



# Friends of the Mississippi River

Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area

[www.fmr.org](http://www.fmr.org)

Spring 2009

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## The Amendment and the Mississippi

### Voter-Approved Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment Has Vast Potential for the Mississippi Watershed in the Metro

by Dave Dempsey

You cast a vote for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment last November 4 and you love the Mississippi River here in the Metro. Now you probably want to know what Minnesota voters' decisive approval of the amendment means for this favorite natural resource.

Providing an estimated \$250-300 million per year in new revenue for the next 25 years through a three-eighths cent sales tax increase, the state constitutional amendment directs the bulk of the money to clean water, parks and trails, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation. That should help the River, but how exactly? Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is digging into the amendment's implementation process to find out and teaming with a variety of partners to assure good investments in the health and well-being of the River.

The most obvious connection between the amendment and the River is the approximately \$100 million per year it provides for water protection, mostly to implement the state's Clean Water Legacy Program.

As the Amendment moves toward reality – the sales tax increase and resulting revenue take effect July 1 – answers to some of the most basic questions about the amendment's impact on the Mississippi are becoming apparent, even as other questions crop up. FMR's three program directors, board members and allies in the Minnesota Legislature are all watching the process closely.

#### Land Conservation and Parks

A significant chunk of money is needed to assure habitat conservation and parks and trails



The Vermillion River, a Mississippi tributary, is impaired for turbidity and fecal coliform. New dedicated funding could help clean it up. Photo by Tim Boyle

development in the Mississippi watershed. In the metro, that means protecting everything from prairie to forests to wetlands.

A natural resource assessment conducted by the Metro Council and released in 2006 revealed that roughly 100,000 acres of regionally significant natural lands remain unprotected in the

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### Mission

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

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## From the Director

Kids have a way of keeping you on your toes. My daughter once asked me, “Daddy if your job is to help the river why do you spend so much time sitting at your desk typing on your computer?”



Whitney Clark,  
*Executive Director*

I remember feeling somehow exposed as a fraud. How do you answer a question like that? “Well, honey, it is because that’s where the emails come from....”

Anyway, I was reminded of that question the other day while going from meeting to meeting at the State Capitol. If I’m supposed to be protecting the health of the Mississippi River, why am I spending so much time at the Legislature? Well, as I write this, the river is a forbidding, frozen slab and more importantly, this year there will be a number of decisions made by the Legislature that could have a profound and lasting impact on the Mississippi River. One in particular is the subject of this letter.

This session Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is leading the effort to pass legislation (House File 424) that would significantly strengthen ecological and scenic protection of the river in the Twin Cities (see article page 3). Under current state law, cities along a 72-mile stretch of the Mississippi from Dayton to Hastings are required to have plans and ordinances that regulate land-use and development in conformance with state standards. The problem is that the standards are vague and difficult to enforce.

When FMR convened stakeholder meetings in the fall of 2007, we heard from cities, developers, citizens and river users that, yes, the river deserves special protection but the current framework is outmoded and needs improvement. This past fall under the leadership of Representative Rick Hansen and Senator Katie Sieben we brought together a small study group of key stakeholders to work through the issues and draft legislation to improve the way Critical Area works.

The proposed legislation would accomplish several things, but perhaps the most significant change is that it would require the Department of Natural Resources to initiate a rulemaking process that would establish new Critical Area districts that conform to the river’s unique geography and ecological character. The river changes moods and topography many times as it makes its way through the Twin Cities. Above Saint An-

thony Falls the Mississippi is a prairie river with low banks and numerous small islands. When it drops over the great falls it becomes a gorge with steep bluffs close to the river on either side. In downtown Saint Paul the river morphs again and widens into a big broad floodplain river, with bluffs more than a mile apart in places and lots of backwater channels and lakes.

Under the new rules each of the new districts would have new standards designed to govern things like structure

height, setback, etc. The standards could be tailored to protect the characteristics that make that district special, without overbroad restrictions that needlessly limit uses that wouldn’t negatively impact the river.

We’re proud of this proposed legislation. It is a practical measure developed with lots of input from a wide range of river interests. The many characteristics that make the river such a beloved community asset are nonetheless fragile. We hold them in trust for future generations. Careful regulation is needed this session – regulation that acknowledges the need for many different interests to coexist along the corridor while still protecting the river’s special qualities. Please stay tuned. We may need your help to get it passed.

*Careful regulation is needed this session – regulation that acknowledges the need for many different interests to coexist along the corridor while still protecting the river’s special qualities.*



# Program Highlights

## Mississippi River Critical Area Bill in Play

by Irene Jones

A bill to amend Mississippi River Critical Area law has been introduced at the State Legislature by Rep. Rick Hansen and Sen. Katie Sieben. The Mississippi River Critical Area, a 72-mile corridor from Dayton to Hastings, was established in the late 1970's to protect the Mississippi's natural, historical, cultural, scenic, recreational and economic resources of statewide significance through the Twin Cities.

The proposed changes were developed in response to a series of stakeholder meetings organized by Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) in 2007. Frequently, stakeholders noted that standards and guidelines were outdated or unclear. Many municipalities have struggled to update, adopt, and enforce complex regulations, and the DNR has faced some challenges in administering the program. Developer and citizen stakeholders alike raised concerns that enforcement gets protracted, political, costly and is inconsistent between and among cities

Drafted with input from a diverse study group convened by Hansen and Sieben, the proposed legislation is designed to solve complex issues in a balanced way. The bill maintains key components from the original law, and it authorizes a



The Mississippi River Corridor through the Twin Cities was designated as a State Critical Area in 1979 and as a unit of the National Park Service in 1988. It's time for an update to state law.

rulemaking process by the DNR. In order to ensure that standards and guidelines will effectively protect resources, the rulemaking would establish new districts that take natural and cultural river features into account, in addition to historic and current land-use patterns. The bill also includes definitions for key terms, clarifies the responsibilities of local and state government, and provides incentives to coordinate review of applications by the DNR.

For more information on FMR's critical area reform work and the latest updates on this bill, visit [http://www.fmr.org/news/current/mrca\\_reform\\_fact\\_sheet-2009-02](http://www.fmr.org/news/current/mrca_reform_fact_sheet-2009-02)

## FMR & Partners Protect Large Natural Area in Hastings

by Dave Dempsey

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is proud to be part of a major land protection success in Dakota County that is adding to an existing state wildlife management area and establishing a new aquatic management area at the confluence of the Vermillion, St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers.

An eight-year effort to convert the six parcels and 297 acres of open space from private to public ownership culminated in the land deal late in 2008. Working with a number of partner organizations including the Minnesota DNR, the Trust for Public Land and Dakota County's Farmland and Natural Areas program, FMR helped keep the project on track over the years.

"This was an exciting thing to bring to fruition," said FMR Conservation Director Tom Lewanski. "The land has all kinds of values. It's good recreation land, it's excellent habitat, it's important to water quality."

The land, which is within the city limits of Hastings, includes significant portions of the Vermillion River Bottoms, a



Aerial photo of the Freitag property on the north side of the Mississippi River. To the east is Hastings. Photo courtesy of Dakota County

half-mile of Vermillion River and a mile of Mississippi River frontage.

FMR will continue to play a role in the project, teaming with the City of Hastings and the DNR to use a grant to develop a resource management plan for the land. As part of the plan, FMR and partners will inventory the site's natural and historic features.





A SHEP volunteer collects macroinvertebrate samples along the Rice Creek in Shoreview, MN. Photo by Cathi Lyman-Onkka

## Rice Creek Watershed SHEP

by Trevor Russell

Friends of the Mississippi River's 2008 Rice Creek SHEP (Stream Health Evaluation Program) results are in, and the program is showing great improvement in the health of Rice Creek Watershed streams.

SHEP monitoring data shows that stream health is improving in Hardwood Creek, Clearwater Creek and the Rice Creek, the three major stream systems in the Rice Creek Watershed. In addition, the results show that recent restoration activities in the Rice Creek are already making a significant positive impact on stream health.

The results also show that FMR's SHEP volunteers continue to exceed our performance expectations. SHEP volunteers were once again more than 96% accurate in their assessments. Congratulations to all our 2008 SHEP volunteer teams!

For more info on SHEP, or to view our 2008 season results, please visit <http://www.fmr.org/projects/shep>

### 2008 SHEP Volunteers:

#### Hardwood Creek & Clearwater Creek monitoring team

Team leader: Gary Averbeck  
Team members: Jim Bukowski, Tere O'Connell, Wayne LeBlanc, Linda Grundter, Barb Hoernemann, Dana Raines, Don Vegoe, Sarah Sevcik

#### Rice Creek monitoring team

Team leaders: Gwen & Frank Neumann  
Team members: Bob Bartlett, Glenn Fuchs, Julie Glanton, Ralph Butkowski, Barbara Bor, Susan Fuller, Debbie Hartman, Eileen Zierdt

#### Locke Lake monitoring team

Team leader: Cathi Lyman-Onkka  
Team members: Wendy Barron, Bill Radmer, Marilyn Radmer, Analiese Miller, Ted McCaslin, Christy Dolph, Catherine Majkrzak, Elan Mejkrzak, Susan Young, Nancy Wilberts

# Program Updates

## Pine Bend Stewards Improving Critical Habitat

by Irene Jones

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) has worked for more than 10 years to protect and restore the Pine Bend Bluffs Natural Area—1,300 acres of high quality habitat along the Mississippi River in Inver Grove Heights and Rosemount—and now we are working to build a cadre of “Pine Bend Stewards” to assist with ongoing restoration of these special places.

In 2009, FMR is engaging volunteers at three key sites at Pine Bend. We are sponsoring an Earth Day event at Macalester College's Katharine Ordway Natural History Study Area with Macalester volunteers. This summer we are hosting two invasive species removal events at the Pine Bend Scientific and Natural Area. And we will continue our ecological management efforts on Flint Hills Resources' buffer property by offering employee restoration workdays and a public volunteer event.

Special thanks goes to the Minnesota DNR, Flint Hills Resources, the Dwight Malcolm Trust, Macalester College, the Beim Foundation and the Aveda Corporation for making Pine Bend stewardship possible.



The Pine Bend Stewards program this year includes volunteer events at the Katharine Ordway Natural History Study Area – a site where FMR has not worked since 2004.

## Metropolitan Conservation Corridors: Protecting the Twin Cities' Best Remaining Natural Areas

by Tom Lewanski

Since 2003, the Metropolitan Conservation Corridors partnership, a coalition of conservation organizations, has been working to protect and improve a system of natural areas that provide critical wildlife habitat and water quality benefits in the Twin Cities. The Metro Corridor partners include Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR), Friends of the Minnesota Valley, the DNR, Trust for Public Land, Minnesota Land Trust, and Great River Greening. With funding from the Environmental Trust Fund, these partners have permanently protected and restored thousands of acres of habitat and open spaces for the residents of the region to enjoy.

Since the project began, FMR has conducted restoration activities on over 320 acres of habitat including the Mississippi River gorge in Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area (SNA), the Hastings Sand Coulee SNA, and the Hastings Riverflats Park, among others.

In 2009, FMR will add several new sites to this list. We will conduct restoration activities on several private lands in Dakota County that have been permanently protected by conservation easements. Visit any of these sites to see firsthand the work that FMR and our partners are doing.





Composite photo of the Mississippi River Gorge in St. Paul, as viewed from the Lake Street-Marshall Avenue Bridge. Photo by Bob Spaulding

## 2009 Mississippi River Challenge! July 25 & 26, 2009

By Heather Haynes

Some of you have paddled and/or volunteered EVERY year for the past five of the Mississippi River Challenge and we send you a huge thanks for your commitment and support. In 2009, we're hoping you will help us bring a lot of new people to the river, too – we've got some great recruitment incentives and a better deal for families to help you do that. We are adding new interpretive aspects and we'll have the same great food, music and support that we've always had.

This one- or two-day, fully supported paddle on the Twin Cities stretch of the Mississippi is the experience of the summer. Not only is it a unique paddling event – it's an opportunity for you to help your local river by raising pledges to support FMR's work and spreading the word about how people can get involved.

To register or find out more about the Mississippi River Challenge visit [www.mississippiriverchallenge.org](http://www.mississippiriverchallenge.org) or call Kristin at 651-222-2193 x19, or call sue at 651-222-2193 x14 to sign up to volunteer. And don't forget to recruit your friends – help us make this event successful by sharing your love of the Mississippi with others!

**2009 Sponsors:** [TwinCities.com/Pioneer Press](http://TwinCities.com/PioneerPress), Kare 11, Minnesota Monthly, Otagawa-Anschel, Hoigaard's, Whole Foods, American Canoe Association, Fort Snelling, Summit Brewing Company, Wenonah Canoe/Current Designs, National Park Service, Aggregate Industries, Thousand Hills, Northeast Bank, Midwest Mountaineering, Spot Design, Bell Canoe, Big River, Chippewa, Mississippi Market, Northwest Canoe

## Critical Area Zoning Revisions Inch Closer to Adoption

by Bob Spaulding

St. Paul's Critical Area Zoning revisions, which are the guidelines that protect the Mississippi River valley, are inching slowly toward adoption.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) thinks highly of the Task Force process St. Paul used to craft the Critical Area Zoning revisions, but would like the height limit to stay at the current 40 feet maximum in the gorge area of the river, and set a height limit of 60 feet in the city's West Side Flats area.

Over the last several months, FMR has met with most of the St. Paul City Council and mayoral staff. Most of the council greeted FMR's recommendations quite warmly, and we expect the council to vote on the issue in the next few months.

## Gorge Stewards Gearing Up for 2009 Season

by Karen Solas

Thanks to renewed support from the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization and the Longfellow Community Council, Friends of the Mississippi River's (FMR) Gorge Stewards program will again be offering public education and volunteer restoration events in the river gorge, as well as a second year of focused work and training with the Gorge Stewards Leadership Team. FMR is also very pleased to have been awarded another grant from Capitol Region Watershed District, which will provide for a second year of work at Crosby Park. With the help of volunteers, we hope to continue management of the newly restored prairie, and expand our restoration efforts to other areas of the park, as well as a site along the river bluff in the Desnoyer neighborhood.

The 2009 Gorge Stewards program also has funding support from Toro Company, Aveda Corporation and the RBC's Blue Water Project.



Gorge Leadership Team members Karen Jenkins and Maggie Hill prepare native wildflower seed to be spread at a prairie restoration site at Crosby Farm Park in St. Paul. Photo by Karen Solas





*Continued from cover*

metro area, compared to 280,000 acres of total natural lands and 1,900,000 acres of land overall. Many of these acres are part of existing and proposed natural and parks conservation corridors identified by the Council.

FMR is teaming with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Land Trust, the Trust for Public Lands, Great River Greening, and others to develop a major proposal to secure and protect these conservation corridors. "It'll be a strong proposal," says FMR Conservation Director Lewanski. "There's been a history of success with this partnership."

Another area of interest for FMR: habitat and parks proposals that may emerge in the southeast metro, where both Dakota and Washington Counties have land protection programs. "Protecting their habitat areas has high value for us," Lewanski says. He points out that in the metro, "I'm not sure we could find a single sizeable piece of land that fills only one habitat need. A lot of them are a combination of grassland and woodland or wetland." He points out that protecting habitat along the River will support the clean water goals of the amendment, too – as just one example, wetlands filter pollutants that would otherwise foul the Mississippi.

FMR River Corridor Program Director Irene Jones concurs in the value of investing amendment funds in metro parks corridors. She also points out specific parks and habitat opportunities adjacent to the River, including the Upper Harbor Terminal site above the St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis, the gradual expansion of the future Grey Cloud Island Regional Park, and many local parks.

An unanswered question, she adds, is how much if any of the amendment funding can be used for ecological restoration in regional parks. Removal of invasive plant species such as buckthorn and replacement with native species could benefit them as well as the Mississippi River gorge.

Projects that provide parks and trails access along the river

could stimulate river corridor housing and business projects, she points out. "We tend to be more in favor of development along the river that has a park in front of it than development that doesn't. It could be a win-win," Jones says.

## **Clean Water**

The purpose of clean water funding under the amendment is to make sure all of the state's lakes and streams are tested on a 10-year cycle, to develop cleanup plans for those that are polluted, and to make the plans work. One-third of the annual revenue from the amendment, or as much as \$100 million a year, is earmarked for this effort.



The Pine Bend Bluffs natural area is one of several high quality sites along the river in the Twin Cities that could receive additional restoration funding from the constitutional amendment. Photo by Tim Boyle

Trevor Russell, FMR's Watershed Program Director, thinks the scope of potential clean water work in the metro – and the potential payoff – are huge. "Over the last 30 years, the net pollution of the River has gone down, but we've already picked the low-hanging fruit...the point sources of water pollution like factories and sewage plants. What's left is much more difficult and expensive to address."

The continuing spread of paved and developed surfaces in suburbs and exurbs and more intensive farming practices in rural areas are major contributors to the area's pollution



problems. Controlling them means working with landowners one-by-one and also means innovation in capturing and treating polluted runoff by departing from traditional engineered solutions. In urban areas, that will mean a greater emphasis, for example, on rain gardens, which use native vegetation to filter pollutants and retain runoff from sudden or large storms, rather than stormwater ponds.

The mother of all impaired waters on the Minnesota list is Lake Pepin. Downstream from the Twin Cities, the lake suffers pollution from the Minnesota and St. Croix as well as the upper Mississippi. Its major pollutants are sediments, which cause turbidity, and phosphorus, resulting in algae blooms. Meeting Clean Water Act standards in Lake Pepin will require massive reductions in pollutants running off land across



Volunteers can make restoration dollars go further. Here volunteers assist with restoring native prairie at the Sand Coulee Scientific and Natural Area near Hastings in 2008. Photo by Tim Boyle

the metro as well as further reductions in waste from industrial and municipal sewage sources.

Asked how he would spend the amendment's clean water money if he were in charge, Russell says, "I would invest primarily in projects that will help us clean up Lake Pepin. If we're successful there, we'll demonstrate that we can be successful with large-scale nonpoint source pollution anywhere."

**Read more** ■.....▶

## Board Profile: Sarah Strommen



Sarah with her son at Paul Bunyon State Forest.

The Mississippi River has "always been part of my sense of place," says Sarah Strommen, FMR's newest board member. A resident of the metro for most of her life, Sarah grew up in a house near the River, later biked to and along it while living in Otsego, and today enjoys the River with her family (husband Jon, and three-year-old son William) as a resident of Ramsey.

"I've never lived in a community that didn't have the River," Sarah reflects.

The central region director for Minnesota Land Trust, Sarah has also worked for Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness. Governor Pawlenty appointed her to the state's Clean Water Council.

Says Sarah: "I've long been an admirer of FMR, both for its focus on the Mississippi River and for the way its programs and projects create a comprehensive approach to conservation." As a board member, Sarah hopes to advance FMR's mission by providing strategic direction and securing adequate resources.

## More About the Amendment

In addition to the Governor and Legislature, several advisory councils will play a role in decisionmaking on spending from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment:

- The Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council will recommend to the Legislature by April 1 how to spend fish and wildlife habitat conservation money. The Council is holding numerous public meetings to receive ideas and proposals. <http://www.lohc.state.mn.us/>
- The Clean Water Council oversees the 2006 Clean Water Legacy Act and makes overall recommendations on how to achieve the water quality goals of the Act. <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/cleanwatercouncil/index.html>

Amendment Language Now in the Minnesota Constitution: Article XI, Section 15

For more information, visit <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/cc/rules/mncon/Article11.htm>

# Join FMR for Earth Day!

by Karen Solas

Whether you prefer working to clean up the river right in the heart of the city, digging in the dirt of a more “off-the-beaten-path” site, or learning what you can do in your own backyard to help water quality, we have the Earth Day event for you!

\* Learn about native plants, raingardens and more at a watershed-friendly gardening and landscaping workshop! Wednesday, April 22nd, 6:30-8:00 p.m. Go to [www.fmr.org/participate/events](http://www.fmr.org/participate/events) for more information.

\* Pull invasive garlic mustard at Katharine Ordway Natural History Study Area, part of the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area! Saturday, April 25th, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Go to [www.fmr.org/participate/events](http://www.fmr.org/participate/events) for more information.

\* Celebrate Earth Day by participating in the 15th Annual Minneapolis Earth Day Watershed Clean Up, Saturday, April 18th, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.! Last year's event drew about 3,000 community members who picked up 22,000 pounds of trash! 2009's event promises to be even bigger and better, with almost 50 clean-up sites throughout the city. Find out more at [www.minneapolisearthday.com](http://www.minneapolisearthday.com).

Volunteers pick up trash along the riverbank at the 2008 Minneapolis Earth Day clean up. Photo by Peter Kastler



FMR will be coordinating two sites for the Clean Up, at 36th Street and West River Parkway and 44th Street and West River Parkway. Go to [www.fmr.org/participate/events](http://www.fmr.org/participate/events) for more information on these two sites.

You can also support the Earth Day Clean Up by participating in the 5K Recycle Run, Sunday, April 19th. Go to [www.minneapolisrecyclerun.com](http://www.minneapolisrecyclerun.com) for details and registration info.

However you decide to celebrate, have a great Earth Day!

## Friends of the Mississippi River Legacy Society

by Heather Haynes

The Mississippi River has been here for millennia. Its beauty and its strength are the foundation of your community, and have been enjoyed by countless people of all ages and all walks of life for many generations. All of us have our own history with and connections to the river.

With a planned gift to Friends of the Mississippi River, you can ensure that generations to come will have the same opportunities you have to connect with and experience the Mississippi River. Help us protect and enhance the river for those to come – join the Mississippi River Legacy Society today!

To find out more about ways to remember Friends of the Mississippi River in your estate plans, please contact Heather at 651-222-2193 x20 or [hhaynes@fmr.org](mailto:hhaynes@fmr.org). You can also visit the website – [www.fmr.org/support/planned\\_giving](http://www.fmr.org/support/planned_giving).



FMR is proud to be a member of the Minnesota Environmental Fund ([www.mnenvirofund.org](http://www.mnenvirofund.org))



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