

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

Seizing opportunities Above the Falls

Striving for river trails, parks *and* connections in North Minneapolis

by Margo Ashmore

Dozens of volunteers converged in the mist Oct. 8, 2015 to plant the little sticks and starter plants that promise a showy prairie at Ole Olson Park in springs to come. Into the dark they worked atop the west bank of the Mississippi River near the Broadway bridge in North Minneapolis, working under streetlight until the chill convinced them to finish another day.

After years of meetings, from big-picture planning sessions to negotiating detailed restoration plans for sites like Ole Olson, Friends of the Mississippi River volunteers and staff were thrilled to get their hands dirty and support the transformation of the North and Northeast Minneapolis riverfront in a more immediate, tangible fashion. However, the volunteer event was also a hint of the great deal of work yet to come.



Installing a showy prairie near Broadway in Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of MPRB.

many community members have been advocating for a greener, more accessible riverfront in North and Northeast Minneapolis — a stark contrast to today's predominantly industrial stretch. But now with the Above the Falls Master Plan officially in place, calling for a ribbon of parks and trails on both sides of the river from St. Anthony Falls in downtown Minneapolis to the city's northern edge, the transformation has begun.

With the 2015 closure of the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock in downtown Minneapolis, the few remaining barge-dependent industries are relocating or likely will be. Now the fate of dozens of North and Northeast riverfront acres is up in the air and we face two significant challenges: Can we keep pace with the opportunities to acquire the riverfront acres to realize this park vision? And as park and trail development moves forward, how do we make sure community access remains a priority, particularly for North Minneapolis residents long cut off from the Mississippi River by Interstate 94 and a wall of industry?

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Mission

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

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

'Rebirth,' the inspiring story of our local national park

by Whitney Clark



Back in the 1970s, from the deck of his boat, the Turtle, Tom Kelley fell in love with the Mississippi River. Though the river was very polluted and private industrial land uses

dominated much of the river's banks at that time, Kelley understood the river's power. He knew that despite having been mistreated and underappreciated for decades, the Mississippi, with its mythic stature as America's River, was at the heart of the history and identity of the Twin Cities.

Tom Kelley saw, before others could, the potential of the river to be the Twin Cities' greatest asset and an ecological, recreational and cultural treasure that could restore our community's sense of place. If the river could be restored to health, Kelley thought, it could be a world-class public amenity around which the community could revitalize and redevelop.

Tom Kelley's far-fetched idea to establish a national park along the Mississippi River through the Twin Cities took some time to catch on but eventually he got the attention of Congressman Bruce Vento and Senator Dave Durenberger. After years of bipartisan work, they finally succeeded in convincing Congress to designate the 72-mile stretch of the river from Dayton to Hastings as a national park — the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) in 1988. According

to MNRRA's Comprehensive Management Plan, "The Mississippi lies at the heart of what is American and more than any other natural feature is an unmistakable symbol of this nation."

I believe the designation of the park was a tipping point for the health and vitality of the river in the Twin Cities. After that moment public decisions about the river tended to have a gravitational pull toward, rather than away from improving public access and ecological health.

This is the story we set out to tell in our new documentary film, "Rebirth: The Mississippi's National Park," which premieres on Twin Cities Public Television this spring and is also part of the National Park Service centennial celebration.

Today, the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities is enjoying a renaissance. The river is cleaner, fish and bald eagles are abundant, new parks and trails are being planned and implemented, and river-adjacent redevelopment is driving economic growth and community vitality.

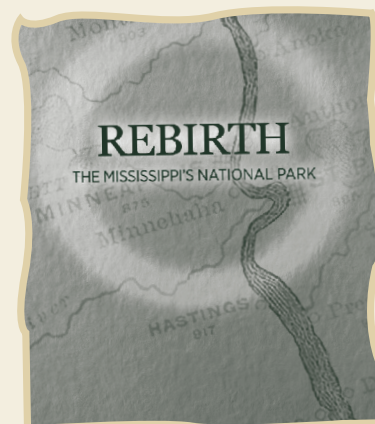
To guarantee the gains that have been made and to address the significant challenges still facing the river, it will be necessary for all of us to continue to see the desired future of the river as clearly as Tom Kelley did and to continue to speak up on its behalf.

