

**FMR.ORG**



**AUTUMN 2018**

**Celebrating 25 years of protecting the river together**

# 25 ways you can help the river

Together our individual actions become a powerful force for change

As our river and our community face enormous challenges — habitat loss, water pollution and constant development pressure — individual action can seem like just a drop in the bucket. Perhaps a different water metaphor is apt here instead. At the headwaters of the Mississippi, Lake Itasca spills into a slight creek you can hop across on stones. The river's might amasses over miles as more and more streams join and contribute their waters. Through this gathering, the river gains its power.

Likewise, individual actions often lead to larger actions. Cole Williams began stenciling storm drains with FMR to help her neighbors understand their direct connection to the river. But since then, she's become an FMR advocate (or "River Guardian") and embarked on an intensive restoration project on her shoreline property in Cottage Grove. Williams has planted over 50 species of native plants at the site, which is designed to weather high water events and provide habitat for pollinators.

"Early on I started with casual volunteer events. This inspired me to do projects at home and to apply for the Master Water Stewardship program. I'm looking forward to watching the FMR restoration sites grow with annual tending, as well as our very own backyard prairie!" says Williams.

Individual actions, whatever their scope, also inspire others. After years of seeing rain barrels on neighborhood walks, Kristin Knudson signed up for an FMR make-and-take rain barrel class as soon as she became a homeowner. "Making a rain barrel is an easy way to be a steward of our water resources. And it's a visual that my neighbors can ask *me* about."

To celebrate our silver anniversary, we've put together this special issue featuring 25 ways we can all help the river (pages 4-7). Most likely, you'll find many of our suggestions familiar. But whether it's unclogging a storm drain or lobbying at the Capitol, we hope you'll find something new to try. We also hope you'll share these ideas with friends.

We know from our organization's origin story (see the letter from our director on page 2) that love for the river and acting for the river go hand in hand. When we deepen our relationship to this place, we feel our responsibility deepen as well. FMR has been able to grow in these past 25 years because more and more individuals like you have felt that connection and taken on the work of advocating and acting for the river. Our power comes from our gathering together, just like the river we love.



Water Action Day in May is one example of how individuals can take collective action for our river. (Photo by Sadie Luetmer)



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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

# The river inspires

by Whitney Clark



Thanks to the passion and organizing of a small band of river lovers, Congress designated our

72-mile stretch of the Mississippi River through the Twin Cities a national park in 1988. The federal designation recognized the importance of our great river not only to our region but to the nation and indeed, its global significance.

The designation was an important step, but river activists realized that it was going to take more than that to protect our river. The Mississippi was in trouble. Years of neglect left the river polluted, fish and wildlife struggling and public decisions about the river often weren't made with the long-term health of the river in mind. What was needed, these activists thought, was an organization whose mission was to focus the community's appreciation for the river into a deeper sense of place and a commitment to take action to protect it and restore it to health. That was the moment when Friends of the Mississippi River was born.

That moment was 25 years ago on July 15, 1993. Today FMR has a staff of 21 professionals, more than 2,600 members, and our annual budget is \$2.4 million. This year more than 2,000

people will attend FMR's volunteer stewardship and education events and our network of 2,000 River Guardians can bring powerful grassroots pressure to bear on public decisions that affect the river.

Much of the day-to-day work we do to protect and restore the Mississippi — from pulling buckthorn to testifying at the State Capitol — can seem mundane, but it's rooted in and inspired by the wonder and awe we feel in the serene, powerful presence of our great river. The river provides us this complex, vibrant natural system intertwined with our human stories going back thousands of years. You can't help but feel it, care about it and love it.

I believe that was the inspiration that FMR's founders felt when they decided to roll up their sleeves and start an organization dedicated to protecting this great treasure. I think it's also the spark that motivates you — our volunteers, donors and advocates — to give your time, talents and resources to this important work.

In honor of this ethic of transforming concern into action, we bring you this silver anniversary issue featuring 25 ways to protect our river.

On behalf of all of us at FMR, thank you for 25 great years. The Mississippi and our community is healthier for the work we've done together.



