



WORKING TO PROTECT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER
AND ITS WATERSHED IN THE TWIN CITIES AREA

The river belongs to us all

An interview with Dr. Dorceta Taylor, environmental justice scholar

by Lisa Peterson-de la Cueva

The reflection of downtown St. Paul sparkled on the water the night of FMR's fall fundraiser. Sounds of chatter, laughter, live music and a lively auctioneer floated around Harriet Island from the pavilion where FMR was raising money toward its outreach and inclusion efforts.

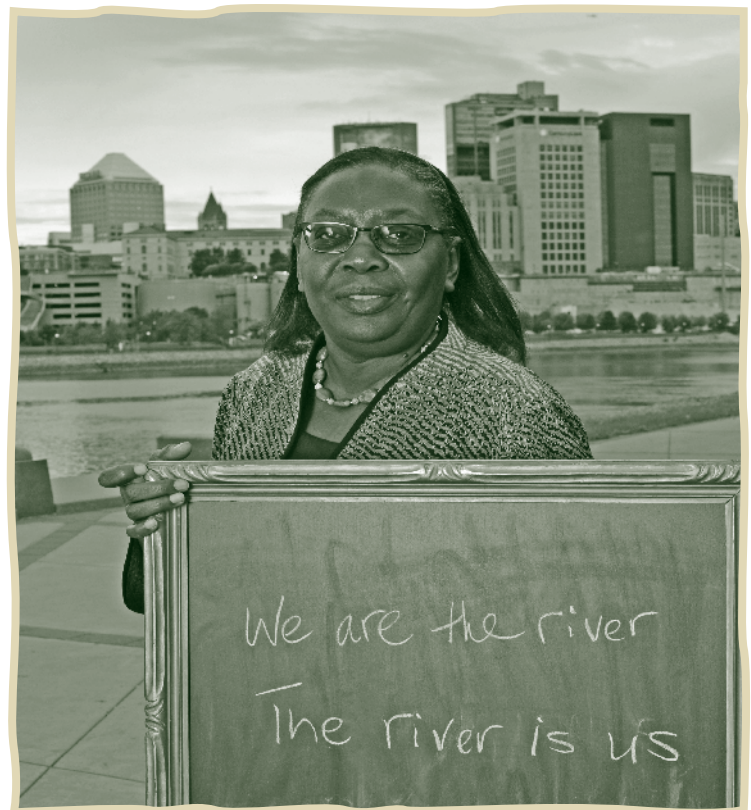
Despite the laughter, keynote speaker Dr. Dorceta Taylor asserted that inside the packed room something was wrong. Where were the people of color?

"Could we change this for next year's affair?" she asked, "Could we bring in some more chairs, reach out to our partner organizations and youth, and fill the room to reflect the Twin Cities?" It is a question FMR and other organizations are investing money, time and organizing efforts to answer.

Addressing the apathy myth

Dr. Taylor, who holds dual Yale doctorates in forestry & environmental studies and sociology, has spent her career working to diversify the conservation movement. She's written extensively about how communities of color are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, yet also disproportionately excluded from environmental organizations.

Her recent book, "The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection," shows how the American conservation movement has historically institutionalized whiteness and kept people of color out. This reality has helped motivate Dr. Taylor in her role as Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability.



Dr. Dorceta Taylor, the keynote speaker at FMR's annual "Evening Celebrating the River" at Harriet Island across from downtown St. Paul. (Photo by Anna Botz)

The river belongs to us all, continued on page 6

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Mississippi



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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

Working for the river *and* equity

It's time to expand the circle



by Whitney Clark

If you're paying attention in 2017 you know that our society and our planet are hurting. Personally, I'm struck by the degree to which we seem unable to agree on how to address

two acute problems harming the health and vitality of our communities: racism and environmental health.

There's no doubt that structural and systemic racism damages our society, leading to persistent and gaping disparities in health, wealth, education and employment outcomes for people of color and indigenous communities.