Documentary to air May 1 & 8 on TPT

"Rebirth: The Mississippi's National Park" premieres on Twin Cities Public Television Sunday, May 1, 7 p.m. and will be reshownd the following Sunday, May 8, 1 p.m.

To learn more about additional upcoming showings of, stay tuned to FMR's Mississippi Messages e-newsletter.

Not on our email list? Sign up at FMR.org. It's the best way to hear about upcoming FMR events, programs and important river news.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Coming this fall: 'State of the River Report II'

by Trevor Russell

FMR and the local unit of the National Park Service, the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area, are proud to announce the highly anticipated release of the second edition of the "State of the River Report", Thursday, September 22 at the Science Museum of Minnesota!

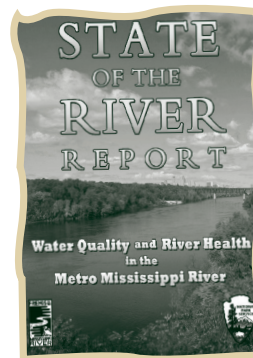
First published in 2012, the award-winning report examines key indicators of water quality and river health in the metro Mississippi River. The report greatly informed local water quality efforts and generated national coverage of the most important issues facing the river.

This fall's edition will include up to date information on many of the original indicators as well as several new indicators. It will also feature three companion guides. The Stewardship Guide will provide residents with simple steps to take to help protect the Mississippi River. The Teacher's Guide will feature new lesson

plans and service projects for Minnesota's classrooms. FMR's Policy Guide will offer priority actions that federal, state and local decision makers and water managers can take for the river.

Stay tuned to FMR's Mississippi Messages e-newsletter to learn more and claim your ticket to the State of the River Report release event!

Not on our email list? Sign up at FMR.org. (Members without email access can contact John Briel, 651-222-2193 x19 for a personal invitation.)



Save the date: Thursday, September 22, 2016

Building river corridors and community

by Alex Roth

While many FMR conservation and restoration sites are situated along the Mississippi River, many are also located along an important tributary, the Vermillion River — a cold prairie stream that runs through the heart of Dakota County before joining the Mississippi River in Hastings.

Over the last couple years FMR has been ramping up the restoration of Hastings' Vermillion Linear Park, building both community and natural connections in the process.

Owned by the City of Hastings, the park encompasses just over 60 acres. In 2013, the city approved an FMR plan to naturalize parts of the park to improve water quality, wildlife habitat and community enjoyment and work took off from there.

In fall 2013, students from Hastings High School biology teacher Joe Beattie's class planted willow stakes to reduce streambank erosion. In 2014, invasive shrubs and trees were removed throughout roughly a quarter of the park.

In 2015, a 9-acre prairie and savanna restoration began — including a prescribed burn and the removal of non-native grasses followed by seeding with three different prairie mixes finetuned for their respective locations.

In fall 2015, Beattie's students returned, this time to plant over 50 shrubs and almost 200 understory plants in the floodplain forest area. This planting involved even more community partners as it was funded in part by the United Way of Hastings and 3M.

Work at the site has also been supported by the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as appropriated by the Minnesota

legislature, and has also been part of the Vermillion Stewards program, coordinated by FMR and backed by the local watershed district, the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization.

Restoration is continuing in 2016, as is student involvement, with more plantings and a research project in the works.

FMR will also likely pursue funding to expand the restoration as well as link it with nearby restored areas at Vermillion Falls and Old Mill parks, building a much-needed corridor of restored and protected lands along this important tributary.



Hastings High students planted willows to stabilize the Vermillion's banks.

SPRING 2016

Working for clean water at the MN Capitol

by Trevor Russell



Perennial crops are a powerful way to reduce water pollution while keeping rural economies strong. Photo courtesy Forever Green, U of M

When Gov. Mark Dayton committed to clean water as a priority for his administration, water became a hot topic among state legislative leaders. FMR is working hard to turn these important conversations into solid progress for clean water this session.

Our top 2016 legislative priorities promote market-based solutions to today's biggest threat to water quality — agricultural pollution, transparency in state environmental policymaking, and vital investments in clean water supply and state conservation programs.

Specifically, FMR wants Minnesota to:

- Establish the Working Lands Watershed Restoration Program. This new program will create a market-based incentive for farmers to grow profitable perennial crops for biomass industries. Deep-rooted perennials filter pollution, reduce erosion and enhance soil health. They're also great for pollinators and are more climate-resilient. Incentivizing perennial crops for ethanol production, green energy and the emerging green chemicals industry makes them good for farmers' bottom lines as well as our environment.
- Fully fund the U of M's Forever Green Initiative. This program will accelerate development of economically viable perennial and cover crops that enhance water quality, climate resiliency and habitat.
- Safeguard state bonding (see sidebar) and Clean Water Fund investments that improve water quality and infrastructure.
- Restore the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Citizens' Board. Until its 2015 repeal, the board ensured open and transparent state environmental policy leadership for 48 years. Several legislators have authored bills to restore the independent citizen body to provide Minnesotans with a voice in how environmental regulatory decisions are made in our state.

In addition to supporting these projects and initiatives, FMR is committed to preventing further rollbacks to existing natural resource policies and programs, like the state buffers law, critical to protecting and restoring our water resources.

Become a River Protector!

To learn more, please visit FMR.org/legislative-updates. Our new legislative updates page features background articles on all of the issues we're leading in 2016 as well as timely water quality news from the halls of the Capitol Complex.

You can also help Minnesota take action on priority water issues. Sign up to be a River Protector at FMR.org/advocate and we'll be in touch about the river issues you care about most!

Funding for the river

Gov. Mark Dayton's proposed \$1.4 billion bonding or borrowing plan includes more than \$220 million to improve water quality, invigorate important conservation programs and advance key Mississippi River national park projects.

FMR bonding priorities include:

- Clean water programs
 - Upgrading aging water infrastructure (\$167M)
 - Funding for closed landfill cleanup (\$12.7M)
 - Targeted conservation easements for marginal farmland (\$30M)
- Conservation funding
 - Aquatic and wildlife management areas (\$20M)
 - Native prairie (\$8M)
 - Scientific & Natural Areas (\$5.8M)
- Local Mississippi River national park projects
 - Revitalizing Historic Fort Snelling in St. Paul (\$34 M)
 - A new regional environmental learning center along the river in St. Paul (\$19.5M)
 - Recreating Hall's Island as part of the Above the Falls Regional Park in Minneapolis (\$13M)

Learn more at FMR.org/legislative-updates!

Here soon: New river corridor rules

by Irene Jones

After years of meetings, public comment periods and FMR advocacy, new stronger rules to guide metro-area river development should soon be on the way.

To protect and preserve its unique scenic, natural and cultural features, the Mississippi River Corridor was established as a State Critical Area nearly 40 years ago.

Flowing from Dayton through the Twin Cities to Hastings, the Mississippi River Corridor also serves as the basis for our local national park — the Mississippi National River & Recreation Area — designated along this same 72-mile stretch in 1988.

In 2009, FMR successfully led a legislative effort to authorize the creation of new, updated critical area rules to guide river development to be more in keeping with the corridor's status as a national park.

Since, FMR and our many partners, allies, members and advocates have been weighing in throughout the Minnesota



New state river development guidelines are on the way.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-led rulemaking process, which involved extensive community engagement.

Now, at long last, the new proposed river corridor rules are heading towards their final phase: formal judicial review and adoption.

Expected to be published in April, the new river corridor rules will be open to public comment through July 6. An Administrative Law Judge will review a summary of

the comments and decide whether the rules are “needed and reasonable” and within the scope of the DNR’s jurisdiction, and then either approve the rules or call for adjustments.

If you'd like to be notified of opportunities to help protect the river corridor rules, let us know by signing up as a River Protector at FMR.org/advocate!

Welcome new board and staff

by sue rich



New board members Marcia Avner and Ryan Mallery

FMR is excited to welcome new board members Marcia Avner and Ryan Mallery, and new staffer Linda Moua!

Board member Marcia Avner comes to FMR with decades of public policy and advocacy experience. She has held a wide variety of positions, from serving as communications coordinator for Senator Paul Wellstone to Minnesota’s Assistant Commissioner of Energy. She serves on several boards and operates Marcia Avner Consulting, working with nonprofits,

foundations, and academic centers throughout the nation on initiatives to advance advocacy and increase community activism.

A member and supporter since 2008, Ryan Mallery joined the FMR Board of Directors in January. Ryan is an avid outdoorsman and passionate about the Mississippi River. He is also the founder of Big River Real Estate and brings a degree in real estate and urban land economics to his volunteer position.

FMR is proud to welcome Linda Moua as our new outreach and development assistant. Linda brings a strong background in administration and operations to her position, and believes everyone should complete at least a year of customer service in their lifetime. She splits her time between FMR’s outreach and development departments, assisting with volunteer and donor communications, events and database management. And is completing her Computer Information Technology degree at Metropolitan State University.



Linda Moua, outreach and development assistant

A riverfront in flux

When Horace Cleveland envisioned Minneapolis connected by the Grand Rounds system of trails and parks, North and Northeast residents and businesses were engaged in what was practical for the time; extracting clay near the riverbanks to make bricks, moving goods by way of river and rail, a working daily life.

More than a century later, the river is valued more for its own sake. With Minneapolis' Above the Falls Master Plan and Vision put in place in the late 1990s, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) started acquiring land as it came available for the new Above the Falls Regional Park.

Today, almost 50 percent of the Above the Falls shoreline is in park hands. This includes developed parks — such as Ole Olson and North Mississippi along the west bank in North Minneapolis, and Sheridan Memorial and Edgewater parks on the east bank in Northeast — as well as lands slated to become parks in the near future, such as Northeast's Scherer Bros site. (See map graphic.)

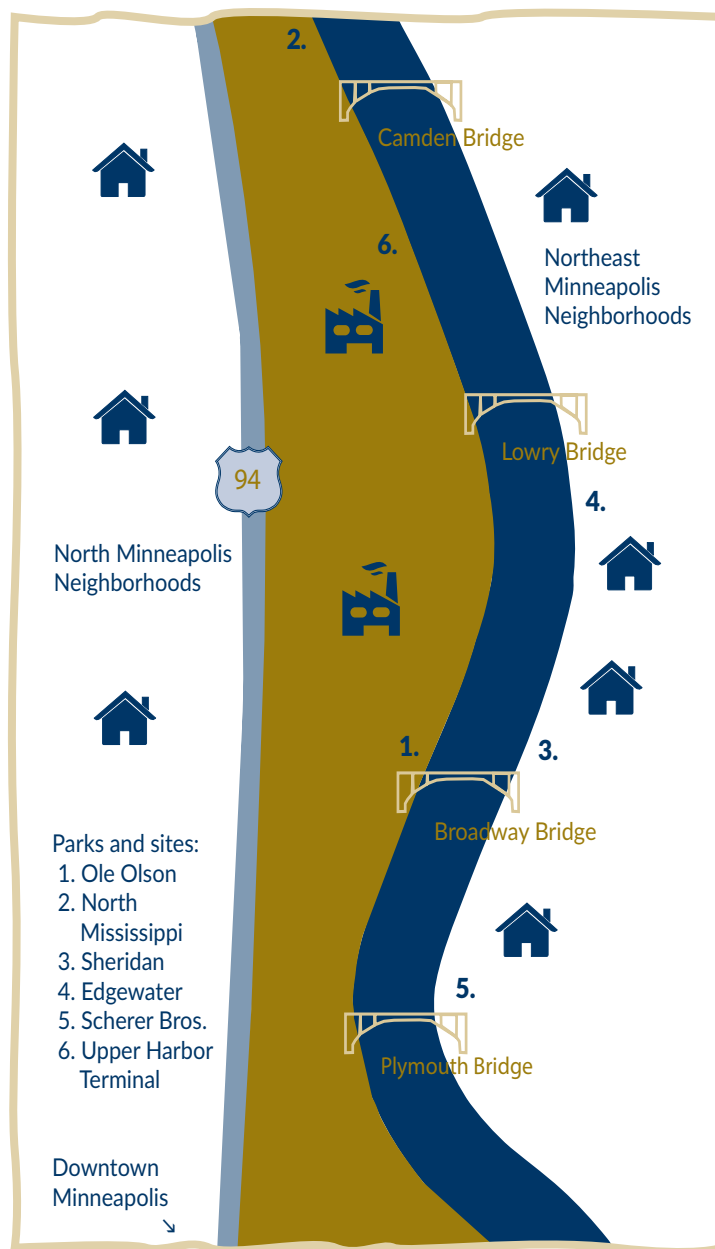
Not all riverfront owned by the park board has been turned into public parkland, however. MPRB is leveraging some shoreline properties to fund future park creation.

"We've been very creative about recent purchases because we know we don't have park development money," said MPRB Chair Liz Wielinski. "We've been leasing back to the companies that want to continue operating. For example, at 1722 Marshall we've put meters up so people can park and go to Psycho Suzi's. Those funds, minus what it costs to operate the properties, are being put aside for the eventual redevelopment."

Remaining privately held properties are interspersed, and likely expensive. The lock closure, which helped halt the spread of invasive carp upriver, has also led some large barge-dependent industries to either move or express a desire to do so. Both Aggregate Industries and Northern Metals have approached the legislature for moving assistance, which could theoretically put up to 20 acres of potential Northside parkland on the market. With many smaller parcels in hand, the park board's biggest challenge will be acquiring larger sites as they become available.

In addition to the privately owned riverfront acres in flux, a very large property owned by the city of Minneapolis is also coming into play. In late 2014, the city shut its public port, the Upper Harbor Terminal. The 48-acre North Minneapolis riverfront site will be a mix of uses (possibly including a business park), with anywhere from 20 to 30 acres set aside for parkland.

"There are groups that would like to raise funds; people realize



I-94 and industry separate North residences from the riverfront.

that it is a good investment to get these properties now," Wielinski said.

From the General Mills Foundation to the local Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, the park board is working strategically with multiple funders and partners. Wielinski said they're also working with remaining owners who may be willing to notify the park board first when they're ready to sell, put a right of first refusal in their wills, or negotiate an easement to help complete that green ribbon of parkland along the river.

Over the interstate and to the river

Fifth District Congressman Keith Ellison is excited about the Above the Falls plans for his district. "New parks and trails, along with redevelopment of adjacent properties, could be a stabilizing and strengthening amenity for Northside neighborhoods," he said.

However, he's also quick to highlight the need to think beyond the installation of parks and address community access. While new riverfront parks on the Above the Falls' east bank are mostly accessible to Northeast residents via city streets, Interstate 94 and a wall of industrial properties separate most North residents from their neighborhood's riverfront.

"The physical connections for walking and biking across I-94 are very important. The river is a Northside asset and its benefits must reach the neighborhoods and the people who live there," said Ellison. He also stressed the importance of including Northside neighbors in the planning process, and making sure their voices are heard in a larger conversation about how to best reconnect to the river.

FMR couldn't agree more and is working closely with local residents and organizations to develop a strategy to promote, fund and implement better Northside river connections.

With almost two decades' experience advocating for the Above the Falls riverfront, encouraging and monitoring changes, FMR River Corridor Director Irene Jones has seen many plans to improve bike and pedestrian connections for Northside residents. They span from the creation of grand land bridges over the freeway to renovating and improving existing highway crossings. But Jones cautions that when multiple agencies are involved, each with its own priorities (and federal, state, county and various local entities are all involved in the Northside riverfront properties) community access can be pushed low on the list or fall off the plate altogether.

"We need to look at the connections piece now. We can't let it get phased in at a later date that may not ever come. We need to ensure that North Minneapolis will not only have the riverfront regional park it was promised more than a decade ago, but also access to it," said Jones.

Improved access to parks has been shown to benefit property values, health and community fabric, as people walk or bike together more. Alexis Pennie of the North Minneapolis Bicycle Advocacy Council points out that better river access also means better access to the rest of the city. "Connections would provide access to safe bike routes to the river and into downtown from North, and will support the rapidly growing community interest in biking," said Pennie.

