11. THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CRITICAL AREA CORRIDOR/MNRRRA

In 1973 the Minnesota Legislature enacted the Critical Area Act to protect and preserve areas of significant natural and cultural resources. In 1976 the stretch of the Mississippi River from Ramsey and Dayton to just south of Hastings was designated a critical area by Governor Anderson, continued as a critical areas in 1979 through Executive Order 79-19 by Governor Quie, and made permanent by the Metropolitan Council in 1979. This order stated the following purposes for designating this part of the river as a critical area:

a) To protect and preserve a unique and valuable state and regional resource for the benefit of the health, safety and welfare of the citizens for the state, region and nation:

b) To prevent and mitigate irreversible damage to this state, regional and national resource;

c) To preserve and enhance its natural, aesthetic, cultural, and historical value for the public use;

d) To protect and preserve the river as an essential element in the national, state and regional transportation, sewer and water and recreational systems; and

e) To protect and preserve the biological and ecological functions of the corridor.

The order also established guidelines and regulations for developing critical area plans that address the intentions of Executive Order 79-19. These plans were created by local units of government and reviewed by regional and state government agencies to ensure consistency with state laws.

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) program was established in 1988 under Public Law 100-696 to coordinate efforts to protect, preserve and enhance the Mississippi River, its natural features, cultural heritage, scenic vistas, quality of water and the

Figure 11-1 Mississippi National River Recreation Area
Source: Comprehensive Management Plan
environment and recreational opportunities it provides. Within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, MNRRA includes 72 miles of river and 54,000 acres of land stretching from the City of Ramsey and Sherburne County border to just south of Hastings.

Many opponents of MNRRA legislation perceive it as another unneeded layer of government; however, MNRRA does not add any further regulatory powers to the river corridor. Rather, MNRRA seeks to enhance and build upon the types of policies and regulations set forth many years ago in such state legislation as the Critical Areas Act (and Executive Order 79-19), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, or the Floodplain Management Act. The partnership between the Metropolitan Council, the National Park Service and the Department of Natural Resources is intended to assist local units of government in providing adequate controls to ensure orderly and environmentally friendly development and preservation of lands within the Critical Area Corridor. To accomplish this, the plan calls for two tiers of involvement. Achieving Tier I status simply means meeting the requirements of the state legislation to protect critical areas. Tier II goes beyond what is required by state statutes and begins to address issues relating to image, heritage, education, recreation and orderly economic development. Although Tier II is a voluntary stage in the plan, it is required in order to be eligible for federal funds to assist in implementation of the plan.

A. Purpose and Intent of the Critical Area Plan

The Critical Area Plan accomplishes several things. It establishes a vision for the Mississippi River Corridor, consistent with the wants and needs of the Ramsey Community and the policies and requirements set forth by Executive Order 79-19 and Public Law 100-696 (MNRRA). It provides for goals and policies that improve public access points to the river, protect water quality and other natural resources, provide for recreational opportunities and preserve historic and cultural elements. In addition to satisfying the requirements of Executive Order 79-19, the plan meets the objectives of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Shoreland Management Act and Floodplain Management Act. The plan also acts in a similar capacity of the Comprehensive Plan in that it provides general direction to the decision-makers and staff of the City on how to handle river corridor decisions in an informed and efficient manner consistent with regional goals and policies.

This plan closely follows the directions laid out in the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The plan achieves the required elements of the Critical Area Act (Tier I) and identifies goals, policies and strategies to protect, preserve and enhance the Mississippi River Corridor beyond the required elements of the Critical Area Act (Tier II). Like the CMP, goals and policies were developed through a public participation process including two city-wide vision meetings, one of which solely focused on quality of life along the Mississippi River, and a community wide phone survey sampling conducted by Decision Resources, Ltd.

1 “Comprehensive Management Plan Mississippi National River and Recreation Area” 1994 Mississippi River Coordinating Commission and National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. This plan was a result of the MNRRA Public Law to serve as a general management plan for MNRRA.
2 As part of the Comprehensive Plan process, a city-wide vision session was held September 9, 1997 to begin the planning process. This session was attended by nearly 100 residents and business people from the community. Another city-wide vision session was held April 9, 1998 to focus on the Mississippi River. This meeting was attended by nearly 40 residents. Summaries of both meetings are attached in Appendix XX.
A Vision for the River Corridor

“The Ramsey community has acknowledged and embraced the importance of the Mississippi River Corridor, its history, water quality, beauty and recreational opportunities. The future of the corridor through Ramsey consists of a sanctuary where wildlife and nature coexist with people and development. Much of the land is preserved as passive open space, restored to its native vegetation offering opportunities for education and recreation to both residents and visitors to the river corridor. While the rights of private property ownership are protected and respected by the users of the river corridor, it remains accessible to the general public through controlled access points such as the Mississippi West Regional Park site and the continuous trail corridor linking Ramsey to other riverfront communities. In the future, the river corridor will continue to be an important part of the Ramsey community identity and will receive the attention that its local, regional and national significance demands.”

B. Background Information

1. Natural Communities and Features
   Original vegetation within the river corridor included a variety of prairie grasses (Dry Sand-dune Prairie) and floodplain forests consisting of lowland tree canopy of seasonally flooded river bottoms. Today’s features are much different due to acts of weather, urbanization and agriculture activities. (See Figure 11-2 “Critical Area/MNNRA Environmental Features.”) The following is a cursory inventory of existing natural features and communities present in the corridor.

   a) Wetlands
      Few wetlands are located within the Critical Area Corridor in the City of Ramsey. No wetlands are featured by the DNR protected waters inventory, however, the National Wetland Inventory indicates some wetlands of Wooded Swamps (Type 7) and Seasonally Flooded Basins (Type 2) as being within the Critical Area Corridor. The many islands along the corridor are typically classified as Wooded Swamp wetlands. The Critical Area Corridor is entirely within the Mississippi River Watershed and is therefore affected by surface water runoff coming from lands within the Highway 10 Corridor that also drain towards the Mississippi River. There are several wetlands of the Shallow Marsh (Type 3) located in the central portion of the Mississippi River Watershed but not within the Critical Area Corridor.

   b) Floodplain
      The riverbank along much of the river has relatively distinct edges with slopes of 12-25%; however, some areas are more even with the river’s water level and are more prone to seasonal floods. These areas were officially mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and can be seen on flood rate maps produced by FEMA or on the City of Ramsey's official zoning map.

   c) Soils/slopes
      The predominant soil types found within the Critical Area Corridor include the Hubbard, Dickman and Becker Series of soils. Slopes are predominantly flat to gently rolling and generally do not exceed a slope of 6% except for a few
depression areas. A portion of the riverbank along the northern stretch of the corridor is of the Nymore Series soil type with slopes of 12 to 25%. The Hubbard and Dickman soils are typically much flatter and are more suitable for urban development than agriculture uses. The Becker series on the other hand is found in the lower lying areas of the corridor and is better suited to agriculture production than urban development. However, because the Becker series is typically in lower lying areas it is much more susceptible to occasional flooding and longer periods of wetness. Some of the land containing Becker Series soils has been consumed by urban development.\(^3\)

Figure 11-2 Critical Area Corridor/MNRRA Environmental features

Note: The illustration above is a general reference to environmental features and is not intended to be used for detailed site planning. To determine if a property is in a floodplain, wetland or has poor soils, actual site analysis including a land survey is recommended. Official floodplain and wetland maps are on file at City Hall. The critical area boundary is described through legal description in Executive Order 79-19.

\(^3\) The most thorough inventory of soils available is from the 1977 Anoka County Soil Survey by the United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with the University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station.
d) **Tree Canopy**

The City of Ramsey has conducted general tree inventories using aerial photography and random sampling in 1979 and recently in 1992/93. This report indicated that the predominant tree type in Ramsey is the Oak tree. This pattern is consistent with the Critical Area/MNRRA Corridor. Other species that are commonly found in the Critical Area Corridor include Boxelder, Cherry, Green Ash, Elm, Dogwood, Basswood and other bottomland tree species. Oak wilt has been on the rise in Ramsey and is a concern to the stability of the Oak population.

e) **Rare Species**

Other than the fish that occupy the Mississippi River, the Critical Area/MNRRA Corridor does not appear to harbor any significant rare species. However, given the significance of the Mississippi River as a route for wildlife migration and a harborage for a variety of species, we should not rule out the possibility of rare species living within the Corridor. As development occurs within the corridor, site analysis should be performed to rule out the presence of any rare species.

2. **Historical and Cultural Features**

The first white settlement occurred at Itasca Village located just southeast of the current Wayside rest along Highway 10. This village was a prime location for a trading post as it was near the Mississippi River, the Red River Trail (a.k.a. Military Road) and eventually Dayton Station, one of the first depots along the Northern Pacific railroad from Minneapolis to St. Cloud. However, the Village was slowly abandoned during the late 1850s as the Federal Government relocated the Winnebago Indians and the nearby town of Anoka grew into a regional center. A monument, which tells the story of Itasca Village and its settlers, is located at the Wayside Rest along Highway 10. Also, a residential subdivision located in the general area of the historic village was named Itasca Heights and has a sign that boasts the name. Bowers River Estates subdivision is named after one of the early settlers who helped with the settlement of Itasca Village. Many settlers established farmsteads along the river and the Red River Trail. A few old barns remain along the highway, but most remnants of early settlement are no longer present. No locally or regionally designated historic sites are located within the corridor in Ramsey. North of the Ramsey boarder in Elk River is the Oliver Kelly Historical Farm. This Minnesota State Historical Site, which sits along the Mississippi River, includes a visitor center and a living history farm. Information about the early settlement days of Itasca Village and the region can be researched at the visitor center. Several pieces of literature describing the village make reference to Indian artifacts remaining in the corridor; however, no physical site has been documented to exist today. The Anoka County Historical Museum is also a good source for historical and cultural information for the river corridor. (See Figure 11-3.)

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4 These tree inventories are summarized in a report by Kunde Co., Inc. Consulting Foresters “Forest Covertype and Inventory of the City of Ramsey” date unknown but not prior to 1993.

5 See the Anoka County Biological Survey Map published by the Department of Natural Resources. This map features Natural Communities and Rare Species for Anoka County.

6 Information on Itasca Village was obtained from the Oliver Kelly Historical Farm Visitor Center located south of Highway 10 in Elk River.
3. Overview of current management efforts

The Mississippi River, as it stretches through Ramsey, is the northern most stretch of the Mississippi River designated as a Critical Area and one of the southern most stretches of river north of the metro area regulated by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Development along the river has been carefully managed and regulated since the early 1970’s through such programs as the Critical Area Act (1973), Wild and Scenic River Act (1973), the Floodplain regulations and local zoning controls. The following summarizes each program:

a) Critical Area Plan and Ordinance

Ramsey completed a plan in collaboration with the communities of Anoka and Champlin in 1979 to meet the requirements of Executive Order 79-19. At that time the State Environmental Quality Board was the responsible agency for reviewing local Critical Area Plans. According to Metropolitan Council records, the Ramsey Critical Area Plan never received approval from the EQB because of

Figure 11-3 Critical Area Corridor/MNRRA Historical and Cultural Features
inconsistencies between the Ramsey Plan and Executive Order 79-19. Implementing the 1979 plan, Ramsey adopted an environmental ordinance that regulated development within the corridor; however, approval authority still rested with the EQB and later the DNR. Many of the elements of the plan from 1979 still hold true today and will be repeated in this plan. Executive Order 79-19 created districts for the Critical Area Corridor. In Ramsey, lands designated as an urban developed district include Section 35(T32N,R25W), while lands beyond the Urban Developed district were designated as rural open space district.

The urban developed district established guidelines that preserved lands within the corridor largely for residential uses while limiting expansion of existing and new non-residential developments to preserve and enhance the residential character of this district. The rural open space district established guidelines to preserve open, scenic and natural characteristics and ecological and economic functions within the corridor. The rural open space district also called for preserving existing islands in their natural state and maintaining and preserving the existing transportation function of the river corridor.

b) Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

In 1973 Congress passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to protect Minnesota’s Rivers that possess scenic, recreational, natural, historical, scientific, and similar values. The Mississippi River north of the Metropolitan Area begins its designation as a Wild and Scenic River in Ramsey. The Act classifies the river as being of a “wild”, “scenic” or “recreational” nature and imposes different regulations for each designation. Within Ramsey, the Mississippi River is considered a recreational river because it has adjacent lands that are considerably developed, but are still capable of being managed so as to further the purposes of the Wild and Scenic River Act. Like the Critical Area Act, the state created a management plan for rivers receiving this designation and local municipalities were to amend their official controls to the extent necessary to comply with the standards and criteria of the commissioner and the management plan. The Environmental Ordinance adopted by the City of Ramsey was intended to meet these needs; however, no separate reference was made to the Mississippi River as a wild and scenic river corridor.

The current Wild and Scenic rules applicable to Ramsey regulate minimum lot sizes, types of development, and setbacks to protect scenic and recreational characteristics of the Mississippi River. Upon completion of a community-based planning effort in 2004, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) proposed several rule amendments in order to give cities along the river increased flexibility for managing population growth and development along the river corridor. The proposed rule amendment exempts the City of Ramsey from lot size requirements, setbacks, and development standards established previously in the Wild and Scenic rules. The proposed amendment states that portions of Ramsey within the Wild and Scenic area shall be subject to adopted local land use and lot requirements approved by the Metropolitan Council and the DNR.

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7 See May 12, 1997 memorandum from Sandra Lee Pinel, MNRRRA Planner with Metropolitan Council to Ryan Schroeder, Administrator at City of Ramsey.
c) **Floodplain Management Act and Ordinance**

The Floodplain Management Act was passed in 1969 as a tool to minimize damages due to flooding. Using standards established by the DNR, the City put in place a floodplain ordinance that regulates development within floodplain areas. Maps prepared by the Federal Insurance Administration in 1979 and revised by the DNR in 1987 delineate floodplain areas.
4. Existing Land Use

A variety of business, residential, park and open space land uses currently exist within the River Corridor. Executive Order 79-19 lays out guidelines for the corridor according to district designations that were defined by the character of the corridor during enactment of the Critical Area Act. Through Ramsey, the river receives two designations. The Rural Open Space District comprises the majority of land in the corridor with the exclusion of the area generally east of Sunfish Lake Boulevard. The Rural Open Space District is described as follows:

"the lands and waters within this district shall be used and developed to preserve their open, scenic and natural characteristics and ecological and economic functions. Presently undeveloped islands shall be maintained in their existing natural state. The transportation function of the river shall be maintained and preserved."

The remainder of the corridor, generally east of Sunfish Lake Boulevard, is designated by Executive Order 79-19 as the Urban Developed District defined as follows:

"The lands and waters within this district shall be maintained largely as residential areas. The expansion of existing and development of new industrial, commercial and other non-residential or non-recreational uses shall be limited to preserve and enhance the residential character of this district."

