



VISION

Americans will recognize and protect the Mississippi River and its people, places, and stories as a national treasured landscape.

MISSION

The mission of the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative is to promote the magnificence and diversity of the Mississippi River as a national treasured landscape. This joint effort will work to increase recognition of America's Great River, enhance the existing resources, acquire funding for conservation, and ensure that all Americans can enjoy these assets in the future.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Mississippi River is the nation's best-known and most important river system. As America's "great river," it is both an ecological lifeline to the nation and a bellwether of the nation's health in all aspects: social, economic, environmental, physical, mental, and spiritual. Today, coordinated recognition, management, and monitoring of the river at the federal, state, and local levels is necessary to change the nature of the river's status from that of a largely neglected and ignored "orphan" to one of America's most treasured landscapes.

The Mississippi River Connections Collaborative (MRCC) represents a new prototype for river-long resource restoration, protection, and programming that relies on a network approach to amplify the depth and reach of individual parks, trails, refuges, or other sites in aggregate and to monitor the relationship of human populations to these resources.

This newly emerging collaborative is an informal network of local, state and federal refuge, park, and trail managers, alongside non-profit organizations that are committed to connecting people to the Mississippi River through recreation, river access, and active transportation; through history, culture, and lore; through education and stewardship; and by co-creation and co-delivery of resource-based messaging and programs. It works in partnership with other organizations that have a physical presence up and down the entire Mississippi River corridor such as the Mississippi River Trail and the Great River Road.

The Mississippi River Connections Collaborative seeks to provide people with physical and thematic connections to the river by tapping unrealized potential to restore and protect this nationally significant resource. Unique attributes of the Mississippi River contribute to its significance as a national treasured landscape. These include 10 national parks, 8 national scenic and historic trails, 32 national wildlife refuges, numerous US Army Corp of Engineers facilities, and dozens of state parks. A total of 326 species of North American birds use the river basin as a migratory flyway, stimulating wildlife-based recreation and tourism. The routine wet and dry cycles of the Mississippi River, including its periodic flood phases, have provided the rich natural habitat to support this diverse wildlife.

Since before the arrival of European settlers on the North American continent, people have been using the Mississippi River for transportation and for the sustenance. They also enjoyed the benefits of its rich, fertile cropland for corn and cotton and sugar. The early European-American settlers travelled southward down the river, then walked back up to the Midwest by way of ancient animal and Indian paths like the Natchez Trace. The invention of steamboats brought an explosion of movement up and down the river in the 1800s, with a corresponding use of the river to move enslaved peoples into the Deep South and as a route to freedom in the North for escaping slaves. It defined the jumping off point for settlement in the western portion of the continent, and its control proved a major strategic focus for the American

Civil War. The Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927 spread 60 miles wide in some areas south of Memphis and fueled the Great Migration of African Americans from southern plantations to northern cities.

The Mississippi River has elevated significant urban areas along its banks: Minneapolis, Minnesota and Davenport, Iowa; Rock Island, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee, Vicksburg, Mississippi, and New Orleans, Louisiana. More than 12 million people live in the 125 counties and parishes that border the river; and it drains 41% of the contiguous United States, providing drinking water to more than 18 million people. The banks of the Mississippi River have produced some of America's greatest literary figures: Mark Twain and William Faulkner and Eudora Welty and Richard Wright – along with the great musical art forms of Jazz and the Blues.

This Strategic Plan for the MRCC will serve as a framework for decisions, provide a basis for more detailed planning, explain the MRCC to others in order to inform, motivate, and involve, and assist with tracking the development and performance of the MRCC.

The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program is providing assistance with the organizational development of MRCC by convening federal, state, and local agencies and organizations up and down the river. MRCC seeks to provide people with physical and thematic connections to the river, thereby tapping unrealized potential to restore and protect this nationally significant resource. The MRCC will maintain a fluid organizational structure with an assemblage of work groups, committees, and points of contact based on geography, agency mission, and subject matter expertise.

The Collaborative has identified five primary thematic areas for development:

- History, Culture & Lore
- Education & Stewardship
- Conservation & Partnerships
- Improvement of Parks and Refuges
- River Access and Recreation

Projects and specific actions will be developed by the Collaborative each year to further our combined work in these areas. The list and those responsible for such actions will be captured in an annual Operational Plan. These activities may be done by an individual, station, organization or combination of these and may be at a single site or any degree of landscape wide. It is intended that the Collaborative may work with all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, private individuals, through legislation, communication activities and any other means developed by the Collaborative to achieve our Mission and Vision. Agencies and private organizations may be brought into the MRCC as partners by means of a Memorandum of Understanding.

At least once per year, the MRCC will meet fact-to-face at a location along the Mississippi River to solidify relationships, review and document the progress, develop new projects and specific actions if needed, and work on any administrative matters needed for the Collaborative. Communication at other times will be carried out by conference calls or email.

