

RIVER TALK

THE MINNESOTA RIVER CURRENT

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MIN FALLS DAM

Constructed in 1905 on the site of a natural rock outcropping waterfall, the Minnesota Falls Dam has seen its better days. As a result this aging concrete structure located a couple of miles downstream of Granite Falls is slated to be removed by its present owner Xcel Energy at an estimated cost of \$2.2 million to \$2.9 million. Fixing the dam would cost as much as \$6.9 million.

Over the years this nearly 600-foot dam has served a number of purposes including its original one of producing hydro electric power until 1961. From the 1930s until 2004 the reservoir provided cooling water for the operation of a coal-fired power plant. Later, the Granite Run Golf Course and the Granite Falls Energy ethanol plant utilized the higher water levels for their own uses including irrigation and producing ethanol.

Xcel Energy began to look at either fixing the dam or removing it completely when the DNR expressed concerns about the structural integrity of the concrete structure. A study by Barr Engineering in 2009 spelled out the limitations of the dam in its present condition. With the dam serving no financial purpose for Xcel Energy except on the liability side, the power company sees no other option except to remove the dam, causing some hard feelings among those living along this stretch of the Minnesota River.

During a couple of open houses held by Xcel Energy and DNR to gather public input on the dam's future, a number of citizens and business owners expressed concern about the

impact of removing the Minnesota Falls Dam. In addition to the issues with the ethanol plant and golf course, some residents worry about an unsightly exposed shoreline once water levels drop an estimated 12.7 feet.

On the other side of this debate is the MN DNR, an agency in charge of not only regulating dams but also supports a program for removing old structures that no longer serve their original purpose. Removing the Minnesota Falls Dam will provide a number of benefits. The biggest one will be migration of fish upstream for



Minnesota Falls Dam – photo by MN DNR

the first time since the turn of 20th century. These lowhead dams serve as a fish barrier preventing species like sturgeon, flathead catfish and eels along with other aquatic organisms like mussels from repopulating

this stretch of the Minnesota River.

The other factor cited by the DNR for removing the dam deals with safety issues. Low-head dams can be extremely dangerous for recreational users like paddlers. Chris Domeier, DNR fisheries biologist calls them death traps because people get caught up in the roiling tailwaters and aren't able to escape from being pounded into rocks underneath the water. Between 1974 and 2009, a total of 58 Minnesotans drowned in lowhead dams including three in Montevideo (1975) and two in Watson (2004).

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DID YOU KNOW?

DNR's Clean Water, Land and Legacy Logo

A logo representing the four dedicated funds of clean water, outdoor heritage, parks and trails, and arts and cultural heritage has been unveiled by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Designed by Bernadette Stephenson of St, Cloud, this logo will be used to identify projects funded by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

Approved by the voters in 2008, the Legacy Amendment set in motion a 3/8ths of a cent sales tax to



pay for projects involving habitat restoration, park amenities, historical interpretation and much more. An estimated \$246 million was raised this year along with hundreds of millions of dollars each year for the next twenty-five years. The logo will be displayed throughout the state at amendment-

funded projects along with printed or other materials.

The logo incorporates multiple images to identify the four separate funds. Mandated by the 2010 Legislature, the contest entries were reviewed by a panel of judges that included staff from the DNR, Parks and Trails Council, Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and the Minnesota Arts Board. DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten made the final decision based on their recommendations.

River Talk is published quarterly in conjunction with the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (Watershed Alliance) and partners. Thanks to the Water Resources Center for funding this effort.

Watershed Alliance Coordinating Team:

Jesse Anderson, Lower Sioux Indian Community

- oeairq@redred.com
507-644-8353

Susie Carlin, Minnesota River Board

- susan.carlin@mnsu.edu
507-389-6279

Brad Cobb, Green Corridor Project

- 1231tlc@charter.net
320-493-4695

Dee Czech, MN Earth Sabbath Team

- dczech@frontiernet.net
507-964-5171

James Fett, Blue Earth SWCD Technician

- james_the_walleye@hotmail.com
507-521-3388

Chantill Kahler-Royer, Bolton & Menk

- chan@kahler-royer.com
507-625-4171

Tim Lies, Friends of the Minnesota Valley

- timlies@hotmail.com
612-749-3958

Patrick Moore, Clean Up the River Environment

- patrick@cureriver.org
320-269-2984

Lori Nelson, Friends of the Minnesota Valley

- lnelson@friendsofminnvalley.org
612-370-9123

Forrest Peterson, MPCA

- forrest.peterson@state.mn.us
320-441-6972

Lee Sundmark, MN DNR

- lee.sundmark@dnr.state.mn.us
320-234-2550

Joel Wurscher, High Island Creek & Rush River Watershed Project

- joelw@co.sibley.mn.us
507-237-4050

Scott Kudelka, Editor (507-389-2304) or scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu

Check out the Watershed Alliance's web site: <http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com>





A communication audit on the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance was conducted by Jenny Gieseke in November to provide an objective picture of communication practices of the organization. Gieseke is pursuing an MS in communication studies at Minnesota State University Mankato. According to the audit, Watershed Alliance members rely on a number of communication pieces including the River Talk newsletter, MN River Weekly Update and somewhat on the web site.



Report Overview

The purpose of this audit was to identify the methods of communication most commonly used by people associated with the Watershed Alliance. Identifying which of the Alliance's current communication channels are most utilized will enable the group to identify which methods of communication are successful for them, which methods need additional effort, and which methods can be eliminated. This information will help the Watershed Alliance adapt to the recent changes in funding as well as understand if their current communication channels are working.

Results

The survey was completed and returned by 38 people, 13 of whom were current or former Coordinating Team members. Fifty three percent of the respondents indicated that they had been members of the Watershed Alliance for three or more years. Members responding to the survey can be categorized into four groups: Citizens, Nonprofit Organizations, Government Agencies, and Private Businesses. The largest number of responses came from governmental employees (61%).

