Chapter 8
Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Protection

The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a joint state, regional and local program that provides coordinated planning and management for the 72-mile stretch of the Mississippi River corridor that goes through the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Comprised of 54,000 acres of land that surrounds the river, the area extends through 30 municipalities from the cities of Ramsey and Dayton in the north to the Ravenna Township in the south. The MRCCA exemplifies many of the metro area’s most significant natural and cultural resources and is home to a variety of land uses, including residential neighborhoods, parks, and river-related commerce, industry, and transportation. While the river corridor has been extensively developed, many natural areas and wildlife remain.
In order to manage and protect the Mississippi and its surrounding area's vital resources, Governor Wendell Anderson designated the MRCCA in 1976 by Executive Order 130 under authority of the Critical Areas Act of 1973. After being renewed by the succeeding governor, the designation was made permanent in 1979 by a Metropolitan Council Resolution. In 1988, Congress recognized the value in protecting the river's resources and established the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, which shares the same boundaries of the MRCCA, and the park's Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), signed by the Governor and the Secretary of the Interior, incorporates by reference the MRCCA program for land use management. Rather than institute a separate layer of federal regulations, MNRRRA largely relies on the MRCCA to manage land use within the park. This reliance establishes a unique partnership and framework for land use management amongst the local, state and federal governments to protect the intrinsic resources of the Mississippi River Corridor. Three years later, a Minnesota Statute designated the MRCCA a state critical area with the Critical Areas Act. In 1995, the DNR was given the administrative responsibility and rulemaking authority for the MCRRA. Since then, the DNR has developed goals of the MRCCA program and carried out a rulemaking process and consultation with local governments, other agencies, and interest groups. In 2014, the DNR produced a final draft of the MRCCA rules, which were published December 27, 2016.

**Designated goals of the MRCCA program include:**

1. Protect and preserve the Mississippi River and adjacent lands that the legislature finds to be unique and valuable state and regional resources for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the state, region, and nation;
2. Prevent and mitigate irreversible damages to these state, regional, and natural resources;
3. Preserve and enhance the natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historical values of the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for public use and benefit;
4. Protect and preserve the Mississippi River as an essential element in the national, state, and regional transportation, sewer and water, and recreational systems; and
5. Protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the Mississippi River corridor.

A total of 30 communities, including the City of Coon Rapids, have land within the MRCCA. These communities currently regulate land use within the MRCCA through local MRCCA plans and ordinances. By the 1980s, all local governments in the MRCCA had adopted MRCCA plans.

Coon Rapids first adopted a MRCCA plan in 1979, which was included in the City’s 2001 Comprehensive Plan update. During the 2008 Comprehensive Plan update process, the MRCCA plan, then called the Mississippi River Critical Area Plan in the Plan’s Land Use chapter, was updated. Since 1979, many of the first plan’s recommendations have been implemented, while several still require ongoing efforts and remained relevant in 2008 as well as today. The City implemented the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Overlay District and continues to enforce the regulations set in place to promote orderly development in and protect the natural resources and beauty in the corridor. Additional zoning regulations continue to be maintained to ensure limited commercial development associated with recreational activity are permitted in the corridor. The City has also done work to introduce appropriate riverbank vegetation and ensure adequate erosion control along the corridor by working with the Metropolitan Council, Department of Natural Resources, Anoka Conservation District, Army Corps of Engineers, and neighboring cities. Additionally, the City has continued to pay attention to water quality issues and ensure elimination of non-point sources of pollution, and encouraged an efficient erosion control permit process for homeowners.

This section of the Coon Rapids 2040 Plan updates the MRCCA Plan. The public input process for this plan was included in the outreach activities for the Comprehensive Plan. At a City Council retreat in April 2017, Councilmembers reviewed selected policies and goals from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, including the section on the Mississippi River Critical Area. The items reviewed received overall positive responses and no policy or goal was heavily questioned.

In the fall of 2016, the City of Coon Rapids administered the National Citizen Survey through a partnership with the National Research Center, Inc. The National Citizen Survey is often used as a tool to measure a community’s quality of life including residents’ thoughts and opinions on community characteristics, city services and community engagement. While the survey did not specifically ask residents questions related to the MRCCA, it captured resident opinions within the three pillars of a community across eight central facets, one of which being the natural environment. The MRCCA is the most significant example of natural environment in the city.
Respondents rated the natural environment very highly, with 78% of respondents rating the overall natural environment positively. Cleanliness and air quality also received high ratings.

During the spring and summer of 2017, the City of Coon Rapids invited residents to take the Comprehensive Plan Survey, an online survey about the future of the city as it relates to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The survey asked open-ended questions to gain resident input about their vision for transportation, housing, employment, parks, trails, and recreation facilities in the city over the next ten years. When asked what their favorite place is in Coon Rapids, the most mentioned places include the Coon Rapids Dam and other parks or trails. Areas like the MRCCA are highly valued by residents and the natural environment and its facilities should be maintained to continue to be important places in the city.

