

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEWS

Fall 2018 / Winter 2019



*The official newsletter of Mississippi Park Connection and
the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.*



MISSISSIPPI PARK CONNECTION

Discover your river

The mission of Mississippi Park Connection is to strengthen the enduring connection between people and the Mississippi River by enriching the life of the river and the lives of all who experience our national park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Park 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.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEWS

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

Generation Next

Katie Nyberg, Executive Director, Mississippi Park Connection



Photo by Bethany Birnie

"The river is an ideal classroom for learning about history, ecology, physics, literature and the arts."

At Mississippi Park Connection, we believe that the river should shape every kid who grows up here. An introduction to the park, whether through fishing or canoeing or hiking, builds a foundation for lifelong learning and connection. We are pleased that the natural world is increasingly being appreciated as a tool for building strong, healthy and happy children.

The river is also an apt platform for building knowledge about the world around us, which is why we have built many partnerships with Twin Cities schools. The river is an ideal classroom for learning about history, ecology, physics, literature and the arts. Ranger-led programs like Big River Journey and Journey to the Falls combine standards-based curriculum, teacher professional development and on-river learning with park rangers.

Thanks to the support of a generous community, we've been able to support tens of thousands of school children on field trips to the river. Philanthropic support provides funding for park rangers, bus scholarships, teacher workshops, and special programs like the Big River Art Contest.

Last spring, thanks to the support of the National Park Foundation and other generous donors, we launched a new River Educator program that capitalizes on the vast experience of retired teachers to help our park reach more elementary school students than ever. Trained by Mississippi Park Connection and the National Park Service staff, River Educators lead a variety of field trips and in-school visits for elementary schools.

Reaching New Heights

John Anfinson, Superintendent,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area now serves over 24,000 students and youth annually. We do so through a variety of programs and many partners. Some programs focus on science and some on the river's history and visual arts. Some kids get to learn about fishing and orienteering, and others participate in habitat restoration or service projects. Reflecting the growing diversity of the Twin Cities and promise for connecting with the next generation of park visitors and supporters, nearly half of participants are students or youth of color.



Photo by Joey Tichenor

Big River Journey is our longest running program and keeps reaching new levels. The program served 4,928 students during the most recent school year, our largest number ever. Partnering with 12 organizations, the park led 48 riverboat trips with 60 schools and 202 teachers. Overall, the park worked with more than 100 schools, more than 500 teachers and 20 partners in the past year.

Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) and the National Park Foundation (NPF) are central to our efforts. The NPF funds the *Every Kid in a Park* program, which provides 4th graders a pass that lets them and their families into national parks across the country for free. In addition, they provided a grant to support our new River Learning Journeys program, which we piloted this year in partnership with MPC. Thanks to their support and other generous donors, the number of 4th graders served by the park will double by the end of 2018.

NPF and MPC are also essential to two new endeavors: River Educators and a citizen science program. In partnership with the Science Museum of Minnesota and MPC, the citizen science program will be piloted in the fall with two middle schools to introduce students to watershed science.

Ice Fishing

Gordon Dietzman, Park Ranger,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

I once had an inquisitive child ask me if fish shiver, while standing on an ice-covered Pickerel Lake. It was a fascinating question not only because it dealt with biology and adaptation, but more importantly a child's imagination and curiosity. What is it like down there, under the frozen lake?



Participants in our ice fishing program have three ways to explore the strange and forbidding world of frozen and iced landscape.

One, they can try their hand at ice fishing. We supply rods and reels, encouragement, and bait for free. We'll even bait your hook and drill your hole if you need assistance. Secondly, they can observe the life below the ice through the underwater camera. Who knows what will come swimming out of the gloom and into view! Finally, they can talk to a park ranger to learn about the lake and wildlife in the area.

Twice coyotes joined us on the ice to watch the festivities and, I suspect, to scavenge any bait we might leave behind. They were disappointed. On another occasion, two bald eagles engaged in aerial ballet high overhead and we've been entertained by the gentle murmuring of the beautiful and rare trumpeter swans that sometimes winter on this lake.



