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RIVER TALK

THE MINNESOTA RIVER CURRENT

THE MINNESOTA RIVER AND PADDLING

The Minnesota River flows for 335 miles from Big Stone Lake on the South Dakota border to its confluence with the Mississippi River at Fort Snelling. As the river meanders across the broad valley it picks up a diverse selection of tributaries both large and small. There is the Chippewa River as it slowly cuts across the prairie landscape, or the boulder-filled Beaver Creek and the fast-flowing streams of the Blue Earth Watershed.

Once upon a time rivers played an important role in the lives of people, whether traveling by boat, moving goods from one place to another or stirring the imagination of artists and writers. This is where we established our cities, constructed our industries and spent our leisure time. But as time went on people began to turn their backs on the rivers by building floodwalls for protection, dumping raw sewage and other garbage into the water, along with the loss of a personal connection.

Interest in the Minnesota River and its tributaries and what they had become began to change in the late 1980s and early 90s. More people began to recognize the importance of

rivers and the need for restoration and protection. Today, these efforts continue with individuals, nonprofit organizations, government agencies and others working together to bring positive changes to our rivers and surrounding landscape.

One way to continue these positive changes is to give people a reason for getting out on the rivers. This is why the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance (Watershed Alliance) will be launching the first-ever **Minnesota River Paddler Program**. The goal of this program is to reconnect people with the Minnesota River and its many tributaries. Hopefully, this will spark a greater

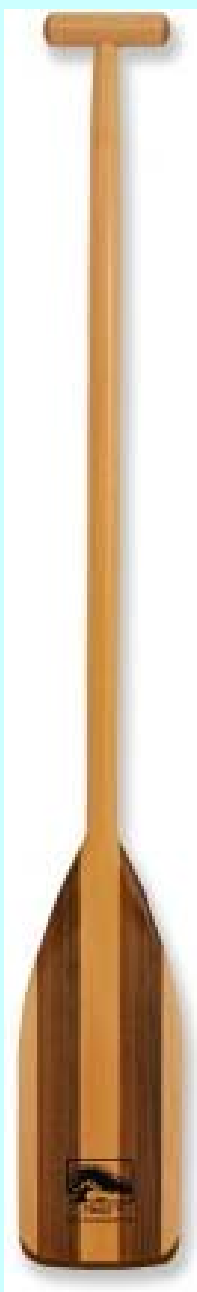
appreciation for the rivers and natural environment.

We also see the paddle/patch decal as a fun way to motivate people to explore some or all of the rivers in the Minnesota River Watershed. This in turn will promote other aspects of the Minnesota River including local businesses, culture sites, recreational opportunities, natural

features, community events, and much more. Ultimately, the Watershed Alliance hopes the **Minnesota River Paddler Program** increases the number of river advocates and people enjoying this significant water resource.



Paddling Hawk Creek



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DID YOU KNOW?

Clyde N. Ryberg, a self described river rat and State Senator Henry McKnight from Hennepin County paddled and motored their way down the Minnesota River in September of 1963 from the Big Stone Lake dam to Mankato. In the early 1960s, few people paid much attention to the Minnesota River except when it flooded or using it as a dumping ground for garbage, sewage and even cars.

Ryberg and McKnight undertook the five day survey of the Minnesota River to determine practical navigation areas, what type of watercraft could use the river and locate access points, camping sites, and hazards, along with "sites of historical significance." Ultimately, the two men wanted to "make the best use of the river's potential" by providing data and maps to government agencies, private enterprises and the general public.

On the trip they experienced a variety of conditions including cutting through brush, fallen trees, and others leaning horizontally for the first 12 river miles. Along the way they met with community leaders to talk about the recreation and economic potential of the Minnesota River.

After the trip they published the report: "1963 River Survey; Minnesota River from Ortonville, Big Stone Lake to Fort Snelling, Mississippi River." Sponsored by the North Central Marine Association, the report included a narrative on significant sites and camping facilities along the river. The report also featured a historical timeline, areas suitable for boats and recommendations for the Minnesota River.

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Watershed Alliance Coordinating Team:

Susie Carlin, Minnesota River Board

- Susan.carlin@mnsu.edu
507-389-2304

Dee Czech, MN Earth Sabbath Team

- dczech@frontiernet.net
507-964-5171

James Fett, MSUM Student & Maple River CWP

- james.fett@mnsu.edu
507-521-3388

Shannon Fisher, Water Resources Center

- Shannon.fisher@mnsu.edu
507-389-5492

Charlie Guggisberg,

- 507-354-5797

Larry Gunderson, MN Pollution Control Agency

- Larry.gunderson@pca.state.mn.us
651-296-8402

Chantill Kahler-Royer, Bolton & Menk

- chantillka@bolton-menk.com
507-625-4171

Patrick Moore, Clean Up the River Environment

- cure-ed@info-link.net
320-269-2984

Lori Nelson, Friends of the Minnesota Valley

- lnelson@friendsofminnvalley.org
612-370-9123

Brooke Patterson, Rush River CWP

- brookep@co.sibley.mn.us
320-237-7409

Scott Sparlin, Coalition for a Clean MN River

- vasure@lycos.com
507-359-2346

Watershed Alliance Staff:

Scott Kudelka, Communications Coordinator

- scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu
507-389-2304

Check out the Watershed Alliance's web site:

<http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com>





Senator Dennis Fredrickson of New Ulm has served in the Minnesota Senate since 1980 and been an advocate for the Minnesota River including the efforts to restore and protect this valuable resource. Senator Fredrickson has also been a champion of the Clean Water, Land and Cultural Legacy Amendment and serves on the Legislative – Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. Here are some of Senator Fredrickson's reflections about the Minnesota River and paddling:

Paddle quietly and feel the peace. Brush your hands on the 3.8 billion year old granite outcroppings. Be startled by the slap of a beaver's tail, and be surprised by the butterflies and the eagle soaring over head. Cast your fishing line into that deep pool shaded by the overhanging trees. The Minnesota River entices you to enjoy the water and absorb the scenic beauty.