River Talk newsletter

Seventy four percent of the people responding to the survey indicated that they currently receive River Talk, and 85% of those that receive the newsletter take the time to read it. Respondents stated that the format they prefer for the River Talk is in the Electronic (75%) one. The favorite feature is What's Happening at 34% with Water Quality Features next at 27%.

MN River Weekly Update

This email newsletter provides information on projects, job opportunities, news features and events across the watershed. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that they receive the weekly update, and 97 percent of those people read it regularly. Alliance members said the features they most enjoy include: Event Notices (44%), Environmental Article links (38%) and Job Opportunities (16%).

Current vs. Desired Information Levels

The final question on the survey asked Watershed Alliance members to indicate the amount of information they currently receive through its communication methods. Overall, the responses to this question indicate that members are currently receiving the most information from the Weekly Update (35%). It seems important to note that not one respondent indicated that they would like to receive "little" or "very little" information from the Weekly Update. This seems to say that it is one of the favored methods of communication among the Watershed Alliance members.

Summary and Conclusions

The data collected from the survey indicates that with the exception of the website and perhaps face to face communication, members are for the most part satisfied with the communication methods used by the Watershed Alliance to distribute information. The Weekly Update and list serve appear to be the most effective methods of distributing quarterly meeting notices, and personal email is used most often to share information about small group meetings. The River Talk and the Weekly Update are the primary sources used by members to obtain more detailed information about projects and happenings around the watershed and appear to be very well liked by the Watershed Alliance members. Overall, communication methods used by the Watershed Alliance predominantly rely on the use of the internet.

The communication audit can be found at: <http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com/>

GRANITE FALLS RIVER REVITALIZATION SAVES K.K. BERGE BUILDING

By Scott Tedrick, Granite Falls Advocate Tribune

After two years of setbacks, successes, jumping through hoops and fundraising, it appears that the K.K. Berge has been saved.

On Monday, the Granite Falls City Council followed a recommendation by the Flood Task Force and unanimously approved the acceptance of the K.K. Berge construction proposal and the execution of a Development Agreement that will turn the building over to the Granite Falls Riverfront Revitalization (GFRR) for the price of a dollar.

GFRR President Patrick Moore, attended the meeting with 10 members of the community minded non-profit and expressed the group's gratitude to the City and community supporters, 155 of whom combined to donate over \$32,000 toward the approximately \$200,000 project.

"On behalf of the organization we just want to thank the City for its patience while we worked to come up with a proposal that met the conditions laid out by the council," said Moore.

"We have the money and we have a contingency raised in case there is a cost overrun – we're anxious to get started ... [The project] is going to hire local people through the winter and hopefully by next Western Fest the building will be opened, become the new office of the Chamber of Commerce and a source of civic pride."

Prior to the GFRR involvement, the 86-year-old K.K. Berge building had been scheduled for demolition as a part of the City's Flood Mitigation Plan. The first floor of the structure is presently located

approximately 20 inches below the 100-year flood plain, and the City had received an allocation of \$150,000 in flood mitigation dollars from the state DNR to fund its removal. Once demolished, stipulations tied to the money mandated that the site henceforth remain green space.

This didn't sit well with many community members, who then began to ask the City if there was a way to save the building. Council members responded by issuing a Request For Proposals (RFP) open to any entity who that would meet 10 conditions laid out by the city – including the flood proofing of the structure, obtaining gap financing and a Certificate of

Occupancy. If all conditions were met, the building would then be sold to the entity for a nominal fee and upon the project's completion, the entity would receive the \$150,000 originally set aside for demolition.

Individuals who eventually came to form the GFRR began meeting in late 2008 and put forth the only

preliminarily proposal, subsequently accepted by the City. Over the course of the past two years the group has worked to meet all conditions, encountering numerous unforeseen issues along the way.

Moore alluded to the challenges as he addressed the council commenting, "We went through two different structural engineers, two different architects, and we almost gave up. If it wasn't for the leadership that [Granite Falls Chamber of Commerce Director] Nicole Zempel demonstrated in saying, 'let's try one more way' and then getting [Construction Manager] Steve Ladner on board to help us, we wouldn't be here today. But we are, and we have a pretty good plan."

The GFRR group has stated its desire for the K.K. Berge building be viewed as the "Front Porch of Granite Falls." The intent is for the structure to serve as a location to welcome and acclimate individuals to the Upper Minnesota River Valley while showcasing

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By Judy Swenson, Montevideo American-News

A project designed to foster friendly relationships between upstreamers in the Minnesota River watershed with downstreamers from the Mississippi River and Lake Pepin area has received the most votes in a statewide online contest to promote collaboration.

As the convening organization that launched the project, Clean Up the River Environment (CURE), based in Montevideo, will receive a \$25,000 Bush Foundation grant to help continue the collaboration.

“We are indebted to all the organizations in the Friendship Tour who made this happen and we are grateful for all the people from throughout the state who voted for us,” said CURE Executive Director Patrick Moore. “It is evident that people want to see us all working together and with this boost of support, we’ll do our best to carry the collaboration forward.”



When asked what the next step is, Moore said there are several possibilities. The principle collaborators are planning to meet.

“We’re going to build the road by walking, as they say,” said Moore. “There’s a lot that can potentially divide us, but we’re not gonna go there. We’re only going to talk about the things we can agree on and that have demonstrative results.”

The Bush Foundation launched the InCommons Collaboration Challenge in November 2010. More than 800 nonprofit organizations were invited to send in written descriptions of their unique collaborative projects to a new Web site created by the foundation. Two hundred twenty-three entries were received and placed in the running for the \$25,000 first prize.

The field was narrowed down to 20 semi-finalist projects and then to three finalist projects by a panel of judges.

Short 4-minute video explanations of the three finalist projects were made and then posted to the Internet where the public was invited to vote for their favorite collaboration over a 10-day period. During that time more than 3,000 online votes were cast.

