



Friends of the Mississippi River

Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area

www.fmr.org

Fall 2008

Patient, place-based advocacy sees FMR through 15 years of steady growth

by Chris Steller

The phrase comes towards the end of Friends of the Mississippi River's vision statement: "A river no one can ignore." And in the course of working to make the Mississippi that kind of a river as it runs through the Twin Cities metropolitan area, Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) has become that kind of organization – one that no one can ignore.

"We're engaged in most of the important decisions happening relative to the river, in some way," says Executive Director Whitney Clark. "More and more people look to us as a go-to organization – 'Where's FMR on this? Can they help?'"

FMR's growing capacity can be seen in numbers. From a startup organization with a \$50,000 budget and one employee in 1994, FMR now employs 17 people and has a budget of about \$1.3 million. It's what Clark terms a "nice evolution."

FMR was founded in the summer of 1993, following the designation by Congress of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) as a unit of the National Park Service.

MNRRA was, at first, a park in name only. Meetings of the Mississippi River Coordinating Commission that had been charged with creating MNRRA's comprehensive management plan were full of corporate lobbyists but short on citizen input. Current FMR Board Chair Peter Gove also chaired that commission, and was the driving force to launch FMR.

A first order of business was to add a strong citizen voice to the development of MNRRA, and



Avid birders participating in one of FMR's Special Places Tours.

giving voice to public concerns regarding the Mississippi remains central to FMR's work. It's an effort, together with protecting water quality and conserving land along the river, that has wide appeal.

One reason for that, according to FMR co-founder John Anfinson, is that FMR has managed to keep its energies directed on a specific place – the Twin Cities metropolitan Mississippi. Anfinson, Gove and two other members of the current board – Hoka Miller and George Dunn – also served on FMR's first board 15 years ago.

An example of FMR's organic yet spectacular growth is a tradition beginning with informal paddles led by Clark, then an early FMR member, that evolved into FMR's marquee event, the two-day, 44-mile Mississippi River Challenge.

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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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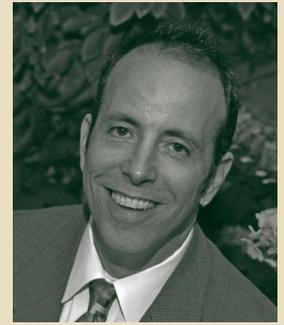
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From the Director

Fifteen years ago some far-sighted leaders, recognizing the many threats to the health of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities, got themselves organized, founding Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR).



Whitney Clark,
Executive Director

FMR's first Board of Directors saw the river as an incredible asset that flows through the heart of our community, but they worried that it was in danger of suffering a "death by a thousand cuts." The go-go economy of the 1990s was starting to heat-up and everybody wanted a piece of our great river.

In the balance were the public values of the river: swimmable, fishable waters, protected riverfront open space, public access to the river, scenic views. The new nonprofit would be a watchdog, and an advocate to represent the concerns of citizens and river users who lacked the capacity and resources of the big private interests. But perhaps more importantly, this new organization would be a voice for the Mississippi River — a complex living system of international significance — that could not speak for itself.

But it is a long journey from the pollination of an idea to its actual fruition. Looking back, you have to admire the sagacity of those early founders who put in the long hours, evenings and weekends to build the foundation of an organization that could eventually make a difference. You also must respect the courage of those early funders — The McKnight Foundation, the Patrick and Aimee Butler Family Foundation, to name just two, who believed in the idea, made early investments, and have been strong supporters ever since.

Back in 1994, as an FMR volunteer, I planned and led the first river outing for the new organization. With a group of perhaps 25, we canoed from the University of Minnesota, down through the gorge, past the Minnesota River confluence and took-out at Harriet Island. Along the way we stopped to hear talks about the geology of the gorge and native plant

communities. We collected macroinvertebrate samples and learned about aquatic ecology. I boned-up on my history and offered a pretty amateur presentation on the human history of the river valley in the Twin Cities. What sticks with me from that day is the enthusiasm — the excitement that we all felt about rediscovering the amazing richness of the Mississippi and the growing resolve that we felt to make sure we passed this gift on to the next generation healthier than we found it.

In January of 1997, I became FMR's second executive director. With the steady guidance of a terrific Board of Directors and the hard work and dedication of an amazingly talented staff we've grown a lot and accomplished some great things (see a partial list of accomplishments on pages 6-7).

I believe we've built an organization that has the capacity to be a lasting force to bring about positive changes for the river. Being a place-based organization means we've had to learn to work with a wide range of partners, from oil refineries to neighborhood groups. We've made long-term commitments to the local communities where we focus our work and we've tried to bring stakeholders together to solve problems pragmatically and in a

spirit of partnership.