The Minnesota River was formed thousands of years ago by the River Warren as it drained Glacial Lake Agassiz. Over many centuries, it probably changed very little, being buffered by the endless prairie. Settlement of the Minnesota River watershed by European pioneers began a slow change of the landscape and the quality of water in the river deteriorated. The river was always there and not many people noticed that it was carrying increasingly heavy loads of suspended solids and other impairments. The fish and mussels were not as abundant and waterfowl slowly disappeared. The river was ignored and mistreated, which was our loss.

The people's awakening or turning point for many was in 1995 when Governor Carlson set out the goal of making the river "swimmable and fishable in ten years." The goal seemed simple. It was not.

Talk of swimmable and fishable has changed to a more technical jargon of TMDLs, Mg/L of P, fecal coliform colonies, and TSS. Complying with the 1972 federal Clean Water Act and meeting our citizens' desires for a multiuse and cleaner river has changed our expectations. Cleaner is no longer a simple and subjective goal but a scientific and objectively measured standard.

Impairments come from two sources: point and non-point. In many ways point sources

are easier to clean up because the pollutant source is precisely identified and corrective actions are taken, usually by cities with financial assistance from state or federal funds.

Non-point sources can be more difficult to address because they come off the broad landscape, often involving private property owners, many of whom till the soil and provide us with food. The rich prairie land provides our farmers with the ability to grow food in abundance. Renville and Redwood Counties are separated by the river and grow the most bushels of corn and soybeans in the state. It is a farming challenge to maintain agricultural productivity in a way that also protects the water quality in the river. The farmers and Department of Agriculture are as important to involve in river activities as the angler or environmentalist. State and federal funds are also available to help reduce non-point source of pollution, recently augmented with the passage of the Clean Water, Habitat and Cultural Legacy Amendment.

Citizen involvement is especially important in cleaning up non-point pollution. People get involved when it is an issue about which they care. Activities that get people to the river like canoeing or boating, fishing, enjoying a multitude of activities with friends by the river remind people that they don't have to travel "up north" to enjoy our water resources. Community events like River Blast, river clean-up days, and canoeing flotillas bring people to the river which builds support for enhancing water quality.

An excellent place to start engaging citizens with the river is youth activities. The activities can be entirely recreational, or they may be scientific or educational. I have never seen a student stand in water with a seine and not get excited at seeing for the first time the small critters living in the water. Curiosity leads them to wonder why they find few riffle beetles but many pouch snails for example. The answer helps them understand water pollution and how human activity affects the river.

We don't have a "river problem"; we have a "watershed problem." The solution involves thousands of people and tens of thousands of acres. With collaborative management the Minnesota River can be a healthy, dynamic resource that we can enjoy today and pass on to our grandchildren as a clean water legacy.



Senator Fredrickson on the Redwood River

PADDLING WITH JOE

"Any day you are out paddling the river is a good day," Joe Michel waxes poetically as we push off from the Judson boat landing on the Minnesota River. On a crisp, late October morning all three of us from the Water Resources Center feel fortunate to be paddling with one of the most dedicated and respected paddlers in the Mankato area.

Joe started paddling around the age of eight when one of Mankato's old-timers took him and his friend Dale Hennek out in a canoe. World War II had just ended and the boys were hanging out at a canoe dock owned by the Blue Earth and Minnesota Rivers Canoe Club. After the club disbanded, the dock disappeared too.

"About the time the guys came back from the war," Joe relates, "canoeing was a big thing for them then." This was an inexpensive form of recreation for men who didn't have a lot of money or vehicles to do other things. "They [would] take their canoes from there and paddle upstream maybe 4, 5, 6 miles and have a little picnic and turn around to come back again."

Over the last sixty years, Joe has become something of a local legend for the amount of time he has spent paddling the Minnesota, Blue Earth and Le Sueur rivers. No matter the time of year as long as there is open water, chances are you will find Joe out on a river. A sticker on his canoe says its all: "It's Not A Passion. It's An Obsession."

Out paddling with Joe – a spry 73-year-old – you quickly realize how much he knows about the river, especially at reading the current. "This is a meandering river," states Joe. "There has been up to 17 or 18 changes in the 42-mile stretch from the [New Ulm Quartzite] quarry down to Seven Mile Creek just in my lifetime."

Even though Joe has paddled many rivers including in Alaska and Montana, his favorite happens to be literally in his backyard – the Minnesota River.

"I was brought up on this one," Joe offers. "I know there are more spectacular little rivers around here but I guess it's just in my blood, this river." Each time Joe talks about the river you see the excitement in his eyes and hear it in his voice.

Joe also enjoys paddling the Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers. Both rivers impact the Minnesota River including on a water quality level and with recreational opportunities. "If you put [your canoe] in on Highway 22 of the Le Sueur River, you can come down and you'll go by the Maple and Cobb and end up on the Blue Earth and Minnesota," exclaims Joe.

"Five rivers in that little 18 mile jog, and that's the unique thing. I don't know of too places that you could say that if you want to come down the river, make a little loop into the other river, you can say you were on it."

One time Joe paddled 18 miles in about two hours and five minutes from the Highway 22

bridge to Sibley Park. According to Joe, "it wasn't me, it was just the current was so fast and I am a fairly good paddler, I was then anyway. Well, I did race at one time . . . about nine miles an hour." In the 1970s, Joe participated in canoe races across the United States. He has a box of trophies to show for his prowess at paddling.

