

The Mississippi Critical Area – Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Plan

Section D

Introduction

The Mississippi River plays a significant role in Ramsey County's history, its current life and its future. According to the Ramsey County Historical Society¹, people have lived on the Mississippi River in the vicinity of Saint Paul for at least 10,000 years. More recently, the river in downtown has been a major transportation resource and the focus of extensive commercial and industrial activity. The Mississippi River's future is a topic of extensive discussion with an emphasis on its value as an urban amenity that enhances residents' lifestyles while remaining a central part of the area's economic activity.

For Ramsey County, the river in downtown Saint Paul is the location of several major offices and service centers. In other areas, the County engages in parks, open space and transportation activities that are adjacent to the river.

Purpose of Plan

This Plan addresses the County's policies, plans and activities related to the portions of Minnesota's Mississippi River Critical Area Corridor (CA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) that are located in the County. The geographic areas associated with these two programs are identical in Minnesota. In this plan the term "CA—MNRRA" will be used to refer to this geographic area. Ramsey County's segment includes areas in Saint Paul and Maplewood as shown in **Map 1**, on the following page.

The development of a Mississippi River Critical Area Plan is required by Executive Order 79-19, and is subject to review by the Metropolitan Council and approval by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

¹ Scott F. Anfinson in Ramsey County History, Special 150th Anniversary Issue, Spring, 1999 (p 4).

Major Statements

The following excerpts are from *Ramsey County: A Strategic Planning Guide for the Future of Ramsey County, May 2006*

"Ramsey County will become nationally known for its ability to realize economic rewards from celebrating nature rather than exploiting it, and the Mississippi River will once again become the principle area of focus within Ramsey County. The network of greenway corridors that connect the river front to the parks and open space of outlying communities will bring renewed vitality to the County's core city".

"We envision a County where each citizen is as familiar with the body of water their land drains to as they are with the streets in their neighborhood. They will understand the lake, river or wetland they live near may be directly affected by decisions they make in their personal lives. They will see that what happens in their neighborhoods may ultimately impact the larger system of ground and surface water in the County, State and Nation.

"Our citizens will live in a culture of environmental stewardship that looks beyond individual benefit for the good of all. Consequently, individuals will become responsible for the impacts of their actions on our rivers. As stewards of the headwaters of the great Mississippi River, the citizens of Ramsey County will understand that they have a moral obligation to deliver clean water to our neighbors downstream and to ensure clean water for future generations."

The CA—MNRRA Plan will also be reviewed by the National Park Service for voluntary conformance with the MNRRA Comprehensive Management Plan policies. The Metropolitan Council is coordinating local planning assistance for these plans and is requiring a joint CA—MNRRA Plan be prepared and included in Local Comprehensive Plans for jurisdictions falling within this Corridor. For Ramsey County, the CA—MNRRA Plan is closely tied to its required comprehensive plan components: Transportation, Surface Water Management, and Parks and Open Space.

This plan focuses on topic areas in which Ramsey County has responsibilities and has an active role. Since Ramsey County is exempt from the Land Use planning requirements, it does not have a role in regulating land use by other jurisdictions or entities, nor does it have the ordinances,