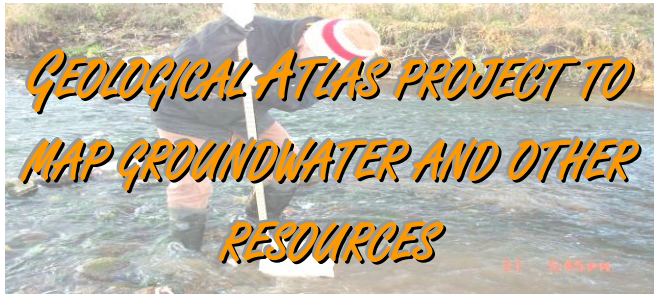
It has not been released how many votes were received by each project, but the Friendship Tour project received the most votes. More than 1,350 views of the Friendship Tour online video were recorded on You Tube during the voting period.

“We feel great! Dixie and I and the CURE board are just totally thrilled to see the outpouring of support. We had no idea there were so many people rooting for us!” exclaimed Moore.

The idea of the Friendship Tour was conceived and organized by CURE, which worked with the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance, based in Red Wing, and the Minnesota Ag Water Resources Coalition (a statewide coalition of agricultural organizations), the Minnesota River Board, the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance and the Cannon River Watershed Partnership to sponsor the tours in August and September of 2010.

Moore and others in the partnership will accept the award at a ceremony at the Walker Arts Center. Moore said there will be around 100 people, including the judges, the other non-profits that were finalists, and members of the Bush Foundation who will be presenting the award.

For more information on the Friendship Tour and to watch the winning video, visit www.cureriver.org



By Tom Cherveney, West Central Tribune

With hammer and chisel in hand, Alan Knaeble split open the gray core of clay like he was opening a book and peered at the landscape of Renville County some 400,000 to 500,000 years ago.

It was bleak: A massive sheet of ice covered all of it.

Pebbles of limestone in the gray clay were the clues that told Knaeble what era of Minnesota's past had just been unearthed from some 190 feet below a farm site south of Bird Island. The limestone would have been carried here from Manitoba by glaciers that advanced deep into what we know today as corn country.

"We're trying to fill in all the gaps," said Knaeble as a crew with Traut Hydro, Waite Park, drilled Oct. 28 on the farm site. It's one of four, possibly five sites, where they are to drill this autumn in Renville County.

Knaeble is with the Minnesota Geological Survey. It is now well into phase two of its project to map Renville County's geology as part of the Minnesota Geological Atlas project.

The first phase required using Global Positioning System technology to pinpoint the locations of more than 850 water wells scattered about the county. Then, Knaeble and colleagues analyzed the well driller's logs for each, marking the depths at which they recorded layers of clay, sand, gravel or silt.

This autumn they are probing what he calls the "gaps," the areas where the information is incomplete. Cores of material are being pulled from the depths at each, cut into five-foot lengths, marked and packed in wooden crates for analysis this winter.

With the help of a computer, the information gleaned from the well logs have already produced a fuzzy image of what lies below the county. One prominent features is a large valley carved in the basement bedrock. It lies parallel and often underneath U.S. Highway 212.

It's not know yet whether this large valley was carved in the pre-glacial era, or is the product of melt waters from one of early ice sheets, said Knaeble.

The basement bedrock that underlies Minnesota is covered by layers of glacial tills and

materials deposited during three to four different major glacial epochs that occurred during the last 2 million years.

Some of the glaciers bulldozed their way down from the northwest, pushing along gray clay, silt and limestone from Manitoba and North Dakota. One ice sheet slipped down from the northeast, and left behind a tell-tale red mix revealing how it had scraped and ground its way over iron-bearing rocks.

Along with analyzing the telling mix of materials below our feet, Knaeble and his colleagues are analyzing the groundwater they hold to know its age and chemistry. The information can tell us the recharge rate of aquifers and even identify those where we may be "mining" water left from ancient times.

Knowing these things makes for interesting science to geologists like Knaeble, but the information is even more important to the people who grow the corn that now covers the landscape. The Geological Atlas project will produce a map that will identify the groundwater resources of the county.



The information will help make decisions on where water-dependent activities such as raising livestock, irrigating crops or turning corn into ethanol or other products are best located. It can also tell where groundwater resources are more vulnerable to contamination, he explained.

Some who spot the drilling rig tease Knaeble about whether he's looking for oil or valuable minerals like gold.

He's not expecting to find either, but Renville County does hold valuable underground resources. This work will help reveal more about where to find them too.

Kaolin clay is mined along the Minnesota River Valley for use in a variety of products. The county's sand and gravel deposits are mined for use in everything from building roads to homes and schools, he pointed out.

Knaeble enjoys most the sleuthing involved in uncovering the past. It's like working on a giant, 500-piece puzzle but relying on about 20 pieces to do it, he said.

In truth, he will soon have hundreds of five-foot-long cores of material to analyze this winter. The meticulous work of putting all the gathered information together into maps for review will require about 1 ½ years, he said.

Minnesota River Board receives Carlson Minge Award

The Minnesota River Board (MRB) was recently honored with the Carlson Minge Award from the Friends of the Minnesota Valley. Dakota County Commissioner Tom Egan accepted the award on behalf of the MRB at the Friends' annual dinner in Bloomington.



Susie Carlin and Tom Egan from the MN River Board accept the Carlson-Minge Award from Scott Sparlin

"The Minnesota River Board is very proud of its well known efforts to improve water quality and best management practices along the Minnesota River," stated Tom Egan. "It is very humbling to receive this award from the like-minded people making up the Friends of the Minnesota Valley."

Scott Sparlin, the Friends Watershed Initiative Coordinator presented the Carlson Minge Award by highlighting a few of the MRB accomplishments. "The MRB helped to push and directly lobby for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, provided funds for needed programs and projects throughout the watershed, and provided an on-going forum for people to voice concerns, showcase projects and programs among other things."

