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RIVER TALK

THE MINNESOTA RIVER CURRENT

"DECEMBER 7, 1962 & JANUARY 23, 1963"

In the early 1960s two oil spills brought national attention to the Minnesota River Watershed and demonstrated how little people understood or even cared about water quality issues at that time. These two dates - December 1, 1962 and January 23, 1963 - now stand out in how our efforts have changed when it comes protecting water resources.

On December 7, 1962, a pipe froze and cracked at the Richards Oil Company of Savage, pushing a steady stream of oil through a culvert into the Minnesota River. For more than a month only company officials knew what was happening as a million gallons of oil flowed into the river.

The first person to report the problem to the state was a citizen trapping on the Minnesota River floodplain east of Savage. He found oil drifting on the water and ice moving downstream. When state officials did respond they told Richards Oil Company officials to plug the culvert and clean up the oil. While company officials promised to take care of the mess, they ignored the problem and oil continued to leak into the Minnesota River.

On January 23, 1963, a steel storage tank ripped open at a seam and more than three million gallons of golden soybean oil poured into a four-block area of southwest Mankato. The 40

foot high by 100 feet wide tank was part of the Honeymead Company, the world's largest soybean processing plant. In places the oil rose to three feet deep and a powerful surge washed two railroad cars into the Blue Earth River.

Unfortunately no one knew how to properly handle this environmental disaster as the flood of oil isolated businesses and homes. One woman was trapped in her home with three small children as her story ran in the Washington Post. In the beginning the City of Mankato responded by pushing some of the oil into the Blue Earth River, until state officials arrived the next day and put a stop to it.

The city also responded by mixing sand and snow with the oil to help solidify it more quickly. City crews and Honeywell staff worked around the clock in a futile attempt to clean up the mess. They scraped and plowed until the oil turned into lard, and city workers flushed the oil and raw sewage directly into the Minnesota River to prevent it from clogging sewer pipes. In addition, they hauled the glob to a dumpsite on the Le Sueur River, where it also found its way into the Minnesota River.

At that time there was no federal or state agencies specifically devoted to environmental protection or pollution control. The Water Pollution Control Commission (WPCC) - part of the State Health Department - did investigate the spills but didn't "have specific authority to require preventive measure to effectively contain stored non-waste materials,



MN Historical Society

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DID YOU KNOW?

A retired trucker is trying convert drivers to use ethanol by handing out one dollar bills at gas stations. In May, Donald Brown showed up at a station in Plymouth to convince people that using E-85 is about cleaner air.

"For every thousand gallons of ethanol we buy, that's 1,000 gallons of gas we don't buy, said Brown. "That money doesn't go overseas. It stays here. That's a good deal."

This Golden Valley resident has filled his minivan for the past three years with a 50 percent ethanol blend by mixing E-85 with E-10. Brown has given out over \$500 and plans to hand out the money indefinitely.

December 7, 1962 & January 23, 1963 (continued from page 1), nor does it have authority to require those responsible for a loss of this kind to take necessary cleanup or salvage action unless a public health emergency is created."

No one thought much of the potential environmental risks as the oil moved downstream into the Mississippi River and into Lake Pepin. That is until March 29th when teenager John Serbesku spotted "dark blobs struggling in the murky waters of the Mississippi near Pine Bend." He took home the oil-soaked ducks to try cleaning them. When there became too many ducks for the Serbesku family to handle, John's father, George, hauled "two bushel-baskets full of dead and oily ducks to the state capitol [to ask] for help." This finally caught the attention of Governor Karl Rolvaag, along with state and federal officials. Despite action by government agencies and citizens, over 10,000 ducks died, along with 177 muskrats, 26 beavers, and uncounted numbers of fish, turtles and songbirds.

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Audrey Arner and her husband Richard Handeen raise grass-fed cattle on their Moonstone Farm. They have 240 acres on the gently rolling bluff land of the Upper Minnesota River Valley that has been in Richard's family since 1872. Audrey and Richard have experimented with cover crops and reduced tillage to improve soil and water quality.

What is the biggest issue affecting quality of life in the Minnesota River Watershed?

My understanding is that the loss of biological diversity is the overarching issue under which fall problems like soil erosion, water quality and economic stability. With more diversity in the landscape, which will be brought about by creativity, entrepreneurship and changes in federal farm legislation, we are creating a more attractive, wholesome watershed with plentiful wildlife, a healthier human population and a great place to live.



How do we connect the river to the public?

Interestingly, communities seem to be gravitating back toward the riversides as places for cultural events. One great example is in Appleton where the DNR eliminated the old dam on the Pomme de Terre and created a beautiful fishing and picnic spot. Canoeing events and "Let's Go Fishing" initiatives are getting youth, elders and every age in between realizing the great resource we have in our own backyards and the need to be involved in its protection. I also believe that identifying ourselves through our bio-region – for us the Upper Minnesota River Valley – keeps our consciousness focused on right livelihood in the natural world.