For Joe Michel the river is a place he gravitates to, a place he wants to be at. "When I am on the river, especially alone, there is a real spiritual connection," Joe adds. "That might sound weird, but it's there, and you can almost feel it. I don't know how to explain it, just you're close to God to me. It's a big freedom to be out there all alone, on the river, even with someone else, but all along you pick it up. You're part of the equation. Yeah, it can overcome you, it just makes you feel good, I get it sometimes out skiing when we stop to look and it's just neat, it's just beautiful."

Next time you are out paddling the Minnesota, Blue Earth or Le Sueur rivers, look for Joe in his trusty gray canoe with the cool bumper sticker.



Joe Michel and Kim Musser paddling the MN River

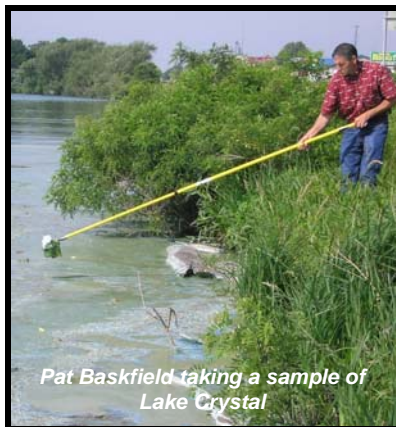


Pat Baskfield has the best of both worlds. As a hydrologist for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Pat spends his days studying and monitoring rivers across the state. After working most of his MPCA career on water quality issues in the Minnesota River Watershed, Pat is now the state-wide monitoring coordinator for the Clean Water Legacy Major Watershed Load Monitoring Program.

On the other side of the coin, Pat lives along the Watonwan River and likes to get out paddling as often as possible depending on flow and if the walleyes are biting. After buying an Old Town "Otter" kayak, "I started going down the rivers in this area at least once if not twice a week, given flow conditions and fishing success," acknowledges Pat.

In order to understand and identify water quality problems, Pat feels it's absolutely instrumental to get out on the water. "I live on the Watonwan River and have had the good fortune to work and recreate on many of the other rivers in the Minnesota River," Baskfield says. "Living in the area allows me the opportunity to observe. Watching the landscape, climatic patterns and how the rivers respond to varying conditions gives me the best feel for what is going on."

As an MPCA hydrologist, Pat has played an important part in training and offering guidance to many of the people monitoring rivers in the Minnesota River Watershed. This includes Scott Matteson, who has worked with Pat since 2000 first on the High Island Creek Watershed Assessment Project and later as the monitoring coordinator with the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato. According to Scott, "Pat is



incredibly dedicated about water quality issues and a real role model for the many people he has trained in the monitoring field over the past 12 years."

Paddling Rivers

"When it comes to paddling trips," relates Pat. "I like the lower Blue Earth when flows are high. Early last summer, we went out several times when the flows were between 3000-5500 cfs and had a ball. At this range the water is high but the rocks are under water so it's actually a fairly easy paddle for people with a little experience beyond the fundamentals of paddling. My kids all did the trip at least once last year and really had a good time. The lower Blue Earth flows through an incised valley that is absolutely beautiful. There are also several scenic locations such as Devil's Gorge and Triple Falls that make the trip a lot of fun." Baskfield also counts as the Le Sueur and Big Cobb rivers as ones he likes to paddle.

"Early morning trips, especially during the spring when the birds are migrating; hard to deny the hand of God during a sunrise trip in May," Pat Baskfield



Pat has many fond memories and stories of paddling. One of his favorite has to do with the time him and his daughter were paddling a stretch of the Watonwan. His daughter was so caught up in looking downstream for wildlife that she failed to notice a mink sitting on the bank six feet from her. They spend a lot of time on the river as family camping, fishing, looking bones and making clay pots. Out paddling Pat has surprised a bald eagle eating a fish, had a beaver come close to landing in his kayak after diving from the river bank and catching the annual mayfly hatch during a full moon in August.

After all his time on the water, Pat offers some advice about getting people interested in rivers. "Easy, get them on the water. Rivers are not as forgiving as lakes, most people are cautious of flowing water and prefer to be shown or taught 'how to, 'when to' and 'when not to' go down rivers. Once I get someone on the water I let nature do the rest."

GOING THE DISTANCE

Greg Wyum, a science teacher from Dawson – Boyd Schools first got into paddling during the summer of 2000 when he was invited to go along on a high school canoe trip down the Minnesota River by Butch Halterman, a Montevideo biology teacher. “I bought a book on how to canoe and learned over the next two weeks,” says Greg. “After that I was hooked and also wanted to provide the same experience to my students at Dawson – Boyd.”

For the past eight summers Greg has been leading a river canoe trip down the Lac qui Parle River for any student interested in an adventure. “My favorite part of the trips is seeing the reaction from the students,” Greg Wyum relates. “Many have never been canoeing before and find it a new challenge. It can be very frustrating and physically trying for many, but by the end of the two days those who show a confidence in their abilities really enjoy the experience. I have had many students who want to quit after the first day but after the second day they talk about how great it was and how much fun they had.”

So far Greg has taken out over 190 people on these river trips and has been lucky with just a few cuts and some sun burns. He also recognizes it as being lucky. “My least favorite part [of leading a trip] is convincing some of the canoeists that we need to be safe all the time and wearing a life vest and making good decisions,” offers Wyum. “The worst thing to happen has been a large cut to a girl’s toe (she hadn’t kept her shoes on).”

When asked what’s his favorite river to paddle Greg says a section of the Chippewa River north of Watson. “Its water is clear with riffles and challenges



Greg & Jenna Wyum on the Lac qui Parle

with some very high banks that make it feel wild,” exclaims Greg. “The Lac qui Parle River is also fun with its many rapids and high scenic banks.” He

talks about the excitement of seeing his daughter stopping on sand bars to collect mussel shells, dodging rocks in small rapids and watching baby goslings dive under the canoe.

