

Minnesota River Watershed

Blueway Nomination

Pre-Proposal



January 2013

NATIONAL BLUEWAY SYSTEM

Minnesota River Watershed PRE-PROPOSAL

Nominated National Blueway Name, Hydrological Unit Code, Size and Location:

The Minnesota River (HUC 4 - 0702) flows through south-central Minnesota on a 335 mile journey from Big Stone Lake on the South Dakota border to its confluence with the Mississippi River at Fort Snelling. This large basin drains nearly 20 percent of Minnesota's land base, roughly 10 million acres in the state plus a small portion in northern Iowa and eastern South Dakota. Twelve major watersheds make up the Minnesota River Basin. All or part of 39 Minnesota counties contribute to the watershed as the river moves from a mostly rural landscape to a major urban setting. In between you will find communities of all sizes dominated by agricultural lands with a few remaining sections of native prairie, forests, wetlands and shallow lakes. The river valley floor and bluffs provide one of the highest conservation focus areas in southern Minnesota. About 870,000 people inhabit the basin, most in the Lower Minnesota River Watershed.

The immense Glacial River Warren carved the present day Minnesota River Valley (5 miles wide at some points) over 10,000 years ago. As a result, the channel of the current day Minnesota River is continually shifting and changing in the large space available on the valley floor.

In 1992, Minnesota's Governor Carlson called for the river to be "cleaned up" so that our children might safely swim fish, picnic and recreate on it. Thus began the partnerships that have led to the submission of this river for the National Blueway Designation.

Nominating River or Watershed Partnership: The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (MRWA) is an organized network of citizens, public agencies and nonprofit organizations dedicated to communicating the benefits of an ecologically healthy Minnesota River Watershed to others. The group actively works toward the river's improvement and protection. Formed in February of 2005, this group of river advocates has channeled the power of the entire basin to advance a number of wide ranging initiatives including a Minnesota River Paddler Program that promotes rivers in the Minnesota River Basin to encourage more people to paddle. Each year the group picks an action item to focus on. In the past this has included a Conservation Lands Easement Initiative to permanently protect critically sensitive lands, assisting with organizing the Minnesota River Summit in 2007, initiating the Minnesota River to Lake Pepin Friendship Tours, and a Minnesota River Film Documentary. The Watershed Alliance uses weekly, quarterly, and bi-weekly communication initiatives –all focusing on the Minnesota River Basin reaching over 600 people in the watershed. The MRWA meets quarterly, each meeting being sponsored by a member group or agency. Additional information about this alliance can be found at <http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com/>.

Sponsoring Federal or State Agency: The two sponsoring agencies are the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service – Midwest Region.

See Appendix A for letters from sponsoring organization and agencies.

River or Watershed Partnership Attributes

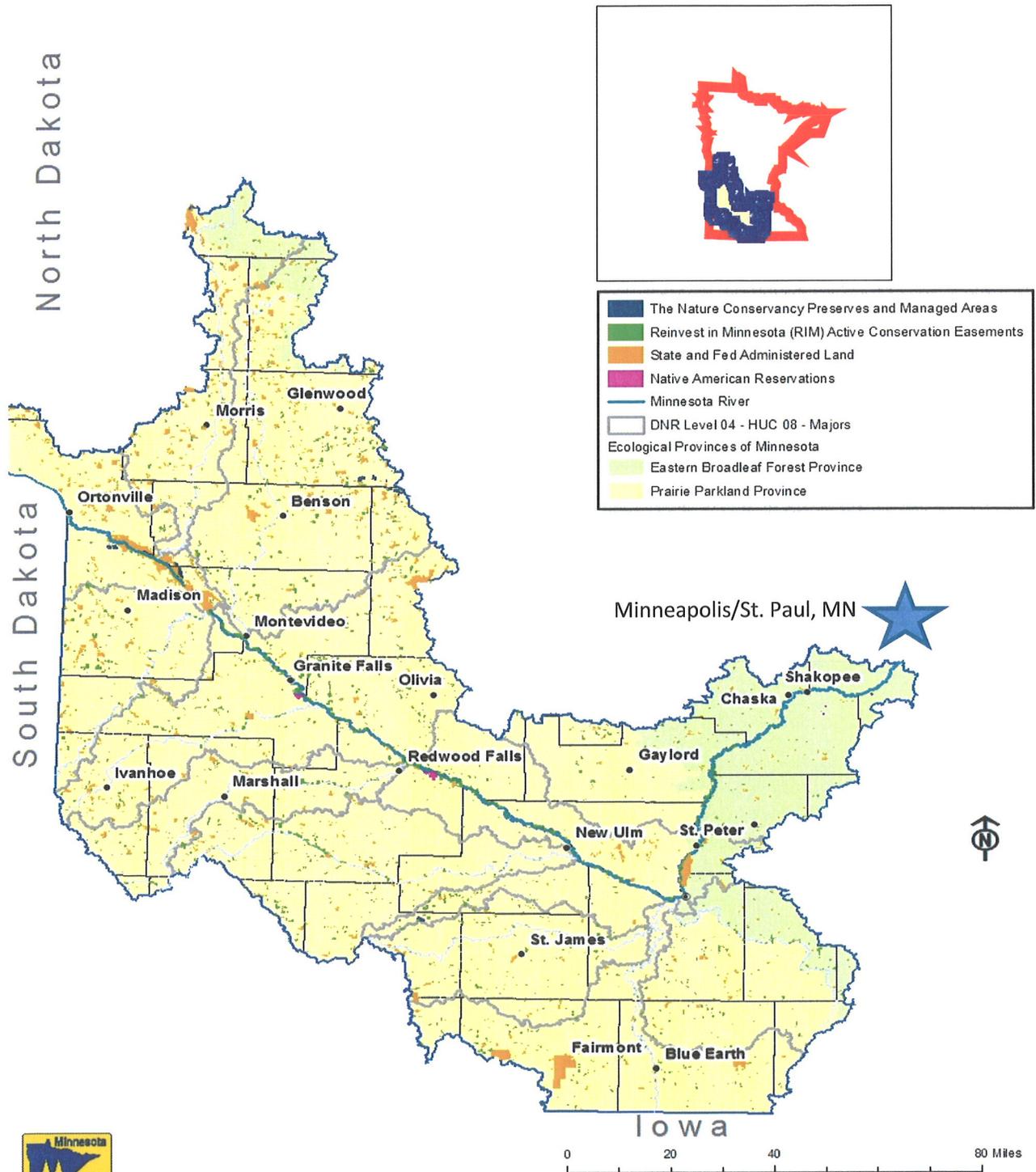
Membership and Diversity of Nominating Partnership, Association or Coalition:

Organizations; local, state and federal government units; and agencies across the Minnesota River Basin have formed partnerships to develop basin-wide strategies to improve water quality, focus more on public outreach, restore habitat and increase recreational access and opportunity. Membership and diversity of the nominating alliance is quite varied and includes those listed below and many others.

- Minnesota River Board (MRB). Formed in 1995, the MRB is a joint powers board comprised of 27 counties within the basin. The mission of this organization is to provide leadership, build partnerships, and support efforts to improve and protect water quality in the Minnesota River Basin.
- Water Resources Center (WRC). Created in 1987, the WRC at the University of Minnesota, Mankato, serves as a regional research center for water quality. In 2008, the WRC received \$1.2 million to continue its applied research, including water quality monitoring, communication efforts and civic engagement in the Minnesota River Basin.
- Friends of the Minnesota Valley (FMV). Formed in 1982, this nonprofit advocates for the MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge while partnering with a wide range of organizations to improve the lower valley's natural resources. FMV launched an award winning "Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality" program in 2003. Other initiatives involve restoring the old Cedar Avenue Bridge trail connection, and a demonstration project on conservation drainage in the Seven Mile Creek Watershed.
- Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR). This nonprofit, founded in 1989, continues to celebrate and advocate for the river, while continually working to find common sense solutions for the water quality challenges which presently exist. CCMR has a history of accomplishments ranging from producing the MN River Watershed Drainage Policy Reform Report, sponsoring the River Rangers Program (youth program), to facilitating the first successful point to non-point water pollution trade in the United States. CCMR also manages and presents the successful Riverblast celebration an annual free festival that celebrates the importance of the river to the town of New Ulm.
- Mankato Area Paddling and Outing Club (MPOC). The mission of this volunteer-based group is to participate in and lead a wide variety of outdoor activities including canoeing, kayaking, biking, cross country skiing and networking with people of similar interests. Founded in 1993, MPOC hosts an annual River Valley Cleanup on area rivers each spring.
- Tatanka Bluffs. Formed by citizens of Redwood and Renville Counties, this group's mission is to protect the natural resources of the Minnesota River corridor between Upper Sioux Agency State Park and Fort Ridgely State Park. Tatanka Bluffs facilitates others to take action within five focus areas including the outdoors (public recreational land acquisition and trail development); renewable tourism; celebrations, entertainment and gaming; education and green energy. The vision of the group is to develop one of the top tourism destinations in Minnesota.
- Green Corridor, Inc. Green Corridor Inc. aims to acquire, restore, preserve and develop the unique natural resources in the Minnesota River Valley and surrounding area. Its vision is a premier recreation destination by providing the necessary public infrastructure.
- Clean up our River Environment (CURE). The mission of CURE is to focus public awareness on the Minnesota River Watershed and to take action to restore and protect its water quality, biological integrity and natural beauty for all generations. Founded in 1992 CURE seeks to inspire area youth and the general public through river trips and field days. CURE holds meetings bringing together people with diverse backgrounds and objectives to create common purpose and vision. CURE advocates for public policy at the local, regional, and national level. CURE is a membership-based

Minnesota River Basin Major Watersheds and Conservation Lands

HUC 4 - 0702



Map Produced by MN IT @ MN DNR - Southern Region GIS
Copyright: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2012