This fall we welcomed two new staff: Database Coordinator Jennifer Schuetz Hadley (left) and Communications Associate Ellie Rogers (right).

Jennifer and Ellie will work together in FMR's communications department, allowing us to better serve our supporters and reach out to new audiences.

## PROGRAM UPDATES

**Wildlife returns to restored habitat, a park opens to all and legal action may help protect state environmental funds. Follow the links listed in these program updates to read the full stories online.**



CHRIS SMITH

### Land Conservation

#### **Skinks and pollinators returning to FMR-restored prairie**

This summer, a new prairie took hold at William H. Houlton Conservation Area in Elk River. We're excited to report back on this former soybean field's newest residents, including bumblebees, butterflies and prairie skinks.

— Read more at [fmr.org/wildlife-returns](https://fmr.org/wildlife-returns)



### River Guardians

#### **FMR River Guardians are now 2,000-strong**

Over 2,000 people have taken action as River Guardians to advocate on behalf of the Mississippi River and its watershed. It's hard to believe this program is just in its second year!

— Read more and sign up at [fmr.org/2000](https://fmr.org/2000)



TOM REITER

### River Corridor

#### **River Heights Park saved, restoration begins**

After hearing from community members and FMR River Guardians, the Inver Grove Heights city council voted to protect River Heights Park (foreground at left) instead of selling it. Now the city, FMR and neighbors are working to restore park habitat and make it more accessible for all.

— Read more at [fmr.org/river-heights](https://fmr.org/river-heights)



### Water

#### **Why we initiated a lawsuit against the State of Minnesota**

The Legislature's raid on the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund last session violates the will of the voters and is unconstitutional. For these reasons, FMR joined eight other conservation organizations in initiating a lawsuit against the state. It's an unusual move for FMR, but an important one.

— Find more details at [fmr.org/waterblog](https://fmr.org/waterblog)



### Stewardship

#### **Tips for a river-friendly winter**

Winter doesn't have to cool down your love for improving the river. Now is the time to consider changing your winter maintenance routine around your home and yard. To get you started, we've gathered info on alternative deicers, salt and more.

— Read more at [fmr.org/winter](https://fmr.org/winter)



# 5 ways to reduce lesser-known water pollutants

When we say water pollution, many people think of oil slicks or gasoline. But some threats to water aren't as obvious: pills, soaps, salts, plastics — even leaves! Here are five ways to ensure these lesser-known pollutants don't end up in the river.



## 1 Mix up your deicing game plan this winter

Road crews often use salt to melt ice on streets and highways, but such deicers are the primary source of chloride to Minnesota's waters. Just 1 teaspoon of salt can permanently pollute 5 gallons of water.

Use these safe alternatives on your walkways and driveway: Shovel early and often to prevent ice buildup. Use deicers sparingly and sweep up extra for future use. And if it's below 15 degrees Fahrenheit, know that rock salt loses its melting power. So when it's truly cold, turn to an alternative deicer or try sand for traction. Learn more at [fmr.org/winter](http://fmr.org/winter).

## 2 Don't flush pills

While it's important to get rid of expired or unwanted medications, don't send them down the drain. Wastewater treatment systems won't remove acting agents — leading to reproductive, growth and feeding issues for fish and other aquatic wildlife. Find out where you can get rid of old pills safely at [DisposeMyMeds.org](http://DisposeMyMeds.org).



**Jen Hadley**  
FMR Database  
Coordinator  
and reuse champion

"I minimize my use of plastics by bringing reusable bags for grocery shopping; I even reuse my produce bags! Also, when doing other shopping, I opt to carry the items without using a bag if at all possible or use one that I've brought with me. When taking leftovers home, I ask for aluminum foil."

## 3 Use a car wash

Washing a car in your driveway might seem like a water-conscious choice since you can control how much water you use. But all those suds, built-up salts, grease and dust rinse right down the road into your storm drain, then straight to the rivers and lakes nearby — unfiltered and untreated.

