

*For the health
of our communities*

OUR GREAT RIVER NEEDS

A FRIEND

*For the
sake of our
drinking water*

*For vital riverfront
habitat and
scenic natural areas*

FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER
1999 ANNUAL REPORT





LETTER

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends:

The Mississippi River adds so much to the Twin Cities. It lends breathtaking natural beauty to our landscape and supplies much of our drinking water. The wilderness along the Mississippi's banks provides habitat to countless forms of wildlife and recreational opportunities for local families. The river plays a central role in our local history – and it is a critical part of our future.

The Twin Cities needs a healthy Mississippi River. Unfortunately, today's Mississippi River has lost much of its ecological value. Although improvements in the river's water quality have been realized in the last 20 years, much more needs to be done.

It is important to realize that the future of the Mississippi River is in our hands and together we can make a difference.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is the only nonprofit organization focused exclusively on protecting and enhancing the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. We work through four program areas to ensure a healthy future for the river: Conservation, Education and Outreach, River Partnerships and River Watch.

In 1999 FMR's program work generated some exciting results. We launched our heritage land registry of landowners along the Mississippi and Vermillion Rivers. We helped to identify and restore key riverfront habitat. We have also set the stage for the restoration of hundreds of acres of bluff prairie and oak savanna overlooking the Mississippi. More than 800 young people took part in our volunteer program to increase awareness of and prevent non-point source pollution. Our annual Mississippi River Canoe Adventure and spring bird hikes brought hundreds of people to the Mississippi to have fun and learn about this great river. Finally, we continue to make progress advocating on behalf of the river and its watershed in policy forums such as the Minnesota legislature.

FMR's work would not be possible without the many members, volunteers, citizens, donors and partners who support our efforts. On behalf of FMR's board and staff I would like to thank everyone involved in helping to protect the Mississippi River and everything it adds to our communities.



George Dunn

Sincerely,

George Dunn
Chair, Board of Directors



Conservation Program: Protecting and Restoring Vital Riverfront Land

The Mississippi River's scenic bluffs and vital floodplains have an enormous impact on the water quality and habitat functions of this great waterway – and on local quality of life. After a series of mapping and strategic planning activities, FMR determined that there was a strong need to work with the landowners on the fast-growing fringes of our metro area to restore and prevent degradation of riverfront lands. Highlights of FMR's 1999 Conservation Program work include the following specific projects, strategies and accomplishments.

MISSISSIPPI-VERMILLION HERITAGE LAND REGISTRY

In 1998 FMR launched the first-ever registry for Mississippi riverfront property in Minnesota. This voluntary registry is for landowners committed to stewarding their property, from replanting native vegetation or shoreline buffers to permanently protecting their land by donating a conservation easement. Through mapping and parcel-by-parcel assessments, FMR's staff identified the properties along the Mississippi and Vermillion Rivers that are particularly suited for restoration. FMR has contacted nearly 150 riverfront landowners and discussed with them the special qualities of their property and what they can do to increase the ecological value of their land.

As new sites are enrolled in the registry, specially designed yard signs will be used to highlight the properties. FMR is also increasing awareness of the vital Pine Bend-Vermillion corridor – and local efforts to protect it – with a vibrantly illustrated poster and brochure of the area.



With FMR's assistance, riverfront landowners Ryan and JuliAnne Pool have restored much of the rare dry prairie that exists on their land.

THE PINE BEND-VERMILLION CORRIDOR

FMR's Conservation Program is currently focused on protecting and improving a vital green corridor in the southern reaches of the metropolitan area. The area is bookended by near-pristine sites of regional significance – Pine Bend Bluffs, near Rosemount and Vermillion River Bottoms near Hastings. Located in Dakota County, one of the fastest growing sections of the Twin Cities, the corridor is at risk for development. It also has enormous potential as vibrant urban wilderness offering rich plant and animal diversity, critical habitat and opportunities for local families to enjoy our beautiful river.



PROGRAMS

RIVERFRONT RESTORATION PROJECTS

In 1999 FMR began on-the-ground restoration of a number of properties along the river. Working with one large corporate landowner, for example, FMR developed a management plan for several hundred acres overlooking the river in the Pine Bend Bluffs area. FMR is recommending removing non-native species, restoring a prairie on an area that is now cropland, and planting an oak-dominated community on a site that is now a vacant field. Much of this work will be carried out by volunteers whose efforts will imbue them with a sense of responsibility toward the river and its ecological health.

Other riverfront landowners are beginning to take action as a result of our work. For example, one landowner conducted a controlled burn and removed invasive species on FMR's recommendation. As a result, wildflowers bloomed on this family's hillside for the first time last spring.

Through the Big Rivers Partnership, a coalition project led by several environmental

organizations including FMR, our staff is expanding restoration projects in the southern section of the Twin Cities. Projects slated for restoration through this aspect of our efforts include restoration of native plant communities on land owned by Koch Petroleum Group, Carpenter Nature Center and Spring Lake Park Reserve.



DAKOTA COUNTY FARMLAND AND NATURAL AREAS INITIATIVE

Preventing the destruction of riverfront land in fast-growing communities requires a solid local commitment to land protection. Through this initiative, FMR is working at the county level to identify and prioritize natural areas, environmentally-sensitive areas, scenic areas and agricultural lands in the county for eventual permanent protection. A primary focus of the project is to build a strong grassroots constituency that includes local elected officials, community opinion leaders and members of the general public. In 1999 we delivered presentations at six public forums in the county. In the coming year we will be building on local concern and identifying the specific land protection tools needed to preserve local quality of life.



Above top: Eroding stream banks degrade water quality on the Vermillion River and other Mississippi River tributaries.

Above: After restoration by the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District, vegetation holds the bank in place. In 2000 FMR will lead an effort to complete 15 shoreland buffer projects along the Vermillion River.

Outreach and Education: Connecting People to the Life of the River

Improving the Twin Cities stretch of the Mississippi River requires a large core of river stewards – people who know about the river, care about its health and are deeply committed to safeguarding its future. Toward this end, FMR sponsors an array of programs designed to instill new awareness of this vital local resource.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER CANOE ADVENTURE

This annual event, co-sponsored by the Minneapolis Aquatennial, reminds people that they don't need to drive out of town to enjoy a scenic canoeing adventure. In 1999 the guided interpretive paddle took more than 300 canoeists from River Flats Park on the University of Minnesota Campus to Hidden Falls Regional Park near the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. The event has proven both popular and educational. As one participant said, "I feel like I've seen a different side of the river. After fifteen years in the Twin Cities I feel like I now understand that the river is a thriving, natural system."



INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

In small group outings people can learn about the river in more depth, upgrading a casual interest to a passionate one – an important step in developing river stewardship. For two years FMR has sponsored spring birdwatching hikes along the river. These events, which were attended by more than 100 people in 1999, are a great opportunity to catch a glimpse of the colorful songbirds that use the Mississippi as a migration corridor. FMR's slate of events in 2000 features ten new "Special Places Tours," including a birding paddle in the Vermillion River Bottoms and a walking tour highlighting the history and recent restoration of Swede Hollow in St. Paul.

STORM DRAIN STENCILING PROJECT

Each summer FMR involves hundreds of people, predominately youth, in service learning about runoff pollution. Volunteers stencil local storm drains with the message: "Please! Don't Pollute! Drains to River." In 1999 we involved more than 880 volunteers, stenciled 3,000 drains and distributed educational materials to 15,000 households. In 2000



FMR is expanding the stenciling project to include the City of Minneapolis and the Minnehaha Creek watershed.

ON DECK: FMR'S NEW POINTS OF INTEREST GUIDE

Paddlers, hikers and others with an interest in exploring the Mississippi River on their own will have a new resource in the upcoming year. In 2000, FMR is beginning work on the first-ever guide book detailing sites of particular ecological and historic significance on the river in the Twin Cities.



FMR's storm drain stenciling program involves hundreds of young people in hands-on river education.

River Partnerships: Building a Common Vision for the River

The Mississippi River flows through a complex web of political jurisdictions as it winds its way through the Twin Cities. It is also a focal point for many people, from the citizens who enjoy its natural beauty to the industries who need it for shipping and developers who want to utilize bluff tops for new housing units. Many existing environmental organizations and units of government also have a vision for the river – visions that mesh in some ways but may also compete or act at cross-purposes.

As host of the bi-monthly River Leaders Forum, FMR makes it possible for government, industry, development corporations and citizens to talk, strategize and forge a common vision for the river. FMR collaborates on many river protection initiatives, some of which spring from the River Leaders Collaborative. For example, our successful Mississippi River Heritage Bill – a legislative initiative that achieved a \$13 million state investment in local riverfront improvements – was passed successfully in 1998. FMR has continued to lead partnership-based legislative initiatives, most recently a Shoreland Buffers Pilot Program to achieve new resources for restoration of riverfront lands.

FMR's other River Partnerships work includes acting as the environmental representative for the Twin Cities steering committee of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative. FMR is a member of the Metro Greenways Program technical working group and an active participant in Watershed Partners. We also work on the Metropolitan Council's Environment Grants Program advisory committee and Surface Use Planning advisory committee.

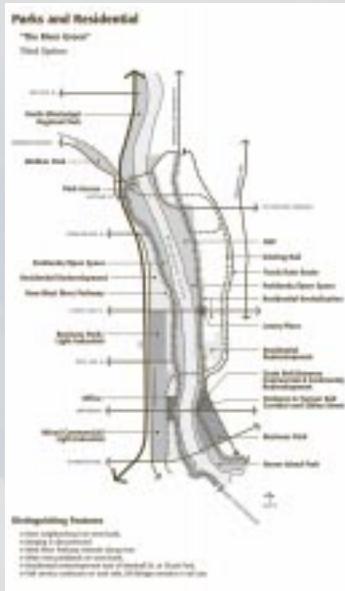
River Watch: Involving Citizens in River Health and Decision-making

The Mississippi River needs a friends group with the capacity and flexibility to take action on new and developing issues – projects or processes that may have a very large impact on its ecological health and public access. FMR fills this role of “citizen watchdog” and consistently steps in to rally citizen support *for* projects that are good for the river and *against* those that are not.

FMR’s recent River Watch work has included involvement in a range of projects. FMR is involved in the Minneapolis critical areas citizen advisory committee, and has

worked to support funding for Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park Service. In 1999 we began work on a partnership-based effort to make Lower Grey Cloud Island a state park. FMR also stepped up our efforts to influence Minneapolis’ Upper River Master Plan process, which will determine the future of the river above St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis.

FMR plans an expansion of River Watch initiatives, including the launch of two new efforts: a citizen water quality monitoring project and a “State of the River” report card which will provide an important snapshot of current threats and opportunities along the river.



FMR is working to ensure that Minneapolis’ Upper River Master Plan results in projects that will improve the ecological health of the river and increase public access.



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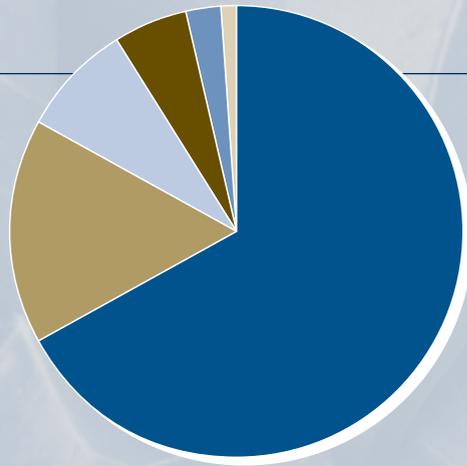




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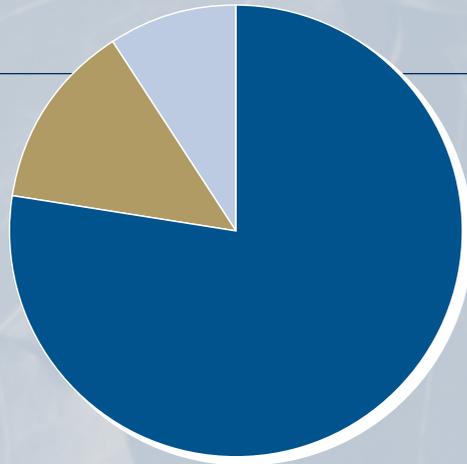
1999 Income

Foundations	\$ 157,150	68%
Government	37,163	16
Individuals	19,124	8
Corporations	12,687	5
Fees	5,659	2
Other	2,159	1
Total Income	\$ 233,942	100%



1999 Expenses

Program	\$ 177,828	78%
Management	30,578	13
Fundraising	20,941	9
Total Expenses	\$ 229,347	100%



FMR's completed IRS Form 990 is available by request.

NEW FMR WEB SITE

In 1999, FMR launched a newly designed web site, located at www.fmr.org. The site includes areas devoted to each of our programs, listings of upcoming events, and volunteer opportunities. The site also includes information on membership, FMR merchandise, and a growing resource library of bibliographies, fact sheets about river ecology, history, and protection efforts, and links to other sites of interest to people concerned about the Mississippi River and watershed protection in general. In 2000, look for our newsletters to be added to the site, details about our series of Special Places Tours, and the beginning of a web-based Points of Interest Guide.

www.fmr.org



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