

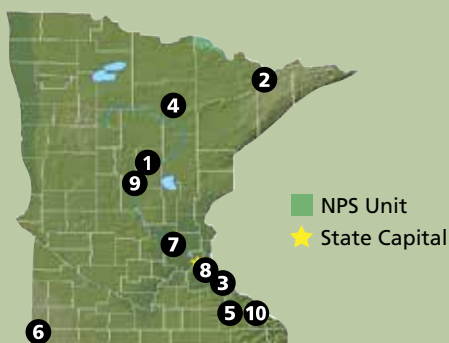


Minnesota News



Participants in the Wheels on Trails Expanding Horizons Program enjoy the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore boat cruise. Photo: NPS

PROJECTS AND PARTNERS 2014



CURRENT PROJECTS

1. Brainerd-Baxter Mississippi Riverfront
Cities of Brainerd and Baxter
2. Connecting Volunteers in the Heart of the Continent
Heart of the Continent Partnership
3. Great Rivers Confluence Project - Phase 3
Friends of Freedom Park
4. Headwaters of the Mississippi River Water Trail
Chippewa National Forest Partnership
5. Indian Heights Park
RNeighbors
6. Luverne Loop Trail
City of Luverne
7. Mississippi River Connections Collaborative/MRT
Mississippi River Trail, Inc.
8. Mississippi River Waterway Access & Trail Assistance
City of Newport
9. Project Engage: Building Youth Connections in RTCA
Wilderness Inquiry
10. Project Get Outdoors - Statewide Expansion
Project Get Outdoors, Inc.

Find out more about each project starting on page 2.

Recent Successes

Expanding Outdoor Horizons for People with Disabilities

Wheels on Trails, a small non-profit organization based in Duluth, hosted thirteen events over the last two years to get people with disabilities outdoors on trail walks and rides, campouts, boat rides, and fishing outings. Founders, Dwight Morrison and Randall Vogt, noticed that

people with disabilities were missing out on the enjoyment and health benefits of recreating outdoors, and founded their Expanding Horizons program a few years ago. In 2012, the NPS joined the effort, providing planning assistance and helping Wheels on Trails identify and obtain a \$24,000 grant. This project was developed to creatively respond to the NPS' Call to Action by introducing an underserved, urban, low-income audience to the outdoors.



Wheels on Trails program participants experience the Ashland Rail-Trail. Photo: NPS

A highlight of this year's program was the fall colors overnight camping trip to the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Wisconsin. People with disabilities and their caregivers visited the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, walked or rode on the Ashland Rail Trail, took the Grand Tour boat cruise, and received a special tour from NPS staff at the Hokenson Fishery.

Current Projects

1. Brainerd/Baxter Mississippi Riverfront Parks and Trails

Project Partners: Cities of Brainerd and Baxter

NPS Contact: Randy Thoreson

Location: Brainerd, Baxter

Congressional District: MN - 8

Project Goal

Complete a Brainerd-Baxter Mississippi Riverfront parks and trails master plan in order to develop connections to the Glacial Lakes Trail, the Camp Ripley Veterans State Trail, and regional trail networks.

NPS Role

Assist the communities in achieving consensus for the master plan, implementing downtown riverfront revitalization plans, and planning and designing trail connections in the area, including links to the regional trails network.

2. Connecting Volunteers to the Heart of the Continent

Project Partner: Heart of the Continent Partnership

NPS Contact: Holly Larson

Location: Northeast Minnesota;

Northwest Ontario

Congressional District: MN - 8

Project Goal

Develop and launch a web-based regional clearinghouse to match volunteers with conservation projects on public spaces throughout in the 5.5-million acre Heart of the Continent region.

NPS Role

Plan, develop, and coordinate the work of the volunteer design team to create the volunteer clearinghouse. Identify and approach community groups and other potential partners to identify projects and recruit volunteers.