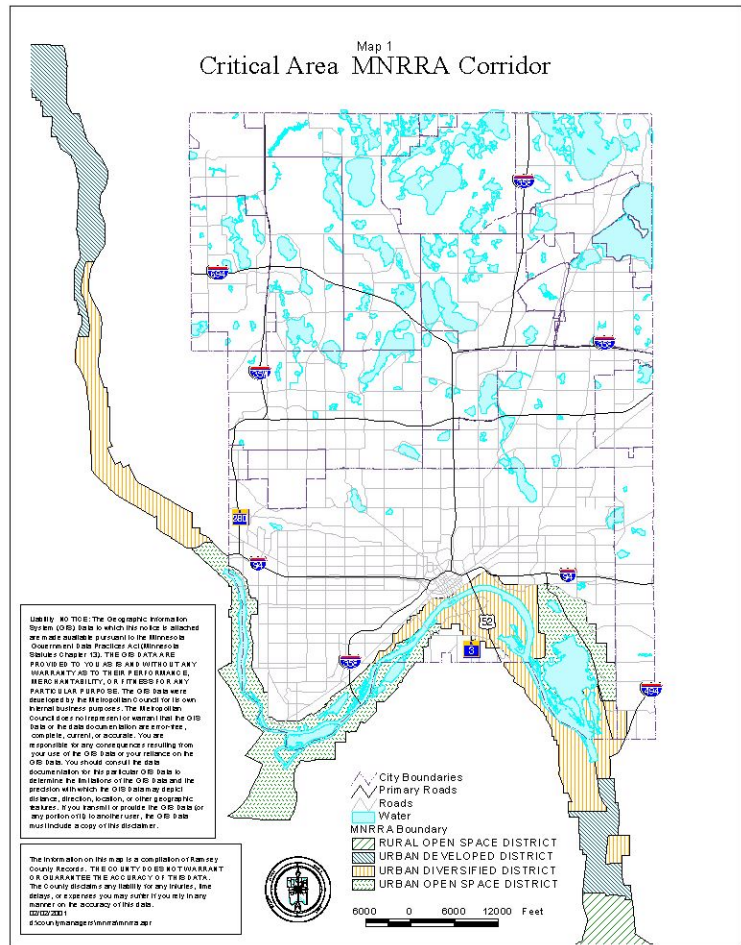
regulations or other authorities associated with land use planning. In general, Ramsey County’s role in the CA—MNRRA corridor stems for its ownership of property and its provision of transportation, parks, recreation and open space services.

Minnesota CA and Federal MNRRA Programs

Both the Minnesota Mississippi River Critical Area (CA) program, operated through the Department of Natural Resources, and the Federal Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) program, operated through the US National Parks Service, are intended to enhance the management and use of land and water within the Corridor. They provide guidelines for how development should be managed in order to protect resources and the scenic qualities of the river corridor.

Minnesota CA Program’s purposes are:

- ◆ To protect and preserve a unique and valuable state and regional resource for the benefit of the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the state, region and



- nation;
- ◆ To prevent and mitigate irreversible damage to this state, regional, and national resource;
- ◆ To preserve and enhance its natural, aesthetic, cultural and historical value for the public use;
- ◆ To protect and preserve the river as an essential element in the national, state, and regional transportation, sewer and water and recreational systems; and
- ◆ To protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the corridor.

Federal MNRRA Program's purposes are to:

- ◆ Preserve, enhance, and interpret archeological, ethnographic and historic resources;
- ◆ Enhance opportunities for public outdoor recreation, education, and scenic enjoyment;
- ◆ Preserve, enhance and interpret natural resources;
- ◆ Provide for continued economic activity and development;
- ◆ Improve the public's understanding of the river and promote public stewardship of its resources; and
- ◆ Recognize and strengthen people's relationships with the river as a dynamic part of our heritage, our quality of life, and our legacy for future generations.

CA—MNRRA Corridor Districts

The CA—MNRRA has been separated into four districts based on the current use and character of different segments of the river. Corridor Districts were established to provide guidelines for protecting sensitive natural resources and preparing site designs in a manner that is consistent with the natural characteristics and its existing development in specific locations. Of the four types of Corridor Districts, two occur in Ramsey County: Urban Diversified Districts and Urban Open Space Districts. These two districts and their use restrictions are described below.

Urban diversified district: The lands and waters within this district shall be used and developed to maintain the present diversity of commercial, industrial, residential, and public uses of the lands, including the existing transportation use of the river; to protect historical sites and areas, natural scenic and environmental resources; and to expand public access to and enjoyment of the river. New commercial, industrial, residential, and other uses may be permitted if they are compatible with these goals.

Urban open space district: The lands and waters within this district shall be managed to conserve and protect the existing and potential recreational, scenic, natural, and historic resources and uses within this district for the use and enjoyment of the surrounding region. Open space shall be provided in the open river valley lands for public use and the protection of unique natural and scenic resources. The existing transportation role of the river in this district shall be protected.

Consistency with Minnesota Executive Order 79-19

Ramsey County recognizes that its planning activities in the Corridor must be consistent with Critical Area guidelines in addition to being subject to the policies, regulations and ordinances of the jurisdiction where the activity is occurring.

For consistency with Minnesota Executive Order 79-19, plans should be developed in line with the following guidelines. Some items may not affect Ramsey County due to its limited role in the Corridor.

