



# Highway 243 Osceola Bridge Project – Environmental Assessment/Environmental Assessment Worksheet

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the Highway (Hwy) 243 Osceola Bridge Project as required by federal ([National Environmental Policy Act](#)) and state law ([Minnesota Rules 4410.1000](#)). MnDOT, WisDOT, and FHWA use the EA/EAW to describe the basic facts and impacts of a project and to decide if a more detailed environmental document (environmental impact statement) is needed. The EA/EAW also lets the public know about the project, provides information on permits needed to build the project, and helps find ways to reduce impacts to the environment. The EA/EAW is not meant to approve or deny a project but be a source of information to guide other approvals.

## Project Overview

The project reconstructs the Hwy 243 bridge over the St. Croix River. The existing bridge will be demolished, and a new bridge will be constructed in the same location as the existing bridge. The project includes reconstructing Hwy 243 from the WIS-35 intersection in Osceola to west of the Osceola Landing entrance in Minnesota. A shared-use trail for those that walk, bike, and roll will be constructed on the north side of Hwy 243 from the Village of Osceola, across the Hwy 243 bridge, to Osceola Landing. The project also includes constructing turn lanes at the Osceola Landing entrance and ponds for treating stormwater runoff.

Figure 1 on the following page includes a computer-generated rendering of the proposed Hwy 243 bridge looking east from the Minnesota shoreline towards the Wisconsin shoreline and Osceola Creek.

## Project Schedule

Project construction is expected to begin in the fall of 2026 with site prep work. The Hwy 243 crossing would be closed starting in the spring of 2027 while the existing bridge is removed, and the new bridge is constructed. The new bridge could be open in the fall of 2028. Restoration of the work area and construction of Osceola Landing improvements would be completed in 2029.

**Figure 1. View of the Proposed Hwy 243 Bridge from the Minnesota Shoreline**



## **Executive Summary of EA/EAW**

The Hwy 243 Osceola Bridge Project uses a combined EA and EAW format. The EA part describes the need for the project; alternatives considered; federal environmental topics not addressed in the EAW form; and summarizes agency coordination and public engagement. The EAW part uses a state-required form which includes questions about potential impacts to the environment because of the project. The Hwy 243 Osceola Bridge EA/EAW has appendices (titled A – P) that provide more background information and communications with experts in various environmental topic areas. Appendix A includes maps and figures, while the other appendices include information and communications on conservation measures, wetlands, floodplains, contamination, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, visual impacts, low income and/or minority populations, and parks and recreation areas.

Table 1 provides a summary of each question in the EAW form. Table 2 provides a summary of other federal issues. Please refer to the full EA/EAW for more details.

**Table 1. Summary of Hwy 243 Osceola Bridge EAW Questions**

EAW Question(s) (EA/EAW Section)	EAW Subject(s)	Summary	Appendices
1-6 (Section 4.1.1 through 4.1.6)	Project Title, Proposer, RGU, Reason for EAW Preparation, Project Location / Description	Questions 1-6 describe the project and its location. MnDOT is the proposer and Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for the project. The EAW was prepared at MnDOT's discretion because the project is in the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (Minnesota Rules 4410.1000 Subpart 3.A). Question 6 describes the need for, and purpose of, the project.	Appendix A (Figure A1)
7 (Section 4.1.7)	Climate Adaptation and Resilience	Question 7 includes data on potential changes in future temperature and rainfall. MnDOT considers potential future climate changes and includes design elements in the project to meet future conditions. Table 4-2 includes climate considerations and adaptations for project design elements, water resources, contamination, and fish, wildlife and plant communities.	None
8 (Section 4.1.8)	Cover Types	Question 8 lists acres of different land cover types (trees, grass, wetlands, pavement) before and after the project is built. Most land next to the project area is wooded/forest, wetlands, lawn, or pavement. It also notes the amount (in acres) of trees the project will need to remove. The project will increase the amount of paved surface in the project area.	None
9 (Section 4.1.9)	Permits and Approvals Required	Question 9 includes a summary of federal, state, and local permits needed to build the project, and the status (are they done, are they in process, or are they to be applied for) of the permits. Table 4-6 lists permits and approvals for the project.	None
10 (Section 4.1.10)	Land Use	<p>Question 10 provides a summary of existing land uses (homes, parks, undeveloped land/open space, wetlands, open water, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway) next to the roadway. The project is compatible with nearby land uses.</p> <p>There is no farmland adjacent to the project area.</p> <p>The project is in the 100-year floodplain associated with the St. Croix River. A study of the floodplain (Appendix H – Floodplain Assessment) shows there will be no permanent impacts to flood elevations.</p>	Appendix H
11 (Section 4.1.11)	Geology, Soils, and Topography / Landforms	Question 11 summarizes existing geology, soils, and topography (hilly, flat) in the project area as well as soil removal, grading, and erosion and sediment control activities that will be used during construction. The project is in the St. Croix River Valley. Elevation changes by more than 200 feet from the St. Croix River up to the top of the Wisconsin bluff.	None
12 (Section 4.1.12)	Water Resources	<p>Question 12 summarizes impacts water resources. Water resources in the project area include wetlands, the St. Croix River, and Osceola Creek. The project includes ponds and other features to manage the stormwater runoff that comes from the Hwy 243 bridge and approach roadways. The project will reduce the volume of pollutants that are discharged to the St. Croix River.</p> <p>The project will build earthen causeways in the St. Croix River for contractors to access the existing bridge for demolition and construct the new bridge. The causeways will temporarily affect flood elevations and river flow. MnDOT and WisDOT are preparing permits for these construction impacts for the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources. The causeways will be removed, and the river bottom will be restored, per required permit conditions after construction.</p> <p>The project will affect 0.35 acres of wetlands. Bridge construction will affect the St. Croix River and the Osceola Creek. MnDOT and WisDOT are preparing permits for these impacts for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. MnDOT and WisDOT will provide replacement wetlands in a different location as a part of the project.</p>	<p>Appendix A (Figure A2 and Figure A3)</p> <p>Appendix G</p> <p>Appendix H</p>
13 (Section 4.1.13)	Contamination / Hazardous Materials / Wastes	Question 13 summarizes areas of known contamination. MnDOT studied current and past land uses to find potential contamination risks in the project area. Because MnDOT is concerned that there is the potential for pollution in the ground next to the bridge, MnDOT will conduct more studies and tests on the dirt/soil. This investigation is referred to as a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA). The Phase II ESA will be used to find the	Appendix I

EAW Question(s) (EA/EAW Section)	EAW Subject(s)	Summary	Appendices
		presence and extent of contamination in the project area. MnDOT will prepare a contaminated materials management plan for handling contamination encountered during construction.	
14 (Section 4.1.14)	Fish, Wildlife, Plant Communities, and Sensitive Ecological Resources	Question 14 includes a summary of plants, fish, and wildlife in and around the project area, including those protected by state and/or federal laws. The EAW describes what the project will do to avoid or decrease impacts to protected plants, fish, and wildlife. The EAW also describes the conservation measures to offset impacts to protected wildlife. The EAW, Appendix J, and Appendix K include input from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.	Appendix J Appendix K
15 (Section 4.1.15)	Historic Properties	Question 15 describes cultural resources and historic properties. MnDOT conducted cultural resources surveys in the project area. MnDOT and WisDOT work with the Minnesota and Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) to identify historic properties and to determine if the project will impact these properties. MnDOT and WisDOT determined the project would not affect historic resources.	Appendix J
16 (Section 4.1.16)	Visual	Question 16 summarizes visual resources and describes impacts to visual quality. MnDOT does not expect the project to result in long-term visual impacts to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and surrounding lands. MnDOT and WisDOT prepared a Visual Quality Manual for the project. The Visual Quality Manual describes design features to reduce visual impacts and enhance visual quality. Recommendations in the Visual Quality Manual will be added to the final bridge plans. MnDOT and WisDOT will construct a landscaping project after bridge construction is complete.	Appendix L
17 (Section 4.1.17)	Air	Question 17 describes impacts to air quality, including pollution from cars and trucks, dust, and odors. The project does not require a detailed air quality analysis because traffic volumes are below limits requiring a detailed analysis and because Minnesota and Wisconsin meet current air quality standards. MnDOT provides a list of activities that contractors building the bridge can use to reduce dust and odors during construction.	None
18 (Section 4.1.18)	Greenhouse Gas Emissions / Carbon Footprint	Question 18 summarizes greenhouse gas emissions that are likely to happen during construction. Table 4-12 includes greenhouse gas emission estimates for constructing the project.	None
19 (Section 4.1.19)	Noise	Question 19 describes traffic and construction noise impacts. MnDOT does not expect the project to increase traffic noise. Construction of the project will increase noise, but the noise increase will only be during construction. The EAW includes information on construction noise. Most construction activities will be during the day.	None
20 (Section 4.1.20)	Transportation	Question 20 describes impacts on traffic and parking. No new parking spaces will be created with the project. The project is not expected to increase traffic; however, future traffic is expected to grow by about 30 percent over the next 20 years due to planned growth and development.  The Hwy 243 bridge will be closed during construction. Traffic will be detoured to the US 8 bridge in Taylors Falls, Minnesota and St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. Temporary improvements will be constructed at the US 8/Hwy 95 intersection to improve traffic flow during construction.	Appendix A (Figure A4-1 through A4-9, Figure A5)
21 (Section 4.1.21)	Cumulative Potential Effects	Question 21 provides an overview of expected effects that may come from other projects, and continued growth and development in the project area, along with the project. Together, these activities are called “cumulative effects.” Table 4-16 summarizes environmental effects of the project. Table 4-17 lists other future actions in the project area. The EAW summarizes potential cumulative effects related to fish and wildlife resources, noise, transportation, and Section 4(f) resources.	None
22 (Section 4.1.22)	Other Potential Environmental Effects	MnDOT does not expect the project to cause other environmental effects. The project will implement conservation measures to decrease environmental impacts of the project and offset environmental impacts that cannot be avoided.	Appendix F

**Table 2. Summary of Hwy 243 Osceola Bridge Other Federal Issues**

EA/EAW Section	Other Federal Issues	Summary	Appendices
4.2.1	Social Impacts	<p>Social impacts include what the project will do to travel patterns and access, accessibility, community facilities, neighborhood cohesion, and transportation sensitive communities.</p> <p>The project will not cause permanent impacts to travel patterns. A detour route using the US 8 Bridge in Taylors Falls, Minnesota and St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin will be provided during construction.</p> <p>Design and construction of the project will follow accessibility requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act.</p> <p>The project will not affect community facilities or neighborhood cohesion. MnDOT and WisDOT will coordinate with emergency service providers in Minnesota and Wisconsin to ensure emergency access to the St. Croix River during construction. MnDOT and WisDOT also will coordinate with area schools regarding school bus trips and closure of the Hwy 243 bridge during construction.</p> <p>The project will not affect transportation sensitive communities. Pedestrians and bicyclists will benefit from the new shared-use path along Hwy 243 between Osceola Landing and Village of Osceola.</p>	None
4.2.2	Considerations Relating to Pedestrians and Bicyclists	<p>Considerations relating to pedestrians and bicyclists refers to existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the project area and what the project will do for walking, biking, and rolling.</p> <p>The project includes construction of a new shared-use path along Hwy 243 in Minnesota and Wisconsin and along the new bridge, connecting the Village of Osceola to Osceola Landing. The project also includes constructing a trail along the Wisconsin shoreline under the Hwy 243 bridge, connecting trails in Cascade Falls/Wilke Glen to Osceola Picnic Bluff.</p>	None
4.2.3	Environmental Justice	<p>Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice (EJ) directs all federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects on low-income and minority populations. A low-income population is in the EJ study area in Wisconsin. The EJ analysis in Appendix M describes the impacts that the project will have on the low-income population compared to non-low-income populations.</p> <p>The project will not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on any minority population or low-income population.</p>	Appendix M
4.2.4	Economics	<p>The Hwy 243 bridge will be closed for up to two years during construction. A detour route using the US 8 Bridge in Taylors Falls, Minnesota and St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin will be provided. Business community engagement will continue through final design and construction to keep businesses informed of project activities and schedules.</p>	None
4.2.5	Relocation	<p>The project will not require any residential or commercial business relocations.</p>	None
4.2.6	Right of Way	<p>The project will not require any right of way acquisition. Land owned by the National Park Service at Osceola Landing will be used during bridge construction.</p>	None
4.2.7	Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act of 1966	<p>Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act of 1966 is a federal law that protects publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife areas, and waterfowl refuges. Section 4(f) also protects significant historic sites. Six Section 4(f) resources, including local parks, trails, and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway are along Hwy 243 and the Hwy 243 bridge.</p> <p>The project will result in temporary impacts to the St. Croix State Water Trail and the Cascade Trail along the Wisconsin shoreline under the Hwy 243 bridge. The St. Croix State Water Trail and Cascade Trail will be temporarily closed during construction. The letters with the Minnesota Department of</p>	Appendix N