Greg says one of his most memorable paddling adventures was a trip he took 26 summer school students and four adults on. *It had rained the week before and the water was running very fast, probably a little too fast. About ten minutes into the trip I rounded a corner and found four kids and one capsized canoe on the bank. I asked about the second canoe and they said they couldn’t stop it and it went down the river around the next bend. I got them into the canoe and went after the other. I found it stuck in a tree and I had to get in the river to get it out. A little later I rounded a corner and found two heads and a canoe sticking out of a tree in the water. It was two 7th graders that had capsized and couldn’t get the canoe out of the tree. I asked about the third student that had been in the canoe with them and they said the current was too fast and he couldn’t get to shore and the last they saw of him was him going around the bend holding onto his paddle. The water was too fast and too deep for the shorter kids to touch bottom with life jackets on so if they couldn’t kick to shore they were just swept away. About twenty minutes later I caught up to the floater and got him into my canoe. It was a crazy day, no one got hurt, but one of the teachers swore never to do anything like this again and some of the rather bold students were somewhat humbled by the power of the river.*

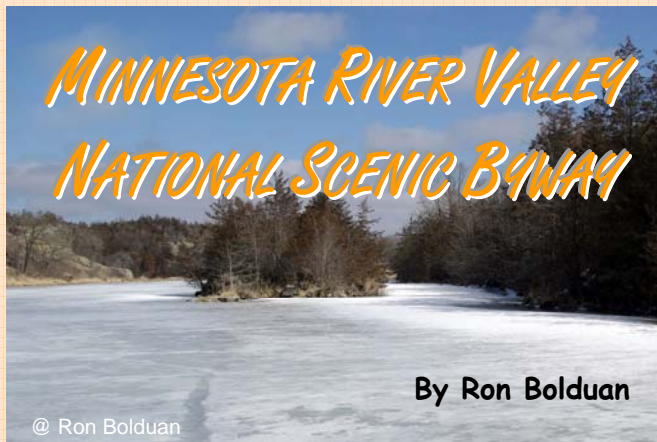


Dave Craigmile and Greg Wyum checking out conditions on the Lac qui Parle

In a paddling season Greg gets out to canoe six or seven times with one being a two-day student trip. Greg says “I connect to a river when in the channel, feeling isolated from the nearby farm land, creating a feeling of being in an undeveloped wild place.” He also connects to a river “when the power of the current kind of forces me to work out a partnership or agreement with the river in order to drift down the river and still be in some level of control of my canoe.”

How do we get the public interested in rivers?

I think talking about rivers, providing statistics and numbers on how their quality has been impaired or changed, may interest some, but until people feel a personal connection they won’t be willing to make the personal, economic or societal sacrifices necessary to make change. But being on the river or living near its banks, can create a deep connection to a river in a person. These feelings increase even more when supported with memories of a river experience.



Running from the South Dakota border to Belle Plaine, the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway offers a multitude of attractions. It is 287 miles of culture, history, agriculture and natural beauty. Designated a national scenic byway in 2003, our exposure expanded and opened more eyes to an often overlooked travel destination.

Encompassing 10 miles on either side of the Minnesota River, the Byway includes some of the most productive farmland in the world. Thus, 'Food For a Nation' was one of the three themes selected by the Byway Alliance for promoting the valley. Besides viewing fertile crop lands, a traveler can visit agriculture-related historical sites like the Minnesota Machinery Museum in Hanley Falls, spot numerous old barns or catch a glimpse of the Jolly Green Giant watching over Highway 169 outside of LeSueur.

Another theme is 'A River's Legacy' which looks at the natural history and beauty of the valley. Along with the abundant wildlife and varieties of sometimes unique vegetation, a traveler can visit geologic wonders found few places in the world. When Glacial River Warren carved out the Minnesota River Valley thousands of years ago it left behind exposed granite bedrock that attracts geologists from all over. Prairie vegetation remnants, waterfalls, eagles on the wing, and a whitetail buck noting your passing all

join to create memories of a trip through the valley. Those seeking direct contact with the valley environment will find that canoeing, fishing, hunting, birding, hiking and biking opportunities abound.

Our third theme is 'Struggles For a Home'. This is a very broad focus because it entails all which has come before. The Byway is rich in history and tradition, celebrated by a bounty of festivals. A few examples: Sauerkraut days (Henderson), Bavarian Blast and River Blast (New Ulm), Farmfest (Redwood Falls), Fiesta Days (Montevideo), Applefest (Appleton) and many more. There are numerous sites and monuments preserving stories of the valley's rich history.

Historically, the most significant and tragic event in the valley was the U.S./Dakota Conflict of 1862. Both the European immigrants and the Dakota people suffered grievously and there are numerous sites recognizing that tragic time. The fact that the Conflict occurred while the country was engaged in the Civil War prevented a broader awareness of it as one of the greatest conflicts of its type.



More information on the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway can be obtained by visiting our website www.mnrivervalley.com or calling 1-888-463-9856 for a brochure providing more detailed information on the Byway and its stories. A virtual photo tour can be taken by visiting www.experiencenature.com

Continued on next page

MN River Valley National Scenic Byway *continued*



DISCOVERY SITES

The Minnesota River Valley features a diverse selection of historical, cultural and natural places to stop and visit. Listed below are just a few of these sites. More can be found at www.mnrivervalley.com

Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge

Big Stone NWR has 10,795 acres of marsh and open water created by the three-mile dam across the Minnesota River. The refuge offers a four mile self-guided auto tour along which you will experience western prairie, mixed hardwoods, and wetlands with over 230 different species of birds living there.

- Located one mile southeast of Ortonville off of Highway 7/75
- Phone: 320-273-2191

Minnesota's Machinery Museum

Five large buildings contain a marvelous collection of antique tractors, gas engines, implements, and tools in mint condition. Many fond memories will surface as your stroll through the farm home rooms and general store. Experience rural Minnesota's finest look at yesterday and today's agriculture and transportation, including a display on vintage automobiles.