- organization with more than 500 members. Its annual meeting routinely attracts more than 300 people from throughout the watershed.
- Chippewa River Watershed Project (CRWP). CRWP is a joint powers organization of 8 counties in the Upper Minnesota River Watershed that focuses on water quality monitoring and public education to improve the Chippewa River which is a major tributary to the Minnesota River. Recently the CRWP has teamed up with the Land Stewardship Project to launch the Chippewa 10 % project which is designed to encourage 10% of highly erodible land in the Chippewa Basin to be placed in permanent vegetative cover that can still be grazed and harvested by local farmers.
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). MPCA coordinates water monitoring on the Minnesota River and its major tributaries, providing reports every two years on impaired waters in the basin. The weblink below provides access to reports going back to 1996 on various portions of the watershed.
<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/water/water-types-and-programs/minnesotas-impaired-waters-and-tmdls/tmdl-projects/minnesota-river-basin-tmdl/project-minnesota-river-turbidity.html>
- Minnesota Valley History Learning Center (MVHLC). MVHLC teaches the cultural and natural heritage of the Minnesota River Valley and inspires people of all generations to understand, preserve, and learn from our shared history. The MVHLC is a place where students are immersed in Minnesota history during a week-long curriculum designed to exceed Minnesota Department of Education standards. The MVHLC brings history to life for students and researchers by placing them in the historical context of many of Minnesota's most significant historical events, and by making primary source reference materials available to them. www.mvhlc.org
- U of MN Southwest Research & Outreach Center (SWROC). The SWROC links agriculture, communities and families to the research, education and outreach resources of the University of Minnesota. It is a prominent resource for natural resources and environmental science for preK-12, undergraduates and adult learners. Research and outreach efforts help to stabilize the sometimes emotional environment of differing world views related to agricultural production through sound multidisciplinary research enriching and strengthening our rural environment and agricultural production.

Demonstrated Watershed Support:

- U of M – SW Research & Outreach Center staff and researchers conduct watershed research and outreach education focused on K-12 educators and students.
- Tatanka Bluff holds collaborative meeting in November 2012 to expand support for outdoor recreation destination in the center of AGO project area.
- MN DNR funds part time planner position for Minnesota River Initiatives January 2013
- USFWS funds intern position to support Blueway Nomination Application for Minnesota River Watershed December 2012.
- Prairie Waters provides tourism and economic development support for 3 counties and surrounding communities at the west end of the watershed. <http://prairiewaters.com/index.php>
- January 2013 MRWA member meeting approved Minnesota River Blueway pre-proposal developed by steering committee.

Accomplishments of Nominating Partnership:

Most of the accomplishments highlighted below and many more can be found with more details in the Minnesota River Basin Progress Report 2010. The link to this 194 page document is <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/minnesota-river-basin-progress-report> .

- Nearly all of the 13 major watersheds in the Minnesota River Basin have a watershed project working to monitor and improve water quality. These projects access hundreds of thousands of dollars each year from state, federal and non-profit sources to implement BMPs, monitor water quality and provide educational opportunities (ongoing).
- Non-profit groups lobby state legislature to provide additional tools for public access to recreational opportunities in the Minnesota River Valley (2013)
- Non-profits establish Minnesota Valley History Learning Center in Morton, MN, in 2011 (<http://www.mvhlc.org/>)
- City of Henderson sponsors the J. R. Brown Minnesota River Center and Ney Nature Center (<http://neycenter.org/>)
- TNC, DNR, USFWS and others partner to Identify core Prairie Conservation Areas http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/mcbs/mn_prairie_conservation_plan.pdf
- Numerous cities/counties sponsor and fund rain garden and rain barrel installations to decrease storm water impacts
- 4 Dams have been removed on the main stem or major tributaries since 2004. The Minnesota River from Granite Falls, MN to confluence with the Mississippi River is the longest stretch of free flowing river in Minnesota at approximately 253 miles.
- Dakota County Greenway feasibility study is underway. The corridor will travel the south side of the Minnesota River valley from Burnsville to St. Paul. <http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks/Planning/Greenways/Documents/MinnesotaRiverMasterPlan.pdf>
- MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, established in 2001, works to acquire and restore lands and waters in the lower Minnesota River Valley in concert with the USFWS. FMV receives an LCCMR funded restoration project
- Co-sponsored Managed Drainage field days and workshop presentations are conducted to introduce new concepts to landowners and see how and where equipment works best on the landscape.
- A State Trail Master Plan has been completed for the Minnesota River State Trail which will connect Big Stone Lake State Park to LeSueur.
- Efforts are currently underway to complete the Minnesota Valley State Trail, which will run from LeSueur County to Fort Snelling State Park.

Capacity Profile of Nominating Partnership: Describe capacity and resources of partnership:

- Staffing: Existing- Part-time Planner, Acquisition Specialist, 1 intern, Steering Committee Needed – Full time Blueway Coordinator, 3 interns
- Technical skills: Existing – Restoration and Management Specialists (DNR, TNC, USFWS), Monitoring Specialists (MPCA, SWCDs, WRC) Needed – Part time GIS Specialist, Six person Conservation Corps Minnesota crew
- Policy skills: Existing – MRB provides policy perspectives and guidance at the county and watershed level, numerous individuals in nonprofit, local government, state and federal entities that are members of the Alliance provide policy input as needed. Needed – Legislative liaison at the state and federal level.
- Socio-economic skills: Existing – Diverse Steering Committee provides guidance, Needed – Half-time Communications specialist (Social Media), Volunteer Coordinator
- Financial skills: Existing – An organization that is a member of the Alliance will provide financial skills.