How do we get youth involved in MN River issues?

I love initiatives like CURE's "Fishing with Dylan" that assist young people in fishing because inevitably they will become more observant, maybe read the department of health's fish consumption advisory and then become more involved in restoring the river's beauty and biological integrity. Canoeing and kayaking are very accessible and inexpensive get-aways, enriching the lives of young people who realize that there are plenty of opportunities to have fun on our waterways. Involving youth in riverside garden projects, rain gardens, prairie restorations and sustainable agriculture all move their awareness downstream.

How do we get the different competing interests to listen to each other in a safe environment?

One approach I've experienced success with is engaging in a discussion about what we each want to experience in the long term, what we want to provide for the next generation, what kind of quality of life we want in our communities. After coming to agreement about something large, it's easier to talk about strategies for what needs to happen now to carry us all forward.

What would you like to see as your legacy when it comes to your work with the Minnesota River?

The torch we are bearing is about our quest to make a living while taking a lesson from the great prairies, to more healthily feed ourselves and our neighbors while stabilizing the topsoil, and to co-create a future landscape that invites and fosters a new generation of stewardship farmers.

What are the positive aspects of working with a group like CURE?

We've been involved with CURE since it was a glimmer in the eye of a group of us asking the Montevideo septic treatment plant to quit dumping coliform and contaminant-laden sludge into the river 15 years ago. Since then CURE's wide variety of wonderful events and initiatives have provided us with loads of learning opportunities as well as the chance to express, especially to non-farmers, what is important to us making a living through managing ecosystem processes on our home 240 acres. The relationships that have been nourished throughout these years have also formed a strong basis of social capital that helps sustain us intellectually, emotionally and economically.

What do you see as the role of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance when it comes to improving, protecting, and restoring the MN River Watershed?

Since the Minnesota River remains such a heavy carrier of topsoil, nutrients and contaminants heading toward the Gulf's hypoxia zone, we owe it to those downstream and future generations to keep good communication among our watershed's individuals and distinctive organizations – that's the job of the Alliance.

MINNESOTA RIVER INFLUENCES MUSIC, CULTURE

By Amanda Dyslin
The Mankato Free Press

Take in a City Mouse show at Pub 500 or NiteRail at the Inferno and the Minnesota River probably isn't on your mind.

As it should be when you listen to the beat of the powwow drum at the Mahkato Wacipi, and the blare of the trumpet at Polka days in New Ulm.

It's what Ross Gersten thinks about when he looks back on the musical and cultural development of southern Minnesota. Just as Southern music is tied to the Mississippi River, a unique blend of musical styles is tied to the Minnesota River.

"As long as people feel that it's important to interact with the river, then I feel the river is going to end up in the music," said Gersten of New Ulm, who has been researching Minnesota music since the early 1990s. "The river doesn't only provide a biological base, but a cultural base."

It's not as simple as just listening to the lyrics. Not many songs written these days are tributes to nature. It's a thousand different influences on a band's sound. It's the instruments they're playing and the countries they came from. It's in the melding of musical styles over decades. It's the fact that these bands are here – living along the river, a source of life that has attracted people for thousands of years to live along its shores. "The river has always been vital to life," he said.

This correlation between the river and music is something Gersten – who taught ethnomusicology in the Anthropology Department at Minnesota State University – began to take interest in while living in Washington, D.C., where he moved in 1995.

An audio researcher at the Library of Congress, Gersten updated the index for Minnesota folk music field. He also assisted in Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart's Endangered Music Project and coordinated the audio programming for the Library's "World Treasures" exhibit.

While working as a backstage manager at the Smithsonian's Asian Art Museum, Gersten worked with world-class musicians, including Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Having returned to the area in 2004, Gersten works for the Nicollet County Historical Society at the Harkin Store, where he's the assistant site manager.

Throughout this research in D.C., Gersten would come across fascinating nuggets of information related to Minnesota. One of the first was learning that the powwow drum originated here, and that Frances Densmore, a Red Wing native, had made the first recordings of Indian music in the early 1900s, including tribes in Minnesota along the rivers.

The Dakotas' ties to the Minnesota River were clear. They had to live near the river for water and transportation, and, accordingly, the music they made was influenced by their natural surroundings.

What Gersten learned piqued his curiosity about the river's influence on future generations of music and how it evolved. He also came across the



perfect model for the questions he was raising about the Minnesota in 1999 – "The Mississippi: River of Song," a Smithsonian Institute series for public television and radio that studied the music along the course of the Mississippi River. The series extended from an Ojibwe powwow in northern Minnesota to the bandstands of New Orleans.

