

The mission of Mississippi Park Connection is to strengthen the enduring connection between people and the Mississippi River and build community support for Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The connection supports the park's environmental stewardship and education programs, including outdoor recreation, education, and volunteerism.



In 1988, a national park was created in Minnesota to preserve, protect, and enhance the significant values of the waters and land of the Mississippi River corridor.

Known as Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, the park extends for 72 miles along the river, running through the heart of the Minneapolis/Saint Paul metro area.

Printed on Minnesota-milled, chlorine-free recycled and recyclable paper with 10% postconsumer material.

Photo by Bethany Birnie

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEWS

111 Kellogg Blvd E, Suite 105
Saint Paul, MN 55101

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEWS

Newsletter of Mississippi Park Connection &
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Fall 2016–
Winter 2017

WELCOME

Celebrating Our Park in Every Season

By Katie Nyberg, Executive Director, Mississippi Park Connection



Photo by Eric Haugen

As the National Park Service Centennial comes to a close, I reflect upon how the celebration has created many new partnerships and programs that have furthered our mission of connecting people to the river and supporting our national park. The Centennial provided us with the inspiration to reach higher and further with our programming. We produced two community days of play—Winter and Summer 4Play, doubled our volunteer program, opened a new visitor center at St. Anthony Falls, and created an innovative kayak-sharing program in North Minneapolis.

But even as summer 2016 is in the rearview mirror, we continue to strive to create experiences that benefit our community and the national park. Some of the best park experiences are in the fall and winter. Make sure to get out on the trails in the river gorge and see some spectacular fall foliage. When the snow arrives, sign up for ice fishing, snowshoeing, and survival RAVEs! Also, be sure to look for wildlife, including tundra swans, otters, and wild turkeys.

And don't forget to visit our new visitor center in the lobby of the Science Museum. Thanks to strong support from our generous community and the National Park Centennial Challenge, visitors can immerse themselves in river experiences in all seasons. Rangers will be there six days a week to help you plan your Mississippi River adventure.

NPS WORD

Reflecting on the Centennial Year

By John Anfinson, Superintendent,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area



Photo by Eric Haugen

I was recently asked by the National Park Service's Centennial Coordinator for a few sentences on how we've celebrated the Centennial locally. Specifically she wanted to know how we've leveraged the Find Your Park campaign to boost community engagement and draw more attention to lesser known national parks—beyond the Yellowstones and Grand Canyons of the National Park Service. I found myself at a loss, knowing it would take far more than just a few sentences to capture all the fantastic work our park has done around the NPS Centennial.

Mississippi National River and Recreation Area has been using the Find Your Park and Centennial campaigns extensively in our promotions, partnerships, and programming. Our partners—most importantly, Mississippi Park Connection—have readily employed these campaigns in our joint events and programs. We jumped onto the Centennial wagon with full force because, as a smaller and less well-known park, we had so much to gain from this once-in-a-lifetime event. The payoff has been tremendous!

We have gained attention nationally both for our robust efforts to celebrate the National Park Service Centennial, and for our innovative programs that have been years in the making. This past year our park won a national award for its outstanding volunteer program, launched a first-of-its-kind paddle share program to get more folks on the river, and have been recognized in many publications for providing national park experiences in the middle of a bustling metro area. I'm proud to see this park recognized nationally as a premier urban national park, and am optimistically looking forward to the next 100 years of the National Park Service.



What Is The Big Sit?

Sharon Stiteler, Park Ranger,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area



One of the cool features of the Mississippi River is that it is a major bird highway during spring and fall migration. Coldwater Spring’s transformation into an oak savannah habitat has made it a prime fueling spot for birds on a major marathon to get to Central and South America. That’s why I love to host an all-day birding party that I call The Big Sit. It’s based on an event that happens around the country where birders sit in one spot for 24 hours and document all the birds they see and hear. This light version will go from sunrise to sundown.

On October 15 you can join me and some of my birding friends any time of day to watch birds at Coldwater

Spring. We’ll supply birding guides, identification tips, binoculars and scopes. We’ll even share tips on how to take pictures of birds with your smartphone through a scope. We could see cedar waxwings, eastern bluebirds and all sorts of hawks. The Big Sit attracts birders of all abilities—from hardcore enthusiasts full of tips on how to identify flying hawks, to new birders who want to learn more about sparrows and vireos. It’s low-key, and people can show up at any time of day for any length of time. This is one of the many birding events we host year-round in our national park. Check out the event calendar to find more!

SUPPORT YOUR PARK

Champions for the Next 100 Years

By Anna Waugh, Development Coordinator,
Mississippi Park Connection

On August 25, the Centennial of the National Park Service, dozens of people gathered early in the morning at the new Mississippi River Visitor Center. We came together to enjoy each other’s company and celebrate the 100th birthday of our nation’s most special places. The people in that room had each contributed to an effort – as a donor, a storyteller, an exhibit designer, a volunteer, or a public servant – to welcome new people into our fold of national park visitors, stewards, and advocates. It was inspiring to see so many people who cared about the river celebrating a moment together.

We know that stewardship and discovery are intimately linked, and that enduring connections are created first through experiences on the river. This is why we thank each and every person who has shown up for a paddle, signed a permission slip for their child to attend a field trip, biked with a ranger, worked on the Coldwater Crew, or become a Centennial member. It is because you showed up this year that we have been able to accomplish so much together.

Setting the stage for the next 100 years takes self-reflection. Our duty to connect people to our park goes beyond bright paint and new exhibits. What does it mean to truly be welcoming? How can we invite discovery and inspire stewardship? Member support makes that possible—become a member of Mississippi Park Connection to discover your river and support others in their discovery!

Planning for Play on the Mississippi

Susan Overson, Outdoor Recreation Planner,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

I joined the National Park Service in 1991 as a landscape architect with the Denver Service Center working on large planning projects in western national parks. Serendipity brought me to Mississippi National River and Recreation Area in 1992 for a six month assignment to help develop the park’s comprehensive management plan. I have been here ever since.

As an outdoor recreation planner I focus on achieving the goal of a continuous trail and open space corridor on both sides of the river. Through the Metro Mississippi Trails and Open Space Partnership, I’ve seen that vision come together with the support of multiple public and private partners.

In 2012, I created the park’s alternative transportation plan which identifies ways to get people to the river without a car. Over 50 miles of trails, 50+ Nice Ride bike share stations and, most recently, three paddle share stations in Minneapolis have been installed. These are first-of-a-kind projects in a national park, soon to provide visitors with paddle,



bike, and transit opportunities along the river.

I’ve raised two wonderful twin boys, now 23. I love kayaking, skiing, biking, and reading (often about rivers), and participating in adaptive sports with my husband, Mark. We encourage people of all abilities to enjoy the outdoors, and have had a few adventures over the years.

In my 25 years with NPS I’ve seen the river change in many ways, mostly for the better, but it is always the one constant that brings communities together. It is the lifeblood of our nation and my work. I am honored to be a part of that and never tire of seeing people enjoy our great river.

FEATURED SITE

Mississippi River Visitor Center

By Dan Dressler, Park Ranger,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

In honor of the Centennial of the National Park Service, we received the gift of brand new exhibits for the Mississippi River Visitor Center in the lobby of the Science Museum of Minnesota. The new exhibits are highly interactive and fun! You can pretend to fly like an eagle over Saint Paul, tie two barges together, take a simulated canoe trip on the Mississippi River, and much more!

Though much has changed, some elements of the old visitor center will remain familiar. Foremost, we have taken the popular aerial view from the floor out front and made it even larger. We are also continuing to issue national park passes. You can still become a junior ranger or get your senior pass, and of course you will still be greeted by a friendly park ranger.

The Mississippi River Visitor Center is open Tuesday–Thursday 9:30 am to 5:00 pm, Friday and Saturday 9:30 am to 9:00pm, and Sunday 9:30 am to 5:00 pm. We are also occasionally open extended hours around holidays.

Call 651-293-0200 or check nps.gov/miss to be sure.



Join Our Award-Winning Volunteer Program!

By Kathy Swenson, Park Ranger & Volunteer Coordinator, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area; and Mary Hammes, Environmental Stewardship and Volunteer Manager, Mississippi Park Connection



We are frolicking like a bison, preening like a pelican, and standing tall like a cottonwood tree because...we won the national volunteer award!

The George and Helen Hartzog Awards recognize volunteers for the hard work, vast skills,

and contributions to innovative projects and volunteer involvement. Mississippi National River and Recreation Area won the award for the most outstanding volunteer program in the entire National Park Service, beating out over 400 other NPS units in 2015!

“I want to help the Mississippi River!” are words echoed throughout this park, as thousands of volunteers work to improve the river and its programs. Whether it’s connecting with urban youth, restoring habitat, facilitating community engagement, or working with partners, our volunteer program provides a fun and beneficial way for people to connect with and improve the Mississippi River.

Our volunteer program works with two dozen partner organizations and their volunteer programs. We share this award with thousands of incredible volunteers and hundreds of park partners along the river. Join us in celebrating the people that make this urban national park so fantastic!



Volunteer Voices Centennial Volunteer Ambassadors

By Melissa Clark and Regan Baker, Centennial Volunteer Ambassadors, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

The newest additions to this park, we are two of over a hundred Student Conservation Association interns working in national parks across the country. We are proud to be serving during the National Park Service’s Centennial!

Our work involves connecting with others who are passionate about the river, restoring ecosystems, and preserving the Twin Cities story.



Melissa

I was raised in Michigan and attended Michigan State University for dual undergraduate degrees in Zoology & Agriculture and Natural Resource Communications. My desire to learn more about environmental outreach and communication has taken me from coast to coast—from an internship at Olympic National Park to communication projects at national parks in the Washington, D.C. region. I moved back to the Midwest in September and I’m excited to expand my NPS experience to include an urban park.

Regan

I was born and raised in Iowa and attended two liberal arts colleges there, Coe College and Central College. I focused on a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Studies with Global Sustainability Track. My love for the environment and nature started when I was young and has gradually grown over time through various personal and professional experiences. My future goals are to find ways to deepen visitor learning and explain how the preservation of nature is helpful to everyone.

We would love to meet you—if you’re in the park, stop and say hello!

To register your volunteer group, contact Mary Hammes, Environmental Stewardship & Volunteer Manager: 651-291-9119, mhammes@parkconnection.org. To register as an individual volunteer, contact Kathy Swenson, Park Ranger & Volunteer Coordinator: 651-293-8424, kathleen_swenson@nps.gov.



MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL RIVER & RECREATION AREA

Explore the river near you or join us for an upcoming program at one of our featured sites. Stop by the Mississippi River Visitor Center in the lobby of the Science Museum to chat with a national park ranger and see our new exhibits.

Frogging in Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

By Nancy Duncan, Natural Resource Program Manager, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

A member of the tree frog family, the tiny, non-climbing Blanchard’s cricket frogs (*Acris crepitans blanchardi*) are considered threatened or endangered in several states in the upper Midwest, including Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin. These small, darkly colored frogs have a very distinctive call, sounding much like someone clinking two pebbles or metal balls together. They are found along rivers, lakes, streams, and ponds; and overwinter, under leaf litter, rocks, and logs near water. Similar to other frogs, these are assumed to partially freeze—from 40 to 70 percent or more of their bodies—during winter hibernation.



While analyzing the 2014 frog song meter acoustic data collected for the National Park Service, researchers detected several Blanchard’s cricket frogs calling in Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Three samples containing identifiable cricket frogs were heard and later confirmed by 2-3 expert observers. The site where these frogs were recorded is a dynamic floodplain forest with ponds, a stream, and some wetlands. Fluctuating water levels at the site provided exposed mudflats during low water, which is beneficial for these frogs.

Because cricket frogs are state endangered in Minnesota, a visual confirmation was desired. We visited the site in late summer 2015 to evaluate the habitat and search for the frogs. While the habitat was suitable, no frogs were observed on these late season visits so we decided to conduct more visual surveys in 2016 to see if we could locate additional populations. Last summer we had a frog researcher and a Macalester College intern out scouting likely locations to listen for cricket frogs. So far we have found a number of other frogs within 15 miles of the original site. The researcher is unsure whether these new populations are all part of a large, meta-population, or if these are unique, new populations. Further work is needed to determine this. Meanwhile, it has been exciting to discover that the riverway has a number of new areas where these tiny amphibians exist.

OCTOBER 2016–APRIL 2017



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Visit parkconnection.org/events for event details and registration information.

- OCTOBER 8** Second Saturday @ Coldwater Spring
- OCTOBER 8** Bike With a Ranger @ Ford Dam Overlook
- OCTOBER 11** Moon Gazing @ Coldwater Spring *Member Event*
- OCTOBER 14** Fall Colors Pontoon Trip @ Harriet Island *Member Event*
- OCTOBER 15** The Big Sit @ Coldwater Spring
- NOVEMBER 2** Bittercress Patrol @ Coldwater Spring
- NOVEMBER 17** Give to the Max Day
- NOVEMBER 17** Behind The Scenes @ Mississippi River Visitor Center *Member Event*
- DECEMBER 7** Winter Walk @ Coldwater Spring
- DECEMBER 10** Duck Watch @ Point Douglas
- DECEMBER 17** Orienteering 101 @ Coldwater Spring
- JANUARY 21** Winter Trails Day @ Fort Snelling
- JANUARY 21** Snowshoe RAVE @ Ordway Prairie
- JANUARY 26** Winter Walk @ Coldwater Spring
- FEBRUARY 9** Fireside Chat with John Anfinson @ NPS Headquarters *Member Event*
- FEBRUARY 11** Geocaching @ Crosby Farm
- FEBRUARY 18** Volunteer Expo @ Mall of America
- FEBRUARY 25** Snowshoe RAVE @ Coldwater Spring
- MARCH 11** Survival RAVE @ Hidden Falls
- MARCH 18** Heron Watch @ Marshall Terrace Park
- APRIL 22** Junior Ranger Day @ Mississippi River Visitor Center
- APRIL 29** Arbor Day Tree Walk @ Coldwater Spring *Member Event*

Members receive free or discounted registration for most programs, including invitations to members-only events. Join today at parkconnection.org/membership. All events are subject to change.



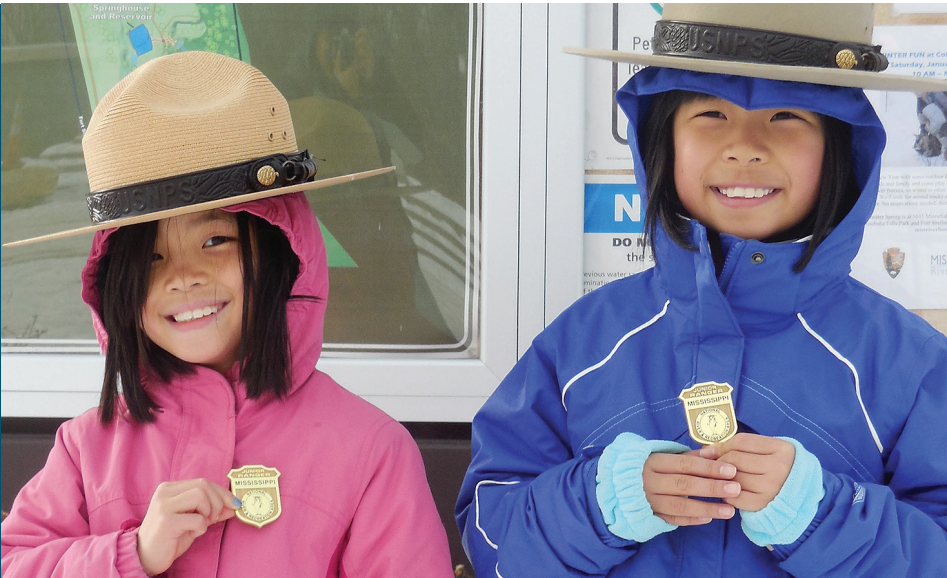
JUNIOR RANGERS

“Explore, Learn, and Protect!”

Make the National Park Service’s junior ranger promise today! Explore our storied American river and earn a junior ranger badge at the newly renovated Mississippi River Visitor Center. Come down to the visitor center on Saturday, April 22nd, 2017 for Junior Ranger Day activities. For more information, visit us online at nps.gov/miss/forkids.

You can also download special junior ranger workbooks to learn about fossils, the Underground Railroad, wilderness, and the night sky!

Visit nps.gov/kids to get your copy.



Become a Junior Ranger!

Junior rangers are young people who promise to learn about, explore, and protect our national parks. Earn your junior ranger badge at our Mississippi River Visitor Center.

Learn how at nps.gov/miss/forkids

CONTACT



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