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RIVER TALK

THE MINNESOTA RIVER CURRENT

GO ON AN ADVENTURE - PADDLE THE MN RIVER

Why paddle the Minnesota River, or one of its many tributaries? Isn't there more exciting places like the Boundary Waters Canoe Area or on the Mississippi River or one of the rivers located in northern Minnesota? What is so special about the Minnesota River Basin when it comes to canoeing or kayaking?

There are plenty of reasons if a person gives it a chance and most likely you will find

yourself coming back time after time. The Minnesota River has been described as the Boundary Waters of Southern Minnesota only without all the people. Here you will find beautiful

granite rock outcroppings, amazing fishing opportunities, and ideal conditions for both expert and beginner paddlers.

In the upper portion of the Minnesota River Basin there is the Chippewa River, a prairie stream with fairly gentle currents and a great family adventure. On the other side of the Minnesota River further downstream check out the Yellow Medicine River, one of the most challenging in the basin when it comes to rapids and fast moving water. The Lower Minnesota River features a number of wild

paddles including the Rush River, High Island Creek and Sand Creek.

Over the last couple of decades a lot of effort has been made in the Minnesota River Basin when it comes improving water quality. People like Tom Kalahar of the Renville Soil and Water Conservation District brags up its unique charm any chance he can get and how he is always looking for an excuse to paddle or fish the river. Some of Tom's favorite times have involved introducing people to the Minnesota River just to see their faces light up.

Tim Krohn and John Cross of the Mankato Free Press are two people who have a unique close-up view of the Minnesota River after paddling the entire length twice. They did it in 1998 and ten years later in 2008 to see how the river was responding to both positive and negative changes on the landscape. In a series of newspaper articles the two reporters described what they saw, the people they met along the way and their own struggles of paddling from Big Stone Lake to the confluence with the Mississippi River. For more on their adventure go to page three.

To help motivate people to get out paddling, the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance is now offering three distinctive patches / decals as part of their Minnesota River Paddler Program. A person can begin slowly by trying out three of the major tributaries and one stretch on the main channel before taking on a bigger challenge like paddling the entire length of the Minnesota River - all 335 miles all at once or in sections. For more information see page five.

Spring is here and time to dust off the kayak or canoe to get out on water. There will be many chances for paddling including trips planned by organized groups like CURE (page 9) and the Mankato Paddling & Outing Club. Enjoy whatever river you happened to be on!



Paddling tandem on the Redwood River

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DID YOU KNOW?

The State of Minnesota sponsors a Wild & Scenic Rivers Program through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Seven rivers - Mississippi, North Fork Crow, Minnesota, Cannon, St. Croix, Rum and Kettle - have stretches designed as either wild, scenic or recreational or a combination of the three. Established in 1973, the program is designed to protect rivers which have outstanding natural, scenic, geographic, historic, cultural and recreational values.

Added in 1977, the designated stretch of the Minnesota River runs from the Lac qui Parle Dam down to the community of Franklin. Two segments have been classified as "scenic" and one as "recreational." According to the DNR, "Scenic rivers are those rivers that exist in a free-flowing state and with adjacent lands that are largely undeveloped." For the recreational classification it means: "Recreational rivers are those rivers that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past and may have adjacent lands which are considerably developed, but that are still capable of being managed so as to further the purposes of this act."

Here are the designed stretches for the Minnesota River:

- Scenic: from the Lac qui Parle dam to U.S. Highway 212 bridge in Montevideo.
- Recreational: U.S. Highway 212 bridge to the Great Lakes Pipeline one-quarter mile downstream of MN Falls Dam.
- Scenic: Great Lakes Pipeline to the Redwood County 11 bridge.

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Check out the Watershed Alliance's web site:

<http://watershedalliance.blogspot.com>





Back in 1998, Tim Krohn and John Cross of the Mankato Free Press wanted to learn more about the Minnesota River and what was happening with the overall progress of improving water quality in the basin. They paddled the entire 335 miles from Big Stone Lake down to the Minnesota River – Mississippi River confluence. Ten years later the two men made a return visit to the river. Both times they wrote a series of articles highlighting the river and people who had a strong connection to this amazing resource. Here are some of their reflections from their last trip.

Paddling the River

We started out by paddling through Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge. People warned us about the tough paddling conditions in the refuge and we found it hard to find our way through the marshy areas filled with cattails and at times we weren't sure we were still on the Minnesota River or heading down a dead-end backwater.

For the entire trip Tim sat in the front or bow while John took the back seat or stern. This wasn't planned; it just worked out that way since both of us were comfortable with our spots. We also ended up paddling on opposite sides of the canoe the entire trip due to shoulder problems which just happened to be affecting different shoulders for each of us.

Just like 10 years ago, we had lots of heavy equipment to deal with including lap-tops and cameras along with all of our camping gear. On this trip we skipped bringing along the 3 horsepower motor, which on the first trip caused us nothing but problems. We always felt there was this asterisk attached to our 1998 trip because of the motor.

We averaged 35 miles per day, more on some days than other days. Tim said they prepared for the trip physically by talking about it but nothing else. We'd be lairs if we didn't admit that on several occasions tired muscles and pesky deer flies didn't have us second-guessing ourselves. We are, after all, 10 years older than we were during our first river journey.

Landscape Observations

For the most part we didn't see a lot of change to the river from ten years ago, although it is tough to see what

is happening beyond the riverbanks. The one thing different we saw was the amount of water flowing into the river happened more quickly after a rainfall and also went down at a faster rate.