Gersten didn't embark on a full-fledged research project on the subject, but he began collecting pieces of information that, in the end, created a story about the Minnesota.

The emergence of settlers along the river in the mid-19th century, who pushed the Indians onto reservations, caused a great shift in the musical landscape. In lieu of a gradual evolution of music, the Indian music was removed entirely and replaced by the music of the native countries of immigrants.

Fiddles, which were instruments popular throughout Europe, were popular with people who lived on farms in the 1870s.

Municipal bands formed in towns, influenced by the predominant culture of the

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Kevin Kuehner is a man on a mission when it comes to helping citizens with water quality and conservation efforts in a three county area of the Middle Minnesota River Watershed. In his job as the Watershed Manager for the Brown Nicollet Cottonwood Water Quality Board, Kevin understands a key to their success has been the ability to develop personal relationships.

"I see myself as being that bridge between the landowner and the various natural resource agencies involved with Best Management Practices," stated Kevin. "This contact may start out as simple as someone mentioning a spot in their field that drowns year after year. We have been successful at working with an individual and going on to help one or more of their neighbors."

One of the most impressive examples that stand out for Kevin is the three neighbors who helped restore a large wetland complex in Nicollet County. "Each of them had a different motivation for wanting to be involved in a wetland restoration but it shows how the end result is still the same," commented Kuehner. According to Kevin, the complex is already attracting large numbers of waterfowl and reducing erosion.

Under this project not only did Kevin bring the neighbors together, he also coordinated a diverse team of players that provided funding to remove cropland from production, day-lighted tile and planted native grass species. Partners in the project included McKnight Foundation, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Nicollet Soil & Water Conservation District and the Farm Service Agency, just a few of the organizations and agencies Kevin works with.

This was only one of the many reasons Kevin Kuehner received an award from the Minnesota River Board for his work on water quality issues in the basin.



According to Judy Hanson, a Nicollet County Commissioner, "Kevin Kuehner is a person who can combine his technical water quality expertise with his ability to communicate with landowners. This combination results in the development of on the ground projects that benefit water quality and allow landowners to use land in appropriate manners." Judy applauds Kevin's motivation to help landowners and farm operators match specific needs with existing conservation programs. "The result is a win/win for landowners and water quality," reports Hanson.

In addition to helping restore over 30 wetlands, Kevin and the Brown Nicollet Cottonwood Water Quality Board staff have been involved in a variety of valuable projects. One of the highlights has been their efforts with Seven Mile Creek, a designated trout stream since the mid-1980s. They worked with the MN Department of Natural Resources and MPCA to improve trout habitat and erosion control by utilizing more environmental friendly conservation practices including j-hook weirs made of native rock.

Kevin grew up on a dairy farm in northeast Iowa and keenly understands the issues facing the farm operator and agriculture in general. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a degree in Water Resources Management and Soil Science, Kuehner came to work for the B-N-C Water Quality Board in 1999. His work over the years has included developing, coordinating and implementing water resource protection grants.

The accomplishments achieved in water quality benefits by Kevin and his staff is being looked at by other organizations and agencies in the Minnesota River Watershed. There has been a lot of interest in conservation drainage which uses water control structures and bio-reactors to decrease peak flows from tile and in the process reduce nitrate levels. Kuehner has been out front and center with this program to help protect the community of St. Peter's drinking water.

Kevin is excited about the strides that continue to be made in the field of water quality the public's understanding of how everything is connected when it comes to our natural resources. "Every day I come to work there is something new to tackle and learn," said Kevin. "This is why I stay in the fight."

PADDLING THE UPPER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED

**By Patrick Moore,
CURE Executive Director**

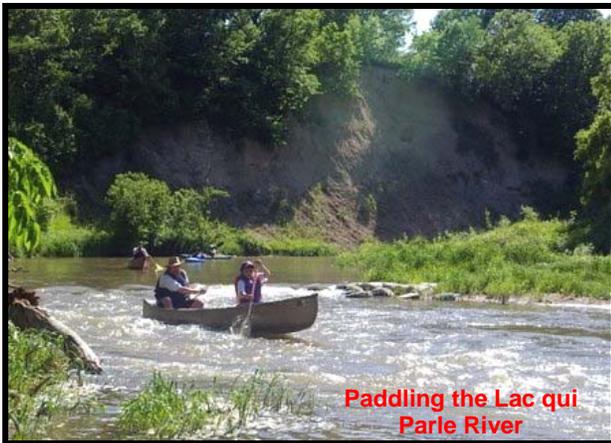
I'll never forget the first extended canoe trip I took on the Upper Minnesota River in the summer of 1988.

My wife Mary and I were still living in Stillwater when we planned a three-day canoe and camping trip with our friends Bret and Jaime from Minneapolis.

We headed west in search of history, pelicans, granite outcrops and solitude on the Minnesota River between Granite Falls and Redwood Falls in western Minnesota.

It was a wonderful trip. We camped on sandbars and made bonfires out of driftwood. We paddled at a leisurely pace downstream and had a thrilling run through Patterson's Rapids in Renville County Park #2 toward the end of our journey.

I was hooked.



Seventeen years later, I have canoed and kayaked many of the tributaries of the Minnesota River and found them to be even more delightful than the main stem.

Here's a brief sketch of what you can expect to find if you explore this area.

Whetstone River - Big Stone City, SD

It may not look like much on a map, but prepare to be blown away by the amount of birds and wildlife you will see on this flashy little stream that enters the Minnesota River at the foot of Big Stone Lake, across the river from Ortonville. This is a kayak trip as water levels are usually low.

Pomme de Terre - Appleton, MN

Named by the French fur traders who saw Native Americans digging prairie turnips along its banks, this is a gentle meandering prairie river for most of its length. I like to start in town of Appleton

and canoe to the mouth at Marsh Lake - this can take anywhere from 3 to 6 hours. This stretch of the river is full of trees - local volunteers try to keep it clear of downed "strainers" but you have to be on your guard. Keep an eye out for otters!

Chippewa River

Lentz Landing to Watson Lions Park

This is a family friendly river - I have taken all of our kids on this stretch when they were very young. A three-hour float with a stop on a sand bar for lunch is the perfect way to spend a Sunday afternoon. I have seen lots of owls and beavers on this reach of the river and the oak savannah near the mouth of Dry Weather Creek is a landscape I never tire of.

Lac qui Parle River

The "Lake that Speaks" river flows into the Lac qui Parle Lake and is a great river for the intermediate canoeist or kayaker. There are several sets of rapids on the stretch from the Lac qui Parle County Park to County Road 31 Bridge, but nothing too challenging. I love to see the kingfishers fly ahead of me as I pass along the high bluffs near form Governor Theodore Christianson's family mansion.

Yellow Medicine River

Named after a medicinal plant used by the Dakota people, this river flows through some of the most beautiful country in Minnesota. The Upper Sioux Agency State Park at its mouth is a great kayaking destination, and along the way you will experience one set of moderate rapids after another. Again, they are big enough to get you excited but not dangerous. The history of the Dakota people and 8,000 years of human habitation comes alive for me on this lovely river.

Hawk Creek

Most of Hawk Creek is a straightened drainage ditch serving the flat farmland south of Willmar. But just beyond Sacred Heart along Hwy 212, the river becomes wild again and descends into one of the most interesting geological landscapes in the state of Minnesota. You'll feel you could be in Colorado or Utah on certain stretches. Watch out for the rapids - depending on water levels, they can be a challenge or a breeze.

Knowing the best water levels for paddling is a key to enjoying your visits to the Upper Minnesota River Watershed. To help, CURE has published a Canoe and Kayak Guide. To order it, call 1-877-269-2873 or visit www.curemnriver.org

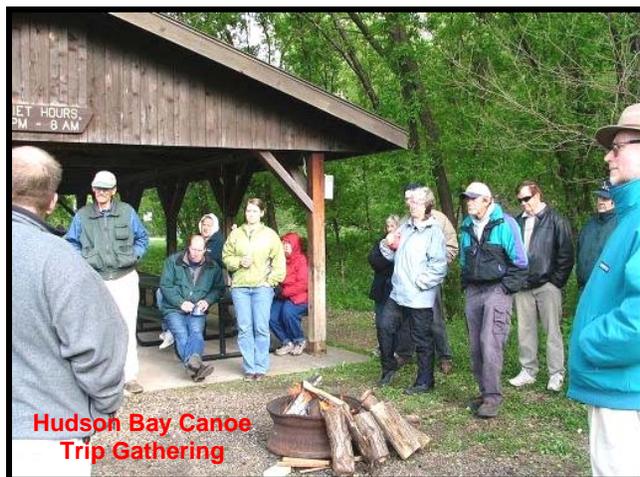


Where can you Kayak, Canoe, Climb and do all sorts of fun outdoor activities as well as help clean up rivers and streams? The Mankato Paddling & Outings Club (MPOC) is a volunteer based group who's mission is to "canoe, kayak, bike tour, cross-country ski, camp, hike, backpack, and do a host of other outdoor activities, to network outdoor enthusiasts with people of similar interests, To promote personal safety and sound environmental practices, to educate people about the out-of-doors and improve personal outdoor skills, to work to create and maintain favorable conditions for outdoor activity.

Since Bob Zoet, and other outdoor enthusiasts, founded the club in 1993, meetings have been regularly held on the first Tuesday of every month, planning and leading programs, various outings around the Mankato area like the upcoming Lura Lake Annual Picnic on July 17th and the Fort Ridgely Hike on August 11th.

Since the founding of the Mankato Paddling & Outings Club, they have done:

- Annual River Valley Cleanup
- Numerous programs and speakers, including the authors of Paddling Southern Minnesota by Lynne and Robert Diebel
- The Annual Summer picnic
- Countless outdoor activities including Cross Country Skiing and Climbing



Mark Bosacker, the Equipment Specialist for the club, says, "One of the things I really like about the Mankato Paddling and Outings Club is that you can have fun on the river and do something good for the environment at the same time. Peggy Kreber, a founding member of the MPOC says, "It's hard for me to say what I enjoy most, but I'd say it would be the different programs that the club puts on."

Recently, Scott Miller and Todd Foster spoke in a program that was hosted by MPOC talking about their journey to Hudson Bay by canoe in 2005. The journey was a tribute to Eric Sevareid and Walter Port's journey to the North Atlantic. Many other key note individuals have spoken in programs for the MPOC including Dylan Buhain from the MSU Experimental Education Department, and Jim Bielke who was the 2006 Minnesota State Champion Canoe Builder. "It's just amazing", says Peggy Kreber, "to talk to these people." Along with outings and programs, the MPOC also supports conservation and cleanup.



Photo Courtesy of Mark Bosacker

Along with outdoor activities and programs, the club has also organized groups to conserve and protect the rivers and streams. The MPOC hosted their annual River Valley Cleanup on May 3rd and 4th. The MPOC has adopted a stretch of water on both the Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers. Every year, members and friends of the MPOC try to do their part and help clean up the river by picking up debris in and on the sides of the river as well as cleaning up the launch areas where Peggy says, "It's treated like dumping grounds". Along with these efforts, the MPOC has relations with other conservation groups such as the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance and Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River.

For more information on the Mankato Paddling and Outings Club or to become a member, contact Warren Wagner at 507-388-7383 or visit their website at:

<http://www.hickorytech.net/~mrbscr>



Ah summer, time to take the kids and dogs swimming to escape the heat. This annual activity is a tradition among people living in Minnesota and we usually do it without any thought to potentially harmful consequences. Unfortunately, in some drastic cases this could mean health risks for both humans and animals.

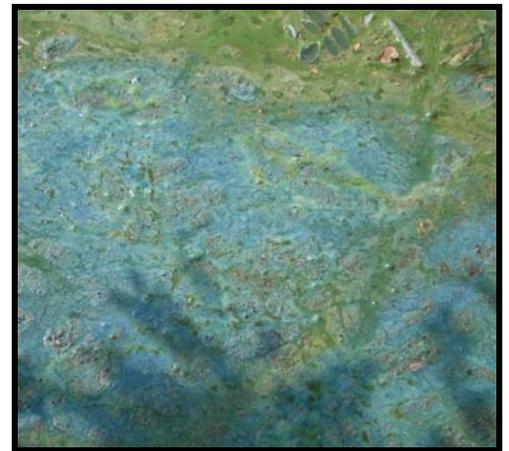
Anyone who has swum, fished, or paddled on a Minnesota lake knows algae is just part of enjoying the cool water, especially in late summer. A natural part of any aquatic environment, algae is normally harmless even when it turns the water green and smelly during so-called "blooms."

What most people don't realize is that under certain conditions a type of algae called "blue-green" algae will turn toxic and has caused the death of dogs, cattle and other animals. For humans it can mean a variety of reactions depending on whether it is by skin contact or ingesting water.

Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), "Swallowing or ingesting water with a blue-green algal bloom may cause symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea; headache, throat irritation, or muscle pain; and in severe cases paralysis or respiratory failure."

During a severe blue-green algae bloom that occurred in the late summer of 2004, two dogs died after drinking the water from Lake Benton in southwestern Minnesota. According to local residents, the lake didn't have a thick scum floating at the surface but the water looked like opaque green paint. "You could have taken it out and painted your house with it," said one man. He reported that his dog looked like it had been dipped in paint after coming out of the lake. Heart hemorrhage, liver damage, and other internal injuries were discovered from an autopsy of one dog.

"The bluest blue-green algae I have ever seen, it was disgusting," reported Pat Baskfield of Lake Crystal. "There were kids 'boogie-boarding' in the lake. We pushed this one because most people don't know the risks associated with recreating in these blooms."



Recently Lake Crystal near Mankato suffered a nasty blue-green algae bloom. Patrick Baskfield of MPCA said the algae forming: thick surface scum; round irregular blobs; or taking on the appearance of "grass clippings" is a sign to stay out of the water.



Blue-green algae or cyanobacteria is found throughout Minnesota and thrives in warm, shallow, nutrient-rich lakes of central and southern Minnesota. As with all algae, blue-green algae usually explode during hot weather of late summer in nutrient rich water. Blue-green algae respond to excessive phosphorus and nitrogen just like the plants found in our fields and lawns.

Most people avoid water affected by toxic algae because of the unpleasant odor and nasty look of the water. If a person comes in contact by skin with blue-green it can cause rashes, nasal irritation, or other health effects. According to the Minnesota

At the same time as the Benton bloom, samples were collected from an ongoing blue-green bloom on Lake Crystal and sent to "Green Water Laboratories," a Florida lab specializing in the analysis of cyanobacteria toxins. Levels of "microcystin," a powerful toxin that can cause rapid degeneration of the liver and a suspected carcinogen, were over 3 & 1/2 times higher than the "very high risk" recreational threshold level set by the World Health Organization.

All of us can help reduce potentially harmful blue-green algae blooms by starting in our backyard. Reduce or eliminate using fertilizer with phosphorus and nitrogen. In the fall mulch or compost your grass clippings and leaves. Establish a natural landscape by planting native plants like Big Bluestem. Upgrade and maintain your septic system. Finally, support land conservation by donating money to groups like Pheasants Forever and your local lake association.

For more information:

- www.pca.state.mn.us/water/clmp-toxicalgae.html

Minnesota River Influences Music, Culture

(continued from page 4)

settlers. New Ulm was alive with German polka. Scottish music provided the soundtrack of Mapleton. Welsh music was predominant in Cambria and South Bend, while Mankato became somewhat of a melting pot.

Many of these cities with distinct cultural identities have preserved their heritage and music, Gersten said. But shifts in the musical landscape continued to be made throughout the years.

With the introduction of technology such as phonographs and radios, musicians were introduced to music from different parts of the country, which also provided inspiration.

The world wars sent soldiers to different countries, from which they brought back international musical influences to their hometown bands.

As technology has made the world and its various musical and cultural influences easily accessible, a melding of sounds and styles has taken place. So the question must be raised: Will a universal pop sound eventually take over, replacing the pockets of diverse music scenes along the river and across the country as a whole?

Gersten says there are people who believe that could become the case. He, however, believes that people have a powerful desire to be unique and creative. And that drive will mean people will always be treated to something new, such as Native American reggae music and Christian rap.

There are also people, such as those who live in culturally rich cities such as New Ulm, who are determined to preserve their heritage. In New Ulm, polka music has survived the test of time and isn't likely to die any time soon.

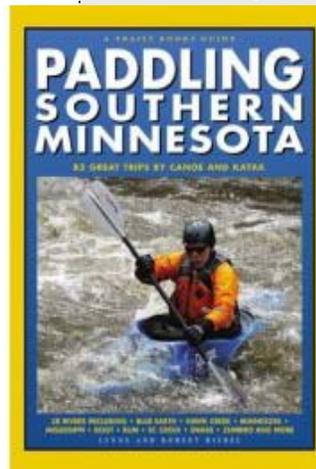
To preserve this rich history and the evolution of culture, Gersten hopes to put together a "Music of the Minnesota River" CD akin to the CD that accompanied the "River of Song" project. So far, funding has stood in his way. But if completed, he plans to use the CD's proceeds to help clean the Minnesota River.



Book Review: "Paddling Southern Minnesota – 85 Great Trips by Canoe and Kayak" by Lynne and Robert Diebel

If you think Minnesota paddling begins and ends in the Boundary Waters, a pleasant surprise awaits you! Here is your guide to 85 adventures on the rivers and streams of the Gopher State's southern half. The Diebels guide you through peaceful, meandering streams, the most challenging whitewater adventures – and everything in between. Young, old beginner and expert will find Paddling Southern Minnesota a trusted companion on the water.

In this book you will find:



- ✓ Precise maps showing roads, put-ins and take-outs, rapids, dams, hazards, campsites, etc.
- ✓ Concise, entertaining trip descriptions that enlighten you to the scenery and points of interest along the way.
- ✓ Information on gradients, water levels, shuttle routes, canoe and kayak rentals, camping facilities, history, etc.

The books also cover tips on how to stay safe, have fun, and help protect our rivers and streams for the future, along with the diverse selection of organizations working on Minnesota River issues.

Here in the Minnesota River Watershed, the Diebels paddled a variety of rivers including the Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, Hawk, Cottonwood, Watonwan, Big Cobb, Le Sueur, Blue Earth, Maple, High Island Creek, Rush, and the Sand. Unfortunately due to time constraints, they weren't able to paddle the Yellow Bank and Redwood rivers or Beaver Creek.

Prairie Bluffs – As it descends into the Minnesota River valley, the Chippewa carves a deep gorge in the flat prairies of southeastern Minnesota. Paddlers exploring the river for the first time are struck by its high wooded bluffs, as were paddlers in the river's past. The Dakota called the river "Manyá Wakan," which means "of remarkable or wonderful bluffs." (They also called it the "Chippewa" because of war parties of their enemies, the Ojibwa or Chippewa Indians, used the river to travel on raids into the Minnesota River.) On his 1838 map, explorer and mapmaker Joseph Nicollet, who admired the bluffs as well, labeled it "Manyá Wakan."



