



# Friends of the Mississippi River

Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area

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Fall 2009

## Mississippi River to Get New Rules to Guide Development

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The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area has a range of uses and a landscape that changes dramatically from one end to the other. During the rulemaking process, new districts that better match the changing geography and diverse resources of the river will provide the framework to address protection strategies for natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational assets of the corridor. Left Photo: Pine Bend Scientific and Natural Area; photo by Tim Boyle. Right Photo: Mississippi River Challenge paddlers pass under the Stone Arch Bridge; photo by Verna Marie Jones.

By Irene Jones

The Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metropolitan area is one of the nation's most famous landscapes. And now, after over 150 years of development and more than 30 years of protection under state law, the 72-mile Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) will soon wear a new shield of state conservation rules.

Earlier this year, Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) led the effort to pass legislation that will guide and fund state rulemaking for the MRCCA. "This new law marks a major milestone for FMR and the River," said FMR's Board Chair, Peter Gove, "and we look forward to playing a constructive role in development of the new rules."

Established in the mid-1970s by Executive Order, the MRCCA is intricately linked to FMR's own 16-year history. By the late 1980s, growing concerns about the unique natural, scenic and cultural resources of the MRCCA led Congress to designate the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), a unit of the National Park Service congruent with the MRCCA. Led by Gove and others, FMR was founded a few years later to provide a citizen voice to growing efforts to protect and enhance the new National Park. The corridor encompasses portions of some 30 governmental subdivisions. Local governments have the lead role in protection and regulation of the corridor, but the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) provides oversight and the Park Service provides assistance and support.

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### Mission

Friends of the Mississippi River engages citizens to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities region.

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## From the Director

One of the great pleasures of my job is the time I get to spend down at the river poking my canoe into a backwater lake or learning what the small-mouth are hitting from a grizzled old fisherman in the shade of a bridge.



Whitney Clark,  
*Executive Director*

But sometimes you find important lessons in unlikely places and one of those places was on my couch recently watching the Ken Burns film *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. The film reminded me of something that I already knew but that is too easy to forget: each and every one of our national parks — these incredible natural and cultural treasures — exist because people who loved them stood up to fight to protect them.

To our great credit as a nation, some deep-seated democratic ideal has somehow prevailed and these places that might have been mined, logged, or subdivided and sold off have instead been set-aside as Teddy Roosevelt said “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”

We have one such treasure right here in the Twin Cities. A 72-mile reach of the Mississippi River stretching from Dayton to Hastings, designated by congress as a National

Park — the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA).

But it is also true that though the Park has been designated it hasn't yet been protected. That work is ongoing and really it is the purpose which Friends of the Mississippi River was founded to pursue.

The great river still faces many challenges from development pressure on its scenic bluffs to massive water quality degradation from agricultural runoff and urban stormwater.

John Muir said “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in

where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul.” And that statement is especially true in a growing metropolitan area like the Twin Cities. The Mississippi is our National Park. It is ours to love, ours to use and enjoy and ours to protect. If we can't find the resolve to do it, no one will.

*...each and every one of our national parks — these incredible natural and cultural treasures — exist because people who loved them stood up to fight to protect them.*

## Leave YOUR river legacy by joining the Mississippi River Legacy Society!

### By Heather Haynes

River stewardship is a long-term commitment and, to be truly effective, conservation organizations have to have staying power. You can help ensure Friends of the Mississippi River's ability to address long-term challenges for years to come by making a planned gift to our Mississippi River Legacy Society. A planned gift can be as simple as a bequest in a will or the donation of a life insurance policy. You can also make a planned gift through a trust, annuity, or other planned giving method.

Talk with your financial or estate planner, visit FMR's web site ([http://www.fmr.org/support/planned\\_giving](http://www.fmr.org/support/planned_giving)), or call Heather at 651-222-2193 ext. 20 to learn more about making a gift to the river that benefits current and future generations. Create your river legacy today.