The one thing that stood out for us was that bank erosion was a major issue, with hundreds of trees hanging precariously to undercut riverbanks. We saw hundreds of trees, still green with foliage that had slide into the river channel after the strong currents from late spring flooding eroded the riverbanks.

We noticed a lot more CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) acres which are very visible now. Ten of thousands of these acres now grow thick and lush where row crops once grew, to slow and filter runoff. At one CREP site we saw crystal clear water flowing off it and lots of minnows. The transparency tube reading was 60 cm. compared to a few feet out in the Minnesota River where it had dropped to 20 cm.

What we experienced

Wildlife was good. We saw more eagles, more sightings of waterfowl mostly in the upper part of the watershed. This time we saw pelicans all the way down to the Le Sueur River, something we didn't see back in 1998. We heard about river otters on our first trip and in 2008 we saw three in the Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge. In the



Tim Krohn and John Cross paddling Minnesota River near Judson

refuge we saw hundreds – make that thousands – of carp. Some probably weighed 20 pounds or more.

We saw more people on the river using it, especially in the upper watershed. There were quite a bit of people fishing. Over the

weekend from Mankato to Le Sueur we saw a lot of people whether it was camping on sandbars, fishing and paddling. At Seven Mile Creek Park upstream of St. Peter we saw a woman on a sandbar painting a picture of the river. Although, one thing about being the river you are usually alone. You own that stretch of the river you are paddling and you are usually alone at every bend you go around.

In the end, we came away with a deep appreciation for the wonderful resource the Minnesota River is for all Minnesotans. It's nearly impossible to come in contact with the Minnesota River and not get muddy. Wearing smears of the rich, sticky mud is the mark of a real river rat. Our mud from the Minnesota River washed away easily. Our memories of the Minnesota River will not.

RIVER RANGER PROGRAM

The Mission of the River Ranger Program is to trigger participants interest, passion and appreciation for the natural environment they live in. Hands-on activity increases awareness and generates long term value systems.



River Ranger Hike at Flandrau State Park

By Ron Bolduan

In 2009, a small group of New Ulm outdoor enthusiasts asked themselves how to best share the pleasure derived from their outdoor experiences. A decision was made to invite young people to join the ongoing efforts at relocating stranded mussels. Minnesota's freshwater mussel population is suffering a serious decline, so in low water periods we patrol the Cottonwood River and move mussels from cut off areas to the main channel.

Our goal is to improve their survivability prospects. Having witnessed public interest displayed during DNR ecologist/mollusk expert Mike Davis' 2007 mussel survey of the Cottonwood River, it seemed the perfect kickoff project. Mindful of the competition for young people's time, we labeled our outing the 'mussel rescue/shell gathering' adventure – more alluring than asking youngsters to join us for a walk in the river.

Between the appeal of helping save a species in trouble and collecting shells for our mussel display at the Regional River History Center of New Ulm, the participants clearly found the trek rewarding. This positive response inspired us to begin planning a long range, organized effort at involving young people, and the River Ranger Program was born.

By August of 2010 with our mission and guidelines defined, we were ready to proceed.

The Program – River Ranger focuses primarily, but not exclusively upon youth participation. Adult assistants also qualify for River Ranger status. With an all volunteer staff, adult helpers are needed for the program to function. Adult staff displaying River Ranger buttons encourages young participants to view the program as more than "kids stuff."

Target Participants – All young people interested in making a difference are encouraged to join. There is no

minimum age requirement. However, during outings and programs those under 8 years old should be accompanied by an older guardian.

River Ranger Status – To achieve River Ranger status you must accumulate three points from two categories. The two categories are In-Field Environmental Learning and Environmental Cleanup. One of the three points must come from the cleanup category. In-field activities include group trips to DNR scientific and natural areas, state parks, national wildlife refuges, learning centers, river walks, etc. Attending monthly lectures during the winter months also qualify as in-field learning.

Cleanup activities will be either taking part in a group cleanup project, such as a Spring or Fall leaf cleanup, or gathering litter during hikes and river walks.

Rewards – All members receive a River Ranger button. Under 18 members receive a River Ranger Certificate and a free River Ranger t- shirt. For now, adult members will need to purchase their t-shirts.

Though the unusually wet late summer of 2010 and the resulting high water levels curtailed our primary goal of river walks, we had an expanded 'to do' list for the group. In the period between August 15 and late October we managed one mini river walk, two trips to explore the Granite Falls area, one day of hiking and crafts at Minneopa State Park, Mankato and a leaf cleanup at Riverside Park/Regional River History Center site in New Ulm. From the first limited walk on the Cottonwood River to the final two events at Minneopa State Park and Riverside Park the turnout grew to nearly fifty people.



River Ranger Gathering at Minneopa State Park

To avoid a winter letdown, the New Ulm Public Library agreed to host and advertise monthly River Ranger programs by guest speakers. This was also a success, with attendance averaging nearly 45 people per program. We are both proud and pleased with the quick public acceptance of the endeavor!

Continued on page 11



Introduction

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance launched a new effort two years ago to connect people to the basin's rivers called the Minnesota River Paddler Program. A committee of seven people – Brooke Patterson, Chantill Kahler-Royer, James Fett, Joel Wurscher, Jesse Anderson, Susie Carlin and Scott Kudelka – came up with three different patches/decals to motivate people to get out to kayak or canoe one of the many rivers and creeks found in the basin.

