

# rivertime

CONSERVING OUR WILD & SCENIC RIVERS



WILD RIVERS

ST. CROIX CONSERVANCY NAMEKAGON



# SPRINGING FORWARD

As spring returns to the St. Croix Valley, I'm reminded of Heraclitus' observation: "No one ever steps into the same river twice." The river is always moving, always changing—and so is our work at Wild Rivers Conservancy.

Late last year, we were building strong momentum when the government shutdown forced an abrupt pivot. While we were temporarily cut off from our National Park Service partners, our shared mission didn't pause. Together, we adapted and kept moving forward, advancing key priorities and staying focused on the long-term health of the St. Croix and Namekagon Riverway.

Behind the scenes, we also began shaping our 2026–2028 strategic plan, supported by a capacity-building grant from the National Park Foundation. With input from partners, community members, and staff, we've developed a clear set of goals, strategies, and priorities to guide our work over the next three years. I'm grateful to everyone who contributed their time and perspective to help shape this roadmap, and I look forward to sharing more in the months ahead.

This spring also marks the launch of EDDY, Education and Discovery Delivered to You, our new mobile visitor experience. Created in partnership with the National Park Service, this electric Sprinter van brings the Riverway directly into communities across the watershed. At a time when only a small percentage of almost 1 million Riverway visitors ever step into a visitor center, EDDY allows us to meet people where they are and foster deeper connections to this remarkable place. We're grateful to Xcel Energy for their leadership as a major sponsor, along with the National Park Foundation and the many individual donors who helped bring EDDY to life.

Alongside these efforts, we've introduced a new website that better reflects the energy and direction of our work. The site is more than a refresh, it's a tool to connect people to the Riverway. With improved navigation, clearer trip-planning resources, and a design that aligns with the EDDY experience, it makes it easier for visitors and supporters alike to explore, engage, and get involved. This work was also made possible through support from the National Park Foundation.

I'm incredibly proud of the Conservancy staff and board, and our National Park Service partners, for the dedication behind these efforts. And I'm equally grateful to the supporters and partners who make it all possible.

These investments strengthen our ability to connect people to the river and inspire the stewardship needed to protect it for generations to come. Like the river itself, this work is dynamic and ever-changing and it's the shared commitment of this community that keeps it flowing forward.



**Matt Poppleton**

Executive Director

# INTRODUCING OUR MOBILE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

While we are lucky to have so many accessible entrances to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, we are different from a National Park such as Yellowstone, where visitors enter through a gate and have a first contact with a Park Ranger. A need for a mobile contact vehicle was identified, and after multiple years of fundraising, build-outs, and programming work, we are ready to unveil this project to the Riverway! Follow along as we share how “EDDY” went from concept to the pavement.

## A new way to bring the park to the people.

Our rivers span over 250 miles, and with two National Park Service Visitor Centers, visiting one can be challenging for some of the 900K annual visitors to the Riverway.

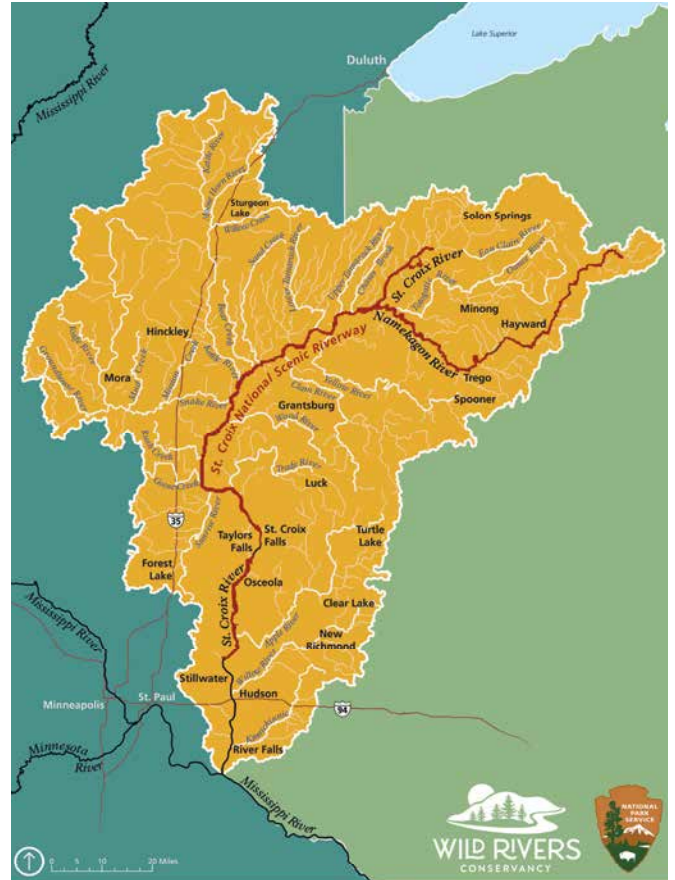
Our new mobile visitor experience, EDDY (Education & Discovery Delivered to You), helps us meet people where they are, making it easier for everyone to learn about and enjoy these nationally significant waterways.

This joint effort combines the resource expertise of St. Croix National Scenic Riverway staff with the community engagement strengths of the Wild Rivers Conservancy team.

## Where will Eddy go -

EDDY will travel throughout the St. Croix and Namekagon River watershed, visiting:

- Community Events & Festivals
- Schools & Libraries
- River Access Points & Parks
- Gatherings Across Wisconsin and Minnesota



Map: NPS

Photo: Wild Rivers Conservancy



## Powered by Xcel Energy.

Xcel Energy has been a major supporting partner for many of the Conservancy’s needs. Early on in the Mobile Visitor Experience project, Xcel saw the vision and importance, and supported the project through sponsorship to make EDDY a reality in the St. Croix Valley.



# BRINGING THE MOBILE VISITOR EXPERIENCE TO THE ROAD.

Thanks to the Xcel sponsor and early private support from a few individuals, we purchased an electric sprinter van, and were ready to brand and outfit this community engagement vehicle.



Art: Wild Rivers Conservancy & Andrew Beckman

## Creating images that capture the wild & scenic energy of the Riverway.

Early in the process our design team identified that illustrated graphic would better capture the entire energy of the Riverway than a photo of a single location. We put out a request for proposal, and received six submissions from extremely talented artists.

We made the decision to partner with illustrator Andrew Beckman. Andrew understood the style we were going for and elevated the artwork to a level better than we could imagine.

## Exper finishing touches, inside and out.

Narrow Road Conversions in White Bear Lake, MN helped us design and build a modular storage system, complete with a custom desk and TV display for interpretive programming. Auto Trimmers in Shoreview, MN, applied the exterior vinyl wrap with the highest attention to detail.



Photo: Wild Rivers Conservancy

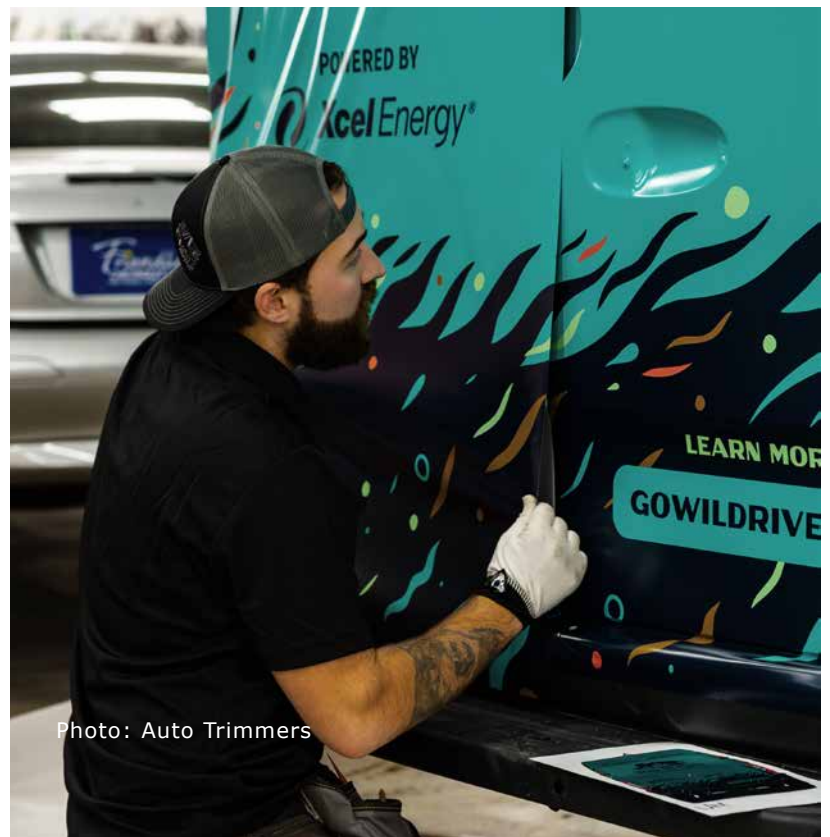


Photo: Auto Trimmers

# READY TO CONNECT COMMUNITIES TO THE RIVERWAY THROUGH EDUCATION & DISCOVERY

EDDY is now ready for action after our celebrated luanch at Wild Rivers Fest on May 2nd. This innovative project is another layer of added partnership between Wild Rivers Conservancy and the National Park Service, made possible with support from the National Parks Foundation, Xcel Energy, and a group of individual supporters. You can expect to connect with EDDY, Conservancy staff, and NPS Rangers, where people live and recreate.

## Programs

Explore river ecology, history, and recreation.

## Exhibits

Join us for talks, demonstrations, and activities.

## Recreation

Meet with experts to plan your Riverway adventure!

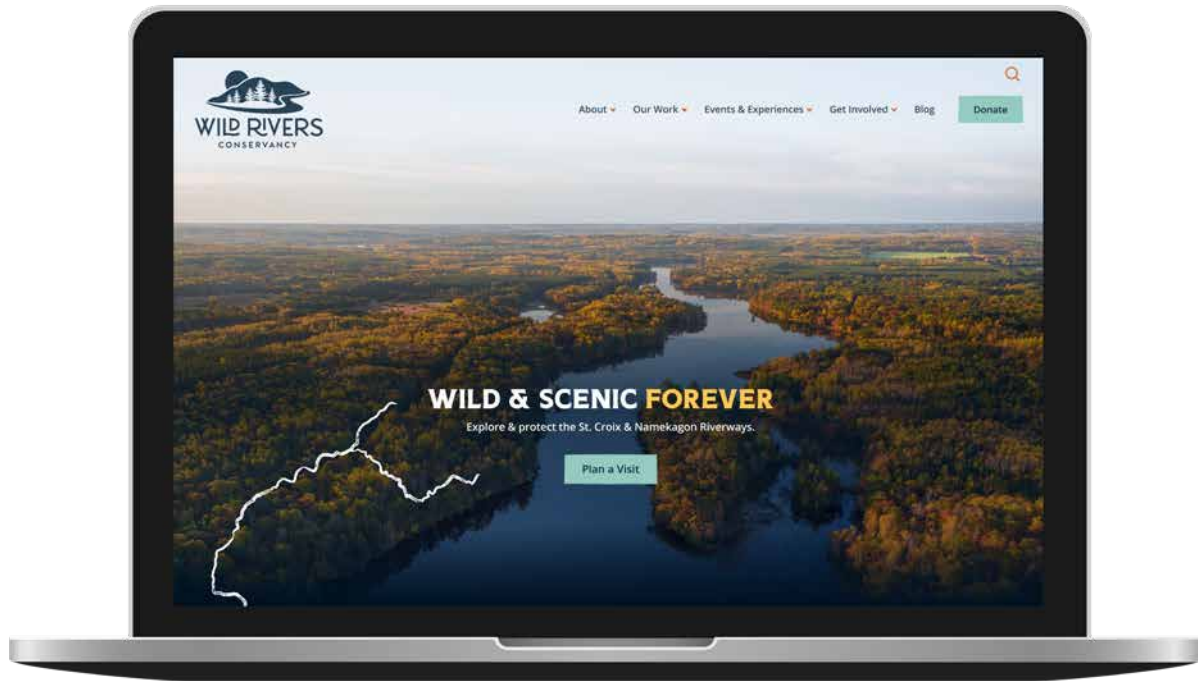
**Visit [wildriversconservancy.org/EDDY](http://wildriversconservancy.org/EDDY)**