The following provides a more detailed analysis of existing land use patterns within the corridor.

a) Existing Residential Use

Today, much of the riverfront property is developed as residential. Itasca Heights, Bowers Mississippi Acres and Alpaca Estates were developed as rural residential developments between the 1960s and 1990s consisting of 1 to 2.5 acre lots on private septic and well systems. Rivenwick Subdivision was platted in 1993 and is served by municipal sewer and water. Rivenwick is developed at more urban densities of roughly 2.5 units per net acre. Because many properties were developed prior to the availability of urban services to Ramsey, the Critical Area/MNRRRA Corridor contains several private well and septic systems, which are within the current MUSA boundary. Overall, the Critical Area/MNRRRA Corridor contains approximately 120 private well and septic systems. To date, there have been no serious health or environmental threatening problems associated with failing individual septic treatment systems within the corridor.

b) Existing Commercial/Industrial Use

Business uses within the corridor are focused at the southeastern tip of Ramsey where the corridor boundary includes part of the Highway 10 corridor. A variety of industry, manufacturing and commercial/retail business uses have made their

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8 Net Acre is established by taking a gross figure and subtracting out any lands that which development is prohibited on including Wetlands and major road R-O-W. For City planning purposes, the National Wetland Inventory is used to determine wetlands. Individual sites will be required to be delineated to determine total acreage of wetlands. For major road ROW use collectors and arterials as illustrated on the Comprehensive Plan transportation system map.
home in the corridor several years ago. New commercial development continues to occur today. All economic development that has occurred within the corridor has occurred away from the riverfront to take advantage of Highway 10. The Mississippi River is not considered as a resource for commercial river navigation through Ramsey; however, there has been some interest by private landowners and developers in riverfront development for commercial purposes such as a restaurant overlooking the river.

c) Public spaces (including parks trails and open space)
Three park facilities are located within the Corridor, all having frontage on and providing access to the River. The State of Minnesota has a wayside rest at the northwest corner of the City, which has a shelter, restrooms, park benches and some historical interpretation markers. Mississippi West Regional park is a County owned park that is a passive recreational park consisting primarily of natural areas with some Oak-Savanna restoration. The third park is part of the Rivenwick Subdivision and includes trail access that connects to the City of Ramsey trail system. This park is directly adjacent to the Mississippi West Regional Park. Boat access to the river is limited to canoes at the Wayside Rest area. Through Ramsey, the Mississippi River is designated a State Canoe Route, as is the Rum River north of the Rum River Dam in Anoka. Ramsey is fortunate to have several small islands (which it shares with the City of Dayton) within the 5-mile stretch of the Mississippi River including the named islands of Foster Island, part of the Mississippi West Regional Park, Cloquet Island and Goodin Island. Many of the islands provide public and private campsites for river travelers. Future park development includes a proposed passive or natural park along the banks of the Mississippi River between Bowers Drive and Alpaca Estates. The intent of this park is to preserve the remaining riverfront in a natural state.

d) Agriculture Use
Roughly 250 acres within the Critical Area Corridor are actively farmed to corn, soybeans, and other cash crops. Although some of the soil types in this area are suitable to agricultural uses, the high permeability of sandy soils and the risk of seasonal flooding create hazards to agriculture uses. The soils in the areas are more suitable to pasture or woodland than cash grain agricultural uses. The current farm operations, however, have not shown an interest in developing their land. However, as urbanization pushes outward along Highway 10, this land is likely to succumb to development pressures. Agricultural uses are expected to continue until urban services are extended to serve this area and the landowners make the decision to develop the land.

e) Transportation
The Mississippi River is primarily used only as a recreational means of transportation within the City of Ramsey. There are no barge terminals or fleeting areas north of the Coon Rapids Dam. Major roadways that are within the corridor are also at a minimum. Highway 10, running generally parallel with the river, is a major four-lane divided highway that is currently operating at maximum capacity. There are no bridges spanning the river within the City of Ramsey, however, Anoka County has proposed locating a new Mississippi River bridge in Ramsey. The County’s proposed alignment for this bridge would generally be the southerly extension of an alternative alignment to Armstrong Boulevard through right-of-
way already owned by Anoka County. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad also runs parallel to the River on the north side of Highway 10. Trail fragments are located within recent developments within the corridor that will eventually be part of the regional trail system consistent with the MNRRA CMP. A Mississippi River Trail Corridor was approved by the City Council in December of 1989 that is currently being implemented with new developments.

f) Utilities
The City of Ramsey provides municipal water and sewer services to a portion of the Critical Area Corridor generally lying east of Mississippi West Regional Park. The area west of Mississippi West Regional Park is also located within the Metropolitan Council designated Urban Reserve Area and is planned to be served by municipal sewer and water. The City of Ramsey also intends to extend municipal sewer and water to the remaining lands within the Critical Area Corridor west of Mississippi West Regional Park by approximately 2015. Storm sewer pipes handle surface runoff from development within the existing MUSA area and outlet surface water drainage directly to the Mississippi River at four locations: Hematite Circle, Garnet Street, Ebony Street, and Tungsten Street. The critical area corridor lies entirely within the boundary of the Lower Rum River Watershed Management Organization, which manages surface water management in the area. The WMO has developed Comprehensive Management Plan, which lays out policies for surface water management in the watershed. The City of Ramsey has also completed a Local Surface Water Management Plan, which identifies goals, policies, and strategies for surface water management within the City. The City of Ramsey will continue to cooperate with the WMO to manage and protect surface and ground water resources in Ramsey. No storm sewer utilities are provided in the rural area. There are no major utility crossing areas of the Mississippi River within Ramsey.
Figure 11-4 Critical Area/MNRRA Corridor Existing Land Use
5. Current Corridor Issues

A public meeting on river corridor issues was held April 30, 1998 and was attended by nearly 40 Ramsey residents and landowners. Although the City advertised the meeting to all its residents, nearly 90% of the participants were residents or landowners within the Critical Area Corridor. Because the attendance was heavily representative of the landowner interests, the key issue of protection of private property owner rights consumed much of the meeting. However, other objectives were identified within this meeting that reaffirmed directives, which are consistent with the intent of the MNRRA Comprehensive Management Plan. A strong effort should be made to preserve the natural resource base and to protect and improve water quality. Some support was given for a continuous trail corridor that linked to greater Ramsey and neighboring communities; however, a strong coalition also supported no trails. Many of the issues discussed at the April meeting were also discussed at previous public meetings and information gathering sessions. The following list identifies the key issues needed to be address within the Critical Area Plan:

a) Key Issues

1. Protection of private property owners rights which allow reasonable use of land and prevent damage to land.

2. Preservation of open space and natural resources to protect water quality, wildlife habitat, and rural character.

3. Improved public access through a continuous trail corridor sensitive to property owner concerns. The critical issues to the trail corridor involve location of trail corridor, its use (bicycle, walking, hiking, rollerblading, etc…), public safety and protection of vandalism to agriculture and private property. Also of critical importance to this issue is public involvement in the decision making process. This plan does not identify a specific location of a trail corridor; rather it will establish a general approach to identifying use and location.

4. Although this issue is much broader than just the MNRRA Corridor, a future bridge crossing should be addressed in the plan. Criteria for the location and design of a potential Mississippi River Bridge Crossing is of critical importance.

5. An issue not discussed at the public meeting is the design, function and land use along US Highway 10. The issues with the Highway corridor are relative to traffic congestion and its impact on air quality and problems associated with strip commercial development including poor image, traffic accidents and interruptions and with non-point source pollution emanating from used car lots on unimproved surface parking lots. These issues should be addressed through the Highway Corridor study recommended for US Highway 10.
C. The Critical Area Plan

1. Future Land Use
   This section is intended to supplement the land use plan described in Chapter V of the Comprehensive Plan.

   a) Future Residential Land Use
   Future residential development within the Critical Area/MNRRA Corridor is guided primarily as "Low density residential"; however, a small portion of the area is located within a “Mixed Use” area.

   Low Density Residential must have urban services before development can take place. These areas will average 3 units per acre and contain single family, detached dwellings. Where Low Density Residential is directly adjacent to areas guided Rural Developing that contain 2.5 acre lots, strategies for density transitioning will be employed. This means that while an area of Low Density Residential may average 3 units per acre, those lots directly adjacent to 2.5 acre lots will be closer in size to 2.5 acres in order to provide an effective transition that maintains the existing character of the neighborhood. Screening methods, such as landscaping must also be employed to transition between very low density areas and urban lots.

   Due to regulations placed on the area to achieve Critical Area Tier 1 and Tier 2 and Wild and Scenic objectives, it is unlikely that a 3 unit per acre average density will be achieved within the Critical Area. However, given regional growth strategy to encourage higher density within MUSA, the opportunity to create a plan with higher densities that is acceptable to the public, and meets approval of local and state regulatory agencies should still be provided.

   Both the Critical Area and Wild and Scenic Rivers designations in Ramsey permit residential development. The Critical Area guidelines for the "rural open space district" call for development that preserves "...their open, scenic and natural characteristics and ecological and economic functions...." and does not specify a density limit. The Wild and Scenic River designation contains similar language; however, it goes on to require 2+ acre lot sizes except when developed through a Planned Cluster Development. The intent of the planned cluster development is to strategically group housing together in order to preserve large open space areas, natural features and scenic views. However, the DNR has proposed rule revisions to provide more flexibility for local governments to manage development within Wild and Scenic Areas. The proposed amendment states that portions of Ramsey within the Wild and Scenic area shall be subject to adopted local land use and lot requirements approved by the Metropolitan Council and the DNR.

   It is the intent of this plan to encourage a development pattern that seeks to minimize density within the Critical Area Corridor while maintaining the ability to achieve higher density development consistent with urban development standards and policies. This intent can be achieved by transferring density from within the corridor to adjacent residential land use areas through the PUD process and through creative zoning strategies.
A small area of the Critical Area at the City’s west border is guided for Mixed Use. Mixed Use areas may include a combination of residential, commercial, light industrial, open space and a transit hub. This designation will provide flexibility to develop in a manner that is consistent with Critical Area regulations, while still achieve community objectives for investment along Highway 10. The portion of the Mixed Use district within the Critical Area will be planned to support Critical Area policies for land use and development standards. Mixed Use development in this area will be accommodated through density transfers and the PUD process to ensure that open space requirements are met and valuable natural areas are preserved.

b) Future Park and Open Space Use
The general intent of the land use plan is to encourage compact development in order to preserve larger areas of permanent open space. Open space combined with active and passive public parklands provides for visual relief from the urban environment, preserves rural character and serves as a source for recreation. The future land use plan includes future parklands along the river and also identifies a greenway corridor that is intended to link other areas of natural resource with continuous green space.

c) Future Utility and Transportation systems
Development of streets and trails will occur, especially as future urbanization expands to the remaining undeveloped lands along the corridor. No major street expansions are planned for within the corridor. Future neighborhood streets will be planned to optimize street width and to minimize destruction of habitat and natural features. Utilities will also be planned to serve the area. Utilities should be placed underground where possible while minimally disturbing sensitive areas.

In order to meet the requirements of the Wild and Scenic River and Critical Area Act and to obtain Tier II status of the MNRRA program, performance criteria are established to guide development within the Critical Area Corridor. These criteria are reflective of many of the policies that follow and are not intended to replace the policies or any other local, state or federal law or program. These criteria are in addition to those found in the future land use plan respective of each land use designation (see Chapter V.):

Performance criteria for developments within the Critical Area Corridor.

1. All development within the Critical Area Corridor shall be through a Planned Unit Development.
2. 50 % of the site shall be preserved as permanent open space. The plan shall include a description of a mechanism that permanently preserves open space such as placing the land within a permanent conservation easement, utilizing deed restrictions, donating the land to a non-profit entity whose mission is to protect and preserve open space (i.e. Minnesota Land Trust) or in places where the City approves, dedicating the land as City park or open space.
3. The project minimizes site alterations and minimizes streets and infrastructure development to reduce negative environmental impact.
4. The project contains specific conditions relative to buffering, landscaping and re-vegetation.
5. The project incorporates the goals and policies for establishing a continuous trail corridor along or near the Mississippi River.

6. The project makes every effort possible to minimize density within the Critical Area Corridor by using transfer of development rights and the PUD process.

**Figure 11-5 Future Land Use Map**

In addition to describing future land use patterns in more detail, the Critical Area Plan seeks to accomplish many objectives consistent with federal, state and local regulations and the MNRRA Comprehensive Management Plan. Federal guidelines establish a two-tiered program where Tier I refers to required elements within Executive Order 79-19 and Tier II refers to voluntary objectives that exceed what is required by federal and state legislation. The following list of goals and policies are intended to achieve all of Tier I and most Tier II elements that are relevant to Ramsey.

**Goals for the Mississippi River Critical Area**

The following are the City of Ramsey’s general goals for the Critical Area Corridor:

1. To protect, preserve and enhance scenic, recreational and environmental values of the Critical Area Corridor.

2. To ensure development is compatible to the river from an environmental and scenic standpoint.

3. To build public support for preservation of the river corridor through education and public involvement in planning projects.

4. To continue the Mississippi Regional trail corridor through the Critical Area Corridor in Ramsey and to link the greater community to the corridor through the trail system.

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9 For a more thorough explanation of the difference between Tier I and Tier II, refer to the MNRRA Comprehensive Management Plan.
5. To improve public awareness and involvement in preservation efforts of the river corridor and to maintain and respect private property owners rights.

6. To establish a continuous permanent open space corridor that reflects the proposed greenway corridor and preserves natural resources, environmental features and scenic vistas.

2. Critical Area Policies

   a) Protecting the Environment

   A critical concern to residents in Ramsey is the protection and restoration of its natural resources, which leads to preserving the rural character of a suburban community. This notion is particularly important when applied to the Mississippi River and the Critical Area Corridor.

   Critical Area Corridor/MNRRRA Policy

   In regards to environmental protection and natural resource management, it is the policy of the City to:

   1. Minimize direct overland runoff in future development and maintain natural watercourses such as ditches, wetlands and floodplains to handle existing storm water runoff and slow the process of surface water infiltration.

   2. Ensure urban best management practices are strictly adhered to during and after construction projects including the replacement of all vegetative cover, which is removed for construction purposes.

   3. Adopt development controls consistent with National Urban Runoff Program (NURP) standards and the MPCA’s Urban Best Management Practices to reduce nonpoint source pollutant loading in storm water runoff. These standards should be applied to both existing and future development.

   4. Minimize site alterations and protect natural watercourses, bottomland forests, prairies and woodlands as part of the development plan through such means as conservation easements or land preservation techniques.

   5. Encourage and assist when possible private property owners in the implementation of river bank protection and stabilization projects consistent with state and local regulations.

   6. Encourage landowners to preserve the physical riverbank and floodplain areas as permanent open space.

   7. Discourage the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers on residential and public lawns and agricultural fields to support sustainable land treatment activities.

   8. Prohibit alterations or disturbances of wetlands, tree canopy, significant habitat areas and natural vegetation areas.
9. Encourage restoration of native vegetation such as floodplain forest or dry prairie grass.

10. Work with federal, state and local agencies and educational institutes to develop educational programs about pollution prevention practices, shoreland protection and stabilization practices and native vegetation restoration practices.

b) Preserving and celebrating the History and Culture
The Mississippi River corridor presents a great deal of history for the City of Ramsey as well as surrounding communities, the State of Minnesota and the United States. It is important to tell the story of how the Mississippi became what it is today and to preserve its sense of history.

Critical Area Corridor/MNRRA Policy
In regards to Historic and Cultural preservation it is the policy of the City to:

11. Work with Minnesota and Anoka County Historical Societies, Native American groups and the State Historic Preservation Committee to identify, research and protect cultural and historical sites and information prior to site plan approval for development projects.

12. Educate realtors, homebuilders, developers and residential lenders on the significance of the Critical Area corridor and develop means to filter information to their prospective clients wishing to locate within the corridor.

13. Work with state and local historical societies to make available information pertaining to the early settlement of Itasca Village, The Winnebago Indians, The Red River Trail and other historical or cultural events.

c) Ensuring Sensitive Development
Development occurs in many areas within the corridor. It has different impacts whether it occurs directly adjacent to the riverbank, near the riverbank, or away from the river but still within the general river corridor. The MNRRRA Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) lays out different criteria for how development can be regulated in each of these cases. The CMP requires compliance with the Critical Area Act, which may be more restrictive in certain instances. The City will ensure development meets the intent of this plan as well as all Critical Area/Wild and Scenic River ordinance Requirements, and other regulatory efforts.

Critical Area Corridor/MNRRA Policy
In regards to site development and land use, it is the policy of the City to:

14. Ensure consistency with existing federal, state and local requirements that preserve floodplains and wetlands and continue to update local ordinances to reflect changes in technology and natural changes in the river system by working directly with federal, state and local agencies including the
Department of Natural Resources (DNR), National Park Service (NPS) and Anoka County Park Department.

15. Require that riverfront development is compatible with riverfront uses\textsuperscript{10}, and preserves a natural appearance while minimizing interference with views to and from the river.

16. Identify land uses within the corridor that are inconsistent with river related uses or are potentially hazardous to natural resources and establish a plan for amortization or replacement use.

17. Work with landowners in the corridor to identify alternative locations for continuation of a regional trail corridor and connections to the City of Ramsey trail system ensuring that trail locations minimize any negative affects on the natural resource base.

18. Encourage open space preservation throughout the entire corridor through transfer or purchase of development rights, purchase of conservation easements, or other land protection tools.

19. Require future development within the Critical Area Corridor to be completed through the PUD process, which ensures thorough review and allows flexibility in design to create developments more consistent with open space preservation, natural resource management, and provisions for scenic vistas, trails and walkways throughout the corridor.

20. Require park dedication (either land or cash) that is made consistent with City Park dedication policies to be used within the corridor either for improvements to parks and trails within the corridor or to purchase open space or parkland elsewhere within the corridor that enhances access to the river where possible.

21. Except for alterations to single-family homes or construction of one single-family residence, site plans shall be required addressing the policies and provisions within this plan and any other local, state or federal regulatory act or program. Site plans shall include, but not be limited to, submission of adequate and detailed description of the project, including activities undertaken to ensure consistency with the objectives of the Executive Order and maps that specify soils types, topography, and expected physical changes in the site as a result of development. More specifically site plans shall include the following:

- New development and expansion shall be permitted only after approval of site plans that adequately assess and minimize adverse effects and maximize beneficial effects.
- Site plans shall include measures which adverse environmental effects.

\textsuperscript{10} See page 17 of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Mississippi River Recreation Area for criteria for compatible riverfront uses.
Site plans shall include standards to ensure that structure, road, screening, landscaping, construction placement, maintenance and stormwater runoff are compatible with character and use of corridor in that district.

Site plans shall contain specific conditions with regard to buffering, landscaping and re-vegetation.

22. For any project that may have river frontage, provisions shall be made for the use of the river for water transportation, which is consistent with adopted state and regional policies and regulations and applicable federal laws, and to minimize any adverse effects associated with such facilities.

23. Ensure future development emphasizes continuous open space, minimizes utility and infrastructure needs and crossings (including transportation river crossings and concentrates them at existing crossings where possible), and allows for scenic vistas, trails and walkways.

24. Work with federal, state, and local government agencies and environmental protection groups to study (exhausting all efforts) the need for a potential bridge crossing. This includes studying alternatives such as expansion of existing bridges, adding additional lanes to existing crossings, and considering a greater reliance on intermodal transportation.

25. In planning and designing construction or reconstruction of all public transportation facilities in the corridor, consideration shall be given to provision for scenic overlooks, safe pedestrian crossings, public riverfront access, and reasonable use of land between the river and roadway.

26. Ensure adequate views to and from the river are preserved while maintaining appropriate landscaping buffers and vegetative cover.

27. Require all future development within the critical area to be serviced by municipal sewer and water except for already platted residential developments and those properties which fall outside of the future urban growth boundary.

28. Require future utility construction within the corridor or crossing the river to be underground while minimizing disturbance of endangered habitat areas or undisturbed natural vegetation areas.

29. Prohibit any unnecessary grading, filling or any other significant alteration of areas within the critical area corridor (including the riverfront, 300’ setback area and bluff face).

30. Prohibit development on or alteration of slopes exceeding 12% including the riverfront bluff face.

31. Monitor private and public on-site septic systems within the corridor through an on-site septic system inspection program to ensure proper maintenance and management of on-site septic systems.

32. Ensure future new development is setback from the riverfront and bluff area in order to preserve the shoreline and riverfront area in its natural state.
33. Allow street designs that are narrower (but optimal to safely handle expected traffic volumes).

34. Restore natural vegetation (using species native to the area) to screen non-compatible riverfront development from the river.

35. Enforce appropriate height restrictions on new development within the corridor and on the riverfront to reduce visual impacts and protect views of the river from the river and its shoreline.