There are many ways for a person to experience a diverse selection of rivers and creeks. Organized paddles sponsored by groups like the Redwood Cottonwood Rivers Control Area (RCRCA) or the Chippewa River Watershed Project make it easy for logistics. A number of rental or guide services spread throughout the basin can provide the equipment and shuttle service needed. Otherwise gather up a group of friends to enjoy a little time in the great outdoors.

"Each river has its own personality."
– Katie Rassmussen



To receive one of the three unique patches or decals a person must meet the following criteria:

MINNESOTA RIVER 335 PADDLER

Named for the number of river miles, a person must complete the entire length of the Minnesota River from the Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge to Fort Snelling at the confluence with the Mississippi River.



You can paddle it all in one trip or by dividing it up into different segments. Documentation (photos, affidavits, etc.) are required to receive this paddle patch or decal.

MINNESOTA RIVER TRIBUTARY PADDLER

All a person needs to do is paddle any of the three 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 for a total of four paddles.



"It is the geology, the sense of the enormity of time and the birds and the fact it so easy and accessible."
– Patrick Moore

MINNESOTA RIVER EXTREME PADDLER

Paddle the following rivers in the Minnesota River Basin: 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, Little 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 23 paddles. Documentation (photos, affidavit from another source, etc.) is required to receive this patch or decal.



"There are many different rivers to choose from in a small area."
– Scott Matteson



A PADDLE ON THE RUSH RIVER

Are you looking for a little adventure this spring when the snow finally melts off the landscape and the ice disappears from the rivers? One of the fastest and most challenging of the rivers to paddle in the Minnesota River Basin is located in the Lower Minnesota River Watershed. The Rush River starts out in western Sibley County flowing across a mostly flat to gently rolling terrain until the three branches come together for the final one-fourth stretch. Here the river drops quickly as it pushes downward into the deeper valley of the Minnesota River.

Two of the best stretches for paddling on the Rush River are on the North Branch before and after the confluence with the South Branch going from 401st Avenue to 300th Street or continue all the way to Highway 93. On this part of the Rush a person might begin to wonder if this is how the river got its name – the rush of the water as it curves and winds through a steeply sloped landscape. Actually, the name for the river comes from the Dakota, a reference to the wetlands filled with rushes and not the speed of the water as it moves rapidly toward the confluence with the Minnesota River below the city of Henderson.

Down in this neck of the Rush River Watershed you will find a mostly undistributed landscape

dominated by steep bluffs, gravel-sand bars and trees covering much of the shoreline. The river twists and turns flowing over one stretch of Class I rapids after another that will continually test your ability to keep the kayak or canoe upright. Most people recommend

this stretch of the Rush River only for intermediate or expert paddlers. The best time to paddle the Rush is in April or May when the water level is running high from the winter snowmelt and spring rains. Water levels on the river can drop quickly and by June are normally too low to paddle. Check the gage at County Road 17 and go when the level is between 1.5 to 3 feet.

The 401st Avenue to 300th Street stretch starts at the Kelso Town Hall with the next bridge access point 9.6 miles later at 300th Street. One of the best books to use as a guide is *Paddling Southern Minnesota* by Lynne

and Robert Diebel published through Trails Books of Madison, Wisconsin. The Diebel's describe this section of the Rush as being 40 feet wide, fast and winding, with chains of waves and the occasional boulder. You will want to be on the lookout for a cable car crossing, a long ridge of land called "The End of the World" only accessible from the river, and a barbed wire fence stretched across the water near the end. Beware of poison ivy when getting out at the 300th Street Bridge.



The steep bluffs of the Rush River

On the next stretch of the river a paddler can go the entire 9.3 miles to the Highway 93 bridge or get out at the Rush River Park for a shorter trip of only 7 miles. The first part of the river is dominated by strong Class I rapids, a streambank cutting and carving through high bluffs, and more than enough fast water to keep you entertained. After a mile and half look for the confluence with the South Branch Rush River as

things really begin to pick up speed. One other unique landscape feature is "Old Faithful" boulders named for two huge rocks sitting in midstream just after mile 3 by the Mankato Paddling and Outing Club. Near the end a nice spot to get out for a picnic or stretch the legs is the Rush River Park, which saw a major restoration project in the fall of 2010 that should make access to the river much easier.

To find out more about paddling the Rush River including access points, directions, shuttle routes

and a detailed map pick up the *Paddling Southern Minnesota* book. This book has a wealth of information that will make for a more enjoyable and exciting paddle. By paddling the Rush River you are one step closer to being awarded the Extreme Paddler patch or decal from the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance. All you need to do is paddle three stretches of the Minnesota River and 20 different tributaries in the basin. For more information on this program, check out page 5.



Joel Wurscher enjoying a late May paddle

Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota

The Minnesota River Board (MRB) is working with numerous organizations representing the Sauk River, Blue Earth River, and the middle and lower stretches of the Minnesota to launch an ecosystem credit trading program. Landowners making the effort to install conservation practices that reduce targeted pollutants like phosphorus in waterways would be compensated under this new program called Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota.

Cities who need to upgrade wastewater treatment plants to meet new tougher water quality standards could buy these eco-credits from farmers who in turn would make a profit off of their best management practices. Grant funding and in-kind services totaling more than \$1 million have been committed to successfully getting the program up and running. The goal is to create a voluntary marketplace like the Chicago Carbon

Trading Market. In addition, the program could offer more flexibility than a government program because it would allow the selling of credits for multiple benefits.

