

Protecting, restoring and enhancing the metro Mississippi together since 1993

ALEXANDRA JABBARPOUR

# Explore the river with 3 new route guides

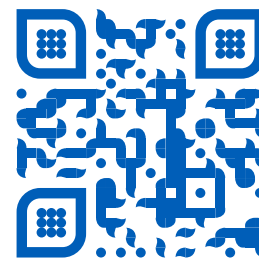
Paddle, hike, bike or roll along the Mississippi this summer



By Ellie Rogers, Communications Manager

At any given spot along the metro river, our staff could point to something — a riverbank, a confluence, a forest — and tell you a story. To kick off the summer, we made guides to three of our favorite river routes in the Twin Cities, each with a dozen notes from FMR staff. These guides include access info and a map marked with tips on wildlife, geology and plants, plus stories of real change brought about by our work with supporters like you.

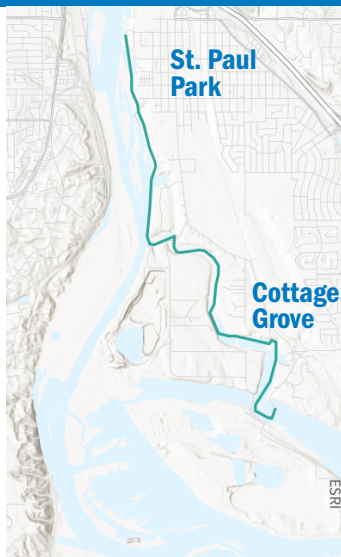
As you paddle, hike, bike or roll along the river, you'll be able to witness the effects of the advocacy and restoration work we do together.



Check out the full guides online at [fmr.org/explore](http://fmr.org/explore)

## **I** Paddle scenic backwaters beside rugged cliffs

On the Mississippi from Lion's Levee Park in St. Paul Park to Hazen P. Mooers Park in Cottage Grove



**Distance: About 5 miles**

**Time: About 2-3 hours**

**Start: Lion's Levee Park in St. Paul Park**

**End: Hazen P. Mooers Park in Cottage Grove**

This one-way paddling route wends through lesser-known backwaters that braid and meander around islands off the main channel of the Mississippi River south of the Twin Cities. Steep, short bluffs define this stretch of riverfront. The other shorelines feature floodplain forest studded with wildflowers and visited regularly by eagles, herons and other water birds. In Grey Cloud Channel, paddlers can rest at Settler's Island picnic area and experience FMR's climate-adapted island restoration. Along the way, you might see FMR's longest-running habitat restoration, stunning cliffs that sparked a major debate over bluff protection, Minnesota's largest native bloom, and part of an old golf course turned parkland.

*(continued on page 7)*



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**Mission**

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

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**FROM THE DIRECTOR**

**Our River Campaign: We did it!**

By Whitney Clark, Executive Director

Though stewarding an environmental nonprofit has been fraught with challenges in recent years, I think one of the most important responsibilities of an executive director is to secure the resources to accomplish the organization’s mission and maximize its impact. In the spring of 2021, FMR’s staff and board saw several critical opportunities for the river and our community, but pursuing them would require even more capacity. For example:

- Our work on reducing agricultural pollution in the river convinced us that new clean-water crops, if adopted at scale across the Minnesota landscape, could dramatically improve the river’s health. But to make that happen, our water program would need to grow. We needed more subject matter expertise, as well as advocacy and communications capabilities.
- Our youth programming was increasingly in demand, underscoring the need for additional staff to support the expansion of our Environmental Stewardship Institute.
- Much of FMR’s work is advocacy-related, whether it’s lobbying at the State Capitol or advancing federal legislation like the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative. But to be successful, we knew we needed to increase our grassroots organizing capacity and cultivate our base of River Guardian advocates.

As we considered these and other opportunities, we realized FMR needed to do more than slowly and incrementally grow. We wanted to find a way to grow a lot over just a few years to meet this moment. To do this, we turned



*We publicly launched our special campaign in 2024. Now completed, the campaign raised \$6 million for the river.*

to you, our generous donors, volunteers and advocates for your help.

In 2021, we began connecting with some long-term leadership donors, resulting in \$4 million in strategic operating capital to advance our ambitious growth goals. By the fall of 2024, it was time to launch the public phase of the Our River Campaign.