**Districts**

**MAP 8-1: Districts**

Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids

An executive order in 1979 established four land use districts within the MRCCA and standards and guidelines to assist local governments when preparing the plans and regulations that guide development. These districts are parts of the MRCCA that have similar characteristics. Because the original four districts became less consistent with development patterns as time went on, 2016 rules established six new districts that more accurately represent existing and planned future development. The six districts include: Rural & Open Space District, River Neighborhood District, River Towns & Crossings District, Separated from River District, Urban Mixed District, and Urban Core District. Each of the districts reflect the character and development along the river and recognize planned and future development. Different dimensional standards (building height, river setback, and bluff setback) are applied to each district. These standards are administered through local zoning ordinances, and some provisions default to the standards outlined in the district’s underlying municipal zoning regulations.

These districts are important for managing the MRCCA because they help protect the Mississippi River as a natural and cultural resource. The standards defined in each district take the existing characteristics into account and keep buildings and other development away from sensitive shoreline areas and areas prone to soil erosion and slope failure. Keeping a distance between sensitive shoreline areas and the development helps to maintain the river’s water clarity and quality and reduce sediment runoff. Height provisions help to preserve the natural views within the corridor.

The City of Coon Rapids has land in the MRCCA that is designated as four different districts: River Neighborhood, Separated from River, River Towns & Crossings, and Rural and Open Space. Much of the land directly adjacent to the river is designated as River Neighborhood, which is described as “developed residential lands and existing/planned parkland that are visible from the river, or that abut riparian parkland.” In Coon Rapids, this district includes the single-family residences that back up on to the river, an apartment building along the river, and the entirety of the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park.

More inland from the River Neighborhood District is the district called Separated from River, which is described as “land that is separated from and not visible from the river.” This district includes mostly single family homes in the residential areas adjacent to the homes in the River Neighborhood District. It also includes the residential neighborhood adjacent to the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park.
In the northern part of the MRCCA in Coon Rapids is the campus of Anoka-Ramsey Community College. This is the only land designated as the River Towns & Crossings district, which the DNR describes as “historic downtown and river crossing commercial areas, as well as existing institutional campuses.” Anoka-Ramsey Community College is a 101.5-acre public campus with educational and recreational facilities as well as a bookstore, a performing arts center, a café, and lounge areas. Nestled into the scenic banks of the Mississippi, campus buildings have views of the river and a riverfront plaza creates opportunities for students, staff, and the public to engage with the river.

Just south of the Coon Rapids Dam are islands that are designated as a Rural & Open Space district, which is “rural undeveloped and developed low density residential land that is riparian or visible from the river, often contains tracts of high quality ecological resources.” The two islands are a part of the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, and are highly wooded green spaces. The northernmost island is accessible to pedestrians via the Coon Rapids Dam walkway and contains a dam facility building, natural areas, and a long paved walkway that runs parallel to the shoreline, providing a unique view of the river. The southernmost island is only accessible via boat and is mostly open space and vegetated areas.

The future land use designations of properties within the MRCCA are consistent with districts within which they are located. Properties that are within the CA-RN district are either single family residential or part of Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and are guided Single Family Residential or Park Recreation and Preserve. Properties that are within CA-SR district are also single family; in addition, there is an existing nursing home that is guided Residential Mixed Use. Properties that are within the CA-RTC are part of Anoka Hennepin Community College or a multi-family condominium and are guided Institutional or High Density Residential.

Primary Conservation Areas (PCAs)

General Overview. Primary Conservation Areas (PCAs) are the key natural and cultural resources and features that are to be protected through MRCCA plans and ordinance requirements. Examples of these resources and features include shore impact zones (SIZ), bluff impact zones (BIZ), floodplains, wetlands, gorges, areas of confluence with tributaries, natural drainage routes, unstable soils and bedrock, native plant communities, cultural and historic properties, significant existing vegetative stands, tree canopies, scenic views, publically owned parks, trails, and open spaces, among other resources. PCAs are important because they help ensure that important resources and features in the MRCCA are given priority consideration for protection by every municipality.

Communities in the MRCCA like Coon Rapids are required to include a section about each PCAs in their community.
Shore Impact Zone. A shore impact zone is defined as the land located between the ordinary high water level of public waters and a line parallel to it at a setback of 50 percent of the required structure setback. The shore impact zone in Coon Rapids is consistently approximately 50 feet wide from the water line. Along the edge of the islands in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, the shore impact zone is around 100 feet wide.

MAP 8-3: Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area - Wetlands & Floodplains
City of Coon Rapids, Anoka County

Floodplains & Wetlands. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain mapping designates the 100 and 500 year floodplain areas in the corridor. About 370 of the 1,160 acres in the river corridor lie within the 100 year floodplain and an additional 20 acres are located in the 500 year floodplain. Floodplains include a narrow strip along the river from Anoka to the dam. Here, slopes and bluff lines limit the area subject to flooding. South of the dam, the bluff turns inland, exposing a broader area to the 100-year flood potential. The floodplain is particularly broad near Coon Creek. South of Pleasure Creek, the bluff runs adjacent to the river, leaving only a narrow area exposed to flooding.