The first step is to analyze existing plans and research additional creative connections options. A longtime North resident, Eric King, is now FMR's graduate research assistant from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. Through May, King will compile connections options, barriers and opportunities and then work with FMR staff to present his findings to Northside communities for feedback and direction.

"We're all about collaboration," said FMR Policy Advocate Alicia Uzarek. "FMR will continue to provide research and support, as well as rely on the guidance and help of Northsiders, to make river connection improvements a reality."

Kaitlin Snoddy, outreach coordinator for Hawthorne Neighborhood Council, said their group "is looking forward to working with FMR to improve pedestrian connections for Hawthorne residents to get to the Mississippi River."

Hawthorne's eastern border is the Mississippi, from Lowry south to Broadway, but its primary residential area lies west of I-94, meaning residents must walk across a highway bridge and make their way through the industrial and commercial corridor before reaching the riverfront, where they could enjoy the trails and young showy prairie taking root at Ole Olson Park.

To learn about upcoming volunteer and river advocacy opportunities in North and Northeast Minneapolis, contact Amy Kilgore, akilgore@fmr.org, to join the Above the Falls Stewards.

Above the Falls FMR Highlights

1998-2000: Served on Upper River Master Plan Citizen Advisory Committee;

Above the Falls plan approved

2001: Appointed to co-lead Above the Falls Citizen Advisory Committee (AFCAC)

2004: Partnered with city to study feasibility of redeveloping the city-owned port, Upper Harbor Terminal, in North Minneapolis

2010-2013: Weighed in with AFCAC on park plan revisions and new designs

2012: Completed natural area scoping document for existing parks

2013: Launched Above the Falls Stewards program to engage volunteers in caring for new parks; Began offering youth service outings in North Minneapolis

2014-2015: Successfully advocated for closure of St. Anthony Falls Lock and Upper Harbor Terminal; Began restoring habitat at Sheridan Memorial Park in Northeast and Ole Olson Park in North Minneapolis

2016: Launched North Minneapolis river connections initiative; Working with AFCAC, park and city staff to plan future parks and development at Upper Harbor Terminal



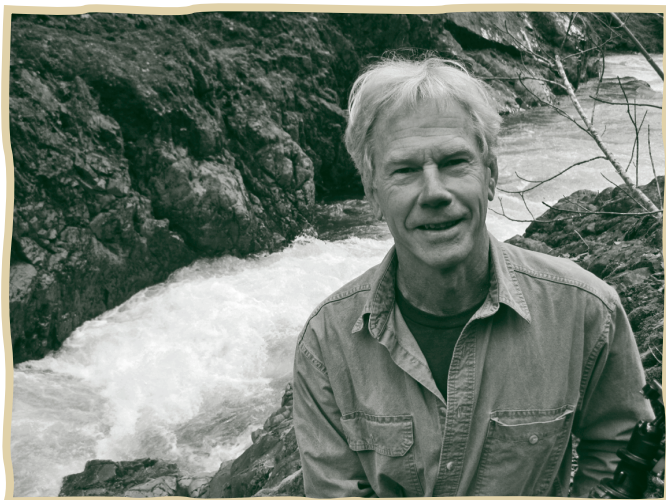
An Above the Falls volunteer checks out the river after planting a rain garden at Sheridan Memorial Park in Northeast Minneapolis. Photo by Rich Wahls



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Join us on the river, October 4, 2016!



Celebrated author, photographer and conservationist Tim Palmer

Make plans to join us for a fun-filled and inspiring evening in celebration of the Big River, Tuesday, October 4, 5:30–8:30 p.m. From our beautiful venue ON the river, the lovely Nicollet Island Pavilion near downtown Minneapolis, we'll enjoy peak fall colors, a river-themed live auction, and stories from the dynamic and engaging Tim Palmer, an award-winning photographer, conservationist and author of 22 books about rivers.

Tim will share tales of his adventures exploring America's magnificent waterways and discuss current river conservation and restoration issues important to us all.

If you have any questions or are interested in sponsoring this special event, please contact John Briel at jbriel@fmr.org. More details and a formal invitation will follow this summer.

If you would like to learn more about giving and membership opportunities at FMR please contact Sara DeKok, Development Director, 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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