
ROCK RIVER TRAIL INITIATIVESM

Imagine...

... canoeing hundreds of miles of meandering streams and rivers ... biking glacier-sculpted landscapes of prairie-covered sand dunes and towering limestone dells ... learning about the Adena and Hopewell mound builders and the lost sites of Woodland Indian villages ... bird watching at the internationally recognized wetland and bird sanctuary at the Horicon Marsh ... marveling at Waupun's End of the Trail sculpture and sculpture park ... gathering along the award-winning riverfront in Beloit for music and recreation ... driving through rich farm country and small towns ... enjoying cultural events in the vibrant urban center of Rockford ... bringing art and agriculture together at The Fields Project in Oregon ... hiking to the Black Hawk Monument, Lorado Taft's tribute to Native American cultures ... camping along the river among the glacial drumlins of Dodge County ... visiting Grand Detour's blacksmith shop of John Deere's pioneering steel plow ... retracing the early steps of Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan.

The Visions ...

A beautiful Rock River recreation trail that meanders down a gentle gradient to carry the water traveler and recreational enthusiast alike over 300 miles, from headwaters in Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, to the mighty Mississippi River at the Quad Cities of Illinois and Iowa.

A Rock River scenic trail along public highways through the river corridor to convey the motorist, cyclist and pedestrian to the scenic natural beauty of the Rock River basin and to connect with other scenic trails including the Grand Illinois Trail and Hennepin Canal State Trail in Illinois and the Glacial Drumlin State Trail and Ice Age National Scenic Trail in Wisconsin.

The heritage of human development along the river corridor memorialized in a Rock River historic trail, enticing the traveler to pause, learn and reflect on the rich panorama of human history in the river valley. From the aboriginal peoples, explorers and early settlers to the industrialists, agriculturalists, statesmen and visionaries of more recent times, unique and significant contributions to the evolution of America have originated in the Rock River valley.

A commonality of interests and respect for the Rock River, conservation of natural resources in the river corridor and wise application of human talents will lead to revitalization of river communities and sustainable economic development for the benefit of present and future generations.



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The Genesis ...

Beginning in the late 1980s, a Rockford, Illinois, newspaper editor and publisher, Frank Schier, spent much of his life studying the Rock River. Canoeing many miles of the river, as well as driving its shores many times, he collected books, stories and wonderful experiences. He even named his newspaper *The Rock River Times*. An idea came to him to seek recognition for the fathomless environs of the Rock River as a multi-use national trail. From jealously publishing his reporters' sojourns on other paths, his models were the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. In 2010, a group of public and private partners from Rockford and Winnebago and Ogle Counties, Illinois helped to establish the Rock River Trail Initiative. The trail initiative was embraced by city and county planners, park districts, conservation organizations, water sports suppliers and local, state and federal political leaders. They recognized the vision and value of historical preservation, recreational opportunities, economic development, resource conservation and green jobs provided by the proposed initiative.

The first Rock River Trail Conference was held in Rockford in April of 2010, followed by a consultancy agreement with the National Park Service for assistance under the national Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. A legislative briefing with Members of Congress from Illinois and Wisconsin, the US Army Corps of Engineers, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and other federal, state and local agencies and private partners was held February 2011 in Rockford. The Rock River Trail Initiative has been joined by public and private partners in Wisconsin for a true two-state comprehensive effort to build a national multi-use trail along the course of the Rock River through Wisconsin and Illinois.

The Rock River Trail Initiative was presented to the Governor's State Trails Council in Stevens Point, Wisconsin in July 2011 and will be included as a state water trail in the Wisconsin State Trails Network Plan. The trail initiative will be presented to the Illinois Greenways and Trails Council in 2012



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Key Objectives ...

The Rock River Trail is a local initiative to establish along the 300-mile river course through Wisconsin and Illinois a multi-use trail of recreational, scenic and historic interest and significance. The proposed national Rock River Trail is a two-state, 11-county comprehensive effort, begun in 2010, which integrates public-private partnerships and intergovernmental cooperation to:

- Establish the Rock River Water Trail and achieve designation as a state and national recreation water trail,
- Establish a scenic, recreational and historic road route within the river corridor,
- Promote ecotourism and recreational opportunities throughout the river corridor, including safe portage of the dams from Waupun, Wisconsin to Rock Island, Illinois,
- Protect, preserve and educate about our native American peoples, settlement cultural heritages and contributions of the river valley's industrialists, agriculturalists, statesmen and visionaries to the American experience,
- Enhance the river ecosystem through natural resource conservation, stewardship and environmental planning and design,
- Support economic development and revitalization of our river communities, and
- Enhance community recognition using unique signage, markers and public materials to conserve and promote the natural, recreational, scenic and historic assets of the trail for present and future generations.