Park Ranger Dan drilling a hole in the ice.

One of my favorite memories is of a child finding a giant water bug swimming in a hole next to his fishing line. With help from participants, we carved a block of ice into an aquarium, filled it with water, and put the massive insect in it. Program participants were more fascinated by the water loving "toe-biter" than any fish caught that day.

There are many ice fishing opportunities this winter you can participate in with us along the river. The ice fishing programs are family-friendly and open to the public. Check the Calendar of Events in this newsletter for dates. Join us for a breath of fresh air, abundant wildlife, and, with luck, maybe a big fish. By the way, fish, being cold-blooded, don't shiver.

Meet Neil Smarjesse

Neil Smarjesse, Park Ranger, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area



Park Ranger Neil (right) with seasonal Park Ranger Cody at Coldwater Spring.

“Go outside and play” are the directions from my mother that ring in my memories from childhood. No matter the weather, I would tromp outside and find something to do. There was always fun to be had with friends while exploring, building forts in the woods, and sledding! All this time outside as a kid led me to have a true love for the outdoors and a desire to understand the natural environment.



Later in life, this desire to understand undoubtedly influenced my decision to pursue a degree in wildlife biology and a career in natural resources. After completing my degree while working summers learning how to restore native

prairie in southern Minnesota, I landed a job with the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area to manage invasive species and ensure the native plants became established at Coldwater Spring.

As the restoration at Coldwater Spring has evolved so has our role in ensuring its success. Initially, we had fields full of troublesome weeds like sweet clover and crown vetch, and now we stare into a grassland full of big bluestem and Indian grass. We've extended our efforts to restoring the oak savanna understory on the north end of the area and the bur oak, pin oak woodland to the south. Just east of the restored tallgrass prairie, we've removed buckthorn and garlic mustard for the last 6 years in the mesic hardwood forest understory. Now, we're seeding and planting native species with an emphasis on spring ephemerals that are essential forage to the rusty patched bumblebee queen as she emerges in the spring. This federally endangered bumblebee was spotted in the forest understory this past spring!

But to me, the most fascinating aspect of this place is the people who care for it in unwavering fashion. No matter the weather, volunteers tromp through the prairie and woodland in search of invasive plants. They're on a mission to help us restore native plant communities to an area once overrun with invasive species, and in that mission, we are kindred spirits.

Pickerel Lake

Gordon Dietzman, Park Ranger, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and Lee Vue, Communications and Event Coordinator, Mississippi Park Connection

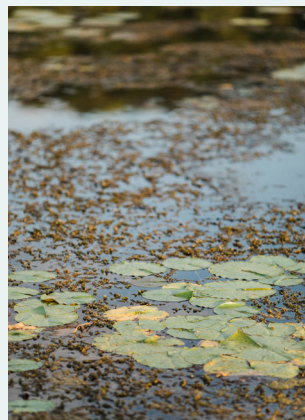


Pickerel Lake is located within Lilydale Regional Park, a 636-acre park along the Mississippi River near downtown Saint Paul. As a shallow floodplain, the lake is often inundated by the Mississippi River during its more restive periods, the spring floods. Oftentimes, the roads are closed due to the floods and it's nearly impossible to get to the lake. During the summer, it hosts a busy parade of herons, egrets, cormorants, and other fish-eating birds. Other wildlife you might spot are signs of river otters and coyotes. Fishing for bluegills, crappie, northern pike, and bass is common before the shallow lake fills with mid-summer weeds and lily pads.

In the winter, life slows as the water cools and ice forms, sealing off life from the rest of the world. Still, turtles are sometimes seen swimming slowly under the glass-clear ice of early winter and some underwater insects are still active. The National Park Service hosts a few ice fishing programs on the lake in the wintertime. You can read more about the ice fishing program in one of the Featured Program sections in this newsletter.

This year we introduced a new Mississippi River Paddle Share station at Pickerel Lake. The station is meant for beginner kayakers and for individuals interested in trying out the Paddle Share program for the first time. Paddle Share is the first-of-its-kind kayak-sharing program in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area that was launched in 2016 to provide access for recreation on the river.