3. Great Rivers Confluence Project, Phase III

Project Partner: Friends of Freedom Park

NPS Contact: Randy Thoreson

Location: Prescott and River Falls, WI;

Hastings and Afton, MN

Congressional Districts: MN - 2; WI - 3

Project Goal

Continue to work towards the Great Rivers Confluence vision to, "recognize and appreciate the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers and its people, places, and stories through connections, partnerships, and recreational opportunities." Phase III of this project will complete an already successful outreach program that serves citizens and visitors to the approximately 100-square mile area.

NPS Role

Assist in a wide variety of partnerships to attain the Great Rivers Confluence vision on issues such as: river and water trail planning and development, natural resources protection, eco-tourism, educational systems, outreach, and wayfinding and mapping.

4. Headwaters of the Mississippi River Water Trail

Project Partner: Chippewa National Forest Partnership

NPS Contact: Randy Thoreson

Location: Lake Itasca State Park to

Grand Rapids

Congressional Districts: MN - 7, 8

Project Goal

Obtain the official designation of the Minnesota portion of the Mississippi River as a National Water Trail.

NPS Role

Provide technical assistance, coordination, and facilitation in the planning and National Water Trail designation process. Develop local, state, and regional partnerships.



Wheels on Trails' Expanding Horizons Program participants learn to fish along the St. Louis River in Duluth through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' MinnAqua Program. Photo: NPS

5. Indian Heights Park

Project Partner: Rochester

Neighborhood Resource Center & the City of Rochester

NPS Contact: Holly Larson

Location: Rochester

Congressional Districts: MN - 1

Project Goal

Enhance the 37-acre natural, passive recreation park to restore and enhance native habitats, celebrate Dakota and other Native American history, improve walking trails, and educate visitors about the cultural history and environment. The site will be preserved as a sacred Native American site while allowing use of the park for nature viewing, walking and spiritual connection. Trails will connect this park to other parks and trails in Rochester, and to the Zumbro River.

NPS Role

Assist in developing a master plan for the park, including a natural resources management plan, by facilitating the planning process for the partners' task force. Assist in identifying funding sources and other resources for implementation, establishing a volunteer program, developing community participation and support, and connecting with national conservation and recreation partners.

Current Projects cont.

6. Luverne Loop Trail

Project Partner: City of Luverne
NPS Contact: Holly Larson
Location: Luverne
Congressional District: MN - 1

Project Goal

Develop a six-mile, multi-use hard surface trail that will encircle the city. This trail will connect to the existing Blue Mounds Bike Trail that leads to Blue Mounds State Park. The project includes conservation of natural habitat in the trail corridor and a new city park.

NPS Role

Organize and facilitate committee meetings to develop a trail master plan. Assist the committee in conducting a trail feasibility assessment, developing community support and involvement, and identifying potential funding sources. Advise the committee on the easement procurement process, permit requirements, and trail grants.

7. Mississippi River Connections Collaborative (MRCC)/Mississippi River Trail (MRT)

Project Partner: Mississippi River Trail, Inc.
NPS Contact: Rory Robinson
Location: Mississippi River, source to mouth, through ten States
Congressional Districts: MN - All

Project Goal

Outreach to local communities to encourage improvements to the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) for recreation, tourism, and community development; continued technical assistance in the development of the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative (MRCC) and increased long-term organizational viability; further develop the Mississippi River blueway portion of the trail system; and develop a geotourism initiative with the National Geographic Society.

NPS Role

Assist the MRCC with organizational development, outreach to other organizations and agencies, and development and implementation of their strategic and operations plans. Increase the MRT's capacity to help develop water and land-based trails along the Mississippi River. Specifically, over the next year, assist the MRCC with the development of a sustainable destination tourism (geotourism) initiative in partnership with the National Geographic Society.

8. Mississippi River Waterway Access & Trail Assistance

Project Partner: City of Newport
NPS Contact: Randy Thoreson
Location: Newport
Congressional District: MN - 4

Project Goal

Improve and develop new recreational public water access sites along the Mississippi River in Newport, Minnesota for boating, fishing, and possibly swimming. Plan and construct trail linkages to these access points as well as to the new Metro Red Rock Transit Station.

NPS Role

Provide technical and facilitation assistance in the research, planning, and implementation of the river access points and the trail linkages.

