

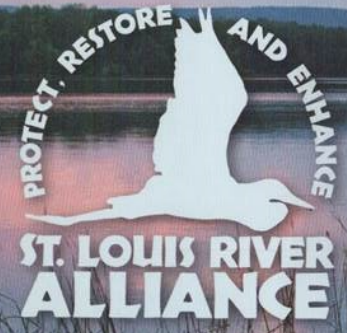
This project was funded in part by the Coastal Zone Management Act, by NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, in conjunction with Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program.

Supported with contributions from:



# ON-THE-WATER GUIDE

## for Paddlers & Boaters



### Natural & Cultural History of the Lower St. Louis River



394 S. Lake Avenue, Suite 321, Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
 (218) 733-9520 | slrcac@stlouisriver.org  
 www.stlouisriver.org  
 Photos © Michael K. Anderson

## CONTENTS

Explore the St. Louis River.....	1
History: Geologic, Natural & Industrial .....	4
Habitat of the St. Louis River.....	13
Plants, Animals and Birds of the St. Louis River.....	15
St. Louis River Area Attractions .....	62

### MAPS

Lower St. Louis River Overview .....	20
Fond du Lac Dam .....	23
Chambers Grove to Perch Lake.....	24
Boy Scout Landing Area .....	26
Mud Lake to Spirit Lake .....	28
Spirit Lake and Clough Island .....	30
Pokegema Bay Area.....	32
Indian Point and Superior Municipal Forest .....	34
Grassy Point and Billings Park .....	36
St. Louis River Harbor Overview .....	38
Erie Pier and Arrowhead Pier.....	40
Ore Docks to the Blatnik Bridge.....	43
Rice's Point and Minnesota Point.....	47
Connor's Point/Superior, Wisconsin and Minnesota Point Area.....	52
Barker's Island to Minnesota Point .....	55
Nemadji River to Allouez Bay .....	59



## THE LAKE SUPERIOR NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE

The Red River Banks Protection Area, the Superior Municipal Forest and Wisconsin Point are just part of a mosaic of public lands included in the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the state of Wisconsin to study and protect Lake Superior's vital coastal and estuarine resources. Freshwater estuaries like this one provide vital natural and economic resources in the United States. The system of 28 National Estuarine Research Reserves nationwide support research, stewardship and education on behalf of these unique ecosystems. The Lake Superior NERR offers a wide range of research and public education opportunities at their facilities on Barkers Island in Superior.

This revision was made possible through the input of local boaters, residents, history experts and partner agencies, including:

Minnesota Sea Grant	Wisconsin Sea Grant
Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources	Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources
Duluth Seaway Port Authority	Natural Resources Research Institute
Duluth Audubon Club	Fond du Lac Tribe of Lake Superior Chippewa
Minnesota Land Trust	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Zenith City Press	Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve

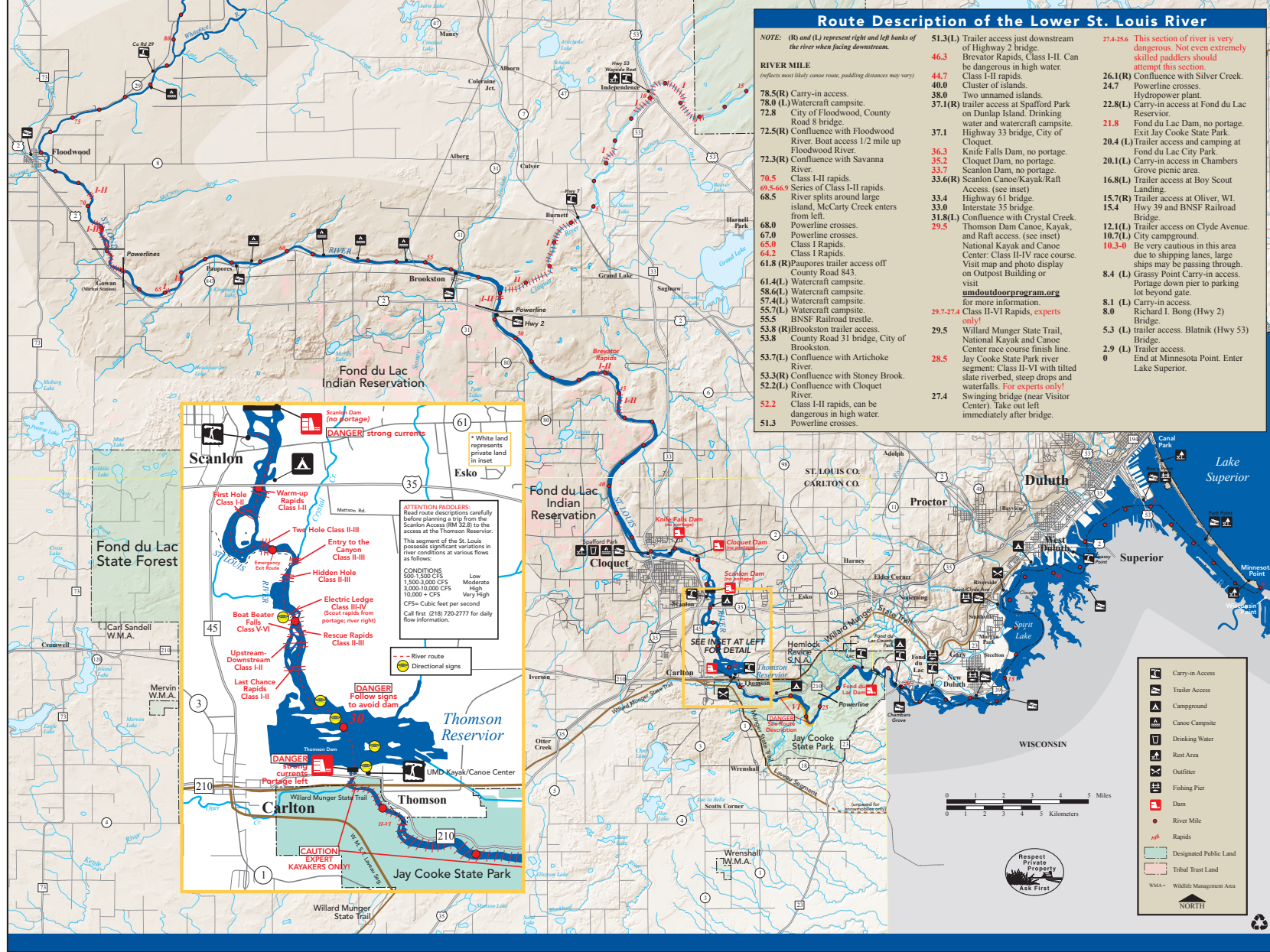
### THANK YOU!

Every effort was made to be accurate as of the print date of this edition. Any corrections and suggestions for future editions can be emailed to [slrcac@stlouisriver.org](mailto:slrcac@stlouisriver.org) or visit [www.stlouisriver.org](http://www.stlouisriver.org) and complete the "On the Water Guide" feedback survey.



394 S. Lake Avenue, Suite 321, Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
 (218) 733-9520 | slrcac@stlouisriver.org  
 www.stlouisriver.org  
 Photos © Michael K. Anderson

