

Gorge Stewards Quarterly

Published by Friends of the Mississippi River • Volume 2 Number 3

It's "Fall" about Buckthorn

Fall is almost here and it is the best time of year to remove one of the most prevalent and troublesome exotic species along the Mississippi River Gorge – buckthorn. By now you've probably at least heard of the invasive shrub or maybe even helped to remove it from the river gorge or other natural areas. This fall you can join Friends of the Mississippi River in the fight against buckthorn and help to preserve the diversity and ecological integrity of the river gorge.

Why battle buckthorn?

Buckthorn is an exotic shrub from Europe that was introduced to North America as an ornamental hedge. Since it is not native to the area, there is an absence of natural predators and ecological factors to keep its growth in check. Consequently, buckthorn is rapidly taking over habitat in the gorge and out-competing native species, effectively eliminating plant diversity. Buckthorn has a competitive edge due to its long growing season and wide-range of tolerable habitat conditions. It also produces berries that have a laxative effect on the birds that eat them, dispersing seeds along the gorge flyway. The threats that buckthorn poses to native wildlife and natural areas has led to it being included on the state "Restricted noxious weeds" list and its sale is banned in Minnesota.

Buckthorn in the Gorge

Buckthorn is growing in many areas along the Mississippi River Gorge, on both public and private property. Parkland on either side of the gorge has seen heavy infestation of buckthorn and both the Minneapolis and St. Paul parks departments have worked in cooperation with neighborhood organizations and volunteers to clear out areas of buckthorn in an effort to restore native plant diversity. With ongoing maintenance and periodic removal of newly sprouted seedlings, many park areas that were at one time completely overtaken by buckthorn have been successfully restored.

But buckthorn is not exclusive to parkland and its spread can persist due to the growth of buckthorn hedges and trees on private property. Birds can spread the seeds of buckthorn from private property to the river gorge so even if you live far from parkland, any buckthorn on your property is contributing to the problem. For removal efforts on our parklands to be completely successful, we must also remove buckthorn from our yards and private property.



Take Action!

Help battle buckthorn this fall as Friends of the Mississippi River teams up with community partners to remove buckthorn from areas along the river gorge in St. Paul and Minneapolis and on private properties in the Longfellow and Seward neighborhoods in Minneapolis.

Private Property Buckthorn Bust

This year the Longfellow Community Council (LCC) and Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG) will be working together on an inter-neighborhood buckthorn bust. Residents who have buckthorn in their yard can participate in the bust by applying for up to \$100 in new matching grant funds to pay for buckthorn removal on their property. People also have the option to remove buckthorn on their own and can then take advantage of a free brush collection on November 1st. Even if you don't have buckthorn in your yard, you can help make the project successful by volunteering in a number of ways. You can be part of the survey crew that identifies homes with buckthorn, pass out information about the program at local churches or schools, help cut buckthorn for elderly or disabled residents, or volunteer on the pick-up day to help stack and haul buckthorn. Please consider participating as we work together to enhance native plant communities throughout the river gorge. For more information or to volunteer, contact Hillary Oppmann, LCC Community Organizer for Environment and River Gorge Issues, at hillary@longfellow.org or 612-722-4529.

