

AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS: Salazar Highlights Two Proposed Projects in Minnesota to Promote Outdoor Recreation, Conservation

Projects Will Be Part of 50-State Report

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WASHINGTON — Just days before the release of a 50-state report outlining some of the country's most promising ways to reconnect Americans to the natural world, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today highlighted two projects in the state of Minnesota that will be included in the final report — representing what states believe are among the best investments in the nation to support a healthy, active population, conserve wildlife and working lands, and create travel, tourism and outdoor-recreation jobs across the country.

Establishing the Upper Minnesota River Watershed as a National Blueway and expanding recreational opportunities at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers in the Twin Cities are among 100 projects nationwide that will be highlighted in next week's report — two in every state — as part of President Obama's America's Great Outdoors initiative to establish a 21st century conservation and recreation agenda and reconnect Americans to the outdoors.

The report is a result of 50 meetings with governors and stakeholders held by Salazar and other senior Interior officials to solicit ideas on how to best implement AGO in their states. These projects were identified for their potential to conserve important lands and build recreation opportunities and economic growth for the surrounding communities as part of close engagement with Gov. Mark Dayton and the state of Minnesota as well as private landowners, local- and tribal-elected officials, community organizations and outdoor-recreation and conservation stakeholders. The full 50-state report will be released in the coming weeks.

“Under the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, we are listening to the people of Minnesota and communities across America and working with them on locally-based projects that will conserve the beauty and health of our land and water and open up more opportunities for people to enjoy them,” Salazar said. “My staff and I have been asking each governor for the most promising projects to support in their states, and we will do all we can to help move them forward.”

The two projects in Minnesota highlighted by Salazar in the forthcoming report are:

Upper Minnesota River Watershed

The 335-mile-long Minnesota River flows through an agricultural watershed that encompasses 20 percent of the state. The upper Minnesota River Valley corridor has a high density of county and state parks, wildlife or aquatic management areas, natural areas, a National Wildlife Refuge, a Wild and Scenic River, a National Scenic Byway,

and a Minnesota Water Trail designation. This corridor also has a rich natural and cultural history of regional and national significance.

The area is a focus of numerous partnerships — between local governments, citizens, nonprofit organizations, and state and federal agencies — to plan and implement programs to connect people to the river. Supporting the expansion of the infrastructure in parks and trails along the river is a key component of this project that will help connect more people to the river.

The Upper Minnesota Watershed project furthers AGO goals through the protection of additional critical natural areas for wildlife migration and expanding and improving access to the river for public use and enjoyment.

Twin Cities Parks: Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

The confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers in the Twin Cities is an area of immense importance for conservation and recreation by virtue of the tremendous water, geologic, vegetative, and cultural resources there. The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, managed by the National Park Service, includes 72 miles of the Mississippi River stretching from the cities of Dayton/Ramsey through the heart of Minneapolis/St. Paul. State agencies, the National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and many local governments and nongovernmental organizations have a presence along the river in this area. This area has potential for accelerated work that supports the goals of America's Great Outdoors to increase recreational access in an urban area, restore the natural systems, and engage young people and communities of color in activities along the river.

Fort Snelling State Park and its historic and cultural resources could also be better integrated into the river experience. Partners believe that the federal government needs to take a leadership role in coordinating the restoration and management of, and increased access to the Mississippi River upstream, through, and downstream of the Twin Cities. Designating the Mississippi River in this region as a National Blueway could also benefit the region by helping to attract more tourists.

The report will also include potential actions by Interior and its bureaus to support the projects identified. In Minnesota, for example, the Department could create a Mississippi River recreation and wildlife coordinating body to maximize local, state, federal, and private partners' restoration, recreation, and education accomplishments. The Department could also designate the upper Minnesota as a National Blueway and provide technical or financial support for expansion and improvement of river access.

The Department of the Interior will work with each of its key bureaus — including the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — to direct available resources and personnel to make these projects a reality.

“The America’s Great Outdoors Initiative turns the conventional wisdom about the federal government’s role in conservation on its head,” Salazar said. “Rather than dictate policies or conservation strategies from Washington, it supports grassroots, locally driven initiatives.”

For more information on the President’s America’s Great Outdoors initiative, click [here](#).

To view a map of the projects already announced, click [here](#).