About 25 homes were constructed in the floodplain before the City adopted floodplain zoning regulations. These properties experience occasional flooding that does not typically cause significant damage. City floodplain regulations do not allow new permanent structures within the 100-year floodplain unless special flood protection measures are provided.

Wetlands are generally located in the floodplain south of the dam. The “Water Resources” Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan addresses wetland locations and types in more detail.

The corridor provides a habitat for a variety of species, including ducks, geese, songbirds and bank swallows, bald eagles, deer, fox, rabbit, woodchuck, raccoon, and muskrat. River fish species include northern pike, bass, catfish, and carp. The lake within the regional park is stocked with trout.
**MAP 8-4: Natural Drainage Ways**
Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids

**Natural Drainage Ways.** In Coon Rapids, natural drainage ways into the Mississippi River include Coon Creek and Pleasure Creek. Coon Creek starts in Ham Lake, a city northeast of Coon Rapids and runs east through Andover and down to Coon Rapids. The Creek runs down the central part of the city through Lions Coon Creek Park, Erlandson Park, Al Flynn Park, and Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park before emptying into the river, just south of the dam. Pleasure Creek runs through Blaine and Coon Rapids. The headwaters of Pleasure Creek are located at the stormwater pond near Jackson Street in Blaine. The confluence between Pleasure Creek and the Mississippi River is located just south of the Highway 610 Bridge.

**MAP 8-5: Bluff Impact Zones**
Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids

**Bluffs & Bluff Impact Zones.** The protection of bluffs in the MRCCA is important to reducing erosion and slope failure, as well as maintaining wildlife habitat, native vegetation and the corridor’s scenic character. As a PCA, bluffs and the associated bluff impact zones within 20 feet of the bluffs are regulated by the MRCCA program.

Throughout most of the corridor, the bluff ranges from 20 to 40 feet in height and rises directly from the river’s edge. From the top of the bluff inland, the terrain is generally flat or gently sloping. This general character of the shoreline changes from approximately 2,000 feet north of the Coon Rapids Dam to the mouth of Pleasure Creek. Along this portion of the river, the bluff is set back from the river’s edge, with the area between the river and the bluff subject to periodic flooding.
Native Plant Communities & Significant Existing Vegetative Stands. There are 19 different vegetative stands in the MRCCA. The corridor generally exhibits a mostly wooded forest character, with a variety of other vegetative environments like prairie, shrubs, sand flats, and wetlands. The wooded areas are mostly located in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and are full of hardwoods. Tree species include ash, cottonwood, elm, linden, maple, oak, and hickory, among others. Over 40% of the river corridor has significant tree cover. These hardwoods offer animal habitat and provide erosion control, especially those located on slopes and bluffs. Previous and current efforts to prevent and control elm and oak tree diseases have been generally effective in preserving these tree resources. Since 1980, the City's Critical Area regulations have controlled the loss of trees on bluff tops and slopes when land development occurs.

Most of the wetland and marshland is located in south of the dam in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, specifically along the edge of the river near the islands. These islands provide for a number of environments including marshes, sand flats, meadows, floodplain forests, and shrublands that harbor a variety of wetland vegetation and supports wildlife habitats. Cenaiko Lake in the park also offers a habitat for wildlife with an aquatic wetland environment.

Outside Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, land is mostly developed with herbaceous and woody developed vegetation, but pockets of more intense vegetation stands exist throughout the corridor. Specifically, wooded areas with conifers, oaks, hickories, and other hardwoods, or fields with successional grasses and forbs are scattered throughout the developed areas of the MRCCA.
Cultural & Historic Properties. The Mississippi River forms the southwestern boundary of Coon Rapids. Originally called “Father of Waters” by Native Americans, the river has significance in United States history. The river has served as a transportation route since the first canoe. By 1000 A.D., Minnesota Native Americans used the river to trade with tribes in the Illinois and Ohio River valleys. In 1690, Father Lewis Hennepin was the first missionary and fur trader to explore the river through Coon Rapids. In 1821, soldiers used the river to float logs from the 200 foot tall white pines growing along the Rum River for the construction of Fort Snelling. This timber resource also supported a flourishing lumber industry north of Coon Rapids during the 1860s and 1870s. From the 1860s to the early 1940s, when construction of single family homes along the river began, much of the river corridor was used for livestock and crop production.