The MRWA is comprised of organizations that have the potential capacity to fill the needed staffing.

Vision and Goals

Watershed Vision Statement:

The Minnesota River watershed is a model of habitat connectivity and resiliency in an agricultural to urban landscape; improved water quality and stable hydrograph; increased public access for outdoor recreation, and economic vitality based on a legacy of natural, cultural, historical, and agricultural resource conservation. We can accomplish this vision because there is a highly engaged and informed watershed citizenry and Blueway Partner Group. The accepted cultural climate is a shared, working landscape where land and water use choices result in a diverse and resilient watershed economy, improved biological diversity, and a healthy and desirable place for people to live, work and play.

Goals:

- **Conservation and Integration of Land and Water Management**
 - Develop and implement key strategies in partnership with agricultural landowners for a resilient working landscape approach through citizen-led processes, Blueway Partner meetings and incentives through the Federal Farm Bill.
 - Identify key regions of watershed for fee title or conservation easement acquisitions, education or incentives that will provide best water quality and hydrograph stabilization benefits while supporting the prairie conservation plan and urban or other water quality/quantity plans. (*Prairie Plan Corridor map, groundwater recharge areas*)
- **Natural Resource Restoration and Adaptive Management**
 - In strategic locations, large areas of prairie, grassland and associated habitats will be protected and restored to create functioning prairie systems that reduce habitat fragmentation. (*MN Prairie Conservation Plan 2010*)
 - Restore targeted prairie pothole wetlands as identified through planning efforts by USFWS, DNR, and associated nonprofit partners.
- **Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Education**
 - Confirm recreation infrastructure gaps and identify short and long term focus areas to acquire land and create opportunities. (DRAFT Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan)
 - Develop 50 additional miles of the multiuse Minnesota Valley State and MN River State Trails
 - Support the University of Minnesota National Science Foundation grant to develop a high school science curriculum that seeks to integrate the Minnesota River into classrooms in the watershed.
- Sustainable and Compatible Economic Activity
 - Continue supporting the Minnesota River Arts Meander and work with the partners to create new festivals and events to celebrate the river. These events bring attention to the emerging “quality-of-life-based clean river economy” that is helping to revitalize the small river towns in the watershed.
- Enhanced and Expanded Stakeholder Engagement
 - The Minnesota River Watershed AGO partner group meeting in spring 2012 identified an expanded partner list which will be used to invite additional partners into the National Blueway System (NBS) nomination and project planning processes. Existing partners will be reaching out to these groups over the next few months.
 - A Blueway outreach and marketing plan will be created spring/summer of 2013.

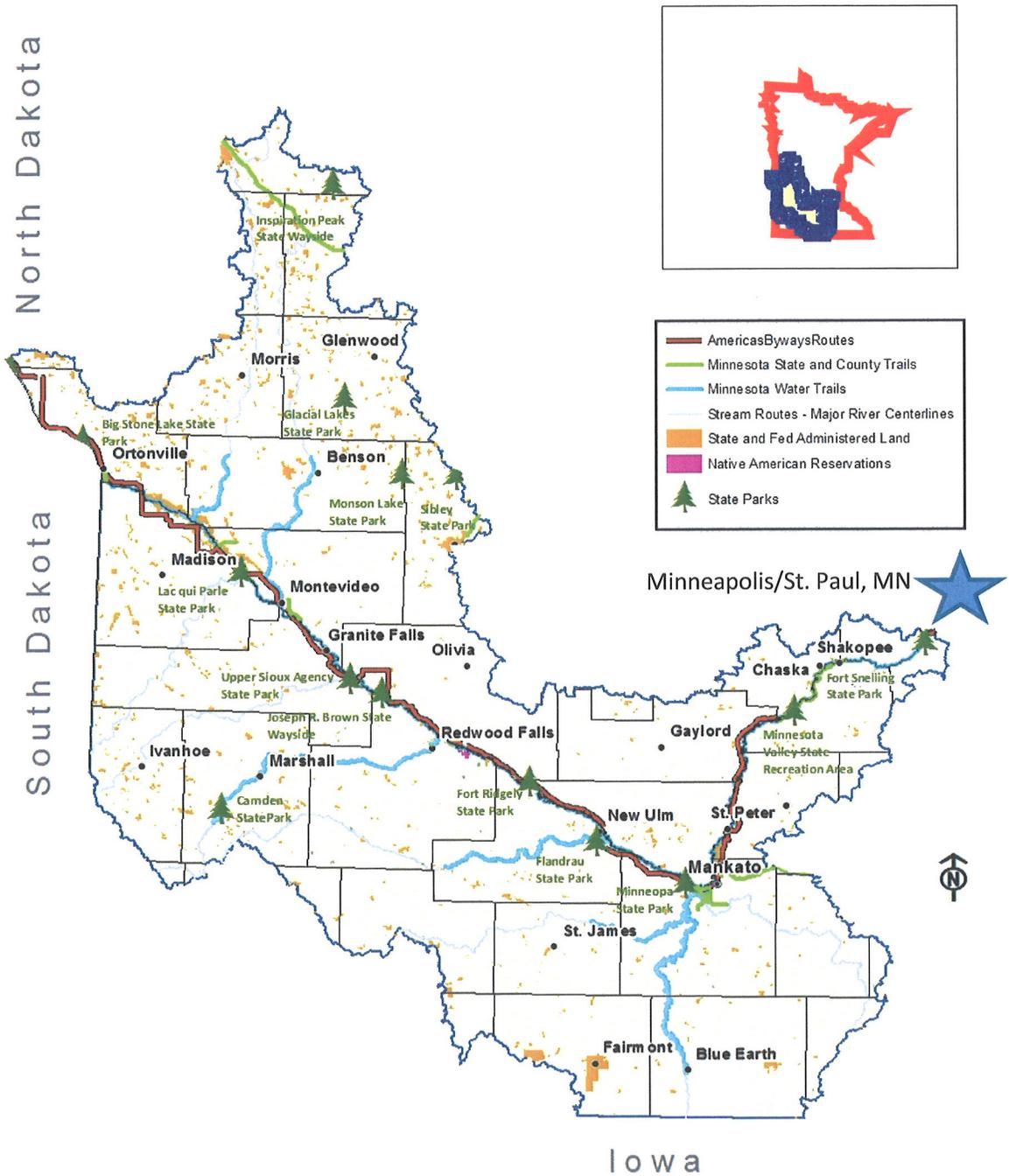
Significance of River and Watershed Resources

The Minnesota River Basin Trends document (<http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/mnbasin/trends>) provides a broad overview of the basin with the goal of providing clues of broader ecosystem health. It shows a mixed story, some indicators are improving, some declining and some static. What continues to grow is the awareness people have for the importance of their land and water use choices and the value of a healthy river system for recreational opportunities, regional economic resilience and sustainability, and a high quality location to live, work and play.

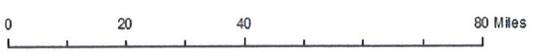
- Important physiographic or geological features
(http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/mcbs/mn_river_report.pdf pgs 2.1 – 2.12)
 - The Minnesota River flows down the centerline of the broad glacial trough formed by ice of the Des Moines lobe, which dominates the topography of the southern half of Minnesota. The trough is almost undetectable from the ground. The valley of the Minnesota River, on the other hand, is an arresting feature that was created abruptly after the Des Moines lobe retreated, resulting in the Glacial River Warren. The valley is still affecting the evolution of the landscape today.
 - One million years of glacial history is preserved in the banks of the Yellow Medicine River in Upper Sioux Agency State Park.
 - Some of the oldest rocks (3.6 billion yrs) discovered at the earth's surface are located in the valley between Granite Falls and Morton, MN. The Morton Outcrop Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) protects an example of this crystalline Morton Gneiss.
 - Cedar Mountain SNA, near Franklin, MN is younger bedrock (3.4 - 1.8 billion yrs), forming the highest point in the valley. The central knob in the area includes two rock types known only from this site; Cedar Mountain Gabbro and Cedar Mountain Granodiorite.
 - The eastern end of the valley contains exposed sedimentary rocks formed under shallow seas 500 to 430 million years ago which contain a rich diversity and abundance of plant and animal fossils.
- Significant ecological values and ecosystem services
 - The Minnesota River valley contains the largest concentration of native plant communities remaining in southwestern Minnesota. Nearly one quarter of the 100,080 acres occur in the four western counties near the river's source. Examples of 52 different plant community classifications occur in the counties adjacent to the river.
 - The rock outcrops of the Minnesota River Valley are unique resources with a distinctive flora and fauna seen in very few locations in Minnesota. The Morton Outcrop SNA is one of the highest quality examples of this plant community remaining in the valley. It is one of few remaining rock outcrops that retain a substantial prairie flora.
 - This nearly contiguous corridor of diverse native plant communities is an important terrestrial and aquatic wildlife migration corridor. It provides habitats for many rare species of mammals (16), birds (27), herptofauna (8), fish (13), and mussels (18).
(http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/mcbs/mn_river_report.pdf pgs 4.1 – 5.43)
- Unique natural resources (fish, wildlife, and plant species; natural communities), designated natural areas, heritage sites, important bird areas, Ramsar, and other state, national, or international designations.
 - The Blue Sucker (*Cyprinus elongates*) is reproducing in the Minnesota River after being absent for decades. Overall number of fish species is increasing. (Minnesota River Trends – <http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/mnbasin/trends>)
 - Bald Eagles, once rare, are commonly nesting along the Minnesota River.
 - River otter surveys indicate a sustained but low population since reintroduction in 1980.

- 89 rare plant species occur in the counties along the Minnesota River, 63 of which are listed under the Minnesota Endangered Species Act (MN Statute 84.0895). Three major groups of plants are those found in bedrock outcrops; upland prairies, savannas; wet prairies and calcareous fens.
- 6 Important Bird Areas occur within the watershed.
- Linkages to landscape-scale designations or collaboratives
 - Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan 2010 – core area for prairie restoration.
 - Parts of the Minnesota River Valley Watershed are included in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture and the Upper Mississippi & Great Lakes Region Joint Venture.
- Cultural and historical resources and historic sites
 - Numerous sites related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 (<http://www.visitgreatermankato.com/documents/DakotaMap2009RevisedVersion.pdf>)
 - Numerous sites related to Native American peoples, European settlement and cultures/historic events in the watershed. There are numerous sites on the National Historic Register.
- Recreational and other social or economic resources
 - 671 miles of Minnesota Water Trails on 7 different rivers in the watershed. The Minnesota River was one of the first designated in 1973. Today there are 46 water accesses and 23 canoe campsites on the main stem.
 - The upper half of the river's main stem was designated a Minnesota Wild and Scenic River in 1977.
 - The Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway is 287 miles long, with 16 interpretive panels along the way. Its website hosts a new geo-cache page around the U.S. – Dakota War of 1862 and an interactive map with tremendous amounts of trip planning information and river stories.
- Existing federal, state, municipal, and private protected areas for conservation purposes
 - 12 State Parks or State Recreation Areas. Surveys indicate rising attendance since 1987.
 - Two National Wildlife Refuges (25,600 acres) and 417 Waterfowl Production Areas in 4 Wetland Management Districts (84,584 acres)
 - 613 Wildlife (132,585 acres) and 212 Aquatic Management Areas (2700 acres)
 - 26 Scientific and Natural Areas (3041 acres)
 - 13 TNC preserves (6843 acres)
 - 4 Native American Tribal Communities near Granite Falls, Morton and Shakopee, MN and Sisseton, South Dakota.

Minnesota River Watershed Recreation Resources



Map Produced by MN IT @ MN DNR - Southern Region GIS
 Copyright: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2012



Date: 1/30/2013

Appendix A – Letters from Sponsoring Organization and Agencies



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

5600 American Boulevard West, Suite 990
Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/R3/NWRS

JAN 31 2013

Ms. Rebecca Wodder
Senior Advisor to the Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Wodder:

I am pleased to support the designation of the Minnesota River watershed as part of the newly established National Blueway System. The Minnesota River watershed is important to the people of Minnesota and the upper Midwest for its economic, historical, and conservation values.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and its partners have a long history of conservation successes in this watershed. Two of our national wildlife refuges, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District and Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge are located among an extensive complex of conserved public and private lands. We have a successful Partners for Fish and Wildlife program as well as active fisheries, ecological services, and migratory birds programs in the watershed. These programs are all directed toward protecting and enhancing trust resources, restoring and managing fish and wildlife habitats and populations, providing public recreational and educational opportunities, working with partners, and engaging communities.

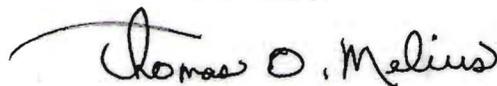
Designation of the Minnesota River watershed would be the catalyst that would promote connecting the conservation actions throughout the 332 mile river and 16,000 square mile watershed. The health and quality of the river system within this watershed is fundamental to the overall condition of the landscape. The Service has a vital interest in working with its partners to improve water quality; restore aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial ecosystems; protect and recover endangered species; educate the public about conservation values; provide recreation access and use; enhance local economies and communities; and advance the use of sound science in integrating land and water resource decisions.

We realize the benefits for trust resources and the public that could accrue from National Blueway designation, including: (1) the pride developed by a partnership-based, community-led endeavor; (2) national recognition and prestige associated with the recognition of nationally-significant resources in which the Service plays an integral role; (3) technical and financial assistance to enhance watershed-wide conservation and education programs; (4) expanding the cadre of partner

organizations involved in a watershed-wide initiative such as USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, National Park Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, non-government organizations, watershed communities, and tribes; (5) increased conservation efficiencies through coordinated programs; (6) improved ecosystem services; (7) increased sustainability of natural resources and dependent local economies; and ultimately, (8) better quality of life for residents of the watershed.

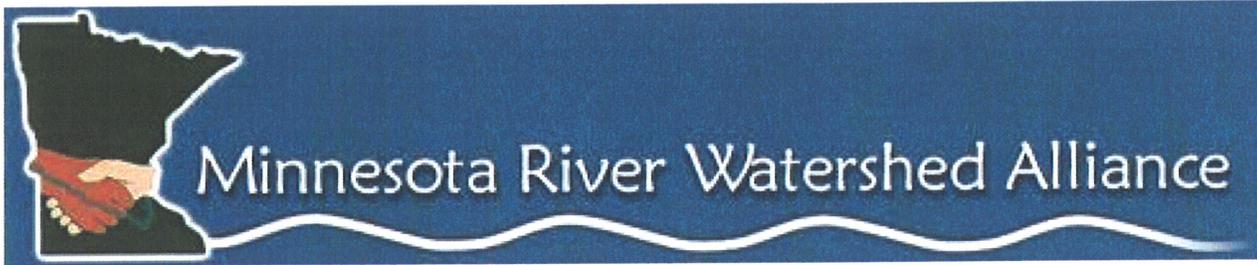
I support the nomination of the Minnesota River watershed as a National Blueway and am eager to witness the beneficial results in years to come by virtue of this designation. Should you have questions or concerns relative to this issue, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Thomas O. Melius
Regional Director

cc: Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System
Regional Chief, Region 3, National Wildlife Refuge System



January 2013

Rebecca Wodder
U.S. Department of Interior
Washington, D.C.

Dear Ms. Wodder

We, the undersigned members of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (MinnRivWa) are submitting the attached preliminary application in the hopes of being asked to submit a full proposal that outlines why the Minnesota River should be one of the first rivers in the nation to receive the National Blueways Designation being developed by your agency.

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance is a unique citizen-led network that has created and held a space for watershed wide interaction for the past 8 years. There are no other meetings held in the basin where so many diverse geographies, points of view and professions come together as equals to talk, indentify areas of common interest, strategize and act together.

It has been said that the National Blueways Designation is a program that seeks to align the programs and efforts of national government agencies with the work and priorities set by grassroots citizens, non-profit organizations and state agencies that have learned how to work together on a watershed scale. As you read this preliminary application, we think you will find substantial evidence that the Minnesota River is a watershed where this happens.

Going forward, we the undersigned members of the MinnRivWa and the people and entities we represent are pledging to widen our circle even further. If invited to submit a full application, we will have even more organizations committed to working with us on issues of Education, Conservation and Recreation in the historic and beautiful Minnesota River Watershed.

Please give this pre-application your strongest consideration. Together, with the Department of the Interior, we are excited to show the nation how powerful it can be when people come together to think and act like a watershed for the common good.

Sincerely, the Members of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance Blueways Pre-Application Team:

Jane, Sk

Clayton

Cheryl Haase

Lauri Nelson

Rui Ellis

Patrick J. Moore

Catherine M. Fuchsi

Bradley A. Costo

Michael Lee

Lee J. Lee

Red Huss

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Office of the Regional Director

Southern Region • 261 Highway 15 South • New Ulm, MN • 56073
507-359-6010



Rebecca Wodder
U.S. Department of Interior
Washington DC

January 30, 2013

Dear Ms. Wodder,

This letter is in strong support of the preliminary application to designate the Minnesota River as a National Blueway. I respectfully request that you invite the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance to submit a full proposal that will provide the basis for why the Minnesota River meets the requirements to be among the first to be designated a National Blueway.

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance is a strong citizen network. During the past 8 years no other organization has motivated so many people from various stretches of the river, diverse view points and occupations to cooperate as equals to talk, identify areas of commonality and form strategies that result in motivating people to act.

The National Blueways Designation is a program that seeks to augment the programs and efforts of government agencies with the work and priorities set by grassroots citizens who have learned how to work together to benefit the entire watershed. When you read the preliminary application, you will find significant evidence the Minnesota River is a watershed where this interaction and cooperation takes place.

If the alliance is invited to submit a full application there will be additional organizations willing to commit to working on Education, Conservation and Recreation in the Minnesota River Watershed.

Please give the pre-application your careful and strong consideration. With the Department of Interior, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Alliance the Minnesota River will be an outstanding example of what can be accomplished by working together.

If you need additional information please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dennis Frederickson".

Dennis Frederickson
Regional Director

DF/bb

Appendix B – Letters of Support from Partner Organizations



January 24, 2013

Subject: Support Letter for MN River Designation as a National Blueway

Dear National Blueways Nomination Committee:

Under separate cover, I provided a letter of support from the Minnesota River Board; however, I am also the Director of the Water Resources Center (WRC) at Minnesota State University, Mankato. On behalf of our staff and students, I am also providing this letter of support for the application to designate the Minnesota River as a National Blueway. The WRC mission is to gather, interpret, and distribute data of environmental significance to help citizens enhance the quality of regional lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater. This is accomplished through faculty and student applied research, educational programming, technical assistance, and water resource planning.

The WRC was created in 1987 to serve as a regional center for environmental research and information exchange. Since its beginning, the WRC has participated in over 150 research, educational, and planning projects involving partnerships with dozens of public and private agencies and organizations – most of which have been in the Minnesota River Basin. The Minnesota River has amazing ecological potential, but we need additional mechanisms to connect the up and down stream stakeholders so that there is a stronger sense of community. The WRC has worked with partners all along the river to enhance watershed management and have seen amazing changes occur in the basin.

A Blueway Designation would provide a well-deserved recognition for the dedication of thousands of citizens to improve the Minnesota River. Designation would also elevate the Minnesota River's recreation, habitat and scenic beauty value to new levels. Trends have shown that we are making progress – fish species are repopulating segments of the river where they had been absent for decades, state and county park use along the river is steadily increasing, and people are embracing the river more as a valuable resource, rather than a polluted flooding machine.