According to Sparlin it was the MRB's role in helping Friends launch their Community Clean Ups for Water Quality program that really resonated with them. "Without the Minnesota River Board and their continued support much of what has been accomplished to date in the Minnesota River Watershed would simply not have been possible," offered Sparlin.

The Carlson Minge Award is named in honor of David Minge (former U.S. Representative) and Arne Carlson (former MN Governor), in spirit of bipartisan support of the Minnesota River and advancement of clean-up efforts. This award is given to a current or former elected official, public figure, or public employee who has demonstrated outstanding leadership on the conservation of natural resources within the Minnesota River Watershed.

"The Minnesota River Board has long been one of Friends of the Minnesota Valley's closest allies and strongest supporters in our effort to improve the Minnesota River," said Lori Nelson, Executive Director of the Friends. "The board provided initial seed money during the first year of the Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality which was critical to launch the program. The board took the risk that the program would be successful and we owe a good part of our success to the vision of the Minnesota River Board."

To date the Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality have removed 14,000 pounds of phosphorus and nitrogen pollution from the Minnesota River Watershed involving 4,400 volunteers representing 40 partners. Currently, the program is being expanded across the entire state of Minnesota in partnership with the Freshwater Society.

County Commissioner Spotlight – Harold Solem of Lac qui Parle County

Harold Solem serves in the Fifth District of Lac qui Parle County representing the townships of



Ruth and Harold Solem

Baxter, Camp Release, Lac qui Parle, Maxwell, Riverside and Ten Mile Lake along with the city of Boyd. Now in his 11th year as county commissioner (reelected in 2008), Harold was

originally encouraged by friends and neighbors to run because they felt he could provide more representation for them on the county board. After his military service Harold has been a farmer for over 50 years. For the first 30 years he concentrated on raising livestock before focusing on a grain operation the last 20 plus years. Harold has been on the MN River Board for eight years becoming chairperson of the Executive Board in 2010.

Harold and his wife Ruth raised two adopted children; a daughter and her family live in Coon Rapids, MN and a son who lives in Dawson with his family. They also raised three of his sister's children after they came to live with them in their teenage years. The outdoors plays an important role for Harold having fished and hunted all of his life. They have a fishing spot in eastern South Dakota and enjoyed an annual deer hunt in Wyoming with friends for many years.

Over the years, Harold has supported the ongoing development and expansion of the Lac qui

Parle County Park located a few miles from his farm. Harold's wife Ruth grew up only a mile from the park and used to attend District #4 school picnics down there. According to Harold, "It's a beautiful setting and we are excited to see the additions of the shelter, bathrooms, canoe landing, camping, playground equipment, trail riders and so much more that can be done."

Why do you feel it is important to have an organization like the Minnesota River Board?

The Minnesota River Board represents a large area; and includes so many different occupations from the farm lands to the cities, both large and small. We all need to work together to obtain cleaner waterways for the next generation.

What type of water quality/conservation projects is Lac qui Parle involved in?

Lac qui Parle is working on Dissolved-Oxygen-Turbidity-TMDL in eleven different locations in the county. We have an excellent staff working with Clean Water Partnership, and we will be celebrating our 10th year in 2011.

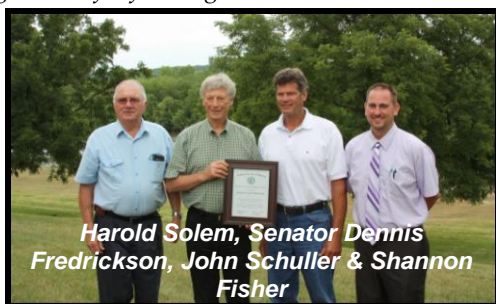
We offer incentives to filter strip on stream banks and ditch banks, including replacing open intakes using rocks and pattern tiling. We offer loan programs to upgrade septic systems. The biggest challenge we have is working with the state of South Dakota. We have a large problem with flooding and water quality. CRP and EQUIP play a large role in Lac qui Parle County.

What is one thing that is exciting or challenging about being on the MN River Board?

It's exciting to see board members with such a broad range of occupations; working together to have a cleaner, friendlier river. The challenge is overseeing the tremendous amount of acres and the distance the MN River covers; from Lake Traverse in the NW to St. Paul where it joins the Mississippi River.

What direction do you see the MN River Board moving toward in the future?

The MN River Board has made great strides in the last years and I hope to keep moving forward with even greater successes. So many of the things we hope to accomplish depends a great deal on the State of MN and the Legislature for funding.



Project Spotlight – Chippewa River Signage

In 2010, the Minnesota River Board gave out \$9,000 in grants to four groups working on water quality related projects across the basin. The four projects approved for funding were:

- Chippewa SWCD/Chippewa SWCD Conservation Field Days - \$1,700
- GBERBA/Testing CMM in the Greater Blue Earth River Basin - \$3,000
- CCMR/Working Together for the MN River film documentary - \$3,000
- CURE/Annual River and History Weekend & River Signage - \$1,300

Long-time Girl Scout and Montevideo High School Senior Jennessa Runia worked with Patrick Moore of CURE to design and produce an interpretive sign: "Confluence of the Minnesota and



Chippewa rivers. To develop the sign, Runia researched a number of important topics including Joseph Nicolle's expedition up the Minnesota River, locally abundant fish studies and American Indian tribes of the area.

Jessica Runia used the information to develop the interpretive sign and in the process learned about the area's biology, ecological importance of river confluences, how to successfully manage a public project and maintain large contact lists. The sign celebrates the history and wildlife of the Minnesota Chippewa Rivers confluence and placed near the Chippewa River Dam in Smith Park. A sign unveiling was held on August 5, 2010 for the public. Funding for sign came from a number of sources including the Minnesota River Board.

