

ST. CROIX RIVER ASSOCIATION

# 2019

ANNUAL REPORT



# LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear River Friends,

As we write to you in 2020, it seems the world we knew in 2019 is far away. Our lives have all been impacted by the global pandemic of COVID-19 in ways that fundamentally shape how we interact with one another. The challenges of this time have touched both the St. Croix River Association (SCRA) and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (Riverway) deeply. Yet in the midst of these challenges, the Riverway is a steady presence and source of solace.

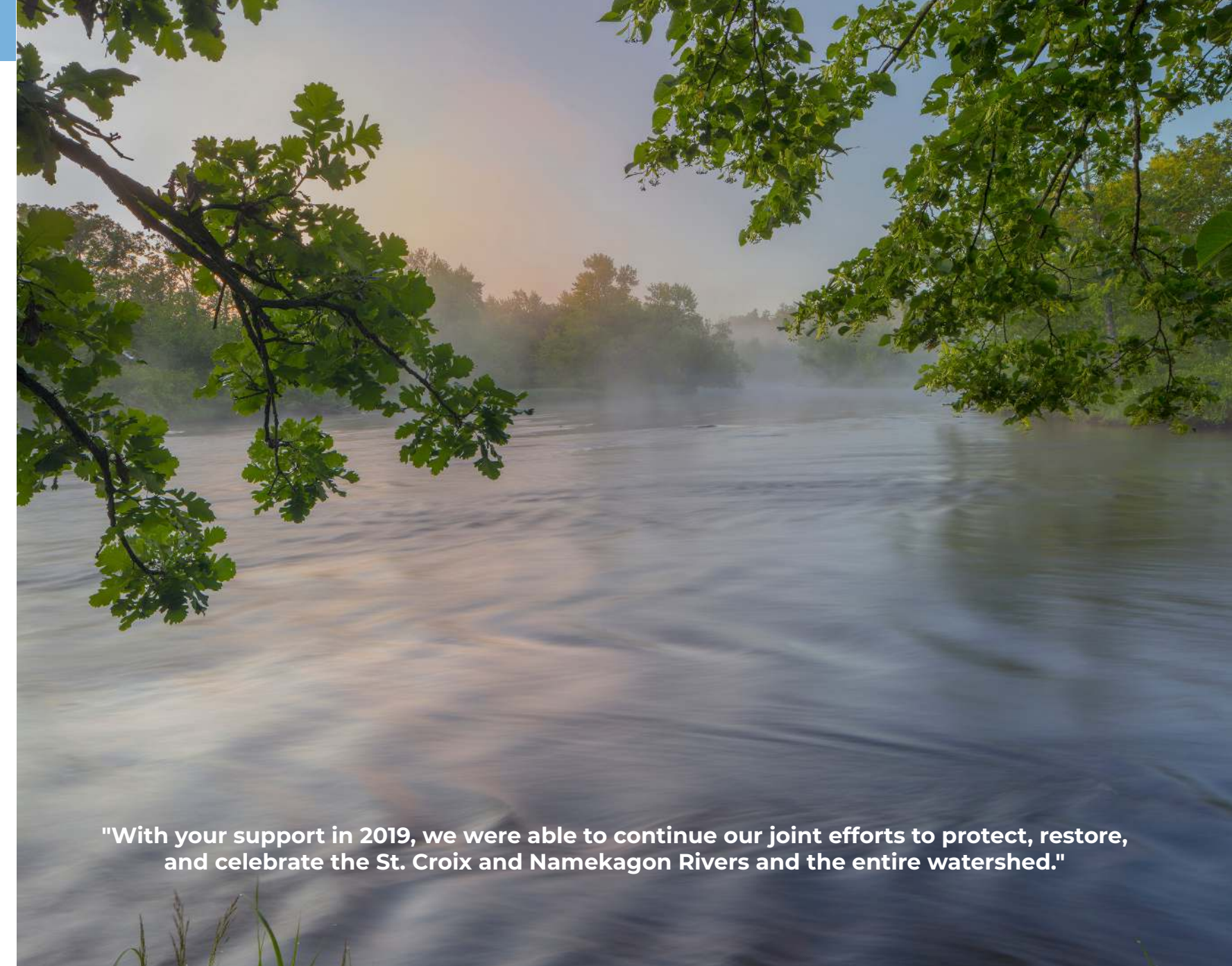
This presence is why we celebrate the accomplishments of 2019 even in the midst of 2020's challenges. The work we did over the past year has not been diminished by a pandemic but rather confirmed in its vitality. With your support in 2019, we were able to continue our joint efforts to protect, restore, and celebrate the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers and the entire watershed.