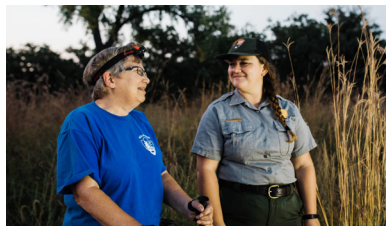
Pickerel Lake is a beautiful place to explore whether it's fishing, kayaking, or enjoying the fall foliage!



Volunteer Voices

Sue Fredstrom, Volunteer for the Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP) Program

A young boy came up to me recently at the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam Visitor Center and gave me a high five. It took a second, but I realized he was carrying out the pledge he had just made: *“As a Junior Ranger of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, I promise to learn about the river, protect the river and enjoy the river — and give every ranger I see a high five!”*



Sue (left) with Park Ranger Johnna at the Moth Tour during the summer at Coldwater Spring.

Even though I was not a park ranger, it didn't make a difference to him. Being a volunteer and being present was enough. When I was young, my dream was to become a park ranger, but during that time, women were limited in their career choices. My family visited the national parks for the first time when I was 15 years old in 1966. We visited the national parks in South Dakota and Wyoming and I was in awe at seeing real buffaloes, moose, bear and burros. We attended every interpretive program we could. From that experience, my love of the national parks was born! There have been many more national park trips since, from Maine to Hawaii, Alaska to Florida, and the local national park here in the Twin Cities.



Sue (far left) with her mom and sisters during their family trip to Grand Teton and Yellowstone, circa 1966.

When I retired, I discovered the Volunteer-in-Parks (VIP) program and all its wonderful chances to work and play in the park and help others do the same. As an interpretive assistant in the visitor centers, I interact with people of all ages: swapping national park stories with older folks, helping kids *Fly like an Eagle*, and introducing the littlest ones to nature with the creature puppets and baby eagle videos. Out on the river, I help with facilitating real outdoor experiences like watching for birds and otters or taking a first hike with the kids on the youth program, Big River Journey. Turning an *“Eeuww! Bugs/worms/whatever!”* to *“Oh, wow! Look what I found!”* is the best reward!

Not sure you want to spend time with kids, or lots of other people, for that matter? The park is filled with so many great programs and activities for all, from coyote howl surveys to seed growing and planting. Like a Junior Ranger, you'll learn about the river, protect the river and enjoy the river — and get a few high fives! Start your volunteer journey today, visit parkconnection.org/volunteer to learn more.

River Learning Journeys & River Educators

Mike Barnes, River Educator, Mississippi Park Connection

The spring of 2018 marked the beginning of a cooperative project between Mississippi Park Connection and the National Park Service to provide field trips for Minnesota fourth graders. David Kappelhoff, Mississippi Park Connection Education Coordinator, and Jim Ford, National Park Service Education Specialist and Park Ranger, launched this program with the help of six River Educators: Mike Barnes, Brian Geisler, Mark Lex, Terry McDanel, Amy Mester and Jill Weese.

River Educators is a group of licensed or experienced educators. Many of us are former classroom teachers, hired as part of a new program to help the national park meet the needs of its growing education programs and to serve as leaders and facilitators to urban student populations.

During the month of May, hundreds of Twin Cities kids experienced one of two new pilot education programs called River Learning Journeys at St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis and Harriet Island in Saint Paul. The St. Anthony Falls field trip gave students opportunities to learn — and take photographs — of the falls, lock and dam, historic mill ruins, and the Stone Arch Bridge. From Harriet Island, students traveled upstream to learn about the Mississippi River's ecosystem on a paddleboat. They observed animal and plant life in the river's floodplain, examined mussels that live on the river bottom, and learned about the life-cycle of fish that swim in the river.



River Educators at Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam.

This year, along with traditional NPS school programs, River Educators will continue developing and improving the River Learning Journeys. A unique aspect of these programs is that they feature lots of interactive education and games, along with opportunities for kids to emotionally express themselves and connect with the park's natural spaces.

