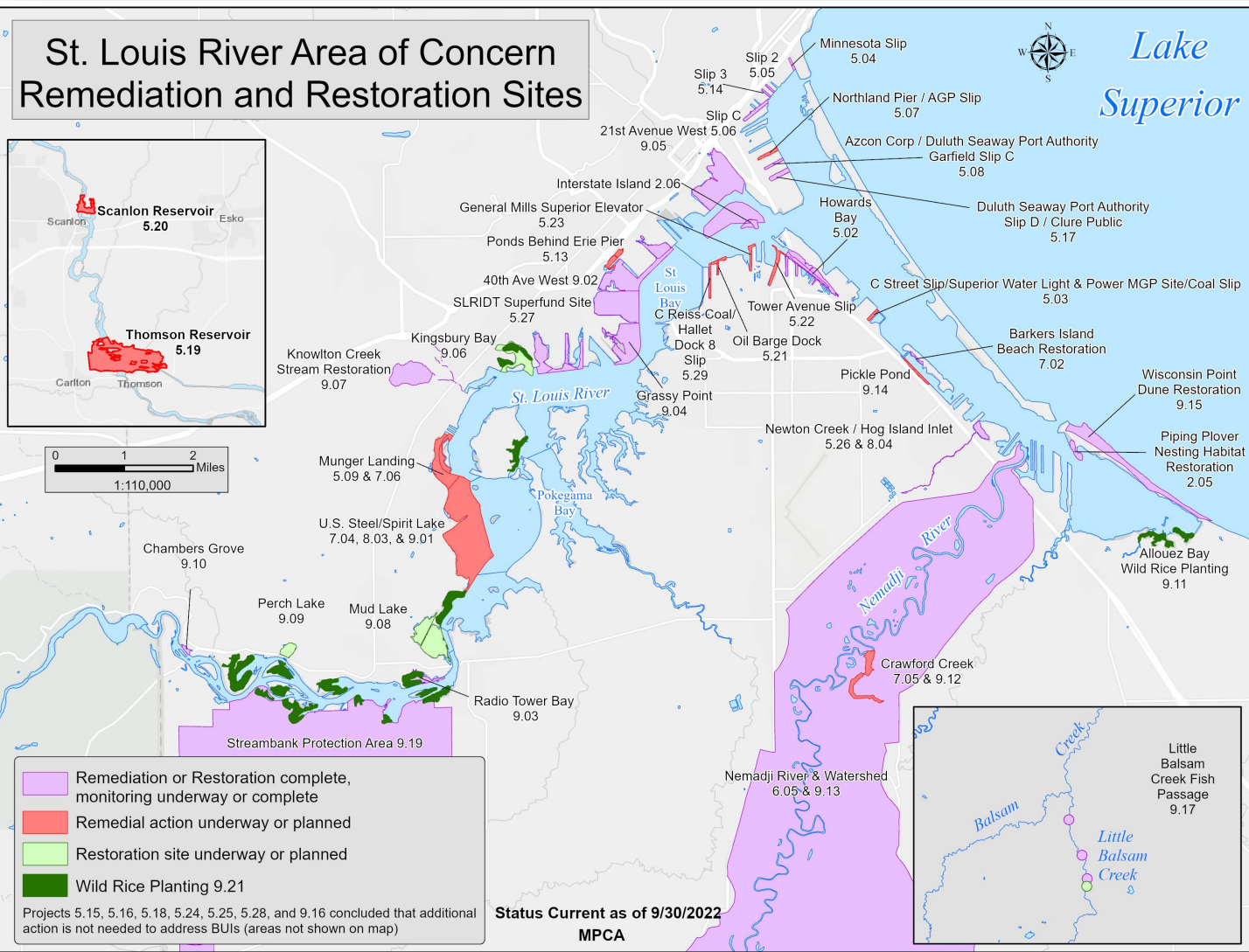


# St. Louis River Area of Concern

We will achieve our goal of removing the St. Louis River from the list of most polluted sites on the Great Lakes when public uses are no longer impaired by pollution, native habitats are restored, and fish and wildlife are sustainably protected. As contaminated sediment is removed and habitat restoration continues, the river is becoming an ever more valuable resource for recreation and the local economy.



Summer Matteson



To learn more about St. Louis River AOC projects and progress visit <https://dnr.wi.gov>, search “[St. Louis River AOC.](#)”

St. Louis River — part of the largest fresh surface water resource in the world — the Great Lakes ecosystem



## Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Office of Great Waters

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# St. Louis River Area of Concern

## BENEFICIAL USE IMPAIRMENT RESTORATION REPORT

Winter 2023

The St. Louis River was designated an Area of Concern (AOC) in 1987. Improper management of municipal and industrial waste led to contaminated sediments, poor water quality and impaired public uses of the St. Louis River.



