

FY2021 Interior-Environment Appropriations

Representative McCollum, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in regard to the 2021 Interior Budget. I am here today speaking on behalf of the St. Croix River Association, the non-profit partner to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (SACN), the nation's first wild and scenic river national park, which includes both the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers.

The National Park Service manages 230 miles of river in this park, in a complex system built on partnerships. There are state parks, state forests, county forests, state natural areas, county parks, and nonprofit land conservancies in and adjacent to the park's boundary. These public and private areas manage resources similar to those found within the Riverway boundary and are partners in resource protection.

The Riverway has 877 scenic easement tracts, about ¼ of all the easements held by NPS, and more than any other single unit of the National Park System. Management of these tracts involves communication with approximately 750 landowners.

We are grateful for the increase in the FY20 enacted budget of about \$87,000, which covered some fixed personnel costs. The President's FY21 budget request (Green Book) for the Riverway is \$3,756,000, down from \$3,971,000 in 2020, or a cut of about \$215,000. Once you add in fixed cost increases, that will translate to about a \$300,000 decrease in our park budget.

We are deeply concerned about impacts on visitor safety, natural resource protection and enhancement, and visitor services with the downward trending budgets for Parks. Cuts over the past five years continue to have a cumulative impact on the capacity of NPS to participate in and help coordinate the partnerships required in a place like the Riverway. This is especially concerning in light of the proposed impairment listing on a new segment of the St. Croix.

SACN currently has 25 of 29 permanent positions filled. Five years ago, there were 35 permanent positions. SCRA and the park management team have been creative in finding ways to make the cuts work, but the situation is becoming untenable. The St. Croix River Association is now coordinating the aquatic invasive species program and the K-12 educational program, and our interns provide much of the scenic easement monitoring.

Over the past 5 years the Riverway has:

- Limited interpretive programming and outreach
- Limited ability to maintain website and social media
- Almost no capacity for publications, exhibit panels
- Significantly curtailed the habitat restoration program
- Eliminated monitoring of some key indicator species (birds, frogs)
- Been unable to provide maintenance at Arcola Bluffs and Fairy Falls
- Limited capacity to respond to external issues
- Limited capacity to engage volunteers
- Limited capacity to remain engaged in coordinating multi-partner efforts (basin team, Lower Riverway management commissions, invasive carp, native mussels, etc.)

SACN Positions Lost - Since 2016

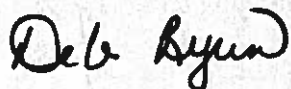
- Division Chief – Consolidation of Natural Resources and Interpretation, Education & Cultural Resources
- Interpretive Media Park Ranger
- Maintenance worker – subject to furlough (Marshland)
- Volunteer and Partnership Coordinator
- One natural resource management position (combined terrestrial and aquatic)
- Planning and Compliance Specialist
- Facility Management System Specialist – regional restructuring
- One full time park ranger (Trego) became subject to furlough

The Riverway is down to the very basics. Any budget cut now would most likely require a combination of not hiring one or two permanent positions and up to 10 (half of our total) base-funded seasonal positions. That may mean the loss of a permanent law enforcement position and seasonal positions in interpretation/education, natural resources, lands, and maintenance.

What would that mean?

- Fewer rangers patrolling larger areas, creating longer response times
- Elimination of most public programming
- Reduced visitor center hours, continuing the trend of less service provided to the public
- Fewer seasonal maintenance employees means less coverage; inability to provide services such as trash removal and cleaning, mowing less frequently at campsites and landings, especially ones that are more remote
- Scenic easements will have even less monitoring
- Reduced capacity for habitat conservation and restoration

Respectfully Submitted by,



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