During 1912 and 1913, the Coon Rapids hydro-electric dam was built for one million dollars. At the peak of construction of the dam, 1,000 laborers worked on it for 24 hours a day. Completion of the dam required 800 railcar loads of crushed rock and 42,000 cubic feet of concrete to produce the structure which raised the level of the river 15 feet behind the dam. The dam produced electricity until 1966 and became regional park property in 1969. In the mid-1970s, a walkway was built across the top of the dam for pedestrian and bicycle use and a visitor center was built. In the 1980s, major construction occurred to assure the structural integrity of the dam, provide better and more efficient water level control gates, and to provide a new walkway across the river below the dam.

In 2012, the DNR and Three Rivers Park District entered into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA). The JPA specified that the DNR is solely responsible for the reconstruction of the dam, for management of the dam as a fish barrier, and for setting the pool operation parameters. The District remains the owner of the dam and is responsible for its routine maintenance and daily operation. In 2013, the Dam underwent a two-year rehabilitation process that included installation of new water control gates and rehabilitation of an existing gate and construction of a new stilling basin.

State Historical Society records indicate that the Coon Rapids Dam is the only historic structure in the river corridor and that the corridor does not contain any significant archaeological or cultural resources.

MAP 8-7: Soil Susceptibility
Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids
Unstable Soils & Bedrock. Overall, the soil in the MRCCA is mostly stable. Areas of unstable soil susceptible to soil erosion tend to be located along bluffs. Bluffs are found throughout the corridor, mostly the riverfront in the northern part of the city, by Anoka-Ramsey Community College, the residential neighborhoods, and in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. Unstable soil associated with bluffs are located around the outer edge of the park and through the southern portion of the park near the Highway 610 Bridge. South of the bridge, unstable soils are found along the bluffs on the outer edge of the parks adjacent to residential neighborhoods, and throughout the neighborhoods at the southernmost part of the city.

Public River Corridor Views (PRCVs)

Public River Corridor Views (PRCVs) is a term defined as "views towards the river from public parkland, historic properties, and public overlooks, as well as views toward bluffs from the opposite shore." Public views of the river corridor are an important scenic resource and the development of the term assists local governments and stakeholders with identifying and protecting these resources. They are important because, as a PCA, they help maintain public viewing access of the river corridor even as communities grow and development occurs. Local governments are required to identify these scenic resources and protect those identified views through ordinance requirements and ordinance administration.

The City of Coon Rapids has little public access to the river outside of the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and Anoka-Ramsey Community College. Most of the river frontage is privately owned with single-family homes backing up onto the river. PRCVs exist along the corridor where the public is able to access and view the river.

MAP 8-8: Public River Corridor Views
Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids
View Toward River from Public Places. The following are selected views toward the river from public parkland, overlooks, and historic properties.

1. View from Anoka-Ramsey Community College

This view is from the river-facing plaza on the Anoka-Ramsey Community College Campus. Accessible by pedestrians visiting the public campus, this plaza provides an open view of the river. This view is particularly valuable because it shows where the river bends northward and shows a perspective of Champlin on the other side of the river. North of Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, there are few public opportunities to view the river. The large-scale plaza and minimal tall vegetation allows for a close view of the river unrivaled by any other public place in the city's corridor. Shorter vegetation along the shoreline or within the Shore Impact Zone (SIZ) would be encouraged, however, as it would enhance shoreline habitat and help filter runoff without negatively impacting views.

2. View from clearing off Mississippi River Regional Trail

This view is from a clearing off the Mississippi River Regional Trail in the northern part of Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. Accessible by bicyclists and pedestrians, the area provides a valuable river view upstream and downstream, and of Brooklyn Park on the other side of the river. The addition of tall vegetation and/or a structure could negatively impact this view. Shorter vegetation along the shoreline or within the SIZ would be encouraged, however, as it would enhance shoreline habitat and help filter runoff without negatively impacting views.

3. & 4. Views from Coon Rapids Dam

These views are from the Coon Rapids Dam which is made accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists via a trail from both the Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park side of the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. These views are valuable because they are expansive river views from the Dam, a historical property in the corridor, and allow you to interact with the Dam. Removal of the Dam or the trail would diminish these views.
5. View from Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park designated viewing area

This view of the river is from a designated river viewing area located in the southern part of Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park near Cenaiko Lake. Accessible by bicycle and walking, the area provides an uninhibited view of the river upstream and downstream. This view is particularly valuable because of the clear view of Coon Rapids Dam, the only historic property in the corridor. Additionally, because of the wooded character of the riverfront in the park, open views are rare and should be protected. Shorter vegetation along the shoreline or within the SIZ would be encouraged, however, as it would enhance shoreline habitat and help filter runoff without negatively impacting views.

6. View from the Coon Creek confluence

This view is from a clearing in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park adjacent to where Coon Creek merges with the Mississippi River. Accessible by bicycle and walking, the area is off the trail near the water’s edge and provides an open view of the river. A similar view is also available from the bridge over Coon Creek. This view is particularly valuable because it demonstrates the large scale of the river, the confluence, and the Highway 610 Bridge. It is also an example of where the river is not screened with vegetation, and an open view of the river is accessible. Shorter vegetation along the shoreline or within the SIZ would be encouraged, however, as it would enhance shoreline habitat and help filter runoff without negatively impacting views.