Luckily, most car washes are required by law to route their water through treatment systems that can pull out cleaners and residue. Some even reuse their water!

## 4 Adopt your street's storm drain

Grass clippings and leaves that blow into the street will wash down the storm drain and into the river. Why would these natural materials be a problem? All that organic matter has to decompose, sucking up oxygen and releasing nitrogen —

factors that lead to fish kills and algal blooms.

One solution is to adopt your street's storm drain. On your neighborhood walks, stop by and scoop out whatever is caught in the grate. Before big storms, be sure to unclog the drain. And you can preempt buildup by raking leaves out of your street.



RICH WAHLS

## 5 Avoid microplastics

Since plastic can stick around for 500 years or longer, it inevitably ends up in our water. Tiny pieces called microplastics are even making their way up the food chain — they're in our drinking water and in the fish we eat. They come from plastic bags, take-out containers, cosmetics and more. But the main source affecting our river is less visible: plastic fibers in synthetic fabrics like microfleece. Through laundering, these fibers enter wastewater treatment, but slip through to the river.

In addition to choosing reusable containers over single-use plastics, river-conscious residents can be careful not to litter or flush plastics down the toilet, check out [BeatTheMicrobead.org](http://BeatTheMicrobead.org) for products to avoid, and buy clothing and other fabrics made of natural fibers.

# 5 ways to restore and protect habitat

Our river corridor's prairies, wetlands and woodlands are home to thousands of species of wildlife. You can nurture and help protect their habitat as you enjoy our great outdoors.



## 1 Stop aquatic hitchhikers

As you explore our lakes and streams, help protect them by keeping invasive species at bay. Trailers and boats of all kinds can pick up unintended hitchhikers like mussels and plants. Some are harmless, but others can significantly disrupt (and harm) the next ecosystem you visit.

So when you dock, clean off any visible plants or animals from the hull. Then drain any water you've picked up (including ballast tank, motor or bilge). This ensures you'll only bring family and friends along on your next boating adventure.

## 2 Get the lead out of shot and tackle

For years, manufacturers of sinkers, jigs and bullets used lead because it was inexpensive and easy to mold. But lead is a neurotoxin for wildlife and for humans. It leaches into the ground and water, or straight into fish, eagles and loons.

Minnesota hunters and anglers proud of their conservation heritage choose lead-free shot and tackle. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency keeps a list of where you can buy safe tackle: [tinyurl.com/NonLeadTackle](https://tinyurl.com/NonLeadTackle).



## 3 Garden for pollinators

Small but mighty, pollinators have an enormous job. Without them, most plants, including the crops we eat, couldn't fruit. That would cause food shortages for wildlife and people alike.

If you rent or live in the city, you may feel like converting part of a small yard to pollinator habitat couldn't impact much. But pollinators are actually drawn to patch-like gardens. They serve as crucial oases, especially in urban and residential neighborhoods where habitat can be scarce. So plant some pollinator favorites like milkweed, coneflower and aster; then see who drops by. Check out [fmr.org/pollinators](https://fmr.org/pollinators) for more resources.

## 4 Don't move firewood

Just as your boat can pick up invasive hitchhikers, so can firewood. Logs can harbor diseases and insects like the emerald ash borer (EAB) that is decimating Minnesota's ash trees. If the spread of EAB continues, we could lose about 8% of Minnesota's total tree population.

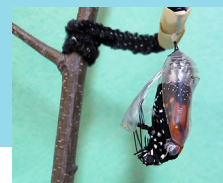
A good rule of thumb is to use wood sourced from within at least 10 miles of your campfire. If you buy your wood, visit [FirewoodScout.org](https://FirewoodScout.org) to find safe vendors near you.



**Karen Schik**

*FMR Senior Ecologist  
and monarch  
nurturer*

"Monarch caterpillars rely entirely on milkweed for their munching needs. Common milkweed is their favorite, but they also like all our native milkweeds. The adult butterflies are less picky, getting nectar from many kinds of plants. One of my favorites — and theirs — is blazing star, the 'monarch magnet!' The important thing is to have blooming flowers of multiple species throughout the summer."