Whether we're working with a city to help them reduce the polluted runoff they send to the Mississippi or with a landowner who wants to protect and restore their riverfront property, we're taking real, tangible steps on the local level that contribute measurably to the improvement of this internationally significant resource. It has been a great honor to be a part of FMR's first 15 years. Here's to a productive and successful second 15. Happy birthday FMR!

But perhaps more importantly, this new organization would be a voice for the Mississippi River — a complex living system of international significance — that could not speak for itself.

Program Highlights

Volunteers Plant and Tend New Prairie at Crosby Park

Nestled at the bottom of the gorge at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, Crosby Park is a gem of a riverside park and a natural oasis in the heart of the city. A new focus area for FMR's Gorge Stewards program, Crosby Park has drawn more than 100 volunteers this summer to assist with habitat restoration and improvement.

Early in the spring, the City of St. Paul Parks Division conducted a controlled burn on four acres in preparation for a new interpretive prairie. Controlled burns help manage and remove weeds, reduce the duff or plant litter layer, and return nutrients to the soil.

On May 31, fifty volunteers planted and mulched nearly 1,000 prairie plugs on a portion of the project site. Situated near the park entrance, this semi-formal section of the prairie planting will provide visitors with an opportunity to experi-

ence the prairie, and to learn about native plants through interpretive signage.

Several volunteers returned throughout the season to help FMR care for the new prairie by weeding around the new plants and removing invasive species in preparation for a fall seeding event. An interpretive event on October 4 was held to celebrate and showcase the work of our volunteers and the natural beauty of Crosby Park.

Special thanks to all our volunteers and to the project partners and funders—Capitol Region Watershed District, Xcel Energy, the City of St. Paul, and the Minnesota Environmental & Natural Resources Trust Fund.

To see photos from some of the events at Crosby this season, visit <http://gorgestewards.blogspot.com>

Beth Hayden conquering giant ragweed. Photo by Emily Johnson.



Critical Area Outreach Project

Launching a new initiative, FMR teamed up this summer with the National Park Service to proactively engage metro river communities in addressing the concerns they are confronting in their part of the Mississippi River corridor.

Dozens of community members, planning commissioners, city staff, and city council members participated in four locally-tailored community workshops to better understand the Critical Area standards for the Mississippi River, and their city's role and responsibility in protecting and enhancing this key local and national asset. Communities identified key questions and priorities to investigate in the coming months:

- How can Cottage Grove work to preserve the unique natural assets around Lower Grey Cloud Island?
- How can the City of Ramsey grow while better preserving riverfront green space, marketing it as an amenity for recreation and economic development?
- How can a new Highway 61 bridge re-energize Hastings' historic downtown and strengthen connections to the surrounding trail system?
- How can Brooklyn Park help residents develop natural responses to erosion control along the Mississippi?



River Park in Brooklyn Center. Photo by Gabe Ormsby

The workshops gave FMR an opportunity to work proactively with local communities, and to get out ahead of key challenges through partnership and open discussion. The workshops also served to strengthen the partnership between FMR and the National Park Service. We continue to work together to follow up on the priorities illuminated by the initial set of workshops, and plan to reach out to additional cities next year.



Hastings High School students volunteering at the Sand Coulee. Photo by Tim Boyle

Hastings Sand Coulee Update

FMR has been working with numerous partners to protect and restore the Hastings Sand Coulee prairie, including Hastings High School teacher Joe Beattie and his field biology classes. Last spring, FMR instructed Joe's class on how to collect prairie seed. Local nursery owner Nancy Schumacher of The Vagary volunteered to germinate the seed and grow the seedlings over the summer. In September, FMR, the students, the city and other community volunteers planted 1,500 prairie plants in a degraded area at the site. The students not only learned about the natural prairie community but they were active partners in improving its health.

On another part of the Coulee, the Murnane family recently took steps to permanently protect their land, in honor of their parents Joe and Joanne Murnane. After donating a conservation easement to the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Area Program, the family donated the 6-acre parcel to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. It will be added to the Hastings Sand Coulee Scientific and Natural Area. (Visit www.fmr.org for more information about this inspiring story.)

Program Updates

2008 Great River Energy Mississippi River Challenge Was A Success!

The sun shone brightly upon the 2008 Great River Energy Mississippi River Challenge on July 26th and 27th. We enjoyed truly perfect weather, with no headwinds to slow participants or diminish their spirits, as this annual event celebrated its fifth year of connecting the community to the Mississippi River.

FMR is pleased to have had over 450 people (288 paddlers, 20 cyclists and 150 volunteers) participating and promoting protection and restoration of the Mississippi River. These dedicated participants raised over \$83,000 for Friends of the Mississippi River's work on the Twin Cities stretch of the amazing river they traveled during the weekend. In addition, numerous new and returning sponsors generously

provided both cash and in-kind support.

A huge thank you to everyone who played a role in the event's success this year from all of us at FMR. See you on the river next year!



MRC participants and volunteers celebrating the end of the first day of the Challenge at Fort Snelling. Photo by Tim Boyle

Planting Bonanza at Rosemount Preserve

This spring, 90 enthusiastic students from Veda Kanitz's advanced biology classes at Rosemount High School took part in a woodland wildflower planting at the 26-acre Rosemount Wildlife Preserve. After several years of buckthorn control, followed by planting native shrubs, the oak woodland was ready for increasing the diversity of native wildflowers. Prior to the event, Friends of the Mississippi River's ecologist, Karen Schik, gave a classroom presentation to each of the classes, teaching them about native Minnesota

plant communities and ecological restoration. Primed with that background, they arrived at the site, ready to dig in. The students planted, watered and mulched over 600 plants, then set up fences to protect them from deer browsing until they get established. Funded by the Vermillion Joint Powers Organization (JPO), a grant from the SKB Rosemount Community Trust and by a Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEP) grant to the high school, this was an exciting hands-on experience for the students, many of whom had never put a plant in the ground before.



Rosemount High School advanced biology students planting wildflowers at Rosemount Preserve. Photo by Rikk Flohr



West Side River Flats. Photo by Irene Jones

St. Paul Updates Critical Area Zoning

After months of careful consideration, St. Paul is poised to update its Critical Area zoning – the zoning that sets the parameters for development along the Mississippi River. Friends of the Mississippi River applauds much of the work, but has two principal concerns.

First, we hope that the zoning will set clear, reliable and enforceable height standards for new buildings in two areas. The area across the river from downtown offers a spectacular view of the river valley, but one that could easily be lost by insensitive development. One proposal effectively creates a loophole in the height standards that would allow taller buildings if the development is part of a city-approved master plan. Similarly, FMR is concerned that the taller proposed height limits for the gorge area along the western edge of the City would allow for more

intrusive development there.

Second, Critical Area zoning divides cities into four zoning districts. St. Paul proposes radically changing these zoning districts to focus on individual parcels, rather than on the larger-scale natural systems and viewsheds. FMR does not believe these zoning changes adequately protect a key regional resource.

The St. Paul City Council is poised to take the matter up during the month of November.

Live in Saint Paul? Contact your council member and encourage them to support the strongest protections for the Mississippi River Critical Area. To learn more about this issue visit www.fmr.org.

The Lake Pepin TMDL: Pollution Reduction Targets Released

At the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Lake Pepin TMDL conference in Mankato (September 23rd & 24th 2008), results from the ongoing Lake Pepin "Total Maximum Daily Load" study were presented to agencies, municipalities, watersheds, non-profits organizations (including Friends of the Mississippi River) and others.

The news: In order for Lake Pepin to achieve its water quality standards, major reductions in suspended sediments and phosphorous will be required for all sources flowing into the lake.

While the implementation plans for achieving these reductions have not yet been designed, the Lake Pepin TMDL, backed by provisions of the

Major Source or River Basin	% Total Suspended Sediment Reductions Required to Meet H2O Quality Standards	% Total Phosphorous Reductions Required to Meet H2O Quality Standards
Minnesota River Basin	50%	50%
Upper Mississippi River Basin	20%	20%
Cannon/Vermillion Rivers	50%	50%
St. Croix River Basin	20%	20%
Waste Water Treatment Plants	0	70%
"MS4" Permitted Municipalities	25%	25%
Others	Reduced Mississippi River "pool two" sediment re-suspension via pool drawdown, increased re-vegetation & island building.	

U.S. Clean Water Act, should eventually result in reduced sediment and phosphorous flows into Lake Pepin - and a much cleaner Mississippi River for all Minnesotans!

For more information on Impaired Waters, the Clean Water Act and TMDL's, visit FMR's website at www.fmr.org or contact FMR's Watershed Program Director Trevor Russell at (651) 222-2193 ext 18 or trussell@fmr.org

Friends of the Mississippi River

Since 1993, FMR has worked with approximately **26,000 volunteers** who have contributed over 250,000 hours.

Since 1998, FMR's land conservation work has led to the **permanent protection of 849 acres** in the Twin Cities region, with 2,288 pending.



Hastings River Flats planting

FMR's **Mississippi River Challenge** has engaged over 1,400 participants who have raised \$312,452 to support river conservation.



