About the Reserve

MISSION

The Lake Superior Reserve works in partnerships to improve the understanding of Lake Superior estuaries and coastal resources, while addressing issues affecting coastal communities through an integrated program of research, education, outreach and stewardship.

QUICK FACTS

The Reserve spans approximately 16,700 acres encompassing portions of the St. Louis River estuary and adjacent public lands in Douglas County.

The Reserve was designated in 2010 to be part of NOAA’s National Estuarine Research Reserve System, a network of 29 Reserves across the United States and Puerto Rico.

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Meeting community needs

Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve’s research, education, outreach and stewardship efforts support our local communities’ diverse needs by reversing environmental damage, improving water quality and maintaining our natural resources.

Public learning center, community classroom space, on track for 2017 opening

With the generous help of apprentice carpenters from the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, the Reserve’s newly renovated learning center on Barker’s Island in Superior is on track to open to the public by mid-2017. Thanks to a $316,667 grant from NOAA, with match from the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the Reserve started the renovation of the new public learning center in 2016. Apprentices from Carpenters Local 361 volunteered their time to complete crucial interior buildouts before exhibit installation begins later this spring. This new public space will become a destination for residents and tourists alike, supporting the local economy. Through an interpretive design that fosters an improved understanding of the Lake Superior watershed and St. Louis River estuary, guests will learn of the interdependence between the natural system and local economy. Meeting and classroom space is part of the buildout and will meet Reserve programming needs and be utilized by community partners.
The Reserve's Research Coordinator, Shon Schooler, chairs the St. Louis River Habitat Work Group, which is made up of more than 50 natural resources managers, scientists and citizens who are interested in the environmental health of the estuary. Members represent agencies and communities from across the estuary’s watershed. The group was responsible for the original St. Louis River Habitat Plan, a key component of the Area Of Concern (AOC) delisting process. The group is currently reviewing the projects and strategies in the plan and evaluating them against the AOC’s official action plan for delisting. The group will carry on coordinating habitat restoration projects after the AOC is delisted, which is predicted for 2025. Their goal is to keep improving the environmental health of the estuary even after the delisting to ensure the investment in remediation and restoration of legacy pollution is not wasted by allowing new problems to degrade our natural resources.

The Reserve’s signature Rivers2Lake Education Program expanded to include Bayfield and Ashland School Districts, in response to requests from the National Park Service and teachers. New funding in the NERRS budget for Teachers on the Estuary programs, and a generous grant from NOAA’s Great Lakes B-WET program made the expansion possible in 2016. The Reserve has partnered with both the Park Service and the Bad River Watershed Association to provide place-based learning experiences to seven teachers and nearly 200 K-12 students along the Lake Superior shore, in addition to 10 teachers and 300 students in the Duluth-Superior region.

The Annual St. Louis River Summit provides a venue for sharing information about the St. Louis River among community members, students, scientists, natural resource managers and educators. The 2017 Summit, “Linking Climate, Landscapes and Community: The Road to Resilience”, will bring together more than 250 attendees representing dozens of institutions and organizations, schoolchildren, university students and interested citizens. The Summit, planned for March 14-15, will feature scientific and community presentations around the topics of ecological and environmental restoration, cultural ties to natural resources and collaboration to build resilient communities. Keynote speaker Peter David, a wildlife biologist with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, will share what he has learned over 30 years of working for Wisconsin's tribal communities in the management of natural resources, in particular manoomin (wild rice). The 2017 Summit has been made possible by more than 20 Reserve partners and sponsors.

Ash trees have played an important role in maintaining water quality within the St. Louis River estuary, but an invasive species’ recent arrival means about 99 percent of the estuary’s ash trees will likely die in the near future. The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) was first discovered in Superior in 2013. Since then, the Reserve has been proactive in planning for the demise of the estuary’s ash population, which is currently the dominant shoreline species. As the ash trees die, the shoreline could become susceptible to erosion if other species aren’t present to fill the ash’s role in preventing soil erosion. The Reserve continues its work to reduce the potential impacts of EAB on water quality along the Pokegama River. Researchers are monitoring the volunteer-planted 800 saplings that could replace ash in Superior’s forest. The City of Superior’s Forestry Board is eager to see more volunteer citizen science opportunities like this. The Reserve will also help coordinate the first EAB conference in the Twin Ports in July, 2017, where the EAB field sites will be visited by conference participants. The Reserve is also extending support to Minnesota DNR for a similar effort there.