



Protecting, restoring and enhancing the metro Mississippi together since 1993

MN is set up to have the most sustainable lower-carbon jet fuel in the U.S.

DREW TARVIN

Thanks to FMR's efforts and unlikely alliances, guardrails for this growing industry will help protect the river

By Shaymus McLaughlin, Communications Specialist

Nobody thought to tally the number of times someone in FMR's Water program uttered the phrase "strange bedfellows" this year. It's enough, though, that it's become something of a running gag.

"If I had \$1 for every time I've heard 'strange bedfellows' recently, I think I could build my own Sustainable Aviation Fuel plant," joked Meghan Anderson, FMR's biofuels policy manager, while presenting at a recent national conference.

The phrase, though, was central to the team's approach to policy work this past legislative session. To get an important bill passed — one that could ensure new, lower-carbon jet fuel helps the river rather than harms it — FMR believed we needed to pull together not just the DFL and GOP, but also other stakeholders that don't typically advocate alongside each other.

That turned out to be the right strategy. A set of environmental guardrails for Sustainable Aviation Fuel (aka "SAF") was one of the few pieces of bipartisan legislation to pass this year, thanks in part to River Guardians who sent 407 messages to legislators. The bill adds five safeguards to an existing tax credit to ensure that any SAF made in Minnesota is produced with water quality, habitat and other sustainability principles in mind. It also expands

the tax credit and extends it further into the future.

DFL Sen. Scott Dibble dubbed it the "feel-good bill of the year." Republican Rep. Bobbie Harder described it as a "win-win-win." This policy got over the finish line because of the "strange bedfellows" that unified behind the legislation — environmental nonprofits, large agribusinesses, state agencies, trade unions, farm organizations and SAF industry groups.

"If you ever would have told me that we'd have a list like this [supporting the same legislation] ... I would have said, can't be done," noted Rep. Greg Davids during an April hearing on the bill. "But it has been done."

How? Over many months, FMR made the case to these groups that prioritizing sustainability is not only good for the climate, it's necessary for business. A SAF industry that improves water quality by prioritizing winter camellina as a fuel source, protects forests and prairies from conversion to agricultural land, and facilitates an economic boost for farmers is one that will legitimately earn people's trust. With that trust comes the public and private investments required to make SAF a success.

The new guardrails give Minnesota the most stringent SAF sustainability measures in the country. Yet there's more work to do.

—continued on page 7



www.fmr.org • info@fmr.org

Mission

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

Board of Directors

Dr. Lynn Broadus, Chair
Hokan Miller, Vice Chair
Aubre Parsons, Treasurer
Peter Gove, Secretary
Dr. Adriana Alejandro Osorio
Dr. John Anfinson
Dr. George Annor
Ronnie Brooks
Stewart Crosby
Chad Dayton
Beth Dooley
George Dunn
Forrest Flint
Yumi Kashihara
Jake Keeler
Perry McGowan

Staff

Meghan Anderson, Biofuels Policy Manager
Corrie Besse, Finance Director
Monica Bierma, Administrative Assistant & Bookkeeper
John Briel, Member Relations Manager
Whitney Clark, Executive Director
Jacob Cunningham, Stewardship & Education Program Director
Sara DeKok, Associate Director-Development Director
Laura Domyancich-Lee, Senior Ecologist
Tessa Enroth, Individual Gifts Officer
Jenna Hawkes, Grassroots Organizing Coordinator
Gabe Holmes, Data Manager
Alexandra Jabbarpour, Stewardship & Education Program Associate
Peter LaFontaine, Agricultural Policy Manager
Dr. Julia Leone, Pollinator Biologist
Shaymus McLaughlin, Communications Specialist
Naomi Nickel, ESI Program Associate
Logan Olson, Restoration Project Manager
Sovatha Oum, Youth Program Manager
Allyson Petry, Individual Gifts Officer
Carrie Pomeroy, Volunteer Program Manager
sue rich, Communications Director
Ellie Rogers, Communications Manager
Shelley Rohlf, Accounting Manager
Dr. Alex Roth, Conservation Director
Trevor Russell, Water Program Director
Colleen O'Connor Toberman, Land Use & Planning Program Director
Leah Weston, Ecologist

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Paddling with the next generation of river stewards

By Whitney Clark, Executive Director

This summer, I had the opportunity to canoe the river with our Environmental Stewardship Institute (ESI) summer program. ESI is designed to support and inspire the next generation of river stewards by helping them learn about environmental issues and careers. High school-aged youth participate in our immersive summer institute or our school-year youth council. All participants are paid, so while the program is a lot of fun, it's also valuable résumé-building experience and exposure to career opportunities in the nonprofit sector.