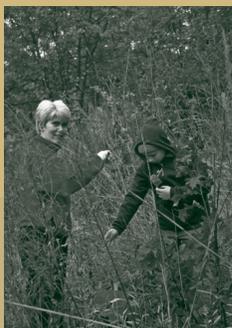
Mississippi River Challenge paddlers

FMR provided leadership in 1998 to found the **Metro Greenways Program** at the Department of Natural Resources and successfully lobbied for its initial \$4 million of State funding.

Since 2000, FMR's **Gorge Stewards Project** has grown to ten neighborhoods on both sides of the gorge and we have exported the citizen stewardship model to three additional areas within the Twin Cities.

In 2004 FMR led a public process that developed the **Upper Harbor Terminal Redevelopment Plan** to turn a riverside industrial area in North Minneapolis into a park and a new neighborhood.

In 2002, FMR led a coalition to pass **Dakota County's Farmland & Natural Areas Program**, which to date has resulted in permanent protection for over 6,245 acres.



Hardworking Gorge Stewards collecting native seeds

Continued from cover

The Challenge is “critical in giving us a river identity,” Anfinson says. “It keeps us, as an organization, tied to the river in a real, connected way – not in an armchair way. FMR is not an organization that works only on paper. We actually get people out on the river.”

Hillary Oppmann has seen that first hand while working closely with FMR on the Gorge Stewards program in her five years as a community organizer for the Longfellow Community Council in Minneapolis. She first got involved with FMR as a volunteer and says FMR impressed her right away as a well-run organization that did “a terrific job of engaging people and getting them out near the river, making people feel connected in a meaningful way to this place where we live, and to make them aware of the uniqueness in the middle of the city.”

FMR's help with Longfellow's Gorge Stewards program “was instrumental in facilitating the implementation of a lot of the planning that the neighborhood had done,” Oppmann says. To make all these restoration activities happen, including the continuing maintenance work afterwards, was going to require more manpower than Longfellow's neighborhood organization could corral and manage. To date, FMR's involvement has helped the Gorge Stewards program grow to ten urban riverside neighborhoods.

FMR's work has brought “value for the neighborhood,” Oppmann says.

In Oppmann's view, one element that's been critical to FMR's success – in conserving land along the river, protecting its watershed, and providing stewardship of the river corridor – is “the ability to maintain good relations with organizations in the community.” Oppmann says she consistently hears compliments and praise for FMR's work.

FMR has established a principled approach to working with elected officials, landowners, barge companies and local and federal government agencies such as the National Park Service – individuals and organizations that, whatever their agendas, will remain part of the river's future for many years to come.

This approach – not burning bridges and working constructively with a wide range of partners – has come to define FMR and is exemplified by a project that FMR began a decade ago. Joined in 2000 by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Great River Greening, FMR began a partnership with landowner Flint Hills Resources, the Upper Midwest's largest petroleum refinery, to restore and preserve the 8,000 acres of high-quality natural landscape at Pine Bend Bluffs in the Inver Grove Heights and Rosemount area.

FMR has shown that the same kind of patient efforts at engagement can work at the finer-grained level of individuals who own land along the Mississippi. Tom Lewanski, who has served as FMR's conservation director for 10 years, is a skilled practitioner of retail conservation. He'll knock on doors, write polite letters, and work the phone for years, initiating and ushering relationships through initial resistance to eventual partnerships that pay off for the river.

Yet there are times when FMR has decided to stand up in opposition to projects that would impair the river's health. In those cases, FMR has

15-Year Accomplishments

In 2006 and 2007, FMR launched two citizen-based campaigns for stronger water quality measures that resulted in the passage of the **Vermillion River Watershed Standards and the Rice Creek Rules** and ushered in a new era of watershed management in the region.

Since 1998, FMR's **Storm Drain Stenciling Project** has involved 20,096 volunteers who have contributed 189,298 hours to stencil 43,340 drains with the message "Please Don't Pollute – Drains To River!"



Students celebrate completion of a Storm Drain Stenciling project.

FMR's leadership resulted in the collaborative development of a comprehensive **Mississippi River Greenway Strategic Plan**, which guides our land protection work and won the 2002 American Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award.

Since 1998, FMR has actively worked to protect and restore the beautiful **Pine Bend Bluffs Natural Area**; restoring hundreds of acres, permanently protecting the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific & Natural Area, and winning the **2007 Minnesota Environmental Initiative Award** in the Natural Resource Protection Category for our leadership role.

