

PLANNING TO PROTECT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR CRITICAL AREA

What is the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area?

Designated by Governor's Executive Order in the 1970s, the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a land corridor along the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area governed by special land planning requirements and land development regulations. These regulations, which are implemented through local MRCCA plans and ordinances, protect and preserve the natural, scenic, recreational, and transportation resources of this section of the Mississippi River. The MRCCA comprises 72 miles of river and 54,000 acres of surrounding land in 30 local jurisdictions.

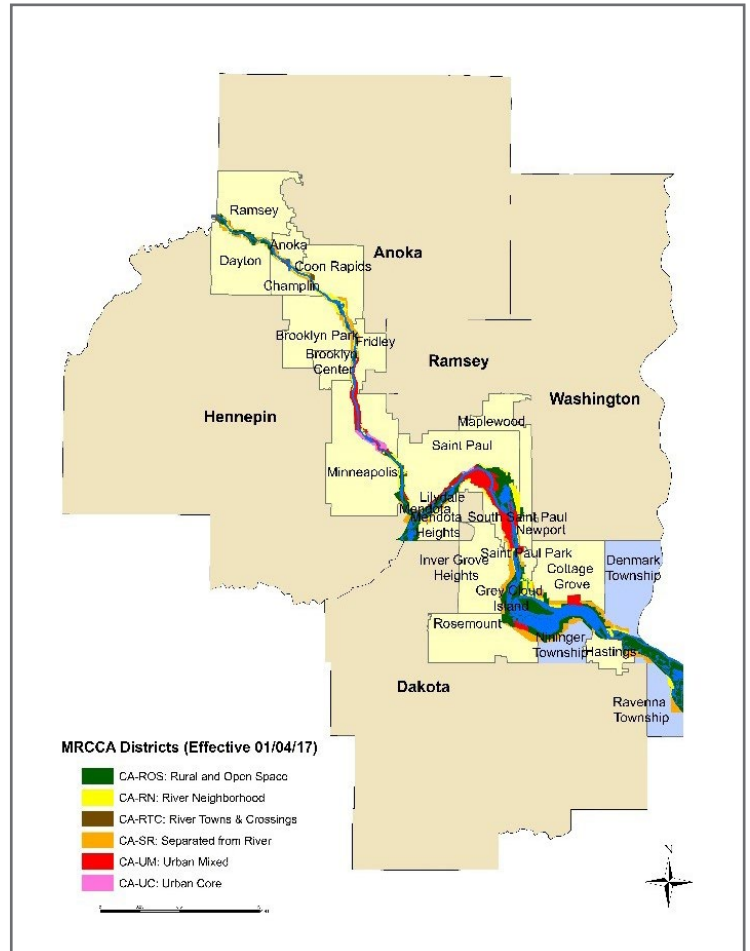
New Rules

Minnesota Rules, chapter 6106, lay out the land planning and regulatory framework that protects the MRCCA's resources. These rules became effective on January 4, 2017, and replace Executive Order 79-19, which previously governed land use in the MRCCA. The rules require local governments to update their MRCCA plans (a chapter of the local comprehensive plan) and MRCCA ordinances for consistency with the rules. The [DNR's MRCCA Program webpage](#) has additional information about the new MRCCA rules, district maps, and FAQs about the program.

Local Government Plan and Ordinance Updates

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the state agency with overall responsibility for administering the MRCCA rules. However, the Metropolitan Council plays a key role in ensuring that MRCCA plans are updated on the same schedule as, and incorporated into, the local comprehensive plans as a separate MRCCA chapter. The DNR and the Metropolitan Council coordinate review and approval of local government MRCCA plans for consistency with the planning requirements in Minn. Rules 6106. Please see the [Critical Area section of the Local Planning Handbook](#) for guidance, tools, and resources for developing plans that meet the minimum requirements.

Under the notification schedule developed by the DNR and Metropolitan Council, local governments must submit their updated MRCCA plans to the Metropolitan Council and the DNR by December 30, 2018 - the same time that the 2040 Comprehensive Plan update is due to the Metropolitan Council. Once a local MRCCA plan has been updated, the DNR will notify each local government to update their MRCCA zoning ordinance. Once notified, each local government will have 12 months to update their zoning ordinances. The DNR anticipates that it will notify all affected local governments to update their zoning ordinances between 2019 and 2021.



The MRCCA contains many sensitive features that are not always suitable for intensive development. Bluff setbacks and vegetation requirements help prevent erosion and protect the integrity of natural systems.

Why is the MRCCA Important?

The MRCCA contains many significant natural and cultural resources, including: scenic views, water, navigational capabilities, geology and soils, vegetation, minerals, flora and fauna, cultural and historic resources and land and water-based recreational resources. The MRCCA is home to a full range of residential neighborhoods and parks, as well as river-related commerce, industry, and transportation. Though the river corridor has been extensively developed, many intact and remnant natural areas remain, including bluffs, islands, floodplains, wetlands, riparian zones, and native aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna. The MRCCA also shares the same border as the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area (MNRRA), a unit of the National Park Service.

MRCCA History

The MRCCA was designated in 1976 by Executive Order following passage of the Minnesota Critical Areas Act of 1973. The Critical Areas Act (Minn. Stat., §116G) provides a general regulatory framework for protecting specific areas of the state that possess important historic, cultural, or aesthetic values or natural systems through a defined local-regional planning and regulation process. The MRCCA was the first and remains the only critical area in the state. The MRCCA protects these resources through local governments' land use plans and zoning ordinances that regulate structure placement, height, vegetation clearing, land alteration, and subdivision of land. Following is a timeline of key milestones in the MRCCA.

- 1973** Minnesota passes Critical Areas Act of 1973 (MN Statutes, Chapter 116G)
EQB adopts rules to implement Act (MN Rules, parts 4410.8100 – 4410.9910)
- 1976** Mississippi River and adjacent corridor designated a state critical area by Governor Wendell Anderson (Executive Order No. 130)
- 1979** Designation continued by Governor Albert Quie (Executive Order 79-19)
Metropolitan Council acts to make designation permanent (Resolution 79-48)
- 1988** Mississippi National River and Recreational Area (MNRRA) established by Congress as unit of NPS (MNRRA shares same boundary as Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area)
- 1991** MNRRA designated a state critical area per Critical Areas Act (MN Statutes, section 116G.15)
- 1995** Responsibility shifts from EQB to DNR by Governor Arne Carlson (Reorganization Order 170)
- 2007** Legislature directs DNR to prepare report on the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (Completed January 2008)
- 2009** Legislature amends MN Statutes, section 116G.15 and directs DNR to conduct rulemaking for the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MN Laws 2009, Chapter 172, Article 2, Section 5.e.)
- 2011** DNR develops draft rule after participatory stakeholder process, but rulemaking authority lapses
- 2013** Legislature directs DNR to resume rulemaking process in consultation with local governments
- 2017** Rules become effective January 4.

Content prepared by:



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**LOCAL PLANNING
HANDBOOK**

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