36. New or modified transportation facilities shall compliment the planned land and water uses and shall not stimulate incompatible development.

37. For those developments requiring discretionary action or a public hearing, the City will notify DNR at least 30 days before taking action on the application.

38. All capital improvement programs or public facilities programs shall be consistent with the standards and guidelines in Executive Order 79-19.

D. Implementation Strategies

All of the following implementation strategies should be heavily intensive in public participation. The participation should include residents and business owners within the corridor as well as outside of the corridor. It should include professional foresters, biologists, ecologist or historians, some of which may be residents and could volunteer expertise. Involvement from the MNRRA agencies, city staff and politicians would also enhance the resource availability. Task force and community workshops should be held to educate the public on the purpose of such a project, build community support and further ideas and solutions to problems.

1. Update Local Ordinances: Update the Shoreland Management Ordinance, Critical Areas Ordinance, Wild and Scenic Rivers Ordinance, and Zoning Ordinance to reflect goals and policies of this plan as well as the requirements of federal and state legislation.

2. Establish Design Guidelines: Building off of design criteria that may be established through a highway corridor study on Highway 10, similar criteria should be established for development within the corridor that protects scenic vistas, utilizes solar energy, restores native vegetation and blends the built environment into the natural environment. These design criteria should apply to public and private development projects and could be established through an overlay district.

3. Use the Future Land Use Plan as a Guide to Future Development: The goals and policies found in the future land use element of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan focus on environmentally sound land use that calls for urban services to include the majority of the development within the corridor by the year 2015 (see Development Staging Section). The predominant land use in the corridor is Low density residential, which allows a variety of housing types and styles at an average density 3 units per acre.
The plan also calls for a redevelopment study of some of the lands along the Highway 10 Corridor to reevaluate the commercial use. The goals and policies of the future land use plan should be adhered to within the Critical Area Corridor.

4. Develop Educational Programs: Working with MNRRRA agencies, incorporate river protection education elements into events such as recycling drop off days and other community wide events. Encourage and participate in regional programs that help educate property owners within the corridor on river quality issues and how their own individual practices can help clean up the river (i.e., Best Management Practices).

5. Pursue Grants and Funding Sources for Acquisition of Sensitive Lands: Some land areas have been identified as significant environmental features that should be protected and managed as permanent open space. These areas are designated as Site 1, Site 2 and the continuous trail corridor on the MNRRRA opportunity map illustrated in Figure 11-6.

Site 1 features significant woodlands that provide natural habitat. This area is adjacent to residential properties on the south and agriculture property on the north, which will likely succumb to urban development in the distant future. This site should be preserved through private sector actions. This could be done through such means as transfer of development rights where density is transferred to the more developable property to the north and east, purchase of development rights, or conservation easement purchase. Acquisition by the public should be a last priority for protection of Site 1.

Site 2 features some lands that are protected by the floodplain ordinance, some lands protected through wetlands regulations and some lands that are not protected at all. Site 2 is a more significant piece of land because of its river frontage. Public Acquisition would appear to be the priority for protection of this site because floodplain ordinances may still permit certain development activity. A study should be completed to establish a detailed acquisition boundary of significant lands and a management plan should be put in place that focuses on low cost passive uses possibly restoring lands that have been disturbed back to native vegetation or a small scenic overlook site. National Park Service Funds could be used in tandem with funding from the City, DNR, Metropolitan Council, non-profit groups or other entity interested in riverfront protection.

Continuous Trail Corridor represents a general location for a trail corridor that would be part of the MNRRRA continuos trial corridor. Strong public opposition is not unique to Ramsey. Many communities face similar opposition. Like it has done in other instances, the City of Ramsey should seek to learn from other community’s experiences. A general description of a trial corridor can be found in an ordinance dating back to 1989: however, many residents were not aware of this. This corridor should not necessarily be abandoned but should be reevaluated using a public participatory process to determine how lands are reserved for the site, whether they should be public or private, how they should be used, maintained and what exact alignment should be used. It should also be clear to residents that a trail corridor is a desired element by the greater community and that the City is ensuring involvement to meet the needs of the concerned property owners.

The Greenway Corridor represents an area that may contain a significant natural
resource or may be an important link to connect significant areas. Much of the riverfront area is contained in the Greenway corridor. The intent of this designation is to provide an area that calls for extra effort to protect environmental resources and plan for the preservation of open space. One of two approaches can be used to implement the greenway strategy. An ordinance can be drafted that calls out site development restrictions and open space preservation requirements, or through the PUD process, developers can work with staff to devise a plan that address the main objective of the greenway corridor which is to preserve the natural resources and link significant environmental areas.

6. Establish Historic/Educational Markers: An opportunity exists to tell the story of the early settlement of Ramsey, similar to the monument located at the Wayside Rest. Opportunities for further education could be established within the Mississippi West Park as part of its development, near a future scenic overlook within Site 2 or somewhere along the Continuous trail corridor. These interpretation pieces could be as simple as a plaque on a stand that identifies natural species or explains the Red River Trail. Funding sources include the National Park Service, City of Ramsey, DNR, Anoka County Historical Society, non-profit groups or resident or business donations.

Figure 11-6 MNNRA Opportunities
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