A girl scout since the age of 5, Runia said, "Working on this project has been an amazing journey. It has taken me to so many places and introduced me to so many people; I could not have imagined how large my network of communication became. I learned a lot about our community through the generosity of the people who helped me with this project." Runia started the preliminary requirements in October 2009 to complete her Girl Scout Gold Award project. Patrick Moore of CURE served as Runia's advisor helping her work with the DNR, the Dakota people and local historians. Moore also provided his own insights on the rivers and what needed to be done for the project.



Introduction

Minnesota has 46 organized watershed districts spread out across the state working as local government units on water-related issues. Each one of these districts encompasses the natural boundaries of a watershed with most named for a lake or river. In 1955, the Minnesota State Legislature passed the Watershed Act that authorized the creation of watershed districts.

A total of seven watershed districts are found in the Minnesota River Basin including three in the Metro area (Riley-Purgatory-Bluff Creek, Nine Mile Creek and the Lower MN River Watershed). The other four watershed districts are as follows: High Island Creek on the lower end of the basin and three in the upper part (Upper Minnesota River, Lac qui Parle – Yellow Bank and Yellow Medicine). Here is some basic information on the three watershed districts found in the Metro area.

Starting Lake Outlet – Purgatory Creek Recreation Area Basic Water Management Project – one component of this project resulted in the construction of a paved trail.



Riley-Purgatory-Bluff Creek

Located in Hennepin and Carver counties, the district is 47 square miles with both the Bluff and Purgatory creeks flowing into the Minnesota River. A recent success story dealt with the Starting Lake-Purgatory Creek Area Basic Water Management Project. Three million dollars was spent to construct an outlet and trail system to provide more than 600-acre feet of flood storage including a basin for water quality treatment of 15,000 acres of tributary watershed as well as habitat improvement for waterfowl along with paved recreation trails.

- Established: July 31, 1969
- Phone: 612-333-7400
- Web Site: www.riley.org

Nine Mile Creek

As the first urban watershed district formed in Minnesota, Nine Mile Creek covers most of the cities of Edina and Bloomington along with portions of Minnetonka, Eden Prairie, Hopkins and Richfield. Nine Mile Creek Watershed District works with residents to plant large rain gardens to filter storm water runoff, re-meander the channel and conduct lake drawdowns to control curly-leaf pondweed and reduce phosphorus-feeding algae blooms. One of the District’s major projects involves stabilizing portions of Nine Mile Creek and working with Three Rivers Park District to develop 7.5 miles of trail in the city of Edina along the creek.

- Established: September 30, 1959
- Phone: 952-835-2078
- Web Site: www.ninemilecreek.org/



Citizens and District Managers learn about the Nine Mile Creek Watershed District’s volunteer water quality monitoring effort.

Lower Minnesota River

This watershed district runs from the city of Carver at its western end to the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers taking in portions of Carver, Dakota, Hennepin and Scott counties. The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District plays an active role with the U.S. Corps of Engineers to maintain a 9-foot navigation channel on the final 14.5 miles of the Minnesota River. On the water quality side of its work, the District assisted the DNR in negotiations with property owners to purchase sections of the Seminary Fen site. They conducted a gully inventory in the cities of Carver, Chaska, Chanhassen, Eden Prairie and Bloomington with field work done by the Minnesota Conservation Corps. In partnership with the USFWS and Friends of the Minnesota Valley, the District retrofitted the storm water drainage system at the Minnesota River Wildlife Refuge Center.

- Established: March 23, 1960
- Phone: 952-856-5880
- Web Site: www.watersheddistrict.org/



The Minnesota River

GREEN CORRIDOR INITIATIVE LOOKS TO MAKE MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY A TOURIST DESTINATION

By Scott Tedrick, Granite Falls Advocate

Brad Cobb welcomes critical comments. Not because he likes the abuse, but because he believes that such exchange is but an intermediate step between conflict and the realization of a mutually beneficial resolution.

Of course, amongst his audience of the Hawk Creek Watershed Board, Cobb had no trouble finding common ground – or for that matter, a common watershed. As the program director of the Green Corridor Initiative, he was preaching to the choir.

Cobb was in attendance during Thursday's Hawk Creek Watershed meeting to educate those present about the activities of the Green Corridor Initiative and hopefully add the board onto its growing list of regional advocates.

"I think from a watershed approach some of the things we're going to try to do is really align with what the Hawk Creek and other programs are trying to do," he said, adding: "It's all about water."

A native of Maynard, Cobb was brought onto the Green Corridor Initiative prior to its kickoff in 2008 because of his history working with the legislature, within the DNR and amongst outdoor recreation groups.

Recognizing the unique gem that is the Minnesota River Valley, the Green Corridor Initiative has sought to acquire, restore, preserve and develop watershed resources with the ultimate goal of connecting properties running from the Upper Sioux Agency State Park, near Granite Falls, to Fort Ridgely State Park, near Fairfax. By doing so, those taking part in the project believe they can assist in the transformation of the mid-Minnesota River Valley into a premier recreation and tourism destination sustained by hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking, biking, horse trails and wildlife observation areas.

Up and down the Minnesota River Valley, environmental, tourism and outdoor recreation organizations dot the landscape and to some degree seek the same outcomes outlined by the Green Corridor Initiative. However, few have been so immediately successful as the initiative, which in its brief life span has been granted or legislatively recommended to receive just over \$8 million toward its ambitions.

Those dollars have been funneled to the organization through recommendations by the Legislature-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor

Heritage Council (LSOHC). Both of these entities were created through legislative directives that task the councils with making funding recommendations based on available monies from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (deriving from lottery proceeds) and the Outdoor Heritage Fund (the Legacy Amendment), respectively.

To date, approximately \$4.2 million has been allocated to the Green Corridor Initiative toward the purchase of 950 acres of properties set aside for public use as a Wildlife Management (WMA), Aquatic Management (AMA) or Scientific and Natural Area (SNA). Including the recommended funds, a total of 1,700 acres are scheduled for acquisition.