*A monarch that Karen raised emerges from its chrysalis.*

## 5 Become a citizen scientist

Scientists often turn to the public to help collect wildlife and insect data. Locally, the University of Minnesota Monarch Lab has collected data on monarch larvae from enthusiasts since 1997. Visit [MonarchLab.org](https://MonarchLab.org) to learn more. And if you're an educator who'd like your students to monitor an FMR restoration site, let us know! Contact our youth coordinator Kate Clayton: [KClayton@fmr.org](mailto:KClayton@fmr.org).



# 5 ways to make your yard river-friendly

Whether urban, suburban or rural, our yards are part of the Mississippi watershed. The effects of how we landscape and route rain show up far beyond our property lines. Dig in to these tips to help protect the river from your own backyard.



**Adam Flett**

*FMR Stewardship & Education Program*

*Director and rain barrel aficionado*

“You can make your own rain barrel if you don’t want to buy one! There are a lot of options for the barrel — plastic drums, recycling bins — anything that holds water well. Plus, you can now find handy converter kits that make connecting a barrel to your roof much easier.”



## 1 Plant natives

To endure Minnesota’s hot summers and deep-freeze winters, prairie grasses like big bluestem grow roots down to 8 feet to reach nutrients and water. These deep roots hold soil in place and allow the earth to absorb far more rain than a turfgrass lawn can. Plus, birds, bees and other critters that live here depend on native plants for habitat.

Unsure where to start? Visit **Blue-Thumb.org** for resources, including classes.

## 2 Reduce chemical use

Pesticides and herbicides that keep turfgrass weed-free can be toxic to people and wildlife. Lawn chemicals account for the majority of reported wildlife poisonings to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

To reduce lawn chemical usage in problem areas, try to find the root cause. The actual roots of your plants may be in poor soil. Aerate your lawn once a year to break up the soil so nutrients and water more easily reach roots. Mulch your leaves in place in the fall. Amend your soil with a thin layer of rich compost. You could also replace some of your lawn with native plants to make a garden that doesn’t need as much chemical assistance to flourish.

## 3 Rig up a rain barrel

Rain barrels collect the rain that runs off your roof and slides down your gutters so you can use it later to water your garden or lawn. But rain barrels do more than conserve water. They also prevent runoff and the pollution it carries from entering already-taxed stormwater systems. Make your own or join us at one of our make-and-take rain barrel classes. Learn more at **fmr.org/rain-barrels**.

## 4 Prevent runoff

Thanks to climate change, when it rains it pours, causing stormwater system overflows. That means pollution discharges into the river. You can help by keeping rain where it lands. One easy way is to cut your lawn to three inches or more. The higher the lawn, the deeper its roots. And the deeper its roots, the more absorptive the ground. Leaving lawn clippings in place also encourages richer, more absorptive soils. Finally, reroute your downspouts away from pavement and into grass, a rain barrel or rain garden.

## 5 Pick up after your pet

This one’s simple. Make sure to pick up after your four-legged friends. Pet waste contains harmful bacteria. If pet waste is still in your yard or at the park when it rains, bacteria leaches into runoff and into the river. In fact, some areas of the Mississippi are impaired for E. coli. So be vigilant, especially before rains and snowmelt events.

## 5 ways to be a part of FMR

### 1 Volunteer



Join 2,000+ volunteers:  
**fmr.org/volunteer**

### 2 Donate



Join 2,600+ members:  
**fmr.org/donate**

### 3 Learn



Join 1,500+ learners:  
**fmr.org/events**

*Did you know FMR offers classes on rain barrels, river-friendly homes and gardens and more?*

# 5 ways to educate yourself and your community

By learning, sharing and exploring with your friends and family, you can help grow support for the Mighty Mississippi.

## 1 Stencil storm drains with your group or class

You've probably seen a spray-painted warning beside a storm drain: "Keep 'em clean — drains to river!" FMR has led school, religious and service groups on stenciling missions for the past 23 years, reminding all of us that if it's in our streets, it's in our streams. We'd love to teach your class or group about our waters and lead a St. Paul cleanup or stenciling outing. Email [stenciling@fmr.org](mailto:stenciling@fmr.org) for more information.