7. View from Highway 610 Bridge

This view is from the southern side of the Highway 610 Bridge that has a path accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists via an offshoot of the Mississippi River Regional Trail that leads to the bridge. It is also somewhat available to motorists traveling on the highway, but is limited due to the high speed of traffic. This view is valuable because it is the highest view that is available in the city’s corridor. It provides a unique large-scale expansive view of the river from above and of the river as its bends and flows southward. Removal of the bridge’s pedestrian path or the construction of a tall railing could negatively impact the accessibility of the view.
Views Toward Bluffs from River. The following are views towards bluffs in the City’s MRCCA that are accessible by a boat on the river or across from the opposite shore:

8. Anoka-Ramsey Community College

This view toward Anoka-Ramsey Community College from the river shows the bluffs that exist along the edge of the campus where it meets the river. The bluffs in this area start just north of the campus where the riverfront is heavily vegetated, and continues south where a clearing provides views of the river. This view is valuable because it shows different riverfront conditions, a view of Anoka-Ramsey Community College, and demonstrates a natural landscape. Removal of the vegetation would diminish this view.

9. Bluffs along Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park

This view of the bluffs along the northern part of Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park shows a natural riverfront edge that exists in few places along the corridor. The vegetation along the bluffs helps to prevent erosion and water pollution, while creating an attractive natural landscape. This bluff view is valuable because it is different from the riverfront condition of the residential area, which spans the majority of Coon Rapids’ river corridor. Removal of the vegetation would diminish this view.
Restorative measures in the river corridor are often necessary for maintaining water quality and resource integrity. Development and redevelopment present opportunities to prevent erosion, stabilize slopes, and restore natural vegetation. Vegetation plays a large role in slowing stormwater runoff, preventing erosion, filtering nonpoint source pollution, preventing establishment of invasive species, protecting habitat, maintaining stability of bluffs and steep slopes, and maintaining corridor character consistent with each management district. Identifying priorities for natural vegetation restoration is important for maintaining the health of the river and its surrounding land and ensuring that new development or redevelopment does not have negative impact on the corridor.

Even though no formal studies or reports have been completed, priorities for vegetation restoration were identified through a GIS-based process that includes determining the primary conservation areas (PCAs) with no natural vegetation, overlaying native plant communities and significant existing vegetation stands, and reviewing areas where non-vegetative PCAs are still visible. The result is areas with no or limited natural vegetation that are particularly sensitive to vegetation removal or at risk of erosion which serve as a restoration priority areas. Restoration priority areas in Coon Rapids include a lot of the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park between Cenaiko Lake and the river and along the bluffs by the Highway 610 Bridge. Priority areas also exist along the riverfront at the southern tip of the city and at the residential neighborhoods north of the park.
**Water-Oriented Uses**

Water-oriented uses such as barge terminals, recreational marinas, public recreational uses, and other river-dependent uses can provide a community with economic, recreational, and cultural benefits. They can also contribute to external impacts like traffic, hours of operation, noise, and surface water use. The characteristics of the river in Coon Rapids is not suitable for heavier uses such as barge traffic. However, other water-oriented uses are important because they provide an opportunity for residents and businesses to take advantage of the river and use it for purposes that require water access. Access to the river for water-oriented uses gives the community a unique advantage over others in the metro area.

In Coon Rapids, the land adjacent to the river is developed low-density residential, institutional, or park and recreational land. No commercial land use exists along the river; therefore, there is no existing or planned commercial or industrial water-oriented uses. However, marinas are an allowed use in the low density residential districts along the river, which includes the college. Water-oriented use of the river is solely boating; which is accessible by private docks along riverfront homes and by the public boat launch located in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. This public boat launch allows for public recreational use of the river. While the launch is heavily used in the summer, it has little impact on the river corridor and its surrounding land. Anoka County Parks Department which runs the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, is planning to expand the boat launch area to include docks. With small-scale floating docks, opportunities to publically access the river and store boats is increased while disruption to the river is minimized. When designed properly, dock construction can be done in a way that protects water quality, minimizes visual impact, and avoids increasing runoff and erosion.

**Open Space and Recreational Facilities**

MAP 8-10: Open Space and Recreational Facilities
Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids

Open space and recreational facilities are a crucial part of any community. Spaces such as parks, trails, scenic overlooks, natural areas, islands, and wildlife areas add to the quality of a community and increase public access to the river. Besides providing numerous environmental benefits, these types of facilities and spaces are important because they create recreational, community engagement, and leisure opportunities. They also provide the city with tourism, economic development, and public health benefits.
Municipalities in the MRCCA are required to encourage creation, connection, and maintenance of open space and recreation facilities, and identify potential public access points and trail locations in their plans. While the majority of the land surrounding the river is single-family homes, the Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park is a 446-acre park located right on the river. A popular, year-round destination for Anoka County, the park offers visitors many activities such as picnicking, fishing, cross country skiing, recreational boating, hiking, and biking. With a visitor center, observation areas, performance and picnic pavilions, trails, and a playground, the park and its facilities are a major draw for the city of Coon Rapids, and one of city residents’ favorite places. Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park also offers a unique fishing experience with a stocked trout lake—Cenaiko Lake, and fishing along the Mississippi River, both above and below the dam. The park is currently the most important open space and recreational facility in the City’s MRCCA; this will continue in the future.