River Gorge Parkland Removals

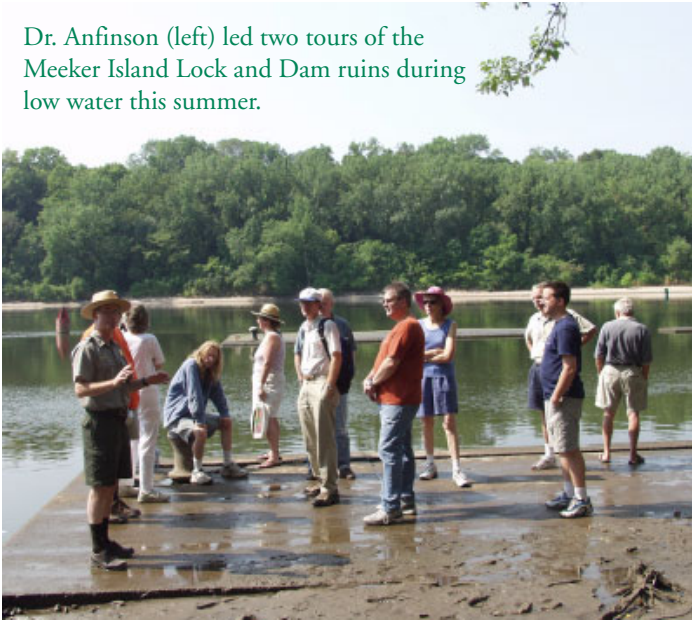
This fall, two buckthorn removals are scheduled to take place along the river gorge in the St. Paul neighborhoods of Merriam Park and Mac-Groveland. Friends of the Mississippi River will be working with St. Paul Parks to remove buckthorn around the Summit Avenue overlook and from areas around Desnoyer Park. Volunteers are needed to help hand-pull buckthorn seedlings and haul brush that is cut by staff from St. Paul Parks. On Saturday, September 20th we will be working along the river in Desnoyer Park from 9-noon and on Saturday, October 11th a removal will take place at the Summit Avenue Overlook from 9-noon. These events are following recommendations from a comprehensive ecological management plan that was recently completed for the St. Paul river gorge area. To volunteer, contact Katie Galloway from Friends of the Mississippi River at 651/222-2193 x5 or kgallowa@fmr.org.

Meeker Island Tour a Big Hit

On Saturday, August 16th over fifty people joined the Gorge Stewards tour of the Meeker Island Lock and Dam ruins. The tour was led by Dr. John Anfinson, historian for the National Park Service, who informed participants about the historical significance of the Mississippi River's first lock and dam. Dr. Anfinson provided an overview of the construction of the structure and explained how the rivalry between Minneapolis and St. Paul and the demand for hydropower led the Corps to destroy the top five feet of the dam only five years after its completion.

Due to very low water levels at the time of the tour, the ordinarily submerged lock ruins stood perfectly out of the water so that participants could actually stand and walk along the lock wall. This was a rare opportunity, and we were pleased to give so many people this extraordinary experience on the river.

Dr. Anfinson (left) led two tours of the Meeker Island Lock and Dam ruins during low water this summer.



Gorge Stewards Calendar

All activities are free and open to the public. This calendar is subject to change (and grow!)

September 18th - Prairie Seed Collection
West River Parkway & 36th Street, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

September 20th - Buckthorn Removal
East River Road - Desnoyer Park, 9 a.m. - noon

September 21st - Prairie Weeding
West River Parkway & 25th Street, 1-3 p.m.

October 9th - Prairie Seed Collection
West River Parkway & 36th Street, 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

October 11th - Buckthorn Removal
East River Road & Summit Avenue, 9 a.m. - noon

October 11th - Sumac Haul and Stack
West River Parkway & 36th Street, 9 a.m. - noon

**November 1st - Private Property
Buckthorn Removal/Pick-up**
Longfellow & Seward Neighborhoods

November - Mussels and Fish of the Gorge
With Mike Davis of the DNR. Date and location TBA

The Mississippi River Gorge Stewards is a neighborhood approach to protecting, restoring and interpreting a natural sanctuary in the heart of the Twin Cities sponsored by Friends of the Mississippi River. Funding is provided by the Longfellow Community Council, the Seward Neighborhood Group, Recreational Equipment Incorporated, Gannett Foundation (as recommended by KARE 11) and the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

*For more information about the Gorge Stewards Project or to get involved,
please contact Katie Galloway at Friends of the Mississippi River
651/222-2193 or kgallowa@fmr.org.*



Friends of the Mississippi River
46 East Fourth Street, Suite 606
Saint Paul, MN 55101

www.fmr.org

Friends of the Mississippi River is a leading citizen organization working to protect and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.