**to stay up to date with all upcoming EDDY events and programming**

Photos: Zoe Yates Photography



Photos: Roving Ranger Mary stands ready to connect with visitors | Park Superintendent Craig Hansen and Conservancy Executive Director Matt Poppleton, introduce EDDY to the Wild Rivers Fest crowd | Illustrator Andrew Beckman points out a detail on his EDDY artwork | Matt Poppleton, Board Chair Loralee DiLorenzo, Craig Hansen, and former Executive Director Deb Ryun pose in front of EDDY to celebrate their collective work spanning multiple years.



## AN IMPROVED WILDRIVERSCONSERVANCY.ORG

In December 2024 we identified the need for an updated and more modern web presence. Our strategic plan has been updated for use in 2026 to 2028, and we recognized the expected increase in community engagement that would come with EDDY. Thanks to a capacity building grant from the National Parks Foundation, we were able to take the leap in this update. Countless hours of research and effort have gone into creating a platform that can serve both longtime supporters, and people new to the values of the Riverway.

A strong digital foundation for our work.

**30,000  
VISITORS  
PER YEAR**

**50%  
VISITORS  
ARE NEW**

**1 MINUTE 22  
SECONDS TIME  
ON PAGE**



Building a platform for our future with a mission aligned partner.

Us Creative Works has been helping organizations tell their stories and realize their missions for over a decade. From Save the Boundary Waters to the Nature Conservancy they have years of experience helping great organizations do great work. Us Creative was founded on the desire to make a difference using digital. As our website partner, they are diligently and creatively working to support our work and—ultimately— helping protect the rare ecological integrity of the St. Croix & Namekagon Riverway.



**Will Jenkins**  
**Director of Development**

## THE MOMENTUM IN CONFLUENCE

The accomplishments that are showcased in this newsletter are a testament to a landmark season for the Conservancy. With the launch of EDDY, our new mobile visitor center, we have a bold new avenue for engaging the public and bringing the wonders of our National Park directly to the people. Simultaneously, our new website represents a major leap forward in how we share our mission and successes with the world in a modern, scalable way.

However, these milestones are not a finish line, they are the starting line.

All of this progress is built on the legacy of those who came before us. While these achievements were made possible by the incredible generosity of private donors and partners like Xcel Energy, the National Park Foundation, and the St. Croix Valley Foundation, we are just getting started. We built EDDY to bridge the gap between the community and the park. We built a new digital home to ensure our work is well-represented for years to come. But to maintain this momentum and fuel our future growth, we rely on you. Whether through the gift of your time as a volunteer or through monetary donations, your support is the foundation upon which the Conservancy's future is built.

As the weather warms and we return to the wild and scenic waters of the Riverway, please remember that while legislation exists to protect this land, legislation is fragile. It takes a dedicated community of supporters and the tireless work of the Conservancy to ensure these qualities endure.

**Thank you for standing with us as we embark on this next chapter.**

*Will Jenkins*

**Make a gift today with the enclosed envelope or scan the QR code to give through our easy to use, secure, online donation platform.**





# WILD RIVERS CONSERVANCY

PO Box 938  
Osceola, WI 54020

*Printed on sustainably produced paper*

## STAY CONNECTED

715-483-3300

[wildriversconservancy.org](http://wildriversconservancy.org)

@wildriversconservancy



Join us for our annual fundraiser, Forever Wild, on September 18th

Rustic Roots Winery | Scandia MN

Learn more & purchase tickets:  
[www.wildriversconservancy.org/events](http://www.wildriversconservancy.org/events)