

Gorge Stewards Quarterly

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New for Gorge Stewards!

Friends of the Mississippi River has added some exciting new components to the Gorge Stewards Project, which is now in its fourth year. Read below about the new “Foray” model that will enable us to respond more quickly and effectively to problems that arise in the gorge such as infestations of invasive species and illegal dumping. In addition, we are working closely with a team of ecologists to help guide our restoration work in the gorge. Cynthia Lane and Carolyn Carr, of Ecological Strategies, LLP, and FMR’s Restoration Ecologist Karen Schik will assist with planning volunteer activities and help lead some of the events.

Gorge Steward Forays Take Off

Gorge Stewards project is embarking on a new approach to gorge protection and restoration efforts this year. The goal is to organize small groups of volunteers (4-10 people) to carry out projects under the leadership of other gorge stewards.

Gorge Stewards participate in many events each year, trail monitors actively keep watch over their sections of trail, and park staff does all they can with shrinking resources to preserve our natural areas. But even with all this activity, more attention and hard work are needed to maintain the work already begun by neighborhood volunteers, and to take greater control of invasive species. The foray approach is designed to enable active volunteers to respond quickly to problems in the gorge.

Last June, ten Gorge Stewards met for an informal training and description of the foray model. Foray leaders will lead either private forays of friends, neighbors and/or family members, or public forays with volunteers recruited by FMR. Since then about a dozen forays have taken place with volunteers weeding the planting at 36th Street, removing buckthorn, picking up litter and participating in a fungi survey (see article on next page).

If you’re interested in becoming a foray leader or participating in a foray, contact Beth at FMR. You’ll help enhance current protection efforts at key sites within the gorge through invasive species removal, seed collection, weeding of planted or restored prairie plants, litter clean-up, fire ring removal, and more.

Or, if you see something that needs immediate attention, such as large amounts of trash, recent graffiti, or a new infestation of invasive species, please contact Beth and we will try to organize a foray (or if needed, contact the park agency) to address the problem.

Gorge Stewards Kate Smith (left) and Carolyn Carr participated in a “Weeding Foray” this summer to help maintain the native prairie planting installed last spring at the 36th Street picnic area.



Minnehaha Students Learn About Gorge Stewardship and Remove Invasive Species

At Minnehaha Academy, every student in grades 9-12 takes part in a spring service project. Since the campus is located near West River Parkway, this service requirement is a great opportunity to foster a sense of place that connects students to the Mississippi River, and introduces them to gorge protection activities.

This year, more than 150 Minnehaha Academy science students attended presentations by FMR staff. They learned about the history and significance of the gorge, the critical role neighborhood volunteers play in gorge stewardship, and the threat of invasive species to native plant communities. In May, the students removed garlic mustard from the gorge, focusing on areas where desirable native plants are in danger of being crowded out by this herbaceous invasive. This Fall, the students put more of their stewardship energy into the gorge by participating in a buckthorn species removal at the Oak Savanna restoration site.

Thanks to Dr. Carmella Whaley and Laura McLendon for facilitating these events, and to all the students who donned gloves and bug spray—we appreciate your work!



Fungi Forays Offer Unique Experience

This season a small group of Gorge Stewards took part in a unique opportunity—fungi survey forays under the leadership of Bryn Dentinger, a PhD candidate in Plant Biology at the University of Minnesota. Bryn's goal is to further document the diversity of fungi in Minnesota and educate citizens about the importance of mushrooms.

Bryn and co-leader Sarah Nassif directed three fungi forays at the Oak Savanna site on West River Parkway at 36th Street, teaching volunteers the basics of mushroom identification and collection. The ecology of the fungal community at this site will be compared to oak savanna at the Cedar Creek Natural History Area, also a focus of Bryn's research.

Mushroom specimens will be processed for permanent storage in the University of Minnesota Fungal Herbarium. We are excited that Bryn is involving the local community by partnering with the Gorge Stewards for these forays. The fungi collection and documentation will both serve the scientific community and benefit the citizens of gorge neighborhoods!

At the fungi foray held in early August, we made some interesting discoveries: four *Russula subpunctata*, one *Lactarius* species, *Gyroporus castaneus*, *Hydnum repandum*, one *Inocybe* species, and one *Scleroderma* species. We also collected the uncommon *Tremella reticulata* and *Melanophyllum echinatum*, which is not ectomycorrhizal (having a mutualistic relationship with oak trees), but had never been documented before in Minnesota!

You can see photos of the collection at: <http://www.rachelandbryn.com/gallery/Mushrooms-of-the-Mississippi-River-Gorge-Oak-Savanna>.

For more information about the Gorge Stewards Project or to get involved in events, forays or other activities, please contact Beth Storey at Friends of the Mississippi River at 651/222-2193 x16 or bstorey@fmr.org.

Gorge Stewards Calendar

Fish and Mussels of the Gorge with Mike Davis, DNR Biologist

**November 9th • 7:00-8:30 pm • Augsburg College
East Commons - Christensen Center 2nd floor**

Back by popular demand, Mr. Davis will provide an overview of the historical changes in habitat and population dynamics of these closely linked aquatic animals and discuss their ecological importance and role as indicators of the health of our rivers. A special emphasis will be given to mussels since they have been named one of the most imperiled groups of animals in North America. Hear about the recent reintroduction of mussels to the Upper Mississippi River and how this effort is helping restore native mussel fauna to the gorge.

Gorge Stewards Holiday Potluck

December 7th • 6:30-8:30 pm

At Beth's House • 3624 42nd Ave., Minneapolis

Active stewards, trail monitors and partners are invited to share an evening of good food and warm conversation. Please sign up with Beth ahead of time.

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 for 2004 is provided by the Longfellow Community Council, the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, Centerpoint Energy/Minnegasco and the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.



***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.