Just 10 years ago, SCRA's board hired the first permanent staff member and adopted the first Strategic Framework. By 2019, SCRA grew to 11 staff members and laid the groundwork for its newest Strategic Plan. We've come a long way with your support. The partnership between the National Park Service and the St. Croix River Association has grown as well, allowing us to collaborate on activities, programs, and projects that strengthen public awareness and safeguard the Riverway's incredible character.

Many highlights stand out when we reflect on the work we did for the Riverway in 2019, including:

- A \$3.75 million grant from Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund launched the largest SCRA-led investment in the St. Croix, permanently protecting over 750 acres within the watershed. This is the first ever permanent protection program dedicated solely to the St. Croix River watershed.
- Our programs saw tremendous growth and reached 25,070 people in the watershed. Together, we have been at the forefront of monitoring efforts for both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, reaching out to businesses, boaters, and the public to educate and empower active engagement to control and stop the invaders. (Over)





**"With your support in 2019, we were able to continue our joint efforts to protect, restore, and celebrate the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers and the entire watershed."**



"Together, we can accomplish work that would otherwise be impossible."



- Our joint K-12 environmental education program, Rivers Are Alive, has grown from reaching 400 students in 2014-2015 when we first collaborated to 5,961 in the 2018-2019 school year with outreach to all corners of the watershed, including 15 new schools.

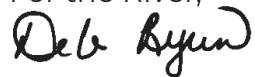
It is an honor to witness the breadth of skills, knowledge, and passion that our community members bring to their engagement with our local National Park. But 2019 did not pass without challenges for the Riverway. Over a decade after Lake St. Croix's impairment designation in 2008, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) proposed adding a segment of the St. Croix River from Taylors Falls to Lake St. Croix to Minnesota's impaired waterbody list.

While this proposal is for an aquatic life impairment and recreational activity can safely continue, it is a reminder that the river is vulnerable and will always be vulnerable. Threats continue to grow, including proposed concentrated animal feeding operations inside the St. Croix watershed, the spread of invasive species, and climate change. We must remain vigilant.

As the official non-profit partner of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, SCRA is committed to continuing collaborative efforts to protect priority lands, improve water quality, and expand our work to build an even stronger constituency of citizen stewards for the Riverway. And we provide safe, enjoyable experiences to an increasingly diverse audience. Together, we can accomplish work that would otherwise be impossible. We are honored to present this report of how your support helped us protect, restore, and celebrate the Riverway in 2019.

As we navigate these uncertain times, we look ahead with hope and gratitude to meet the challenges and opportunities rising from the Riverway's flow through our lives.

For the River,



Deb Ryun  
Executive Director  
St. Croix River Association



Julie Galonska  
Superintendent  
St. Croix National Scenic Riverway



# RIVER CONNECTIONS

The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is known for its vibrant habitat, clean and fresh water, abundant recreational opportunities, and spectacular scenery. The primary goal of River Connections is to provide the opportunity for people to connect with nature and explore this National Park. Together with the Riverway staff, SCRA ensures people have the opportunity to experience this vibrant, healthy river system, which in turn will cultivate future stewards of the Riverway and beyond.

These key programs form the heart of the River Connections Program:

- **River Connections Internships**—Our internship program, now in its sixth year, builds capacity for both NPS and SCRA and gives future conservation leaders practical skills and job experience. In 2019 the 10 interns worked in the focus areas of invasive species, forest stewardship, land management and restoration, and interpretation.
- **Rivers Are Alive**—SCRA partners with the Riverway staff to provide “Rivers Are Alive,” a K-12 environmental education program. Rivers Are Alive offers engaging, standards aligned science activities and in-field discovery experiences.
- **SCRA Outside**—We connect people of all ages, abilities, and skill levels to the Riverway through recreation and exploration activities such as guided hikes, canoe and kayak day and overnight trips, fly fishing workshops, snowshoe walks, and more. We work with key partners to enrich the experiences of park visitors, engaging new and more diverse audiences and overcoming barriers for those who have limited access to the river.

\*Source: Estimated National Value of Volunteer Time for 2018 - \$25.43 per hour, [independantsector.org/resource/vovt\\_details](http://independantsector.org/resource/vovt_details)

5,961  
STUDENTS

enjoyed a National  
Park experience in their  
classrooms and field trips

1,435  
PEOPLE

reached by SCRA Outside,  
up from 220 in 2018



6,204  
HOURS

served by interns, valued at  
\$157,767.72\*



268  
STUDENTS

attended the second annual  
St. Croix Youth Summit for  
aspiring environmental  
leaders







7,336  
PEOPLE

reached by SCRA's invasive  
species program



1,368  
HOURS

of work and outreach by  
three AIS interns reaching  
diverse audiences through  
AIS education



173  
MILES

of the Kettle, Namekagon, and  
St. Croix Rivers monitored for  
invasive species



# INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species are a threat to the overall health of the St. Croix River, its tributaries, and animals. Zebra mussels, curlyleaf pondweed, yellow iris, invasive carp, Eurasian watermilfoil, and purple loosestrife are common invaders. **SCRA raises awareness of invasive species, and delivers terrestrial and aquatic removal and control strategies with a variety of partners to ensure our abundant wildlife and habitat are protected from invasive plants and animals.**

## **In 2019:**

- 118 miles of the Namekagon, St. Croix, and Kettle Rivers were monitored for the presence of yellow iris. This was an increase in both quantity and scope from the 100 miles of shoreline monitored in 2017.
- SCRA staff tested over 28,044 surface water acres across 32 lakes in the watershed for zebra mussels through veliger (mussel larva) sampling.
- **We took on a new invasive species**—Over 185 miles of the St. Croix shoreline were monitored and mapped for removal of Oriental bittersweet since the start of the project.
- We taught 1,320 students what an invasive species is, why they are harmful, how to recognize common invaders, and what actions are needed to prevent and control them through our newly created Aquatic Invasive Species curriculum.
- **SCRA Interns spent 150 hours at boat landings along the St. Croix River, reaching more than 317 boaters** with messaging to encourage people to clean, drain, and dry their boats and equipment.

# LAND PROTECTION

SCRA effectively leverages public and private resources, synchronizes activities, and builds local capacity for conservation of the wild and scenic attributes and important natural, scenic, and environmentally sensitive land.

## **Permanent Conservation:**

SCRA is leading efforts to conserve land for multiple benefits, including habitat quality, groundwater recharge, conservation connectivity, and ability to provide public access and outdoor opportunities. This first-ever program funded by Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund focuses solely on the St. Croix River watershed. **In partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust and The Trust for Public Land, SCRA secured \$3,751,000 to permanently protect approximately 750 acres.**

## **Habitat:**

**The 165-acre restoration project at the National Park Service's Arcola Bluffs site was completed in 2019.** Invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn were removed and the site was restored with native vegetation to enhance the existing forests, wetland, oak savanna, and prairie.

## **Forestry:**

**SCRA leads the "My St. Croix Woods" partnership**, a robust forestry program to protect forested lands, preserve water quality, and promote climate adaptation strategies through landowner engagement and sustainable forest planning and management. In 2019, we presented at four statewide and national conferences to increase transferability of the program.





**\$3.75M**  
SECURED

to support permanent land  
protection in the St. Croix  
River watershed



**165**  
ACRES

of forest, wetland, oak  
savanna, and prairie restored  
in the Arcola Bluffs Day Use  
Area



**4,000+**  
WOODLAND OWNERS

reached by campaigns and  
outreach efforts, impacting  
10,000 acres of private land







# \$200,000

## PROVIDED

to 5 local partners for  
phosphorus reduction  
projects

# 215

## POUNDS

of phosphorus stopped from  
entering Lake St. Croix





# WATER QUALITY

SCRA supports efforts by local citizens concerned about a variety of issues such as an expanding sand mine just south of Osceola, the potential for another pipeline routed through the National Park, and a newly proposed huge hog production facility near Fish Lake Wildlife Area. In 2019, SCRA supported efforts to develop new standards and model ordinances for the siting and establishment of concentrated animal feeding operations in Polk and Burnett counties.

Reducing runoff and phosphorus loading is essential to keeping our high water quality and meeting water quality standards. **The St. Croix River Association has worked with partners for the past 10 years to protect and improve the water quality throughout the St. Croix watershed.**

In 2019, SCRA's Lake St. Croix Watershed Improvement Program provided subgrants of over \$200,000 to 5 local partners in Minnesota. These funds leveraged an additional \$680,000 to complete 7 projects that **stopped over 215 lbs. of phosphorus from reaching Lake St. Croix.** Examples of these projects include gully restoration, rain gardens, conversion of row crops to perennial vegetation, and reducing feedlot runoff.



# FINANCIALS

## Balance Sheet

FY 2019

### Assets

Current Assets	\$199,443
Investments	\$12,406
Property & Equipment	\$37,286

**Total Assets** **\$249,135**

### Liabilities & Equity

Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$6,759
Other Current Liabilities	\$54,801
Total Current Liabilities	\$35,229
Net Assets	\$187,575

**Total Liabilities & Equity** **\$249,135**

*Financial statements audited by CarlsonSV.  
A copy is available upon request.*

## FY 2019 Income \$1,253,138

Government Grants and Agreements 44%

Foundations and Grants 27%

Direct Public Support 26%

Registration 2%

Gifts in Kind 0.04%

Interest 0.08%

Other 0.12%

Events Revenue, Net 0.7%

## FY 2019 Expenses \$1,186,488

Education and Outreach 48%

Land and Water 30%

Administration 11%

Invasive Species 8%

Fundraising 3%



An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest with lush green trees. The horizon is visible in the distance, and the sky above is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**"It is truly a great partnership working with the SCRA!  
They provide invaluable expertise, leadership and support  
to meet our joint goals of fostering land stewardship with  
women woodland landowners."**

**— Barb Spears, President, MN Women's Woodland Network**

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

The St. Croix River Association gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the donors whose annual support ensures we carry out our mission to protect, restore, and celebrate the St. Croix River and its watershed.

## **\$2,500-4,999**

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Emily Weiler  
Barb Wetzel  
Nancy and James Whipkey  
Katharine Widin  
Kate Wright and Adam Mahler  
Mariana Young  
Jeanne and Jeff Zlonis





"I used to think that a dense stand of cheery yellow iris on the river shoreline was a beautiful sight, now I recognize it as the invasive species it is. The large clumps which are undeniably pretty to look at are actually poisonous and out-compete native species. SCRA hosts "Project Red," giving me the tools I need to help stop invaders."

— Sally Arneson, SCRA Board Member and Volunteer





# BOARD AND STAFF

## Board of Directors (2020)

Brian Alton, Chair  
Sally Arneson  
George Boody  
Bill Buell  
Loralee DiLorenzo  
Jim Dorsey  
Lisa Erickson  
Doug Hemer  
John Herman  
Dianne Hickok  
Andrea Jorgenson  
Betsy Kremser  
Bridget Levin  
Stuart Neville  
Amy Short  
Kristina Smitten  
Tom Swain Vice-Chair  
Bonnie Swanson, Treasurer  
Kristin Tuenge  
Mary Uppgren, Secretary

## Staff (2020)

Deb Ryun, Executive Director  
Nicole Biagi, Outdoor Educator  
Bethany Cox, Director of Development  
Nichole Henger, Forestry Program Coordinator  
Sophia Patane, Communications Coordinator  
Katie Sickmann, Invasive Species Program Coordinator  
Kate Wright, Donor Engagement and Events  
Monica Zachay, Director of Programs

**Thank you to all outgoing staff and board members for your contributions to the St. Croix River Association. We are grateful for your work.**



# VOLUNTEERS

Our accomplishments as an organization in 2019 would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our volunteers. **Thank you to everyone who shared their time, talents, and passion with us—and so many others—over the course of the year.**

532 volunteers gave 8,264 hours of service to the St. Croix River Association, valued at \$232,631.60. However, the intangible value of our volunteers' contributions extends even further. **They are the lifeblood of keeping the Riverway healthy for present and future generations.**

If you would like to volunteer for the St. Croix River Association, visit our website to learn more about volunteer opportunities!



\*Source: Hourly rate, \$28.15, State of MN, Independent Sector, [independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2018](https://independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2018)





"I heard many students say how much they enjoyed simply exploring the woods and looking over the river valley. There is a unique feeling of being outdoors and noticing and connecting with nature, and your programs give us a chance to do so. I am grateful for our partnership and look forward to continuing to bring your programs to our students."

—Amy Allram, Physical Education Specialist,  
Taylors Falls Elementary

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# KEEPING THE CROIX

Join us for our annual fundraiser events!

DETAILS



BUY TICKETS



CO-HOST

**[stcroixriverassociation.org/support/annual-fundraiser](https://stcroixriverassociation.org/support/annual-fundraiser)**

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