# A STATE WATER TRAIL GUIDE TO THE LOWER ST. LOUIS RIVER



### Route Description of the Lower St. Louis River

**NOTE:** (R) and (L) represent right and left banks of the river when facing downstream.

**RIVER MILE**  
(reflects most likely canoe route, paddling distances may vary)

78.5(R) Carry-in access.	46.3	51.3(L) Trailer access just downstream of Highway 2 bridge.	27.4-25.6 This section of river is very dangerous. Not even extremely skilled paddlers should attempt this section.
78.0 (L) Watercraft campsite.	44.7	Brevator Rapids, Class I-II. Can be dangerous in high water.	26.1(R) Confluence with Silver Creek.
72.8 City of Floodwood, County Road 8 bridge.	40.0	Class I-II rapids.	24.7 Powerline crosses.
72.5(R) Confluence with Floodwood River. Boat access 1/2 mile up Floodwood River.	38.0	Two unnamed islands.	Hydropower plant.
72.3(R) Confluence with Savanna River.	37.1(R) trailer access at Spafford Park on Dunlap Island. Drinking water and watercraft campsite.	37.1(R) Scanton Canoe/Kayak/Raft Access (see inset)	22.8(L) Carry-in access at Fond du Lac Reservoir.
70.5 Class I-II rapids.	36.3	33.4	21.8 Fond du Lac Dam, no portage. Exit Jay Cooke State Park.
69.5-64.9 Series of Class I-II rapids.	35.2	33.0	20.4 (L) Trailer access and camping at Fond du Lac City Park.
68.5 River splits around large island, McCarty Creek enters from left.	33.7	33.0	20.1(L) Carry-in access in Chambers Grove picnic area.
68.0 Powerline crosses.	33.6(R) Scanton Dam Canoe, Kayak, and Raft access. (see inset)	33.0	16.8(L) Trailer access at Boy Scout Landing.
67.0 Powerline crosses.	33.4	33.0	15.7(R) Trailer access at Oliver, WI.
65.0 Class I Rapids.	33.0	31.8(L) Confluence with Crystal Creek.	15.4 Hwy 39 and BNSF Railroad Bridge.
64.2 Class I Rapids.	29.5	29.5	12.1(L) Trailer access on Clyde Avenue.
61.8(R) Passes trailer access off County Road 843.	29.7-27.4 Class II-VI Rapids, experts only!	29.5	10.7(L) City campground.
61.4(L) Watercraft campsite.	29.5	28.5	10.3-0 Be very cautious in this area due to shipping lanes, large ships may be passing through.
58.6(L) Watercraft campsite.	29.5	28.5	8.4 (L) Grassy Point Carry-in access. Portage down pier to parking lot beyond gate.
57.4(L) Watercraft campsite.	29.5	28.5	8.1 (L) Carry-in access.
55.7(L) Watercraft campsite.	29.5	28.5	8.0 Richard I. Bong (Hwy 2) Bridge.
55.5 BNSF Railroad trestle.	29.5	28.5	5.3 (L) trailer access. Blatnik (Hwy 53) Bridge.
53.8 (R) Brookston trailer access.	29.5	28.5	2.9 (L) Trailer access.
53.8 County Road 31 bridge, City of Brookston.	29.5	28.5	0 End at Minnesota Point. Enter Lake Superior.
53.7(L) Confluence with Artichoke River.	28.5	27.4	
53.3(R) Confluence with Stoney Brook.	27.4		
52.2(L) Confluence with Cloquet River.			
52.2 Class I-II rapids, can be dangerous in high water.			
51.3 Powerline crosses.			

**Scanton**

Scanton Dam (no portage)  
**DANGER strong currents**

White land represents private land in inset

**ATTENTION PADDLERS:**  
Read route descriptions carefully before planning a trip from the Scanton Access (RM 32.8) to the access at the Thomson Reservoir. This segment of the St. Louis possesses significant variations in river conditions at various flows as follows:

**CONDITIONS**

500-1,500 CFS	Low
1,500-3,000 CFS	Moderate
3,000-10,000 CFS	High
10,000+ CFS	Very High

CFS= Cubic feet per second  
Call first (218) 720-2777 for daily flow information.

— River route  
— Directional signs

**Warm-up Rapids** Class I-II  
**Twy Hole** Class II-III  
**Entry to the Canyon** Class II-III  
**Hidden Hole** Class II-III  
**Electric Ledge** Class III-IV (Scout rapids from portage, river right)  
**Boat Beater Falls** Class V-VI  
**Rescue Rapids** Class II-III  
**Upstream-Downstream** Class I-II  
**Last Chance Rapids** Class I-II  
**DANGER strong currents**  
**DANGER Follow signs to avoid dam**  
**CAUTION EXPERT KAYAKERS ONLY!**

Thomson Reservoir  
Thomson Dam  
UMD Kayak/Canoe Center  
Jay Cooke State Park  
Willard Munger State Trail

The St. Louis River was legislatively designated in 1967 as a Minnesota State Water Trail, long before most states had organized paddle sports recreation infrastructure or designations. Many of the existing facilities (public water accesses, campsites, rest areas, etc.) on the river are the result of this designation. Minnesota DNR has the first and largest Water Trails system in the nation, and has been very involved in the expansion of Water Trail planning and programming at the national level, including providing assistance to the National Park Service in the development of criteria for National Water Trail designation.

Lower St. Louis River

MINNESOTA  
STATE PARKS  
AND TRAILS  
ESTABLISHED 1891



The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

This information is available in alternative format upon request.

Minnesota State Parks and Trails  
Regional Unit:  
1201 East Highway 2 Grand Rapids, MN 55744  
(218) 999-7923

Online water trail information and maps can be found at [mndnr.gov/watertails](http://mndnr.gov/watertails)

**DNR Information Center**

The DNR's Information Center is available to provide free publications of facilities and services as well as answers questions pertaining to DNR recreational opportunities in Minnesota.



