



MISSISSIPPI PARK
CONNECTION

Discover your river


Annual Report
2015-2016



The National Park Service celebrated its Centennial this year. The focus of the milestone was a public awareness and education campaign to celebrate the first century of service and to inspire the next generation of park visitors, stewards, and advocates. Mississippi Park Connection, in partnership with the National Park Service, was proud to lead the effort to leverage the “Find Your Park” Centennial campaign locally and bring attention to Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.

The centerpiece of our Centennial efforts was a \$1M fundraising campaign to support important park projects. We completed that campaign and are very pleased with the outcomes, particularly the re-opening of the Mississippi River Visitor Center at the Science Museum of Minnesota. Throughout the year, we have been amazed by you—our members, donors, partners, and volunteers. Your time, your efforts, and your financial support made the accomplishments outlined in the following pages possible. Thank you for all that we’ve built together—and thank you for your role in what is to come.


Katie Nyberg
Executive Director


Jay Cowles
Board Chair



In 2016, Katie and I challenged our staffs to take advantage of the National Park Service Centennial and we pulled together a Centennial Committee of our closest friends and advocates to develop creative ways to do so. Unlike Yellowstone or the National Mall in Washington, D.C., one of our greatest hurdles is visibility. The big parks did not have as much to gain as we did. Nationally and in the Twin Cities, most people didn’t know we existed. The Centennial provided an opportunity to change that. Working together, we reached thousands of new visitors and received extensive media coverage. How successful were we? The Midwest Region Office recognized one park each quarter for the best overall program celebrating the Centennial. We won for the third quarter. (For those who don’t know, the Midwest Region covers 13 states and 61 NPS units.) The power of the MPC-NPS partnership and our many friends and advocates made it all possible.


John Anfinson
Superintendent, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area



CENTENNIAL HIGHLIGHTS



“Marshall-Lake” by Thomas Paquette, courtesy of Groveland Gallery

Artists Celebrate 100 Years of Parks

Many artists in our community joined the Centennial celebration by using the Mississippi River as inspiration. Groveland Gallery hosted a “plein air smackdown” along the river in addition to hosting Thomas Paquette’s exhibit, “America’s River,” a series of paintings inspired by Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Artist collaborative Project Art for Nature (PAN) had its traveling exhibit stop by three galleries along the river, and graciously donated a portion of their proceeds to Mississippi Park Connection. Additionally a collaboration with the Minneapolis Institute of Art resulted in Seeing Nature, an exhibition of interactive frames along the river.

Mississippi River Paddle Share

Mississippi River Paddle Share launched on August 25—the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. This unique kayak-sharing program allows experienced paddlers to take self-guided tours of the Mississippi River in north and northeast Minneapolis as well as in the Mississippi River gorge. Aligned with Nice Ride MN bike stations, users can rent a kayak and paddle downstream to their desired return station, then bicycle back to where they started throughout the summer months.

NPS Centennial Day at the Minnesota State Fair

On August 29, the Minnesota State Fair opened up Carousel Park for a one-day national parks takeover in honor of the Centennial. Joined by rangers from six national parks and key partners from across the state, Mississippi Park Connection supported a full day of performances and activities to connect fair-goers with Minnesota’s national parks. All in all, more than 2,000 visitors found their park at the fair.



National Parks Adventure Sneak Preview & Gala

America’s Best Idea was celebrated in film this year with National Parks Adventure—an IMAX feature film about our nation’s most special places. Thanks to our partners at the Science Museum of Minnesota, we were able to host a party and sneak preview of the film for our Centennial sponsors, donors, and partners. Thanks to the 525 movie-goers who celebrated the 100th birthday of the National Park Service by supporting the Centennial campaign on this day.



A CENTENNIAL YEAR BY THE NUMBERS

91% increase

in the number of
volunteers on the
river since 2014

43 active

bald eagle nests found in
Mississippi National River
and Recreation Area

6,560 VOLUNTEERS AND

20,328 VOLUNTEER HOURS

14,737 visits
to Upper
St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam

3,568 TOURS
OF THE LOCK

2

Visitor
Centers

open for the
National Park
Service—
one in
Minneapolis,
one in
Saint Paul

300% increase

in visitation at
**Mississippi River
Visitor Center**
in its first 2
months after
reopening to
the public

97

Degrees
Fahrenheit

on the lock wall
on July 22nd
(the hottest day
of the year)

ARTISTS

PARTICIPATE IN GROVELAND GALLERY
PLEIN AIR SMACKDOWN, PAINTING SCENES
FROM THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

18

1 National Award

for outstanding volunteer program.
The George and Helen Hartzog Award
for Outstanding Volunteer Service was
awarded to our park's joint volunteer
program in a ceremony in Washington D.C.

5,702

students
served on Big River
Journey and Journey
to the Falls—

3,923 aided by
scholarships.

1,329

students
and adults

served by UWCA
Fellows on canoe
programs.

540
students

entered the Big
River Art Contest

VISITORS

4PlayMSP: Regional Days of Play

Nearly 3,000 people played along the Mississippi River at two events in January and July, participating in activities ranging from cross-country skiing to kayaking, to a giant snowball fight! Partnering with Greater MSP, we hosted 4PlayMSP, a series of outdoor playdates for newcomers and longtime residents to connect with one another during each of our distinctly different four seasons. Dozens of outdoor activities—from simple to extreme—were offered by partners like REI and Northern Lights.mn. 4PlayMSP was a winning idea from the 2015 Knight Cities Challenge, which supports the best ideas to make cities more successful.



“Working with Mississippi Park Connection in 2016, we made a big impact on sharing the best of what Minneapolis–Saint Paul has to offer with hundreds of people new to the region—or new to the joy of outdoor recreation. The impact of this partnership will be significant and long-lived. The photos, video and personal stories that emerged from the winter and summer events are being used to tell the story of this place to residents of Minnesota and people living around the world.”

–Peter Frosch, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships, Greater MSP



Photos by Bethany Birnie



Photo by Joey Tichenor

New Exhibits at the Mississippi River Visitor Center

On August 25, the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, we unveiled a completely remodeled Mississippi River Visitor Center in the lobby of the Science Museum of Minnesota. Since its opening we’ve seen visitor center traffic triple as more visitors get to know the Mississippi River’s only national park. A 21st century visitor center, one reflecting the National Park Service’s second century, is now a gateway for residents and out-of-town visitors to connect with the Mississippi River beyond their visit to the museum. The new exhibits encourage visitors to connect to the river through ranger-led bike, paddle, and wildlife watching programs.

“Through our financial support of projects like the Mississippi River Visitor Center, we can inspire important, long-lasting connections between people and national parks.”

– Susan Newton,
Senior Vice President,
Grants and Programs,
National Park Foundation

Reopening the St. Anthony Falls Visitor Center

“What a transformation! Today, thanks to Mississippi Park Connection and the National Park Service, we welcome visitors from all over the U.S. and the world to this beautiful urban park anchored by St. Anthony Falls and the mighty Mississippi. The new visitor center, staffed by national park rangers and Mississippi Park Connection staff, engages neighbors and tourists alike to experience and explore our park, and deepens our appreciation for this special place. We found our park!”

– James Eastman and Cynthia Kriha,
Mississippi Park Connection
Members



Photo by James Eastman

In addition to revamping our park’s primary visitor center in downtown Saint Paul, Mississippi Park Connection supported the National Park Service in operating the St. Anthony Falls Lock & Dam Visitor Center in downtown Minneapolis over the summer.

In just three short months we welcomed more than 14,000 visitors to the observation deck, and took more than 3,500 visitors on tours of the lock overlooking St. Anthony Falls. Mississippi Park Connection has been proud to support the park in creating spaces for visitors to find their park on both sides of the river.

STEWARDS



Photos from left: Gene Zieman, Tom Matre Photography, Gene Zieman

Habitat Restoration at Coldwater Spring

From an office park housing the Bureau of Mines to a buzzing oak savanna prairie and wetland landscape, Coldwater Spring has been transformed over the last five years through the efforts of donors, volunteers, and National Park Service staff. From annual programs like the Big Sit to ongoing activities provided through Second Saturdays, Coldwater Spring has become a destination on the Twin Cities' park scene. In 2013, we measured biodiversity on the site for the first time during a 24-hour BioBlitz and found 503 species. This year, we remeasured the site during a second BioBlitz event, and saw a 20% increase in the number of species living at Coldwater Spring—a fantastic sign that the efforts of more than 20,000 volunteer hours is making a difference.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Cares

“Having the opportunity to bring travel professionals from all over the country to Minneapolis to give back at Coldwater Spring was such a unique experience. We were able to introduce locals and visitors to green space they may not have known existed. Working with Mississippi Park Connection to make this happen and provide a fantastic volunteer opportunity for our group was one we won't forget—their daily commitment and passion for the park is overwhelming and it made our staff and our industry see a new Minneapolis.”

– Jessica Ahern, Events Director, Tourism Cares

Mississippi River Eagles: How Are They Doing?

Mississippi Park Connection provides annual support for the study of bald eagles on the Mississippi River. Tracking bald eagle populations can give us clues into the river's overall health. When the river supports more bald eagles, it indicates that the ecosystem of the river is doing better. For the past decade, the National Park Service and the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network have surveyed eagle populations. Mississippi Park Connection is proud to support the effort. Today we know that eagle populations are rebounding after many decades of decline due to DDT and contamination from other chemicals.



Photo by Jim Campbell-Spickler

“Thanks to support from Mississippi Park Connection, we are able to monitor year-to-year increases in the number of active bald eagle nests in our park. Though we know there are threats to eagle populations, such as river development, lead, mercury, and emerging chemicals of concern, the bald eagle population in our park is flourishing. This is good news for the health of the river, and it means that on any given trip to the river, you are likely to see one of the majestic birds perched upon a tree branch or soaring overhead.”

– Nancy Duncan, Natural Resources Specialist, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area



100 Years, 100 Beers, 100 Volunteers

2016 was a great year for forging new partnerships, specifically with the local brewing community. Dangerous Man Brewing Company volunteers supported habitat restoration projects in Mississippi National River and Recreation Area with 333 hours of service during the Centennial, and graciously opened up their tap room doors to us during National Park Week to host our first-ever beer fundraiser. A specially made golden-rye CentenniALE was brewed with Minneapolis tap water, which is sourced from the Mississippi River, to honor the Centennial and the Mississippi River's only national park. On top of the fundraiser, Dangerous Man and Surly Gives a Damn paired up for a special volunteer event later in the year to commemorate the National Park Service Centennial through stewardship. In one of the largest volunteer events of the year, 100 volunteers came together at Riverfront Park to plant 60 trees and 200 shrubs in just three hours!

ADVOCATES

Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures Fellowships

Now in its third year, Mississippi Park Connection is proud to host the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA) Fellows program for young adults to gain work experience in the outdoors. Darius, Mai Ker, and Nhia were our 2016 UWCA Fellows.



Their paid internships involved leading youth groups on educational day-trips in our national park, providing interpretation on public programs like Canoe Ferry and Share the River Northeast, and preparing for future careers in conservation. Over three months, the UWCA fellows worked on a combined 27 programs and guided canoe trips along the Mississippi River for 1,329 school children and adults.



"[The UWCA Fellowship] educated me, encouraged me to explore the urban wilderness more, allowed me to become more social, and opened my mind and eyes to other career opportunities. I enjoyed the bonds and connections I made with the students; as a matter of fact, being able to work with these diverse groups of students was my favorite part of the summer and internship. I appreciate the whole experience and opportunity."

– Mai Ker Thao, UWCA Fellow

Photos courtesy of Mississippi Watershed Management Organization



Celebrating 20 Years of Big River Journey

Big River Journey is the cornerstone of our youth education programming, providing 3rd-5th grade students the opportunity to learn about science, math, technology, and history through the lens of the Mississippi River. 2016 marked the 20th anniversary of Big River Journey. Thanks to partners like Xcel Energy, 3M, Ecolab, Padelford Packet Boat Co., and the National Park Foundation, we provided school scholarships and curricular support to a wide range of schools. In 2016, the program served 2,626 students with scholarships and 4,533 students overall—more than in any previous year.



"For two decades this program has allowed children to personally connect with the great outdoors and has spurred respect for the environment. Its hands-on, STEM oriented curriculum enriches students, affecting them for a lifetime. Environmental stewardship is important to us and we're proud to help Minnesota's youth gain access to great opportunities that lead to an appreciation and passion for our environment."

– John Marshall, Community Relations Manager, Xcel Energy

Photos by Melissa Buss

CONTRIBUTORS

July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016

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In January, we lost Linda Goodspeed. Linda enjoyed being a part of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area community. Some of her happiest childhood memories were of her family's vacations in national parks, including Yellowstone, Glacier, and Theodore Roosevelt. She wanted to provide opportunities for others to have quality park experiences, similar to those she enjoyed with her family. She will be missed as an avid volunteer and advocate for our park.



* Gifts made directly to NPS

** In-kind gifts



Photos from left: Jim Campbell-Spickler, Gerald Hoekstra, Bethany Birnie, Joey Tichenor

FINANCIALS



Expenses

Fundraising	\$28,777
Administration	\$68,821
Program Services	\$723,584
TOTAL	\$821,182

Revenue

Individual Gifts	\$103,019
Foundation Grants	\$250,240
Corporate Grants	\$255,623
Government Grants	\$58,478
Endowment Distribution	\$144,552
Other	\$10,111
TOTAL	\$822,023

Some contributions will be used for projects in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.



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“Green Gorge” by Thomas Paquette,
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T. PAQUETTE