In 2010, the Minnesota River Board provided funding to establish a Conservation Marketplace Minnesota (CMM) demonstration site managed by the Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance (GBERBA). A four-acre buffer demonstration site in Watonwan River Watershed was planted and will be maintained by GBERBA for five years. Located near the City of Mountain Lake, this buffer strip is an opportunity for educational outreach along with testing the CMM delivery and administrative systems.

A field day was held in the summer of 2010 to spur a discussion on how the CMM has the potential to allow farmers to sell conservation credits to industries, wastewater treatment plants and others. The goal of the CMM program is to “establish a voluntary marketplace for ecosystem services transactions in the three watersheds of Greater Blue Earth, Lower Minnesota and Middle Minnesota all part of the Minnesota River Basin.” As a nonprofit organization, CMM would serve as a broker to put together deals between companies contributing to water quality problems who are looking to buy credits and those farmers who can provide them.

Photo by Tom Cherveny



Part of the Conservation Marketplace team

County Commissioner Spotlight – John Schueller, Redwood County

A farmer near the small town of Wabasso, John Schueller has been involved in community service most of his adult life. Schueller became a member of the Jaycee board at the age 19 and served on the local school board for 6 years and 12 years as a township supervisor. Married with two children, John enjoys fishing and pheasant hunting when he can find the time.

John Schueller first ran for a county commissioner position when a seat came open in his district because he wanted to take on a new challenge.

Schueller serves District 2 in Redwood County making up the townships of Charlestown, Lamberton, New Avon, Vail,

Waterbury and Willow Lake along with the cities of Lamberton, Sanborn, Wabasso, and Wanda.

Currently, John is into his third term as county commissioner and just started his ninth year. Schueller said the best part of being a county commissioner is the people they meet on the job and the diverse issues they deal with. John has been a delegate to the Minnesota River Board since 2003 and has served on the executive committee as secretary, treasurer and presently as first vice president. He is also on the policy committee for the project “Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota” sponsored by the Board among with other partners.



John Schueller presents Dennis Fredrickson with a MRB award

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

The MN River basin is so large and diverse that an organization is needed to give a voice for those that live in the basin. By being organized as a joint powers board (JPO) we govern as elected officials with more local control. This gives us more flexibility on programs and implementation procedures.

What type of water quality/conservation projects is Redwood County involved in?

Redwood County is a member of Area II a nine county JPO, which does flood prevention and water retention projects both large and small.

We are also a member of the 8 county, Redwood Cottonwood River Control Area (RCRCA) JPO, which promotes BMP practices such as rock tile

inlets, sediment basins, stream bank stabilization projects and septic programs. The County is also a strong supporter of our local Soil and Water Board.

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

It's exciting to be able to work with fellow commissioners from across the river basin. The challenge lies in the diversity within the basin, and the funding to support the Board. The basin needs continued funding to implement the programs that we have seen work such as CREP, CRP and others. Without the support of state and local funds the progress we have made to clean up the MN River and its tributaries can be wiped out in a few years.

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

The State of Minnesota seems to be moving in a more watershed basin based direction compared to a county by county approach that we presently have to implement BMP's. The MRB is a JPO that is already set up to organize the 37 counties in the MN river basin. There are 13 sub watersheds within the MN river basin that are, or can be formed to implement programs on a more local level. I see the River board being a coordinator, facilitator and advocate for those groups.

Photo by Troy Krause



State Representative Paul Torkelson and John Schueller meet in St. Paul

Project Spotlight – Working Together for the Minnesota River

A diverse group of partners in the Minnesota River Basin have come together to produce a video documentary focusing on the long-time effort to improve water quality in the basin. The Minnesota River Board provided a grant of \$3,000 in 2010 to help the producers of the documentary, John Hickman and Jon Carlson of EPIC Media, film a number of segments including the Lake Titloe Monitoring Project headed by Professor Bryce Hoppie from MSUM and flooding on the basin's lower end at the city of Henderson.

This one-hour documentary, produced in collaboration with Ron Schara Productions and the

Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University Mankato, will air on KARE 11 Television on or near



April 22nd as the station's focus on Earth Day. The documentary covers the geological history of the river (depicted in a state-of-the

art computer animation) and cultural history of the basin from the earliest inhabitants through the development of large-scale agriculture and urban centers. Part of the documentary deals with water quality issues, successful conservation stories and the history of civic engagement in the basin.

Organizations that have endorsed and supported the project include the Friends of the Minnesota Valley, Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR), Clean Up the River Environment (CURE), Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, MPCA, U.S. Geological Survey and the High Island Creek and the Rush River Watershed Implementation Projects.

County Spotlight – Redwood SWCD

Established in 1953, the Redwood SWCD concentrates on promoting and installing Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce soil erosion from wind and water to positively affect water quality. Redwood County sits in the middle portion of the Minnesota River Basin broke into three major watersheds: Redwood River, Cottonwood River and the Middle Minnesota.

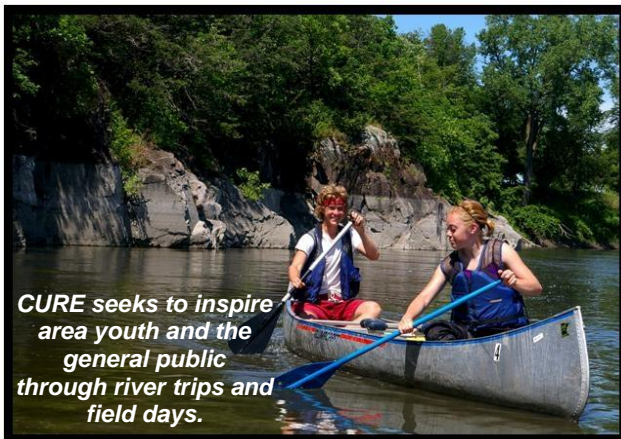
The Redwood SWCD has concentrated some of its conservation efforts in the southwest portion of the county through conservation easements to provide cover on some of the most vulnerable areas. As one of the five SWCD offices in the MN River Basin, the Redwood SWCD is part of the Granite Rock Outcrop Easement Program, protecting 376 acres of land through permanent easements.



