



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Wisconsin nominates the St. Louis River freshwater estuary (SLRFE) for designation as the Wisconsin Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve (WI LS NERR). The WI LS NERR is located at the headwaters of the Great Lakes and is significant from a local, state, national, and international perspective. This designation promotes the appreciation, understanding, and protection of the unique freshwater estuary systems of Lake Superior, North America's largest freshwater resource. Local communities, citizens, governments and organizations in the region will work in a partnership with the WI LS NERR to better understand the importance and significance of estuarine and coastal resources and learn about effective strategies to enhance their regional environment, economy and quality of life. Goals for the WI LS NERR include:

- **Offer outreach and educational programs** for students and others to make the St. Louis River estuary a vital community asset, a destination for visitors, and a place to experience freshwater estuaries and their unique resources;
- **Become a regional leader** in academic and applied research, coastal land management, and educational outreach related to freshwater estuaries, their interactions with the Great Lakes, and their response to long-term and short-term changes.
- **Demonstrate freshwater estuary protection, restoration, and management strategies** to state, local and Tribal government and agencies, local organizations and citizens along the shores of the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan basin to better incorporate research and monitoring into their management decisions.
- **Provide a model for long-term community involvement** to engage the many governments and citizens in the region and attract additional resources and energy for freshwater estuary protection and enjoyment.

This document describes the process and outcome of the work to nominate the SLRFE within Wisconsin's Lake Superior coastal zone for designation as a National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR). The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) is administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as authorized under Section 315 of the Coastal Zone Management



Act of 1972. The overall mission of this program is to promote stewardship of the nation's estuaries through science and education, using a system of protected areas. Although national in scope, individual sites are state operated and managed with oversight and coordination provided by NOAA. Local partnerships can also play an important role in a state's NERR operation and programming.

The selection of a WILS NERR site was initiated by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP) within the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) in partnership with other state, tribal, and local agencies and organizations. The WCMP sought the assistance of the University of Wisconsin – Extension (UWEX) to coordinate the site selection process and assist with preparing the site nomination document.

The site selection process was accomplished through the work of four teams: the State Agency Liaison Team, Coordination Team, Site Selection Technical Team, and Public Involvement Team. The combined tasks of the four teams included identifying, evaluating, and selecting a proposed NERR site, as well as developing appropriate local, state, tribal, federal, and private partnerships that will ultimately define the NERR. The roles of the four teams included the following:

- The State Agency Liaison Team (SLT) provided overall guidance to the process and was responsible for making the final site recommendation to the Governor.
- The Coordination Team (CT) managed the logistical aspects of the site selection process and provided facilitation, process, and content support to the other teams.
- The Site Selection Technical Team (SSTT) provided technical guidance and relevant expertise in evaluating sites.
- The Public Involvement Team (PIT) planned and conducted public outreach and collected public feedback during the site selection process.

Membership in the SLT included representatives of the DOA, Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), and UWEX. The CT included representatives from the DOA and UWEX. Members of the SSTT and PIT included individuals from state, tribal, and federal agencies; local public officials (local agency employees and elected officials); tribal



government representatives; academic institutions; private groups; and the general public. The site selection process also included a public meeting to solicit comment and input from the general public in Superior, Wisconsin, near the proposed WI LS NERR site.

After evaluating 35 sites on the Lake Superior coast of Wisconsin, the State recommended the selection of the SLRFE for nomination as the WI LS NERR. The NERR site is located in the Lake Superior biogeographical subregion of the Great Lakes biogeographic region, as described by NERRS regulations (15 C.F.R. 921). The proposed site (15,117 total acres) includes the following components:

- St. Louis River Streambank Protection Area (6,400 acres), owned by WDNR, characterized by coastal habitat including island complexes, aspen forest, hardwood and shrub swamp, emergent marsh, and sedge meadow.
- City of Superior Municipal Forest (4,400 acres). Included within the Superior Municipal Forest is the Dwight's Point and Pokegama Wetlands State Natural Area (3153 acres). This component contains mature coniferous forest, extensive emergent marsh, and wet clay flats supporting a mixture of shrub swamp and wet meadow.
- Part of the City of Superior's Wisconsin Point conservation and recreation area (120 acres) and University of Wisconsin–Superior's Dutchman Creek property (77 acres). Wisconsin Point is the eastern portion of a long coastal barrier spit separating the waters of Lake Superior from Allouez Bay. Major site features include several miles of open sand beach and dunes, small interdunal wetlands, and a xeric forest of white and red pine.
- Pokegama Carnegie Wetlands State Natural Area (220 acres), owned by WDNR, featuring shrub swamp and sedge meadows between the Pokegama and Little Pokegama Rivers.
- Connecting waterway portions of the St. Louis River, Allouez Bay, and Lake Superior (approximately 3,900 acres).

Upon acceptance of WI LS NERR nomination by NOAA, WCMP and UWEX will work with project partners on the development of drafts of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Management Plan (MP) for the site. It is anticipated that appropriate management agreements will be developed during this phase of site designation to address the research, education and management objectives of the NERR. The overall goals, objectives, and policies of the WI LS NERR will be scoped during the EIS process and addressed in the



MP. Partnerships in the WI LS NERR are anticipated to include the WDNR, UWEX, UW–Superior, City of Superior, WCMP, and Douglas County.