This publication was produced by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in cooperation with: Annonah Regional Development Commission, St. Louis River Board Special thanks to Len Anderson, Katherine Johnson, Lynelle Hanson. Organizations working to protect the river system:  
St. Louis River Citizens Action Committee (218) 733-9520  
St. Louis RiverWatch (218) 878-0399

All photos: Holly Sandbo Cover Photo: Jay Cooke State Park  
© 2016 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

# A STATE WATER TRAIL GUIDE TO THE LOWER ST. LOUIS RIVER



*"...in that moment when you ease the canoe from the bank into the current, you sense that you are a part of something very old and precious. It is a moment that should be guarded jealously and handed down with care." - John C. Sawhill, Forward from The River Reader*

## The Lower St. Louis River (Floodwood to Duluth)



DANIELA B. HOFFER/ST. LOUIS RIVER ESTUARY

The lower St. Louis River has a varied character. While usually surrounded by woods, bogs, and rocks, the river also passes by major cities and industries. The current in this section varies from a leisurely paddling speed to a raging torrent.

Between Floodwood and Cloquet, the river has a steady current with occasional rapids. There are several campsites and many spots to explore, swim, pick berries, and look for wild leeks. You might find ancient Indian food caches or other artifacts. Please do not disturb these sites.

Below the city of Cloquet, the river becomes wild, as rocky rapids increase in frequency and intensity. There are also several dams in this stretch. At County Highway 61 in Scanlon, there is access to the river for whitewater rafting and decked canoeing and kayaking.

Below Thomson Dam and through much of Jay Cooke State Park, the intensity of the river increases even more, as the river plunges through a series of rocky gorges. Canoeists should not attempt this stretch.

Downstream of Jay Cooke State Park the river becomes wider and more easily canoeable. The St. Louis Bay becomes a major transportation route for huge freighters traveling the Great Lakes. On this section of the St. Louis River you will find many different land types, from the remote to the agricultural to the urban areas of Duluth and Superior.



DANIELA B. HOFFER/ST. LOUIS RIVER ESTUARY

## History

The history of the lower St. Louis River is similar to the other rivers of northern Minnesota. However, the lower St. Louis had a unique role as a transportation connection between Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. It was used by Native Americans, early European explorers, and trappers. The connection was completed by the Savannah Portage, a six-mile overland carry that connected the West Savannah River, which flows into the Mississippi, to the East Savannah River, which flows into the St. Louis River near Floodwood.

The Dakota Indians inhabited the St. Louis River area, including its rich estuary along the shores of Lake Superior, but were driven out by the Ojibwe in the early part of the 17th century. An important Ojibwe settlement called Fond du Lac (French for "head of the lake") was developed on the estuary.

The Ojibwe were in the area when the first European fur traders and traders began using the river for the transportation of furs and supplies. Eventually, the Ojibwe abandoned Fond du Lac and established their settlement on the river's banks near what is now Cloquet. The site of this former village can be located by a large rock on the west bank about 500 yards upstream from Spafford Park.

Loggers were next to make use of the river. The first crews blasted rock formations, logjams, and curves to prepare the river for the big spring log drives. The logging era began in 1878 when the first sawmill was built at Cloquet. It ended in 1924, the year of the last log drive on the St. Louis River.

Above Cloquet, the remains of an old logging camp can still be found on the east shore (about River Mile 48.5). Also at this point, a series of small rocky islands were used by sorters from various mills who stood on the islands and sorted the logs according to the brand stamped on the ends. Today the islands provide good smallmouth bass fishing, or a good spot to find an old white pine log recently freed from the river bottom.

## St. Louis Estuary

The St. Louis River estuary is a large body of water extending from Lake Superior to extreme western Duluth. The western end of the estuary is popular for motorboating, and the eastern end is utilized by ocean-going ships. The shoreline is a mixture of forest, wetlands, and major industries. When paddling on the estuary, remember to avoid the shipping channels and to respect private property. Also note that wind can come up very quickly and change paddling conditions.

## Fishing

The St. Louis River has a diverse and excellent fish population. Walleye, smallmouth bass, and northern pike are popular catches. The river holds a good population of channel catfish, providing a unique fishery for anglers in northern Minnesota. The St. Louis River estuary is also home to the mighty muskellunge. The DNR is working to re-establish the once-thriving sturgeon population in the St. Louis River watershed. If you catch one of these ancient fishes, you are required to return it to the water immediately.

Mercury contamination is a problem for the entire watershed. Because this river system has an excellent fish population, it is necessary to know the health hazards of eating the fish. Keep smaller fish for eating, release the older, larger fish which have a higher concentration of contamination. People, especially women of childbearing age and children, should strictly adhere to guidelines set by the Minnesota Department of Health. Complete information is available by calling 1-800-627-3529.