# Program Highlights

## Saving Lake Pepin (and everything upstream)

By Trevor Russell

Lake Pepin, a natural lake on the Mississippi River near Lake City, has been around for thousands of years and drains about 48,634 square miles (or 56%) of Minnesota. It is home to world class boating, fishing and other water recreation activities — it's even the birthplace of waterskiing. Sadly, this extraordinary natural resource may not have long to live.

Though the lake is massive (it covers about 40 square miles with an average depth of 18 feet), sediment from the Mississippi River threatens to completely fill in the upper portion of the lake within 100 years. The entire lake could be gone in fewer than 300 years at the current rate of sedimentation. In the meantime, the impacts of excess phosphorous have placed the lake on Minnesota's list of Impaired Waters.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is leading a large stakeholder group to answer key questions about the sources of the pollution and best course of action, as a part of the Lake Pepin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL).

A TMDL is a study that identifies the total amount of any given pollutant that a water body can receive and still meet its state water quality standards. A TMDL is more than just a number — it's a process by which we determine how much pollution is entering a water body and it enables us to appor-



The confluence of the St. Croix River (darker water) and Mississippi River (brown, cloudy water). Mississippi River sediments, largely from the Minnesota River Basin, threaten to completely fill in the upper portion of Lake Pepin in 90-100 years.

tion pollution reductions among the various sources. The MPCA, after years of study, is ready to release new Lake Pepin pollution reduction targets that could dramatically reduce pollution to more than half of Minnesota's waters.

The draft TMDL calls for 50% reductions in sediment and nutrient flows in the Minnesota and Cannon Rivers and 20% in the Mississippi, Vermillion and St. Croix Rivers — all of which contribute pollutants to Lake Pepin. The TMDL will also require major improvements in the way cities manage stormwater, and major reductions (as high as 70% by 2030) in allowable phosphorous effluent from many wastewater treatment facilities.

FMR has participated in the stakeholder group and plans to host a public hearing on the TMDL in partnership with the MPCA next spring. We are working hard to ensure that the Lake Pepin TMDL ushers in a new era of water quality protection and management in Minnesota.

## Natural Resource Management Planning Reading the Landscape, Writing its Future

By Karen Schik and Irene Jones

Over the years, FMR has engaged thousands of volunteers and dozens of landowners in restoring native plant communities on land that surrounds and connects to the Mississippi River.

Many landowners, both public and private, seek the benefits of preserving and restoring native landscapes to improve habitat, protect water quality, and celebrate our natural heritage of prairie, wetland and forest landscapes. But to do this successfully and sustainably requires a thorough understanding of the property, careful planning, and a commitment to ongoing monitoring and management.

A Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) is a tool to help landowners get this done. A NRMP describes the past, present and desired future natural conditions of a piece of property. But it's not as dry as all that. The process of preparing a NRMP is all about discovery. By delving into historic aerial photographs, poring through geologic information, and talking to those who know the land best - the landowners - we discover much about the ancient and more

recent site history. What geologic forces acted on and shaped the land, what plants and animals were there before Europeans arrived, how the land was used, and how those activities changed the land.

All of this discovery of past and present conditions leads to discovery of future intent, which is the primary purpose of a NRMP – to determine how to restore and maintain the important ecological functions of the land. This is where FMR's skilled restoration ecologists put their years of experience to work, detailing plans to control invasive species, re-establish native grasses, shrubs, and trees, re-vegetate streambanks, etc.. After more than ten years of planning and implementing those plans the Mississippi River landscape is coming back to health — one property at a time.



Conducting fieldwork - Karen Schik, FMR's lead restoration ecologist.

