

106 SUCCESS STORY

Four Agencies, One Goal: Restoring a New Deal Treasure—St. Croix RDA Pine County, Minnesota



“Working with great partners like the National Park Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Historical Society, and Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management allowed us to quickly and efficiently repair, rehabilitate, and preserve this important resource.”

—NICHOLAS MUELLER
Regional Environmental Officer, FEMA



THE STORY

For centuries, the St. Croix River served as a transportation route for Native Americans, then European and American fur trappers. When the fur trade ended in the mid-1800s, loggers cut the virgin stands of pine, using the river to float logs downstream. By 1915, the landscape was devoid of trees, and settlers attempted to farm the rapidly depleting soil. In 1934, 18,000 acres of farmland were purchased to become the St. Croix Recreational Demonstration Area (RDA). A New Deal project, the RDA was one of 46 parks planned by the National Park Service (NPS) as part of a program to create jobs through the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration, repurposing marginal agricultural lands for recreational use, and building roads, campgrounds, and structures. The St. Croix RDA, one of the largest and best examples of RDA planning and design, became a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1997.

THE PROJECT

In July 2011, storms with 100-mile-per-hour winds tore through the St. Croix RDA, felling trees, blocking roadways, and damaging buildings. A Presidential disaster declaration allowed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through the Minnesota State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, to assist the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in funding 60 repair projects. Damaged structures included Adirondack-type shelters, masonry and log cabins, bicycle and picnic shelters, and administrative buildings. Most suffered damage to roofing systems; two were completely leveled by the storm but could be rebuilt; and two were damaged beyond repair, requiring complete reconstruction using salvaged parts.

THE 106 PROCESS

FEMA, the federal agency funding this project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required

Photos: Above, cabin after reconstruction; (photo courtesy Minnesota DNR); Right, early spring at Fox Landing and camping along the St. Croix flowage (photos courtesy NPS)

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Photos: Left, storm damage to the cabins; Right, cabin in need of repairs (photos courtesy Minnesota DNR)

to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue.

As all the structures were contributing elements to the NHL, FEMA focused on protecting their significant historic features. The number of resources affected and the variety of the damage sustained complicated recovery efforts. FEMA collaborated closely with the NPS, the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and state agencies to ensure all work on the damaged buildings met the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties while proceeding expeditiously.

Using building inventories maintained by the DNR and assisted by the SHPO, FEMA prepared summaries of proposed treatment measures and coordinated review with the consulting parties. Although winter storms limited access to the park and hindered project development, the consulting parties regularly reviewed repair specifications and discussed treatment measures to ensure the historic character of the RDA would not be compromised. This level of engagement, driven by the DNR's plans for repairs and managed by FEMA's environmental review staff, resulted in the Section 106 project reviews being completed the following summer.

Consulting Parties:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Minnesota State Historic Preservation Officer
- National Park Service
- Minnesota State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

THE SUCCESS

The St. Croix RDA recovery project demonstrates how the Section 106 process fosters effective collaboration among consulting parties to achieve positive preservation outcomes. The project would not have been successful without the willingness of all parties to find solutions that respected the RDA's status as an NHL and promoted expeditious disaster recovery.

FEMA and its consulting parties' commitment to following the Secretary's Standards avoided adverse effects to the historic structures and simplified the planning process. Further, the treatment summaries developed for each property provide guidelines for maintenance and repairs, ensuring that DNR's future work will continue to maintain the RDA's historic integrity.

Despite the substantial damage to the RDA sustained in the summer of 2011, the Section 106 process successfully addressed repair of the park's historic resources and demonstrated the benefits of active collaboration in developing preservation-sensitive solutions. The result was the nationally significant historic assets of the St. Croix RDA will continue to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation as they had done for almost 80 years.

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