Fortunately, our community responded. In 2025, we organized a series of fundraising events designed to introduce people to the campaign. By August, we had reached our \$5 million goal, and with growing interest and several events still to come, we decided to announce a new stretch goal of \$6 million.

I am very proud to announce that, thanks to your incredible generosity, we met our \$6 million goal this spring! To accomplish this, we relied on nearly 600 gifts ranging from \$5 to \$1 million. Since launching the campaign, we’ve added six new staff members and significantly increased our budget, greatly expanding and deepening the effectiveness and impact of our work.

So, to each of you reading this now who made a gift to the Our River Campaign, attended a volunteer event or participated in an FMR advocacy action, please know how grateful we are to share in this important work with you.

# MEET OUR NEWEST STAFF & BOARD MEMBERS

## Shelley Rohlf: Accounting Manager



Shelley brings more than 10 years of nonprofit accounting experience to FMR. She has lived within a few miles of the Mississippi River for most of her life. Shelley is also a talented visual artist and musician.

**Favorite river spot: Lilydale Regional Park**

## Beth Dooley: Board Member



Beth is a James Beard Award-winning food writer and author of over a dozen books celebrating the bounty of America's Northern Heartland. Beth has advocated for years alongside FMR on regenerative agriculture.

**Favorite river spot: Harriet Island**

## PROGRAM SNAPSHOTS

### Top stories from [fmr.org](https://fmr.org)

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### Legislative session wrapup

FMR River Guardians can be proud of big wins for river-friendly jet fuel, our dam removal study and more.

[Learn more at fmr.org/legi-2026](https://fmr.org/legi-2026)



DAVID WHEATON

### How updated, improved rules protect the metro Mississippi

Find out what new development rules are set up to guard against.

[Learn more at fmr.org/MRCCA](https://fmr.org/MRCCA)



### The results from our multi-year bumble bee research study are in

How can we improve habitat for bumble bees, including endangered species? Check out our findings.

[Learn more at fmr.org/bees-2026](https://fmr.org/bees-2026)



MIKE DÜRENBERGER

### Can an outpouring of support for a full cleanup make a difference?

Advocates put the pressure on for a full cleanup of the toxic riverfront dumpsite at Ford Area C in St. Paul.

[Learn more at fmr.org/ford-2026](https://fmr.org/ford-2026)



ALEXANDRA JABBARPOUR

### Latest storm drain mural connects streets to the river

High school youth collaborated with artist Jesús Ramírez on this year's storm drain mural at Harriet Island.

[See pictures at fmr.org/mural-2025](https://fmr.org/mural-2025)

### This summer storm season, get to know your street's storm drains

And help prevent stormwater pollution



When it rains on your home, where does the water go? Our water quality education team often asks people to think about its route.

It's likely that beneath your feet, a network of underground pipes carries that rainwater to nearby lakes and streams. In the Twin Cities, the rain we see rushing down our streets ends up in the Mississippi River.

#### Storm drains 101

Stormwater is what we call the water that runs off unabsorbed from rooftops, parking lots and roads. Most urban stormwater picks up trash, leaves and clippings, road salt and more before flowing into storm drain inlets — grated openings along your street.

While sewer systems deliver water to treatment plants, the water that ends up in a storm drain usually enters nearby water bodies completely untreated. In other words, whatever's on the land ends up in the water. Our storm drain stenciling initiative makes that connection visible.

#### What you can do

Since 1999, FMR has worked with volunteers to spraypaint a message next to storm drains. "Keep 'em Clean, Drains to River" one stencil reads. Other stencils share a similar message in Hmong and Somali.



Volunteers can check out free kits from FMR to do their own storm drain stenciling and cleanup in St. Paul. Our kits include everything you'll need: a map of where you can stencil, safety and cleanup materials, stencils, spray paint and information to share with neighbors.

If the kits are booked, you and your family or friends can still make a difference close to home:

- On your neighborhood walks, stop by to scoop out and dispose of whatever is caught in the grate. (Don't forget to wear safety gloves!)
- Before big storms, check and unclog nearby drains.
- Prevent buildup by cleaning up trash and leaves from the street.

Alexandra Jabbarpour, FMR's Community Science & Education Coordinator, encourages people to take care of the streets where they live: "Small actions can make a significant difference for urban water quality. For example, picking up littered cigarette butts on a walk means fewer toxins going into our waterways. It's important to keep in mind larger policies and legislation that impact our waters, and we can also take steps on a neighborhood level to improve the health of our local ecosystems."