At the same time, despite progress in some areas, we continue to pollute and degrade our environment and deplete our natural resources at an unsustainable rate, threatening the ecological balance on which all of our lives depend.

I believe these challenges are interrelated and must be understood together if we're to make progress on either. Yet as I look at mainstream environmental organizations, FMR included, I see a community of predominantly white, relatively affluent people. Despite our best intentions, I believe our privilege blinds us and prevents us from seeing the full range of environmental impacts to our community.

If we can't challenge ourselves to become more culturally competent and inclusive — and that means re-imagining how we define both environmental problems and solutions — we will become less relevant and effective in our increasingly diverse society.

At FMR, we're actively working to become a more diverse, equitable and inclusive organization, both internally and in the work we choose to focus on. As a first step, we've established a workgroup of board members and staff to advance the equity goals in our strategic plan and we recently adopted an equity statement. FMR's full equity statement is available on our website, but here's an excerpt:

We understand that environmental problems disproportionately burden communities of color, indigenous peoples and low-income communities. We further acknowledge that mainstream environmental and conservation organizations have largely failed to understand and address the systemic underpinnings that are common to both environmental problems and injustice. We are committed to using our resources and influence to redress structural inequality where it intersects with the health and vitality of the Mississippi River.

"Equity" is now also one of FMR's Core Values, along with Stewardship, Sustainability, Leadership, Expertise, Integrity and Collaboration.

The focus of our work is also evolving as we use an equity lens to expand the partners we engage and the issues we seek to address. In North Minneapolis where we have long advocated for a transformation of the riverfront from predominantly private industrial land to a new vision of continuous parks and trails along the river, we're now working with new community partners to ensure that as the parks come online that Northside neighbors can fully benefit from them (page 6-7).

We also had the privilege of hosting environmental justice scholar Dr. Dorceta Taylor (page 1) as not only the keynote speaker for our annual fall fundraiser but for a forum with a diverse group of environmental groups, community leaders, funders and environmental justice advocates who are striving to work together to become more effective.

We know these are but the first steps in a longer journey, but I wanted to let you — our valued members, volunteers and partners — know that we're committed to this path and look forward to doing our part to move toward a more just and sustainable world. Just as the river belongs to all of us, so should FMR and the environmental movement as a whole.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Engaging youth to protect the river

by Kate Clayton

As St. Paul Academy environmental science teacher Ned Heckman read through students' course reviews, a trend quickly emerged. "Pretty universally the students' favorite parts were the service-learning outings we did with FMR," said Heckman. In fact, the course involving FMR was so well-reviewed that he added a section to meet demand in the upcoming school year.

FMR works with dozens of teachers and roughly 2,500 youth annually in the Twin Cities metro. Whether in the classroom or outdoors, activities are designed to meet core standards while also being fun, engaging and helping to protect the river.

Heckman and his students got involved through our most popular program, stenciling storm drains in St. Paul. By painting the message "Keep 'em clean: Drains to river!" along drains and distributing educational flyers, youth educate residents about the direct connection between our yards, streets and waters.

Student Clare Tipler said the stenciling outing with Heckman's class not only educated neighbors of how fertilizers, motor oil and other pollutants travel from their yards into the river, but informed her perspective overall: "It made me realize that environmental efforts are not individual efforts: it's about getting the information out, getting help, and getting work done."

Students also assist FMR with river habitat restoration research. St. Paul's Open World Learning Community (OWL) school is particularly active with a variety of grade levels working at Indian Mounds Regional Park.

OWL students harvest seeds from native prairie plants on the river bluff, grow them in the school greenhouse, then plant the plants back in the prairie and remove invasive species. Carefully documenting their work, the students are both increasing



Over 2,500 young people have worked with FMR so far in 2017 to educate metro residents about river pollution from our yards and streets, restore habitat and assist with much-needed research. (Photo by Kate Clayton)

wildlife habitat and helping FMR ecologists track the site's health and improve the species mix for future restoration work.

