



State of Wisconsin \ DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Jim Doyle, Governor
Scott Hassett, Secretary
John Gozdziwski, Regional Director

Northern Region Headquarters
810 W. Maple Street
Spooner, Wisconsin 54801
Telephone 715-635-2101
FAX 715-635-4105
TTY Access via relay - 711

February 6, 2007

To: Everyone interested in the proposal to name the Totogatic and the Headwaters Segment of the St. Croix as state Wild Rivers

Greetings:

In the past two years, Department staff, partner agencies, and interested groups and individuals have been researching the possibility of designating two additional rivers as State Wild Rivers under Chapter 30 of the statutes. Some of you receiving this letter have contributed to this effort, and we extend very hearty thanks for your work and input. For others, this may be the first opportunity you have heard of the proposal.

A public meeting was held in Minong on September 20, 2006 to present our proposed changes to Chapter 30 (explained below). The next step is to secure local support and seek legislative sponsorship, as the proposed statute change will need to be passed by the legislature and the Governor to officially name these stream segments as Wild Rivers.

Also, in a separate effort, NR 102 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code was changed to provide additional protection to several streams in northern Wisconsin (effective in December, 2006). Both the St. Croix Headwaters segment and the non-impounded reaches of the Totogatic were included, and are now officially state Outstanding Resource Waters. This classification is not the same as the Wild River designation, but will provide more water quality protection than in the past.

Based on input from public meetings in 2005 and 2006, along with recommendations from the Department resource managers that work along these rivers, we have suggested statute changes that we feel address the concerns and suggestions we received. Here is a summary of the proposed changes that we will be forwarding for legislative sponsorship:

Sections of these rivers to be included in the designation:

For the Headwaters segment of the St. Croix, the designation would include the entire river from the outlet of Upper St. Croix Lake to just upstream of the HWY 53 Bridge at Gordon. Here is the actual description:

For the St. Croix River, from the downstream end of Upper St. Croix Lake to the upstream side of the railroad corridor in Gordon, Wisconsin (from the NW1/4 NE1/4 Section 1, T.44N.-R.12W. to the SW1/4 NW1/4 Section 31, T.44N.-R.11W.).

On the Totogatic, the proposal exempts the 4 flowages and dams and establishes 4 designated reaches:

- *Reach 1: From the outlet of Totogatic Lake in Bayfield County to the upstream end of Nelson Lake in Sawyer County (from the lake outlet in the SE1/4 NW1/4 Section 31, T.43N.-R.8W. to the southern edge of the walleye spawning refuge in the SW1/4 NW1/4 Section 14, T.42N.-R.9W.).*
- *Reach 2: From the Totogatic Wildlife Area dam in Washburn County to the upstream end of the Colton Flowage in Washburn County (from a point 500 feet below the wildlife area dam in the SW1/4 SE1/4 Section 12, T.42N.-R.10W. to the south edge of the NE1/4 NE1/4 Section 5, T.42N.-R.10W.).*
- *Reach 3: From the outlet of the Colton Flowage in Washburn County to the upstream end of the Minong Flowage in Douglas County (from a point 500 feet below the dam forming the Colton Flowage in the SW1/4 NE1/4 Section 6, T.42N.-R.10W. to the northern boundary of the S1/2 of Section 32, T.43N.-R.12W.).*

- *Reach 4: From the Washburn County Highway I bridge below the Minong Flowage to the confluence with the Namekagon River in Burnett County (from the southern edge of the CTH I corridor in the NE1/4 SW1/4 Section 13, T.42N.-R.13W. to the river mouth in the NW1/4 NW1/4 Section 35, T.42N.-R.14W.).*

Rationale: Since the flowages are impoundments (more like lakes than rivers), and Nelson Lake, the Colton Flowage, and the Minong Flowage have significant shoreline development, they would not fit the expectation of a “wild river” experience. Also, starting the designated segments 500 feet below an existing dam will allow a zone for future work on the banks and in the stream (for dam maintenance, repair, and possibly replacement).

Provisions for maintaining existing river crossings:

For the St. Croix Headwaters segment and the Totogatic, the department shall allow all recreational and forestry-related water crossings existing at the time of bill passage to be repaired, replaced, or modified to the extent necessary to ensure public safety, if done in a manner that results in the least impact on the natural condition and beauty of the river, and in compliance with chapter 30 requirements.

Rationale: Significant concerns were raised over the fate of existing bridges and culverts that serve recreational trails and forest activities. It is the Department’s recommendation that existing water crossings be allowed to remain in place, and be upgraded as needed. The proposal would not allow for additional crossings to be added, so that contiguous sections of the rivers without crossings could be preserved. Public road bridges can currently be upgraded and replaced on Wild Rivers under Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 302.

Provisions for protecting wild rice habitat:

Natural obstructions may be removed in the St. Croix Headwaters segment and Reach 1 of the Totogatic if performed by (or with permission of) the Department of Natural Resources where needed for protection and propagation of wild rice.

Rationale: Totogatic Lake is located just above the beginning of the proposed designation on the Totogatic. This is a high-quality wild rice lake. Wild rice stands are also present on the Headwaters segment of the St. Croix. Wild rice is vulnerable to water level changes, particularly in the early stages of growth. Beaver dams and log snags, etc., on the river channels can raise the water level and adversely affect rice production. For this reason, the Department and partner agencies that help manage wild rice need authorization to remove natural obstructions.

These were the major issues raised that we felt could be addressed by revising the statute. Other concerns related to activities on private land are already regulated by Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 302 (titled “Management of Wisconsin’s Wild Rivers”). We do not envision making any changes to these requirements, as they would affect protection measures already in place on the three existing Wild Rivers (the Pine, Pike, and Popple in northeastern Wisconsin).

If you are interested in hearing more about the proposal, there are several background documents available that provide more information on the nominated rivers and the details of the Wild River designation. These can be viewed on the UW-Extension St. Croix Basin Education website:

<http://basineducation.uwex.edu/stcroix/Links/WildRiver/Index2.htm>

We are also available at the Spooner Service Center (at the phone numbers listed below) to discuss the proposal and answer questions.

Kathy Bartilson
St. Croix Basin Watershed Supervisor
715/635-4053

Ed Slaminski
Water Management Specialist
715/635-4097