*Stenciling volunteers share doorhangers with neighbors featuring this artwork, plus tips in three languages for reducing stormwater pollution.*



**Last year, volunteers stenciled 2,301 storm drains reminding people that stormwater goes to the river.**

**Want to help? Kits are still available for late-summer requests: [fmr.org/stenciling](https://fmr.org/stenciling)**

## New FMR study will help answer crucial questions about potential dam removal

By Colleen O'Connor Toberman,  
Land Use & Planning Program Director

Should two locks and dams in the heart of the Twin Cities be removed? Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam 1 (the Ford dam) are both aging and functionally obsolete. Removing these structures would restore rare habitat, improve water quality and enhance river recreation. But we don't have enough information to determine whether removal is the right choice.

### Unanswered questions

Next year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will release a "disposition study" sharing its recommendations for these two structures that the Corps owns. Unfortunately, this study won't be comprehensive enough to answer crucial questions about dam removal, like: Where would new islands, rapids and shorelines arise in an undammed river? How might rare species like paddlefish and some mussels benefit? How much sediment is built up behind the existing structures, and can it be safely released downstream?

### Filling the information gap

We can't make major decisions about these structures without a better accounting of the costs and benefits. FMR is filling this critical information gap by designing and securing funding for a major dam removal feasibility study. We're excited to announce that the Minnesota Legislature just approved a \$923,000 grant to FMR for this project, thanks in part to advocacy from River Guardians.

By examining the habitat restoration opportunities, water quality improvements, endangered species benefits, sediment transport, infrastructure impacts and recreational changes that dam removal could bring, this project will support scientifically sound decision-making to improve the health of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities and downstream.

### What's next?

The study findings will be released to the public in 2028, and FMR and our partners will provide many opportunities to learn about its recommendations and weigh the



MIKE DURENBERGER

*Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam (top) and Lock and Dam 1 (bottom) are both functionally obsolete, aging structures. We're working on a major study to help us understand if removal makes sense for these two metro locks and dams, thanks to funding from Minnesota's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.*

pros and cons together as we advocate for the best future for the river.

Community members and local, state, federal and Tribal nation elected officials all have a role to play in making these decisions. But given the significance of the Mississippi River gorge to Dakota people, we believe that Dakota Tribes should lead its future. In collaboration with Owámniyomni Okhódayapi, FMR has held meetings and site visits with Dakota Tribes' elected leaders to learn from them about what, if any, role they would like to have in deciding the future of these locks and dams, and what information this supplemental study must include to support their decision-making. We look forward to continuing this work together.

[Learn more at fmr.org/metro-dams](https://fmr.org/metro-dams)

# A new chapter for water quality: MN aims for 8 million acres of continuous living cover by 2050

By Shaymus McLaughlin, Communications Specialist

More than a decade ago, when the state introduced its flagship strategy to bring down nitrate and phosphorus pollution, FMR recognized a “more of the same” approach wouldn’t cut it.

Agriculture is the biggest source of this nutrient pollution to the Mississippi River, and simply ramping up longstanding best practices (non-harvestable cover crops, buffer strips, judicious fertilizer use) wouldn’t be enough. To get clean, healthy water, Minnesota would need to do something different.

The solution FMR arrived at was to get more crops on the landscape year-round — in-demand crops that would allow farmers to make more money, providing incentive to be grown on as many acres as possible. This concept, called continuous living cover, was virtually unknown in Minnesota back then. FMR and River Guardian advocates worked in partnership with the University of Minnesota’s Forever Green Initiative, both behind the scenes and in public, to change that.

## A decade of middling progress

The original Nutrient Reduction Strategy, released in 2014



The state will pursue multiple tactics to achieve Minnesota’s nutrient-reduction goals, including continuous living cover.  
(Source: Minnesota Nutrient Reduction Strategy)

by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, called for a 45% reduction in nutrient pollution to the Mississippi River by 2040. Progress has been mixed.

While some major pollution sources (like municipal wastewater treatment plants) have greatly improved their performance, agriculture hasn’t followed suit. It remains the largest source of nutrient pollution to the river.

During the intervening years, FMR’s Water team championed continuous living cover at every opportunity with agency staff. We pointed to research, like the 2023 Putting Down Roots report, that showed this approach could help achieve the strategy’s elusive water quality goals and support farm health.

To their credit, they listened.

## A commitment to continuous living cover

In 2026 the agency released an updated version of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy, the first significant revision since its inception. It includes an unprecedented goal: 8 million acres of continuous living cover (roughly one-third of the state’s existing cropland) in Minnesota by 2050.

That milestone, on its own, could dramatically cut nutrient pollution levels. Putting Down Roots, for example, found 8 million acres of clean-water crops from Forever Green would get the state halfway to its nitrate reduction goal — a significant step after years of little to no improvement.

It makes continuous living cover the most impactful piece of the nutrient reduction puzzle (see chart at left).

This new Nutrient Reduction Strategy could be a real turning point for the river. With continuous living cover embedded in state agency strategy for the first time ever, meaningful reductions in historically stubborn, stagnant nutrient pollution levels could be just around the bend.

Learn more: [fmr.org/CLC](https://fmr.org/CLC)

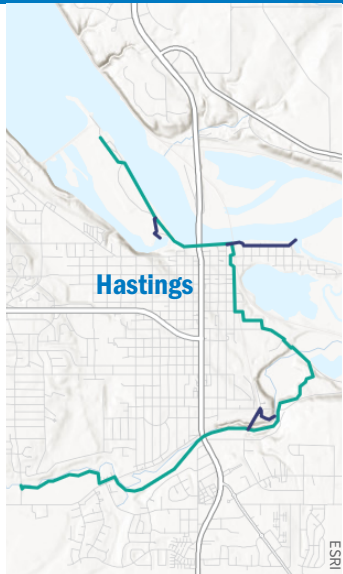
## 2 Bike or roll beside the Mississippi and Vermillion rivers

On the Mississippi River Greenway and the Vermillion River Greenway in Hastings  
Full map at [fmr.org/explore](http://fmr.org/explore)



(continued from front page)

TOM REITER



**Distance: 10 miles roundtrip**

**Time: About 1 hour**

**Start: Lock and Dam No. 2 in Hastings**

**Turnaround: Vermillion River Linear Park in Hastings**

Follow two greenways, public trails that match two habitat corridors along the Mississippi River and the Vermillion River. You'll roll beside the Mississippi River starting at the Hastings dam, southeast through an FMR-restored ecological hotspot transformed from an oil tank storage site, then through downtown Hastings to the confluence with the Vermillion River. Soon you'll pick up another greenway that continues along the Vermillion, one of the few trophy trout streams located in a metro area. With our Vermillion Stewards volunteers and partners, we're restoring habitat at a dozen sites along this major Mississippi tributary. On this out-and-back route, you can find an oxbow lake, a dry river, the ruins of an old mill, a prairie demonstration garden and a must-see waterfall.

## 3 Hike the only gorge on the entire Mississippi River

On the Winchell Trail from West River Parkway and 44th Street to 34th Street in Minneapolis  
Full map at [fmr.org/explore](http://fmr.org/explore)



KJETIL DRARVIK



**Distance: 3 miles roundtrip**

**Time: About 1-2 hours**

**Start: 44th Street and W. River Pkwy in Minneapolis**

**Turnaround: Longfellow Beach**

This out-and-back hike brings you through the only river gorge on the entire Mississippi River. The gorge formed over the course of 12,000 years and is now an oasis of steep limestone and sandstone bluffs, rugged ravines and natural springs in the heart of the Twin Cities. This section of the Winchell Trail, a mostly unpaved footpath, winds between W. River Pkwy and the river, through the gorge's woodland, oak savanna and floodplain forest down to a sandy beach and the river's edge. Depending on the season, hikers might find woodland wildflowers, blooming prairie and migratory birds. No matter when you go, you'll see an FMR urban habitat restoration, three advocacy landmarks (including a dam that could be removed someday) and signs of innovative, herbicide-free invasive plant removal.



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MEET FRIEND OF THE RIVER

# Mary Kay Lynch

“ Nature has been my passion since childhood. Becoming involved with FMR has provided the opportunity to indulge my passion and sense of wonder through volunteering in natural areas that impact the Mississippi River. Knowing that our efforts benefit the river is satisfying, and working with other engaged volunteers is enjoyable. FMR is a leading and well-managed organization with staff who combine expertise with great people skills. At the age of 86, I continue to look forward to the joy of supporting FMR and participating in FMR events!” ”



A Friends of the Mississippi River member, stewardship SuperVolunteer and Super River Guardian advocate, Mary Kay Lynch does it all.



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