- Located 1 & ½ blocks west of Hwy 23, Hanley Falls
- Phone: 507-768-3522



August Schell Brewery Museum and Gardens

New Ulm's oldest industry, the August Schell Brewing Company, was founded in 1860 and still a family business. Schell's brews have won several honors in national brewing competitions. The brewery also offers a walking garden, Museum of Brewing, gift shop and brewery tours.

- Located south on Broadway, then west on 18th Street
- www.schellsbrewery.com



Joseph R. Brown MN River Center

An interpretive center telling the life story of this exceptional man who helped shaped early Minnesota history. His influence on early Minnesota government, relations with Indians, and his business endeavors are explained in the center. A place to study the geographical and cultural history of the Minnesota River Valley with an exhibit called the "Minnesota River Table."

- Located 600 Main Street in Henderson
- www.mnriverjrb.org



The Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance welcomes everyone's participation and encourages you to contact us for meeting locations and dates.

- Ron Bolduan President, MRVSBA
- 507-354-8367 boldriv@newulmtel.net



Residents of Renville and Redwood counties have come together to form the non-profit organization "Tatanka Bluffs." The mission of Tatanka Bluffs is to create economic sustainability and protect the natural resources of the Minnesota River Corridor between the Upper Sioux Agency State Park and Fort Ridgely State Park and areas surrounding the two counties.

According to Loran Kaardal, a member of this organization, the vision of Tatanka Bluffs is to develop one of the top tourism destinations in Minnesota by using its trademark brand and developing a multi-faceted plan highlighting an effort of communication, collaboration and cooperation among citizen leaders and volunteers. Ultimately this will help businesses in the area to build on this vision and offer future generations a place – "Tatanka Bluffs" – to live, work and prosper.



Five Focus Areas of Tatanka Bluffs:

1. Outdoor Recreation: Enhance tourism in our region by caring for and preserving our natural resources.
2. Education: Enhance life-long learning opportunities for residents to gain the skills needed to meet job demands in our area.
3. Economic Development: Working together to support and promote our area assets and business economy.
4. Community Celebrations & Tourism: Create interest and opportunities for visitors to enjoy as they travel in our area.
5. Gaming and Entertainment: Continue working with the Lower Sioux Community and other groups who are working to provide activities and entertainment that would draw larger crowds to our area.

Green Corridor Project

One of the focus areas for Tatanka Bluffs is improving outdoor recreation opportunities and natural resource preservation. As a result, the Green Corridor Project was developed to preserve unique natural, historical and cultural significant areas along with developing a trail system.

Green Corridor Project Manager Brad Cobb says "the Green Corridor is a true community/ citizen based initiative with a focus on protecting, enhancing, and restoring our natural resources. By developing and protecting these natural resource infrastructures we see the opportunity for regional economic growth and development in the areas of outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, paddling, hiking, camping) and tourism."

In 2008, the Minnesota River Valley Green Corridor received a \$1 million grant from the Legislative – Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) to preserve some of the unique

natural resources along the Minnesota River Valley – bluff to bluff – from Upper Sioux Agency to Fort Ridgely. The project will also keep an eye out for future trail development and preserving historical and cultural significant areas in the Minnesota River Valley.

Cobb reports, "the Green Corridor is focused on work in the Middle Minnesota River Watershed and tributaries by developing habitat connectivity or "Green Corridors" of both public and private lands through simple fee acquisition of

State Wildlife Management Areas / Aquatic Management Areas for public use and specifically targeted conservation easements that help to establish corridors of habitat which have been proven beneficial for wildlife development and sustainability. And to assist both public and private organizations and landowners to restore and/or enhance wildlife habitat."



Recently, the Green Corridor Project received a \$1.617 million funding recommendation by the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council for the new Outdoor Heritage Fund to move the project into Phase II and continue the work started in 2008.



Tim Krohn and John Cross of the Mankato Free Press paddled the entire length of the Minnesota River – all 330 miles – in 1998 and again ten years later to get a personal feel of the river and some of the people tied to this meandering community. Both trips took 11 days as they wrote a series of articles for the paper on what they encountered along the way.

Many of Tim and John's observations dealt with water quality aspects of the river. This was especially true of their 2008 paddle. Right at the beginning, Tim wrote about how the river was claiming trees and soil. *If there is one highly noticeable change to the Minnesota River since our canoe trip down it 10 years ago, it is the rapid erosion of the banks.*

In 1998, we had noted that banks had eroded some following the massive flooding of a year earlier. Today, thousands and thousands of trees along the Minnesota have recently, or will soon fall into the river as banks are quickly being eaten away. In one dramatic example, a large tree that had been on the shoreline was now standing upright in the river, but some 10 feet from the bank, which had apparently been recently washed away.



Rivers naturally want to widen themselves by steadily eroding away what they can from the banks. But many who live along the river have said increased development and more farm drainage systems have caused the river in recent years to rise rapidly with runoff water, causing the undercutting of the banks that destabilizes them until they fall into the river.

One of the positive aspects of water quality they noticed had to do with the enrollment of critically sensitive areas into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). CREP brought hundreds of millions of federal and state dollars to permanently return marginal farm land into vegetation. The upper half of the Minnesota River valley enrolled 60 percent of the 100,000 acres that were put into CREP.

Today, those acres are visible all along the river, as tall willows and grasses cover land that was once

farmed near the river. There are still crops hard against the river bank in places and the occasional cow pasture along the banks, but the farming up close to the river is much less evident than a decade ago.

The benefit of returning land to vegetation was evident at a spot near Granite Falls. A former farm field

was now covered in vegetation and under several inches of water.

Using a clarity checking tube we found the water flowing out of the wetland to be greater than the 60 centimeter maximum in the

tube. When we paddled a few yards out to the main river channel, that clarity dropped to 22 centimeters.

