



RIVERTIME

EXPERIENCE IT. PROTECT IT. FOREVER.

FALL/WINTER 2020



A TIME OF CHANGE, A HAVEN FOR ALL

DEB RYUN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear River Friends,

It goes without saying that we are at a time of change in the world. Even as technology has become a staple of social interactions, the simple benefits of being outdoors have proven essential to our mental and physical wellbeing. Crowds of people at national parks across the country speak to the power of fresh air, wild places, and unspoiled beauty at a time of immense uncertainty, even as the increased numbers of visitors create new challenges.

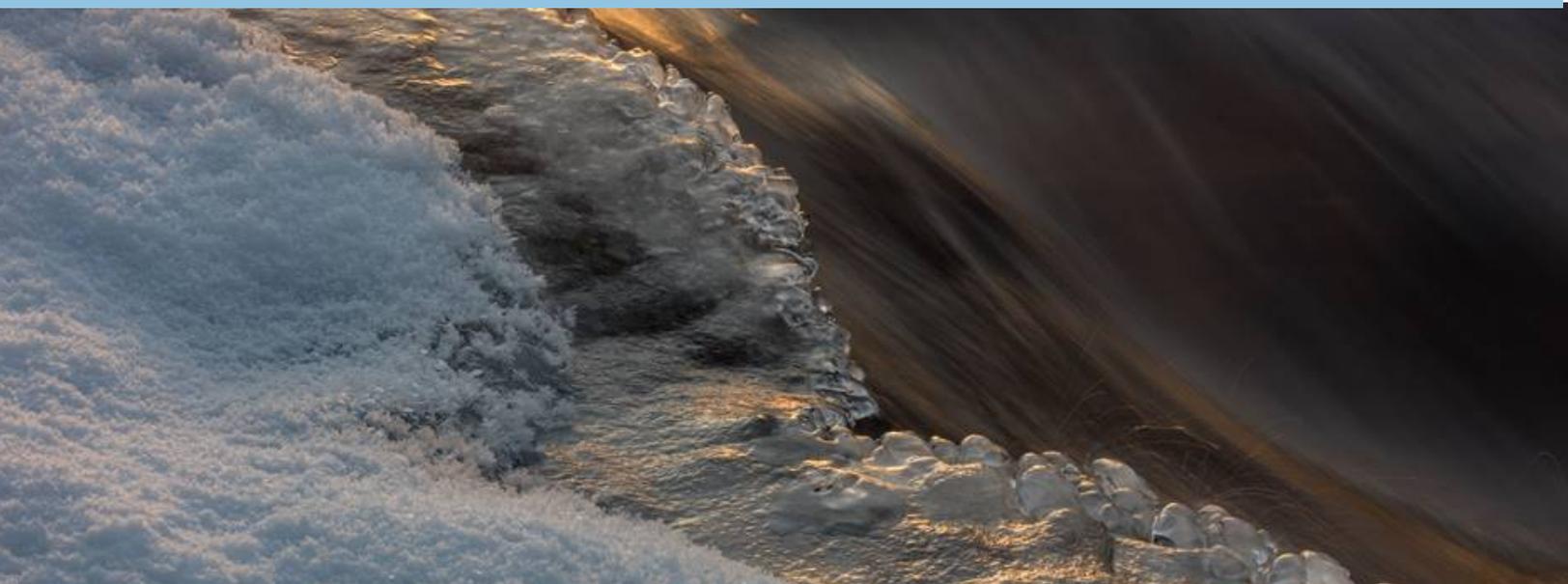
For me, it is always a joy to learn how the river has touched people's lives. That is one of the best parts of my job. Thankfully, I am not immune to the Riverway's charms and magic. In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, political division, social unrest, and personal loss, it has brought me comfort, peace, joy, companionship, laughter, and new discoveries. The river requires a person to live in the moment, forcing me to slow down and pay close attention to the surroundings. I am beholden to it, and I'm compelled to do what I can to give back to it.