4th grade teachers interested in the River Learning Journeys, contact:
David Kappelhoff at dkappelhoff@parkconnection.org

Planting Young Trees

Mary Hammes, Environmental Stewardship and Volunteer Manager,
Mississippi Park Connection



Crew member, Becca, cutting down an EAB-infested tree on Pike Island in Fort Snelling State Park.

The Mississippi River Conservation Corps crew has been hard at work preparing the river’s floodplain forests for some new residents — young trees from the community tree nurseries we planted in partnership with other organizations this past spring! The crew comprises four outstanding young adults dedicated to the environment: Andrew, Kristin, Becca, and Sam. They have been busy removing invasive species, thinning EAB-infested

ash trees, and scoping for tree planting sites that will welcome resilient new tree species to be planted this fall. This prep work will ensure the tree seedlings get an extra boost to help them get established. However, caring for trees does not stop once they are in the ground! The crew will be on-hand throughout the fall planting season and beyond to make sure they are watered, weeded, and cared for.

In addition, the crew, along with hundreds of volunteers, will install tree tubes on the young trees. These tubes will help protect the trees from predators like beavers and white tailed deer and act as a mini-greenhouse to facilitate growth.

Caring for the urban forest provides great employment opportunities for young people in our community. As we continue to see loss of canopy due to EAB, an appetite on the part of urban planners to use trees in climate-adaptation initiatives, and more awareness of the benefits of urban forests, there will need to be more caretakers for trees. We hope our crew members continue on with careers to care for the tree canopy even after their time serving with the Corps along the river. And given the positive impacts made by trees including air quality improvement, ambient cooling, and habitat — it’s satisfying work!



Crew members, Andrew and Kristin, watering the trees after they were planted at Upper Landing Park in Saint Paul, MN.

School Field Trips

Katie Nyberg, Executive Director,
Mississippi Park Connection

Fall means cooler temperatures, changing leaves, and of course school field trips! Many teachers take advantage of our fall school trips to set the stage for curriculum engagement and team building. Park rangers, volunteers, and River Educators are out nearly every day hosting school groups in the park.

Research shows that nature-based learning increases engagement in school learning and is critical in a child's emotional well-being. That's why we are committed to providing children access to outdoor learning opportunities in our park.

School budgets are lean and cutting field trips is often a way for administrators to balance the budget. Community philanthropy is a critical piece of our youth education programs. For instance, our Ticket to Ride Scholarship Fund removes barriers to river education by providing bus stipends and program discounts for schools that need it the most. Thanks to support from individual donors and the business community, Mississippi Park Connection has supported 24,000 students on park programs annually.

Donors to the Ticket to Ride Scholarship program make a big difference to schools that struggle to pay for field trip transportation. Last year, more than half of the schools that attended Big River Journey or Journey to the Falls qualified for a scholarship. And teachers report on the great connections their students make at the river:

When we wrote about the day I noticed many [of my students] talking about seeing eagles. More than one commented about “keeping ‘our’ river clean because we drink out of it.”

You can make a donation to the Ticket to Ride Scholarship fund online at:
parkconnection.org/ticket-to-ride



Photos by Dawn Kish, National Park Foundation



WAYS TO GET INVOLVED



BECOME A MEMBER

Join today at parkconnection.org/membership

Share in our commitment to preserve, protect, and enjoy the Mississippi River. Members can sign-up for special members-only events and receive discounted registration.



VOLUNTEER WITH US

Learn more at parkconnection.org/volunteer

There are plenty of volunteer opportunities available: visitor center, habitat restoration, youth education programs, office administrative support, etc.



ATTEND EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Full listing at parkconnection.org/events

The park offers a wide range of programs that you can attend with the family such as birding, fishing, and fun outdoor activities.



DONATE

Visit parkconnection.org/donate

Gifts have a big impact on park programs from formal education to habitat restoration on the river. Mark your calendar for Minnesota's giving holiday, Give to the Max Day, on November 15!



BECOME A COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR

For more info, email info@parkconnection.org

Engage with the public to increase awareness and support for the park by tabling at community and partner events throughout the year.