While it has been relatively easy for the Green Corridor Initiative to gain stakeholders and partnerships from outdoor and environmental enthusiasts, Cobb explained that group has also gone to great lengths to appeal to political, agricultural and other organizations represented in the region.

Cobb said that Green Corridor's efforts are bolstered politically when placed in the context of the \$4.3 billion of annual economic activity that is generated through hunting, fishing and wildlife observation in Minnesota, according to a 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service national study.

"That's a significant economic engine that should carry significant political capital toward what we're trying to do," he said.

"Minnesota anglers spend \$6 million on just ice cubes," chimed in Lee Sundmark of the DNR Fisheries division.

In reference to agriculture, Cobb emphasized that farming is the number one economic driving force in the state and that there is no intent to take ag-lands out of production. He noted that all of the land purchased through the Green Corridor Initiative is done so with the consent of landowners and that riparian lands are the area of focus. Whether a farmer, politician or outdoor enthusiast, the more Cobb talked about the Green Corridor Initiative the more each situation appeared to be a win, win, win, regardless of interest.

"The more we share our thoughts and opinions, and do so in a constructive fashion, the more we can all learn where common grounds exist," he said. Cobb may welcome critical comments, but it sure doesn't appear that he invites them.



Green Corridor Initiative Program Director Brad Cobb speaks with the Hawk Creek Watershed Project Board.

Minnesota Falls Dam continued from page 1

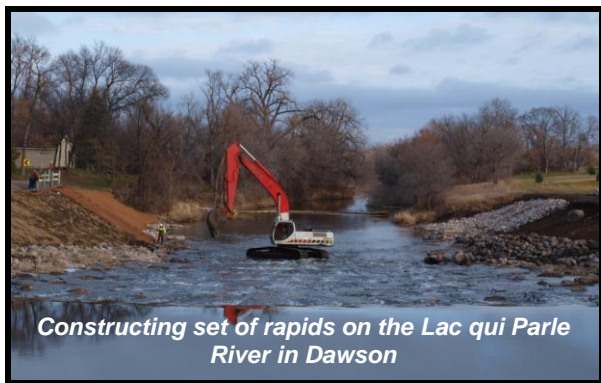
Over the past decade a number of lowhead dams have been removed in the Upper Minnesota River Basin including ones in Appleton and Dawson. The one located on the Pomme de Terre River in Appleton was built for a mill operation in 1872 and had partly failed by 1997. On July 9, 1998, the Appleton Milldam was breached and replaced with a rock arch rapids. Restoration work involved



Pomme de Terre River in Appleton

excavating 2,500 feet of channel to re-meander the river, installation of nine rock riffles for grade control and placing of root wads, boulder vanes and willow stakes to protect the

streambank. Today, this stretch of river is enjoyed by people fishing, tubing and paddling. Total cost for the project came in at \$367,000 for dam removal and river restoration.



Constructing set of rapids on the Lac qui Parle River in Dawson

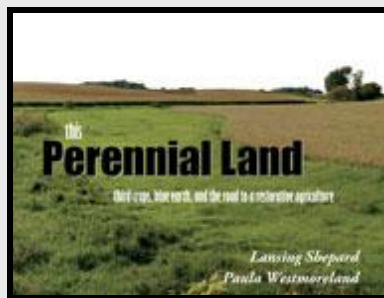
The Dawson Dam was built in 1913 on the Lac qui Parle River as a water supply reservoir for the community. Removed in 2009, the DNR put in series of 15 rapids to maintain the original pool level while providing a safe passage for paddlers and allowing fish to migrate upstream for another 50 miles. The DNR worked with the local community to make sure their needs were met and also provide a wide range of recreational opportunities including better fishing. This project cost \$650,000.

In addition to the MN Falls Dam, the DNR has also set its sights on removing the dam on the Chippewa River in Montevideo. This lowhead dam is also experiencing structural challenges and could be a safety hazard for people using the river. There are about 1,300 dams found all across the state of Minnesota including ones on the Minnesota River at Big Stone, Marsh Lake, the Churchill dam at the foot of Lac qui Parle Lake, and the Granite Falls hydroelectric dam.

Book Review: This Perennial Land by Lansing Shepard and Paula Westmoreland

Along the rivers and streams, among the nooks and crannies, between the fields of corn and soybeans, a quiet revolution is underway that is changing the face of Midwest agriculture. A new kind of farming that incorporates perennial “third” crops into the standard two-crop system of corn and soybeans, is adding value to the farming landscape – and returning the land to ecological health. And that’s good for the soil, water, wildlife, rural communities, and all of us interested in leaving a healthy and productive land for future generations.

Lansing Shepard and Paula Westmoreland spent three years traveling the length and breadth of one iconic Midwest watershed – the greater Blue Earth River basin in south-central Minnesota and north-central Iowa to discover who was driving that change and what impact they were having. Along with professional photographers Meg Ojala and Chris Faust, among others, they documented the work of farmers, scientists, recreationists, conservationists, policymakers, and field level state and federal agency staff.



What they discovered they brought together in This Perennial Land.

Through essays and photographs the authors trace the natural and cultural history of the land and share stories of a new breed of

pioneering farmers who are working the land with nature in mind. Organized around a unique, multilayered GIS map of the landscape, they’ve put together a vision of an agriculture that could be – a truly restorative agriculture and a possible way to get there.

Lansing Shepard, a former writer for the Christian Science Monitor, specializes in conservation, environmental policy, and natural history. A contributor to the Smithsonian Institution’s Guides to Natural America series, he has been the writer for several exhibitions for the U.S. National Park Service and the University of Minnesota’s Bell Museum of Natural History, with which he is affiliated.

