



St. Louis River Estuary Water Trail

The St. Louis River Human History

Welcome to the St. Louis River, the headwaters of the Great Lakes. Local Ojibwe know it as *Gichigami zibi*. "The River that flows into the great waters." The colorful human history of this area includes Native American settlements dating back as early as 800 A.D., European explorers, and missionaries. Attracted to the great abundance of a unique geology, humans have been making the Estuary their home for centuries.



A log drive on the St. Louis Estuary, 1888

Courtesy of University of Minnesota Duluth, Kathryn A. Martin Library, Northeast Minnesota Historical Center Collections.

Unfortunately, due to industrialization and unregulated dumping, by the 1970s the

St. Louis River had become one of the most polluted waterways in the United States. However, it is now slowly and painstakingly being restored to health through the EPA's Area of Concern process and nature's own resilience. A cleaner river is a direct result of decades of citizen collaboration, work by agencies, and organizations. The Water Trail celebrates the slow return of abundance and gives people access to recreate and reconnect to the River once again.

In Pursuit of the National Water Trail

In 2017, the City of Duluth and many Minnesota and Wisconsin partners completed and approved the St. Louis River Estuary National Water Trail Master Plan which was then submitted to the National Parks Service. In April of 2017, the application for the Water Trail was submitted to the National Parks Service. The national review committee has made the recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior to designate the St. Louis River

Estuary Water Trail as part of the larger National Water Trail System. We are currently waiting for the Secretary of the Interior's signature to make this official! The benefits of the cleaner river and the plan for the water trail are being implemented right now and managed by the St. Louis River Alliance. Please contact your US Senators and representatives to encourage them to support the designation of the National Water Trail.



The St. Louis is the largest estuary in the Great Lakes. Driven by wind and air pressure over Lake Superior, a wave called the seiche (SAY-sh) mixes river and lake water multiple times each day, an effect similar to a tide. Expect occasional reversing current.

An Ojibwe encampment on what was once called Crosier's Point is the likely source of the name "Indian Point Campground."

The remains of the barge Alice Vivian can be seen at this canoe access point, including the smokestack.

Spirit Lake Marina is the former location of a shipyard owned by Alexander McDougall, who designed and built whaleback ships.

This area is part of the Dwight's Point and Pokegama Wetlands State Natural Area as well as the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The Whiteside family operated a farm here until it burned in 1956. The island is now owned by the State of Wisconsin. No overnight camping is allowed.

Mantou Minis, or Spirit Island, is one of seven stopping points named in the Ojibwe migration story to this area, and purchased by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewas (Ojibwe) in 2011.

The US Steel Duluth Works operated here from 1915 through 1981, smelting iron. After closing, legacy pollution remained. This Superfund site is not safe for recreation though clean up is scheduled to begin soon.

The Pokegama River is known for the clay soil that dyes it a rusty red after rain. It is located in the Superior Municipal Forest, encompassing more than 4,400 acres of boreal forest within the City of Superior. It's the Nation's 3rd largest municipal forest.

Once extirpated from the estuary, long-lived Lake Sturgeon now spawn at the base of the Fond du Lac Dam in spring. This area is closed to fishing.

In 1816, the American Fur Company established a post at present-day Fond du Lac. Historical accounts also document the use of this area by Native people long before the trading post was built at this location.

The Fond du Lac dam was built in 1924. Current may be strong below the dam. Minnesota Power regularly alters the flow of water. Listen for an alarm given prior to this action and pay attention to river flow.

At this site of a former lumber mill, 115,000 cubic yards of wood waste were removed from the river bottom in 2015.

The 1909 wreck of the wooden steamer M.C. Neff lies 500 ft. south of the Oliver bridge.

Wild rice, called *manoomin* in Ojibwe, is a native grain found only in Northern Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and southern Ontario. Wild rice restoration is underway in some of these sheltered bays.

Almost entirely undeveloped, the Red River Stream Bank Protection Area is a large block of steep, forested terrain. Several springs here flow with brightly-colored orange water, the result of the presence of iron bacteria.

St. Louis River Flora and Fauna

BIRDS
The Estuary is home to a diverse array of native animal species. Over 230 bird species have been documented in the lower St. Louis River. This area is both a critical migratory stopover and an important breeding area. In addition to songbirds, raptors, and shorebirds, the rare common tern is making a comeback due to cleaner waters and habitat restoration. The great blue heron is an iconic symbol of the Estuary, and you may even catch a glimpse of pelicans in their spring migration.

MAMMALS
You will likely see woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, weasels, mink, beaver and the playful otter, among hundreds of other small mammals. The black bear, white-tailed deer, coyotes and red fox will make their appearance as you navigate the wild areas of the river.

FISH
The most popular fish in the St. Louis River may be the walleye, but the pre-historic lake sturgeon is making a comeback. Habitat restoration is leading to the natural spawning of this "species of special concern", and scientists are hopeful they are here to stay. You may even get a close encounter with one of these giants rolling on the water! Other fish such as muskellunge, northern pike, and smallmouth bass as well as panfish are plentiful and are year-round residents.

PLANTS AND TREES
The shores are lined with red, white, and jack pine, white and burr oak, sugar and silver maples, spruce, cedar, basswood, birch and many more. Cattails, black-eyed susans, waterlilies, milkweed, iris, and buttercups are just a few of the plants you will see.

Perhaps the most important plant in the Estuary is *manoomin* (wild rice). Manoomin is a keystone species that is culturally significant and one of the main reasons Ojibwe settled here. It is also a water quality indicator and provides important habitat for fish and wildlife. There is ongoing manoomin restoration in the Estuary, and you will likely see the plants immersing in the late summer. Due to scarcity, there is little harvesting in the Estuary and there are regulations to follow. You can find information about the restoration and importance of this plant so you can help protect it: StLouisRiver.org/Wild-Rice-Project

Gold Sponsors

We would like to sincerely thank our local Gold Level Sponsors for advocating for the St. Louis River Estuary Water Trail. Their generous financial support will assist in implementing the Master Plan and will allow paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy the abundance of the St. Louis River Estuary.

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