

LOG HOUSE LANDING RAMP INFORMATION

Overview: Log House Landing (LHL) is a Scandia-owned public landing located on the Wild and Scenic St. Croix River. The landing is in Scandia and a designated National Park. It is one of two St. Croix River public accesses in Scandia. The City Council is currently reviewing access options for the existing boat ramp at the landing. The option selected will determine future usage, development and preservation of the site. The ramp access options are:

Option 1: LEAVE RAMP AS IS WITH NO CHANGES

Option 2: CONTINUE TO PURSUE RAMP REBUILDING FOR TRAILERED AND OTHER BOATS

Option 3: CHANGE THE RAMP TO WALK-IN / CARRY-IN ONLY - NO TRAILERS PERMITTED

Option 4: CLOSE THE RAMP COMPLETELY

In 2012, the Watershed District Managers (CMSCWD) approached the Scandia City Council with concerns about storm water run-off. This led to discussions about long-term planning for the ramp, the landing and the road. Since that time (and before) several site designs have been proposed, but all have been rejected due to a combination of cost and environmental impact. In an attempt to involve the various stakeholders and citizens in the search for solutions, the Scandia City Council appointed a committee in 2014 to study the site and make recommendations. The LHL Committee consisted of nine members from several groups considered important to the project: Scandia City Council, Scandia Planning Commission, the Watershed District (CMSCWD), the St. Croix River Association (SCRA), and citizen/users of the site. The committee met over 3 months in 2014 and 2015. Working with the Washington County Engineering Department, the committee identified the following seven specific criteria to be considered when evaluating any LHL options:

- **Historic Integrity:** The LHL committee agreed that the site should be protected to the greatest extent possible from any development that would change its character and historic integrity. The Log House Landing is a rustic and historic site. The surrounding trees and natural landscape have remained relatively undisturbed throughout its over 170 year existence. In the mid-19th century, the landing was an early steamboat stop and became an important point of entry for immigrants seeking a new life. It was a gateway to the burgeoning Scandia farming community. The original Log House is now privately owned, but at one time served as an inn for travelers. During its first 100 years, the landing was used as both an entry to Scandia and a place of recreation for picnicking and shore-fishing. In 1935 a strip of land was donated to the city by the Ingersoll family for use as a park. The bank and shoreline were intact; there were wood steps leading to the river. In the 1960s a boat ramp was cut into the steep bank. Then the St. Croix River became one of a handful of protected rivers under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968, limiting development within the river's view shed.
- **Erosion and Water Quality:** The LHL committee agreed that any proposed plan should address erosion and water quality issues. While there is a lot of debate over just how much erosion and sedimentation actual exists; there is little debate that there are issues that need to be addressed. The St. Croix River, under the protection of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, is considered by the National Park Service (NPS) to be one of the cleanest rivers in the mid-west. Over the last several decades, Scandia has struggled to maintain the LHL road, landing and ramp

in a way that protects the river and the adjacent Gilbertson's Creek from erosion and sediment run-off. The boat ramp has been a problem since its inception due to an unstable base and steep terrain. Trucks and boat trailers churn up the sandy ramp in a continuous cycle of erosion and maintenance. In 2013, 2015 and 2016 plans using concrete cable planks and engineered concrete were proposed. Objections raised about those proposals have included expense, impact to the natural environment and overdevelopment of the site. Last fall, the City re-graded the road and landing, and added large trap rock to the boat ramp surface in an interim attempt to reduce erosion and stabilize the ramp. It has recently been noted these road and landing modifications has made trailered launching and parking more difficult.

- **Protect the Natural Environment and Aesthetics: The LHL committee agreed that any proposed plan should protect the natural environment and rustic aesthetics to the greatest extent possible.** Because the Log House Landing is in a National Park and visible from a National Wild and Scenic river, there has been much discussion and concern expressed about wanting to keep the site rustic and natural. There are several places in the Scandia Comprehensive Plan that support and encourage protection of "unique areas of rural character, historic charm and natural resources." In fact, the Log House Landing is arguably one of the most intact historic natural locations in the city. In 2014, when the Council was considering a plan that would have modernized the site and expanded the road, there was a public outcry and over 650 petition signers protested the potential impact on trees, vegetation and the aesthetic natural beauty of the site. The National Park Service (NPS), the SCRA and dozens of citizens wrote letters expressing the desire to keep the site as natural as possible. The Watershed and the Council ultimately rejected this plan as too impactful and expensive. Both the Watershed and DNR engineers felt that concrete from the top of the landing and into the river was necessary to stabilize the boat ramp for truck and trailer use; however concerns similar to previous plans have been expressed about these newest proposals. Recently, an additional environmental issue has been raised about modernizing the boat ramp. This section of the river (from Arcola Mills north to Taylors Falls) is designated as a slow/no wake zone. The slow boat speeds are needed to protect the shoreline from wave erosion. This issue raises concern that modernizing the boat ramp too much could attract larger faster boats that are inappropriate on this section of river.
- **Access: The LHL committee wanted to keep the landing open to as many users as possible, while recognizing that certain site limitations may result in limiting access.** There are several types of users that desire access to the river from the LHL. These include pedestrians, shore fishermen, carry-in watercraft, trailered watercraft, and snowmobiles. Future users could include tourists, picnickers, swimmers, and handicapped visitors. LHL is the starting location for the annual Lions Club Fat Cat Triathlon, where participants use the ramp for carry-in watercraft launching. The committee wanted to see the landing stay open to as many users as possible, while also recognizing that the site has several constraints that limit the number and type of daily users. Some of the site constraints include its location, configuration and parking. LHL is located in a residential neighborhood with two homes adjacent to the short and narrow gravel road and landing. Parking is limited and cannot be expanded - the NPS has designated the LHL as a "no increased parking" site. LHL currently provides year-round, 24 hour access to users. There is one other river access site in the city of Scandia and two other river access points within 10 miles of the LHL (*see below).
- **Safety: The LHL committee recognized the need for safety considerations for all users and the preservation of emergency vehicle access.** All of the options under consideration will

accommodate emergency vehicle access to the river. A recent consideration for boat ramp safety includes shared usage on the ramp and in the water. Prior to the creation of a boat ramp at this location, the landing was often used for picnics, swimming and shore activity. However, over the years the trailer use has almost eliminated those other uses. Trailered vehicles use most of the landing for maneuvering boats onto the ramp. The subsequent surface disturbance caused by heavy trucks and trailers has made the area almost unusable for anything but trailered launching of boats. The current trap rock surface makes the ramp difficult for most other uses; it is designed to be conducive to trailered vehicles.

- **Maintenance:** The LHL committee agreed that maintenance time and effort should be a consideration in selecting any proposed plan. While some maintenance work is expected at any public amenity, the amount of time and effort needed to maintain the boat ramp needs to be considered. The current trap rock ramp surface will require more time and effort than the other options. The continuous cycle of erosion and repair due to heavy trucks and trailers would continue. Alternatively if either a concrete structure or re-vegetation of the ramp were to occur, the amount of annual maintenance should be lower.
- **Cost:** The LHL committee agreed that life cycle cost is an important consideration in selecting a plan and determining the direction for the Log House Landing site. The cost / benefit ratio for the various ramp options should be examined and contrasted. The Log House Landing is an important access point to the St. Croix River for Scandia. However, due to a number of factors, not the least of which are its small size, challenging configuration, limited parking and rustic nature, it is not and arguably will never be, a widely used access point. An informal study done over 85 days in the summer of 2015 showed that the average daily usage of the site was 5.2 vehicles, with approximately half of the users being carry-in. The LHL road, landing and ramp are all tax-payer funded. The most expensive ramp option by a significant amount would be to rebuild the ramp. Prior to sending the project out for the first concrete ramp plan bid, the council had budgeted \$33,587. The first bid came in at \$147,855 for the ramp alone. The council rejected this bid and plan. A second, presumably less expensive concrete ramp plan was developed in 2016. This plan had a shallower concrete depth, but was wider, and removed several amenities and aesthetic features. As of this time this second ramp plan has not been sent out to bid or voted upon. However, any concrete structure will be significantly more costly than leaving the current ramp surface or re-vegetating the surface for carry-in and pedestrian uses only. There is also a life cycle cost to be considered. A concrete structure would need to be replaced at some point in the future. LHL has limited parking and as such, limited access and usage. A question to be considered is how costly an installation expense for taxpayers is justified based on the actual, small number of ramp users.

***Additional information about alternative local river landings for trailered vehicles and others:**

1. **William O'Brien Landing:** entrance in Scandia 1 mile south of LHL. Easy gradual concrete ramp, ample parking, other recreational facilities, restrooms, picnic tables, drinking water, camping. State maintained. Open 3 seasons. Hours are 8:00am – 10:00pm with earlier access available to sportsmen – contact park manager. Annual pass \$25 / Day pass \$5.
2. **Osceola Landing:** 6.5 miles north of LHL on the MN side. Easy gradual concrete ramp, nighttime lighting, parking, picnic tables, restrooms. National Park maintained. Open 24/7. No fee.

3. **Franconia Landing:** 10 miles north of LHL on the MN side. Easy gradual gravel ramp, limited parking. Franconia Township maintained. Open 24/7. No fee.

Unlike LHL, these launch sites are not located close to neighboring homes. They are designed for truck and trailer access, with straight and gradual slopes. Parking availability is greater with easier configuration at these alternative access sites.

The City Council Log House Landing Public Hearing will be held at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, April 25, 2017 at the Community Center.