# Program Updates

## FMR Partners with Riverside Park Neighbors

By Irene Jones

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) has begun a new partnership with the Riverside Park Task Force of the West Bank Community Coalition (WBCC) in Minneapolis. The Task Force, made up of a dedicated group of local citizens and students, reached out to FMR last year for assistance with initiating an ecological restoration project along the bluff at Riverside Park. Riverside Park, adjacent to the University and downtown Minneapolis, is located in the heart of a diverse community of recent immigrants, students, and families. The four-acre natural area consists of a terraced forested bluff, bisected by a staircase that connects the upper and lower areas of the park.

As a first step, FMR is developing an ecological restoration and management plan. Once the plan is completed, the community will work with FMR's Gorge Stewards Program and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to begin resto-



Riverside Park near downtown Minneapolis. © Regents of the University of Minnesota. Used with permission of the Metropolitan Design Center.

ration activities such as removing buckthorn and installing native plantings at the site.

In addition to assessing the ecological needs of the site, the plan will include a cultural history of the park, and will incorporate local research about the potential for neighborhood volunteer involvement in carrying out the plan. The plan is scheduled to be completed early in 2010 with the first restoration activities occurring next spring.

## FMR Working On Three Land Protection Projects

By Dave Dempsey

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) has recently facilitated three important land protection projects in the watershed – one of them now complete – that provide important public benefits, including habitat stewardship, scenic values and water quality.

The children of the late Joanne and Joseph Murnane donated seven acres to expand the Hastings Sand Coulee Scientific and Natural Area. After moving to the neighborhood in 1987, Joanne and Joe had successfully fought against a proposal to

Students from Hastings High School are helping with ongoing restoration at the Karpen property, a 5-acre site that will have a conservation easement held by Dakota County. Tecla Karpen (pictured right) enchants students with the history of the property, owned by her family since 1857. Photo by Karen Schik



mine the sand and gravel from the coulee which would have destroyed the native prairie. After their deaths, FMR Conservation Director Tom Lewanski worked with their children to permanently protect their property. The Sand Coulee is the largest remnant sand gravel prairie in the county. It contains 13 rare species of plant and animals.

A second project will protect 41 acres in Ravenna Township, on the bluff overlooking the ecologically significant Vermillion Bottoms. Landowners Carolyn and Dennis Emrick have agreed to donate half of the value of a permanent conservation easement to the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program with the County purchasing the other half. The land, which has been in the family dating to the original breaking of the prairie, is now mostly farmland but will be restored to oak savanna.

Another project nearing completion is a five acre blufftop parcel of wooded land overlooking Lake Rebecca in Hastings. FMR has worked closely with landowner Tecla Karpen to restore and manage the natural communities on the property for several years and now the land will be permanently protected through a conservation easement held by the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program.

FMR would like to thank these landowners for their dedication to ensuring that these properties continue to provide habitat, water quality benefits and scenic beauty for genera-

## Gap in Minneapolis Park System Focus of FMR-led Stakeholder Group

By Bob Spaulding

A missing parkway link downriver from the Stone Arch Bridge has long been a concern addressed in Minneapolis' plans. But advocates hope that a September 21st discussion will provide the momentum needed to turn the plans into reality.

Along with Park Board President Tom Nordyke and area State Representative Phyllis Kahn, Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) convened a meeting that included key government and neighborhood stakeholders. The meeting focused on what was needed to move forward three inter-related components of park improvements.

First, the Park Board has prioritized the need for substantial capital improvements to repair broken staircases and access at Father Hennepin Bluffs Park, just upstream of the east end of the Stone Arch Bridge.

Second is the growing recognition of the need to acquire for parkland the 600 Main Street SE site, just downstream of the east end of the Stone Arch Bridge. Because of its key location adjacent to the river, the land is identified in city and regional plans as future parkland. In recent months, property owner Bluff Street Development has twice tried unsuccessfully to gain city approvals for a 79 to 98-unit apartment project on the site. Currently, the land remains privately owned, awaiting the public funding needed to buy it.

The third component would finally bridge a key missing gap in Minneapolis' parkway system. The Park Board would create a connection between Main Street's end at the Stone Arch Bridge and East River Road, where it terminates on the University's East Bank Campus. The City and Park Board are seeking federal funding for the project.

The diverse representatives at the September meeting hoped the discussion will begin a collaboration that can overcome the obstacles and move forward on a cohesive set of improvements for this key reach of the Mississippi.

The East River Parkway missing link extends from the University to the east end of Father Hennepin Bluffs Park in southeast Minneapolis. Photo by Bob Spaulding



The Blue Star City initiative will recognize cities that take positive steps to prevent stormwater pollution, such as the green roof atop the Minneapolis Public Library designed by Kestral Design Group, Inc. with Cesar Pelli & Associates as Design Architect and Architectural Alliance as Architect of Record. Photo by Kestral Design Group, Inc.

## New Program Aims to Recognize Cities for Clean Water Excellence

By Trevor Russell

As communities develop, new surfaces like roads, roofs and parking lots often replace prairies, forests and wetlands. These new impervious surfaces, unlike their predecessors, are unable to absorb rainfall and filter water back into the ground.

As a result, communities are increasingly facing the impacts of stormwater runoff – rainfall and snow melt that washes across impervious surfaces and into storm drains – carrying untreated pollutants like bacteria, salt, trash, and sediments directly to nearby lakes and rivers.

While the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) requires minimum controls for stormwater pollution, some of our communities are working hard to exceed these standards and achieve excellence in stormwater management.

The brand new Blue Star Recognition Program, to be launched next year, will offer communities that excel in stormwater management the positive public recognition that they deserve. Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR), in partnership with Emmons and Olivier Resources Inc. and the MPCA's Green Step Cities Initiative, is currently developing an assessment to measure municipal stormwater management efforts. Cities that have adopted advanced stormwater management policies and practices will achieve Blue Star recognition as a community that has made extraordinary efforts to protect and preserve Minnesota's water resources.

The project is funded with a grant from the Irwin Andrew Porter Foundation, with local support from the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.

# Critical Area Rulemaking at a Glance

## Purpose of rulemaking:

To ensure the MRCCA is managed as a multi-purpose resource in a way that:

- Conserves the scenic, environmental, recreational, mineral, economic, cultural, and historic resources and functions of the river corridor;
- Maintains the river channel for transportation;
- Provides for the continuation and development of a variety of urban uses;
- Provides for certain reaches of the river as a source of water supply and as a receiving water for treated sewage and industrial effluent properly treated sewage, stormwater, and industrial waste effluents; and
- Protects and preserves the biological and ecological functions of the corridor.

## River resources and features that must be protected or enhanced:

- Floodplains, wetlands, and gorges;
- Areas of confluence with key tributaries, natural drainage routes, shorelines, and riverbanks;
- Bluffs;
- Steep slopes and very steep slopes, unstable soils, and bedrock;
- Significant existing vegetative stands, tree canopies, and native plant communities;
- Scenic views and vistas, publicly owned parks, trails, and open spaces;
- Cultural and historic sites and structures; and
- Water quality.

## Other key components of rulemaking:

- Mapping of all the corridor bluffs and steep slopes;
- Consideration of comprehensive plans adopted by local corridor municipalities; and
- Establishment of new MRCCA districts that take diverse river features and characteristics into account.

## Timeline:

- Rulemaking must begin by January 2010;
- There will be opportunities for stakeholders to comment before and after the DRAFT rule is released by the DNR;
- Rulemaking usually takes 18 months, but this process could take two years or longer; and
- Cities and townships will be required to enforce the new rules through their municipal ordinances within six months of formal adoption of rules.



The Mississippi River is famous for its scenic bluffs, but regulating for bluffs and scenic views can be tricky and controversial. Mapping bluffs and assessing scenic resources will employ modern technologies and methods during the rulemaking process. Photo: Vento's View – looking north from Lilydale Park. Photo by Whitney Clark

## *Continued from cover*

In spite of both state and federal protections, FMR and many other stakeholders came to view the Critical Area protections as inherently weak and cumbersome to implement and enforce. After leading a series of stakeholder meetings for the DNR in 2007 and a legislative study group in 2008, FMR worked with Representative Rick Hansen and Senator Katie Sieben to draft the new legislation for the MRCCA.

Already more than two years in the making, the updated MRCCA protections may take another two years to become final. In that process, the interests of dozens of cities and townships, landowners, businesses and developers, the National Park Service, the general public, and conservation and environmental groups will all need balancing.

But in the end, according to FMR Executive Director Whitney Clark, the matter boils down to this: “Much of the land in the Critical Area is privately owned, but the Mississippi River belongs to all of us and really we are holding it in trust for future generations. The challenge is to develop rules that respect the rights of property owners while safeguarding the river’s public values. We believe that is possible.”

While the rulemaking process will not be without challenge and controversy, FMR and other conservation groups are eager to get started. “FMR is excited about the opportunity to participate in developing rules that will work with 21st Century realities,” continued Clark. “For example, mapping the corridor’s bluffs and steep slopes using modern technology will ultimately lead to more nuanced, and hopefully more effective, protection of the river’s unique and changing geography.”

Protection of bluffs and scenic vistas was among the greatest concerns raised by stakeholders prior to passage of the new law. These resources were also identified as more difficult to measure and regulate. Location of the bluffline (top of bluff) is important for two reasons: 1) limiting development on bluffs and steep slopes prevents erosion, and 2) requiring

buildings to be setback from the bluff is a strategy for protecting scenic views and vistas. Defining and mapping the bluffs in the corridor will go a long way towards resolving these issues.

Yet even as modern methods and technology will improve our knowledge of bluffs in the corridor, evaluating scenic resources remains more of an art than a science. A few years ago the National Park Service successfully created an assessment tool to measure and rank scenic views along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Seeing the potential opportunity, MNRRA convened a workshop that offered classroom and field sessions on the science of visual analysis and protecting important views, based on the Blue Ridge Parkway tool. Teams of participants in the field sessions ranked views of the St. Paul river valley from Indian Mounds Regional Park to the Mississippi River gorge from the Summit Avenue overlook.

Susan Overson, a MNRRA landscape architect and park planner who coordinated the workshop, says the Blue Ridge Parkway methodology wasn't directly transferable to the Mississippi River corridor. "Twin Cities residents are not looking just for pretty postcard views, but a mix and balance that includes scenic, cultural and natural resources."

The visual quality workshops along with research conducted by a graduate student have added to the toolbox for evaluating scenic resources. The research identifies several existing models, beyond the Blue Ridge Parkway tool, for taking a scientific approach to ranking scenic views. FMR is working with MNRRA and volunteers to expand our combined photo collections of the river's scenic resources and apply some of the criteria for assessment suggested by the research.

Protection of scenic views and vistas can be controversial, because aesthetics are often considered subjective. "What is interesting about the research is that, when studied, it turns out personal aesthetics are not as varied as one might assume," said Bob Spaulding, FMR's River Advocate. "There are some very common themes of likes and dislikes." The downtown areas will likely present the greatest challenges because of the presence of natural, cultural, historic, urban, and industrial all mixed together along the corridor.

To learn more about the rulemaking process and opportunities for public comment, look at the sidebar on the previous page and stay tuned to the FMR website.

## New Staff!

### Two New Faces on FMR Staff



FMR has recently welcomed two new staff members. Ecologist and Project Manager **Ellen Fuge** is a veteran of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources where she was responsible for managing the health of Minnesota's more than 140 Scientific and Natural Areas. She has a master's degree in botany from the University of Minnesota and also worked as lead ecologist for Great River Greening.

Ellen joins long-time FMR Ecologist, Karen Schik, significantly increasing the organization's capacity to work with public and private landowners to restore and manage important natural areas along the river. "Ellen's great skills and experience are surpassed only by her passion for caring for these very special natural places," says FMR Conservation Director, Tom Lewanski. "We're pleased and proud to have her on our team."



**Barbara Heintz** is FMR's new Bookkeeper. A longtime administrative and financial professional, Barb was formerly the financial administrator of St. Mark's Lutheran Church and senior accountant for the Association of Minnesota Counties and the Minnesota Counties Insurance Trust. From 1992-2002 she was a fulltime homemaker by choice, raising her children until the youngest entered school. She has a degree in accounting from Iowa State University. FMR is excited to have Barb working in our finance department.

## Thank You, Volunteers!

By sue rich

Have you ever walked along the river trail in south Minneapolis or St. Paul's Crosby Park and noticed songbirds (instead of thickets of invasive species)? Have you marveled at the view from Pine Bend Bluffs or caught a trout in the Vermillion River? Did you paddle the Mississippi River Challenge, or see a spray-painted stencil in the street that warns "Please Don't Pollute - Drains to River"?

These things are only possible thanks to some 3,000 hard-working habitat restorers, storm-drain stencilers, stream monitors, and event assistants - not to mention the in-office interns and helpers who worked hundreds of hours behind the scenes this year. Thank you, volunteers. You are truly friends of the Mississippi River.



# Friends of the Mississippi River

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## 2009 Mississippi River Challenge Breaks Participation Record!



Paddlers depart Lock & Dam #1 on Saturday afternoon of the Mississippi River Challenge. Photo credit: Tim Boyle

By Kristin Nierengarten

To simply say that the 2009 Mississippi River Challenge was a success is to tell an incomplete story. This year Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is proud to announce the highest paddler registration ever with over 430 people discovering the charms of the great river up close. We also had our highest volunteer participation in the six-year history of the event with more than 200 people donating time to help make the event run smoothly.

With the help of our hard working, pledge raising paddlers, and the outstanding generosity of our sponsors, FMR raised more than \$110,000! Thank you to all who participated by paddling, volunteering, or pledging!

Finally, very special thanks are due to each of our sponsors: Otogawa-Anschel Design-Build, Great River Energy, Hoigaards, American Canoe Association, Historic Fort Snelling, Pioneer Press, Kare 11, Minnesota Monthly, Summit Brewing Company, Aveda, Thousand Hills Cattle Co., Wenonah Canoe/Current Designs, Sea Kayaker Magazine, Aggregate Industries, National Park Service, Whole Foods, Friends of Bruce Vento, Northeast Bank, Midwest Mountaineering, Midway Party Rental, Wilderness Inquiry, Wild River Outfitters, REI, Big River Magazine, Mississippi Market, Peace Coffee, and Northwest Canoe Company.

Please visit our website [www.mississippiriverchallenge.org](http://www.mississippiriverchallenge.org) for more information about all of our sponsors.

Mark your calendars. Next year's Mississippi River Challenge is scheduled for July 24 & 25, 2010.

We hope to see you there!

## Stay in touch!

By sue rich

This newsletter comes every few months, but river-related news and activities are year-round. To stay in touch:

- Sign up for "Mississippi Messages," a monthly calendar and e-newsletter, via the blue box on the right at [www.fmr.org](http://www.fmr.org).
- Visit [www.fmr.org](http://www.fmr.org) and subscribe to FMR's RSS feed (the orange button) to have updates posted to your personalized news reader.
- Search for "FMR" and become a fan on Facebook.
- Follow "@friendsmissriv" on Twitter.

Are you an FMR member who prefers to receive communications through the mail? Contact Kerry Walsh at 651.222.2193 x22 to request occasional print event notices.

**Save the date!**  
Mississippi River Challenge  
July 24 & 25, 2010



FMR is proud to be a member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund ([www.mnenvirofund.org](http://www.mnenvirofund.org))