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Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
and Recreation Area

A Case Study¹

by

Wayne M. Sames and L.C. Merriam²

October, 1980

STAFF PAPER SERIES NUMBER 18

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	1
PREFACE.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
METHODS.....	5
STUDY AREA INFORMATION.....	7
I. Description of the Study Area.....	7
II. Historical and Cultural Aspects.....	9
III. Early Preservation Efforts.....	12
IV. The Establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area.....	21
INTERVIEW RESULTS AND SUMMARY.....	27
SUMMARY DISCUSSION.....	42
Historical Factors.....	42
Physical Characteristics.....	44
Political Factors.....	45
Social Factors.....	46
MAP AREA AND REGION.....	48
LITERATURE CITED.....	49

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PREFACE

Cutting through the southern half of the Twin Cities metropolitan area is a huge valley which was carved by glacial meltwaters eleven thousand years ago. Today, the Minnesota River meanders through the broad floodplain of this valley on its way to its confluence with the Mississippi River at Fort Snelling. The lower Minnesota River valley, an area of great natural, historical, and cultural significance, has been the focus of exploration, settlement, and commerce since the first white explorers discovered it almost 300 years ago.

In 1976, Congress created the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area. This action was the latest in a long series of efforts aimed at protecting the outstanding natural and cultural qualities of the valley. Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources are in the process of developing a management plan for the protection, preservation, interpretation, and use of the area.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the importance of citizen involvement in natural resource planning and management. Managing agencies have initiated measures to try to increase the amount of citizen participation in the decision-making process. According to Robinson, this increased effort in public participation has come about through a combination of judicial, legislative, and administrative actions and "...has become an accepted norm of the planning and decision-making processes of administrative government."

Through the years, however, there have been many instances where private citizens have not waited for the administrative agencies to draw them into their often ponderous planning processes. Citizen groups have initiated and formulated their own resource protection plans, garnered the necessary local and political support, and lobbied these plans through the appropriate administrative and legislative channels.

A project was initiated by local citizens in Minnesota during the early and mid-1970's. These people were active and well organized. The results of their activity was the creation of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area in 1976.

This report is a case study of the background, origins, and establishment of the refuge and recreation area. One of the objectives is to determine the goals and perceptions of those people who actively advocated and worked for establishment of the refuge. The study also attempts to identify the attitudes of local officials, commercial and industrial

interests, and the various managing agencies toward the wildlife refuge. The attitudes and perceptions of all these groups are compared in order to identify any existing or potential areas of conflict in terms of future use and management of the refuge. Previous resource management proposals for the valley are reviewed and compared with the citizen group's project. Finally, the study looks at how important the early citizen action and interest was in the establishment of the refuge and how it might affect the future management of the area by the public agencies.

It is hoped that such information will be helpful for the managing agencies, local officials, and interested local citizens who will deal with questions of alternative uses and management of the refuge and recreation area in the years to come.

METHODS

The case study of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area involved three distinct categories of research: (1) Field observations, (2) Data collection, and (3) Personal interviews with key people. All of the information gathered by these three methods was then combined to provide a comprehensive overview of the processes and people involved in the establishment of the refuge.

General information related to the physical, cultural, and historical resources of the valley was collected. Later research involved the collection of background information related specifically to the refuge project. Numerous documents, including earlier proposals for protection of the river valley, reports, maps, news articles, meeting transcripts, copies of legislation, work plans, and similar information, were reviewed and compiled.

Finally, a series of standardized interviews was completed during the summer 1979. Those interviewed were a select group of people representing the various interests involved in the refuge project including local citizen activists, local government officials, representatives of the various managing agencies in the valley, commercial and industrial representatives, and local landowners. They were all people who had a direct personal or job-related interest in the proposal for and establishment of a national wildlife refuge in the Minnesota River valley. It was felt that these people would likely have the strongest opinions and best knowledge about the area and the refuge.

A total of 41 people were interviewed using a standard interview schedule. The interview schedule consisted of 23 questions related to the respondent's knowledge and opinions regarding the refuge proposal in general, the impact of citizen involvement on the success of the proposal, and their ideas as to how the area should be used and managed in the future. Among the people interviewed were representatives of 5 state and federal agencies, 12 local government units, 6 private commercial or industrial interests, 3 citizen activist groups, 3 newspapers, and several private landowners. These individuals were drawn from 13 different communities in the area. All of the standardized interviews were conducted in person, usually at the home or office of the interviewee.

In addition to the standardized interviews, several other informal interviews were conducted over the phone or in person with various people who provided additional useful comments or information for the study.

STUDY AREA INFORMATION

I. Description of the Study Area

The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area is located along the valley of the Minnesota River between Fort Snelling State Park and Jordan, Minnesota. This area is in the southern and southwestern fringe of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The national wildlife refuge consists of five separate units: (1) Long Meadow Lake, (2) Ferry Crossing, (3) Upgrala, (4) Chaska Lake, and (5) Louisville Swamp. The national recreation area includes much of the remainder of the valley between the refuge units (Map p. 48).

The Minnesota River itself flows 36 miles in its meandering course through a broad floodplain. Numerous shallow floodplain lakes line the river on both sides. Habitat types include open-water lakes and ponds, marsh, floodplain forest, upland woods and savannah, prairie, and some croplands. The total acreage authorized for acquisition for both the refuge and recreation area is 18,500 acres (23).

Much of the area has remained in a relatively undeveloped state, although it is intersected by several roads and rail lines. It is an excellent habitat area for waterfowl and other types of wildlife.

Several administrative units have jurisdiction over this portion of the lower Minnesota River valley. They include four counties, eight municipalities, and several other federal, state, and local agencies.

There are many competing land uses within the lower Minnesota River valley. While much of it remains relatively undeveloped, there are man-made intrusions, particularly on the fringes of the floodplain. Residential areas are mostly in the upland areas and along the bluff tops, although some of the older towns were built close to the valley floor. Agriculture has been an established use in the valley since its earliest settlement and still exists today in scattered pockets. It is gradually being succeeded by more urban-oriented land uses. Commercial developments are, as one might expect, concentrated near the population centers in the valley or along the transportation corridors. They are of a type typical of many outer-fringe suburban areas--service enterprises, fast-food restaurants, etc. Industrial development has played a large part in the recent land use history of the valley. A large electric power generating plant has operated in the floodplain area for many years. With the growth of the metropolitan area toward the river valley and beyond came a wide variety of light industrial developments, many of which were located in areas along the fringe of the floodplain.

The river itself is an important transportation corridor for barge-serviced industries. The most important of these in the valley are the grain terminal operations. This type of industry has also operated for many years. One of the more recent industrial uses of the valley, and perhaps the most controversial, is use of the floodplain for solid waste disposal or sanitary landfills. Many areas of the valley in the Savage and Burnsville areas have been filled for this use (1).

One recent trend in use of the valley is for specialized recreational or commercial uses. These include the Valleyfair amusement park, the Minnesota Valley Restoration historical interpretation site, and the Renaissance Festival (14, 26).

II. Historical and Cultural Aspects

In order to better understand the special qualities of the lower Minnesota River valley it is helpful to look at its geographical, historical, and cultural setting. Only then can one fully appreciate the circumstances which eventually led to its present status as an urban national wildlife refuge and recreation area.

Prehistory

Eleven thousand years ago the massive glaciers of the Wisconsin Ice Age began a slow northward retreat. In what is now northwestern Minnesota (as well as portions of North Dakota, Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan) the meltwaters formed a huge inland sea that scientists later named Lake Agassiz. Throughout much of its existence, Lake Agassiz had a southern outlet that released torrents of water to flow in a generally southeastward direction across the land that is now southern Minnesota. This river, called by geologists the glacial River Warren, carved an immense valley through this area (including the beautiful Mississippi River Valley between Minnesota and Wisconsin). This valley is so huge in places that it is hard to believe that it was once filled with water.

The bluffs are often from one to five miles apart and as much as two hundred feet in height (21).

Eventually, Lake Agassiz waters developed a northern outlet and began draining northward into what is now Canada. The River Warren was replaced by the river now known as the Minnesota River--a respectable stream, but only a mere shadow of its mammoth predecessor. Though the Minnesota River still illustrates the tremendous power of natural forces during its frequent, and often destructive, spring floods, one look at the size of the earlier river's valley is enough to convince the observer that it must have, indeed, been awesome.

When the first European explorers arrived in the area of the lower Minnesota River valley in the late 1600's, it was inhabited by the Dakota (or Sioux) Indians. In later years there were at least six major villages in the area now encompassed by the national wildlife refuge and recreation area. Today, one can still find numerous burial mounds located throughout the valley and adjacent bluffs. The Indians used the valley for fishing, hunting, agriculture and food gathering (20).

There was almost constant conflict between the Dakota and the Ojibway (Chippewa) to the north. As late as the 1850's, these two tribes fought a battle in the river valley near Shakopee. One of the primary goals of the early U.S. government administration of the Minnesota frontier was to attempt to keep the peace between the Dakota and Ojibway.

In the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, signed in 1851 in the river valley near the present town of St. Peter, the Dakota relinquished their

claims to almost 24 million acres of land to the United States. (This historic site is preserved in Traverse des Sioux State Park.) This included most of the Minnesota River valley. Problems associated with this treaty resulted in the bloody Sioux Uprising of 1862. This revolt by the Indians was eventually put down by the army and most of the Indians were removed to reservations in the Dakota Territories. The way was now open for widespread white settlement.

History

Actually, the influx of Europeans into the Minnesota Valley region had begun well before the expulsion of the Dakota. The first known explorer in the region was the Frenchman, Pierre LeSueur, who traveled up the river in the late 1600's. He was followed by several others, including the Englishman, Jonathan Carver in 1766, and Zebulon Pike of the United States Army in 1805. Pike's mission was to try to establish peace between the Dakota and Ojibway and, perhaps more importantly, to establish United States jurisdiction over that portion of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory (20).

Fort Snelling was built in 1819 on a high bluff overlooking the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. For many years it was the westernmost outpost of the United States government in what was then a very remote region.

After the Sioux Uprising, the white settlers lost little time in establishing themselves in the valley. Some of the earliest towns in

the Minnesota Territory were platted in the lower Minnesota River valley. Shakopee, Carver, and Chaska were all established in the 1850's and 1860's. Farmers and other settlers began to move up the river valley. Those who were not farmers were often associated with the river trade. Steamboats plied the river as far up as Mankato and even farther for many years. They brought supplies to the growing farm communities and returned with the harvest of the fertile fields. Gradually, roads, railroads and bridges displaced most of the river travel in the valley (18).

During these early years the sleepy river towns were at least a day's journey from either Minneapolis or St. Paul. The old Shakopee Road, a popular route between Fort Snelling and Shakopee, still runs through what is now the suburb of Bloomington.

The area remained predominantly a rural area until after the Second World War when the Twin Cities suburbs expanded rapidly. Cities such as Bloomington, Burnsville and Eden Prairie experienced rapid population increases. There was a corresponding development of industry, commerce, and transportation facilities, some of which directly impacted the river valley. This rapid growth, and some of the problems which it brought, was a factor in the rising concern over the future of the valley.

III. Early Preservation Efforts

Even before this rapid growth period in the valley, some people had begun to see a need to protect some of the outstanding natural qualities of the area. As the Twin Cities continued to prosper and expand in the

early 1900's, the Minnesota River valley became physically less isolated and more familiar to the city dwellers. Some vacationed at country homes along the bluffs, joined one of the gun clubs offering fine waterfowl hunting in the bottomlands, or simply took their automobiles on weekend tours along the valley. Interest in preserving the river valley for recreational purposes began to grow (18).

In 1934, during the great depression, Governor Floyd B. Olson directed the energetic General Superintendent for Parks in Minneapolis, Theodore Wirth, "...to supervise the preparation of a general plan for the acquisition and utilization of the valley of the Minnesota River from Shakopee to its confluence with the Mississippi River at Mendota and adjacent lands." Wirth, sometimes referred to as the "father" of the Minneapolis park system, visualized the valley as "...a recreation area for the Twin Cities and adjacent communities or, in fact, the whole state." He also proposed the establishment of a "forest preserve" along much of the south boundary of the valley. The proposal was apparently conceived, at least in part, as one of the many public works projects undertaken during the depression era (27).

The ambitious proposal would have involved almost 24 miles of the valley, averaging almost 3 miles in width and containing over 41,000 acres. The favorable impression that the valley made on Wirth is illustrated by his own description of the area:

"The river bottom or submersible land covers about 6,000 acres and contains groves of a variety of trees, undergrowth, large hay and pasture meadows, swamps, springs, streams, and spring-fed lakes. Many beautiful wooded valleys depart from

the main valley on both sides of the river, and through these the spring-fed creeks and rivulets run."

"The river banks are mostly wooded and the areas included that are not wooded lend themselves well for proposed forest preserves, as they are not adapted to profitable farming, except in a few cases. The bordering hillsides rise to about 200 feet above the river and provide many fine points for observation of the valley, which, from a landscape point of view, are most attractive and desirable." (27)

Wirth gave particular emphasis to the recreational and aesthetic values that would accrue from such a project:

"The principle object is to provide a large recreational area for the entire state and particularly that section in which the two largest cities with their condensed populations are located. Then too, in preserving as much as possible the many picturesque and historical features and the very attractive landscape picture as a whole, we do a work of inestimable value to posterity. If in the course of years we make the grounds more accessible to the people, we serve a timely purpose, which the change of times and conditions imperatively demand, namely, the establishment of appropriate and ample opportunities for our people to employ their much-increased leisure time under happy surroundings and proper character and health building conditions, exercise, and uplifting recreation."

Wirth was also interested in preserving the forest resources of the valley. He proposed that the entire south boundary of the area, in what is now Eagan, Burnsville and Savage, as well as the rugged hills in the northwest corner of the project area near Chaska, be set up as "forest preserves." According to Wirth:

"These forest lands could be developed by the employment of relief labor and eventually would be a great value from many points of view, well known to the public and in some parts at least, after they had reached a certain age of maturity, would serve as additional outing places for the public." (27)

Finally, Wirth noted areas of special and historical interest in the valley, including the Sibley House, Fort Snelling, Indian camps, trails, the Battle of Shakopee (between the Dakota and Ojibway in 1858), an old tavern and stone mill, and the "boiling springs."

He cited the rapidly growing population of the Twin Cities, recreation and tourism values of the proposal, and the availability of Federal assistance and a large number of "itinerant workers" as justification for the project. In reviewing the existing state and Federal parks and forests in Minnesota he pointed out that "...the forests are all far north of the Twin Cities." (27) He urged acquisition as soon as possible.

The proposal was outlined by Wirth in a letter to Governor Floyd B. Olson in April, 1934. This letter, along with some additional information, was also included in a "Tentative Study Plan of the West Section of a Metropolitan Park System For the Twin Cities Minneapolis and St. Paul," which was part of the 53rd Annual Report of the Minneapolis Park Board of Commissioners in 1935.

But, in the end, the dream was never realized. Governor Olson, one of the prime supporters of the idea, died in the summer of 1936. Apparently, the new administration did not have the same degree of interest in the project. A few overlook areas were developed, including one near the Flying Cloud Airport in Eden Prairie and another near Mendota, but the real essentials of the plan never materialized. During the next three decades commercial, industrial, and residential development in the valley was such that the completion of Wirth's plan became impossible.

Even so, it did spark an interest in the minds of some people that was not completely extinguished.

Whatever the real reasons for the failure of the original Wirth proposal, the idea of preserving at least portions of the lower Minnesota River valley never died completely. There was a period of several years during World War II and afterward when little appears to have been done to advance the idea in any concrete manner. By the early 1960's, however, there were some stirrings of action. In 1963, the Minnesota River was one of four rivers in the state to be designated by the legislature as a state canoe and boating route. This legislation provided for the marking of hazards and points of interest, development of water recreation sites, and acquisition of lands for such purposes. Little, if anything, was accomplished under this act in the Minnesota River valley until the early 1970's, however.

About the same time that the canoe and boating route act was passed, the legislature created the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (MORRC). This commission was empowered to study the recreation resources of the state and recommend to the legislature a comprehensive program for further study and development of these recreation resources (28).

The legislature provided special funds, as a result of the MORRC recommendations, for the study of certain of the areas identified. One of these areas was the Minnesota River valley. The Minnesota Conservation Department, now the Department of Natural Resources, commissioned a study

of the river valley to determine its suitability for a state park. In 1966, a study report and plan for a Carver State Park was developed for the department by the consulting firm of Theodore Wirth and Associates of Billings, Montana. This Wirth was the grandson of the Theodore Wirth who had developed the original preservation proposal of 1935 (28).

The proposal for Carver State Park was almost as ambitious as the 1935 plan. One major difference, however, was that the emphasis had shifted further upstream to the area west and south of Chaska. In addition, many new factors had entered the picture to make the selling of such an idea perhaps more difficult than it may have been in earlier years. For one thing, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had begun to discuss the possibility of flood control dams in the river valley. One of these dams would have been built near the site of the proposed state park. Floods were, and will probably always be, a topic of considerable debate and interest to people of the valley. Some people wanted the dams badly, while others did not. Among those opposing the development of the dams was the Conservation Department. Another factor was that this state park proposal originated essentially from a state agency, though there was some local support for the idea. The original Wirth proposal appears to have been largely the product of two far-sighted and imaginative individuals, Wirth and Olson. The younger Wirth himself noted some of the similarities between his report and that of his grandfather:

"The same 1935 report pointed out some of the same deficiencies in park and recreation opportunities that exist today. In other words, the problems of today regarding recreation opportunities are not new. They are, in fact, problems of long duration grown more acute because of a more accelerated population and industrial growth, an increasingly affluent society, and an ever increasing leisure time." (28)

The Division of State Parks of the Conservation Department, which had commissioned the second Wirth study, held a series of meetings and discussions with local officials and citizens throughout much of the period from 1965 to 1969. There was apparently a mixed reaction in the area to the idea of a state park in the valley. In general, those who favored the proposal saw it as a good method to preserve the natural values of the valley, provide needed recreation opportunities, and perhaps bring some tourism dollars into the area. They may also have seen it as a means of preventing the Corps of Engineers proposal for a series of dams and reservoirs in the river valley.

Those who opposed the state park concept most often cited their support of this reservoir system as a major argument against the park. Some felt that the valley was not suitable for a park and that the reservoirs were needed much more for the prevention of flood problems. They also argued that the park would take in several potential gravel extraction sites on private lands and might harm the valley by bringing in too many people (29).

Though there was some support from local legislators and county officials, there was apparently enough local opposition to prevent park creation. By 1969 the Division of State Parks had all but abandoned the

idea of a state park as originally envisioned. Instead, the concept of a linear recreational trail system in the valley has gained support and interest. In 1969, the state legislature passed a bill creating the Minnesota Valley Trail and authorized the Department of Natural Resources to:

"...provide a recreational travel route...which provides access to or passage through areas which have significant scenic, historic, scientific, or recreation qualities..." When completed, this trail will follow the Minnesota River from Fort Snelling to LeSueur. A detailed "Plan for Recreational Trails in the Minnesota River Valley" was prepared in late 1969 for the Minnesota Boating and Trails Association by a consulting firm. Information from this report was passed on to the Division of State Parks for some of the initial planning of the trail. (11)

The Department of Natural Resources began acquiring land in the valley soon afterwards and by the mid-1970's had established several trail wayside areas. Some of these waysides were established in the area that was originally proposed for a state park. They include the Rush River Wayside near Henderson, the Lawrence Wayside near Jordan, the Carver Rapids Wayside between Jordan and Chaska, Trail Site Two near Chaska, and the Rice Lake Wayside between Savage and Shakopee.

There was some controversy about the acquisition of large parcels of land for these waysides. Some people felt that the Department was buying more land than was needed for trail purposes. The fact that much of the land acquired was in the vicinity of the proposed state park also upset some people.

While the Department of Natural Resources was attempting to acquire and protect certain portions of the valley, local units of government

were also getting into the act. The Hennepin County Park Reserve acquired a large section of the valley adjacent to Blue and Fisher Lakes between Shakopee and Savage. This is now known as the James J. Wilkie Park Reserve. The City of Bloomington was also very active in acquiring lands along the bluffs for park purposes. Some of the other towns in the valley, most notably Shakopee, also had park areas along the river.

Yet, with all of this activity aimed at protecting portions of the valley, by the early 1970's much of the area was being threatened by industrial and commercial development. Burnsville and Savage were particularly active in attracting industrial and commercial uses in the floodplain areas. In 1969, a flood in the valley did tremendous damage to these developments. The filling in of the floodplain continued, however, and the developments continued also. Communities south of the river had begun to grow rapidly and the need for additional road crossings was becoming a controversial topic. The population growth of the area promised to put ever increasing strain on the natural qualities of the river (1).

It was in such an atmosphere that the idea of greater and more comprehensive protection of the valley took root. Change in the valley was evident to almost anyone traveling across it, particularly along Interstate 35. The floodplain was being filled in with large sanitary landfills, industrial sites were springing up over a large area, and the inevitable strip development of commercial enterprises was in full swing. This change was even more obvious to the people who lived and worked in or near the valley. It was these people who finally decided to act.

IV. The Establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area

The sporadic efforts to protect the natural habitat within the lower Minnesota River valley did not seem to some people to be enough to stem the tide of commercial and industrial expansion in the early 1970's. The damaging floods and landfills were enough, however, to convince a small group of citizens in the city of Burnsville that the time had come to take some action to prevent complete development of the valley (1).

A group of local Burnsville residents formed an organization called the Burnsville Environmental Council in the early 1970's. One of the major projects of this group was to try to prevent the issuance of permits for some landfill operations in the river floodplain in Burnsville. They were unsuccessful in their initial attempts, partially because the city council of Burnsville was apparently pro-development at that time and wanted to see industrial activity in the valley area. All of the 1,400 acres of floodplain land within the city at that time was zoned for industrial use (30).

In an effort to broaden support for protection of the river valley, the Burnsville Environmental Council developed a brochure entitled "The Lower Minnesota River" and distributed it throughout the area. In this booklet, the group called for the establishment of a "Lower Minnesota River National Wildlife Refuge Area." (1) The primary objective of this action was to "...maintain an urban floodplain in its natural state, to prevent further pollution and degradation of the area and to retain a corridor of wild land in the heart of a metropolitan area."

In order to gain support for their plan, the Council also decided to try to involve interested citizens in the nearby municipalities. Perhaps the most well organized group in the area with similar attitudes toward the preservation of the river valley was the Bloomington Natural Resources Commission. This was an advisory group to the Bloomington City Council and had been very active in a number of environmental issues in that city. They, too, had concerns over the development in the valley. Bloomington has little floodplain that is capable of supporting industry and the bluffs are closer to the river there. Because of this, the city of Bloomington had followed a policy of protecting much of the bluff areas next to the river as city park land.

Bloomington residents could still see the development occurring in the river valley in Burnsville and Savage, however, and they were concerned. When contacted by the Burnsville Environmental Council about their river protection plan, several members of the Bloomington Natural Resources Commission and other local citizens became very interested. By the spring and summer of 1973 the two groups had joined together to form an ad hoc Lower Minnesota River Committee. This group held a series of organizational meetings during the summer of 1973 and elected two co-chairpersons to coordinate their activities (12).

An article in the June 22, 1973 issue of the Minneapolis Star about one of these meetings revealed some of the sentiments on both sides of the issue at the time. In regard to the existing industrial development in the valley, the chairman of the Burnsville Environmental Council was

quoted as saying: "We're not suggesting any of these be moved, but they're examples of what has happened already. If we don't do something now, the whole area will be used in this manner." On the other hand, the mayor of Burnsville at the time made the following observations: "A man ought to be able to develop his land when he wants to. If we don't want him to develop it, we should purchase it. Then we can do what we want with it. Sure, I'd like to see the land stay wild, too, but trying to raise the kind of money to buy and preserve the land is beyond our means." (30)

The citizen group had decided that local efforts were, indeed, inadequate to preserve the valley and they were determined to push for the establishment of a federal management program. This would take a tremendous lobbying and educational effort and they lost little time in getting to work. They began organizing local information meetings in the various towns in the valley and recruiting new members. They launched a major mailing campaign to alert state and federal legislators of their plans and invite their support. They developed and distributed informational brochures and also developed an excellent slide presentation of the lower Minnesota River valley which, incidentally, is still being used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today. The news media was contacted and several papers ran stories and editorials regarding the proposal.

Finally, they developed draft legislation for the creation of a national wildlife refuge and recreation area and sought authors for the

bill. Then Senator (now Vice-President) Mondale was the chief Senate author while Congressmen Oberstar, Frenzel, and Hagedorn were the prime movers of the bill in the House (25). Field hearings in Minnesota were held by sub-committee's of both the Senate and House in 1975 and 1976. The testimony was very largely in favor of the proposal at these two hearings. The bill finally passed the U.S. House of Representatives on September 20, 1976 and the U.S. Senate on September 24, 1976. The President signed the bill into law on October 9, 1976 (21) (15). After years of intense effort, the citizen group had succeeded in gaining the type of comprehensive management and protection for the valley that had been envisioned, but never quite realized, since the days of Theodore Wirth.

The legislation creating the refuge and recreation area was not, perhaps, all that the citizen group had originally dreamed of. Several compromises were necessary in order to gain the crucial support of local officials and to neutralize some of the objections of industries in the valley. The willingness of the citizen group to compromise on some of these issues may have been an important factor in the eventual success of their proposal.

The first, and perhaps most sensitive issue at the time, was the argument over whether a new bridge crossing in the western Bloomington portion of the river valley should be allowed. Many people on the south side of the valley, particularly in the Shakopee and Scott County areas, wanted a bridge very badly. Many people in western Bloomington did not

want the disruptive road development in their area that would be caused by such a project, not to mention the disruption such a crossing would cause in the river valley itself. The Scott County Board of Commissioners withheld their support of the refuge project until a provision allowing for a well planned and environmentally sensitive bridge crossing was added to the bill (24).

Another major concern of industries in the valley was that the commercial navigation on the river not be disrupted by the establishment of the refuge. The grain industries in the valley were particularly concerned about this. Again, special provisions were written into the bill which provided special instructions for disposal of dredge spoil from the river channel and a specific provision was included insuring the continued use of the navigation channel (15).

There were also some objections from some local farmers and other landowners over the possible loss of agricultural and other private lands within the proposed boundary, but the number of these people was small and they did not seem to develop serious enough opposition to create any major roadblocks for the proposal (24).

The legislation provided for dual-management of the area. The national refuge portion, about one-half of the total acreage, is to be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The remainder of the area constitutes the national recreation area and is to be managed by the State of Minnesota and its political subdivisions. The law also provided funding for land acquisition and for development of a comprehensive

management plan within three years of adoption of the bill (or by October, 1979) (15). To date (spring, 1980), several thousands of acres have been acquired as part of the refuge. The management plan, however, is still in the process of completion and will not be finalized until at least the fall of 1980.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, present manager of the Minnesota Valley Trail units and Fort Snelling State Park, is the lead agency cooperating with the Fish and Wildlife Service in the planning of the refuge and recreation area (13).

Several of the members of the citizen group are still active in following the progress of the refuge and may play a role in the public review process of the proposed management plan for the project. Reports from the refuge planners during the winter of 1980 indicated that several informational meetings they held on the progress of the planning effort were well attended and that people were very interested and had many ideas regarding the future development and management of the refuge and recreation area.

INTERVIEW RESULTS AND SUMMARY

The following are tabulations and results of interview data obtained from a standard interview format utilized as a part of the case study. During the course of the interviews it became obvious that the standard format was not adequate to take into account various qualifiers or comments that several respondents added to their answers. These deviations from the standard answer format were recorded, however, and new categories developed during the tabulation phase to accommodate them. These new categories are noted for each individual question in the following summary.

Question

"As far as you know, how and when did the idea of creating a national wildlife refuge in the Minnesota Valley originate?"

A. How: As an entire group, the respondents indicated that they felt the project was initiated by the following groups (by frequency of responses):

- 1) Citizens and citizen groups
- 2) The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- 3) Federal and state legislators

This response tends to support much of the evidence from the case study that indicates the strong degree of involvement and influence by local citizens in the effort to establish the national wildlife refuge and recreation area.

- B. When: A total of 30 respondents out of the 41 interviewed indicated "when" they felt the idea originated:

<u>Time</u>	<u># of Respondents</u>
1) Long time ago; early 1900's; 20 yrs. ago; several yrs. ago; Theodore Wirth (1930's).	12
2) Mid 1970's	5
3) Early 1970's	9
4) 1960's	4
	<hr/>
TOTAL	30

This response is interesting because it seems to show some knowledge on the part of several of the respondents of the earlier efforts to preserve the valley. Others mark the origins of the idea at about the time of the latest (and the only successful) efforts of the early and mid 1970's that resulted in the creation of the national wildlife refuge and recreation area. A comparison of the sub-groups yields some further interesting information:

Summary of Sub-group Responses:

- 1) Most of the state/federal/regional government officials interviewed saw the wildlife refuge and recreation area idea as a relatively recent one.
- 2) The local officials were somewhat more divided in their opinions, though six of the fourteen saw it as an idea that originated a long time ago.

- 3) Four out of the eleven citizen/environmentalists recognized the early origins of the idea; the others were more divided in their views.
- 4) The private landowners and business representatives were also divided in their opinions.

These sub-group responses seem to indicate a better knowledge on the part of local officials and local citizens of the past history of their local area as compared to state/federal/regional government officials who may be less familiar with such information.

Question

"As you may know, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area was established in 1976 with the passage of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Act. As far as you can recall, have you seen a copy of the Act itself?"

A. Summary of 41 total respondents:

*Yes.....27

No.....13

Unsure.....1

*About 2/3 of all the people interviewed had seen a copy of the Act.

B. Summary of sub-group responses:

	<u>Had Seen Act</u>	<u>Had Not</u>
State/Fed/Region Officials	7	2
Local Officials	9	5
Citizen/Environmentalists	8	3
Landowners/Business Reps.	4	3
	<u>28</u>	<u>13</u> (41)

The five local officials who had not seen a copy of the act were almost all newly arrived to the area and were not around at the time that the proposal was being presented at local meetings and hearings.

Those respondents who answered "yes" (who had seen a copy of the act) were then asked the following question:

"What are the major provisions of the act?"

Those who had seen copies of the act seemed to be reasonably familiar with the major provisions. Those provisions mentioned most often were:

- 1) Funding and authorization for acquisition, development, and maintenance (15 respondents).
- 2) Description of the area involved, its boundaries and acreage (15).
- 3) Cooperative, coordinated administration (10).
- 4) Nature center, environmental education, interpretation (9).
- 5) Preservation of habitat, wildlife, floodplain (7).
- 6) Various restrictions on uses (7).
- 7) Two-part designation (refuge and recreation area) (7).

- 8) Procedures, timetables, and deadlines (4).
- 9) Bridge crossing provisions (4).
- 10) Comprehensive planning; a management plan (3).

The above responses represent a reasonably good summary of the major provisions of the act.

Question

"Did you favor or oppose passage of this act?"

*Summary of 41 total respondents:

Favored.....33

Opposed.....1

Neutral/Undec.....7

*Most of the individuals who indicated that they were either neutral or undecided about the passage of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Act were not around at the time the act was passed (1976). These included three local officials and two representatives of commercial enterprises in the valley. The other two who listed themselves as neutral or undecided were a local landowner who was around at the time, but apparently paid little attention to the proposal, and a representative of one of the major industrial enterprises in the valley who was also in the area at the time the proposal was being discussed and had, in fact, testified at the hearings.

The person who was originally opposed changed to a position of support once the provisions allowing for a new bridge crossing of the river were added to the bill.

The above results could lead to the false assumption that there was no opposition to the national wildlife refuge proposal. A review of the meeting transcripts and some of the newspaper articles, as well as conversations with the interviewees and others indicates that there was, in fact, some opposition. Efforts to interview one of the better known

opponents with the standard interview format were unsuccessful. The last question deals with the interviewees' impressions about the opposition to the proposal.

"Could you tell me your reasons for either favoring or opposing the passage of the act?"

Reasons for favoring passage:

1) Citizen environmentalists and other citizens:

There was strong agreement on two major reasons:

- a) The act will stop industrial development and landfills in the valley.
- b) The act will help to preserve the area's wildlife habitat and natural resources.

Secondary reasons given were:

- a) Reduced costs of floods.
- b) Natural significance of the area.
- c) The need for land use plan.
- d) Aesthetic reasons.
- e) Economic benefits.
- f) Limits imposed on recreational uses.
- g) Generally a proponent of open space and parks.
- h) Sewer problems.

2) State/Federal Officials:

There were less specific in their reasons, cited broader concepts and benefits.

- a) Preservation of open space and wildlife habitat in an area accessible to the Twin Cities Metro Area.
 - b) Federal involvement is needed because state and local governments either would not or could not do the job of protection and management on their own.
 - c) Floodplain developments were adversely affecting the area, including high flood damage costs.
 - d) Some conflicts of interest (barge traffic) were noted.
 - e) Generally the area was seen as an outstanding resource, threatened, that ought to be preserved.
 - f) Agricultural uses were somewhat harmful (fertilizers).
- 3) Commercial/Industrial Interests, Local Landowners:
- a) Responses of the five who were neutral/indecided:
 - Two people did not even know about the project when interviewed.
 - One was concerned about the effect of the project on company property and interests.
 - Two cited concerns about vandalism, lack of respect for private property.
 - b) Responses of those who favored passage of the act:

There was definitely some ambivalence and qualification in their support. They seemed to support the concept of protecting the valley in general, but had some specific concerns about how this could be

accomplished. Major reasons given for support and concern:

--Floodplain should function as a floodplain; if it is altered we all pay the cost.

--Saving wetlands and wildlife is necessary and desirable.

--It is a unique area close to the Metro Area.

--Last chance to preserve the area.

--Educational benefits.

--Example for other communities.

Qualifications and Concerns:

--Concerns over the valley trail system.

--Concern over the boundaries of the refuge area (respondent's land affected).

--Cost of the project, possible loss of tax base.

--Interpretive center poorly located (respondent's land affected).

--Passive support indicated.

--Concerns over the possible future effect on the Black Dog power plant.

--NSP lands at Carver Rapids.

--Only supported if DNR went along with it.

4) Local Officials

a) Four were neutral/undecided.

Three had not seen the act or were not in the area at the time. One was originally opposed because of concern of bridge crossing provision; now favors because of the bridge crossing provisions included in the act.

- b) The interests of the local officials were generally more parochial than those of the state/federal regional government officials:

Five mentioned that the act was in line with existing city or county policy--to protect open space areas for public use. Several mentioned the wildlife area as a benefit and asset to the city, local people, and local economy and that management of the area would be helpful.

Several also mentioned the unique value of such open space area close to the Twin Cities Metro Area within reach of public transportation; significant in light of the energy problem.

Two people mentioned that it would restrict industry along the river.

One person noted that the bridge crossing and tax issues had been resolved.

In general, several local officials noted the value of the natural resources of the river valley, the long-term preservation of areas that would not be lost, and personal interest in the valley.

Question

"Do you feel that the designation of portions of the lower Minnesota River Valley as a national wildlife refuge and recreation area will or will not help protect the natural and cultural resources of the valley?"

Opinion among the people interviewed was almost unanimous that the designation will protect the natural and cultural resources of the valley. Only two people indicated that they were unsure.

When the total group of respondents is further broken down into sub-groups, the pattern of almost evenly divided opinions remains much the same on the question of the effect on the business values in the valley. One exception is in the sub-group of private landowners and business and industry representatives. They see a generally more negative affect on business and commercial values.

	<u>Will</u>	<u>Will Not</u>	<u>No Response/ Undecided</u>
Local Officials	6	6	2
Landowners/ Bus. Reps.	1	3	3
State/Fed./ Reg. Offic.	4	3	2
Citizens/ Environ.	5	4	2
TOTAL	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>9</u>

Question

"Prior to the passage of the act, were you involved in any way in the question of whether the wildlife refuge and recreation area should be established in the Minnesota River Valley?"

Summary of 41 total responses:

Was involved.....30

Not involved.....11

	<u>Involved</u>	<u>Not Involved</u>
Local Officials	9	5
Landowners/ Bus. Reps.	4	3
State/Fed./ Reg. Offic.	8	1
Citizens/ Environ.	9	2
TOTAL	30	11

The results of these questions show that the respondents were active and involved in the question of whether the wildlife refuge and recreation area should be established in the Minnesota River valley. It supports the idea that many of the respondents were key people in this issue. They were members of citizen groups and governmental agencies; they attended and testified at public meetings and hearings; wrote letters; and participated in other activities related to the refuge questions. Those who indicated they were not involved include several who were not in the area at the time or who did not know about the refuge proposal.

Question

"How interested do you feel the general public was in the proposal to designate the Minnesota River Valley as a national wildlife refuge and recreation area?"