- C.1.a.(4) Protect all bluff greater than 18% and provide conditions for the development of bluffs between 18% and 12% slopes.
- C.1.a.(5) Minimize direct overland runoff.
- C.1.a.(6) Minimize site alteration.
- C.2.a.(3) Site plans shall include measures which address adverse environmental effects.
- C.2.a.(4) Site plans shall include standards to ensure that structures, road, screening, landscaping, construction placement, maintenance, and storm water runoff are compatible with character and use of Corridor in that district.
- C.2.a.(5) Site plans shall provide opportunities for open space establishment and for public viewing of corridor whenever applicable.
- C.2.a.(5) Site plans shall contain specific conditions with regard to buffering, landscaping, and vegetation.
- C.2.e.(1) Retain existing vegetation and landscaping of existing development.
- C.7.a. Minimize river crossings and concentrate at existing crossing where possible.
- C.7.b. Corridor shall not be used as a convenient right-of-way.
- C.7.b. New or modified transportation and utility facilities shall complement the planned land and water uses and shall not stimulate incompatible development.
- C.7.c. In planning and designing construction or reconstruction of all public transportation facilities in corridor, consideration shall be given to provision of:
 - Scenic overlooks for motorists;
 - Safe pedestrian crossings and facilities along corridor;
 - Access to the riverfront in public ownership; and
 - Reasonable use of land between river and transportation facility.
- C.8.a. Development of a 5-year capital improvement program or public facilities program for all public projects to be sited in the corridor.
- C.8.b. The capital improvement program of public facilities program shall be consistent with standards and guidelines in Executive Order 79-19, B and C.

- G.1. Notification by the local unit of government to DNR of all developments requiring discretionary action or a public hearing at least 30 days before taking action.

Consideration for MNRRA Guidelines

Ramsey County will consider the voluntary design guidelines identified in the MNRRA Comprehensive Plan for its activities within the CA—MNRRA corridor. To be consistent with the MNRRA program, plans should be developed in line with the following guidelines (some items may not affect Ramsey County due to its limited role in the Corridor):

- New development in the riverfront area should have a relationship to the river, a need for a river location, or capability to enhance the river environment (i.e. provides visual open space; maintains views of the river; retains or restores natural shoreline/bluff line appearance).
- Discourage development in areas containing significant wildlife habitat.
- Provide uninterrupted vegetated shoreline/bluff line where practical.
- Provide pedestrian/bicycle paths to connect the river to downtowns, neighborhoods, parks and open space.
- Prohibit land disturbance along the bluff face (slopes in excess of 12%).
- Preserve the bluff impact area (40 feet back from the bluff line) in a natural state. Restore natural vegetation in order to screen development.
- Provide additional setbacks in an additional 60-foot area (for structures over 30 feet tall) for a total bluff preservation area of 100 feet from the bluff line.
- Reduce visual impacts and protect views of the river and from the river and its shoreline areas by establishing maximum building heights for the bluff line and riverfront preservation areas – within 100 feet of the bluff line – 30 feet.
- Protect existing wetlands, restore degraded wetlands where practical.
- Work to increase and restore wildlife habitat and biological diversity, including in development projects.
- Apply setback and height restrictions and encourage careful site design to maintain views from open space and developed areas.
- Screen development with native vegetation wherever practical.
- Preserve endangered, threatened and rare species and their habitats, including in site development projects.
- Where practical, encourage placing utilities underground.
- Provide easements for future trail corridors in new developments.
- Preserve natural areas when designing parks and open space.
- Require new private developments to provide appropriate public trails and river access, including views.
- Reduce use of chemical fertilizers.
- Reduce use of salt on roads.
- Encourage alternatives to lawns to reduce fertilizer and pesticide runoff into river.
- Support regional pollution prevention and control plans for the metro area.

- Encourage uninterrupted vegetated shorelines/bluff lines to facilitate wildlife movement along the corridor.
- Preserve native vegetation or encourage re-vegetation using native species.
- Encourage open space land use in order to protect archaeological resources.

These same considerations will be required of Ramsey County by all municipalities and other governmental agencies operating in the CA—MNRRA corridor. All must establish land use policies and ordinances that incorporate the requirements of the Executive Order. If the County wishes to make significant changes in the use of one of its properties, it is subject to the same regulations and permit requirements as other entities working within the municipalities. Ramsey County works with Maplewood, Saint Paul, the US National Park Services, MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Metropolitan Council, MN Department of Transportation, and other relevant agencies when it is considering or planning changes.

Ramsey County Policies and Practices

It has been, and will continue to be, Ramsey County’s policy and practice to work with the US National Parks Service—MNRRA, the DNR, local municipalities and other relevant entities as the County plans and implements programs and projects. The Mississippi River is a vital presence within the County and acting responsibly within the CA—MNRRA Corridor is in the County’s best interest. The County’s values and planned activities, as described below, are consistent with the intent of the CA—MNRRA programs. Ramsey County will pursue plans and project designs that are consistent with the Critical Area Corridor District guidelines for the project or facility’s site.

Ramsey County's interest in and impact on the Corridor are the result of the County’s ownership of property in the corridor, the direct services that it provides within the Corridor and the County's collaborative activities with other jurisdictions and local organizations. Therefore, unlike municipalities with land use planning authority, the County’s policy statements are related to its own activities and operations.

The County has a limited role in Surface Water Management. Ramsey County's role in surface water management is to ensure comparable levels of water resource management, education and citizen involvement throughout the County. This can be accomplished by supporting the water management organization's (WMO) role in several ways, including providing technical information and administrative assistance where requested, assessing the relative effectiveness of WMO water management plans, utilizing consistent performance criteria for WMO board of manager applicants, providing opportunities for WMOs to share information and management strategies, and review of regional and state water quality goals and plans.

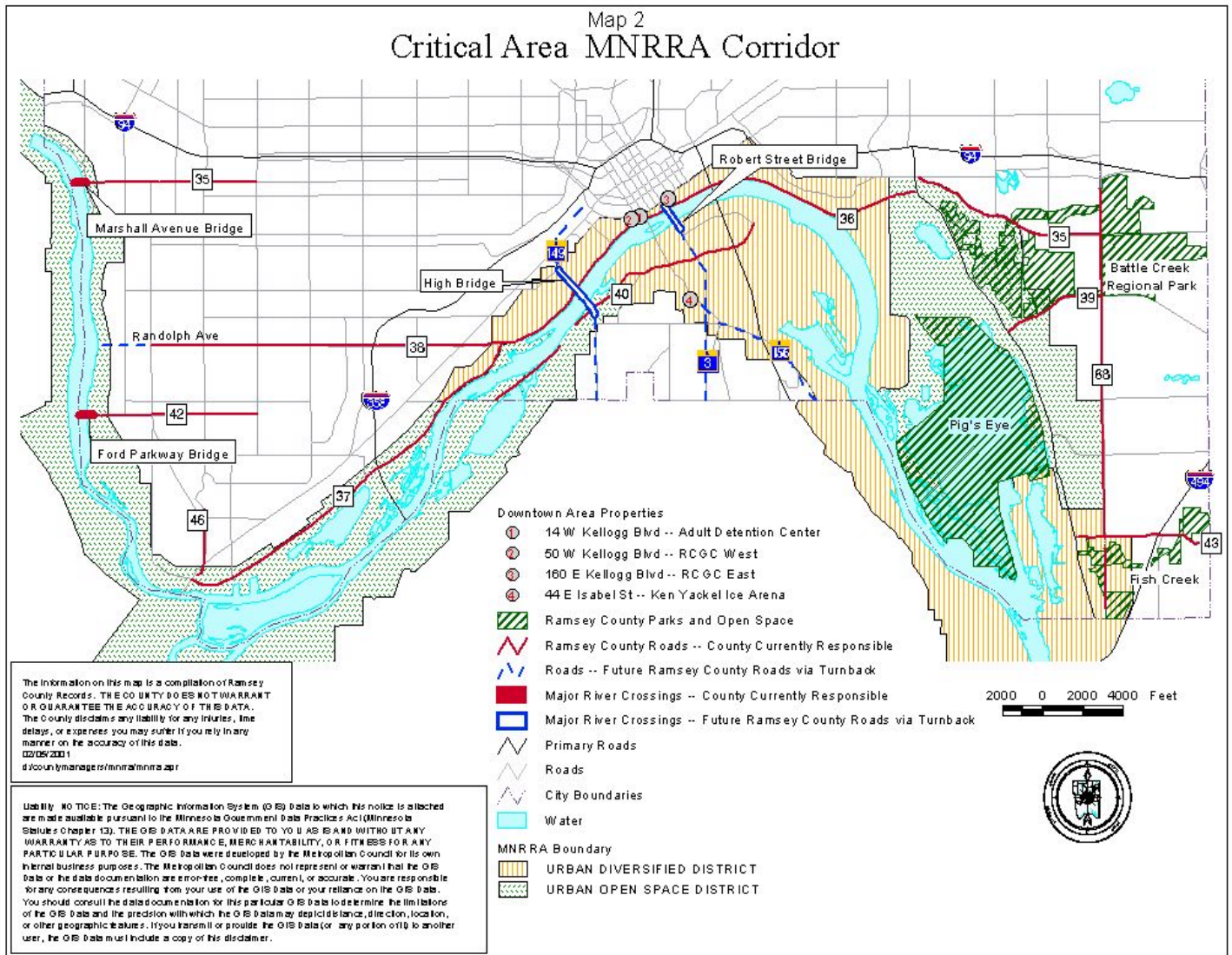
The County's surface water concerns tend to center around the impact of redevelopment on water quality. The County is also addressing water quality issues related to run-off from its rights of way. Best management practices and relevant performance measures

are being developed to guide County operations. These are also discussed in more detail in Transportation and Water Resources Management sections in this Comprehensive Plan.

Ramsey County Presence in the CA—MNRRA Corridor

Introduction

Map 2 identifies the CA—MNRRA corridor within Ramsey County. The corridor crosses the southern area of the County. Most of it is in the city of Saint Paul: downtown Saint Paul and south of downtown. A small area is in Maplewood. The Ramsey County properties located within these areas, and their uses, are described



Ramsey County’s most visible planning issue in the CA—MNRRA corridor—and the area most likely to have significant change in the future—is the downtown Saint Paul riverfront area. The County has four major downtown St. Paul facilities and an ice arena in this corridor as described in **Table 1** on the following page.

Ramsey County owns a significant amount of property—approximately 3,200 linear feet—along the Mississippi River bluff between the river and Downtown Saint Paul. This includes most of the land on the north side of the river extending east from District Energy (Kellogg and Market Street) down to the County’s Government Center—East Building (Kellogg and Jackson). There is also an area of river bluffs between these buildings. The limestone outcroppings with a network of caves forms a natural pedestal on which the central business district is built. This area includes the following properties:

- The **Ramsey County Government Center West** (RCGC-West) is composed of six buildings completed between 1895 and 1964. This former home of West Publishing Company headquarters building was renovated for County use in 1992. Its 620,612 square feet houses several County Departments. The County has undertaken relocation plans to relocate County Departments from the RCGC-West facility
- The **Ramsey County Government Center East** (RCGC-East) was built in 1908 and was originally used as a warehouse. It was renovated for County use in 1995. Its 386,000 square feet houses the Ramsey County Department of Community Human Services.
- The **Adult Detention Center** was built in 1979 as the County’s jail. It has 122,410 square feet on seven levels. The County has built a new Law Enforcement Center in a different location and, subsequently, the Adult Detention Center has been vacated.
- The **90 West Plato** facility was built in 1979 as an office building. The County acquired and renovated the property in 2007. Its 85,000 square feet houses the Ramsey County Departments of Property Records and Revenue and Title Examiner and is the future home of Public Health Administration, Emergency Management, and Veterans Services.
- The **Ken Yackel—West Side Ice Arena** is located at 44 East Isabel Street in Saint Paul; it is not adjacent to the river. This is one of nine public ice arenas built in the 1970s to serve Ramsey County residents. It has one regulation hockey rink, a warming room, locker rooms, restrooms, an office and mechanical room. No major changes are planned and there are no natural resource preservation issues associated at this facility.

Table 1
Ramsey County Plans and Consistency with Critical Area—MNRRA Land Uses

Property or Activity	Type of Corridor District	Changes in Planned Use	Consistency with State & Federal
Area in or near downtown Saint Paul			
RCGC—West and Adult Detention Center	Urban Diversified	Proposed sale of properties to improve access to riverfront and private use of these facilities	Appears to be consistent
RCGC—East	Urban Diversified	No changes	Appears to be consistent
90 West Plato	Urban Diversified	No changes	Appears to be consistent
Ken Yackel-West Side Ice Arena	Urban Diversified	No changes	Appears to be consistent
Union Depot / Concourse	Urban Diversified	Purchase of property from US Postal Service to be transformed into a transit hub	Appears to be consistent
Parks and Open Space; Roads and Bridges			
Battle Creek Regional Park-- Battle Creek segment	Urban Open Space	Additional trails; Additional road to support more picnicking and trails; Additional winter sports areas	Appears to be consistent
Battle Creek Regional Park-- Pig's Eye segment	Urban Open Space	Continued and additional natural preservation and education activities	Appears to be consistent
Fish Creek Protection Open Space	Urban Open Space	Continued natural preservation activities	Appears to be consistent
Mississippi River Bluffs Protection Open Space	Urban Open Space	Preserve existing bluffs	Appears to be consistent
County roads and major river crossings including the Ford Parkway Bridge	Various	Roadway improvements including major rehabilitation of the Ford Parkway Bridge deck	Appears to be consistent

- The **Union Depot** is located on East 4th Street between Sibley and Wacouta streets in downtown St. Paul's Lowertown area, a vibrant neighborhood along the Mississippi River just 1 mile south of the State Capitol. The U.S. Postal Service has indicated that it will move its operations from the Depot concourse to Eagan in 2010, freeing space for the multi-modal transit center at Union Depot. In October 2007, the Regional Rail Authority approved a purchase agreement with the U.S. Postal Service for the Depot concourse. The first phase for the Depot will include provisions for Central Corridor light rail transit, Amtrak passenger rail, Jefferson and Greyhound Lines intercity buses, Metro Transit buses, bicycles and pedestrians. Later phases will bring in commuter rail and Midwest High-Speed Rail from Chicago.

The County has determined that the sale of the Riverfront Properties, which includes the Ramsey County Government Center West and the Adult Detention Center facilities, would better support economic development activities and improve public access to the river. The County has entered into a purchase agreement with a local developer for the sale of its Riverfront Properties. By November 15, 2008, the County will know if this sale will be completed. To the extent possible, given existing conditions and uses, Ramsey County will incorporate CA—MNRRA design considerations for the bluff, setback and other issues. A MNRRA representative has been involved in the County's Riverfront Planning Team activities.

The types of changes being considered are consistent with the area's urban diversified district status. Historically, these properties had a wide variety of uses including an ice storage facility, printing, and warehouses. Most of the space in these buildings, other than the Adult Detention Center, is now office space. Any potential changes are likely to be dominated by office space with the possibility of residential space.

Parks and Recreation areas in the southeastern area of the County include the Battle Creek and Pig's Eye sections of Battle Creek Regional Park and Fish Creek. The County has also acquired several properties on the Mississippi River bluffs between Battle Creek and Fish Creek. CA—MNRRA design considerations and guidelines will be considered in developing activities within these areas.

- **Battle Creek Regional Park—Battle Creek segment.** This is an 846-acre segment of the regional park. The most prominent visual characteristics of the park are the steep, wooded slopes paralleling the Mississippi River and Battle Creek. The park includes approximately two miles of bluff land along the east side of the Mississippi River Corridor. Battle Creek flows through a steep, wooded valley that varies in depth from 25 feet to over 150 feet. The bluffs are significant in the development of the park as they provide a corridor, barriers, and panoramic views of the river valley.

Battle Creek flows from east to west through the park on its way to the Mississippi River. Although the creek has been degraded and altered due to runoff from the surrounding development, it still maintains an overall positive aesthetic impact on the park. Improvements to the creek and upstream watershed area by the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District have corrected erosion problems and restored the creek as an asset to the park.

The existing development includes:

- A large group picnic area and water park at the intersection of McKnight and Upper Afton Roads;
- A system of paved pedestrian and bicycle trails throughout the park;
- Parking in the lower end of Battle Creek near Highway 61 and trails connecting to regional trails along the river;
- Cross country skiing and mountain bike trails between Highway 61 and Winthrop Street; and

- Most of the remaining area will be maintained and managed in a natural state including efforts to restore areas degraded by landfills, erosion, borrow pits or other intrusions.
- **Battle Creek Regional Park—Pigs Eye Lake segment.** This area of the regional park lies entirely within the floodplain of the Mississippi River. The lake covers approximately 500 acres and is very shallow (less than 10 feet). The park includes 610 acres surrounding the lake that is entirely floodplain. The area includes a major heron/egret rookery, bald eagle nesting and extensive areas of floodplain habitat. The rookery is currently managed as a scientific and natural area (SNA) by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
 - **Fish Creek Protection Open Space** is a 130-acre site located in the southeast corner of Ramsey County. It includes the entire 1.5-mile length of Fish Creek as it flows from Carver Lake west under Highway 61 and then into Pigs Eye Lake. I-694 separates the area into two segments:
 - The segment downstream of I-694 is a deep wooded valley with very steep side slopes. The creek has a large drop in elevation through this ¾-mile segment. The area also includes the steep wooded bluff line of the Mississippi River parallel to Highway 61 and ½ mile of bluff line south of Fish Creek.
 - The segment upstream of I-694 has a much flatter creek gradient and lacks the deep valley. This part of the creek corridor includes a variety of wetlands, wooded slopes and grasslands.
 - **The Mississippi River Bluffs Protection Open Space** site is located in the southeast part of Ramsey County in the city of Saint Paul. The site is a 2-mile long narrow strip of steep sloped bluff line, paralleling the east side of Highway 61 between Battle Creek Regional Park on the north and Fish Creek Protection Open Space on the south. The site is entirely a steep, wooded slope with an incline of more than 30%. The site generally lies between residential properties at the top and bottom of the bluff.

Ramsey County has acquired 69 platted lots in this area totaling 12 acres—about 25% of the total site—through tax-forfeiture or donations. The County will continue to acquire lots in this area through tax-forfeiture or donations.

Ramsey County is participating in a Joint Powers Agreement to develop the **Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor**. This corridor is intended to extend into the CA—MNRRA corridor in Saint Paul. However, Ramsey County’s responsibility will be in the suburban area of the County.

Parks and Recreation Department activities will continue the development of both recreation infrastructure and natural preservation areas in a manner that supports the urban open character of the location. The Parks and Recreation Plan proposes improved

resident access to the Corridor with new trails and parking areas. In relation to natural preservation activities, Ramsey County's participation in a bluffs restoration project with the Great River Greening Program is typical of the type of activities that are envisioned. This restoration project is a cooperative activity funded by MN Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources and US Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.

The CA—MNRRA corridor has numerous roadways that travel through or intersect the corridor. Ramsey County has responsibility for a significant number of roads in this corridor.

➤ **County roads:**

35 – Marshall Avenue	35 – Upper Afton Road
36 – Warner Road	37 – Shepard Road
38 – Randolph Ave.	39 – Lower Afton Road
40 – West Water Street	40 – Plato Boulevard
42 – Ford Parkway	46 – Edgumbe Road
43 – Carver Avenue	68 – McKnight Road
State 156—Concord Avenue	State 149

➤ **Major river crossings:**

Ford Parkway Bridge	High Bridge
Marshall Avenue Bridge	Robert Street Bridge

Implementation of Activities

In order to implement any of the policies and plans described above, several steps are usually necessary. Typically, Ramsey County develops projects with teams that could include representatives from Ramsey County, municipalities, the state of Minnesota, Metropolitan Council, federal agencies, not-for-profit organizations or citizens.

The first step would be to develop specific project plans. The proposed plans would then be reviewed and approved by the County Board and other sponsoring agencies, permit and zoning issues would need to be addressed and funding secured. The review and approval process for projects within the Corridor is likely to require participation by the DNR. If a proposed project requires an amendment to this plan, the DNR must approve the amendment in writing before it is enacted by the local government. In addition, for all Corridor developments that require a public hearing or discretionary action, a local government must notify the DNR at least 30 days before action is taken. The DNR will review and comment on the project's compliance with Critical Area, MNRRA policies, and other state requirements. Notice of the final action is required to be sent to the DNR.

Ramsey County activities would be included in the appropriate budget process. In particular, if a project requires capital investments, the proposal will be incorporated in the County's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget.

Citizen Participation and Intergovernmental Cooperation

Ramsey County uses extensive citizen participation and intergovernmental activities to plan and implement its activities. While some of this activity is necessary to preparing required plans or permits, a significant amount occurs because it is the best way to do business. One example was the County's Strategic Planning process that included direct outreach to thousands of people on a variety of topics. Another example is the riverfront planning process that engaged community leaders in a design workshop focused on Ramsey County owned properties.