9. Project Engage: Building Youth Connections in RTCA Waterway Communities

Project Partner: Wilderness Inquiry
NPS Contact: Randy Thoreson
Location: Multi-State
Congressional District: MN -

Project Goal

Expand and extend the successful model of the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA) program to communities within the Mississippi watershed as well as other waterways where NPS projects exist now and in

the future. This is part of the America's Great Outdoors youth and recreation initiative. This model can be used for NPS youth outreach assistance in waterway communities throughout Minnesota and the U.S.

NPS Role

Assist in developing UWCA programs in the Mississippi watershed and in other NPS waterways communities.

10. Project Get Outdoors Statewide Expansion

Project Partner: Project Get Outdoors, Inc.
NPS Contact: Holly Larson
Location: Southeast Minnesota; Statewide
Congressional Districts: MN - 1, 2, 4

Project Goal

Expand Project Get Outdoors into urban areas and small towns in Minnesota in order to serve more low income and under-served youth. Establish the Project Get Outdoors as a model for outdoor youth programs outside of the state. Provide programs for exploration, play, and reflection in nature near local communities so children grow to be healthy, comfortable outdoors, knowledgeable and passionate about their land and community throughout their lives.

NPS Role

Assist Project Get Outdoors with organizational development and capacity building to help grow the program in the Twin Cities urban area and other regions of the state. Staff will work with the board of directors in strategic planning to assess and engaging new partners and stakeholders, develop the network of collaborators, determine volunteer management strategies, and identify funding sources.

We're Here For You!

Could your project benefit from NPS Staff Assistance? Contact us to find out.



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2013 Nationwide Partnership Success

1,357 Miles of Trail Developed

736 Miles of River Conserved

20,270 Acres of Open Space and Parkland Protected

ABOUT US

The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. Program staff provide technical assistance to community groups and local, state, and federal government agencies working to protect natural areas and water resources and enhance close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities. We help communities plan, organize partnerships, and achieve on-the-ground success on projects they initiate.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

Recent Successes cont.

Although only about seventy miles from Duluth, most of the participants had never seen their closest National Park unit, and were thrilled with the opportunity. One participant, George, has joined almost all of the events of the last two years. "He just lives for these events," confided his caregiver.

NPS staff assisted Wheels on Trails and their partner, ArcNorthland, with organizational capacity and partnership building, volunteer and participant recruitment, budgeting, program planning, and development of promotional materials.

Mississippi Riverfront Revitalization Underway in Brainerd

Exciting things are happening along eight miles of the Mississippi River corridor in Brainerd, Minnesota, known as the Bridge to Bridge Revitalization Project for its location between two major highway bridges. For many years, Brainerd has been known as the "Lakes Area" of Northern Minnesota. However, that is soon to change as an effort is underway to improve and promote the Mississippi River corridor as an important and precious natural resource, economic, and recreation hub. In fact, one can find views of the beautiful and majestic Mississippi River within the city that rival those in the more remote headwaters region farther north .

The City of Brainerd contacted the Minnesota NPS office for technical and facilitation assistance in planning trails and recreational areas, and promoting the Mississippi riverfront as an important part of the fabric of the community. The Mississippi Riverfront Advisory Committee has been established, and is comprised of city and county, chamber, and community college representatives; business owners; recreational and environmental interests; and a number of engaged citizens. Key Mississippi riverfront land areas have been acquired, and plans are underway to expand land and water trails, nature interpretive areas, and wildlife viewing areas with design assistance from the University of Minnesota's Center for Rural Design. To promote the area, the committee has created a web-based, interactive "Mississippi Corridor" map and photo log. In all these efforts, the NPS has been active in bringing people together, facilitating meetings, providing funding research and support, and helping to build strong and lasting partnerships among many varied interests.

The future is bright for Brainerd's Mississippi River corridor. No longer is Brainerd known only as "Lakes Area," but now a "Doorstep to the Mississippi" as well!



The Mississippi River from Kiwanis Park in Brainerd, part of the riverfront corridor that is the focus of the Bridge to Bridge Revitalization Project. Photo: Steve Roos