Paula Westmoreland is an agro-ecologist and permaculture designer. She grew up on a diverse family farm in northwestern Iowa and has worked in sustainable agriculture for many years. Paula is passionate about creating restorative systems and has done extensive research on plants, their ecological functions, and their human uses, applying her research to the design of polycultures and cropping systems.

RIVER RAMBLINGS by Scott Kudolka



Winter has taken hold on the Minnesota River Basin just like the old days with more snow than we have seen in years and blizzard conditions stopping even the most adventurous in their tracks. I love winter. This is my favorite season because of the things most people don't like - the cold temperatures, snowy conditions and short days. To me there is nothing more satisfying than going for a long cross-country ski run on a clear, bitterly cold night alone in the woods. The stars glow in the dark sky, the snow crunches under the skis and the temperature takes your breath away.

Of course there is no typical winter especially here in southern Minnesota. Scott Bohling and I found that out when we went water quality sampling in the middle of December. The ice wasn't thick enough to pull our gas auger out on the river and open sections were hard to find or verging on the dangerous side. We managed to get our five samples but not before one of my boots when through the slushy ice on the Le Sueur River. I was also a little annoyed with rain that hit right before the 1st of the year. As anyone of you can contest to, rain and ice don't mix.

One of the more fun events I got to take part in was the Winter Solstice Celebration out at the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Mankato. As a member of the Center for Earth Spirituality & Rural Ministry advisory board, I led a snowshoe hike for a group of hardy souls ranging in age from 6 to 60 plus. We had a great time trooping through the heavy snow and experiencing a whole different type of landscape. Afterwards all of us enjoyed a simple meal and continued the celebration with fire dancers and a bonfire.



As with any season, winter will be gone before we know it and spring in its place. I enjoy the season changes because you never know what the next one will truly bring. We do know there will most likely be some flooding and many opportunities to paddle our favorite rivers and creeks in the Minnesota River Basin. Paddling always gets me fired up but I am still looking forward to more cross-country skiing and snowshoeing adventures including a Candle Lit Ski Event out at Minneopa State Park. Enjoy the winter while it lasts!

Granite Falls River Revitalization continued

the areas historical, environmental, artistic and social offerings. Plans are for the basement to be used for kayak and canoe rentals, the first floor as the location of the Chamber of Commerce and community space, while the second floor will likely be rented out to a business to help cost-flow utilities.

"I think it's going to be a real asset for the whole community and that's an exciting thing to see that come to fruition," said GFRR member Helen Stukel.

It will be at least four weeks before construction can begin at the site, but to the members of the GFRR, after two long years, a few weeks seems like an instant. Asked if it was worth it, not one

member expressed any doubt, but they did express thanks.

"I would say thank you very much Granite Falls," said GFRR member Barb Benson. "We belong to Granite Falls and we belong to you."

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Clean Water, Land and Legacy Web Site

A new web site for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment is up and running as it tracks the progress of hundreds of funded projects. This site includes projects from the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund, Clean Water Fund, Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF), Outdoor Heritage Fund and Parks & Trails Fund.

One of the projects featured on the web site is the Chippewa 10% Project, a \$247,000 grant from ENRTF to support the development of “local food and perennial biofuels markets and conservation incentives to encourage farmers to diversify Chippewa River Watershed fields, resulting in measurable ecosystem improvements compared to modeled benefits.” The project is coordinated by the Chippewa River Watershed Project and Land Stewardship Project.

Prairieland Compost Facility

In 1990, Prairieland was built as a joint effort by Martin and Faribault counties to turn garbage into compost with \$4 million in bonds and a \$2 million state grant. An annual subsidy paid by each household and business in the two counties paid off the debt in 2010 along with funding the plant’s operating costs. Because the compost produced at the plant never found a saleable product market, the board of directors is looking at alternatives like converting the garbage into refuse-derived fuel, which could be then be burned at an electricity-producing plant.

Prairie Oaks Institute at Robert Creeks

Sisters Kim and Tammy Devine have taken their family farm in Belle Plaine and created an institute devoted to ecology, to education, and to retreat and renewal. Of the original 240 acres, the 20 acres containing the building site operates as a nonprofit by a board to allow people to escape the technology world for one with wide-open spaces and the quiet of nature.



Seminary Fen

Certain members of the Scott County staff aren’t thrilled with the idea of permanently protecting sensitive areas like the Seminary Fen because it prevents them from building new roads. Named for a former seminary, this calcareous fen is home to several threatened species of wildflowers and also potentially blocks the construction of roads to ease traffic congestion in the area.



Presently, only part of Seminary Fen is protected in a 43-acres Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) owned by the DNR. Another 69 acres will be enrolled into a conservation easement by the nonprofit Trust for Public Land. According to the U.S. EPA, fens are a “rare” wetland because up to 10,000 years are required to form one naturally.” Fens are a reflection of a fairly rare combination of groundwater chemistry and soils, says Doug Norris, DNR fen specialist. The DNR feels these fens are an important part of the Minnesota’s landscape and deserves protection.

Blue Earth County Land Purchase

The purchase of forty-one acres of woods and a ravine for \$50,000 has been approved by the Blue Earth County Board. Plans for this parcel of land focus on keeping it natural with the possibility of hiking trails and a camping area. Appraised in 2010 for \$103,700, Blue Earth County feels it’s a great deal and they are currently waiting for a \$25,000 grant from the DNR before final approval of the purchase. Thomas and Nancy Sullivan of North Mankato owned the land and felt it needed to be preserved in a natural state.

Christmas Bird Count

Each year dedicated citizens get outside to count birds of all types for the annual Christmas Bird Count. This includes New Ulm where residents braved near zero temperatures to cover a 15-mile circle encompassing Flandrau State Park, Clear Lake, Courtland, Klossner and the west edge of Swan Lake. More than 44,000 people volunteer each year to take part in the National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count held from December 16th through January 2nd all across the United States. The first Christmas Bird Count took place on Christmas Day in 1900 when ornithologist Frank Chapman proposed people count birds instead of shooting them which had been the holiday tradition.