Very interested	5
Somewhat interested	17
Not interested at all	12
No opinion*	2
Qualified*	5

*New categories

Most of the respondents felt that the general public was either somewhat interested or not interested at all in the proposal to designate the Minnesota River Valley as a national wildlife refuge. Many of the respondents made additional comments about this question. Some indicated that more than one category of interest was needed. Their responses are included in the "qualified" category.

There were not striking differences in how the various sub-groups rated the public interest, except that 3 of the 5 people that felt the general public was "very interested" were members of the citizen group.

Question

"In your opinion, how strong was the public support for the proposal? That is, would you say there was:"

Strong public support	9
Moderate public support	13

Almost no public support	9
Other responses*	6
No opinion*	4

*New categories

Sub-group responses:

In general, the local government officials seem to have seen the least amount of public support for the proposal of all the sub-group respondents. Five of the nine people who indicated almost no public support were local public officials. Both the state/federal/regional officials and the citizen environmental groups seem to have seen greater public support. Seven of the nine people who saw strong public support for the proposal were from these two groups. The landowner/industry representatives sub-group gave a very mixed response.

The responses seem to indicate that there were varying degrees of support depending on which group one is talking about and, to some extent, the location of those people. The consensus seemed to be that the active citizen group showed strong support, but that support from the larger public was moderate to light depending on the degree of knowledge and interest. There was also some indication that the greater support was seen in the eastern portion of the valley.

The responses to this question of support seem to correspond quite easily with the answer to the previous questions about the degree of interest. In general, it appears that the more interested people were in the proposal (such as the members of the citizen group), the more

likely they were to support the proposal. Those people were also more likely to perceive a greater degree of support for the proposal overall. Again, there was some expression of the belief that the general public just doesn't always know about proposals or issues of this kind and does not necessarily make its views about them known. Some saw the citizen group as representing the public interest.

Question

"Do you know if there was any opposition to the proposal?"

Yes.....25

No.....10

No op.....4

"If so, how strong would you say the opposition was?"

Strong opposition	9
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Moderate opposition	6
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Almost no opposition	7
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Other	3
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Almost 2/3 of the respondents said that they knew of opposition to the proposal. Opinion on this question was almost equally divided within the two sub-groups of government officials. Most of the citizen/environmental and landowner/industry representatives, however, said that they knew of opposition to the proposal. These two sub-groups also saw the opposition as being stronger than what the government officials saw. Six of the nine people that felt there had been strong opposition were from

these two groups. The state/federal/regional officials seemed to be the sub-group which preceived the least opposition.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION

In attempting to analyze how and why the effort to create a national wildlife refuge in the lower Minnesota River Valley was successful, it is helpful to look at the various social, political, historical, and physical characteristics involved. All of these factors played a role in determining how people viewed the river valley and its resources and shaped their attitudes concerning its future. These factors are all intertwined, but it is possible to isolate some of the more obvious effects of each factor.

Historical Factors

The focal point of initial white settlement of what is now the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area was Fort Snelling at the mouth of the Minnesota River where it joins with the Mississippi. From that point, settlement could have spread either up the Minnesota River valley or up that of the Mississippi. It followed the latter. Attracted by the water power offered by St. Anthony Falls, entrepreneurs and settlers built a great city on either side of the Mississippi. Along the Minnesota, on the other hand, only a handful of towns were platted and they were destined to remain sleepy little river towns until finally engulfed in the urban sprawl of the 1960's and 1970's.

It was this early settlement pattern that resulted in the essentially rural character of the valley and allowed much of the natural habitat to remain largely intact through the years. But the gradual expansion of

the metropolitan area toward the Minnesota River valley began to have an impact on the area by the early part of the twentieth century. As industry, transportation facilities, and residential developments encroached, there was an almost simultaneous realization that the natural values of the river valley were worth protecting.

Hunting preserves and summer cottages had been a part of the valley for many years. The first really comprehensive effort to protect the valley, however, was that proposed by Theodore Wirth in the 1930's. This particular effort failed, but his far-reaching vision never did completely die. Some thirty years later many of Wirth's original ideas were included in a similar plan by the state conservation department which called for the creation of a Carver State Park in a portion of the valley. While this proposal also failed to materialize, it was later resurrected in the form of the Minnesota Valley Trail System.

The stage was set for another attempt at a comprehensive protection effort. Perhaps all that was needed was a trigger to set things in motion. The river itself provided this triggering event with a disastrous flood in 1969 and further flooding in subsequent years. These floods caused enormous damage to industries which had developed in the floodplain in previous years. When filling and development of the floodplain continued almost unabated after these floods, some local citizens felt that something should be done to stop it for good. At that time, during the early 1970's, momentum began to build noticeably and was not to let up until much of the valley was designated as a national wildlife refuge and recreation area in 1976.

It is somewhat ironic that while the Minnesota River valley was "saved" by the movement of growth and development up the Mississippi in the 1800's, it had to be again rescued from that same growth almost one hundred years later as the Twin Cities metropolitan area continued its rapid expansion.

Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of the valley itself may have been important in the successful protection effort. The Minnesota River valley has many characteristics that make it ideally suited to wildlife production. At the same time, it has features which limit its use for residential, industrial, and even agricultural development. This combination made it an attractive area for natural resource protection efforts and limited the competition from other types of land uses that might otherwise have encouraged industry. Flooding has also made agriculture a risky proposition in the valley. The soil is very rich, but poor drainage and late planting schedules due to lingering floodwaters are a major disadvantage.

In short, the physical characteristics of the valley have made it a desirable resource in terms of natural resource protection and a less than ideal location for many of the alternative land uses of man. This certainly contributed to the success of the efforts to preserve the natural habitat.

Political Factors

There is little doubt that favorable political factors contributed to the success of the effort to protect the Minnesota River valley. The most important factor was that the proposal to create a wildlife refuge and recreation area in the valley came not from government agencies and government officials, but from a group of local citizens. It appears to have been essentially a "grass-roots" effort. This local group was able to enlist the support and help of politicians and other government officials to further their cause. They were also able to demonstrate at least the appearance of general public support for their proposal to these politicians, even though widespread active support may not, in fact, have really existed.

Interview results indicated that many of the respondents did not feel that the general public was all that interested or supportive of the proposal. Only 5 people interviewed felt that the general public had been "very interested" and only 9 felt that there had been "strong public support" for the project. Nevertheless, the politicians apparently developed a perception of widespread public support. This may not be particularly unusual for issues of this kind. The perception of the situation appears to have been more significant than the reality.

The particular politicians involved were also important to the success of the project. Then Senator Mondale (now Vice-President) was a very influential member of the Senate and had a personal interest in environmental issues. He was also supported by the late Senator Hubert

Humphrey, one of the most influential political figures of the U.S. Senate. On the House side, Congressman Oberstar was a member of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee which had a role in reviewing the proposal.

It is also important to note that the proposal had bipartisan support. In addition to the above mentioned Democratic Party members, Republican Congressmen Hagedorn and Frenzel also supported the effort.

On the local level, the citizen group was able to garner substantial support from many of the local politicians and used compromise very well in nullifying the objections of others.

For example, the citizen group realized the political clout of the barge and grain industries in the valley and agreed to provisions in the bill allowing for continued operations and maintenance of the barge channel. When some local politicians felt the refuge would prohibit a desired new bridge crossing, the bill was amended so as not to hinder such a project. Those politicians then gave their support to the refuge.

Social Factors

Social factors were also very important in determining the success of wildlife refuge proposal. It is difficult to single out specific factors since they are all interrelated. Some of the more obvious ones were apparent, however, from the interviews and research.

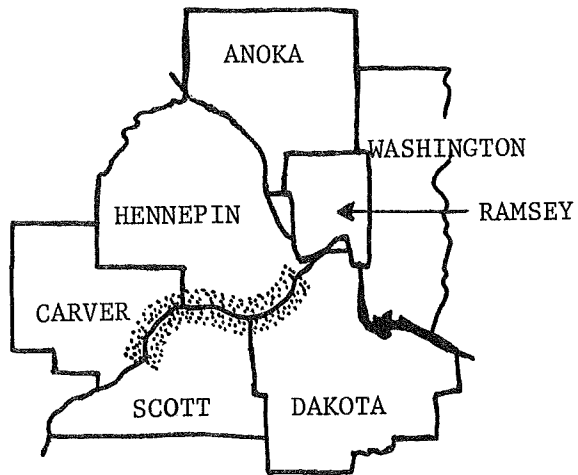
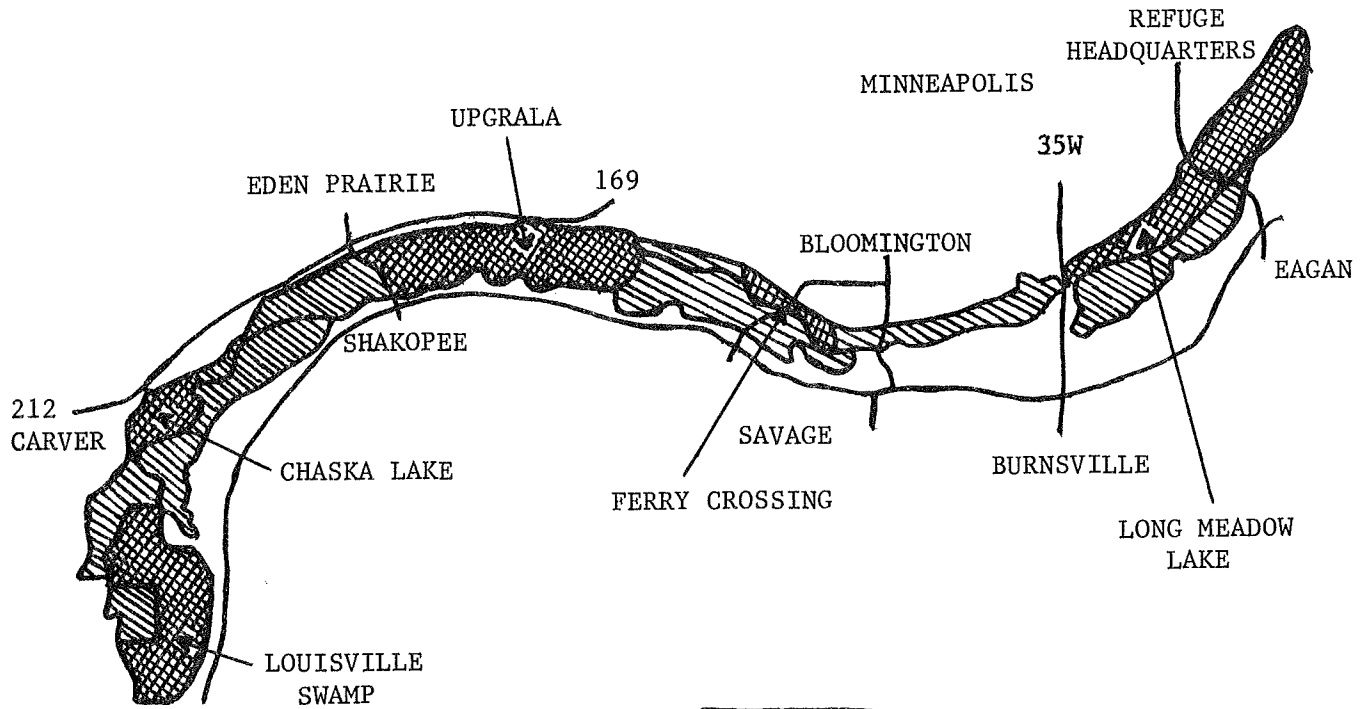
One very important characteristic of the time during which the proposal was being lobbied was the general public interest in conservation

and environmental protection. During the early 1970's interest in the environment was at a very high level in Minnesota as evidenced by the numerous pieces of environmental legislation passed by the state legislature about that time. Examples are the state shorelands program (1969), state Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1973), and state Critical Areas Act (1973).

This general interest in environmental protection was reflected in the interest shown by politicians and the press. The favorable climate toward environmental issues was probably a major factor in the ability of the citizen group to influence local officials, agency officials, politicians, and the press to view their proposal as a viable and serious project.

The specific people involved with the citizen group were also key factors in the success. The leaders of the group were skillful organizers who had had some experience in local citizen action efforts. They were able to devote a great amount of time to the wildlife refuge proposal. They knew that they would have to have support for their effort and they set about to gain that support. A well-organized, small group of local citizens laid most of the groundwork for the project.

THE MINNESOTA VALLEY
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE/RECREATION AREA



J.M.
10/16/80

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