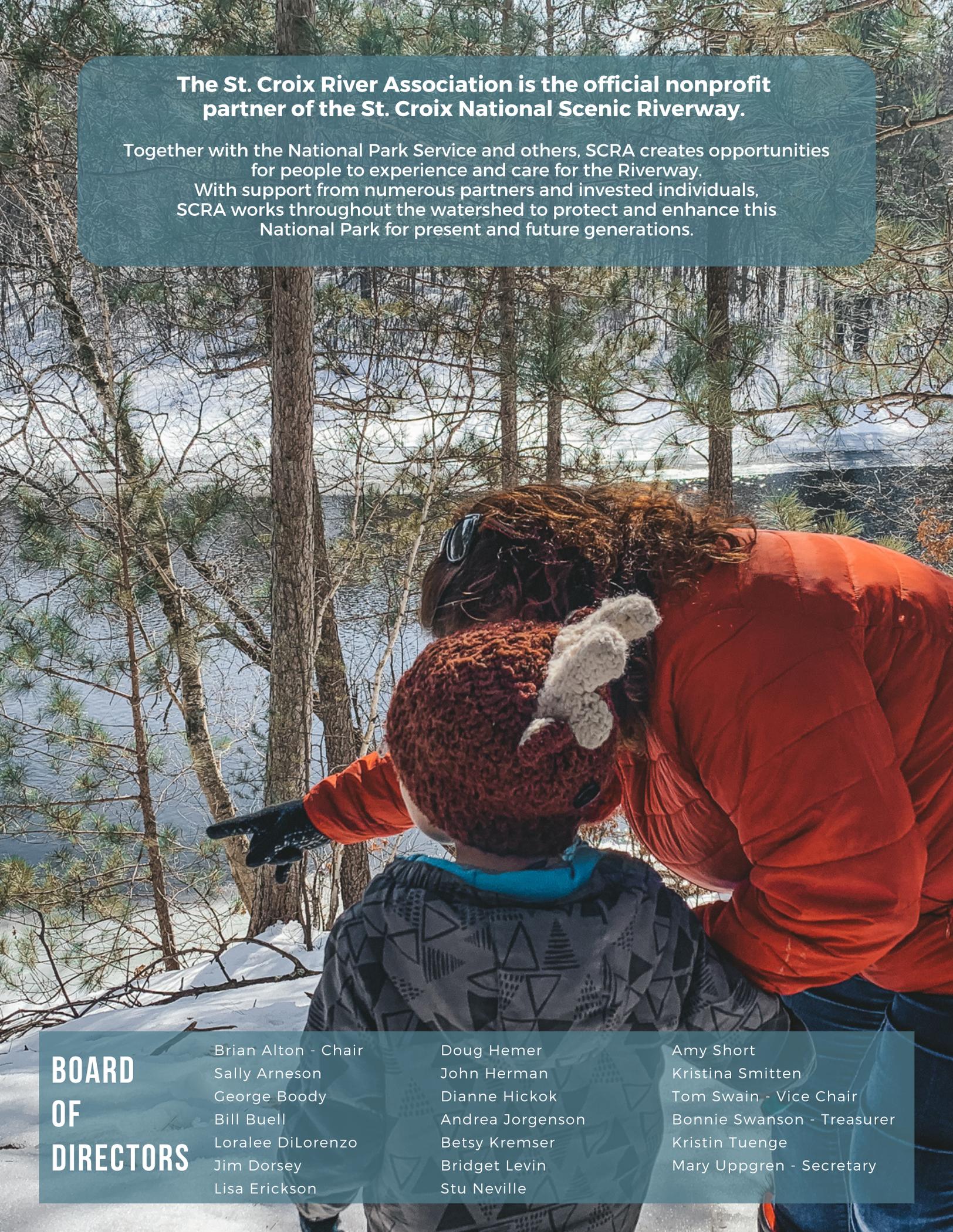
The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is a haven not only for humans, but for all the plants and animals unique to the St. Croix valley. The St. Croix River Association has not stopped our conservation and education efforts. Our board, staff, and partners are building creative solutions to meet the challenges we face in today's world. It is perhaps more important than ever that we deliver our core functions, ensuring, protecting, and enhancing the Riverway's ecological integrity.

As we continue to see increased use of the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers, it is critical that we work with everyone to encourage responsible recreation and stewardship. To that end, we've expanded our digital communications to include new platforms. From the new SCRA Blog to our YouTube channel and beyond, our virtual outreach makes it possible to get involved in protecting your river.