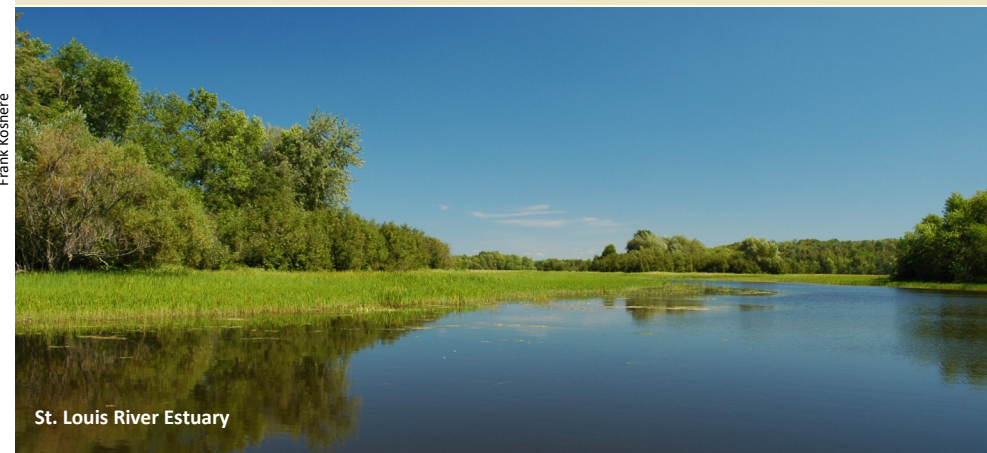
Wisconsin Point Lighthouse



Laure Studee

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and citizen groups identified nine Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) to target here for improving the river.

See the progress report inside →



St. Louis River Estuary



Volunteer monitors for Piping Plovers

Frank Koshere

St. Louis River Alliance

# St. Louis River AOC – Restoration Status Update

**Tackling AOC** problems, known as Beneficial Use Impairments, requires several steps. We must first understand the causes and define the extent of the problems through monitoring, assessment and data analysis. We then determine the necessary actions to fix the problems and implement them.

State and federal agency managers aim to complete actions that address AOC problems by 2030. Funding support from the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is essential to achieving this goal. Although projects are large and complex, coordinated efforts by many partners and community members will ensure success.

After projects are completed, we then monitor to verify if we've achieved our goals for pollution cleanup and restoration. Once all impairments are removed, the St. Louis River can be removed from the list of most polluted sites on the Great Lakes.

This update shows the status of the removal process for nine impairments in the St. Louis River AOC.



Soil is analyzed during Clough Island survey (above left). An engineer samples sediment at Crawford Creek (middle). Biologists monitor Little Pokegama Bay (above right). Petroleum-contaminated sediment is removed from Newton Creek (lower right).

**Impairment Removal Phases:**

- MA MONITOR & ASSESS:** define problems, gather data, engage stakeholders, develop management actions.
- DP DEVELOP AOC PROJECTS:** engage stakeholders to develop the set of projects that are necessary for reaching AOC goals.
- IP IMPLEMENT PROJECTS:** take action to improve conditions within the AOC if monitoring data shows goals are not being met.
- VR VERIFY RESULTS:** after actions have been taken, monitor to determine if target has been met.
- RM FORMAL BUI REMOVAL:** targets have been met. BUI removal documentation is being prepared or reviewed, or has been submitted.

**Status of Each Phase:**  
 Not Started (circle with dot) Underway (circle with arrow) Complete (star)

**Dredging activities for commerce or navigation are restricted**

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Continue cleanup of riverbed and harbor sites identified as pollution hotspots (2026).
- Update and enhance the sediment quality database (ongoing).

MA DP IP VR RM

**Fish and wildlife populations are degraded**

**BUI REMOVED**

**All the steps to address this Beneficial Use Impairment were completed and it was officially removed in Jan. 2023.**

MA DP IP VR RM

**There are increased rates of fish tumors and deformities**

**BUI REMOVED**

**All the steps to address this Beneficial Use Impairment were completed and it was officially removed in Feb. 2019.**

MA DP IP VR RM

**There are health concerns with eating fish and wildlife**

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Continue studies to compare PCB and mercury levels in fish at AOC sites and similar unimpaired sites.
- Continue to clean up contaminated sites containing mercury and PCBs (2026).
- Continue to monitor contaminants in fish following sediment cleanup.

MA DP IP VR RM

**Communities of sediment-dwelling organisms are degraded**

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Continue to clean up polluted sediment sites (2026).
- Restore aquatic habitat in the AOC (2026).
- Monitor the recovery of sediment-dwelling organisms and plants at aquatic habitat restoration sites as they are restored (ongoing).

MA DP IP VR RM



**Water contact through beach use or other recreation is limited**

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Cleanup contaminated sites with body contact restrictions: Munger Landing, Crawford Creek, US Steel (2026).
- Continue to document permit compliance and improvements to wastewater treatment.

MA DP IP VR RM

**Appearance of rivers & waterfront needs improvement**

**BUI REMOVED**

**All the steps to address this Beneficial Use Impairment were completed and it was officially removed in Aug. 2014.**

MA DP IP VR RM

**There are excessive sediments and nutrients**

**BUI REMOVED**

**All the steps to address this Beneficial Use Impairment were completed and it was officially removed in April 2020.**

MA DP IP VR RM

**Loss of fish and wildlife habitat**

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Remove contaminated sediment at Pickle Pond in Superior and restore aquatic habitat (2023).
- Improve flows on Little Balsam Creek to allow fish to pass through culverts (2023).
- Continue to restore manoomin (wild rice) (2024).
- Restore aquatic habitat in the AOC (2026).

MA DP IP VR RM