## 2 Share the 'State of the River Report'

So, how is the Mississippi River? In collaboration with the National Park Service, we pulled together answers to that question in our "State of the River Report."

Updated in 2016, the report highlights 14 key indicators of river health, and is an approachable, engaging way to learn about all the forms of pollution mentioned in this "25 ways to help the river" feature. Read and share the report and companion guides for at-home and community stewardship, policy, and education at [StateOfTheRiver.com](http://StateOfTheRiver.com).

## 3 Encourage pride in our national park

Many Minnesotans think our only national park is Voyageurs, some 300 miles north of the Twin Cities. But the entire 72-mile stretch of the river that runs through our metro area makes up the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA).

Watch the story of this unique national park's designation in "Rebirth" at [fmr.org/rebirth](http://fmr.org/rebirth). Then head to [nps.gov/miss](http://nps.gov/miss) to plan your next outing.

## 4 Educate your reps as a River Guardian

While clean water is a simple concept, it can get complicated quickly. How can the average person learn about and speak up effectively about agricultural issues or river corridor development policies with their local or state representatives?

That's why FMR created the River Guardians program. River Guardians receive emails that not only allow them to act quickly and easily but keep them in the know on important policy decisions impacting our local river corridor. They're also invited to presentations and happy hours to learn more and meet fellow advocates. Sign up at [fmr.org/advocate](http://fmr.org/advocate).

## 5 Visit the river together

One of the best ways to foster care for our river is through experience. For three years, the Twin Cities has been ranked highest in the nation for park accessibility. Check out our Special Places map at [fmr.org/celebrating-25-years](http://fmr.org/celebrating-25-years) to find a few of our favorite spots. And make sure to share the special places you find with others. Visit by foot, by boat or simply be still on the shoreline. The river is sure to inspire connection.



**Sophie Downey**  
FMR Outreach Assistant  
and river explorer

Photo by Tom Reiter

"My favorite place on the river is the trail along the sand flats in Minneapolis. You get beautiful, up-close views of the river there. And there's always the chance that you might see some interesting wildlife. Easy access from West River Parkway is also a plus!"

## 4 Advocate



Join 2,000+ River Guardians:  
[fmr.org/advocate](http://fmr.org/advocate)



**Amy Kilgore**  
FMR Volunteer  
Coordinator and  
River Guardian

"I signed up to be a River Guardian because issues that threaten the Mississippi don't always make it into the news. The River Guardian action alerts make it so easy to speak up. After a few clicks and a couple of moments adding my personal sentiments to the already powerful messaging FMR has crafted, my note is on its way to the right people."

## 5 Share



Friends of the  
Mississippi River



@FriendsMissRiv



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## Behind the scenes of our 25th anniversary video

In honor of our 25th anniversary, we worked with filmmakers, photographers and countless volunteers to tell the story of FMR through film. We collected 40 hours of amazing footage — interviews from members and friends, shots of special places and stunning aerial views of the Mighty Mississippi.

We somehow managed to edit all this down to a 10-minute video, but it wasn't easy. We have a lot to showcase from this urban stretch of the river and our avid supporters.

Debuted in September, the video is now online at [fmr.org/video](https://fmr.org/video). We hope you watch and share with friends. And we hope you feel proud of all you've contributed to the protection and restoration of our river.

To support the work we do behind the scenes for the river, please consider donating today. **Visit [fmr.org/donate](https://fmr.org/donate) or mail us the enclosed donation envelope with your gift of support. FMR and the river thank you!**



*Executive Director Whitney Clark on camera at Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area. Pictured with filmmaker Donnie Koshiol of River Street Creative and FMR staff. (Photo by Tom Reiter)*

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Sign up for our twice-a-month e-newsletter "Mississippi Messages" at [www.fmr.org](https://www.fmr.org).



"Friends of the  
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FMR is proud to be a member of  
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