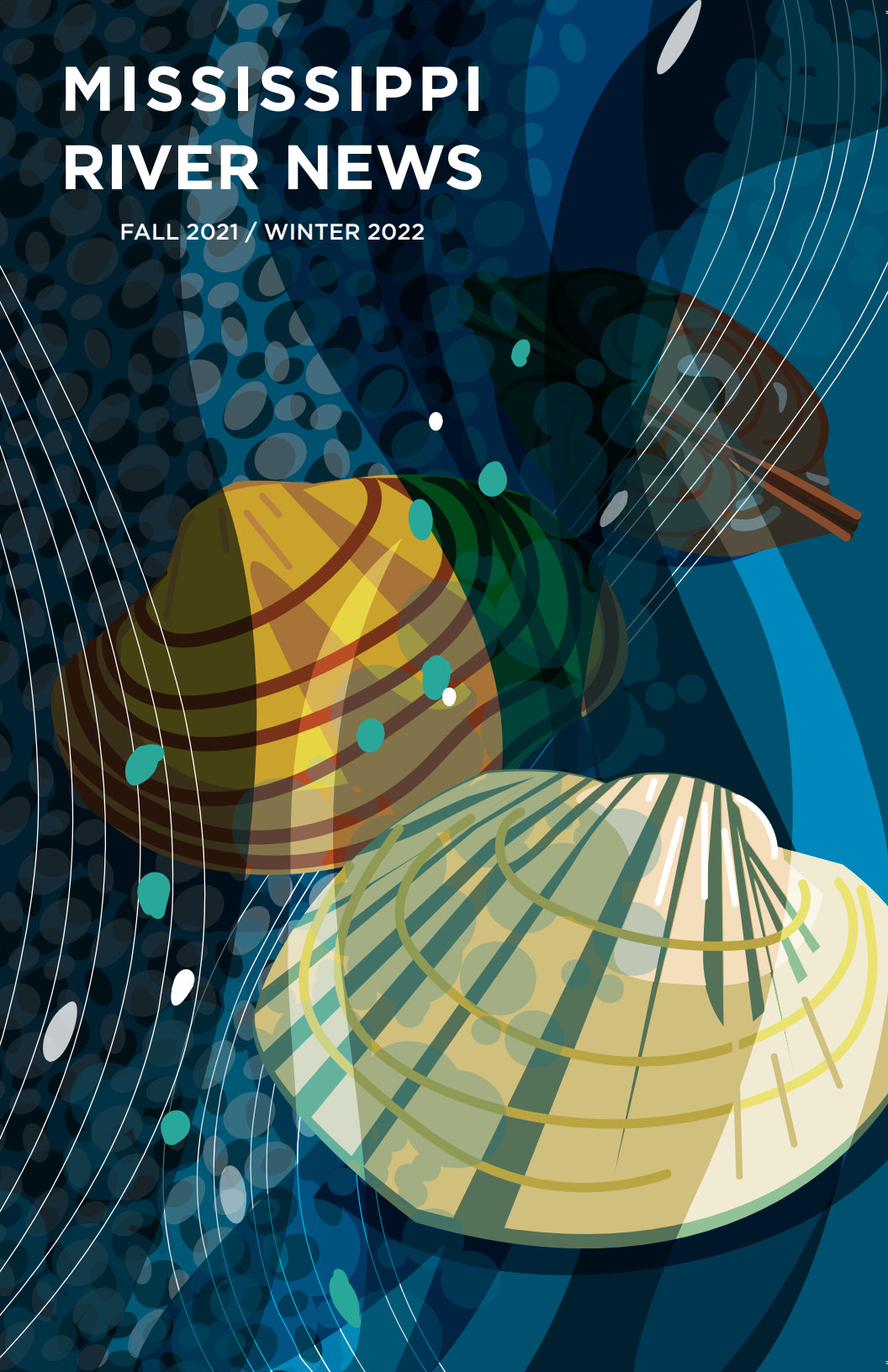


MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEWS

FALL 2021 / WINTER 2022



A New Superintendent For The River Park

Katie Nyberg, Executive Director, Mississippi Park Connection

This fall, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area welcomes its fourth superintendent, Tucker Blythe. Tucker comes to us from Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in Missouri but is no stranger to Minnesota and the Mississippi River. Tucker grew up in Memphis and currently lives in St. Louis near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. He and his wife, Sandy, are looking forward to making a home upriver in St. Paul.