Hello! **“The Minnesota River, Float It, Fish It, Fix It.”** What else is there to say? This slogan came out of the inaugural Minnesota River Summit and has caught the attention of leaders in the Minnesota River movement. In this case, less is more, six words describing what all of us want to accomplish as we work to protect, improve and restore this valuable resource. The best part - this slogan is for everyone to use.

The Minnesota River Watershed Alliance continues to play a key role of bringing attention to the Minnesota River Watershed. We are working on a number of important initiatives including permanently protecting our sensitive lands by restoring shallow lakes and other critical sensitive areas. In the last couple of months we have also joined the efforts to establish a Minnesota River Friendly label to showcase those organizations and groups working on environmental friendly products and leaving a lighter footprint on the earth.

We see a lot of positive things going on in the Minnesota River Watershed and beyond. Hell, even President Bush finally admitted there is such thing as global warming and that all of us need to do something about it. Now hopefully our leaders and politicians on the local, state and federal levels can move beyond the words and provide us the resources and funds to get the job done.

I still find it amazing or maybe I should say disgusting at how some people continue to treat our natural environment as a place to get rid of toxic material like oil. Recently 20 to 30 gallons of oil were dumped into a catch basin that drains into Minnehaha Creek. Fortunately a citizen reported the incident and city crews were able to clean it up before it flowed into the creek and affected the aquatic organisms and vegetation.

This story shows that all of us can make a difference by a simple phone call when we see something being done that will cause a negative impact on our natural resources. Even better we can make a difference by volunteering to help out with a community cleanup, recycle our household products, and take an energy efficient test for your home.

Ultimately, all of us should get outside to float, fish and fix the Minnesota River, one step at a time.

MINNESOTA RIVER CALENDAR

The Water Resources Center at MSU, Mankato has updated its calendar on the Minnesota River Basin Data Center web site. This calendar highlights activities, meetings, workshops, job postings and other topics related to the Minnesota River and beyond at: <http://mrfdc.mnsu.edu/calendar/index.html>

A Few Upcoming Events:

- July 17th – Minnesota River Watershed Alliance Quarterly Meeting in Hutchinson.
- July 30 & 31 – Conservation Selling Skills Workshop in Mankato
- August 23rd – Rally for the Valley 5k Fun Run
- August 31st & September 1st – Riverblast in New Ulm
- September 21st & 22nd – Explore the wonderful world of mussels
- September 23rd – Rally for the Valley 5k Fun Run – Fort Snelling
- October 16th – Minnesota River Watershed Alliance Quarterly Meeting in Hutchinson

To post an event please contact Scott Kudelka at scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu or 507-389-2304.

WANTED: LANDOWNER PROFILES

Interested in being interviewed? We are seeking long-time Minnesota River Valley residents who would be willing to share their stories about the Minnesota River and tributaries with us. In particular, we're interested in collecting stories about how the river has changed over time related to water clarity, water quality, water depth, fishing as well as landscape changes such as channel meanders and land use change. If you are willing to be videotaped and feel comfortable sharing your stories in printed material and/or on the web, please contact us to set up an interview.

Do you have any old photographs of the Minnesota River that you'd like to share? We're collecting historic photographs of the rivers in the Minnesota River Basin. If you have any that we can borrow, scan and return, we would appreciate it. We would like to use the photographs to create a "then" and "now" profiles of places along the rivers and streams.

- scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu or 507-389-2304
 - kimberly.musser@mnsu.edu or 507-389-5307
- MSU Mankato Water Resources Center



Third Crop Initiative Receives MEI Award:

The Third Crop Initiative developed by the Blue Earth River Basin Initiative (BERBI) won the Minnesota Environmental Initiative's Land Use Award for 2006. This program promotes diversified cropping systems that can provide ecological services to the public, economic return to the farm family and community benefits through local agricultural processing. Partners in the Third Crop Initiative include BERBI, watershed farmers, county governments and soil & water conservation districts.

Annual Minnesota River Expedition:

On June 7th, Butch Halterman hit the Minnesota River with 47 students and 8 chaperones to discover the natural beauty of being in the outdoors. This biology teacher from Montevideo has been leading this youth expedition since 2000 to help shape and mold the next generation of river advocates. This life-long educational experience will end at Renville County Park #2 a mile downstream of Upper Sioux Agency State Park.

Fishing the Minnesota River:

According to the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District, fishing in the Minnesota River is healthier and funnier than we think. They have put together a fact sheet on how the river is becoming fishable for everything from catfish to walleye.