In 2007, after two years of FMR working closely with numerous stakeholders, the proposal for the massive **Bridges of St. Paul** development project was finally **defeated** – an affirmation that the many public assets of the river are highly valued by our community.



Signage indicating a Scientific & Natural Area.

Since 2001 FMR has worked to restore over 80 acres of a rare prairie in Dakota County that is home to 13 rare plant and animal species. In 2007 the 76-acre **Hastings Sand Coulee Scientific & Natural Area** was formally established, permanently protecting this fragile native landscape.



MPCA staff and a Stream Health Evaluation Program volunteer collect samples of macroinvertebrates in Clearwater Creek in an effort to measure and improve water quality in the Rice Creek watershed. Photo by Sara Muchowski

relied on its mission and commitment to public values along the metro Mississippi as guides to making decisions and taking action.

A recent and major example is the mammoth Bridges of St. Paul development proposal. FMR was part of a pitched battle over the future of downtown St. Paul's riverfront, advocating for the preservation and protection of scenic views of the Mississippi and public access to the banks – a position that ultimately prevailed with the strong support of elected leaders.

Not all decisions with important impact on the river are made in city council chambers or corporate boardrooms. For years, FMR volunteers have taken to the streets – or more specifically, the gutters – to stencil messages near storm drains that remind neighbors not to let polluting substances reach the Mississippi River via the grates at their curbsides. It's a program that continues from FMR's early days, having started in 1995.

Lectures and outings have long made up another big part of FMR's outreach as Oppmann, the neighborhood organizer, sees it. She recalls an FMR birding hike one spring morning led by experts who knew birds by their songs – "always a real treat," she says. That day the group saw lots of bluebirds, colorful warblers and even a scarlet tanager at the top of an oak tree.

It's one thing to learn that 40 percent of North America's shorebirds and waterfowl migrate along the Mississippi Flyway, Oppmann says, but seeing them as they pass through our stretch of the Mississippi "really brings it into focus — this is our treasure to protect."



New Staff!

As FMR's new Internet & Data Systems Manager, **Noah Mundahl** manages the organization's web site and database as well as providing computer technical support for FMR's staff. He has a degree in Computer Science from the University of Iowa and experience with other local nonprofits in IT and web development.

FMR welcomes intern **Alyssa Neeb** from the HECUA Environmental Sustainability program for the fall semester. She will work alongside FMR's stewardship and education team.

FMR is pleased to welcome Development Assistant **Kristin Nierengarten** to the staff. She will be helping to make sure the organization's fundraising keeps up with its growing objectives. FMR was lucky to attract Kristin, who graduated in June from Carleton College where she worked in the Office of Stewardship.

Not pictured:

Michele Bevis, Administrative Assistant joined the FMR staff last spring and has made herself an indispensable part of the team. Michele brings a great passion for river conservation and environmental protection to FMR. She works with all of the staff to keep the office running smoothly.

FMR's new Finance Manager, **Bruce Freidson**, is a seasoned nonprofit finance professional with a CPA certificate and an MBA. Bruce will manage FMR's accounting and budgeting functions and help staff keep track of the numerous grants and contracts that make our work possible.

For profiles and photos of all of FMR's staff, please visit www.fmr.org.

Gorge Stewards Earns Local Support

The Mississippi River Gorge Stewards are winding down another successful year of volunteer clean-up, restoration and training activities designed to engage neighborhood residents in river protection efforts. Although local participation is a hallmark of the program, 2008 is the first year we've had so much local funding.

Watershed organizations on both sides of the river are supporting the project this year. The Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) is providing funds for the fifth year in a row, and Capitol Region Watershed District (CRWD) became a funder this year. Long-fellow Community Council, a long-time neighborhood partner, is also supporting the project.

Several local businesses stepped up to sponsor this year, providing more than \$1,500 for the program. Many of these businesses are located near the river – show your appreciation by stopping in and thanking them for their support!

2008 Gorge Stewards Sponsors: Xcel Energy, Aveda Corp., Bibelot Shops, Mother Earth Gardens, Merlin's Rest, Northern Sun Merchandise.

Thank you FMR Volunteers!

Buckthorn busting, membership mailings, photography, plantings - Friends of the Mississippi River volunteers do it all. Without assistance from these 2,300 volunteers so far this year alone, many beloved projects and programs would simply not be possible. The Oak Savanna in the Minneapolis River Gorge would be a buckthorn thicket. There would be no Mississippi River Challenge. Tons of trash would still be in and along the river, not only spoiling a beautiful paddle or walk, but harming wildlife and water quality. And too many additional contributions to name here. We humbly extend our gratitude to you: **Thank you.**



FMR is proud to be a member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund (www.mnenvirofund.org)



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