As one SCRA member said, "The river has been the only constant in my life." No one could have expected the challenges that 2020 has brought our way, but we stand ready to tackle them. By working together, we will continue to meet the growing needs of the Riverway and protect this source of recreation and solace for future generations.

Ever Forward,





The St. Croix River Association is the official nonprofit partner of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

Together with the National Park Service and others, SCRA creates opportunities for people to experience and care for the Riverway.

With support from numerous partners and invested individuals, SCRA works throughout the watershed to protect and enhance this National Park for present and future generations.

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THE HEALING REFRAIN OF THE RIVERWAY

JULIE GALONSKA, SUPERINTENDENT, ST. CROIX NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAY

In the midst of our strange new reality of wearing masks, learning to visualize six feet of distance in every setting, and monitoring data on COVID-19 case indicators and trajectories, summer still arrived in the Upper Midwest. That, in itself, conveys some encouragement as, in the words of Rachel Carson, "There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

Many, many people this year have sought the opportunities that the Riverway provides, from active outdoor recreation to quiet contemplation. Like so many outdoor spaces, we are glad to be that place (it is, indeed, part of our mission) and we have been challenged by unprecedented numbers as people have stayed closer to home and chosen to go outside. High visitation has resulted in significant traffic and parking issues at some locations, as well as busy campsites and trails throughout the park. Unfortunately, not everyone has embraced #RecreateResponsibly, so we have also seen increased trash and conflicts among visitors.

National Park Service staff continue to do their jobs with professionalism and commitment to public service, while adapting to evolving situations. We've made operational adjustments to help reduce the risk of the virus and found new ways to connect with people on virtual platforms. NPS and SCRA are currently working on transitioning educational materials so that teachers and students who cannot make their annual field trip to the Riverway can still experience it. We've learned how to move a major project, like the Osceola Landing rehabilitation, into design development largely through online meetings. Osceola Landing remains on track for construction beginning a year from now, in the fall of 2021.

While there may be shifts in how we do our work, our mission remains the same. People still love their national parks. They love the St. Croix and Namekagon. We'll continue to work together to preserve, protect and enhance the rivers for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Stay safe and take care,

Handwritten signature of Julie Galonska.

A FAREWELL INTERVIEW WITH SACN NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM MANAGER, BYRON KARNS

If you're wondering where to find something in the river, chances are that Byron Karns will know where to look. As the retiring Natural Resources Program Manager for the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (SACN), Byron has played a vital role in protecting the Riverway and educating the public about its resources.

"I have greatly enjoyed working with Deb, Monica and staff, past and present, since the inception of the "new" model for the SCRA over ten years ago," Byron says. "The passion, dedication, creativity and especially flexibility has provided the park and notably, the aquatic resource program, the help needed to accomplish work on behalf of the resource."

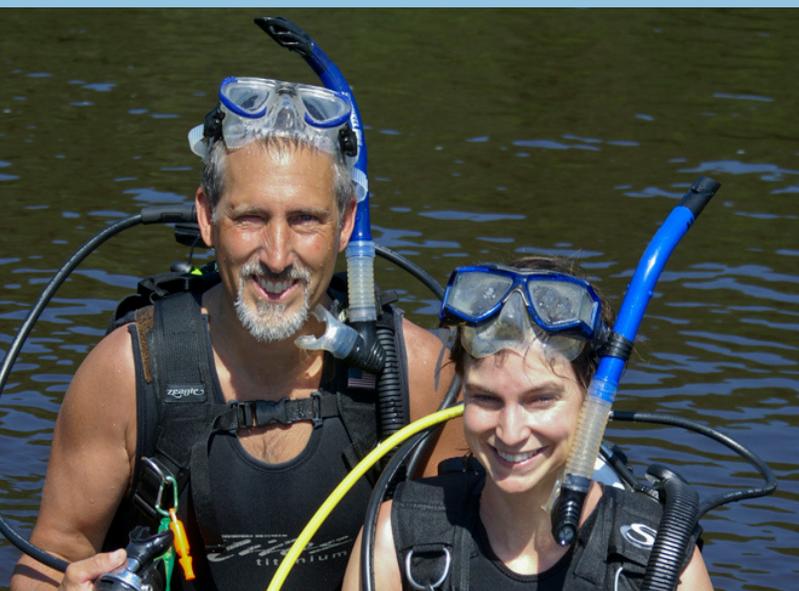
Byron began as a seasonal interpreter in 1991 and has followed a career path led by additional education, a willingness to remain a seasonal for a decade, and retirements at the right time for him to fill the positions. He has worked on a number of fascinating projects, including the propagation (breeding and dispersing) of native mussels. "Several of the native mussel projects with the USGS [United States Geological Survey] over the years have provided a great sense of accomplishment," he mentions. "Our periodic habitat/community assessments with the ACOE [Army Corps of Engineers] of mussel beds along the river have been great too."