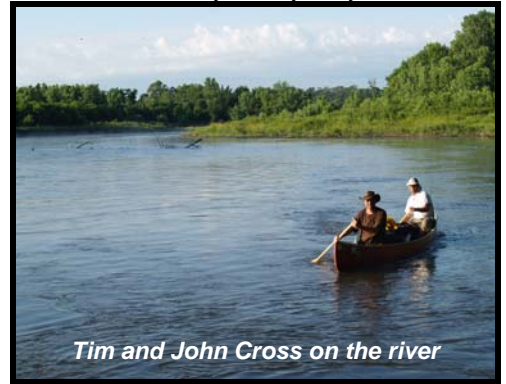
The two men also observed an abundance of wildlife, in particular birds. It's hard to notice great changes in a river in just 10 years, but two things have struck us – we continue to see much greater numbers of eagles and pelicans than in our last trip. We've seen bald eagles or pairs of them every 5 to 10 river miles – at least two dozen so far. Seeing so many of the majestic birds sailing through the valley is a heartwarming sight.

The very upper stretches of the Minnesota, particularly Marsh and Lac qui Parle lakes, were loaded with pelicans both last trip and this one. What was different this time is the number of pelicans we are seeing far down the river. We've been seeing pelicans as far as New Ulm. Their numbers and or their habitat seem to be expanding.

At the end of the river trail, Tim and John made some overall observations about their trip. First off, it's important to recognize the Minnesota River has never really been a sparkling clear-water flowage. It historically has carried a certain amount of suspended sediment as it wound through a wide variety of terrain and soils. And like all rivers, the Minnesota is a living thing. It is constantly changing, its currents searching for a weak spot along tight turns in which to establish a new channel.

What has changed, say longtime river observers, is that because of extensive farmland tiling and the draining of wetlands, the erosion has been accelerating. Extensive drainage systems in the river watershed now flow quickly into the river, causing water levels to wildly fluctuate, coming up very quickly sending torrents of water to eat away at the river banks before falling just as quickly.

It's nearly impossible to come in contact with the Minnesota River and not get muddy.



MN River Watershed and Paddling continued

Minnesota River Paddler Program

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance will award three paddle patch/decals to anyone who meets the following criteria:

- **Minnesota River 335 Paddler:** For anyone who paddles the entire length of the Minnesota River from Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge to Fort Snelling either all in one paddle or by segments.
- **Minnesota River Tributary Paddler:** Paddle any three of these major tributaries – Chippewa River, Lac qui Parle River, Pomme de Terre River, Yellow Medicine River, Hawk Creek, Redwood River, Cottonwood River, Watonwan River, Le Sueur River, Blue Earth River, and one stretch of the Minnesota River.



The Little Minnesota River

- **Minnesota River Extreme Paddler:** Paddle the following rivers in the Minnesota River Watershed – Little Minnesota River, Whetstone River, Yellow Bank River, Chippewa River, Lac qui Parle River, Pomme de Terre River, Beaver Creek, Yellow Medicine River, Hawk Creek, Redwood River, Cottonwood River, Watonwan River, Le Sueur River, Blue Earth River, Big Cobb River, Maple River, Rush River, High Island Creek, Sand Creek and three stretches of the Minnesota River (Upper, Middle, and Lower) for a total of 22 paddles. Documentation is required for this paddle patch/decals (photos, affidavits, etc.).

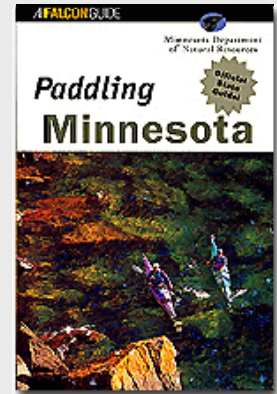
Spring and another paddling season in the Minnesota River is upon us. Get out on your favorite river and try a new one. Stop to enjoy a meal at some local establishment and take in one of the many historical and culture attractions found in the valley. Have a great paddling season!

Book Review: Paddling Minnesota by Greg Breining

Southwestern Minnesota takes in broad regions of sloping prairie (now farm fields), dominated by the wide valley of the Minnesota River. In geological terms, the river is underfit, a puny inheritor of the vast trench carved through southern Minnesota by the mighty Glacial River Warren. Rivers run swift from the uplands into the Minnesota Valley with generally easy rapids.

As the official state guide for paddling, this Falcon book covers numerous rivers in the Minnesota River Watershed including the Blue Earth, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Le Sueur, Minnesota, Pomme de Terre, Watonwan and Yellow Medicine.

Paddling Minnesota describes paddling routes across the state by highlighting scenery, difficulty, location and other factors.



Pomme de Terre River

In a region of Minnesota that is devoted almost completely to agriculture, the Pomme de Terre provides a pleasant oasis. The stream runs past low bluffs and a mix of woods, pasture and some farmland. Look for white-tailed deer, mink, songbirds, and water-loving birds such as kingfishers and great blue herons. Below Appleton, the Pomme de Terre runs through several easy rapids as it drops to meet the Minnesota River at Marsh Lake.



Paddling the Pomme de Terre River

Greg Breining is a freelance writer from St. Paul who has written a range of stories for the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine and numerous books including: A Hard-Water World: Ice Fishing and Why we Do It

RIVER RAMBLINGS

by Scott Kadelka



Paddling a river is for anyone who enjoys the great outdoors. The Minnesota River Watershed has a lot to offer whether you are a beginner or have been doing it for years. I've been fortunate to have gotten a chance to paddle the Minnesota River and some of the tributaries including one time I'd rather forget (Joel Wurscher can attest to that).

