Report to IDNR River Programs
Interpretive and Informal Biological Reconnaissance
Des Moines Metro Area Waterways

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River Segment: North River

Interpretive Theme(s) suggested for this river segment: None. I do not recommend that it becomes a water trail.

Stream Reach:

UTM Beginning: 0454911 E – 4593635 N—140th Ave. bridge access point

UTM End: 0459350 E – 4595262 N—Exit from river, near Avon Dr. bridge, NE side of Carlisle

Approximate mileage: ~4.4 miles (plus 3.2 miles to confluence with DSMRiv, plus 7 miles to MidRiv/DSMRiv confluence plus 9 miles to dependable access at Bennington Bridge on Red Rock)

CFS average during this time period: 250 cfs

Description and interpretation of this section:

This entire stretch of the North River is privately owned on both sides of the river. As land owners vary, so does the management along the river. Some portions have a well-treed riparian zone that extends many yards into the flood plain forming bottomland hardwood woodlands. In some places, the silver maples arch over the river, forming a beautiful shaded respite from hot summer sun. In others, the corridor is only sparsely treed or has none at all, with cropland visible above the steep banks of the river.

Where habitat permits, the wildlife responds. Great blue herons are common in this river, making use of the many trees in the water for fishing perches. Blue jays, red-headed and hairy woodpeckers, wood ducks, catbirds, barred owls, sharp-shinned hawks, and even scarlet tanagers can be seen from the paddler's vantage point in the river. Song sparrows, mourning doves, and goldfinches make use of the more sparsely treed areas along this stretch of river. Raccoon and deer tracks are common in the mud banks along the river and evidence of beavers is seen in chewed sticks of willow and cottonwood. Cedar waxwings hawk for insects from perches on snags in the water, while tree and cliff swallows fly over the water, gobbling insects from the air. Spotted sandpipers share the beaches with killdeer, and a few healsplitter mussels persist in a difficult, constantly changing environment in a few locations.

But the dominant feature along this river at this time is the large number of log and tree piles that block the river, partially or entirely. The combined effects of the alluvial soils through which this river flows, a previously channelized section between 140th Ave. and

Carlisle, a watershed that makes for rapid rises and falls in water level, plus the influence from the Red Rock Lake water level control, make for extreme erosion along the river. I recorded eleven 75-100 percent blockages in this short, 4.4 mile stretch. While I was able, at this water, level to paddle through or over some of them, at least four of the blockages required exiting the river, up steep and muddy banks, to portage around them safely. Even more will require portaging, I believe, at lower water levels. There are many other places along the river where trees are blocking less than 75% of the river (at this cfs), but that still would prove hazardous for novice paddlers and others. These log piles also serve to catch hundreds of cans, bottles, and other trash that seem to find their way into the water. In some locations, cars and other large trash litter the bank as "rip rap".

The other major problem is access. Accessing the river at the U.S. 65 bridge, a fast and busy road, is unacceptably dangerous. Therefore, the next possible access was at the 140th Ave bridge east of U.S. 65. It MAY be possible to create an access on the northeast side of the bridge, but few paddlers would use the northwest side which we chose, entailing a steep and long portage, including a deep gully crossing. At the other end, an access MAY be able to be created where Avon Dr. bridge crosses the river, the Hwy 5 bridges being as unacceptable as Hwy 65. Both the 140th Ave. and Avon Dr. potential accesses would require negotiation with private land owners to create a suitable parking area, as well as engineering to create accesses down 60+ degree banks that are 8-10 feet high (or higher, depending on water levels). Beyond Avon Dr., paddlers must commit to another ~19 miles of paddling to find a dependable access on the DSM river.

Because of the access problems and severe problems of trees blocking the river—a problem that is likely to continue to be created with each rise in the water level—I cannot recommend that a water trail be created on the North River. I believe it would expose the sponsoring agencies and organizations to both unacceptable liability and constant maintenance to make it available to paddlers.

Major vegetation groups along the reach:
Young bottomland hardwood trees dominate much of the first part of this stretch of the North River. Silver maples, cottonwoods, and box elders are common along the banks. A few slippery elms and the occasional sycamores are also present. Riverbank grapes and poison ivy vines commonly drape over the banks. The orange roots of mulberries can be seen in more sparsely treed sections, their roots exposed by bank erosion along the steep banks. Where the riparian zone is wider, some slippery elms, hackberries, and walnuts are present, and a few cottonwoods exceed 36 inches in DBH. In sections with few trees along the river, brome grass dominates on the bank tops, with some *Bidens* and other weedy annuals on the sparsely vegetated banks. On the north side of Carlisle, where the river is wooded on both sides, silver maples, cottonwoods, and box elders dominate closest to the water, while ash, oaks, some honey locusts, walnuts, black cherries, and basswoods can be seen farther upland.

Notable hazards and locations:
0455366 E – 4594009 N—Downed silver maple blocking 75+% of river
0456165 E – 4594344 N—Trees blocking 100% of river
0456583 E – 4594540 N—Transmission lines crossing river
0456844 E – 4594611 N—Trees blocking 100% of river
0456899 E – 4594635 N—Trees blocking 100% of river
0457090 E – 4594689 N—Trees blocking 100% of river
0457475 E – 4595124 N—Trees blocking 100% of river
0457938 E – 4595022 N—Trees blocking 100% of river and old cars in/along river
0458295 E – 4595302 N—Trees blocking 95% of river
0458918 E – 4595617 N—Trees blocking 100% of river
0459168 E – 4595357 N—Trees blocking 95% of river
0459350 E – 4595262 N—Trees blocking 100% of river

Notable landmarks and locations:

Interpretive sub-themes: none

Recommended Experience Classification: Short at <5 miles, but challenge classification due to MANY blockages and necessary portages around tree blockages.

Photos and descriptions: 27 photos in 1 folder provided

Recommendation on how/where interpretive information could be shared with the public: If it were to be made a water trail, interpretive information should be shared at the same locations as the Middle River. However, I do not recommend that it become a water trail.