

# MIDWEST NATURAL RESOURCES GROUP MINNESOTA RIVER FOCUS AREA TEAM NOVEMBER 2003



Minnesota River Basin sub-watersheds

## Team

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Bill Lorenzen	Natural Resources Conservation Service
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Cheryl Martin	Federal Highway Administration
Kimberly Anderson	U.S. Forest Service
Lee Traeger	Federal Emergency Management Agency
Chuck Spitzack (lead)	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
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Cheryl Heidi	MN Department of Natural Resources
Doug Thomas	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources

## Location/Description

The Minnesota River originates at the Minnesota-South Dakota border, flows 335 miles through some of the richest agricultural land in Minnesota, and joins the Mississippi River at Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. The river drains 16,770 square miles, with 14,840 in Minnesota, 1,610 in South Dakota, and the remainder in North Dakota and Iowa. The Corps of Engineers maintains a 9-foot-deep navigation channel in the lower 15 river miles from Savage, Minnesota, to the Mississippi River confluence. In the same vicinity is the 14,000-acre Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service also manages the Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge in the upper reaches of the Minnesota River Basin.

Since settlement, the native prairie has been replaced by agriculture with constructed drainage systems. Seventy percent of wetlands that existed pre-settlement have been drained. The Minnesota River contributes substantial sediment and nutrient loads to the Mississippi River. The magnitude and frequency of flooding in the Minnesota River Basin have increased in recent years.

## Activities in Fiscal Years 2003-2004

- Reactivated the Minnesota River Focus Area Team
- Developing an interagency “working paper”
- Planning for an interagency meeting in February 2004
- Issued a news release
- Using a Corps reconnaissance study as an opportunity for interagency coordination and collaboration

These initial activities are geared toward achieving a collective understanding of what Federal agencies have accomplished since 1992 (*when then Governor Arne Carlson challenged all Minnesotans to make the Minnesota River swimmable and fishable within 10 years*); what is the current state of the Minnesota River Basin; what remains to be done to achieve the 1992 challenge; and what opportunities are available for coordination and collaboration with each other, with State and local governments, and with non-government organizations.

The Minnesota River Reconnaissance Study by the Corps of Engineers will identify opportunities to reduce flood damages, restore aquatic ecosystems, improve water quality, address recreation needs, and improve navigation in the Minnesota River Basin. This study is the first step toward obtaining funding for additional water resource planning studies and specifically authorized Federal construction projects. The Corps of Engineers is coordinating this study with other Federal agencies through the Midwest Natural Resources Group (MNRG) Minnesota River Focus Area Team.

Since it officially reactivated, the Minnesota River Focus Area Team has had two teleconference meetings. Currently, the team is preparing a “working paper” in preparation for an interagency meeting in February 2004. Representatives of several State agencies are also members of the team. Additional non-Federal participation is anticipated at the interagency meeting.

It is expected that these initial steps will form the foundation for follow-on actions leading to more effective coordination and collaboration in managing and restoring the natural resources of the Minnesota River Basin.