The one thing I like about paddling a river in the Minnesota River Watershed is the solitude and peace you find. Very few times I

have ever come across anyone else. You aren't going to find that say in the Boundary Waters or paddling the St. Croix up by Taylor Falls or the Root River

down in the Lanesboro area. We have great paddling rivers without the crowds.

One of the goals of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance is to get recreational users involved in our effort to protect and promote the watershed. We hope this new initiative – the Minnesota River Paddle Patch / Decal will get people excited about trying out the diverse selection of rivers found here and nowhere else.

My advice for paddling a Minnesota River, go with a friend to share the adventure or hook up with a group sponsoring a community event like the annual Minnesota River History Paddle by Clean Up the River Environment (CURE). If you are looking for a regular chance to get on the river join the Mankato Paddling and Outing Club, who put on trips throughout the paddling season.

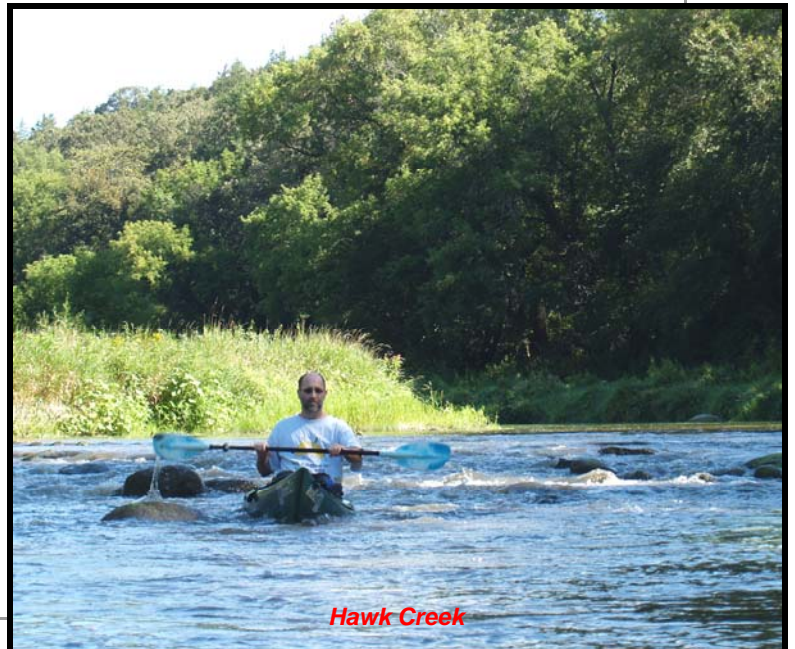
One of my favorite paddles happened with a little luck. Tim Krohn and John Cross of the Mankato Free Press were out paddling down the Minnesota River last July on the 10th anniversary of their original trip when I decided to try to catch them. With somewhat of an idea where they might be I took a chance by driving up early in the morning to Skalbekken Renville County Park downstream of the Upper Sioux Agency State Park.

Amazingly, as I carried my kayak down to the riverbank two guys in a canoe came paddling out of the fog. I couldn't have been any luckier. Tim and John were taking the pulse of the river for a series of articles on the Minnesota River in the Mankato Free Press. They did a great job at capturing some of the interesting river characters and what has happened to the Minnesota since the last time the two of them canoed it in 1998.

Paddling a river is never the same twice. Rivers are constantly changing along with the surrounding landscape and natural environment. You never know what will be waiting around the next bend. I have caught the glimpse of a river otter diving into the water, seen trees take that final plunge into the rushing current and paddled through a new channel cut by flooding. There is something magical and spiritual about being out on a river and a freedom that can be hard to find somewhere else. My advice is to start out small and go with friends or family.



Yellow Bank River



Hawk Creek



An Expanding MN Valley NWA

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been quietly buying land to expand the 12,500 acre Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. They are using \$26 million from a settlement with the Minneapolis – St. Paul International Airport to allow flights over the refuge. Under this expansion plan, refuge officials seek out landowners willing to sell their property without any condemnation of land. To date over 1,000 acres have been added with the hope for another 4,000.

Nine Mile Creek Pedestrian / Bike Trail

Residents in Edina are looking forward to, and also bracing for the construction of a pedestrian / bike trail along Nine Mile Creek. Trail development could be done in conjunction with work by Nine Mile Creek Watershed District to restore the creek's floodplain by replanting natural vegetation along the banks in an effort to improve water quality.



Three Rivers Park District officials has budgeted \$900,000 for a trail section from Hopkins to the Edina border with most of the route falling on public land. Some residents are unhappy about a public trail being constructed behind their homes along the creek.

Recycle Mania at GAC

Students and staff at this St Peter Institution – Gustavus Adolphus College (GAC) – are involved in Recycle Mania, a friendly competition for college and university recycling programs to promote waste-reduction activities on campus. Over 400 schools are competing by reporting recycling and trash data to be turned into rankings according to who collects the largest amount of recyclables per capita, the largest amount of recyclables and the least amount of trash per capita. The competition runs until March 28 and part of it measures how much material goes to a landfill, with GAC having about an 85% diversion rate.

Fisher named MASWCD's Outstanding Supervisor

Loyal Fisher of Renville SWCD received the 2008 award from the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) for Outstanding Supervisor. Fisher has served as a Renville SWCD Supervisor since 1997 and became chair in 2003. During this time he has devoted countless hours to promoting conservation in his personal endeavors and through his work at the local, state, and national levels. In May of 2008, Fisher developed a Green Career Day for students at Renville County West High School that was a hit for both students and teachers.

Scott County Railroad Corridor

Union Pacific is looking at abandoning a 5.6-mile railroad spur over the Minnesota River between Scott and Carver counties, while Scott County has eyed it as a vital link for an emerging non-motorized trail system. Railroad traffic on the spur stopped in 2007 after a derailment caused a bridge collapse. Scott County is hoping Union Pacific will donate the rail spur along with fixing seven bridges on the route.