EA/EAW Section	Other Federal Issues	Summary	Appendices
		<p>Natural Resources and Village of Osceola in Appendix N describe what the project will do to decrease temporary impacts to the St. Croix State Water Trail and Cascade Trail.</p> <p>The Section 4(f) <i>de minimis</i> report in Appendix N describes the impacts to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, what the project will do to avoid and decrease impacts, and mitigation measures that will be incorporated into the project, and enhancements to the surrounding environment. This report also summarizes project coordination meetings and activities with the National Park Service. FHWA will request concurrence from the National Park Service that the project will not adversely affect the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway following the EA/EAW comment period.</p>	
4.2.8	Section 6(f) / Land and Water Conservation Fund Act	The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act is federal program that provides funding to protect outdoor recreation areas. Recreation lands and outdoor places developed with LWCF Act funds are protected from conversions to non-recreational uses. The project will not use any land bought or developed with LWCF Act funds.	None
4.2.9	Noise	The project does not require a traffic noise analysis under FHWA regulations. Question 19 in the EAW form describes construction noise.	Appendix J
4.2.10	Farmland Protection Policy Act	The Farmland Protection Policy Act requires federal agencies to examine the impact of projects that convert farmland to non-agricultural uses. The project will not affect farmland.	None
4.2.11	Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act	<p>Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires federal agencies to cooperate to conserve threatened and endangered species and listed critical habitat. Projects that affect protected species and/or critical habitat must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.</p> <p>Question 14 in the EAW form and Appendix K describe potential effects to federally threatened and endangered wildlife and critical habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing the project and will issue a Biological Opinion this fall. MnDOT and WisDOT will implement conservation measures to decrease and offset impacts to protected wildlife.</p>	Appendix K
4.2.12	Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act	<p>Projects that use federal funding or require federal permits must follow Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The Section 106 regulations require MnDOT and WisDOT to consider the impacts of the Hwy 243 Osceola Bridge Project on historic properties.</p> <p>MnDOT and WisDOT determined the project would not affect historic properties.</p>	Appendix J
4.2.13	Section 7(a) of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act	<p>The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is a federally designated wild and scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is a federal law protecting the free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values of Wild and Scenic Rivers, including the St. Croix River.</p> <p>The project will be reviewed by NPS under Section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. NPS will decide if the project would or would not have a direct and adverse effect on the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. NPS will release its Section 7(a) evaluation and determination after the EA/EAW process is complete.</p>	Appendix P

## Next Steps

MnDOT will publish the EA/EAW notice of availability in the Minnesota EQB *Monitor*. This begins a 30-day period during which anyone can provide comments on the EA/EAW and the Hwy 243 Osceola Bridge Project. MnDOT will put an official legal notice in the *Country Messenger*, *Osceola Sun*, and *Wisconsin State Journal*. After the 30-day comment period, MnDOT must decide if an EIS is needed. MnDOT will prepare a Record of Decision, including a Findings of Fact and respond to comments collected during the comment period. MnDOT will distribute notice of this decision in the EQB *Monitor* and to those that provide comments on the document. This step concludes the Minnesota environmental review process.

FHWA also must decide if an EIS is needed. If FHWA decides that there are no significant impacts associated with the project, then FHWA will prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The FONSI summarizes potential impacts to the environment because of the project and includes responses to comments collected during the comment period. MnDOT will distribute notice of the FONSI decision on behalf of FHWA. This step concludes the Federal environmental review process.

## List of EA/EAW Appendices

- A. Figures
- B. Purpose and Need Statement
- C. Alternatives
- D. Bridge Type Study
- E. Constructability Report
- F. Environmental Management Plan
- G. Wetland Impact Assessment & Two-Part Finding
- H. Floodplain Assessment
- I. Contaminated Properties
- J. Agency Correspondence
- K. Biological Assessment
- L. Visual Impact Assessment
- M. Environmental Justice Analysis
- N. Section 4(f) Documents
- O. Benefit Cost Analysis Document
- P. National Park Service Correspondence