Tucker has served 24 years in the National Park Service. He has held leadership roles in several parks throughout his career including as acting deputy superintendent at Gateway Arch National Park; superintendent at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site; acting superintendent at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve; historian in the NPS Historic Architecture Division; supervisory ranger at Oklahoma City National Memorial; and chief of interpretation at Frederick Law Olmsted and John F. Kennedy National Historic Site. Outside of the NPS, he spent nine years as a business owner in Newton, Kansas.

“I am honored to be selected as the superintendent of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area,” Tucker said.

“I look forward to working closely with park staff and partners, and engaging with community members to protect the incredible resources and tell the many stories the park offers. I am excited to join the team and work with the many partners who are passionate stewards of this majestic river. My family and I are looking forward to exploring the Twin Cities and getting to know the surrounding area.”



Tucker’s deep experience with partnership will be put to good use as we plan for new and expanded programs, including the development of the River Learning Center.

As much as we are excited about Tucker’s appointment, we are sad to say bon voyage to Acting Superintendent Craig Hansen. In his nine-month tenure, Craig led the park through dynamic COVID-19 protocols, steered tribal nations engagement at Coldwater Spring, and advanced the River Learning Center project. We wish him continued success at his home park, Grand Portage National Monument in northern Minnesota.



Mississippi River Fellowship Recap

Deacon Deboer, Mississippi River Fellow, Mississippi Park Connection

In what seemed as quick as a cottonwood seed floating to the ground, the Mississippi River Fellowship provided countless educational experiences on topics once foreign to me prior to this summer. Mississippi Park Connection's fellowship went above and beyond my expectations. It supported my learning and encouraged me to freely explore my interests pertaining to the river and Unci Maka (Grandmother Earth). I had many supportive and constructive conversations with relatives and coworkers in relation to both my future and the future of this park. These communicative relationships are vital to building reciprocal relationships with the land.

This summer I learned by rotating through many positions within the National Park Service in partnership with Mississippi Park Connection. One of my favorites was conducting animal surveys with MNRRA biotechs, varying from monarch butterfly monitoring to bats, beavers, and bees! All these critters tremendously help our ecosystem. I am so thankful for the experience to work up close with them. I loved seeing monarchs on top of *Itoptasapa thapezhuta* (milkweed).

I applied to this fellowship because I look to the Mississippi River as a relative and it should be treated as such. It is my home away from home here in Bde Ota (Minneapolis). I spent much of my childhood near the Cetan Wakpa (Hawk Creek) and Mni Sota Wakpa (Minnesota River) in Pezihutazizi Kapi near Granite Falls. Those waters connect me to Bde Ota and Imniza Ska (Saint Paul). The fellowship was an opportunity for me to build relationalities along the Haha Wakpa (Mississippi River) and create safe spaces for relatives to use.

I built these relationalities by hosting a *Paddling While BIPOC With Truth Telling* event pertaining to Mni Sota Makoce (land where the waters reflect the sky). When I learned that I would design a capstone project at the end of my fellowship, it didn't take more than a minute to conjure up what I wanted to do. Our route took us around Bdote (the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers) and through the back channel of Wita Tanka (Pike Island). The event was beautiful. We were gifted serene weather with the dew of rain, which we all have been missing lately. We chatted amongst ourselves as relatives and built knowledges as we decolonized our narratives. The core of this paddle was building a reciprocal relationship with Unci Maka and the environment, and letting the land hear our language of decolonization.

I still find language to be an afterthought in peoples' minds pertaining to a place's spirituality and the weight a name holds in describing these places. Going forward, our society has a lot of work to do in working toward decolonization. Many organizations are entirely systemically colonial. Recognizing this as an organization and amplifying BIPOC voices within can aid in decolonization efforts.

With the long-term goal of creating a park staff that is more representative of the communities it serves, the Mississippi River Fellowship is a 10-week paid opportunity for diverse and underrepresented young adults ages 18-25 to explore the different branches of the National Park Service. Deacon Deboer (center) and Melina Pakey-Rodriguez (center right) were the 2021 fellows.



