

# NORTHFIELD'S CANNON RIVER REGIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

## WILD & SCENIC RIVER REGULATORY IMPACT ON CANNON RIVERFRONT ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES IN NORTHFIELD

In 1973 the Minnesota Legislature established the State Wild & Scenic Rivers Program to protect rivers with outstanding natural, scenic, geographic, historic, cultural, and recreational values. The Cannon River is one of six such rivers in the state, the others being the Mississippi, Minnesota, Kettle, Rum, and Crow Rivers. Additionally, the Saint Croix River is a National Wild and Scenic River. The Cannon River was designated in 1980 from Faribault to the confluence with the Mississippi.

### Classification

There are three classifications within the Wild & Scenic Rivers Program. These are Wild, Scenic, and Recreational. State statute defines which river segments are designated and the restrictions in place to protect them. Generally, Wild Rivers have the most stringent protections, then Scenic, with Recreational Rivers being the least restrictive within the program. The Cannon River from Faribault to Cannon Falls, including Northfield, is designated as a Recreational River. From Cannon Falls to the Mississippi, it is a Scenic River.

The Cannon River flows through the City of Northfield on its way from South Central Minnesota to the Mississippi River. In Northfield, the river flows generally from Southwest to Northeast, passing industrial areas, parkland, the Downtown Riverwalk and Carleton College. A privately owned dam, known as the Post Dam, sits in the river in Downtown Northfield.

### Issues

The Recreational River designation for the Cannon River in Northfield has implications for how land, including parks, along the river can be developed. This includes building setbacks, vegetation removal restrictions, and bridge crossings. These regulations are meant to preserve the existing character of the river and limit negative impacts to the river ecosystem.

During conversations within the Northfield Riverfront Enhancement Advisory Committee, some questions have been asked about how the Recreational River designation affects some of the committee's ideas for riverfront enhancement. These questions are:

- Would new pedestrian bridges be allowed on the river in Northfield?
- What types of structures would be permitted within riverfront parks?
- What regulations are there on cleaning up debris, such as large dead tree limbs, from the riverfront?

The rest of this document will provide clarity about how the Wild & Scenic River Rules affect the answers to these questions.

### New Bridges

The committee has considered the possibility of adding a new pedestrian bridge north of 2nd Street. This connection would link St. Olaf Ave to near Laird Stadium on the Carleton College campus. Such a connection would provide safe access between the northwest portion of the city and downtown. The Wild and Scenic River rules don't speak specifically about pedestrian bridges; they only reference road and railroad crossings.

The language on road and railroad crossings may provide direction for a pedestrian bridge. Crossings need to be located adjacent to existing crossing as much as possible (Minn Rule 6105.0180). These rules state that a DNR permit is needed as covered in Minnesota Statutes, section 103G.245. While new crossings aren't expressly forbidden, they must meet a high standard of criteria set in rules. A possible alternative to the proposed pedestrian bridge would be to make pedestrian and bike improvements to the 2nd St bridge.

### New Park Structures

The Committee has proposed a variety of new structures in the riverfront parks. The rules don't make any specific distinction for structures in parks, rather they follow the same standards for any structures in the river district. For the Cannon River in Northfield, this means structures must be setback 100 feet from the normal high-water mark (Minn. Rule 6105.0110). Additionally, structures may not be built in a floodway. The rules further outline certain permitted structures exempt from the setback, including trails (Minn. Rule 6105.0100).

### Vegetation Clearing

Some committee discussion has centered on the idea of removal of dead trees/ limbs from the riverfront. The vegetation standards outline the possibilities on this topic (Minn. Rule 6105.0150). Clearcutting is prohibited within 100 feet of a recreational river. Selective cutting is allowed under conditions on spacing and size. Removal of diseased/damaged trees that are a hazard is allowed. Pruning understory vegetation with a trunk diameter less than 4 inches is allowed.

### Summary

The Wild and Scenic River regulations do not significantly impact the ability for the committee's ideas to be implemented. New bridges will have to be evaluated as part of future planning processes. New park structures will have to be built within the confines of the regulations, but the proposed structures are not likely to conflict with them. Vegetation clearing is permitted as applicable. The Wild and Scenic River Rules do not prevent the committee's ideas from being executed. It is prudent for the City of Northfield to work within the bounds of the regulations when carrying out the recommended action items.