



STRATEGIC PLAN

UPDATED MAY 2020



OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) envisions a river that is recognized and celebrated for its intrinsic values. Imagine with us a river where the water is clear and clean and safe to swim in, where fish and wildlife are healthy and abundant, and where scenic bluffs and cultural treasures are protected.

This is a river where residents and visitors can escape the rush of daily life to find solitude in a hidden backwater, mystery beside ancient mounds, and the wonder of paddling past towering bluffs.

Here you can catch fish that are healthy to eat. You can stroll through oak savannas and sand prairies alive with the diversity of our natural heritage. Here historic sites speak to the timeless connection between people and the river.

Envision a river accessible to all and a community that actively embraces this river ethic and welcomes its role as the Mississippi River's steward for current and future generations.



OUR CORE VALUES

Stewardship: We believe all of us are accountable for the health of the Mississippi River, its creatures and the communities that live along its banks and rely upon its waters.

Sustainability: We believe our society must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Leadership: Through thoughtful and decisive action, we inspire and engage others to protect the Mississippi River.

Collaboration: We cannot succeed alone. We work with others because our outcomes are better and more lasting when driven by strong and diverse partnerships.

Integrity: We do what is right for the Mississippi River. Our decisions and actions are clearly and proudly aligned with our mission and values.

Expertise: We pursue our mission with professionalism, bringing to bear deep understanding, creativity and technical proficiency.

Equity: The Mississippi River belongs to all of us and its gifts should flow equally to everyone in our community. We strive to be culturally competent, welcoming and inclusive of all people and are committed to using our resources and influence to redress structural inequality where it intersects with the health and vitality of the Mississippi River.

Introduction

The majority of this planning work was done prior to the recognition of the COVID-19 pandemic. The enormous impact of the pandemic cannot be overestimated, nor can it be fully assessed at this point. FMR intends to use the goals of this plan to provide continued guidance but will revisit the plan's strategies and priorities as more clarity emerges.

There are several areas of our work that remain core to our mission and are not changing significantly in this plan. For example, our River Corridor and Land Conservation programs will continue to pursue broad goals very similar to those in past plans.

This strategic plan does, however, contain several areas where our work is evolving significantly to respond to new opportunities or challenges that our mission requires us to address.

Highlights of these areas of change are:

- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**
- **Agriculture (Water program)**
- **Climate Change**
- **Supporting a federal initiative for coordinated clean-water work (Water program)**
- **Youth Engagement**



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Highlights / changes

Diversity, equity and inclusion

Environmental problems disproportionately burden communities of color, indigenous people and low-income communities. Consistent with our internal work on diversity, equity and inclusion principles, the plan:

- Recognizes and respects the diversity of the cities, neighborhoods, and communities throughout the River Corridor and strives to work in ways responsive to that diversity;
- Strives for equity in designing and implementing programs, plans and practices, in order to provide what different communities need to gain access to and enjoyment of the river and its amenities.
- Seeks to be broadly inclusive in all aspects of its work, reflecting the accumulated wisdom and experience of different communities interested in and affected by river-related decisions.

Agriculture

This plan reflects a continuing evolution of our work to address the impacts of agriculture on the health of the Mississippi River. The predominant emphasis of our Water Program is a new multi-sector partnership to transition toward broad, market-driven adoption of continuous living cover cropping systems.

Climate change

Because we recognize climate change poses a critical threat to the health of the Mississippi River and the communities through which it flows, this plan contains a significantly greater emphasis on addressing climate impacts across our programs.

A broader collaboration for river health

We're in the initial phases of a new collaborative effort to develop a federal environmental funding initiative to address river health throughout the 10 mainstem Mississippi River states.

Youth Engagement

Because we know today's young people are the future stewards and advocates of the river, this plan includes a significant expansion of our aspirations in the area of youth empowerment programming and the development of functional pathways into environmental professions for young people and particularly youth of color.