Scott Sparlin offers an old-timer's perspective when he suggests that just about all fish are edible "if you know how to prepare 'em and what you're dealing with."

To learn more about fishing in the river, check out the web site at:

www.watersheddistrict.org/fishing%20river.html



Lac qui Parle Outdoor Show Successful:

Over 1,000 people attended the first outdoor show held at the Lac qui Parle County Fairgrounds in Madison. According to Mary Homan, the organizers felt it was very successful and want to make it more of a regional event. The show featured a variety of activities and special guest Tony Dean.

Community Clean-ups in Lower Minnesota:

Three community clean-ups in the Bloomington area happened on the 38th annual Earth Day celebration. Sponsored by the Friends of the Minnesota Valley, these clean-ups were part of a 15-city series throughout the Lower Minnesota River Watershed including Nine Mile Creek Watershed.

"The volunteers really dug in and cleaned up a lot of junk in a short period of time," said Lori Nelson, Executive Director for Friends of the Minnesota Valley. "We found some interesting items such as a toy car, a construction sign, and rusty screens and buckets.

Seventy volunteers removed over 100 bags containing more than a ton (2,625 pounds) of trash and debris from streets, storm drains, parking lots, etc.

Eco-Voyageurs on the Minnesota River:

Youth from the Minnesota River and the world have been dipping their paddle into the stream to learn about area waters and water quality issues of the basin.



This educational program is being offered by the Prairie Wood Environmental Learning Center on a replica 34-foot voyageur canoe of the 1600s and 1700s.

On one trip students were able to see first-hand how encroachment and development affects a river system, mercury emissions from coal plants and the effects of cattle in the river. According to Anne Dybsetter, the 520-pound canoe is remarkably stable and easy to navigate.

Historic river crossing rediscovered:

The Dakota used a crossing on the Minnesota River called Oiyuwege, later called "crossing place of the Sioux" or Traverse des Sioux by French explorers. Over the last 200 years this shallow spot near St Peter lost significance as the river changed its course and bridges were built. Today the north and south ends of the crossing are no longer in the river channel.

"The river has changed so much, the historic crossing has no real relationship to the river anymore," said Ben Leonard, Nicollet County Historical Society director. "Just boating down the river or walking to the site, you really would have no idea it's there. People have been at this spot as long as the river has been here, and they've been here because of the crossing," he said.

New address for Rural Advantage:

- 1243 Lake Avenue, Suite 222
Fairmont, MN 56031
- 507-238-5449
- linda@ruraladvantage.org



SIGURD F. OLSON

“Simplicity in all things is the secret of the wilderness and one of the most valuable lessons. It is what we leave behind that is important. I think the matter of simplicity goes further than just food, equipment, and unnecessary gadgets; it goes into the matter of thoughts and objectives as well. When in the wilds, we must not carry our problems with us or the joy is lost. Never indulge in arguments or bitter recriminations; never criticize, but be of good cheer ...Thoreau, I know, would have agreed...I can imagine him moving around the old Wilderness Outfitters warehouse with his strange and almost enigmatic smile, patting the guides on the shoulder and whispering, ‘Simplify-simplify-simplify.’”

As a writer, teacher, activist and canoe guide, Sigurd Olson was a leading force in the passage of the Wilderness Act and creation of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The Wilderness Act was passed on September 3, 1964 and this system now encompasses more than 100 million acres.

“Wilderness is more than lakes, rivers, and timber along the shores, more than fishing or just camping. It is the sense of the primeval, of space, solitude, silence and the eternal mystery.”



“I once climbed a great ridge called Robinson Peak to watch the sunset and to get a view of the lakes and rivers below, the rugged hills and valleys of the Quetico-Superior. When I reached the bald knob of the peak the sun was just above the horizon, a flaming ball ready to drop into the dusk below.

“As I watched and listened, I became conscious of the slow, steady hum of millions of insects and through it the calling of the whithroats and the violin notes of the hermit thrushes. But it all seemed very vague from the height and very far away, and gradually the merged one with another, blending in a great enveloping softness of sound no louder, it seemed than my breathing.

“The sun was trembling now on the edge of the ridge. It was alive, almost fluid and pulsating, and as I watched it sink I thought that I could feel the earth turning from it, actually feel its rotation. Over all was the silence of the wilderness, that sense of oneness which comes only when there are no distracting sights or sounds, when we listen with inward ears and see with inward eyes, when we feel and are aware with out entire beings rather than our senses. I thought as I sat there of the ancient admonition, “Be still and know that I am God,” and knew that without divorcement from outside influences man cannot know what spirit means.”

Sigurd wrote nine books and countless articles and has been acknowledged as a leader of the American environment movement. Olson died on January 13, 1982 while snowshoeing near his home in Ely.

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; 507-389-3529 or scott.kudelka@mnsu.edu