In my job, I get a chance to engage with the river across many dimensions and disciplines: science, policy, education, art. But those are all abstractions. There really is no substitute for the experience of paddling the river or exploring its banks and bluffs.

Some of my earliest memories are of visits to the river with my dad when I was just a young boy. I recall that even at that tender age, I sensed the river's awesome power, as well as its beauty and grace.

So we make sure our ESI members get plenty of chances to experience the river up close. When I joined the July paddling trip, I found myself in a voyageur canoe with a very spirited group of high schoolers from Minneapolis and St. Paul whose wonder at being on the river was rivaled only by their desire to "win the race" with the other canoes. Their energy was contagious. I don't remember the last time I paddled that hard.

This summer, when we paddled past the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, we had a chance to



Our 20 youth ESI participants canoed a metro stretch of the Mississippi River as part of their 9-week summer program.

talk about how the Dakota consider this place, Bdóte, their cultural origin. The confluence is also a good place to interpret the tale of two rivers: one, cloudy and laden with agricultural pollution; the other, clear and relatively clean. An indelible lesson about how land uses impact the health of rivers.

Our paddle showed us how, despite the challenges it faces, the river is still vibrant and alive with wonders around every bend. The iconic bald eagle in its massive nest atop an old cottonwood. The dusky great blue heron, statuesque but deadly in the shallows. I was along as a guide and interpreter. It's fun to pass along some of the things I've learned in a long career in river conservation to curious young people. But these paddles are also opportunities for me to renew my own connection to the river.

When you love a place, when you take it into your heart, and you make it part of your identity, you may also begin to feel responsible for it in some way. You may find yourself moved to defend it and keep it from harm. Pulling on a paddle this summer, surrounded by joyful and energetic youth, reminded me why I do this work. It reminded me that we all have a responsibility to steward the river ... and the next generation of river stewards.

Learn more at fmr.org/ESI

MEET OUR NEWEST STAFF & BOARD MEMBERS

Corrie Besse: Finance Director



Corrie's career has been shaped by more than two decades of experience across nonprofits, higher education and the arts. She enjoys theater, art, good food and community.

Favorite river spot: Mississippi/Minn. confluence

Dr. George Annor: Board Member



An associate professor at the U of M, George's research focuses on developing innovative food systems that improve human health while advancing environmental sustainability.

Favorite river spot: Still getting acquainted!

PROGRAM SNAPSHOTS

Top stories from fmr.org

*Not an e-news subscriber yet?
Stay current at fmr.org/sign-up.*



Sneak preview of new children's book about water pollution

Our youth program created a picture book celebrating caring for the river.

Learn more at fmr.org/picture-book



Q&A: What the latest data says about the Mississippi River's health

FMR's Trevor Russell talks about pollution in the river.

Learn more at fmr.org/impaired-2026



New, free curriculum available: Farming for People and Water

What we do on the land has a major impact on our waters. Our new curriculum helps students see how.

Learn more at fmr.org/ag-curric



The latest on the St. Anthony Falls cutoff wall

A three-story concrete cutoff wall beneath the riverbed helps support St. Anthony Falls. Is it at risk?

Learn more at fmr.org/cutoff-2026



Fall yard cleanup: 5 ways to help protect the river

Get tips on river-friendly fall yard care, including when and what to plant this autumn.

Learn more at fmr.org/fall-yard



Six newly constructed islands in St. Paul's Pig's Eye Lake are already providing habitat for myriad birds, fish and other wildlife. FMR is ensuring the islands' long-term vegetation establishes with climate change and diversity in mind.

St. Paul's newest islands are living laboratories

By Alex Roth, Conservation Director

A few years back, passersby on Hwy 61 might have done a double-take at bulldozers, dump trucks and excavators seemingly floating on the water in Pig's Eye Lake, just southeast of downtown St. Paul. Those vehicles were actually helping to build new islands from the lakebed up — a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project in partnership with Ramsey County.

The project was designed to reduce wind fetch in the shallow lake — breaking up wave action and slowing erosion of wetland habitat on the lake's east side — and to provide important habitat for waterfowl and shore birds, spawning habitat for fish, and nesting areas for turtles.

A one-of-a-kind experiment

FMR recently led the design and implementation of the planting plan, which we turned into an experiment that established distinct tree communities on each island. We prioritized combinations of species with varying levels of climate resilience, and drew on lessons from the Adaptive Silviculture for Climate Change experiment at Crosby Farm Regional Park. Variations in species

and planting zones will allow us to investigate how best to jump-start new floodplain forest plant communities that incorporate both climate resilience and habitat value.

With buy-in from the Corps and Ramsey County Parks, and in partnership with Mississippi Park Connection and the U of M, the planting project kicked off in fall 2024.



