

## New ramp at River Bluffs Regional Park gives boaters another access point

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### Document Text

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The Legacy Amendment funding for the boat ramp at River Bluffs Regional Park likely came through because it gives anglers another Mississippi River access. But planners envision a range of uses will take root this season, the first spring since the ramp was installed.

"We are convinced that will get more people on the river," said Lowell Olson of St. Cloud, who, with his wife, Charlotte Stephens, helped to shape park plans through the Natural Parks and Trails Coalition.

In addition, he envisions families making use of the accessible picnic area.

The \$900,000 park development project -- featuring the boat ramp, parking for 10 trailers, electronic gates, new picnic areas, one mile of the Beaver Islands Trail and a native prairie restoration -- included \$427,000 in Legacy funds. The boat ramp opened last fall.

Accessible from 38th Street South off Stearns County Road 75, the ramp is about 3 1/2 miles downstream from the access at Beaver Island Park.

In addition to giving boaters and anglers another Mississippi River access point -- a Legacy Amendment priority -- the ramp will give canoeists and kayakers more options. Two outfitters will offer shuttle service from River Bluffs by appointment.

"For us what it does is opens opportunities for different length trips," said Dan Meer, owner of Clear Waters Outfitting Co. in Clearwater. "It opens up a smaller length trip by having a new access point between St. Cloud and Clearwater."

The outfitter will continue its daily shuttle stop at Beaver Island Park. But groups can request the downriver stop by appointment, shaving about 90 minutes from what usually is a four-hour paddle to Clearwater. (Meer said he expected the regular season to start in about a month, once combined water and air temperatures hit 120 degrees.)

"It's going to make it available to a lot more people. During the week, you could put a day's worth of work in, come home, eat and still do an hour on the river," Meer said.

St. Cloud State University's Outdoor Endeavors planned to launch its canoe and kayak rentals for the season starting Monday, according to Ivan Bartha, coordinator for experiential programs. Bartha, who was involved in River Bluffs planning, said the option would give paddlers more time to explore the Beaver Islands. Outdoor Endeavors' shuttle service is available to those who rent three or more boats.

"That three-mile stretch of river is the primo stretch of river between here and Clearwater. That's the spot everybody wants to fish in. It's the spot everyone wants to explore the Beaver Islands from," Bartha said.

The boat ramp element may be what secured the Legacy funding. But it is one element of a bigger project at the 140-acre regional park.

"You have a lot of opportunities to explore nature, given the trails that are there," said Scott Zlotnik, city park and recreation director. "It's definitely a natural-based passive park opportunity."

On a recent lunch break, three Merrill Corp. co-workers -- Renee Hesse, Ruth Boos and Joan Budde -- lingered at the boat ramp, chatting and looking out at the river. A trail leads from the company grounds into the park.

"We see a lot of eagles, ducks, geese and occasionally deer," Hesse said.

Bartha said he also has seen fox, coyotes and wild turkeys along the stretch of river between the two ramps -- the same stretch Zebulon Pike explored in 1805, which today is known as a premier smallmouth bass fishery.

"I think that whole project -- that River Bluffs project and that boat launch -- is an outstanding asset to the community. River Bluffs is, in my opinion, the crown jewel of St. Cloud parks for a variety of reasons: the wilderness, the aesthetics, that boat launch," Bartha said.

Zlotnik said an opening ceremony likely will take place in late spring or early summer. Meer is considering a Beaver Island-to-River Bluffs paddle in conjunction with Granite City Days this June.

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### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

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