For someone who knows the Riverway so well, it's hard to pick just one favorite area. He notes, "I love Lake St. Croix for diving on the many wonderful mussel beds, camping along the lower St. Croix from Interstate to Stillwater can't be beat—and it's free!" He also recommends several paddle routes, including Norway to Snake, Gordon to County T, and Namekagon Dam to County M.

Byron's parting words of wisdom:

- "It's [the Riverway] not going to last like it is without quite a bit more effort than the public is currently providing."
- "Algal blooms are likely the management issue most vexing as the climate warms."
- "Adjacent State Forest campgrounds are a hidden gem."
- "The canyons on tributaries near the confluence of the St. Croix (e.g. Apple, Kinnikinnic) are super cool and little known."
- "Always bring a mask and snorkel when heading to the river—what's under the water will never disappoint!"

As Byron prepares to split his time between his Ely cabin and family in eastern Pennsylvania after retiring, we want to thank him for his years of service and sharing his knowledge with us. His wisdom and energy will be missed!



PROTECTING WATER QUALITY: A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

MONICA ZACHAY, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

SCRA has worked for nearly a decade to bring watershed partners together to increase on-the-ground actions that reduce phosphorus pollution to the St. Croix River. With support from Minnesota's Clean Water Fund, combined with federal Clean Water Act Section 319 funding and local backing, **SCRA has grown its Lake St. Croix Watershed Improvement Program into a multimillion-dollar program with the goal of improving the water quality of the St. Croix.** Each year, the program provides financial assistance to local organizations to do what they do best—work with landowners to increase conservation throughout the watershed.

In the past five years alone, SCRA has provided **24 sub-grants to local agencies** and organizations working to install best management practices to reduce pollution coming from developed and agricultural lands. Examples of projects include:

- Installation of stormwater retention basins that capture runoff from neighborhood streets
- Restoration of eroding shorelines along the St. Croix and tributary streams
- Conversion of turfgrass to high quality prairie landscapes
- Installation of rain gardens in residential and public spaces
- Restoration of severely eroding gullies along the bluffs of the St. Croix

All of the projects and best management practices used to help protect the water quality of the St. Croix share one common thread—deep-rooted native plants. Whether they are planted among a shoreline or gully restoration, a sediment basin, or a prairie conversion, native plants function to keep the soil in place and increase water infiltration. This greatly reduces pollution runoff to our surface waters and goes far to ensure the health of the St. Croix River.

Planting a variety of native plants is also an easy way that many of us can help decrease water pollution runoff from our own properties. Many varieties can be found at your local garden center and once established, they are drought resistant and can be quite low maintenance. In addition to water quality benefits, they provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife and pollinator species such as songbirds, butterflies, and honey bees.

For more information about planting native plants, visit Blue Thumb at: bluethumb.org



ST. CROIX RIVER ASSOCIATION AWARDED GRANT FROM THE XCEL ENERGY FOUNDATION

The Xcel Energy Foundation has awarded a \$5,000 grant to the St. Croix River Association to support our mission.



“As one of the primary parties involved in creating the Riverway, Xcel Energy has been a long-time supporter of SCRA’s vision and mission and we’ve had employees actively involved in promoting that mission in our service territory for years,” said Andrea Jorgenson, current SCRA board member and Community Service Manager with Xcel Energy. “We are proud to also financially support SCRA through our foundation to help continue the long-term success of this fantastic natural resource.”

Jorgenson recently succeeded Pam Rasmussen, who is responsible for Xcel Energy’s pollinator protection programs and brought her passion for pollinators and sustaining the environment to the board for six years. The Xcel Energy Foundation awarded nearly \$320,000 to 63 nonprofits in Wisconsin and Michigan this year to help provide funding for critical programs in their communities, including SCRA.

This grant will continue to drive our efforts to protect and enhance the St. Croix River and its entire watershed through our land and water initiatives. Education and stewardship programs along with broader communication efforts will foster lasting river connections.

At a time when access to the outdoors is proving vital to the health and wellbeing of many people, this grant will ensure we can continue our efforts to connect more people to the Riverway.





RIVERS ARE ALIVE EXPANDS PROGRAMMING

SOPHIA PATANE, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

For SCRA Outdoor Educator Nicole Biagi and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway's Daniel Peterson (Park Ranger, Interpretation and Education), flexibility has been par for the course since their first day on the job. Having started in their new positions in May and June of 2020, their work on the curriculum for Rivers Are Alive has brought new flexibility to the program's K-12 environmental education offerings.

With several participating schools located in areas in Minnesota and Wisconsin with lower COVID-19 caseloads, the status of in-person field trip offerings is uncertain for the coming months. But with the help of new videos, high-quality virtual field trip experiences are possible.

"We've been able to get a lot done," says Nicole. "We are developing our online video programming that will be available for teachers to use as a flexible field trip experience. Our goal with that online programming is to make it usable even after we get back to in-person field trips." These videos will be available to teachers for free and will create a complete experience for students in engaging, short segments.

"I think it's great to not just try to replace the in-person event, but to actually create something different and something unique," Nicole adds. "Working with Dan has been very helpful. This unusual time has allowed us to form the program to fit us and what works for us in a new way—and make it work for our talents." With videos for identifying plants and invasive species, learning about birding, and even soundscapes in the works, Rivers Are Alive continues to find innovative ways to cultivate the next generation of river stewards.



SCRA INTERN HIGHLIGHT: RYAN ROGERS

RYAN ROGERS, FORESTRY INTERN

My name is Ryan Rogers, and I'm a 2020 Forestry Intern at the St. Croix River Association. **It's been an incredible opportunity for me to work in a place I love, and I've deeply enjoyed my time here.**

I grew up in Osceola, Wisconsin, where my parents introduced me to the joys that the watershed provides. We spent weekends hiking trails, going on bike rides, and occasionally paddling down the St. Croix. However, my favorite pastime came during winter, when we would strap on cross country skis to brave the cold and explore the snow-covered landscape. I fell in love with the beauty and tranquility of gliding through the woods, and testing my endurance in local races. While all this was enough to start me on a path towards studying the environment, the turning point for me was when I began to learn about climate change.

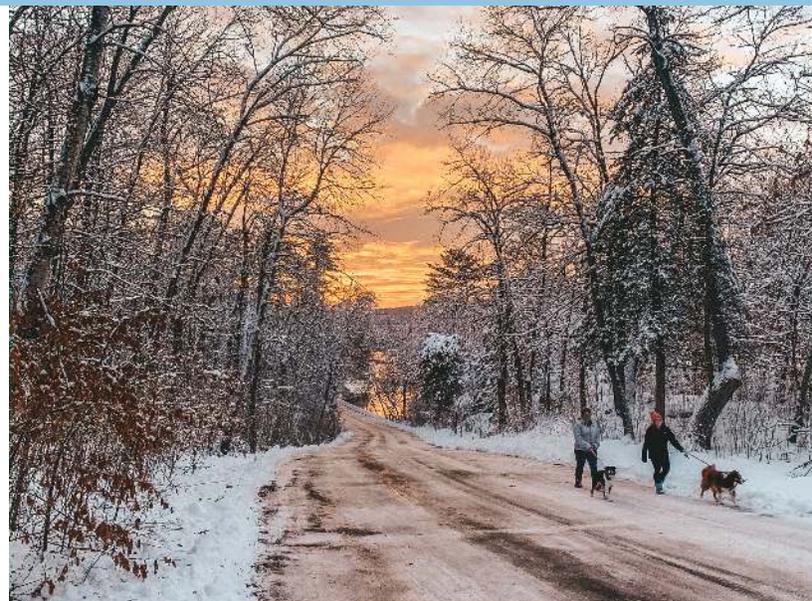
As I learned about the threat climate change poses to people and ecosystems across the planet, I knew I wanted to spend my career trying to do something about it. Two years ago, I enrolled in Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. While majoring in environmental studies, I've had an amazing experience meeting people and learning about environmental issues. I've loved being able to explore the complex problem of climate change from many different angles, learning about what is actually happening and why.

