

## SLR Corridor Legacy Designation Application

**Legacy Parks and Trails Pre-Application****Name: St. Louis River Corridor Recreation Area****Facility website:****Contact Name:** Lindsay Dean**Describe other project supporters:**

Cyclists Of Gitchee Gumee Shores  
 Duluth Cross Country Ski Club  
 Duluth Climber's Coalition  
 River Corridor Coalition  
 Northland Paddlers Alliance  
 St. Louis River Alliance  
 Visit Duluth  
 Duluth Chamber of Commerce  
 West Duluth Business Club  
 Izaak Walton League  
 Minnesota Land Trust

**Statement of Regional Significance (75 words)**

The St. Louis River Corridor Recreation Area (River Corridor) is a system of destination parks and multi-use trails interconnecting mountains, trout streams, the St. Louis River and Estuary, and visitor hubs like Lake Superior Zoo and Spirit Mountain Recreation Area. These amenities are adjacent to the vibrant downtown and canal park business districts. The area is a destination for mountain biking, fishing, hiking, cross country skiing and paddling among other outdoor activities.

**Overview/Description (500 words)**

Duluth vision for the St. Louis River Corridor promotes outdoor recreation, reconnects people to the River, and fosters sustainable economic development. Trails will connect destination parks and provide access in underserved areas or for specific recreation uses. Additions and upgrades as well as new opportunities will complement the outdoor recreation experience.

- Complete 8-mile Duluth Winnipeg and Pacific (DWP) Rail Trail, a multi-use wheelchair accessible crushed stone path along the former rail line. This trail soars 300-to-400 feet above the river and provides expansive views of the river and lake as it winds through diverse habitat, over cascading streams, and through historic tunnels.
- Extend the 3.3 mile Western Waterfront Trail (WWF), a multi-use, wheelchair accessible, crushed stone path nine miles to Jay Cooke State Park. WWF is the only trail along the river and it provides multiple access points including a motor boat launch.
- Complete 3 accessible connector trails between the DWP and the WWFT at Kingsbury Creek, Spirit Mountain, and Stewart Creek. These trails will connect visitors along the river to amenities across Hwy 23 (Grand Ave) including the Duluth Traverse and Superior Hiking Trail systems.
- Restore Fairmount Park and half of the Lake Superior Zoo. Amenities include a nature play area, accessible bike and pedestrian access along a trout stream, multi-use trails connecting the park and mountainside to the riverfront, picnic areas and a new St. Louis River paddling access.

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- Restore Lincoln Park, the Corridor's first park, now nearly 125-years old, which contains many WPA-era structures as well as newer amenities. Lincoln Park facilities will support family based activities, emerging activities like disc golf, and restore Miller Creek to its former glory.
- Create the Grand Avenue Nordic Center, a cross country skiing hub at the base of Spirit Mountain with lights and snowmaking. The trails will be the only ski trails in lower west Duluth and the only trails with snowmaking and lights in the region. Artificial snow is coveted early and late in the season and during increasingly common low snow winters and draws high school, college and professional races and events.
- Create the St. Louis River National Water Trail with paddler-optimized put-in's and paddle-in wilderness camping and wayfinding. The water trail will access numerous point in Minnesota and Wisconsin as well as unlimited paddling on Lake Superior.
- Chambers Grove Park, the westernmost terminus for all of Duluth trails, is undergoing restoration and upgrades after the 2012 flood devastated the park. Chambers Grove is one of the most historic parks in the Corridor; one of two Duluth locations for public fishing that meets ADA requirements; and is a trailhead for the Duluth Traverse and the Lake Superior Hiking Trail.
- Create climbing centers at Ely Peak and Quarry Park for bouldering and ice climbing as well as neighborhood access to the Superior Hiking Trail and Duluth Traverse Mountain Bike Trail System.
- Standardized wayfinding throughout facilitates access and improves navigation of Corridor amenities as well as adjacent opportunities.

## Classification

- ☒ Natural Resource Based Regional Park
- ☐ Special Recreational Feature Park
- ☐ Regional Trail (Non-Motorized)
- ☐ Regional Trail (Motorized)
- ☐ Regional Trail (Motorized and Non-Motorized)

Existing Facilities

- ☒ Camping-cross-section of camper types
- ☒ Electric/water/sewer RV sites
- ☒ Electric/water campsites
- ☒ Electric campsites
- ☒ Non-electric campsites
- ☒ Group campsites
- ☒ Tent only sites
- ☐ Camper Cabins

Other (please describe):