As temperatures drop, we stick to classroom programs focused on how our waters flow, what they carry and what we can all do to protect them and wildlife habitat. Students often carry such lessons beyond the school, reporting to Heckman and other teachers that they pulled invasive species like garlic mustard from their own backyard or swept leaves from the boulevard.

To learn more or set up your own youth outing or program with FMR, contact Youth Coordinator Kate Clayton at kclayton@fmr.org or visit fmr.org/youth-participation.

A rare opportunity to protect drinking water

Let's strengthen the nitrate rule

by Trevor Russell

Clean, safe drinking water should be accessible and affordable for everyone regardless of geography or income. Sadly, that's not the case for many Minnesotans.

Nitrate used in cropland fertilizer is a leading source of drinking water contamination in our state. Although essential for plant growth and health, excess nitrate harms aquatic life and human health and drives the formation of the "Dead Zone" in the Gulf of Mexico. It's also extremely costly to Greater Minnesota communities who must pay to remove it from water supplies.

That's why FMR is working with our conservation allies to strengthen the draft Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Nitrogen Fertilizer Rule — one of the few places in state law where regulators can require row-crop farming operations, the biggest source of nitrates, to reduce water pollution.

FMR has submitted official comments and will stay involved through the rule's anticipated fall 2018 adoption.

Learn more at fmr.org/nitrate-rule or sign up to be a River Guardian at fmr.org/advocate and we'll be in touch when we need your help the most!



Calling for clean water for future generations!

New river rules coming to town!

by Irene Jones

Now that state rules to better protect the metro Mississippi River corridor have become law, planning and implementation are moving to the local level.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has notified the 25 cities and towns in the 72-mile Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area that land-use and development plans for their stretch of the river corridor must be updated by December 2018 to be consistent with the new state rules.

Spanning from Dayton in the north to Hastings in the south, the corridor also comprises our local national park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.

FMR led the charge to revamp the rules to better reflect the corridor's status as a national park and is excited to be moving into the first community implementation and planning phase.

Each community's plan will detail their city or township's riverfront vision and include an inventory of bluffs, shorelines, scenic views and cultural resources to be protected. Plans will also identify opportunities to add and enhance riverfront parks, trails and open space.

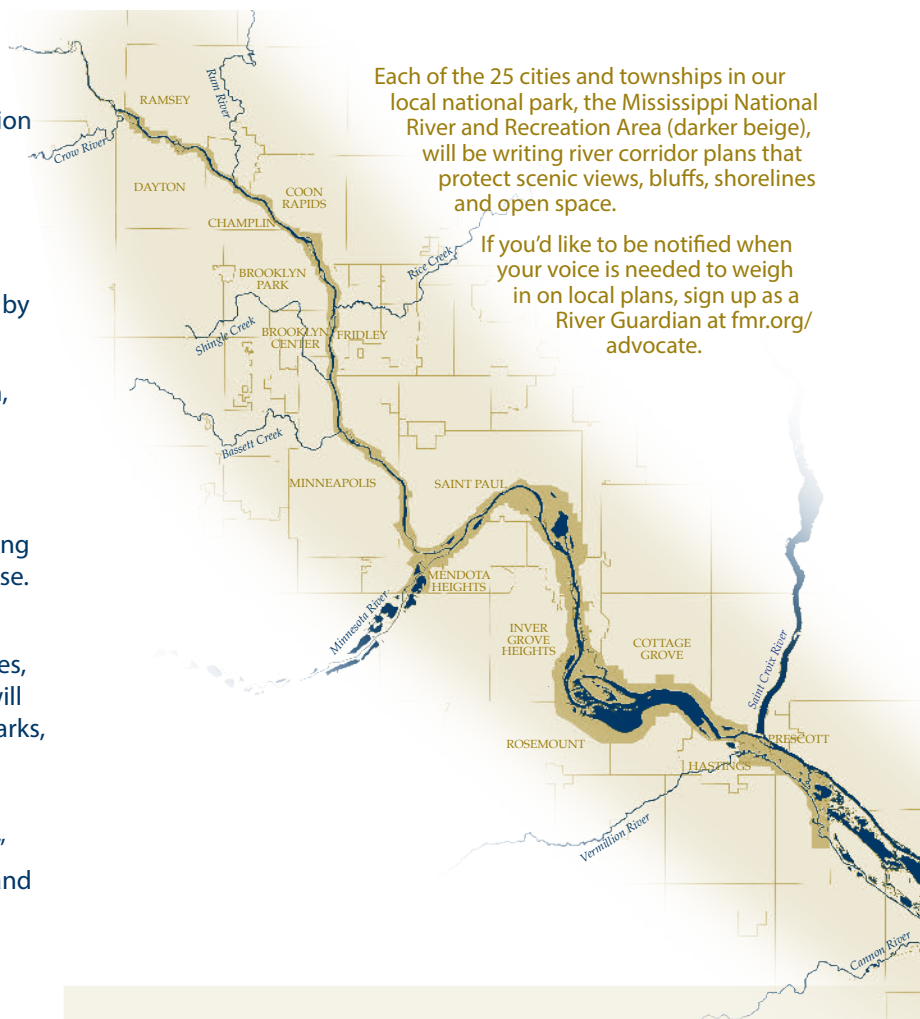
The new river corridor plans will also be part of each city's comprehensive plan. Updated every ten years, "comp plans" essentially serve as the foundation for a city's zoning code and development decisions. Although the Metropolitan Council coordinates comp plan review, the DNR has final approval authority for the river corridor plans within them.