CONSERVATION THOUGHTS



Paul Gruchow – “Grass Roots The Universe of Home”

Paul DeWayne Gruchow, Ed Will’s Farm, Section 28, Rosewood Township, Section 28, Rosewood Township, Chippewa County, Minnesota, USA, North America, Western Hemisphere, Earth, Milky Way, Universe. I wrote the words over and over in my best Palmer-method penmanship, arranging them like the lines of a poem. For me they held a terrible fascination.

For me, the most important place on the farm was the cattail marsh at its north end. To get there, you took the farm’s interior road, a grass track that ran east to the edge of the maple grove and then north as far as the waterway that drained into the slough from the east. The physical distance was not quite half a mile, but so far as I was concerned it might have been halfway around the world.

Here was a piece of Rosewood Township as it had existed for thousands of years, a surviving testament to the tallgrass prairie, and the richest and most complex representative of it. As measured by its biomass, a cattail marsh is one of the earth’s most reproductive features. Only in a tropical rainforest does life reproduce more extravagantly. Rosewood Township at settlement was a great ocean of grass lapping across a level plain. It had nothing that could properly be called a hill. The landscape rose and fell in swells and swales, like the sea. It had no trees, no river or stream, no lake. Because the moisture that fell had nowhere to go, it stayed on the land. The tall grasses caught and held the snow against the fierce winds in winter; in spring the thirsty sod soaked up the meltwaters, and they trickled down through the immeasurable miles of roots that constitute the hidden jungle of a prairie and into the groundwater basins and channels that are its unseen lakes and rivers. The water that the ground could not absorb drained as far as the nearest low place, creating marshes like the one on our farm.

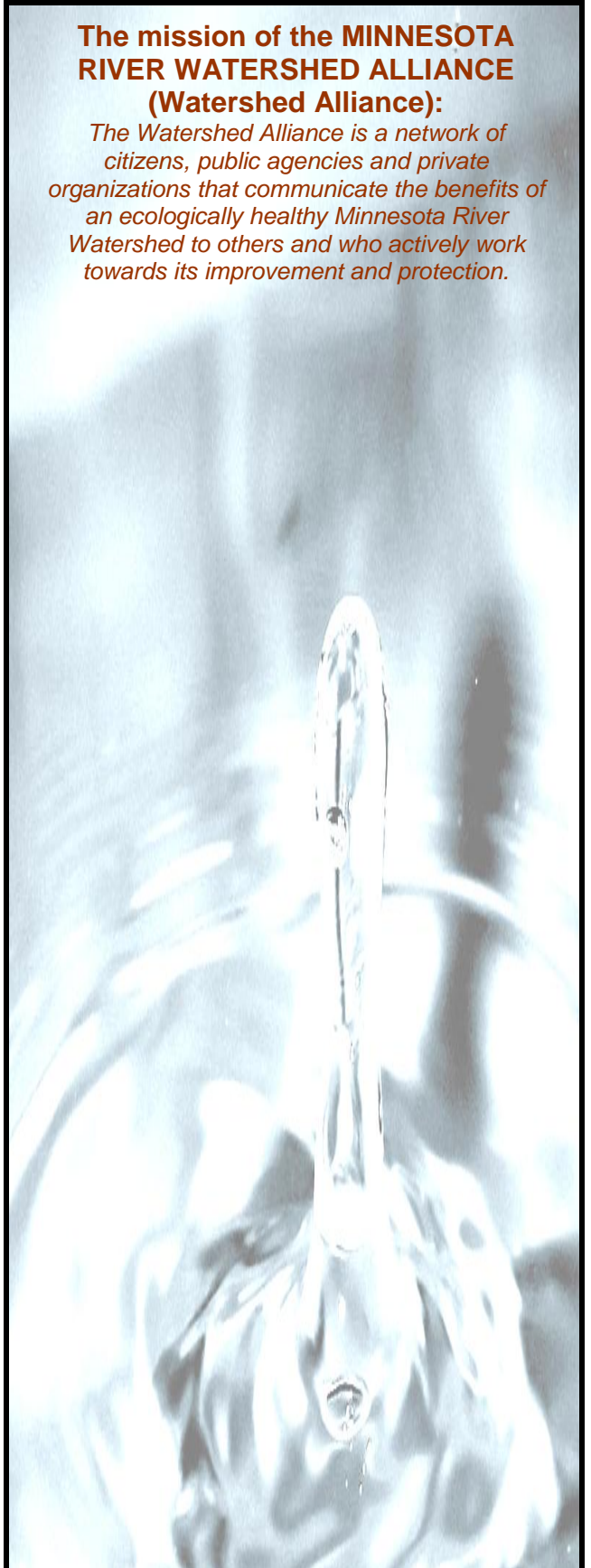
Paul Gruchow was raised on a small, subsistence farm near Montevideo, MN. He was the author of six published books on subjects ranging from the culture of the tall grass prairie to what we teach our children. Paul took his own life in Duluth on February 22, 2004, at the age of 56.



There were a million things to see in our marsh. I spent many days and whole nights there when I was a boy, trying to catch sight of them all. I could never succeed. It was a fabulous textbook to me, a storybook as fantastic as Arabian Nights. It was my university, my theater, my refuge and strength. When I rejoiced, I went there to celebrate; when I was sad, to be consoled. In every weather, I worshipped there.

The mission of the MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE (Watershed Alliance):

The Watershed Alliance is a network of citizens, public agencies and private organizations that communicate the benefits of an ecologically healthy Minnesota River Watershed to others and who actively work towards its improvement and protection.



Questions and comments on the River Talk newsletter can be directed to: Scott Kudelka; Water Resources Center; 184 Trafton Science Center S; Mankato, MN 56001; 507-389-2304 or scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu