

Center for State of the Parks



THE STATE OF MISSOURI NATIONAL RECREATIONAL RIVER: SUMMARY

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

Located in northern Nebraska and the southeast corner of South Dakota, the Missouri National Recreational River protects two remnant free-flowing segments of the Missouri River under the auspices of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA). In 1978, Congress designated 59 miles of river downstream of Gavins Point Dam to Ponca, Nebraska; an additional 39 miles of the Missouri River below Fort Randall Dam to Running Water, South Dakota, were included in 1991, along with the lower 20-mile section of the Niobrara River (a tributary of the Missouri) and lower eight miles of Verdigre Creek (a tributary of the Niobrara). The park contains some 34,159 acres of land, with just 250 acres actually owned by the National Park Service (the WSRA limits fee ownership).

The Missouri River and surrounding landscape have witnessed centuries of human history, including Paleo-Indian groups, American Indian habitation, and Euro-American exploration. Park waters and associated habitats are home to at least 80 fish species, 17 reptile species, nine amphibian species, at least 237 bird species, and more than 40 mammal species.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Natural and cultural resources in poor condition:** NPCA's Center for



The Missouri National Recreational River protects two reaches of the river.

State of the Parks resource assessment of the Missouri National Recreational River indicates that cultural and natural resources in the park are in poor condition, overall, with scores of 51 and 59 out of a possible 100, respectively. The natural resources score is based on just 57 percent of the information required by the methodology; information on some criteria is not available.

- **Resource scores influenced by factors Park Service cannot control:** Since its creation, the Missouri National Recreational River's 59-Mile District was primarily managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service. As a result, many cultural resources management plans and standards mandated in the National Park Service's Cultural Resource Management Guideline were not completed. Moreover, natural resources have been and continue to be affected by dams and flow regulation, habitat fragmentation, and invasive species; the Park Service has little or no control over these factors, which affect park resource conditions and associated scores.
- **Park faces management challenges:** The greatest management challenges facing park staff—for both natural and cultural resources—are that Park Service resource management has only recently begun, the park is as yet only partially funded, and the WSRA requires the Park Service to obtain permission from private landowners before engaging in management activities.



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

- **Cultural resource management limited:** The Missouri National Recreational River does not manage any cultural landscapes, historic structures, or museum and archival collections. The park only recently began to manage cultural resources in the areas of history, archaeology, and ethnography.
- **Cultural resource studies needed:** Several cultural resource studies, including an administrative history and a historic resource study, would provide useful information to help park staff protect cultural resources. This research would provide a historical overview of the park and identify and evaluate cultural resources within park boundaries. Studies of the Goat Island steamboat wreck, one of the park's identified archaeological sites, are needed to help expand interpretation of the history of commercial boat travel on the Missouri River.
- **Park protects relatively natural sections of river:** Six major dams and a 732-mile navigation channel have been built on the Missouri River since the 1930s. These projects have changed the river's natural flow, with effects on plants, animals, riverbank erosion, and sediment transport. The free-flowing reaches of the Missouri National Recreational River retain more natural elements than much of the rest of the river, although even these protected reaches are influenced by the Fort Randall Dam, Gavins Point Dam, and various bank stabilization and erosion-control features.
- **Natural resource threats difficult to address:** The Park Service has little influence on how the Missouri River is managed, even though its aquatic and riparian ecosystems are arguably the most important natural resources within the park. Threats to natural resources include habitat

fragmentation and loss resulting from agriculture and residential development; pollution from agriculture and industry; loss of scenic integrity because of erosion-control structures and residential development; and invasive species such as purple loosestrife and tamarisk. In addition, riparian areas are disappearing as more and more homes and recreational cabins are constructed on riverfront land.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- The park initiated the first annual Missouri River clean-up in Yankton, South Dakota, in 2004. More than 100 volunteers removed trash ranging from small items to furniture, tires, and even abandoned cars from the riparian area.
- Park staff collaborated with American Indian groups to create wayside exhibits to interpret Spirit Mound, a sacred site owned and administered by the state of South Dakota. Wayside exhibits were installed at some two dozen other sites, as well, and park staff maintain these interpretive signs.
- The park is active in efforts to balance bank stabilization with natural resource protection and enhancement, and staff are partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to restore previously ripped sites and develop "bioengineering" strategies to protect public infrastructure.
- Missouri National Recreational Area is part of the northeast Nebraska Weed Management Area, and park staff partner with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and weed superintendents from Nebraska and South Dakota to treat invasive species. In 2005 and 2006, park staff used global positioning systems (GPS) units to

record locations of tamarisk, which were later treated with herbicides.

ABOUT NPCA AND CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policy-makers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of the full report on Missouri National Recreational River (within the *National Parks Along the Lewis and Clark Trail* report) published by NPCA's Center for State of the Parks, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president of Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information about Missouri National Recreational River, contact the park at 402.336.3970 or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/mnrr. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of our national parks, visit www.npca.org/take_action.