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# Upper Mississippi American Heritage River

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## Introduction and Purpose

The 1998 legislative session produced \$13 million for local riverfront projects on the Mississippi River. In late July, the Upper Mississippi River was one of 14 rivers nationwide selected by the federal government to receive "American Heritage River" designation. The federal program is designed to assure that communities agreeing to participate along the river will get help implementing their local plans for restoring and protecting the environmental, economic, and cultural values of the rivers and riverfronts.

Bemidji, Brainerd, Little Falls, and St. Cloud are non-metro communities participating. Twin Cities communities participating are Anoka, Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Coon Rapids, Cottage Grove, Fridley, Hastings, Lilydale, Maplewood, Mendota, Mendota Heights, Minneapolis, Newport, Ramsey, Rosemount, South St. Paul, St. Paul, St. Paul Park, and Ravenna township. The Minnesota communities, not any federal agency, will decide how to protect and restore their section of the river.

## Assistance

At least one, possibly two, "river navigators" will be federally designated to work with the Minnesota communities to provide technical assistance and information on how to best apply for and receive federal, state, and local funding. The idea is to ensure integration and cooperation among the many government agencies that administer programs on the Mississippi. The river navigators will begin assisting the Minnesota communities in early 1999.

## Plan of Action

The details or plans for possible projects under the new designation are included in the December 1997 "nomination packet" submitted by the Metropolitan Council. Ideas outlined for assistance

in this document are: developing innovative brownfield and water quality cleanup; creating a 72-mile long recreational trail in the metro area; updating local river protection plans and ordinances; developing port and surface water use plans that address both commercial and recreational uses; providing interpretive facilities; developing riverfront housing; implementing a coordinated tourism marketing program; integrating public education opportunities; preserving natural habitats; and increasing public access.

A plan of action and vision for the Mississippi was stated in the following principles:

*Balance and Sustainability in Resource Protection and Use.* Sustainable uses and resource preservation needs will be balanced and integrated, protecting both the working river and the natural riverine system.

*Navigation.* Recognizing the importance of the working River to the economy of the metropolitan area and the entire Upper Midwest. Decisions about commercial navigation and facility activity will integrate the needs of industry with the need to protect natural, cultural, and economic resources in the corridor and provide for safe commercial and recreational traffic.

*Public Use.* A broad range of passive and active resource-related activities will be encouraged on both land and water at levels and locations consistent with resource protection. Those activities will be complemented by interpretive and educational programs.

*Resource Management.* A coordinated effort will be made to protect and manage the ecological, cultural, and economic resources of the river valley.

*Open Space/Public Land/Trails.* Land uses and developments will be guided by local plans which, ideally, will emphasize river-related and river-enhancing uses that preserve and restore the natural appearance of shorelines and bluffs, protect habitat and historic areas, and preserve economic resources.

*Overall Management and Monitoring.* Extensive partnerships among all sectors will leverage local efforts, incentives will encourage cooperation with regional goals, intergovernmental coordination will improve efficiency in permitting and regulation, and citizen involvement will build personal commitment to the river.

Documented variously in state, regional, and local plans over the years, the vision and principles are included in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan for the Twin Cities metro area, which addresses land resource protection, commercial navigation needs, park land and recreational facility opportunities, and appropriate local, state, and federal roles. The plan, officially adopted in 1995, provides a framework to assist the state of Minnesota, 30 units of local government, and many nonprofit organizations in implementing integrated resource management programs.

This publication can be made available in alternative formats upon request. Please call (651) 296-6753 (voice); or the Minnesota State Relay Service at 1-800-627-3529 (TTY) for assistance. Many House Research Department publications may also be accessed via the internet at:  
[www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/hrd.htm](http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/hrd.htm).