## Exotic Species

The waters of the St. Louis River below Fond du Lac Dam are infested by invasive plants and animals. These invaders degrade habitat and water quality. Minnesota law prohibits transportation of these species. Brochures are available through fishing centers and the DNR.

Some of the exotic invaders include zebra mussels, round goby, Eurasian ruffe, spiny waterflea, purple loosestrife, threespine stickleback, rusty crayfish, and white perch. Purple loosestrife seeds should be brushed from clothing and footwear. The seeds, about the size of ground pepper, are invisible in mud. The spiny waterflea forms gelatinous-like blobs that stick to fishing line, swivels, and lures. Eggs remain viable out of the water for weeks, even months. Careful cleaning of all equipment will prevent this spread.

To prevent the spread of these species:

- Remove aquatic plants and animals from your watercraft and equipment before leaving the lake.
- Drain lake or river water.
- Dispose of leftover live bait on land.
- Rinse watercraft with high pressure and hot water.
- Allow watercraft to dry for at least five days.

## Enjoy!

Use all of your senses to enjoy the diversity of plants and animals. Listen for the slow, heavy beating of the great blue heron's wings, or the whirr of a hummingbird as it hovers over bell-shaped flowers. In the evening, some people can hear the ecolocation of the many bats. Enjoy the subtle beauty of cedar waxwings and the ever-changing colors of the waters as day turns into evening.



DANIELA B. HOFFER/ST. LOUIS RIVER ESTUARY

## Rating Whitewater

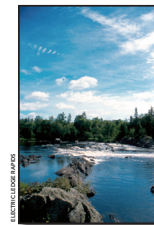
Rivers and rapids are rated according to the International Scale of River Difficulty. Ratings are estimates based on observations at low or moderate water levels or on secondhand reports.

- CLASS I. Easy rapids with small waves and few obstructions.
- CLASS II. Rapids with waves up to three feet high. Some maneuvering is required.
- CLASS III. Difficult rapids with high, irregular waves capable of swamping an open canoe. Narrow chutes may require extensive maneuvering. Usually considered the limit for an experienced paddler in an open canoe.
- CLASS IV. Long, turbulent rapids with high, irregular waves, constricted passages, and blind drops. Decked canoes and kayaks only; open canoes should be portaged.
- CLASS V. Long, violent rapids with complex routes and steep drops or waterfalls. Hazard to life in the event of a mishap. Runnable only by experts in decked boats.
- CLASS VI. Cannot be attempted without great risk to life.

## Planning a Safe River Trip

A successful river trip is safe. To enjoy a safe journey, you should be prepared by acquainting yourself with your route. Choose a distance that is comfortable for you. Water levels can speed up or slow down your trip; get information about water levels from the regional DNR office, DNR website, or DNR Information Center.

Protect the water and shorelands and leave nothing behind you except footprints. Remember that much of the shorelands are privately owned. For daily water level reports below Scanlon and Thomson Dams, contact Minnesota Power at (218) 720-2777.



DANIELA B. HOFFER/ST. LOUIS RIVER ESTUARY

## Trip Planning

- Travel with a companion or group.
- Plan your trip with a map before you depart and advise someone of your plans, including planned departure and arrival times.
- Most people paddle two to three river miles per hour.

- Bring a first-aid kit that includes waterproof matches.
- Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the water.
- You must pack out all trash.
- Leave only footprints; take only photographs!

## Boating Information

- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device that state law requires to be on board the craft.
- Bring an extra paddle.
- Not all portions of this water trail are suitable for motor use.
- Register your watercraft. All watercraft more than 9 feet in length, including nonmotorized canoes and kayaks, must be registered in Minnesota or your state of residence.

## Rest Areas and Camping Sites

- Public rest areas are available along the route to rest, picnic and explore.
- Camp only in designated campsites, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Bring drinking water. It is only available at a limited number of rest areas. Drinking river water is not recommended, but if you do it must be treated.
- Respect private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreland is private property.
- Be sanitary! Use designated toilet facilities or bury human waste away from the river.

## Sustainable Ecosystems

Outdoor recreation is dependent on a healthy and attractive natural environment. Sustainable outdoor recreation enables people to enjoy the outdoors without negative impacts on the environment.

Communities working together can improve water resources by promoting environmentally sensitive land-use practices along rivers and throughout watersheds. Natural shoreline buffers improve water quality by filtering out pollutants and sediments.

Healthy and diverse native shoreline plant communities are attractive and provide important habitat for birds and wildlife.