Prickly Pear Cactus on Granite Outcrop



Clean Up the River Environment or CURE is a grassroots, nonprofit organization working with the public, government agency staff and many others to restore and protect water quality while serving as the primary voice for environmental protection in the Upper Minnesota River Watershed. Now approaching 20 years this citizen-driven group has led the way by sponsoring or funding river observation trips, wetland restorations, cleanup campaigns, river celebrations, informational meetings and much more.



In the late 1980s, people like Del Wehrspann, Patrick Moore, David Minge and others in the Montevideo area began to organize around the idea of developing a citizen-based group to work on river issues. Initially, Moore of the Land Stewardship Project oversaw the planning of this new entity. The original concept was to function as a sister organization to Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River (CCMR) in the middle portion of the basin and Friends of the Minnesota Valley at the lower end.

CURE works in the Upper Minnesota River Watershed to "focus public awareness on the watershed and to take actions to restore its water quality, biological integrity and natural beauty for all generations." This advocacy group serves a 16 county region of approximately 3.5 million acres and a watershed encompassing many of the most economically-depressed counties in southwestern Minnesota. Today, they work towards assisting the region in developing new economic opportunities centered on green tourism concentrating on natural and cultural resources.

Formed in 1992, an elected 15 member board and a small dedicated staff along with 500 plus members have accomplished a number of key initiatives over the years. One of the major success stories involved partnering with other groups and citizens to secure the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) for the entire Minnesota River Basin. This permanent easement program retired over 100,000 acres of critically sensitive cropland and has been a big factor in the improving fishery of the Minnesota River.

Other accomplishments under the direction of CURE has included the annual Fall River Clean Ups, assisting in the establishment of the Chippewa River Watershed Partnership, and organizing the Campaign to stop Hard Rock Mining to protect the Wild and Scenic areas of the Upper Minnesota River Valley. CURE is also known for hosting the "River and History Weekend" on the third weekend in May, guided canoe trips and community presentations featuring topics related to the Minnesota River Basin.

Over the years, CURE has strived to involve young people in the day-to-day operation, serving on the board and looked to their leadership when it comes to the overall mission of the organization. This has been particularly true with the campaign to stop the construction of a second coal-generation power plant on Big Stone Lake. They came out to testify at public hearings, created videos, and showed their passion for what each of them saw as a threat to their future and that of the Minnesota River. The effort paid off with the utility companies pulling the plug on the project.

One of the more recent successful projects initiated by CURE and various partners is the Minnesota River – Lake Pepin Friendship Tour. The goal of this tour is to engage citizens, farmers and others from both areas to see how we all can work together to improve water quality in the Minnesota River Basin and reduce pollutants flowing into Lake Pepin. Two successful tours later, the Bush Foundation recently awarded the project \$25,000 to continue the effort and develop a program that can be used in other watersheds.



CURE sponsors the Prairie River Paddler patch as an award to anyone who paddles six rivers in the Upper Minnesota River Basin – the Chippewa, Hawk Creek, Lac qui Parle, Minnesota, Pomme de Terre and Yellow Medicine. See page 10 for more information on this program.



The Minnesota, Pomme de Terre, Lac qui Parle, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine and Hawk Creek are six streams found in the Upper Minnesota River Basin and if you paddle all of them the nonprofit



organization CURE (Clean Up the River Environment) will award you one of their Prairie River Paddler patches. Each of these streams features their own landscape characteristics, paddling ability and unique charm. Contact the CURE office at 877-269-2873 to learn more about this paddle patch.

Minnesota River

A great place to start your Prairie River adventure is to paddle the Minnesota River from the Churchill Dam near Watson to Prien's Landing in Montevideo. Described by CURE as a casual easy going float, other recommended stretches start at Kinney Landing below Granite Falls and eventually end at Renville County Park 2. Here, a person will find more adventure, scenic beauty and the largest rapids on the MN River.

Chippewa River

Bring the entire family to float the Chippewa River, considered a friendly and relaxing paddle perfect for beginners. Start at the Lentz Landing (near the Easy Bean Farm) off of Highway 40 east of Milan for a 9.5 mile journey down to Watson Lion's Club Park on County Road 13 and east of Watson.



Lac qui Parle River

Looking for a little more challenging paddle try out the Lac qui Parle River with its long stretches of riffles and easy Class I rapids. One of the favorite stretches runs from the Lac qui Parle County Park off of Highway 27 to County Road 31 for a total of 7 miles or continue onto Lac qui Parle State Park at a distance of just under 13 miles.

Pomme de Terre River

On this prairie river a person will paddle through open areas filled with tall grass and other sections surrounded by floodplain forests and even a popple tree plantation.

Paddling the Pomme de Terre River can be fun and easy or more demanding if there are trees (called strainers) down in the water.



One of the more popular stretches goes from Larson Landing at County Road 119 down to Appleton City Park for a 5 mile paddle or continue for another 8.5 miles to Marsh Lake on 100th Street SW.

Hawk Creek

One of more challenging rivers in the upper basin, Hawk Creek features dozens of small rapids, high exposed bluffs and a landscape that doesn't feel like southern Minnesota. Start out at the bridge on U.S. Hwy 212 Bridge east of Granite Falls to speed down into the Minnesota River Basin for a little over 9 miles to Skalbekken County Park on the Minnesota River.



Yellow Medicine River

Located upstream of Hawk Creek is the Yellow Medicine River on the other side of the Minnesota River. Expect the unexpected on this challenging and wild river. A paddler is going to experience rocks, rapids and deadfalls along with amazing scenery. Be prepared for frequent boulder-bed rapids (Class I – II) and long standing waves. Go from Sorlien's Mill Site (560th Street) to Upper Sioux Agency State Park where you can get out at State Hwy 67 or near the confluence with the Minnesota River.

River Ranger Program *continued from page 4*

Future efforts are directed toward continuing with numerous outings and finding the means to move on to new projects. We are striving to provide shared digital camera kits for the group with a plan for a Ranger craft/photo exhibit at Riverside Park this summer. There is also a plan to create a butterfly garden at Riverside Park to be planted and maintained by the Rangers. An adopt a Drain leaf and litter clean-up program is in the works as well.

To become involved with or to assist the River Ranger Program contact:

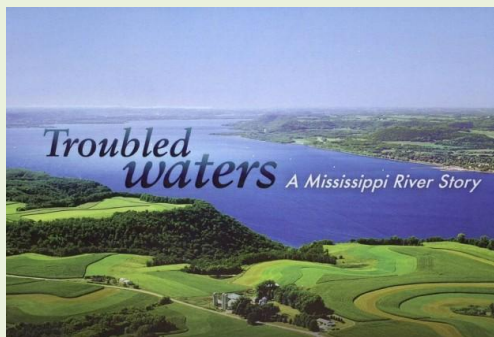
- Ron Bolduan: 507-354-8367
boldriv@newulmtel.net
- Lori or Chad Wengert: 507-359-1386
wengert38@yahoo.com

River Ranger photos and scheduling info available at Facebook: River ranger Program

Or visit: www.experiencenature.com and go to River Ranger section for info. Ron has a power point program of River Ranger activities for presentation to any interested organizations/groups.

DVD Review: Troubled Waters A Mississippi River Story

The American Midwest boasts some of the world's most productive farmland, but this bounty comes with a price. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus, fertilizers essential to the growth of plants, are contaminating the nation's rivers, lakes, and aquifers at the same time as precious soils wash away. Farmers, scientists and citizens are seeking solutions that help meet the goals of an ambitious, food-producing nation while ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of its most precious natural resources.



Troubled Waters: A Mississippi River Story traces the development of America's bountiful heartland and its effect on the legendary river. Through beautiful photography and inspiring narrative, the film offers solutions to the river's troubles through fresh ideas and concrete solutions.

To order a copy: <http://www.bellmuseum.org/>

Book Review: Kayaking – A Trailside Guide by Steven M. Krauzer

A series of guide books were written in the 1990s based on the six-time Emmy-nominated PBS series called "Trailside: Make Your Own Adventure" including ones on kayaking and canoeing. These popular books have been reissued and worth checking out. They have a wealth of information ranging from the basics to interesting historical facts to equipment and resources.



Kayakers wax rhapsodic about their sport – the independence, the tranquility (or excitement), the spectacular scenery, and on and on. But here's the truth: One of the things they like best is that kayaking looks hard. Watch the expressions of landlubbers when a kayak slides smoothly through the surf to the beach, or high-braces into an eddy, pivoting smartly.

Don't ruin it for them by letting the cat out of the bag: If you have never set butt to boat in your life, you are only a few hours of lessons from your first cruise. You'll find the frustration factor is low, and if you are of average physical condition with average large-motor-skill coordination, you'll quickly have many basic strokes down – and yes, that does mean the Eskimo roll.

Kayaking is a family sport. Aleut boys underwent a rite of passage when their kayaking instruction began at the age of twelve, but you need not even wait that long with your own kids. Indeed, for a humbling experience, lend your kayak to an eight-year-old. Unencumbered by the apprehensions and preconceptions you brought to your first voyage, the kid is likely to handle the craft with enviable dexterity – and to enjoy it so much you'll have trouble getting your boat back.

Two pieces of evidence suggest that the kayak was invented as early as 7000 B.C. First, the islands reached by the Aleuts after crossing the Bering Strait are surrounded by rough seas featuring strong currents and year-round open leads. Some sort of kayak-like boat would have been necessary for settlement. Second, datable skeletons of natives found in Aleut burial caves have huge arm bones compared to other remains of the same period. Unless they were pumping primitive iron, this supports the hypothesis that they were paddling solo boats.

Kayaking is a most aesthetically pleasing way to see water and country – and sometimes the only way. If you choose to become expert, you'll have access to waterways too roiling for an open canoe or even a raft.



Welcome to another edition of the River Talk newsletter focusing on paddling in the Minnesota River Basin. I think one of the most unique things about this basin is the diversity of rivers and how anyone should be able to find a stream fitting their skill level. A person could spend the entire paddling season and never run out of new stretches to try and enjoy.

My first paddling adventure took place on the Cottonwood River on a warm, calm day in July. We pushed in at Flandrau State Park heading down to the State Highway 15 Bridge. Even though most of this stretch flows through New Ulm the sights and sounds of a city were mostly hidden behind a floodplain covered in trees. At one bend in the river we came upon a white-tail deer watching us intently flow on by.

Over the last few years I've managed to paddle numerous stretches of the Minnesota River and many of its tributaries. The weather conditions have been both pleasant and less than desirable but that never seems to really matter if you are on the water. Most of the time you wouldn't find another soul on the river and even at that by going around a bend usually brings solitude again. Some of my favorite paddles have been alone and with a group of people. A person never knows what you may see or experience out on a river.

One of the more interesting trips happened on the Little Minnesota River when six of us paddled from County Highway 10 in South



Dakota down to the town of Browns Valley. This was a couple of months after severe flooding devastated the small community. We were impressed by the almost constant drop of the river as it flowed through

rolling hills of the Coteau or Buffalo Ridge. An interesting sight was the abandoned U.S. Geological Survey flow station sitting out in the middle of nowhere.

Two of the more exciting paddles took place on some pretty intense rivers you don't normally find in southern Minnesota. Beaver Creek is found in the Hawk Creek Watershed and filled with boulders of all sizes, making for a challenging and fun ride. On the lower end of the basin you will find Sand Creek flowing into the city of Jordan. Once again, expect a wild ride especially as it picks up speed and makes all these twists and turns.



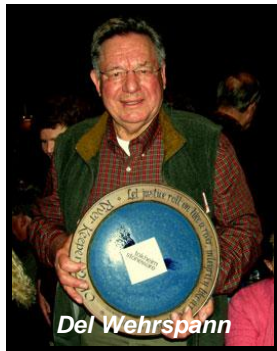
As any good paddler will tell you, I have gone into the water more times than I can count or want to remember. This is what paddling is all about, the thrill of the unpredictability that rivers bring and how they can test us over and over. There will always be a little danger to paddling, especially when conditions are tough due to flooding and other environmental factors. Don't let that scare you from going out to paddle, just make sure you have the proper safety equipment and going with a friend or friends can help secure a little peace of mind.

As we get ready for another paddling season I think of the straight to the point writer Edward Abbey who said this about making sure a person doesn't burn themselves out - *"Enjoy yourself, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to your body, the body active and alive . . ."* My advice follows on those same lines. Embrace the great outdoors by escaping to a nearby river to paddle its water, catch sight of its wildlife and feel the joy of your never-ending smile.



Wehrspann is CURE's River Keeper

One of the most dedicated and passionate advocates for the Minnesota River received the CURE (Clean Up the River Environment) River Keeper



Award at their annual meeting on February 12th. Del Wehrspann has been fighting the good fight since he and his family arrived in the Montevideo area in the late 1960s. As one of the original founders of CURE, Del is part of a long list of citizens working hard to protect and restore this amazing resource.

Over 300 people came out to enjoy locally grown food, bid on a wide range of silent auction items, listen to music, and catch up with friends and fellow river rats. John Hickman and Jon Carlson gave a presentation on their film documentary highlighting the effort of working together to improve water quality in the Minnesota River. On a Saturday Night in February there is no better place to be.

Ongoing Debate over MN Falls Dam

People gathered again in Granite Falls at the beginning of February to talk about options on the future of the Minnesota Falls Dam. One of the major



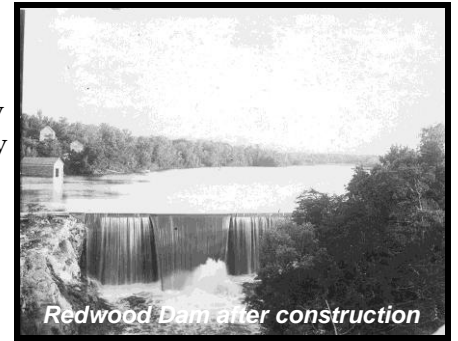
concerns by many community members deals with the removal of the dam and what could result in a significant drop in the water level of the Minnesota River. A number of businesses will be impacted by

the decrease of up to 14.5 feet at the dam site including Granite Falls Energy and Granite Run Golf Course.

Xcel Energy owns the dam but hasn't needed it since 2004 when their coal plant shut down. Once the 105-year-old structure was deemed a hazard by the Minnesota DNR, Xcel began to look at taking out the dam and removing its liability. Community members are looking at ways to maintain the dam's current water level and creating a passage for fish to migrate upstream and to allow paddlers to move downstream.

New Hydro Dam at Redwood Falls

Last September the 1929 hydroelectric generator at Redwood Falls stopped generating electricity when a turbine bearing quit. Redwood Falls' Public Utilities saw the end coming and started to make plans to build a new hydroelectric facility at the current location. On February 15th, the Redwood Falls council moved forward with the project by approving a \$282,520 bid from Barr Engineering of Minneapolis to design and supervise the construction of a new \$2.5 million hydroelectric power plant on the Redwood River.



Most of the existing structure will become part of the new power plant except for the oldest part dating back to 1909. This section will most likely be demolished due to its age and make room for the new construction. The new plant is expected to generate double of the 350 kilowatts of electricity produced by the 1929 generator. At this time, the timeline calls for construction to be finished by December of 2012.

Electro Fishing Studies on the MN River

Brad Koenen of the MN DNR gave a presentation on the efforts of his agency to get a handle on what is happening with the Minnesota River fishery. Currently,

a baseline is being developed to help determine how aquatic systems are affected at different levels of water pollution. An example of a baseline would list



20-20 species per mile as poor; 30-39 as fair; and any count over 40 as good. Creel counts and electrofishing studies conducted on the Minnesota River have averaged 31, right on the line between poor and fair.