Planting the future

Following the fall seeding of wet-loving grasses and wildflowers, and some initial vegetation maintenance on the islands, FMR and our many partner organizations planted about 1,400 trees on the islands in fall 2025 and spring 2026. We ferried bareroot trees and people back and forth by pontoon and jon boat, and canoed

and kayaked staff across the lake for planting days.

Island visitors will now see typical Minnesota floodplain tree species like cottonwood and silver maple, as well as near-natives like sycamore. You'll also see climate-adapted newcomers like tuliptree, as well as more southerly species like sweetgum.

FMR and the U of M are beginning baseline surveys to document plant establishment and tree survival.

If you build it, they will come

It'll be many years before we have usable data on the different plant communities and their habitat benefits. And we won't know the islands' impacts on the shoreline wetlands they were designed to protect for some time. But we're already seeing these islands provide wildlife habitat. Fish breach the water's surface in the islands' horseshoe centers, pelicans alight from the sandy banks as boats approach, and butterflies and bees fly in the seeded meadows. People are even starting to use the islands to fish. We're excited to be involved in the future of this newly created special place in the heart of the metro.



The left photo is present-day Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam south of downtown Minneapolis. The right rendering reimagines the river after dam removal, including the resulting whitewater rapids — a potential recreational draw.

Major study on dam removal highlights economic benefits

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

This summer, the first of three major studies was released to help us understand the potential impact of removing two locks and dams in the heart of the Twin Cities.

Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam 1 (the Ford dam) are functionally obsolete. (Note: Upper St. Anthony Falls is not being studied for removal as it would impact critical infrastructure and our drinking water supply.)

Friends of the Mississippi River has not taken a position for or against the removal of these locks and dams. We advocate for thorough studies and deep Tribal and community engagement as the metro area considers a partially undammed metro Mississippi River.

2026: Economic benefits

In June, our National Parks Conservation Association partners released a report on the economic benefits of removing the two locks and dams.

Researchers found that peer cities that invested in river restoration and recreation reaped significant returns, including \$11-34 million in visitor

spending each year along their rivers.

Once we have an estimate of the cost of removal, this study will allow us to consider the fuller economic impact.

2027: Corps recommendations

Next year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will make its recommendations on the fate of these two Corps-owned structures. In its “disposition study,” the Corps will suggest whether to maintain, transfer ownership of or remove the locks and dams.

This will be a high-level review focused on the Corps’ mission and budget. The Corps has stated its study will likely recommend transferring ownership.

2028: Filling the information gap

FMR is commissioning a study, funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, to answer crucial questions about dam removal and river health.

Anticipated in 2028, this report will

delve into opportunities and impacts related to endangered species, habitat restoration, water quality, sediment transport, infrastructure (such as bridges) and shoreline changes.

Future decision-making

Given the significance of the Mississippi River gorge to Dakota people, we believe local Dakota Tribes should play a leading role in this dam removal decision if they so choose.

Some elected Tribal leaders have visited the dams and discussed the studies with FMR. FMR and our partners will provide ample opportunity for everyone — community members, local, state, federal and Tribal decision-makers — to learn about and consider the research so we can all weigh the pros and cons together in the years to come.

To take action on river issues like this as they arise, sign up to be a River Guardian and learn more at fmr.org/metro-dams.

Gorge Leadership Team restores habitat and builds community

By Carrie Pomeroy,
Volunteer Program Manager



KJETIL DRARVIK

The Mississippi River Gorge is a favorite Twin Cities destination for boating, birdwatching and urban hiking. From St. Anthony Falls to the confluence with the Minnesota River, this stretch of the river stands out as the only true gorge on the Mississippi. Since 2002, FMR volunteers have worked up a sweat to protect this treasured area.

Within the larger River Gorge Stewards volunteer community, FMR's Gorge Leadership Team is a small but mighty group of dedicated volunteers that contributes an average of 150-200 hours of service each year. Whether they're pulling garlic mustard near the Winchell Trail or welcoming volunteers to our annual Earth Day cleanup, this team makes the gorge more hospitable for plants, wildlife and human visitors.

How it started

The origins of the Gorge Leadership Team trace back to an effort led by greater Longfellow neighbors in Minneapolis in the early 2000s. They aimed to protect this unique stretch of the Mississippi River flyway featuring dramatic limestone and sandstone bluffs, floodplain forest, remnant prairie, oak savanna and maple-basswood forest.

To protect the area's biodiversity, ecologist and Longfellow resident Carolyn Carr created a gorge restoration plan. FMR became involved in implementing the plan in fall 2002, when we partnered with Great River Greening and the Longfellow Community Council on a buckthorn removal event that drew 150 volunteers. This kicked off our larger River Gorge Stewards volunteer program.



Former FMR staffers Irene Jones and Karen Solas noticed a group of regular volunteers, and launched the Gorge Leadership Team in 2008 to offer these enthusiastic river stewards opportunities for more frequent, ongoing volunteering and learning. We engaged Carr to lead the group, a role that she has played ever since.

Year after year

Eighteen years later, the Gorge Leadership Team is still going strong

with about two dozen members consistently volunteering. The team typically begins working each April, removing Siberian squill and garlic mustard to make way for spring ephemerals like Jack-in-the-pulpit, Virginia bluebells and bloodroot. In the summer and fall, the team might plant and water native plants, spread native seed, lop and haul buckthorn or table alongside FMR staff at the Longfellow River Gorge Festival.

Because the Gorge Leadership Team returns to the same locations year after year, they get to see the tangible results of their work — improved habitat along the river.

FMR Senior Ecologist Laura Domyancich-Lee notes, "The Gorge Leadership Team is very nimble and knowledgeable, quickly and effectively responding to the appearance of a new weedy plant, jumping in to sow seeds where plant communities need a boost or tending newly planted trees. The Gorge would not be as healthy or beautiful without their dedicated work."

If you'd like to join our larger group of River Gorge Stewards or be notified when there are openings on the team, please email us at volunteer@fmr.org.



"Not only do I have the privilege of working to protect this special space, but the camaraderie of the volunteers and the restoration support from FMR makes me a much better and more valuable steward. Everybody wins!"

—Bonnie Sample, Gorge Leadership Team volunteer

A report to be released soon will detail how the state can get to 1 million acres of winter camelina, a clean-water crop that grows over the winter, protects water quality and can be used to make SAF. FMR expects the same

strange bedfellows that supported the guardrails to take the report's recommendations seriously. It's the only way to make Minnesota SAF as low-carbon, river-friendly and sustainable as possible.



The 5 new SAF guardrails

FMR Biofuels Policy Manager Meghan Anderson explains the recent additions to Minnesota's Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) tax credit and how each helps safeguard our environment.



1

The tax credit scales with carbon emission reductions

HOW THIS HELPS THE RIVER: Encourages use of the most sustainable fuel sources. With the original tax credit, any fuel that reduced emissions by at least 50% received an equal tax credit. Now, it's a sliding scale: The lower-carbon the fuel, the larger the tax credit. This encourages companies to use fuel made from the most sustainable sources, and provides incentives for on-farm conservation practices.



2

Only crops grown on existing farmland are eligible

HOW THIS HELPS THE RIVER: Protects natural habitat from being converted into agriculture. Airlines need a lot of fuel. We were concerned people might raze forests or till up prairie to create more space to grow SAF crops, then take advantage of the tax credit. Now, only crops grown on farmland that has existed for many years can qualify. This also adds incentive to use winter camelina, which can grow on the same acres as existing summer crops.



3

Green hydrogen now qualifies

HOW THIS HELPS THE RIVER: Opens the door for future fuel sources that prove sustainable. Winter-hardy oilseeds being developed by the U of M's Forever Green Initiative, such as camelina, will be the most sustainable way to make SAF for a while. In the future, technologies such as green hydrogen could also offer a truly sustainable source of fuel. These technologies, when available, will qualify for the tax credit.



4

Foreign feedstocks are not eligible

HOW THIS HELPS THE RIVER: Incentivizes on-farm sustainability practices in the river basin. SAF is happening on a global scale. We don't want companies razing natural lands like the Amazon Rainforest to grow crops that qualify for Minnesota's tax credit. By restricting the tax credit to crops grown in the U.S., we're both helping to prevent deforestation elsewhere and encouraging farms here to use river-friendly farming practices that adhere to the tax credit.



5

Enhanced oil recovery is prohibited for SAF tax credit eligibility

HOW THIS HELPS THE RIVER: Blocks a practice that intensifies climate change impacts. Enhanced oil recovery is a process that captures carbon produced by a facility before it enters the air, and uses that carbon to push more crude oil out of the ground. Our work on SAF is about improving climate conditions for the river. Now no one can claim the tax credit if carbon captured during the SAF production process is then used for enhanced oil recovery.



106 W. Water St., Ste. 600
St. Paul MN 55107-2032

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TWIN CITIES, MN
PERMIT NO. 1581



MIKE DURENBERGER

More ways to give

It's not too early for your year-end donation. Friends of the Mississippi River protects our region's greatest resource thanks to your gift.

Beyond a standard donation, you can amplify your impact by:

- **Donating appreciated stock** or mutual funds.
- **Giving a gift membership** to share your love for the river.
- **Inquiring about workplace giving** to leverage employer matching.

Give today: fmr.org/ways

FMR.ORG

Sign up for our e-newsletter
at fmr.org/sign-up



Follow us @FriendsMissRiv