Drawdown of High Island Lake

High Island Lake has been the focus of intense efforts by citizens, local officials and governments agencies since 2003 to improve the lake's water quality. There has been some success with the establishment of conservation practices including a number of rain gardens in the City of New Auburn to handle stormwater runoff.

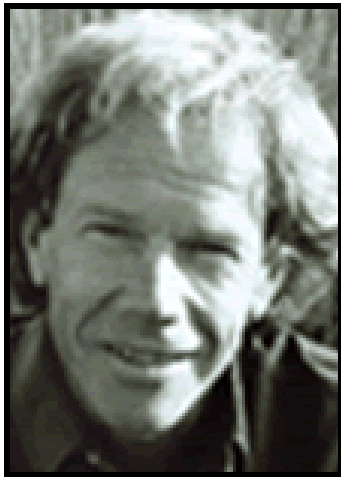
Now, a new initiative is taking place with the MN DNR conducting a drawdown on this 1,340-acre shallow lake in Sibley County. The water drawdown will hopefully winterkill undesirable fish like carp and help establish aquatic plants in an effort for improving water quality. The DNR also plans to use the lake as a rearing pond for walleye, Minnesota's most popular game fish.





TIM PALMER

"Not fitting into one category, streams resemble, rather, a box of jewels each of different color, size, shape and origin. And each region of rivers possesses its own character, as variable as the greenhouse of life, as diverse as all that creeps underfoot or soars overhead. Rivers, indeed, constitute corridors of life, their differences defining what grows there, what swims out of sight, what browses and dabbles along the shore." (Rivers of America)



Tim Palmer is an award-winning author of 19 books about rivers, conservation, and adventure travel. He is a photographer of America's natural landscapes and a dynamic public speaker with inspiring presentations about a wide range of environmental topics. One of his books – Rivers of America – captures the magic of rivers with 200 stunning images and four evocative essays.

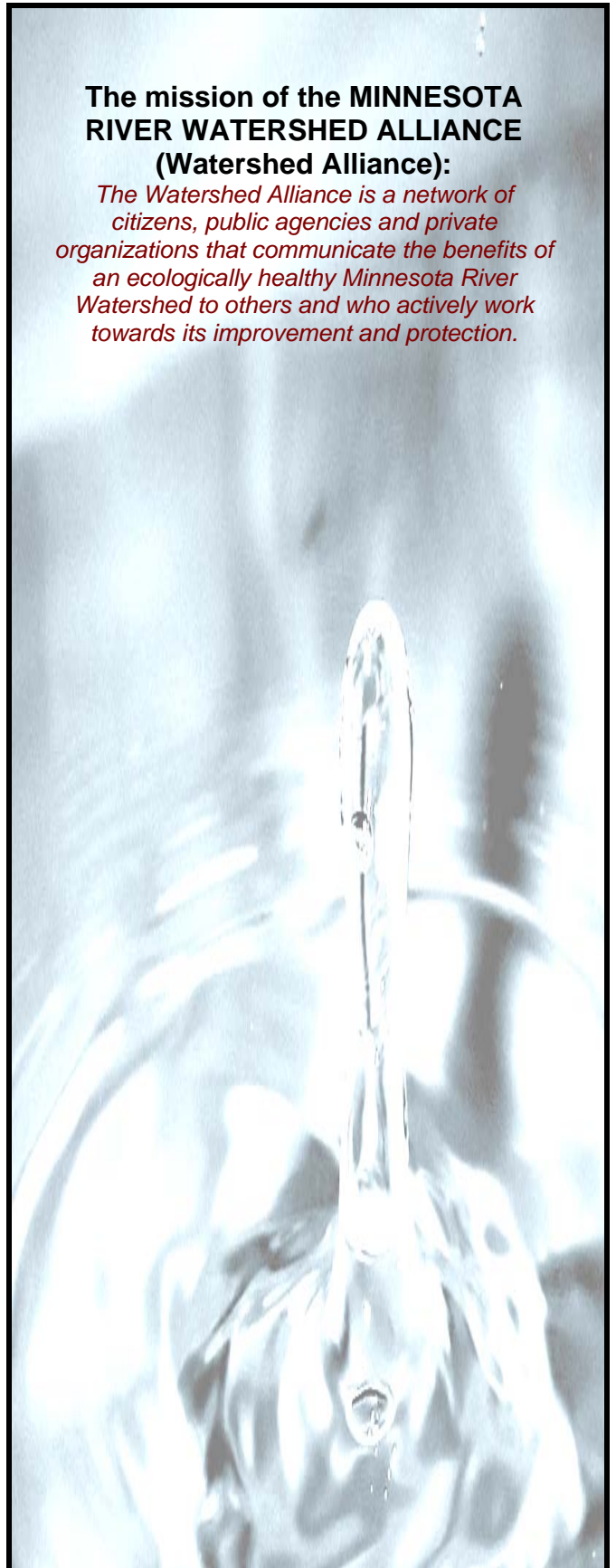
"Yet rivers have been orphaned and lost from the day-to-day thoughts of many, the operative phrase being "Out of sight, out of mind." Some people don't know the name of their closest river. If they dump a bucket of water on their lawn or driveway, they don't know what river it will end up in." They don't know where the water in the tap comes from or where the water in the toilet goes. They don't think of traveling in anything but a car, even when a full-bodied river flows right by."

"Rivers are important, essential, vital to America as we know it and to life on earth. Obviously, we need water to live. Less obvious but just as important, a vast biological community requires healthy rivers. And beyond all that, who we are relates to where we are and to what we see." (Rivers of America)

"Yet who does not desire a river of life? Who would reject a river where children can swim on summer afternoons, where anglers can cast a fly or a worm for food or sport, where homeowners can live in admiration of the fruitful shores and stroll with joy in their hearts on a summer evening? (Lifelines)

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