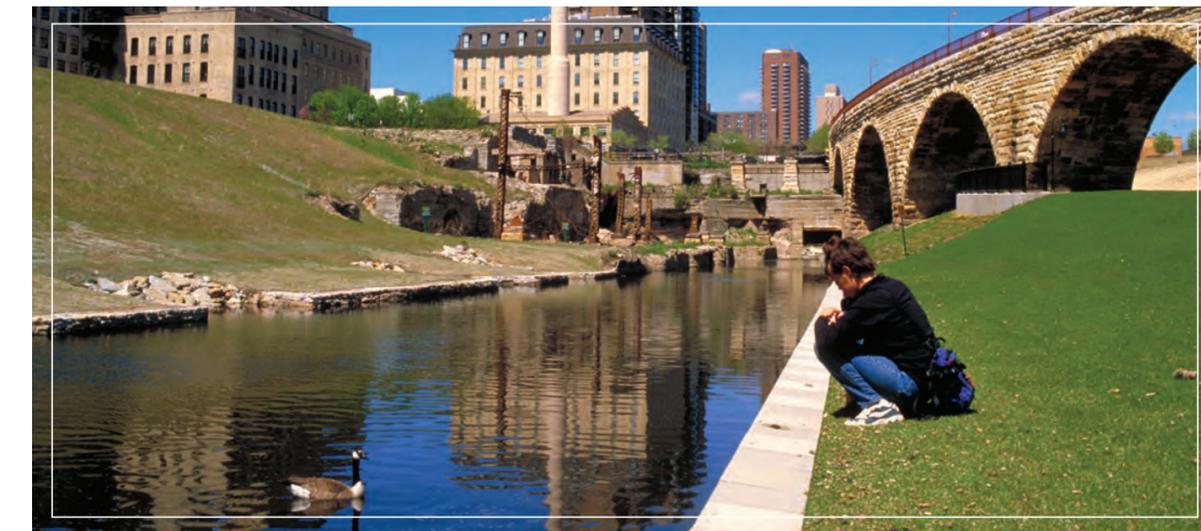
River recreation and scenery provide opportunities for all people to enjoy the national river and recreation area, experience its stories, and find their own connections to the river and its meanings.

Description

The Mississippi River is one of the world's renowned rivers. While 10 national park units lie along or touch the Mississippi River, only one national park unit has the river as its focus and mission. That park is the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (NRRA). Congress established the national river and recreation area to protect, preserve, and enhance the nationally significant historic, cultural, natural, scenic, recreational, scientific, and economic resources of a 72-mile reach of the Mississippi River.

Although the national river and recreation area is only 72 miles long, the Mississippi River's character changes more here than anywhere else along its 2,350-mile course. The river enters the northern corridor as a free-flowing prairie river and moves downstream to plunge over St. Anthony Falls and into the river's narrowest gorge. Eight and one-half miles later, the river exits the gorge to become the country's dominant floodplain river and part of the largest inland navigation system on earth. Through the eight and one-half mile gorge, the Mississippi drops more than 110 feet, the river's steepest descent anywhere. The river's rapidly changing character explains why the national river and recreation area has such a unique concentration of nationally significant resources.

The national river and recreation area boasts a concentration of historical and cultural resources central to the American narrative. These resources cover some 10,000 years of human history, including stories and places associated with American Indians, European explorers and traders, and those who settled and developed one of the river's most important urban areas.



The national river and recreation area features St. Anthony Falls, the Mississippi River's only major waterfall and a place of national and international stories. After his visit in 1680, French missionary Louis Hennepin became the first European to describe the cataract. His published account made St. Anthony Falls "a landmark in the wilderness," a destination for other early European, colonial, and American explorers. As St. Anthony Falls' fame rose, the falls became a destination for tourists, writers, and painters from around the country and the world. Settlers and entrepreneurs saw a different kind of value in the falls. By 1880, St. Anthony Falls gave rise to lumber and flour milling industries that led the nation and, at times, the world in production.

The national river and recreation area includes a critical nexus on the Mississippi Flyway. About one-half of North America's bird species and 40% of waterfowl use this nationally and internationally significant flyway. The Mississippi's large floodplain and bottomland forest ecosystem, which the birds have followed for from hundreds to more than two thousand miles, ends at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, near the middle of the national river and recreation area.

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area includes, connects, and offers access to an exceptionally large number of nationally and state-designated scenic, natural, and recreational trails, byways, and corridors.