Therefore, based on what I see as the ecological value of the Minnesota River corridor, and the need to recognize the waterway for its value, the WRC strongly supports the Minnesota River National Blueway application. Thank you for your time and if I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Shannon J. Fisher".

Dr. Shannon J. Fisher, Executive Director
shannon.fisher@mnsu.edu

WATER RESOURCES CENTER
184 TRAFTON SCIENCE CENTER S · MANKATO, MN 56001
PHONE 507-389-5492 (V) · 800-627-3529 OR 711 (MRS/TTY) · FAX 507-389-5493

An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity University.



January 24, 2013

Subject: Support Letter for MN River Designation as a National Blueway

Dear National Blueways Nomination Committee:

As the Executive Director of the Minnesota River Board (MRB), it is my pleasure to provide this letter of support on behalf of our delegates for the application to designate the Minnesota River as a National Blueway. The MRB is a joint-powers organization of county governments with the mission to provide leadership, build partnerships and support efforts to improve and protect water quality in the Minnesota River Basin.

In countless ways, a Blueway Designation and the ongoing efforts of thousands of dedicated conservationists, producers, legislators, and other citizens would both support and complement each other. The MRB believes strongly that conservation and restoration of the Minnesota River can only be achieved by a cooperative effort between citizens and all levels of government and businesses. A Blueway Designation would boost efforts to elevate the Minnesota River's recreation, habitat and scenic beauty value to new levels – and facilitate additional capacity to leverage existing resources at the local, state and federal levels.

The MRB delegates and staff have seen a revolutionary change in the way citizens in southern Minnesota view our relationship with the Minnesota River. Trends analyses have shown that people are reconnecting with the Minnesota River – in terms of recreation, inherent value, and as a critical resource for water and raw materials. A Blueway designation would also serve as a significant recognition of the countless hours and resources that have been dedicated to improving our namesake waterway.

Therefore, the MRB urges you to give full consideration to the Minnesota River National Blueway application. We believe the river is worthy of designation and that Blueway designation can further energize and already progressive management effort in this watershed. Thank you for your time and if I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Shannon J. Fisher".

Dr. Shannon J. Fisher, Executive Director
shannon.fisher@mnsu.edu

MINNESOTA RIVER BOARD

135 Trafton Science Center S | Minnesota State University, Mankato | Mankato, MN 56001
Phone (507) 389-5491 | Fax (507) 389-5493 | shannon.fisher@mnsu.edu | <http://minnesotariver.org>



MINNESOTA DEER HUNTERS ASSOCIATION



460 Peterson Road • Grand Rapids, MN 55744-8413
218.327.1103 • Toll Free: 800.450.DEER (MN Only) • Fax: 218.327.1349
www.mndeerhunters.com

January 14, 2013

Re: Letter of support for the Minnesota River National Blueways Nomination

Dear National Blueways Nomination Committee:

Please accept this "letter of support" for the Minnesota River National Blueways Nomination.

The Minnesota Deer Hunters Association is a 501(c) membership organization with 63 chapters and 14,000 members across Minnesota. Our mission is to work for tomorrow's wildlife and hunters today through education, habitat, hunting and legislation. We care about Minnesota's natural resources, but especially we are concerned about a thriving future with abundant natural resources for future generation to enjoy and to pass on.

The Clean Up the Minnesota River Watershed Effort is a very important broad based coalition effort that we have and will remain engaged in. The potential Blueways designation brings with it the opportunity to receive the full breadth and power of federal agencies such as USFWS, ACOE, USDA, EPA and others that support locally led initiatives in areas of Education, Conservation and Recreation.

Please give the Minnesota River National Blueways application your strongest consideration.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call to discuss ways in which we can work together to make the Minnesota River National Blueway a model of collaboration for the rest of the country.

Whitetails forever,

Mark Wm. Johnson
Executive Director

January 9, 2013

National Blueways Nomination Committee

Dear Committee,

The New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen is an organization committed to the improvement of fishing and fish habitat within the 50 mile radius surrounding the city of New Ulm Minnesota. We are deeply committed to the improvement of water quality and fish habitat in Minnesota River and its tributaries. In fact, since our inception in 1986 we have held annual Minnesota River Clean Ups and still today are working with local partners to implement Community Clean Ups for Water Quality, a program designed to prevent phosphorus from entering the river.

We have been made aware of the National Blueways Initiative and what it means for the future of the Minnesota River. We are extremely excited to become a partner in this nomination process and will assist the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in our efforts to become selected. If selected, rest assured the New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen will play an important role as the initiative is implemented. We wholeheartedly endorse the initiative and look forward to working with the diverse and numerous partners.

This opportunity will energize our membership of 200 plus members and serve to engage more of the citizenry who fish in our area, especially younger anglers. The national recognition will be invaluable to the New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen and our mission of improved fishing and fish habitat.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and entire membership of the New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen

Most Sincerely

Jason Kuester, President NUASF