According to Koenen, "This is one of the most unique glacial flood plains in all the world. From the outcrops to species diversity it's one of the most interesting places you can find. There are none like it. Anywhere. You can paddle along and see the horns of bison sticking from a sandbar, or what might appear to stick in the till to the antlers of an ancient elk. You never know what you will find, or see or catch if you're fishing. It is that dynamic of a river. If only we could learn to respect it for what it is."



DEL WEHRSPANN

The most pleasant experiences in life are those that you can't buy: The unexpected pheasant that flushes under your feet; The newly hatched brood of wild ducks; The fish that swims by as you are gazing into the stream or river; The fragrance of clean spring air; The birds floating in the sky; The song of the nesting wren as she protects her domain; The butterflies as they gather nectar from the flowering plants. Perhaps the most important to me is the spiritual Rebirth I get when silently floating down a pristine river.

CREP [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program] is probably one of the finest examples we have. It is the biggest boost to restoring the integrity of the river and changing the attitude so people can see some benefits – such as wildlife, and not have a flooded out crop 3 out of 4 years and not having disaster and insurance payments. Not it's just a natural phenomenon. In fact if you have flooding in the flood plain, it facilitates the ducks, it facilitates the fish. So, that there are some real benefits.

Here is a wetland that was planned to be drained because the county owned it and because it had no significant value as a wetland. It wouldn't grow good corn and you couldn't build a house on it. But look what's here now, look at the geese on the wetland, look at the big motel on the other side of the wetland overlooking the wetland, look at the bicycle trail along the wetland. This is what they couldn't see.

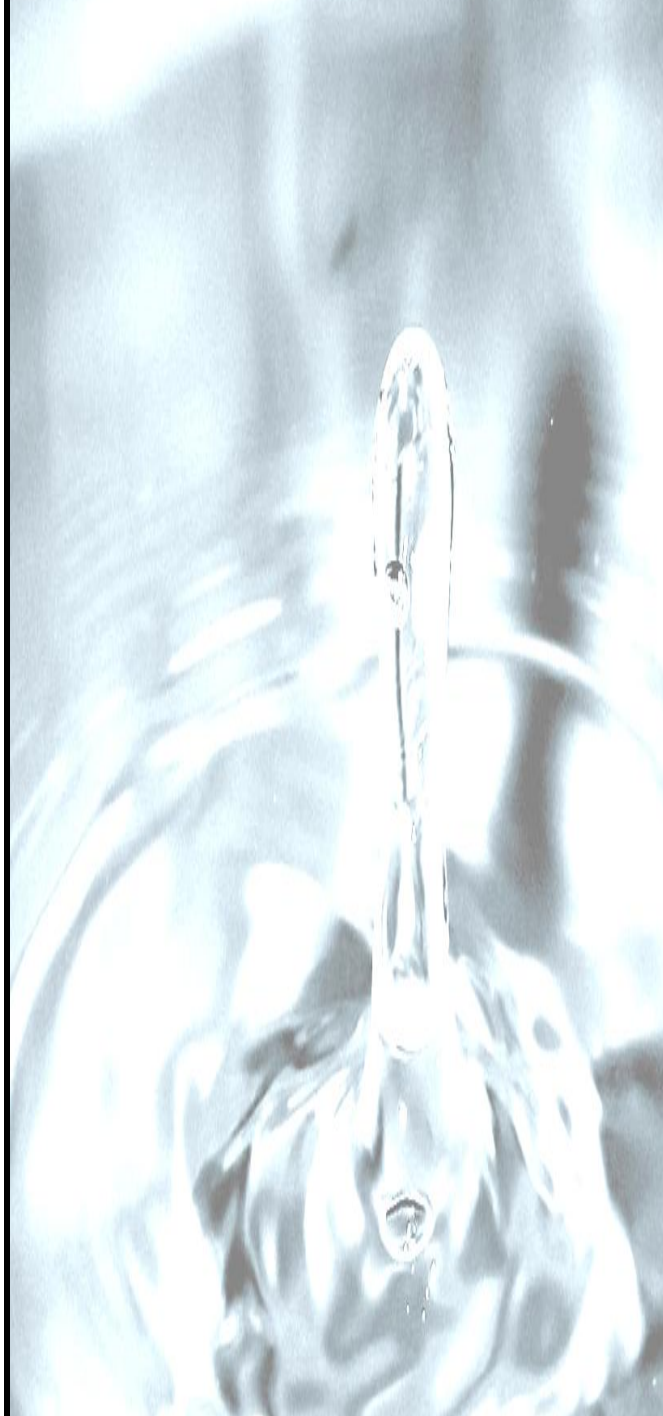


Del and his wife Shirley moved to the Minnesota River Valley near Montevideo in 1968 where he has worked as a cattle buyer. They came here looking for a place to enjoy the natural beauty of native prairies, wetlands and the floodplains. Over the years Del has been a major advocate when it comes to improving water quality.

You can have all the food in the world. If you don't have landscape that gives you goose bumps and the setting then you really don't have anything. That goes back to when my Dad wanted me to farm with him on that farm in the early 1960s. When the beans were going to be nine dollars a bushel back on that farm in Iowa. I said, "there is nothing left" and he said "it's the finest farm ground in the world." Where there's no pheasant, there's no life.

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; 189 Trafton Science Center S; Mankato, MN 56001; 507-389-2304 or scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu