

AltonWorks Proposes New Vision For Riverfront

by Susan Ryan

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ALTON – Americans love their national parks. According to the National Park Service, about 312 million people visited national parks in 2022, a 5% increase from 2021. National parks bring in billions of dollars of economic activity to regions across the country for small and large cities alike.

Today, during the Alton Riverfront Commission Meeting, representatives from AltonWorks unveiled a long-term vision to create the Great Rivers National Park to help transform Alton and highlight the region's crown jewel: The Mississippi River. This

proposal is aligned with the founding principles of AltonWorks which include livability, environmental stewardship, social justice, and inclusivity in rebuilding communities for optimum social impact.

“Alton has many incredible assets,” said John Simmons, CEO of AltonWorks. “The combination of the riverfront, the Clark Bridge, Marina, and the historic downtown area makes the perfect setting for a national park and could attract tens of millions of dollars each year to the city, state and regional economies. To help Alton reach its potential, we want to attract and retain people of all ages to live, work and play here. Together, we can transform the riverfront into a national treasure and family-friendly outdoor recreation destination.”

The Alton Riverfront Commission helps guide planning for Alton's Mississippi River frontage. Commission members are appointed by the mayor with advice and consent of the city council.

AltonWorks Plan Recommendations Include:

1. Improve cruise ship mooring area and amenities
2. Make updates to the marina
3. Add concrete boardwalk along the riverfront
4. Connect the riverfront and downtown with a bike trail
5. Activate the great lumber site for family fun
6. Build a floodproof bike park for all ages
7. Upgrade amenities at Russell Commons Park
8. Make the amphitheater great for artists and guests

The Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois Rivers are tremendous natural, cultural, and national assets. A national park would optimize the Great Rivers Confluence Region as a national treasure and destination, building on the large federal property and presence in the area.

Currently the Great Rivers Confluence Region is managed by 20 federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Bringing these lands together under the National Park Service would provide consistent trails and amenities and leverage park marketing, maintenance and funding for a 135,000-acre, 144-mile designated recreation park.

Alton is home to two Federal Wildlife Refuges, a large federal footprint of actively managed Army Corps of Engineers' land, and the largest State Park in IL at Pere Marquette near the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. In addition, the National Great Rivers Museum, The Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway, the National Lewis and Clark Trail, and the Mississippi River National Water

Trail are located here. Because of this Federal presence and the outsize impact of the Mississippi River on American culture, history, and economic development, AltonWorks believes the idea of a national park is worth exploring.



Examples of similar national parks include New River Gorge National Park in West Virginia and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area in Minnesota.

About AltonWorks

AltonWorks is a social impact redevelopment company focused on the revitalization of Historic Downtown Alton as a healthy, thriving, walkable city. AltonWorks was founded on the principles of livability, environmental stewardship, social justice, and inclusivity and believes rebuilding communities for optimum social impact. As an intermediary organization, AltonWorks offers thought leadership, planning, convening, and connecting, adding capacity to the Region's ability to attract funding, expand social impact, catalyze economic growth, and anchor downstate recovery.