- ☒ Picnicking and picnic shelters

Proposed Facilities

- ☐ Camping-cross-section of camper types
- ☐ Electric/water/sewer RV sites
- ☐ Electric/water campsites
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- ☒ Walking Trails (paved)
- ☒ Hiking Trails (natural)
- ☒ Biking Trails (paved)
- ☒ Mountain Biking Trails (natural)
- ☒ Cross-country Skiing Trails
- ☒ Horseback Riding Trails (natural)
- ☒ Swimming
- ☒ Lake Access for power boats
- ☒ Canoeing Facilities
- ☒ Fishing Piers
- ☐ Visitor Center
- ☒ Nature Center/Interpretation Trails
- ☒ Play areas, with an outdoor theme
- ☐ Outdoor Amphitheater
- ☒ Dog Parks
- ☐ Archery/Shooting ranges
- ☐ Climbing (natural/man-made)
- ☒ Zip Lines
- ☒ Restrooms/sanitation building
- ☒ Roads and Parking Areas
- ☒ Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more)
- ☐ Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet)
- ☒ Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more)
- ☐ Aggregate surfaced trail (less than 10 feet)
- ☒ Aggregate surfaced trail
- ☒ Natural-surfaced trail - user created
- ☒ Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use
- ☒ Underdeveloped natural-surfaced trail - user created
- ☒ Designated natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use
- ☒ Trailhead parking
- ☒ Trailhead information kiosks
- ☒ Trailhead restrooms
- ☒ Benches along trail
- ☒ Picnic shelters at trailhead

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## Master Plan status

X No Master Plan is Available

Existing Master Plan is Available (but needs to be updated to meet strategic plan)

Master Plan meeting requirements of strategic plan is available Complete Master Plans will be uploaded through the Master Plan portal. Check back here for a link when that portal becomes available.

**Describe other supportive information**

The River Corridor highlights a natural resource without comparison for size or quality in Minnesota or the Midwest. The area includes:

- More than 10,000 acres of publicly owned green space
- 20 miles of riverfront (12 in nearly continuous public ownership)
- The world's largest freshwater estuary (12,000 acres)
- Fisheries that include walleye, salmon, lake trout, and sturgeon and 10 designated trout streams
- Mountain peaks and Skyline Parkway, a Minnesota Superior Scenic Byway, provide stunning views of the river and Lake Superior
- Old growth hardwood forests of maple, mature white and red pines, and endangered hemlock
- Classified as a State Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society
- The sandbar at the river's mouth is the longest in North America. The dunes and adjacent habitat cover about 260,000 acres.
- Magney Snively Natural Area and F.R. Paine and Oneota Forest Preserves

The cultural resources are equally significant:

- Spirit Island, Lake, and Mountain, a sacred places for the Anishinaabe including burial sites
- Fond du Lac, site of a historic Anishinaabe settlement, a 1600's fur trading post, and the first Duluth home
- The beginning of the Grand Portage Trail
- The Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad, the first railroad into Duluth in 1872, closely following the riverfront, and still in use today as an excursion railway
- Historic US steel company towns, now the Morgan Park, Riverside and Gary New Duluth neighborhoods

Recreational resources:

- 23 miles of hiking trails connecting to the 300 mile Superior Hiking Trail and the National North Country Trail
- Over 20 miles of mountain bike trails connecting to another 80 miles of the Duluth Traverse, an International Mountain Bike Association Gold Award Ride Center
- The 3.35 mile Western Waterfront Trail along the St. Louis River
- 4 miles of paved accessible multiuse trail connecting to 60 miles of the Willard Munger State Trail
- Numerous paddle and motorboat launch sites
- 10 miles of groomed snowmobile trails that connect to 45,000 miles in Minnesota and Wisconsin
- 55 kilometers of groomed cross-country ski trails
- 22 miles of a Minnesota State Water Trail that connects to unlimited paddling on Lake Superior and its State Water Trail
- Rock/ice climbing destinations at Ely Peak and Quarry Park
- Lake Superior Zoo
- Indian Point and Spirit Mountain Campgrounds
- Spirit Mountain Recreation Area: hiking, mountain biking, Nordic & downhill skiing and year round adventure park.

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## Support services:

- Nearby restaurants, hotels, and attractions in West Duluth, Lincoln Park, Canal Park and Downtown Duluth provide a range of services
- Campgrounds have toilets, showers, RV hook-ups, picnic facilities and water access
- Trailheads and connections utilize existing park facilities that provide access & parking, water, ADA accessible restroom facilities, running water, and way-finding
- A number of top tier websites connect visitors with attractions, lodging, dining, activities, sporting events, and maps

**Alignment with the criteria associated with the selected classification**

## Criteria #1: Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience (300 words)

- Relevant facilities/amenities

The Corridor provides a full range of facilities and amenities from plush accommodations and fine dining to rugged experiences for the expert enthusiast. Example: fishing opportunities range from shore fishing with a pole to a luxury charter with guide. Equipment (bikes/mountain bikes, climbing gear, ski equipment, standup paddleboards, etc) is available for rental.

- Expands outdoor recreation to new or extended populations

Duluth, businesses and user clubs partner and are open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature based trends and group based activities. Examples: Quarry Park includes ice climbing and bouldering, an emerging activity that is accessible to a range of users and abilities. Programs exist for families to learn to climb and climbing equipment exists for the disabled.

- Regional and national tourism destination

Duluth serves 3.5 million visitors annually. Duluth can be found on national and international sites. Examples: rockclimbing.com and the International Mountain Bike Association website. Professional surfers visited Duluth this past winter to surf the waves at Stoney Point and Lester River and were featured on CBS News.

