

# WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

*An unspoiled river is a very rare thing in this Nation today. Their flow and vitality have been harnessed by dams and too often they have been turned into open sewers by communities and by industries. It makes us all very fearful that all rivers will go this way unless somebody acts now to try to balance our river development.*

President Lyndon Johnson's remarks on signing the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, October 2, 1968

Wildness vs. control, beauty vs. profitability, serenity vs. industry... Fifty years ago Americans questioned the balance of recreation and development along national waterways. Decades of pollution, diversion, and construction threatened the health of America's rivers. Outdoor enthusiasts pressed congress into action, creating the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968.

Minnestoans took the lead, motivated by a desire to preserve the St. Croix River. Senator Walter Mondale and Representative Joe Karth collaborated with Wisconsin senator and founder of Earth Day, Gaylord Nelson, to craft the legislation and ensure its passage. Twenty year later, Minnesota Representative Bruce Vento presided over a major expansion of the Act to protect additional rivers.



Minnesota Senator Walter Mondale receiving the pen President Johnson used to sign the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

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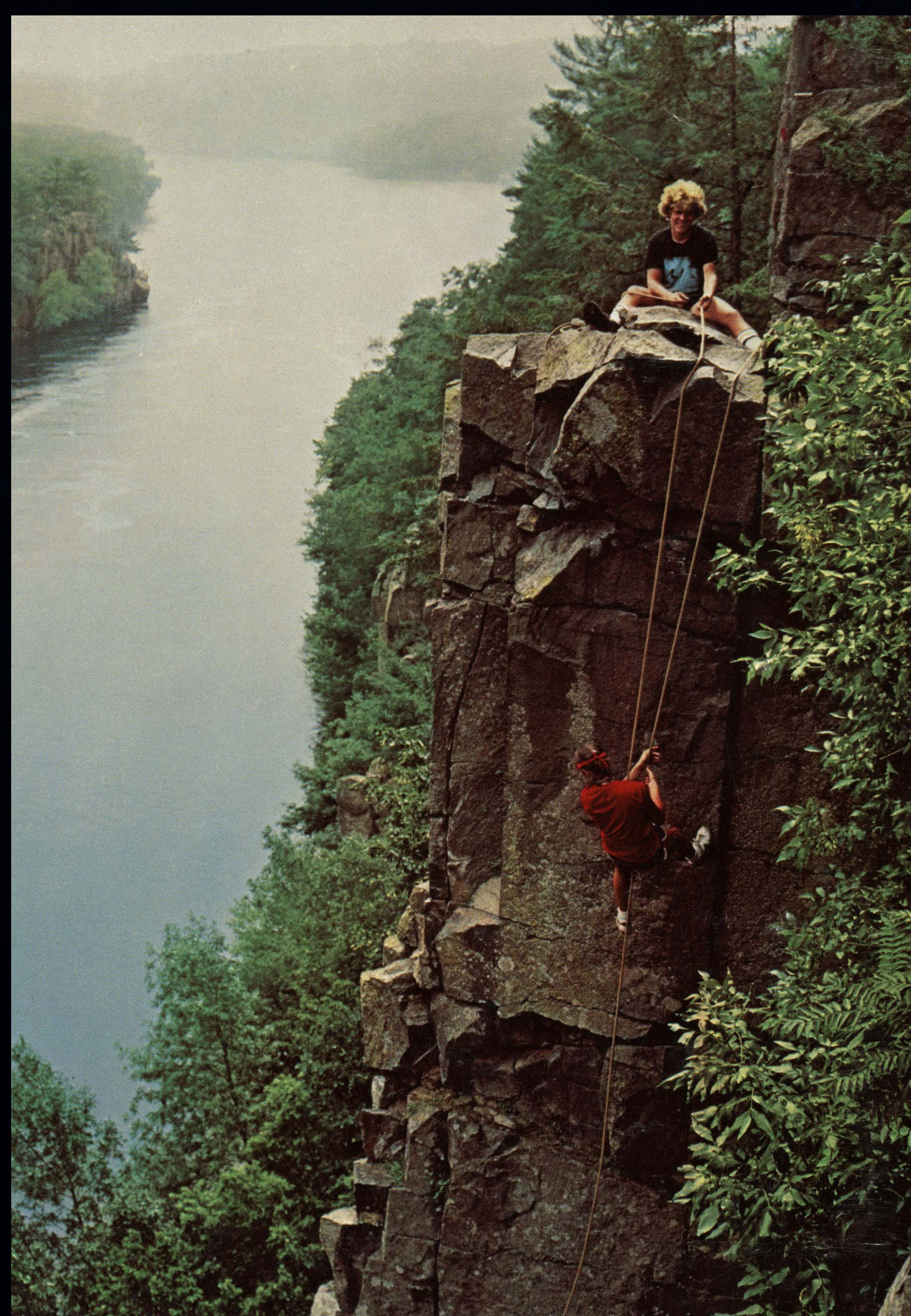


# WILD AND SCENIC: PURPOSE AND NEED

What makes a river worthy of national designation as “wild and scenic?” Three criteria must be met to ensure the river:

- 1) is free-flowing, unimpeded by dams;
- 2) possess one or more “outstandingly remarkable values:” natural, scenic, educational, geological, recreational, historic, fish and wildlife, scientific and cultural; and
- 3) is protected by local, state, or federal laws that preserve the values that made it eligible for designation.

Over the past fifty years, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has preserved 12,754 miles of 209 rivers in 40 states and Puerto Rico. This is less than one quarter of 1% of the waterways in the nation. Preservation is needed now more than ever. As of 2018, 75,000 dams have modified 17% of all rivers in the country—a total of over 600,000 miles.



Rock climbers enjoying the St. Croix National Riverway in 1978. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

Map of the National River System. Courtesy National Park Service.



# THE ST. CROIX AND NAMEKAGON

Flowing 255 miles through forests, sandrock cliffs, and cultural landscapes, Minnesota and Wisconsin's shared Namekagon and St. Croix Rivers were one of eight riverways protected upon passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968. Used historically as a trade route and a logging flume, the St. Croix's "outstandingly remarkable values" also include its geologic features, recreational opportunities, and scenic beauty. More than 200 American Indian and European American cultural sites have been identified along the shores protected by the Wild and Scenic designation.



*Dalles of the St. Croix*, Elijah Evan Edwards, c. 1880, Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.



View looking down on log jam on the St. Croix River at Taylor Falls, Sanford C. Sargent, c. 1886-1892. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society