



North Woods and Waters of the St. Croix Heritage Area Outcomes and Plans

Three outcomes – established through an extensive community engagement process – guide our work today: economic sustainability, resource preservation, and increased understanding of the region’s distinct heritage. Descriptions of each outcome follow.

- 1) **Create sustainable economic opportunities based on our region’s heritage to enhance communities, livability, recreation and quality of life.** This will be accomplished by linking economic growth to resource stewardship and sustainable practices in an “Experience Economy.” Culture and recreation will be promoted as an economic driver. A focus on heritage development will result in increased economic growth including new jobs and businesses focusing on heritage tourism.
- 2) **Enhance connections throughout the region that help preserve and enhance the historical, cultural, and natural resources that exist within our nationally distinctive watershed.** This goal focuses on connecting people and organizations across sectors and geography through increased communication, collaboration, capacity-building, and efficiency. Strong environmental organizations, arts associations, tourism agencies, chambers of commerce, civic and governmental organizations, schools and colleges, state and national parks and forests, and historical societies already exist throughout the watershed. They are scattered geographically and often divided by sector. NWW will not duplicate their work but will serve as a connector throughout the watershed.
- 3) **Increase awareness and understanding of the watershed’s heritage, stories and the resources that demonstrate these stories.** This goal includes two separate strategies - 1) raising awareness for the region’s residents through heritage area events and educational opportunities, and 2) promoting and interpreting the region to visitors and a global audience.
 - Residents – strategies for building awareness will include experiential activities focused on the region’s cultural, historical and natural resources; heritage education curricula for primary and secondary education; opportunities for community involvement and intergenerational, life-long learning; and continued education concerning the importance of the region’s resources along with opportunities to access and enjoy them.
 - Visitors - creating a regional identity and developing interpretive materials with a regional focus will increase connectivity and expand the visibility of all communities within our regional tourism network. Branding the region and promoting it to visitors interested in heritage experiences, recreation, and outdoor exploration will help visitors understand and appreciate the unique character of this region.

Programmatic Focus and Goals

At our strategic planning meeting at the end of 2017, we identified the following priorities for the North Woods and Waters of the St. Croix Heritage Area. In addition to seeking national designation over the next three years we will:

- a visitor-based **Passport Program** (uniting regional heritage sites), based on other implement passport programs sponsored by the National Park Service and other non-profit National Heritage areas. Passport programs call out specific heritage sites and encourage visitors to get their passports stamped at key locations, including tribal sites that are open to visitors.
- create, implement, and evaluate a **re-granting program** that supports heritage interpretation, programming, heritage signage, and cultural awareness for both visitors and residents, including students in grades K-12.
- hold **quarterly convenings** of representatives who work in natural resource, cultural and historical interpretation within the twelve sub-watershed regions, across themes and disciplines, between Minnesota, Wisconsin, and with involvement from the 4 Ojibwe tribes.
- foster professional development via **heritage tourism workshops** that will focus on heritage development, improved presentation techniques to achieve historical and natural resource interpretation, and on local benefits of heritage tourism.
- provide oversight of the **St. Croix Master Watershed Stewards Program** that integrates science, arts, leadership, cultural heritage, community education and local preservation efforts on behalf of the heritage area.
- conducting annual **Familiarization Tours** for tour bus operators and writers who focus on culture, heritage, nature and travel.
- bring non-profit partners together for **planning** to enhance linkages between local and regional stories and cultural events that can be reflected in year-long events calendars.
- operate a **Speakers Bureau** by training a knowledgeable cadre of volunteers who can provide information and education about heritage and natural resource initiatives and cultural preservation opportunities to organizations throughout the watershed.
- develop an interactive **website and use social media**, on behalf of our non-profit partners that will provide a comprehensive single source of cultural, historical and natural resource information in the region and ***allow non-profit partners to place events directly onto the website/calendar, and that will provide a searchable database of recreational and cultural events and activities for residents and visitors. (upcoming, 2019)***
- **printing materials** such as passports, heritage area maps, rack cards, and brochures that cross-promote sites and draw residents and visitors to more than 300 sites throughout the watershed.
- develop and place **signage** at key locations and at heritage sites that will make heritage natural and cultural history more visible to residents and visitors.
- cooperate with existing **international tourism** programs to increase growth in heritage visits that reach the international tourism market, especially in Scandinavia, Canada, France, and Central America.
- promote regional heritage interests using **cooperative advertising** in target markets within midwestern cities such as the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Duluth/Superior, Eau Claire, Madison/Milwaukee, and Chicago.