Plant For The Future Update

Andrew Marotz, Volunteer Coordinator, Mississippi Park Connection

Mississippi Park Connection, in partnership with the National Park Service, dozens of partners, and thousands of volunteers, reached a major milestone in 2021: completing our Plant For The Future campaign to plant 15,000 trees and shrubs in the park!

Plant For The Future started as a conversation with land managers, river organizations, and community members in 2017. We heard about dramatic loss of tree canopy due to the emerald ash borer, and issues with cottonwood regeneration. Together we set out to not only begin filling in these gaps with new trees but also to ensure that we planted a compilation of species that would increase biodiversity and resilience to climate change within these urban forests and green spaces.

Partners and volunteers helped us install experimental tree plots to discover best planting practices for cottonwoods; survey large swaths of forest to create a forest-management assessment with the National Park Service; remove introduced species that overwhelm the floodplain-forest understory; increase plant and tree diversity within the park; fill in large gaps in the tree canopy; and design and install a 1,200-tree, 20-year climate change study at Crosby Farm Regional Park. These combined efforts further our mission of building resilience in urban forests and nurturing the green spaces that enrich our community and connect people to the park.



Those who planted trees, hauled buckets of water, nurtured seedlings, placed tree tubes, and gave advice, moral support, and cash made all the difference. Funders, project partners, land managers, and volunteers truly made this campaign possible. Thank you!

Muscling Their Way Back

Callie Sacarelos, Communications and Marketing Coordinator, Mississippi Park Connection

A consortium of researchers have been monitoring the Mississippi River at Hidden Falls Regional Park for nearly 15 years. But it wasn't until the summer of 2021 that they finally found what they were looking for. Diving beneath the water's murky surface in full scuba gear, they discovered several 2-year-old Higgins Eye mussels. After 22 years of collective efforts to reintroduce the endangered species to this designated essential habitat, they found proof that these mussels are finally reproducing naturally.



Restoring native mussel populations is a lengthy process that often takes decades before seeing progress. Mussels artfully trick certain fish species into hosting their larvae, which briefly attach to the fish until they are ready to detach into habitat only the fish can reach. So, the first step for researchers is to discover the host fish—each mussel species has a unique pairing—and find a healthy habitat where the fish exist.

It took researchers all across the country nearly 15 years to discover the Spectaclecase mussel's host fish. They tested some unlikely hosts, including mudpuppies, lampreys, aquatic insects, and even other mussels, in addition to more than 100 fish species. By comparison, most host fish are discovered after testing 20-30 species. Finally, four years ago in a lab at the Minnesota DNR Center for Aquatic Mollusk Programs, mussel-propagation biologists found the answer: Mooneye fish. Unfortunately, this fish doesn't occur north of the St. Croix Falls Dam anymore, and Spectaclecase mussels no longer exist south of Hudson, Wis.

Allie Holdhusen, a Mississippi National River and Recreation Area biologist, and Mark Hove, a biologist from the University of Minnesota, are working with others from Macalester College and the Wisconsin DNR to track existing populations of the endangered Spectaclecase. They are part of the Mussel Coordination Team (MCT), which works closely with the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee composed of government agencies, universities, and consulting firms. Currently, Allie, Mark and others from the MCT are using techniques similar to those used to restore Higgins Eye to hopefully restore Butterfly, Winged Mapleleaf, Salamander and Snuffbox mussels in the Mississippi or St. Croix rivers.



The Mussel Coordination Team includes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Coast Guard, and the DNR from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri, as well as colleges and universities, and environmental consulting firms. Photo courtesy of Dan Kelner.

The St. Croix, in comparison to the Mississippi, benefits from fewer dams, fewer alterations to the riverbed, less pollution, less sediment from urban development, and less farming chemical runoff. As a result, its fish communities are more diverse, making it an excellent habitat for mussels. The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is also an important habitat for mussels. Water quality in this section of the river is healthier than further downstream. Also, Zebra mussels haven't taken hold in the park like they have in other parts of the river.

"When I first heard about Zebra mussel destruction in the 1990s, I thought about switching careers because I didn't want to spend my life conserving something that might die out like the dodo bird," Mark said. "But as a young professional I was learning about all these rare mussel species and I wanted to help them. So I followed my heart, to make the world a better place [...] A lot of passionate people are involved in this. We need to remember that we're connected to the river and what we do with our lives does make a difference."

Left: Marian Schaffer, a St. Croix National Scenic Riverway biologist, and Dan Kelner, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers biologist, count and identify mussels in the Mississippi River for long-term endangered species reintroduction and monitoring in the national park.

Ways to Get Involved

Designing A New River Space

Mary deLaittre, Executive Director, Great River Passage Conservancy

We are excited to partner with Mississippi Park Connection, the National Park Service, and Wilderness Inquiry on a new project that will enable park visitors to experience the land, water and culture of the Mississippi River at Crosby Farm Regional Park. A new National Park Service Headquarters and River Learning Center will be a gateway to the Mississippi River in Saint Paul, welcoming residents and visitors to the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.


Situated at the convergence of key cultural, historical, ecological, and recreational sites, the River Learning Center will offer four-season programming that honors, teaches, and promotes stewardship of the river. The area is a place of natural beauty for both recreation and reflection and is home to several significant and sacred Dakota sites.

This fall, the City of Saint Paul, guided by community input, will begin designing the center. Find recent design updates, learn about upcoming dates to take a tour of the area, join the new Crosby Volunteer Crew, and make a donation to the effort at parkconnection.org/rlc.



“Our Mississippi River offers enormous opportunities for our entire community. As we continue rebuilding, leveraging its full potential is vital to our city’s future.” – Mayor Melvin Carter






PARTICIPATE

Explore the history, culture, and ecology of the Mississippi River through recreational activities, art events, virtual programming, educational programs, PaddleShare.org, and visitor centers.

Sign up for our newsletters to stay informed!




SUPPORT

Gifts support youth education, habitat restoration, and community programs in the national park while strengthening your commitment to preserve, protect, and enjoy the Mississippi River.

\$1,000
St. Anthony Falls Level

\$60
Family

\$35
Individual



ACTIVATE

Volunteers of all kinds are a crucial component in park operations, school programs, and habitat restoration. Volunteering is a fun and rewarding way to connect to your community while providing the public with a connection to the river.

parkconnection.org/volunteer

Artwork by graphic design volunteer Yana Cherepaishenskaya

Upper Post Preservation Underway

Dan Ott, Ph.D., Cultural Resource Program Manager,
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

After nearly 50 years of neglect and relative quiet, the Fort Snelling Upper Post is a very different place these days. Bustling with trades workers, excavators, dump trucks, cherry pickers, and other heavy machinery, a massive rehabilitation effort to preserve this National Historic Landmark got underway in June after decades of effort to find a new use for the retired military base. The long-awaited Upper Post Flats project will repurpose the 26 remaining historic buildings at the Upper Post into 206 low-income housing units, while revitalizing and beautifying the Upper Post's overgrown landscape. When complete, the site will include walking trails and signs that interpret the significance of the Upper Post in U.S. and Native American history.

As a physical artifact of the river's connection to the larger strokes of national history, Fort Snelling is one the national park's most significant cultural resources. The Fort is connected to the period of American expansion and mobilization for major wars including the Civil War, Spanish-American War, and both World Wars. The Fort is also an artifact of Indigenous dispossession as a base of military operations placed at the center of Dakota homelands. The Fort played a significant role in solidifying U.S. relationships with Dakota and Ojibwe nations, treaty-making, and eventually the forced exile of Dakota following the Dakota War of 1862.

While many people know of the rebuilt 1820s walled-fort operated by the Minnesota Historical Society since the 1960s, it is lesser known that the Fort became quite a bit larger around the turn of the twentieth century with the creation of the Upper Post. The Upper Post was built in the early 1880s as a hub for the United States Army in the Upper Midwest. It included hundreds of buildings sprawling



The Band Barracks is one of 26 buildings that are being rehabilitated for low-income housing as part of the project. It has been largely abandoned since the 1970s.

along the blufftop of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. At one point it housed about 4,000 military personnel at a time. Decommissioned after World War II, the Upper Post has long been neglected as many of its facilities have been demolished for new development or otherwise abandoned. In 2006, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the Upper Post as one of its 11 Most Endangered Places.

Now owned by the state of Minnesota, the Department of Natural Resources has been working with the National Park Service to plan a new life for the Upper Post since the 1990s. Entertaining a variety of proposals and navigating myriad regulatory hurdles over the years, in 2015 the DNR finally received a viable offer from Dominion, a Plymouth-based developer, to adapt the historic site's numerous buildings into multi-family housing. After almost a half-decade of planning among the developer, DNR, NPS, and the State Historic Preservation Office to ensure that site plans would balance developer needs with preservation requirements, the project finally broke ground in June 2021. The rehabilitated Upper Post is set to open for tenants to move in and for visitors to tour the campus in September 2023.

DAYTON

RAMSEY



MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA

SITES ALONG THE RIVER

- 1 Mississippi Gateway Regional Park
- 2 Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park
- 3 River Park
- 4 Manomin County Park
- 5 North Mississippi Regional Park
- 6 Mississippi Watershed Management Org.
- 7 Boom Island Park
- 8 Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam Visitor Center open during summer months
- 9 Stone Arch Bridge
- 10 Mill Ruins Park
- 11 Bohemian Flats Park
- 12 Minnehaha Regional Park
- 13 Coldwater Spring (Mni Owe Sni)
- 14 Historic Fort Snelling at Bdote
- 15 Fort Snelling State Park
- 16 Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park
- 17 Pickerel Lake
- 18 Lilydale-Harriet Island Regional Park
- 19 Mississippi River Visitor Center Located at the Science Museum of Minnesota
- 20 Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary
- 21 Lions Levee Park
- 22 Pine Bend Bluffs SNA
- 23 Grey Cloud Dunes SNA
- 24 Spring Lake Park Reserve
- 25 Hastings Riverfront
- 26 Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center (WI)



MINNEAPOLIS



SAINT PAUL

MINNESOTA RIVER

HASTINGS





OCTOBER 2021 - APRIL 2022

EVENT CALENDAR

OCTOBER

- 9 Paddle With A Ranger: Fall Colors @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 9 Global Bird Day @ Coldwater Spring
- 15 Bark Ranger Day @ Coldwater Spring
- 15 **Volunteer:** Seed Collecting @ Pine Bend Bluffs SNA
- 16 Paddle With A Ranger: Fall Colors @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 16 Hike With A Ranger: Fossils @ Shadow Falls Park
- 17 Bike With A Ranger: River Learning Center @ Hidden Falls Park
- 23 Bike With A Ranger: Fall Colors @ Harriet Island Regional Park

NOVEMBER

- 20 Hike With A Ranger: Prairie Seed ID @ Coldwater Spring

JANUARY

- 8 Hike With A Ranger @ Crosby Farm Regional Park
- 22 Winter Tree ID Hike @ Crosby Farm Regional Park
- 29 Hike With A Ranger @ Crosby Farm Regional Park

FEBRUARY

- 5 **Volunteer:** Hike and Maintenance @ Katharine Ordway Field Station
- 19 Hike With A Ranger @ Crosby Farm Regional Park

MARCH

- 26 Welcome Back The Herons @ Marshall Terrace Park

APRIL

- 16 Junior Ranger Day @ Mississippi River Visitor Center
- 23 **Volunteer:** Citywide Spring Cleanup @ Indian Mounds Regional Park

Go on a Family Tree Walk at the Mississippi River Visitor Center every Friday – Sunday. All events are subject to change, so please check our full calendar for up-to-date information and to register at www.parkconnection.org/events. We hope to see you out on the river!

To be added or removed from the mailing list, please contact info@parkconnection.org or call 651-291-8164.

To contact the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, call 651-293-0200 or visit nps.gov/miss

Photos in this newsletter courtesy of the National Park Service and Mississippi Park Connection, unless otherwise noted.



MISSISSIPPI PARK CONNECTION

Discover your river

Mississippi Park Connection is the official nonprofit partner to the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. We seek to enrich the life of the river and the lives of all who experience the national park through youth education programs, environmental stewardship volunteerism, and outdoor community engagement events.



The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is a 72-mile national park, binding together more than 85 state, regional and local parks from Coon Rapids to Hastings. The purpose of the 54,000-acre river park,

established by Congress in 1988, is to preserve, protect and enhance the significant values of the waters and land of the Mississippi River corridor.

MISSISSIPPI PARK CONNECTION

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