RECOMMENDATIONS



#13: Hidden Falls Regional Fall

Bring the family and have fun learning winter survival skills at a River Action Volunteer Event (RAVE) on Feb 23, 2019.



#14: Pickerel Lake

Join park rangers on the frozen lake for ice fishing on Jan 19, 2019. Fishing poles and bait are provided.

MAP LEGEND

- Boundaries of the park (areas shaded green)
- Mississippi River Visitor Center
Located at the Science Museum of Minnesota
- Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam
Visitor Center closed until summer
- Ranger On Call Stations
Audio tours, www.rangeroncall.com

SITES ALONG THE RIVER

- 1 Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park
- 2 River Park
- 3 Manomin County Park
- 4 North Mississippi Regional Park
- 5 Mississippi Watershed Management Org.
- 6 Boom Island
- 7 Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam
- 8 Stone Arch Bridge
- 9 Mill Ruins Park
- 10 Minnehaha Regional Park
- 11 Coldwater Spring
- 12 Fort Snelling State Park
- 13 Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park
- 14 Pickerel Lake
- 15 Lilydale-Harriet Island Regional Park
- 16 Mississippi River Visitor Center
- 17 Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary
- 18 Lions Levee Park
- 19 Spring Lake Park Reserve
- 20 Hastings Riverfront



#11: Coldwater Spring

Spend the day with Park Ranger Sharon at the Big Sit on Oct 6, 2018 to document all the birds that are seen and heard from sunrise to sundown.

MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL RIVER & RECREATION AREA

Learn more about the national park in the Twin Cities at nps.gov/miss

OCTOBER 2018 - APRIL 2019

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

M = Members Only Event

V = Volunteer Opportunity

F = Fundraiser Event

SEPT

Sept 27 Tree Planting @ Burns Ave Scenic Overlook **V**

OCT

Oct 6 Big Sit @ Coldwater Spring

Oct 11 Volunteer Appreciation Event @ Harriet Island Regional Park

NOV

Nov 3 Tech Nature @ Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Nov 15 Give to the Max Day **F**

DEC

Dec 15 Tech Nature @ Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

JAN

Jan 12 Winter Trails Day

Jan 12 Tech Nature @ Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Jan 19 Take a Kid Ice Fishing @ Pickerel Lake

Jan 23 Working River Tour @ Minneapolis Drinking Water Plant **M**

Jan 26 Family Ice Fishing @ Lake Rebecca (Hastings)

Jan 26 Snowshoe RAVE @ Coldwater Spring **V**

FEB

Feb 2 Snowshoe RAVE @ Katharine Ordway Field Station **V**

Feb 7 Fireside Chat with Superintendent John Anfinson

Feb 9 Family Ice Fishing @ Lake Rebecca (Hastings)

Feb 16 Tech Nature @ Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Feb 23 Winter Survival Skills RAVE @ Hidden Falls Regional Park **V**

MAR

Mar 6 Working River Tour @ Minneapolis Drinking Water Plant **M**

Mar 23 Welcome Back the Herons @ Marshall Terrace Park

APR

Apr 20 Junior Ranger Day

Apr 27 Saint Paul Citywide Spring Clean Up @ Indian Mounds Regional Park

WORKING RIVER SERIES

Join us for one-of-a-kind learning opportunities during the fall and winter seasons! Every year, we coordinate with different facilities along the river such as the Metropolitan Wastewater Treatment Plant, the Minneapolis Drinking Water Treatment and Distribution Facility, and others to schedule free tours for Mississippi Park Connection members. Tours provide a glimpse into how the river is used today and its impact on our everyday lives. Be sure to check the events calendar for tour locations and dates as they pop up.

Members receive free or discounted registration for most programs, plus invitations to special members-only events. Join today at parkconnection.org/membership.

All events are subject to change.

CONTACT INFORMATION



Mississippi Park Connection
info@parkconnection.org
651-291-8164
parkconnection.org



National Park Service
Mississippi River Visitor Center
651-293-0200
nps.gov/miss

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