

Minnesota Environmental Partnership



www.MEPartnership.org

Suite 100
546 Rice Street
St. Paul, MN 55103
Phone 651.290.0154
Fax 651.290.0167

January 31, 2011

The Honorable Mark Dayton
Office of the Governor
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

CC:

Tina Smith, Office of the Governor
Erin Campbell, Office of the Governor
Thomas Sorel, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Susan Haigh, Chair, Metropolitan Council

Re: St. Croix River Crossing Project

Dear Governor Dayton:

We write to express our concern over the fate of the Lower St. Croix, a federally-protected Wild and Scenic River. For years, this regional and national treasure has been threatened by a highway project that calls for the construction of an immense, freeway-style bridge through the heart of the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

Efforts to protect our wild and scenic river against this threat were significantly advanced in October 2010, when the National Park Service decided that the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act prohibits the construction of this massive proposed bridge. By concluding that this project would irreparably harm the Lower St. Croix, the Park Service's decision represents an important victory for the protection of this wild and scenic river. In light of this decision, as well as the State's pressing fiscal needs, the time has come to shelve plans for a new bridge that would cost over \$640 million, damage the Riverway's scenic and natural resources, and accelerate sprawl into rural western Wisconsin.

Instead, we urge you to quickly seize this opportunity to identify, with leadership from the Minnesota Department of Transportation and in collaboration with stakeholders, an alternative proposal for a new, modestly-scaled bridge – one that would dramatically reduce the impact on the Lower St. Croix, while serving the needs of Minnesota and Wisconsin residents and saving

taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. At the same time, we urge you to oppose efforts to move the current unworkable proposal forward.

We support a new river crossing that preserves the scenic and recreational qualities for which the Lower St. Croix was designated a wild and scenic river nearly four decades ago. In developing an appropriately-scaled bridge proposal, we believe the following criteria should be considered:

- Consistent with the directives of the Riverway Management Plan, planners should consider building the new bridge in or adjacent to the existing transportation corridor;
- Unlike the current proposal, which calls for a freeway-style, blufftop-to-blufftop bridge in an undeveloped corridor, planners should consider a low-profile, modestly-scaled bridge that reflects the federally-protected status of the St. Croix;
- Unlike the current proposal, which is designed to accommodate 80,000 pound semi trucks at 65 mph speeds, the new bridge proposal should include a slower design speed. A “low and slow” bridge would help preserve the scenic and recreational qualities of the Lower St. Croix, and there is precedent for this type of design in other river crossings;
- Any new bridge, even a modestly-scaled one, should include strong mitigation measures to reduce the impact of new construction over the river.

We believe that such a bridge could be built for much less than the \$640 million projected cost of the current bridge proposal. Equally important, such an alternative would better preserve scenic qualities, recreational resources, and natural character of the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

We hope you agree with us that the recent National Park Service decision offers a unique opportunity to take a fresh look at this project, and to develop an alternative that will meet the needs of residents, while ensuring the St. Croix’s protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. While we appreciate the long list of issues you must deal with in the current difficult fiscal environment, including transportation priorities, we urge you to act quickly with Mn/DOT and the State of Wisconsin to move this project in a new, less costly direction that will reduce impacts to the Riverway and allow construction to begin in the next few years.

Sincerely,

Sally Wakefield, Executive Director
1000 Friends of Minnesota

Russ Adams, Executive Director
Alliance for Metropolitan Stability

Sean Gosiewski, Director
Alliance for Sustainability

Jim Fitzpatrick, Executive Director
Carpenter/St. Croix Valley Nature Center

Paul Austin, Executive Director
Conservation Minnesota

Jane Cleave
Duluth Audubon Society

Michael Soules
Environmental Law and Policy Center

Ethan Fawley, Transportation Policy Director
Fresh Energy

Whitney Clark, Executive Director
Friends of the Mississippi River

Laura Frederick Wang, Acting Executive Director
League of Women Voters Minnesota

Jeff Brand
Mankato Area Environmentalists

Scott Strand, Executive Director
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Glen Hill, Executive Director
Minnesota Food Association

Thomas Bell
Minnesota Ornithologists Union

Lynn McClure, Midwest Regional Director
National Parks Conservation Association *

Brett Feldman, Executive Director
Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota

Denny Caneff, Executive Director
River Alliance of Wisconsin *

Deb Ryun, Executive Director
St. Croix River Association

Bill Neuman, President
St. Croix Scenic Coalition *

Tim Nixon
St. Paul Audubon Society

Shahla Werner, Wisconsin Chapter Director
Sierra Club John Muir Chapter *

Margaret Levin, Minnesota Chapter Director
Sierra Club North Star Chapter

William Schroeer, State Policy Director
Smart Growth America*

Pamela Arnold, President
Take Action - Conserve Our Scandia*

Barb Thoman, Executive Director
Transit for Livable Communities

* Not a Minnesota Environmental Partnership member organization.