- Provides a quality of experience

Activities meet the differing outdoor recreation needs of people of all abilities and include universal design, family friendly facilities, levels for all skill sets, and an extensive network of lodging, restaurants, outfitters, partner programming, and special events such as mountain bike races and ski tournaments.

- Emphasizes innovation, uniqueness and new ways of engaging residents and tourists in outdoor activities.

Duluth identifies and supports emerging trends. An example is mountain biking. As this sport emerged, Duluth formed a partnership with stakeholders to build trails and there are now 100 miles of these trails. Quarry Park development will provide new ice climbing opportunities in the region. Local outfitters also now offer an array of entry-level instructional opportunities, which until just two years ago, was not possible in Duluth.

## Criteria #2: Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place (limit to 300 words):

- Provides a compelling sense of place and uniqueness

Duluth is the primary access point for visitors to Lake Superior and the St. Louis River and its estuary. The combination of ecosystems within the estuary – wetland and aquatic habitats, its importance to breeding and migratory birds and native fish – unique in the Upper Midwest, the Great Lakes, and around the world. Three peaks provide stunning views of the St. Louis River and Lake Superior. Trails and roads cross cascading streams that create stunning waterfalls. Old growth hardwood forests, mature white pines, and groves of endangered hemlock abound. The Mississippi Flyway provides significant bird-watching opportunities.

- Water access and historically/culturally-significant features

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Recent work with federal, state, private, and local partners cleaned much of the estuary since it was declared an Area of Concern. The entire AOC is due to be delisted in 2025. The waters are now fishable and swimmable and include an opportunity to fish for the prehistoric lake sturgeon, a natural and historical/cultural resource. The estuary, river and harbor are served by landings at Chambers Grove (also a historic site a trading post), Munger Landing (a state access point) and others. The Corridor is home to 22 miles of the State St. Louis River Water Trail and provides half a dozen mapped trails throughout the estuary and inlets in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

- Impacts to the land resource

Recreational development in the Corridor not only "takes care of what we have" but improves it. Duluth is committed to protecting its natural resource base to improve quality of life and economic development. Duluth is restoring as much of the river front to pre-settlement conditions as much as possible, removing exotic species, replanting with natives, and restoring degraded trails, shorelines, and access points to protect the water resource.

Criteria #3: Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourist Destination (limit to 300 words):

- Located by a well-established tourist destination

Duluth serves 3.5 million visitors annually. There are facilities for every interest including museums and historical sites, arts and nightlife, shopping, parks and trails, sporting events, as well as the outfitters to connect visitors with their ideal amenity. Duluth provides the most comprehensive range of facilities for visitors to access Lake Superior and the St. Louis River and its estuary. Nearby visitor destinations include the Great Lakes Aquarium, Canal Park/Park Point, Duluth Convention Center, Tall Ships event, North Shore Scenic Railroad, harbor cruises, Glensheen Mansion, and special seasonal events like Bentleyville Tour of Lights. The Scenic Shore Drive parallels Lake Superior from Duluth to Thunder Bay and is considered one of the most scenic coastal highways in the nation.

- Connected via local, regional, or state-level trails

Duluth trails connect to the Munger State Trail and the Cross City/Lakewalk and Superior Hiking Trails. Loop trails in the Corridor include parks and trails at Enger Park, Piedmont Recreation Area, Brewer Park, Spirit Mountain Recreation Area and the F.R. Paine Forest Preserve and Jay Cooke State Park. The Cross City/Lakewalk Trail is part of the planned National Bicycle Route 41 that will travel from Texas to Canada.

Criteria #4: Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region (limit to 300 words):

- Need for regional recreational opportunities not otherwise available

No other city north of the Twin Cities provides the quality, depth, and breathe of outdoor recreation opportunity. The area provides something for everyone as well as options to explore new activities at every skill level. Visitors can plan multiple activities in a day, weekend, or longer and know that whatever support facilities they need to be successful will be available. It is the perfect situation to engage residents and visitors in new or expanded outdoor activities as well as provide education and outreach about these fragile and critical resources.

- Fills a critical gap in an area with a recreation opportunity shortage

Few places have the varied elevation, topography, scenic destinations, extensive public land base, and close proximity to the well-established tourism infrastructure as does Duluth. Amenities not available elsewhere in the region include:

- Extensive mountain bike trails: Duluth is the only IMBA Gold Level Ride Center in the Midwest
- Ice climbing: Sandstone MN has the only other climbing center
- Hiking state or national trails: Superior Hiking Trail is part of the national long distance North County Trail.
- State St. Louis River Water Trail and Western Waterfront Hiking Trail on the largest fresh water estuaries on the Great Lakes and the only such trails in the Midwest.
- Bird watching: Mississippi Flyway in combination with Park Point and the Estuary

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- Artificial snow and lights at the Nordic Center will provide pre and post season cross country skiing for school teams as well as provide a racing venue for regional and national events.