RIVER CORRIDOR

Vision: With FMR's support and encouragement, local communities appreciate the natural, scenic, cultural, historical, recreational, and other public values of the Mississippi River such that important planning and zoning decisions consistently protect and enhance these values.



Goal:

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRRCA) ordinances are clear, consistent and enforced. Resulting riverfront development balances conservation, recreation, and economic development goals.

Strategies:

- Engage state agencies, local governments and community members to advocate for consistent implementation and enforcement of the MRCCA rules and ordinances, both in letter and in spirit.
- Play a critical, impactful and timely role in the development and implementation of local MRCCA plans and ordinances for priority communities.
- Engage a broad spectrum of community members throughout the corridor to educate public officials about the national park, key resources and threats to the river, and the importance of strong MRCCA ordinances.

FMR led the successful effort to create new rules to guide riverfront development throughout the metro balancing conservation, recreation and economic development goals. Above: the North and Northeast Minneapolis riverfront, a special focus area where we advocate for parks, trails and equitable redevelopment as we transition away from an industrial riverfront.

Goal:

Economic and park development in the corridor is sensitive to the river’s unique natural and cultural resources and climate change. Planning processes build community power, respond to community goals, and advance racial and economic equity.

Strategies:

- Increase FMR’s staff and volunteer capacity to play a strategic and influential role in river corridor policy, land use, and development issues. Priority issues include lock and dam disposition, implementation of St. Paul’s Great River Passage and Minneapolis’ Above the Falls master plans, Ford Area C, and responsiveness to emerging issues.
- Build organizing power throughout the corridor, with a strategic focus on communities most affected by environmental injustice and/or significant development opportunities.
- Adapt engagement strategies for corridor communities’ unique contexts. Pursue state-of-the-art tactics with a focus on building community power and racial, cultural, and economic equity.
- Advocate for riverfront development that reduces human-driven climate impacts, protects fragile habitats, and withstands extreme weather events and impacts of climate change.

Goal:

The Above the Falls vision for continuous parks and trails along the river north of downtown Minneapolis is achieved in a way that creates improved and equitable public river access from surrounding neighborhoods, as well as economic development that supports vibrant, diverse, and affordable communities.

Strategies:

- Play a meaningful role to guide and support the Minneapolis Park Board’s efforts to acquire and develop new parkland for the Above the Falls Regional Park while preventing involuntary displacement.
- Earn and sustain trusting relationships with community members by recognizing and responding to the complexities of relationship-based work, including intersecting community goals.
- Influence Above the Falls planning and implementation of new parks, public infrastructure, and economic development while incorporating anti-displacement tools and strategies.
- Co-facilitate a community-driven process to design and advocate for a Connections Plan that improves bicycle and pedestrian connections between North Minneapolis neighborhoods and the riverfront.

LAND CONSERVATION

Vision: An ecologically functioning and climate resilient corridor of natural habitat exists along the Mississippi River.



Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific & Natural Area in Inver Grove Heights, a popular FMR protection and restoration site.

Photo by Tom Reiter

Goal:

Land that is important to the river’s ecosystem and for building climate resiliency is protected in perpetuity.

Strategies:

- Conduct outreach to at least 50 landowners every two years.
- Conduct project-specific fundraising for protection projects.
- Work with the Metro Conservation Network to develop ecological corridor planning.
- Support local and state initiatives, including the Dakota County Open Space Referendum, to fund conservation and protect habitat.

Goal:

FMR’s Land Conservation Program engages diverse communities in the Twin Cities and fosters the development of racially and culturally diverse environmental professionals.

Strategies:

- Establish an internship program focused on students of color.
- Incorporate issues of community and cultural significance in land protection and restoration efforts.

Goal:

Critical ecological functions of the land managed by FMR are restored for habitat, climate resiliency and pollinators.

Strategies:

- Conduct outreach with at least eight landowners every two years.
- Develop at least four natural resource management plans every two years.
- Conduct restoration on at least 1,500 acres every two years.
- Work within the Metro Conservation Network to identify and address habitat gaps.
- Incorporate climate change resilient species and pollinator beneficial species into ecological management plans and restoration efforts.

Goal:

FMR's protection and restoration work is rooted in science and designed to have the greatest possible ecological and climate resiliency impacts.

Strategies:

- Develop and use methodologies to measure and understand the impact of our work.
- Increase the use of experimentation and research to improve the efficacy of our restoration work and responsiveness to climate change and communicate our results.
- Add ecological capacity and expertise to program staffing through hiring subcontractors, working with interns, partnering with academic institutions and/or hiring staff.



*Read about 2019 conservation intern
Phuong Nguyen's (right) experiences with
FMR and her plans for the future at
fmr.org/phuong-nguyen.*

Photo by Karen Schik

WATER

Vision: The Mississippi River meets all water quality standards and fully supports a healthy aquatic ecosystem.



Sediment and excess fertilizer clouds the Minnesota River (left) where it meets the once-blue Mississippi at the b'dote or confluence in St. Paul. Such pollution is a byproduct of today's dominant agricultural system, but it doesn't need to be. FMR and our partners are dedicated to advancing real-world solutions, including innovative and profitable cropping systems, that keep our waters clean, farms profitable and communities healthy.

Photo by Tom Reiter

Goal:

Continuous living cover (CLC) crop systems emerge as viable options for Minnesota farmers.

Strategies:

- Establish and successfully advance the Forever Green Partnership to provide strategic leadership for the effort.
- Secure state funding support for the University of MN Forever Green Initiative to conduct research and foster commercialization.
- Implement pilot scale CLC projects in targeted areas prioritizing drinking water and public health.
- Develop, prioritize and advocate for policy innovations to advance CLC systems.

Goal:

FMR plays a leadership role in the establishment of a new 10-state Mississippi River initiative.

Strategies:

- Establish and fund the activities of a potential new inter-state collaboration.
- Secure federal authorization and funding.
- Leverage federal funds for FMR priority projects.

Goal:

FMR's water program supports effective communications to accelerate the adoption of continuous living cover cropping systems.

Strategies:

- Develop communications strategies & approaches for targeted sector audiences: decision-makers, legislators, farmers/agribusiness, consumers and funders.
- Implement & evaluate communications strategies with selected priority audiences..



Goal:

State and federal water policy reflects FMR's priorities.

Strategies:

- Advocate for policies and funding that reflect FMR's priorities at the federal and state levels.
- Expand FMR's legislative advocacy capacity.
- Identify and pursue opportunities to act as an ally for Indigenous communities and people of color in their clean water work.

Goal:

Evaluate the benefits of CLC's to deliver carbon reduction and climate mitigation outcomes and advocate for policy and funding priorities that advance them.

Strategies:

- Enhance our understanding of the carbon sequestration, mitigation and offset potential of CLC systems.
- Identify and advance priority state and federal legislative, administrative and funding initiatives that maximize climate benefits.



Photo by Anna Botz Photography

STEWARDSHIP & EDUCATION

Vision: Individuals and communities feel a connection to the Mississippi River and its watershed that inspires an ethic of active participation in stewardship and conservation.

Goal:

FMR annually engages 4,000+ people in stewardship events and outings to learn about the river and meaningfully contribute to protecting and enhancing river resources.

Strategies:

- Work with program funders, partners and other FMR programs to annually identify targeted audiences for stewardship programming.
- Provide background information on each site/project before, during and after via our website and social media, including historic and present importance of the site in Dakota culture.



Goal:

Participants and volunteers are prepared and eager to participate in more events and activities, share their experiences with others, and make river-positive behavior changes in their personal lives, homes and yards.

Strategies:

- Cultivate and sustain deeper relationships with individual volunteers and groups.
- Facilitate strong and sustainable connections to our stewardship sites with local groups, schools and community members.
- Consider expanding river-friendly homes and gardens workshop offerings to include new communities.
- Conduct additional follow-up communication with event participants to provide tips and ideas for personal stewardship and opportunities for deeper involvement with FMR.

Goal:

Stewardship events and activities support other FMR programs and efforts, including membership, fundraising, land conservation, advocacy and communications.

Strategies:

- Expand and enhance our database to maximize relationships with event participants, volunteers and stewardship program partners.
- Work with other staff and the database to coordinate cross-departmental communications.
- Promote membership opportunities at all public events.
- Promote advocacy opportunities when feasible and/or relevant at events.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Vision: A new generation of river stewards is inspired and prepared to protect and restore the health of the Mississippi River and to engage in efforts to promote environmental health and environmental justice as advocates and professionals.



From storm drain stenciling to habitat restoration outings, FMR has long offered educational and service programming to youth and educators. Now, we're building on that foundation to not only support but empower our Mississippi River's next generation of stewards.

Goal:

Youth are engaged in programs that create an appreciation, understanding, and ethic for protecting the health of the river and the diverse communities through which it flows.

Strategies:

- Provide river-based natural resource educational and experiential programming for schools, youth groups, colleges and universities in the Twin Cities metro area.
- Introduce and connect young people to the natural areas and water resources in their community and engage them in hands-on volunteer activities to improve river health.
- Develop and expand sustainable partnerships with schools, youth-serving organizations, the National Park Service and other partners to facilitate long-term youth involvement in river-based programming.
- Develop and integrate program content aimed at increasing understanding of climate change and important changes in agriculture for protecting the river.

Goal:

Youth are empowered to create and lead positive, self/community-driven change for protecting the river and its diverse communities.

Strategies:

- Continue to enhance and refine the Youth Empowerment Program aimed at learning in a cohort model and using self-driven environmental projects for rising high-school age sophomores, juniors and seniors.
- Establish opportunities for continued involvement in the Youth Empowerment Program for past participants to inform and participate as leaders in subsequent years of the program.
- Explore ways to incorporate youth in advising FMR in the ongoing development of youth programming.
- Explore ways to facilitate youth-led involvement in FMR's advocacy and community environmental organizing efforts.
- Incorporate perspectives and knowledge from Indigenous leaders and leaders from communities of color in youth development programming.

Goal:

Expand interest and participation in career pathways for all youth in environmental careers with a priority focus of youth of color and Indigenous youth.

Strategies:

- Expand and enhance the Youth Empowerment Program to create clear, direct paths from engagement to employment in environmental fields.
- Incorporate knowledge and support and explore potential partnerships with people of color and Indigenous-led organizations, to co-create a career pathways program that engages and empowers youth in environmental issues and careers.
- Explore certificate-based programming and or partnerships to advance youth opportunities in environmental careers/internships.
- Create internship opportunities for career exposure across FMR programs and departments and with other existing internship programs.



CLIMATE

Vision: An ever-growing group of diverse, local advocates and environmental stewards are advancing policies and programs that effectively and equitably mitigate climate change impacts on Twin Cities communities and the river.

Goal:

FMR elevates awareness of the impacts of climate change on the river and increases understanding of measures that can be taken to reduce carbon emissions, increase resilience and mitigate climate impacts.

Strategies:

- Include climate change as a topic/issue within youth and stewardship/education program content.
- Through all communications channels, increase understanding of the connection between climate change, the river's health and FMR's work.

Goal:

FMR incorporates climate resilience objectives as a key priority in its policy advocacy and land conservation/restoration efforts.

Strategies:

- Prioritize climate resilience in the selection of land protection sites to mitigate climate impacts on and beyond the site.
- Incorporate climate resilience into all of our ecological management plans and goals.
- Incorporate climate change benefits (carbon sequestration and climate resilience) in the selection of our agricultural water policy priorities.
- Advocate for riverfront development that reduces human-driven climate impacts, protects fragile habitats, and that is resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Goal:

FMR understands that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect Indigenous people, communities of color and low-income communities and incorporates that knowledge into the policies we advocate for and the allies we work with.

Strategies:

- Incorporate climate justice principles in our youth, stewardship and education program content.
- Grow and diversify our base of advocates by engaging with and supporting the work of climate justice organizations where they intersect with our mission.
- Through all communications channels, increase understanding of climate change's disproportionate impacts on Indigenous people, communities of color and low-income communities in the context of our work.
- Through all communications channels, increase understanding of climate justice in the context of our work.

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

Vision: People in Minnesota, especially in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, value and respect the Mississippi River. They are well informed about FMR's work and how to protect, restore and enhance the river.



FMR is proud to not only spread the word about essential river issues but to be a trusted resource for residents, reporters, researchers and public officials alike. (Above: Member and advocate Cole Williams at the FMR-restored prairie in Indian Mounds Park in St. Paul.)

Photo by Anna Botz Photography

Goal:

FMR strategically and effectively communicates with key audiences and communities about the river's importance and the organization's work, inspiring and supporting the actions needed to protect it.

Strategies:

- Assess the use and value of current communications efforts.
- Annually develop FMR's communications strategy, identifying key messages and audiences.
- Enhance synergy across FMR programs and communications to raise the profile of individual programs and FMR as a whole.

Goal:

Strengthen FMR's position as the "go-to" organization for the media, policymakers and other decisionmakers who wish to protect the river.

Strategies:

- Actively cultivate relationships with the media and policymakers.
- Enhance the impact of FMR's online presence.

Goal:

Increase understanding of the connection between climate change and the river's health, community health and FMR's work.

Strategies:

- Identify key messages that illustrate these connections.
- Reinforce connections by highlighting climate change in outgoing content in various formats.

Goal:

Increase understanding of the connection between the health and well-being of metro communities, the river and the importance of the river's benefits flowing to all.

Strategies:

- Identify key messages that illustrate this connection.
- Reinforce connections by highlighting issues of access and equity in outgoing content in various formats.
- Support outreach of river-related events and projects from under-represented groups.

BUILDING INFLUENCE & IMPACT

Vision: FMR is respected for its ability to influence decisions that affect the Mississippi River by bringing to bear reliable information and a strong, diverse and well-informed network of advocates.



FMR River Guardian and SuperVolunteer Sarah Musgrave (left) with Senator Melissa Wiklund (right) discussing the importance of advancing solutions for agricultural and other forms of river pollution on Water Action Day at the Minnesota Capitol.

Photo by sue rich

Goal:

FMR activates a strong, diverse and well-informed network of advocates, and maintains the staff and technical capacity to organize and support their participation in important decisions that affect the Mississippi River.

Strategies:

- Increase grassroots power by growing and diversifying our base of advocates through targeted engagement.
- Expand advocacy staff capacity.
- Expand and utilize a broad menu of advocacy tactics and modes focusing on building community power and continual organizational learning.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Vision: The diverse communities of the Twin Cities are actively engaged in caring for the river and the work of FMR.

Goal:

FMR engages diverse Twin Cities communities to effectively address the needs of the river and our communities.

Strategies:

- Develop strong, mutually beneficial intercultural relationships with diverse communities directly impacted by FMR's key programmatic activities and priorities.
- Identify, engage, and support underrepresented communities in river activities and decisions that impact the river and riverfront communities.
- Engage local Native American communities in our work.
- Cultivate diverse FMR stakeholder representation (volunteers, advocates, event participants, members).

Goal:

FMR's Board and staff reflect the cultural and racial diversity of our community and foster an inclusive organization.

Strategies:

- Identify, recruit, and retain Board members from diverse backgrounds and communities.
- Proactively recruit, hire and retain a diverse staff.
- Develop and contribute to environmental career pathway efforts for youth of color.
- Take deliberate steps to foster a culture of inclusion.
- Prioritize the investment of our time and resources in equity-related work.

DEVELOPMENT

Vision: FMR maintains a sustainable, diverse and flexible resource base to fuel the creativity, pace and agility with which we pursue our mission.



From individual members to institutional givers, FMR donors ensure the future health of our treasured Mississippi River.

Photo by Tom Reiter

Goal:

Leadership giving grows 7.5% annually.

Strategies:

- Develop a system for identifying and stewarding leadership donor prospects and renewing and upgrading current Mississippi Riverkeepers.
- Pursue small family foundation and donor advised fund prospects through targeted communication and stewardship meetings.
- Explore opportunities to more strategically engage and leverage the board in leadership donor identification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship.
- Develop opportunities to more deeply engage leadership donors, including but not limited to serving on a committee, participating in a focus group, hosting a gathering in honor of FMR, engaging in learning and stewardship opportunities (i.e. webinar, lunch and learn), etc.
- Improve our tools and systems (i.e. database functionality) to ensure maximum efficiency.

Goal:

FMR increases its membership base by 50% in three years; totaling nearly 4,000 households.

Strategies:

- Develop a strong member stewardship and upgrade plan.
- Test strategies to incentivize membership acquisition, renewals and upgrading (i.e. premiums, segmented messaging, A/B testing in acquisition and renewal letters, recognition opportunities, etc.)
- Improve our tools and systems (i.e. database functionality, renewals process, etc.) to ensure maximum efficiency and accurate data management.
- Seek funding to support capacity-building efforts, including but not limited to applying special campaign funding (see page 24) to growing our membership, and prioritize funding for membership growth activities in annual budgets.

Goal:

Grow Mississippi River Legacy Society (MRLS) membership to 30 members in three years, ensuring sustaining support for our mission.

Strategies:

- In the first year of the strategic plan, develop a plan to grow our MRLS membership and establish working relationships with professionals in the estate planning sector.
- Develop a system for identifying, cultivating, and soliciting MRLS prospects.
- Work with estate planning professionals to provide annual educational opportunities (i.e. lunch and learn, workshops) to prospective and current legacy donors.
- Consider emphasizing planned giving as a way to support our special capacity-building campaign (see page 24).

Goal:

Institutional giving grows at a pace that meets the demand of our expanding programs and helps to fill the funding gap left by changes in key funder priorities.

Strategies:

- Continuously and proactively seek new institutional donors.
- Explore the development of a business advisory group to deepen relationship with and increase support from corporate partners.
- Annually host a Fall Fundraiser that strives to raise significant unrestricted support for our mission, serves as an inspiring introduction to FMR, and is accessible to – and inclusive of – all.
- Consider expanding Fall Fundraiser corporate sponsorship opportunities.
- Cultivate new and non-traditional funders with interests in burgeoning program areas, including but not limited to our ag/water work, youth development, equity, and climate.

Goal:

Launch a capacity-building campaign to grow enhanced and sustained funding for FMR.

Strategies:

- In the first year of the strategic plan, develop a plan for the campaign, including scope, principle audience, timeline, frame and feasibility.

OUR PEOPLE

Vision: FMR is a great place to work – we recruit extraordinary talent, cultivate a supportive and flexible working environment, value individual and organizational ambitions, and achieve excellence.



FMR Conservation Director Betsy Daub (left) and Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator Sophie Downey (right) on the annual staff paddle.

Photo by Amy Kilgore

Goal:

FMR attracts and retains dedicated, creative, diverse and expert staff.

Strategies:

- Competitively and appropriately compensate (salary and benefits) staff.
- Ensure that the conditions in which staff work and the tools they are provided allow them to thrive.
- Devote organizational resources to fostering a transparent, intentional, inclusive and supportive culture.
- Value, foster and recognize employee development.
- Maintain a staff care committee to advance progress and ensure a platform for all voices at FMR to be heard.



THANK YOU

QUESTIONS? CONTACT ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR / DEVELOPMENT
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