Before filing river corridor plans with the DNR, each city must submit it to the National Park Service and adjacent communities (including those across the river) for comments. They must also hold a public hearing to gather community feedback.

FMR is developing online resources to assist River Guardians and others who want to support strong local river rules. We're also holding workshops to provide more in-depth training and plan to support both residents and local planning department staff.

As longtime activist and FMR board member Susan Vento reminds us, "Even if you don't live near the river or have access to it in your neighborhood, we need you to add your voice to this process so our local river and national park will be protected for future generations and be accessible to all of us."

Join the River Guardians at fmr.org/advocate to be notified of special river corridor happy hours, trainings and other opportunities to weigh in on local river corridor plans, or contact River Corridor Program Director Irene Jones 651.222.2193 x11 or ijones@fmr.org to learn more.



Each of the 25 cities and townships in our local national park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (darker beige), will be writing river corridor plans that protect scenic views, bluffs, shorelines and open space.

If you'd like to be notified when your voice is needed to weigh in on local plans, sign up as a River Guardian at fmr.org/advocate.

Saved: River Heights Park

For an example of the importance of everyday people using their voice to protect the metro river corridor, look no further than River Heights Park in Inver Grove Heights.

This summer, when the city considered converting part of the blufftop park into private property, neighbors rallied.

FMR was proud to weigh in — noting the park's location in the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area and our local national park — and is happy to report that the city decided to preserve it.

River Heights Park provides trails and open space for community members as well as vital habitat in the Mississippi River Flyway.

Inver Grove Heights remains a highly valued FMR partner that we're proud to work with on several important habitat restoration projects.



No additional parks for Ford site ... yet

by Whitney Clark

This September, the St. Paul City Council approved the zoning plan for the Ford site, giving the go-ahead to redevelop the 135-acre river-bluff site without requiring additional parkland.

FMR has been involved in the Ford planning process for 10 years and supports many of aspects of the plan, such as its density, green design and innovative stormwater features. But, along with many neighbors, we'd asked the city to seize the rare opportunity to expand blufftop parkland at Hidden Falls Regional Park by realigning a stretch of Mississippi River Boulevard.

While the task force and planning commission voted to include our parks proposal in the plan, the city declined, arguing that it should not be shown in zoning documents since acquisition funds for the blufftop parcels could not be guaranteed.

We're disappointed, but we were also heartened by the strong show of support for more green space at public hearings and will continue to advocate for the park expansion. When Ford sells the property to a developer, development plans will need to be submitted to the city for approval, providing a potential opportunity to revisit the issue.

FMR also continues to track the investigation of the toxic waste dump known as "Area C" on Ford's river parcel below the bluff. Located on the floodplain, the dump contains solvents, paint sludge and other industrial waste. Currently capped with a concrete pad, it is being investigated by Ford under guidance by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Learn more at fmr.org/ford-update.

Thank you, interns!

- This summer, FMR was lucky to work with **Yengsoua Lee** who studies environmental science at Mankato State. Thank you, Yengsoua, for marking storm drains with youth groups, conducting a tree survey, and removing invasive species! And thank you internship partners Mississippi Watershed Management Organization and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.



- In addition to working full-time as an environmental technician at Lake Minnetonka Conservation District and wrapping up a Master's in Public Policy and Leadership at Metro State, **Matt Cook** is also completing a communications internship with FMR. Thank you, Matt for helping us reach out to educators and creating new maps and other communications tools!



Big FMR staff changes

Farewell, Tom Lewanski!

It's impossible to underestimate the positive impact longtime Conservation Director Tom Lewanski had on the Mississippi River corridor and FMR.



Known for his warmth and wit as well as his deep knowledge of the field, Tom brokered partnerships that led to the creation of three state Scientific & Natural Areas (Pine Bend, Sand Coulee and Chimney Rock) and several Wildlife Management Areas (Hampton Woods, Gores and others).

During his 19-year tenure FMR's conservation program protected 2,200 acres and conducted ecological restoration on 2,800 acres. (For perspective, a football field is roughly 1 acre.)

We look forward to working with Tom in his new role as natural resources manager for Dakota County Parks. *Read more at fmr.org/farewell-tom.*

Goodbye, John Briel!

Known for his infectious laugh, inexhaustable positivity and preternatural efficiency, John Briel was not only a great development officer but a friend to nearly everyone who crossed his path.



We wish him the best as he embarks on a new adventure in Chicago. The lucky folks in the Windy City will be fortunate to benefit from his talents as he continues his nonprofit career with an urban agriculture organization.

Welcome, John Czyncon!

John Czyncon (pronounced "size-on") comes to FMR with a lengthy fundraising and nonprofit resume perfect for his role as our new development associate.

John has worked for numerous nonprofits and campaigns including The Museum of Russian Art, The Bakken Museum, OutFront Minnesota, and Minnesota AIDS Project.

He not only brings a wealth of knowledge to the position but a longstanding love of the Mississippi. Known for stealing to the river to paddle its backwaters while at Winona State, he now appreciates the river for the beauty and solitude it affords in the heart of our thriving metro area.



Growing up in Jamaica Dr. Taylor developed a love of the outdoors, gardening, and biology that fed her interest in environmental conservation. Now, reflecting back on her career path, she remembers the culture of academic excellence of her adolescence.

"We didn't think about the fact that we all had black and brown skin," she said. "We studied for our entrance exams to Oxford and the like, and it was perfectly normal for someone to be both brown and to be excellent at something like biology."

Dr. Taylor was in for an unpleasant surprise when she attended Northeastern Illinois University, where she was the only non-white face in an environmental studies lecture. "I asked, 'where are the other black students in the room?' And the professor told me, 'Blacks are not interested in the environment.'"

If ever there was a moment of epiphany in Dr. Taylor's career it was this one. "It hit me like a thunderbolt. It made me understand that there is a racialization of the environment that falsely portrays black Americans as uninterested in the environment."

Dr. Taylor had a hunch this wasn't true. As an emerging scholar she began to participate in conferences of conservationists of color, and by the early 1990s, she said, "We were coming out of the woodwork." Yet, despite gains in the environmental justice movement and such indicators as the exceptional voting records on environmental legislation by congressional representatives of color, notions that people of color are unengaged in environmental issues persist today.

More white-led conservation organizations, however, are beginning to question assumptions about race and conservation, though they may not always know how to move forward. (To learn more about FMR's equity efforts, see page 2.)

A good first step, Dr. Taylor insists, is for whites and people of color to get to know each other personally and institutionally. For instance, the Twin Cities metro area's severe racial disparities and segregation play out not only institutionally but also in the homogeneity of white people's social networks.

"I am friends with many white people. As a woman of color, it would be completely unacceptable for me not to be," Dr. Taylor said. "So why shouldn't the reverse be true?"

It's a crucial point. How can we move forward if white people and people of color literally don't know each other? It's also why Dr. Taylor rarely speaks to conservation groups without also facilitating workshops that bring together mostly white-led environmental organizations and organizations led by people of color. The process isn't always comfortable. "Some



Ky'Mari Love stands before one of the storage domes of the obsolete Upper Harbor Terminal on the North Minneapolis riverfront. Love helped gather feedback and ideas to ensure that community members' ideas and concerns, such as gentrification, are part of the riverfront redevelopment discussion. (Photo by Lisa Peterson-de la Cueva)

difficult conversations can come out of these workshops," she explained.

The day after FMR's fall fundraiser, Dr. Taylor helped lead "Going Beyond Green" in downtown Minneapolis. Organized by FMR, the McKnight Foundation and the Public Policy Project, the half-day forum was attended by over 70 people from 50 local mainstream, community and environmental justice organizations. They pledged to work intentionally together — an important first step for developing a community spirit of collaboration, says Dr. Taylor.

It's a spirit FMR is also working to support in its program work, especially as we engage Northside residents in planning for new parks on the river such as the Upper Harbor Terminal, a now-defunct industrial site on the Mississippi in North Minneapolis.

The challenges and the opportunities for collaboration were apparent on two fall 2017 FMR-hosted walks to the Upper Harbor Terminal that drew 71 people, mostly local residents, to give input on how to better connect the site to Northside neighborhoods.

Among these was Ky'Mari Love, a resident with lifelong Northside connections and a senior at North High School.

Love became passionate about rehabilitating the Mississippi after gathering resident input on the Upper Harbor Terminal

as an apprentice at Juxtaposition Arts. A kayak trip down the North and Northeast Minneapolis stretch punctured her illusion of the river as a natural habitat for wildlife, and replaced it with images of industry built precariously close to the river's edge and the sounds of traffic whizzing by on Interstate 94, the barrier between the river and most of North Minneapolis.

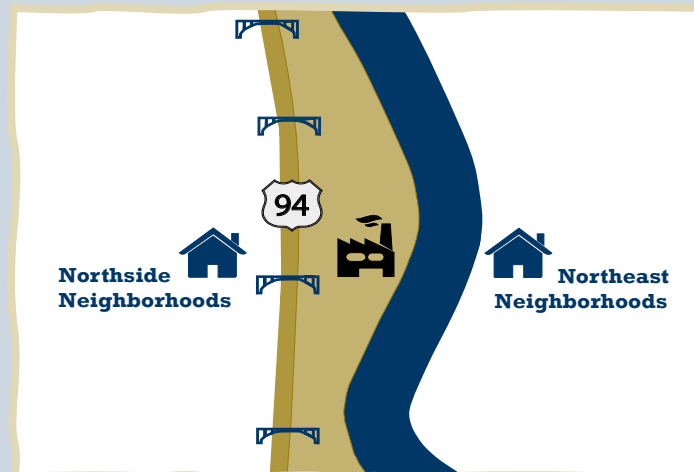
Her field experiences reinforced the statistics she had been absorbing about industry's impact on neighboring residents. "When I was kayaking down the river, oh my goodness, the pollution was just in your face," Love said.

Love is proud of her interviews to understand residents' concerns about gentrification, as well as their innovative ideas for repurposing the site. This community feedback greatly informed FMR's approach to the project, which is now transitioning from research into implementation. (See sidebar.)

Love also weighed in on FMR and Dr. Taylor's ideas about diversifying environmental movements: "People have to realize that we've been railroaded, cut off from the river. We haven't had access to these resources: the river, the jobs on the river, or decision-making about the river. So how do you diversify this movement? Honor people's time. Pay people for their time, because it is precious to them and their time is money. And get the youth involved, make a scholarship to reward them for their involvement because they — well, we — will make things happen."

Dr. Taylor is impressed with Love's ideas. "That young woman has hit the nail on the head. She is the future of these movements."

Lisa Peterson-de la Cueva is a freelance writer and the Director of Training and Education for the Community Technology Empowerment Project at St. Paul Neighborhood Network.



Over the interstate and to the river

Since 1997, FMR and community members have been advocating for a greener, more accessible riverfront in north and northeast Minneapolis — a big transformation from today's predominantly industrial stretch.

At long last, plans are in place for a ribbon of parks and trails on both sides of the "Above the Falls" stretch of the river from downtown Minneapolis to the city's northern edge.

But as former industrial sites are transformed into amenities, it's important to also make sure they're accessible to community members. Interstate 94 cuts the majority of North Minneapolis residents, mostly people of color, off from their riverfront.

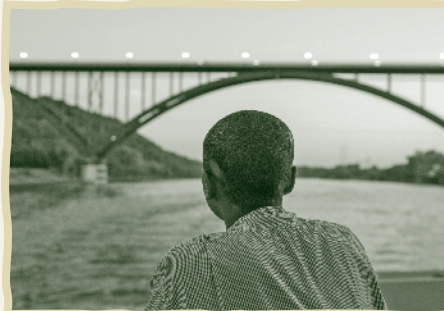
After a year and a half of gathering community input on how to improve Northside paths and connections to the river, such as making existing bridges more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, FMR has shifted into advocacy mode to make these changes reality.

Learn more at fmr.org/walk-river-north or contact Alicia Uzarek at auzarek@fmr.org, 651.222.2193 x29.

Additional features available at fmr.org!



Check out our first **mural for water quality**, by Artist Gustavo Lira developed in partnership with Como Active Citizens Network, District 10 and St. Paul Public Works!
fmr.org/mural-water-quality



The fall edition of **Write to the River** is now available! Enjoy the prose and poetry of fellow FMR supporters inspired by the photo above, "Reflections on the Smith Bridge," by Tom Reiter.
fmr.org/write-to-the-river



Join volunteers as they **survey trout and other aquatic wildlife** in the Vermillion, a major tributary in Dakota County tended by FMR Vermillion Stewards. Story by Cole Williams and photos by Rich Wahls.
fmr.org/trout-survey



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Eight years of music for the Mississippi!



Above (left to right), artist Antje Duvekot with hosts Dan Gjelten and Lisa Burke. Many thanks to all the members who host house parties large and small to benefit the river!

FMR takes a deep bow of gratitude to longtime members Dan Gjelten and Lisa Burke who hosted their eighth annual "Music and the Mississippi" this summer featuring nationally renowned singer-songwriter Antje Duvekot.

The couple's annual backyard event raises thousands for FMR's mission and garners new friends of the river every year.

"When we bought a house a few blocks from the river gorge, we wanted to make it a place where family and friends would gather, a welcoming place filled with art and live music and lively conversation," reflected Dan and Lisa. "Being outside and looking at the evening sky while listening to music we love, surrounded by people we love, in support of an organization we love, is our great privilege."

A quick shout-out to Fulton Beer for supporting the event, too!

Have an idea for a house party to support our great river? Or are you looking to support the river in a creative fashion? Let us know! Contact Sara DeKok at sdekok@fmr.org.



Get the FMR event calendar and river news in your Inbox! Sign up for our twice-a-month e-newsletter "Mississippi Messages" at www.fmr.org.



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