The Mississippi River and the Coon Rapids Dam are major focuses of the park. Riverfront trails run the entire 2-mile river frontage and picnic areas and designated viewing areas allow for visitors to interact with the river. The dam itself has a paved pedestrian walkway extending from the park, which offers unique views of the river. The trails and the dam walkway provide access to the Mississippi River Regional Trail and the North Hennepin Regional Trail. A boat launch on the river provides visitors with recreational river boating opportunities.

The Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park is part of the Anoka County Parks System. The County has planned for the future of the park in its Master Plan and other documents. Besides ongoing maintenance, upgrades to a number of facilities, and the construction of additional facilities, few major changes are slated for the park. One of these upgrades includes the addition of the docks to the existing boat launch area on the river. This would allow for more recreational boating and boat storage opportunities. Redevelopment of the roadway, parking lot and picnic facilities are also planned. Downstream, a carry-in canoe launch and an emergency boat launch are needed. A new maintenance facility is also planned along with gatehouse replacement and visitor center remodeling. Related to the environmental impacts of development, addressing the high water damage and shoreline restoration in the corridor continues to be a challenge for Anoka County.

Transportation and Utilities

**MAP 8-11: Transportation and Utilities**
Mississippi River Critical Corridor Area
City of Coon Rapids

If not properly designed, transportation infrastructure and utilities such as power, gas, water, sewer and stormwater can have negative impacts on scenic views, wildlife habitats, and soil erosion. Development of these facilities must be conducted in a manner that minimizes impacts. The MRCCA plans developed by cities should describe methods for minimizing impacts to the corridor’s resources from transportation and utility facilities.
In Coon Rapids, impact on the corridor due to transportation and public utility facilities is minimal. Within the MRCCA, roadways and their associated vehicles and transit are located at a distance from the river. Single-family homes and open space act as a buffer between the traffic and the river corridor. Along the southern portion of the MRCCA, a regional walking and bicycling trail runs along the riverfront, starting at the trailhead for the Mississippi River Regional Trail and continues through Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and out of the city. These trails are 10’ wide paved pathways for use by pedestrians and bicyclists and are around 40-150’ from the shoreline. A naturalized buffer with vegetation and trees helps to maintain the shoreline. These existing transportation facilities are expected to remain in the future and no new facilities are planned for the future.

Six electrical transmission line facilities currently cross the river and there are no planned crossings that would require new right-of-way. There are 13 storm drainage system discharge points to the river including Coon and Pleasure Creeks, Riverview and Egret drainage channels, and nine storm sewer outfalls. The drainage channels and sewer outfalls have little visual impact on the public river corridor views, but electrical transmission lines can lower the quality of river views. However, there are few electrical line facilities in the corridor and most are south of the dam, where access to the water is more limited. Utilities can have an impact on primary conservation areas by making them more susceptible to soil erosion and loss of vegetation. Efforts should be made to ensure that the development of new utility facilities have minimal negative impact on public river corridor views and primary conservation areas.

**Key Issues and Opportunities**

The MRCCA will continue to be an important part of Coon Rapids in the future. Over the next ten years, few severe changes are likely to occur as the city and the riverfront is essentially fully developed. The residential neighborhoods along the river will be maintained. The riverfront location presents an opportunity for high value homes. Improvements to existing homes and the development of new homes may occur over the next decade. Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park is currently a highly valued asset for the community. With prime dam and riverfront access, the park provides city residents and visitors with an expansive space for leisure and recreational activities. This presents an opportunity to maintain this great resource and river access. As the planned park renovations occur, it will be a challenge to preserve the river views, public access, and recreational opportunities.

Maintaining environmental quality will continue to be a challenge as new development and changes occur in the MRCCA. Renovations to the area present the issues of managing stormwater, maintaining water quality, and reducing soil erosion. While future natural occurrences that impact the river and riverfront are unknown, area updates present an opportunity to combat these occurrences. With proper planning, ongoing maintenance, and a focus on the restoration of vegetation and the shoreline, actions can be made to protect the health of the river and preserve it as a natural and cultural resource for decades to come.
Goals and Policies

Designated goals of the MRCCA program include:

1. Protect and preserve the Mississippi River and adjacent lands that the legislature finds to be unique and valuable state and regional resources for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the state, region, and nation;
2. Prevent and mitigate irreversible damages to these state, regional, and natural resources;
3. Preserve and enhance the natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historical values of the Mississippi River and adjacent lands for public use and benefit;
4. Protect and preserve the Mississippi River as an essential element in the national, state, and regional transportation, sewer and water, and recreational systems; and
5. Protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the Mississippi River corridor.