Last summer, I had the opportunity to be a student researcher alongside one of my environmental studies professors. Our research focused on soil science, with our main project investigating sustainable farming practices. These techniques help to create healthy and productive soil. Healthy soil can hold significant amounts of carbon as organic material. **While forested soils held the most carbon and conventional farm fields held the least, we also found that farm fields using regenerative agriculture could hold as much carbon as a restored prairie!** This was particularly exciting, as the farming techniques we were promoting had the potential to be used as an effective tool in fighting climate change.

Here at SCRA, I've learned more about how climate change is affecting natural areas in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and what we can do about it. I've seen that woodland owners have a unique opportunity to fight climate change. Planting trees is another method of capturing carbon, but it's also important to manage woodlands to increase their resilience to a changing climate. Native tree diversity—along with planting species adapted to warmer conditions—works to protect and preserve habitat that will be viable long into the future.

I plan to continue my studies on climate change and the environment at Luther, and perhaps go on to a graduate program. My time with SCRA has shown me just how impactful an organization run by passionate individuals can be. Wherever I end up in a future career, I hope to emulate and build upon their success in environmental efforts.

KEEPING CURRENT: CONNECTING WITH SCRA



The past few months have redefined how we experience community and connect with one another, and SCRA has expanded its communications to bring you more opportunities for learning, connection, and celebration of our beloved Riverway.

These efforts have been coordinated by our new Communications Coordinator, Sophia Patane. Sophia joined SCRA in March 2020 and is responsible for developing and implementing our communications strategy, including managing the production of print materials and electronic communications and leading our social media strategy. Sophia says, "It's an enduring joy to connect with a watershed-wide community and find creative ways to tell the myriad stories that make the Riverway a vital place to protect for future generations."

There are many ways to connect with SCRA and stay up to date on the latest program updates, events, stories, and features!

- Subscribe to our E-Newsletter through our website for updates on the work we're doing across the watershed! Sign up here: www.stcroixriverassociation.org
- Our new SCRA Blog offers a deeper dive into the stories of the Riverway through original content. Visit it here: www.stcroixriverassociation.org/scra-blog
- Like us on Facebook for up-to-the-minute updates and a variety of fun and engaging content for all river lovers ranging from Facebook Live events to photo galleries! www.facebook.com/stcroixriverassociation
- Looking for some beauty in your day? Follow us on Instagram to see the Riverway in a new way. www.instagram.com/stcroixriverassociation
- Subscribe to our new St. Croix River Association channel on YouTube to watch our new Scenic Shorts video series and webinar recordings! www.youtube.com/channel/UCv6Ery0Fxbf1KrBrq620Mgg



THE RIVERWAY FLOWS DEEP

BETHANY COX, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Having been lucky enough to spend time on the Namekagon River this summer on both the June and August 3-day paddles, this Riverway holds a special place in our members' as well as our staff's hearts. The Riverway is many things; a place of solace and restoration, a space for laughter and connection, and a vessel for healing in these challenging times. **The rivers truly give so much.**

As we continue moving forward in 2020 the St. Croix River Association (SCRA) remains steadfast. We are committed to being the nonprofit partner to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and together we will continue to protect clean water, beautiful scenery, rare plants and animals, and high-quality outdoor recreation.

The threats faced by the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers continue outside of the health and societal challenges we navigate. As more people than ever flock to the Riverway, **SCRA needs your support.**

Your donation today will allow SCRA the flexibility needed to allow for pivoting in these rapidly changing times. Your gift makes a difference in the Riverway and helps raise the voice of the rivers.

Thank you for sharing your support.



**SUPPORT THE RIVERS YOU LOVE!
EVERY. GIFT. MATTERS.**

Name(s): _____

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Please make checks payable to St. Croix River Association and mail to: PO Box 655, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024

\$5,000 \$2,500 \$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$50 Other _____

You can also make a secure donation online at stcroixriverassociation.org/support/donate

Donations to SCRA are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



PO BOX 655
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2021 PADDLE NAMEKAGON

June 13-15, 2021

&

August 1-3, 2021

Our Namekagon River 3-Day Paddles let participants experience nature at its best with a fully supported kayaking adventure.



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