General

Policies that recognize the importance of the MRCCA and help to further its goals include:

1. The City will give appropriate attention to water quality and ensure elimination of non-point sources of pollution.
2. Manage surface water drainage to maintain river water quality.
3. Improve quality of surface water runoff received by streets and watercourses through Best Management Practices. Manage the use of chemical fertilizers and application of salt to streets in winter.
4. Minimize direct overland surface water runoff.
5. Encourage and support special events that bring people to the river.
6. Promote tourism in the river corridor.
7. Encourage investments in river corridor improvements.

Districts/Land Use

Policies with the intent of guiding land use and development and redevelopment activities consistent with the management purpose of each district include:

1. The current zoning - predominantly low-density residential - should be maintained. No industrial and only limited commercial development associated with recreational activity should be permitted in the corridor. This should apply to each MRCCA District – River Neighborhood, Rural & Open Space, River Towns & Crossings, and Separated from River.
2. Minimize site alteration within the corridor.
3. Retain compatible, existing low density residential, recreational and institutional uses in the corridor and do not allow commercial or industrial development within any of the four MRCCA Districts.
4. Ensure new development in the river corridor has a relationship to the river, a need for a river location, or the capability of enhancing the river.
5. Preserve existing residential, institutional, and recreational land uses within the corridor.
Primary Conservation Areas (PCAs)

The Primary Conservation Areas (PCAs) within Coon Rapids' MRCCA include shore impact zones, floodplains and wetlands, bluff and bluff impact zones, significant existing vegetative stands, cultural and historic properties, and unstable soils and bedrock.

Policies with the intent of protecting, prioritizing, and minimizing the impact to PCAs are as follows:

General/Land Use

1. Protect all PCAs in Coon Rapids and minimize the impact from public and private development, as well as land use activities.
2. Support mitigation of impacts to PCAs through various land use tools such as subdivisions/PUDs, variances, CUPs, and other permits.
3. Support alternative design standards that protect the City’s identified PCAs, such as conservation design, transfer of development density, or other zoning and site design techniques that enable better protections or restoration of PCAs.
4. Prioritize permanent protection measures (such as public acquisition, conservation easement, deed restrictions, etc..) that protect the City’s identified PCAs.

Shore impact zones

1. Enforce the zoning code restricting development within the shore impact zones.
2. Encourage native landscaping and restoration of natural shorelines.
3. Provide an uninterrupted vegetated shoreline where practical by encouraging preservation and replacement of natural plant materials.

Wetlands, floodplains, and areas of confluence with key tributaries

1. Protect wetlands in accordance with the Wetland Management Plan.

Natural drainage routes

1. Maintain the land around natural drainage routes and creeks to reduce river water pollution due to soil erosion.
2. Encourage new development and reconstructions to employ stormwater management practices on site to reduce stormwater runoff into the river.

Bluff and bluff impact zones

1. Restrict development along bluffs and in their associated bluff impact zones.
2. Encourage steep slopes to be used for open space uses.
Significant Existing Vegetative Stands

1. Identify and protect areas of significant vegetation, unique vegetative species and wildlife habitats within the corridor and retain existing vegetation and landscaping.

2. Protect natural resources with preservation areas on public land and work to restore wildlife habitat, particularly for threatened and endangered species, and preserve biological diversity in all areas of the corridor, especially development projects.

3. Removal of natural vegetation in the MRCCA is prohibited, as all development shall be located to preserve the natural features of the site and to preserve significant trees or plant communities (including remnant stands of native trees or prairie grasses or plant communities that are rare to the area or of particular value). Also to be preserved are trees with a diameter at breast height of 12 inches or larger.

4. Natural vegetation shall be restored to the extent feasible after any construction project is completed to retard surface runoff and soil erosion and to provide screening. Adequate erosion protection measures such as trees and vegetation plantings on slopes shall be used to ensure that soil loss levels do not degrade the protected water body.

Cultural and historic properties

1. Protect archaeological resources, historic structures, and cultural landscapes in their present condition.

2. Maintain pedestrian and bicycle access to the Coon Rapids Dam.

Unstable Soils & Bedrock

1. Restrict development within areas of unstable soils and bluff impact zones.

Public River Corridor Views (PRCVs)

Policies with the intent to protect and minimize impacts to PRCVs include:

2. The City will continue to enforce the controls on billboards that exist in the zoning ordinance. Specifically prohibited are off-premises advertising signs and billboards that would be visible from the river.

3. Structure site and location shall be regulated to ensure that riverbanks, bluffs and scenic overlooks remain in their natural state, and to minimize interference with views of and from the river, except for specific uses requiring river access.

4. The City will prevent development that blocks or has a significant negative impact on key scenic views and encourages design which preserves, enhances, or creates key scenic views, explicitly PRCVs identified in Coon Rapids’ MRCCA plan, as well as those identified by other communities adjacent to or across the river from Coon Rapids.

5. Maintain existing natural landscaping and clearings in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park that help to frame river views.

6. Require that riverfront development preserves a natural appearance while minimizing interference with views to and from the river.
Restoration Priorities

**Policies with the intent of restoring native and natural vegetation and stabilizing soil include:**

1. The City will work with the Metropolitan Council, Department of Natural Resources, Anoka Conservation District, Army Corps of Engineers, and neighboring cities to ensure adequate erosion control along the corridor.

2. The City will encourage property owners along the river to replace diseased trees with new plantings and introduce appropriate vegetation on river banks and steep slopes to control erosion.

3. Work with Anoka County to restore vegetation within the Vegetation Restoration Priority areas in Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, including protection/enhancement of and along PRCVs identified in this plan.

4. The City will encourage an efficient erosion control permit process and City staff should be available to help homeowners prepare applications for erosion control permits.

5. Provide an uninterrupted vegetated shoreline where practical by encouraging preservation and replacement of natural plant materials, including protection/enhancement of and along PRCVs identified in this plan.

6. Control and prevent riverbank erosion by:
   - Regulating preservation of shoreline vegetation
   - Encouraging replacement of lost shoreline vegetation with native plant materials
   - Encouraging installation of systems to control existing areas of erosion
   - Continuing to assist homeowners to obtain required permits for erosion control
   - Providing needed erosion control measures at City storm drainage outlets
   - Utilize the CUP, variance, vegetation permit and subdivision/PUD process to restore vegetation in restoration priority areas as necessary

7. Evaluate proposed development sites for erosion prevention and bank stabilization issues and require restoration as part of the development process.

8. Protect native and existing vegetation during the development process, and require restoration if any vegetation is removed by the development process.

9. Sustain and enhance ecological functions during vegetation restorations

**Water-Oriented Uses**

**Policies with the intent to protect water-oriented uses and minimize the conflict between those uses and other land uses include:**

1. Require that riverfront development is compatible with riverfront uses, and preserves a natural appearance while minimizing interference with views to and from the river.

2. Access to the riverfront shall be incorporated, where appropriate, in new development and redevelopment activities within the Critical Area/MNRRRA Corridor.

3. Maintain existing safety procedures for preventing recreational water use south of the Coon Rapids Dam.

4. Enforce that public river use be allowed only at designated locations along the river.

5. Protect existing water-oriented uses at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park and other areas with current water-oriented uses.
Open Space & Recreational Facilities

**Policies with the intent of encouraging the creation and maintenance of open space and recreational facilities and public access to the river include:**

1. Preserve natural areas when designating parks and open space.
2. Maintain existing City, County, and State park lands and trail facilities within the corridor.
3. Encourage connections to the river corridor trail system and existing park land from more inland residential neighborhoods.
4. Pursue opportunities to increase pedestrian access and add parkland to the riverfront in the northern part of the corridor if redevelopment of large lot residential areas occurs. Encourage that land dedicate requirements be used to acquire land suitable for public river access.
5. Support facilities to provide enhanced visitor experiences at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park.
6. Provide carefully designed, safe, and accessible public facilities that complement their river corridor context.
7. Provide high quality and sustainable open space, public plazas, historic landscapes, interpretive facilities, and related facilities in the river corridor responsive to Mississippi National River and Recreation Area location and resource protection policies.
8. Existing islands within the Corridor shall be preserved and managed as open space.
9. Identify and encourage the connection of land Separated from the River District (CA-SR) to existing and planned parks and trails for developable land within those districts.

Transportation & Public Utilities

**Policies with the intent to minimize the impact of transportation facilities and public utilities on the MRCCA include:**

1. Design new or modified transportation facilities to complement planned land and water uses and to not stimulate development incompatible with the river corridor.
2. Ensure future development emphasizes continuous open space, minimizes utility and infrastructure needs and crossings (including transportation river crossings and concentrates them at existing crossings where possible), and allows for scenic vistas, trails and walkways.
3. Encourage, where practical, the placing of utilities underground.
4. In planning and designing the construction or reconstruction of all public transportation facilities in the river corridor, give consideration to providing:
   - Scenic overlooks for motorists
   - Safe pedestrian crossings and facilities along the river corridor
   - Access to the riverfront in public ownership
   - Aesthetically pleasing details, including railings, lighting, paving, and landscaping
   - Any future utility crossings in existing rights-of-way
   - Public improvements to strengthen the link between the Coon Rapids Boulevard corridor and the river
5. Ensure that solar and wind generation facilities, public transportation facilities, and public utilities have minimal if any impact on PCAs and PRCVs.