

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEWS

SPRING / SUMMER 2022



Let the River Excite You

Katie Nyberg, Executive Director, Mississippi Park Connection
Tucker Blythe, Superintendent, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

There are so many new, updated, or expanded programs to be excited about this season.

Mystery on the Mississippi, our popular interactive theater performance in partnership with Fearless Comedy Productions, is finally returning from a pandemic-hiatus with a completely different outdoor location and brand new format. Participants will walk through a progressive theater experience on the St. Anthony Falls lock wall while influencing the script by interacting with the cast.

BIPOC in the Outdoors is entering its third year of programming and events that provide intentional affinity spaces for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to engage with parks in empowering, restorative, and joyous ways. The program continues to grow and adapt to community input.

Mississippi Park Connection is proud to support Twin Cities Pride's newest event: *OUT Venture*, a tapestry of Minnesota outdoor activities, hosted by the LGBTQIA+ community and allies. Come to the event to enjoy Mississippi River Paddle Share, learn about



the NPS/MPC volunteer program, and discover other recreational opportunities along the river. The outdoor festival also features a Rainbow Run 5K, beer garden, food stations, DJ, and a drag show.

Visitors at St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam can now take home river-related items from Mississippi Park Connection's new gift shop, located in the observation deck of the visitor's center. The shop features National Park Service themed gifts as well as local art and items inspired by the river. All proceeds will support operations, staff, and programming at the lock.

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area also welcomes a new permanent park ranger to the interpretive team, Rhys Joaquin. Ranger Rhys follows longtime friend and Ranger Sharon Stiteler, who recently moved to Denali National Park. We look forward to getting to know Rhys, who has experience as an interpreter, educator, and volunteer coordinator at Death Valley, Mount Rainier, Big Cypress, and Yosemite national parks.

While staff officially returned to the office on March 28 (with many still teleworking), we want to acknowledge and thank the staff and volunteers who continued to serve the public at the visitor centers and other public programs over the last two years. We are excited to safely see more of you and hope you will celebrate the season by joining us on a program, planning your own Mississippi River Paddle Share kayaking adventure, or volunteering with us along the river!

Quiet Respite in an Urban Setting

Callie Sacarelos, Communications and Marketing Coordinator,
Mississippi Park Connection

Mississippi West Regional Park offers spectacular views of the Mississippi River and is the only park within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area with canoe campsites. The most recent addition to the national park corridor, this park features a public-access boat launch that gives guests a different viewpoint of this majestic river. With rolling prairies and mature forest, you will feel immersed in this beautiful 273-acre park through its nature and wildlife.

Visitors might be graced with the presence of deer, wild turkeys, bald eagles, migratory waterfowl, and songbirds. The 2.36 miles of ADA-compliant paved trails wind through pin oaks, cottonwood, silver maple, and hackberry that provide spectacular color changes in the fall. During winter, a portion of the trail is plowed for winter walking, and visitors can snowshoe off-trail. The park also has four observation areas, shore fishing opportunities, more than 100 acres of restored prairie, and parking lots with ADA spots.

Mississippi Park Connection was glad to partner with the Minnesota DNR, REI, and the City of Ramsey to construct the free canoe campsites for public enjoyment. They are on the small island adjacent to the park on a first-come first-served basis. Each site has a cleared tent space, fire ring, picnic table, and access to a vault toilet, making this park a quiet respite in an urban setting.

Photo courtesy of Anoka County Parks

Make connections and find perspective through community science

Alanna Elder, Minnesota GreenCorps Member, Mississippi Park Connection

Observers of cherry trees in Kyoto, Japan have been writing down flowering dates since the year 800. These data offer a rare perspective: the changes and shifts over time in a single plant species. This echoes 7,000 miles away in Washington, D.C., where people wait each spring for cherry trees to bloom on the National Mall.

The study of the timing of plants' and animals' annual life cycles, also known as phenology, helps build understanding of complicated changes taking place in the natural world. Studying phenology along the Mississippi River gives us a unique perspective on changes that are taking place in the floodplain.

Currently, there are about a dozen volunteers following the phenology of trees in forests at Crosby Farm Regional Park. This work is one of many ways to see the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area from new angles. There are other ways to observe phenology in our park. Volunteers are using their observations of the park's wildlife to support a broader understanding of our changing climate.

Monarch butterflies are impressive, important, and in decline. Volunteers across the continent peer at milkweed plants to find out when and where monarch caterpillar populations will be found each year. Here at the park, the frequency of monarchs can be an indicator of precipitation.

Finally, we are beginning to track a new species this year: beavers. Like humans, beavers can have a big impact on ecosystems. Chewed logs, or bite marks on a trunk can help biologists understand how beavers are behaving in the park and surrounding areas. This in turn helps guide our habitat-restoration efforts.



Creating Intentional Spaces

Tamara Few, Program Coordinator at Mississippi Park Connection, was recently honored as the 2022 Courageous Innovator at the Environmental Initiative Awards for her role in creating *BIPOC in the Outdoors!* The awards annually recognize and celebrate people and projects working in partnership at the nexus of a healthy environment, a prosperous economy, and an equitable society.

BIPOC in the Outdoors is a Twin Cities movement that centers the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and their relationship to nature, land, and each other. The events range from habitat restoration to recreating on and along the Mississippi River, to educational workshops, and simply being in community with others while in nature. Tamara created *BIPOC in the Outdoors* in fall 2020 after collaborating on BIPOC events with Asha Shoffner, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation's Environmental and Outdoor Education Coordinator, who started the initiative.



The award recognizes Tamara as a Courageous Innovator for creating programs and events that provide intentional spaces for BIPOC community members to engage with parks in ways that are empowering, restorative, and joyous. These spaces allow community members to freely connect, learn, and simply exist without the fear or pressure of being alone in the outdoors or the threat of experiencing discrimination. Tamara believes in the representation of BIPOC narratives and people in outdoor spaces and organizations to shift the paradigm of who belongs in nature.

The Courageous Innovator evaluation team said in a statement, “Tamara’s vision and clear sense of purpose drives her work to increase access for BIPOC communities to public parks and outdoor programming. Staff is highlighting Tamara’s leadership style which is people-centered, collaborative, and caring. Tamara is making a difference both through the direct impact on those individuals who are touched by her work and by the model of leadership she embodies.”

Tamara also co-coordinates the Mississippi River Fellowship, a 10-week paid summer fellowship for diverse and underrepresented young adults to explore the different branches of the National Park Service. The fellows work directly with National Park Service rangers, Mississippi Park Connection staff, and other park partners to help facilitate educational programs, habitat restoration events, and wildlife monitoring on the Mississippi River.



Joy and Wonder in the Outdoors

Anna Waugh, Development & Communications Director,
Mississippi Park Connection

Imagine a child in the sunshine running through a forest, joyfully grinning from ear-to-ear. We know there are some kinds of joy that aren't explained by science. And yet, the atmosphere of the wind whistling and sun baking and the puddles just begging to be jumped in is the perfect environment in which to learn science.



We have many programs for students on the river, and one of my favorites is Take Me to the River. In the fall of each year, we support fourth graders at Hidden Falls Regional Park in connecting to the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The program focuses primarily on the cultural history of the river, but also addresses geography, geology, and physical science. Students rotate through three activity stations led by National Park Service

rangers and Mississippi Park Connection River Educators, including orienteering & geocaching, shelter building, and fire building.

Along the Mississippi River, students are experimenting with real world tools and concepts that trigger learning in a way that technology can never beat. That's what we offer at the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area: field trips that are immersive and fun for students, steeped in learning, opening eyes to a whole new world of wonder. Make a gift to support Ticket to Ride, our school scholarships program!

Ways to Get Involved



PARTICIPATE

Explore the history, culture, and ecology of the Mississippi River through recreational activities, art events, 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

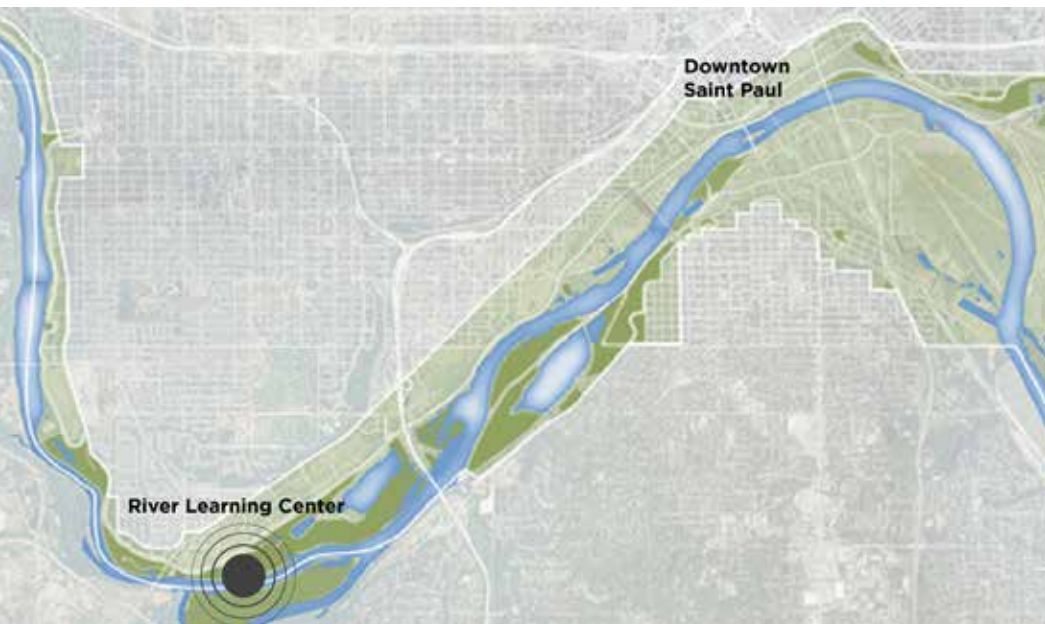
Volunteers of all kinds are a crucial component in park operations, school programs, and habitat restoration. Volunteering is a fun and rewarding way to connect to your community while providing the public with a connection to the river.

parkconnection.org/volunteer

Community Building at the Mississippi River Learning Center

The City of Saint Paul and Great River Passage Conservancy have hired New York-based W Architecture & Landscape Architecture to lead a schematic design and community engagement process for a new Mississippi River Learning Center and National Park Service Headquarters at Crosby Farm Regional Park. The Conservancy has also contracted with Full Circle Indigenous Design to collaborate with Minnesota's four tribal nations and the local native community on the project.

Schematic design is identifying significant Dakota sites, engaging the community, and determining the roles and responsibilities of partners on the site. The National Park Service, Mississippi Park Connection, and Wilderness Inquiry are supporting the development of on-site programs for youth, schools, families, and the public. Please consider attending the next community workshop in June at the link below. This will be one of several opportunities to provide feedback.



More info: greatriverpassage.org/projects/river-learning-center

MAY - SEPTEMBER EVENT CALENDAR

MAY

- 21 OUT Venture @ Boom Island Park
- 28 St. Anthony Falls Visitor Center Season Opener
- 28 Mississippi River Paddle Share Season Opener @ paddleshare.org

JUNE

- 9 Adaptive Paddle @ Pickerel Lake (Lilydale Regional Park)
- 11 Paddle With A Ranger @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 12 Two Paddles: Post Paddle Party @ Boom Island Park
- 14 Paddle With A Ranger @ Pickerel Lake (Lilydale Regional Park)
- 18+19 Stone Arch Bridge Festival @ St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam
- 22 Park After Dark @ Mni Owe Sni / Coldwater Spring
- 24+25 Mystery on the Mississippi @ St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam
- 29 Paddle With A Ranger @ Minneapolis Heron Rookery

JULY

- 6 Paddle With A Ranger @ Minneapolis Heron Rookery
- 9 Paddle With A Ranger @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 12 Big River Awards @ Fort Snelling State Park
- 14 Adaptive Paddle @ Pickerel Lake (Lilydale Regional Park)
- 15+16 Mystery on the Mississippi @ St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam
- 21 Volunteer Appreciation Event @ Harriet Island
- 23 Aquatennial @ St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam
- 26 Park After Dark @ Crosby Farm Regional Park

AUGUST

- 6 Paddle With A Ranger @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 13 Paddle With A Ranger @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 20 Paddle With A Ranger @ Vermillion River Bottoms
- 23 Park After Dark @ Crosby Farm Regional Park
- 30 Picnic For The Park Annual Fundraiser @ Harriet Island

SEPTEMBER

- 13 Park After Dark @ Crosby Farm Regional Park
- 24 National Public Lands Day

Visit the National Park Service booth during the Minnesota State Fair! All events are subject to change. Current information and registration is available at parkconnection.org/events. We hope to see you out on the river!

Reconsidering Restoration Language

Cory Mohn, Park Ranger, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

There is an Indigenous-led discussion taking place in the scientific and land management communities about the ethics surrounding the use of certain words. Terms like “invasive species,” “aggressive,” and “crowding” are harsh, militaristic, and unflattering, indicating that certain species are universally bad. But, all species are simply trying to live wherever they find themselves. Also, the word “eradicate” implies an end to this work. When some volunteers realize that we can’t completely remove a species, they can become angry at the plant and the people who introduced it. Our work is rarely to eradicate anything but instead to build processes and networks that can monitor and improve our ecosystems as a whole.

When we remove a species, it is helpful to understand the natural process that we are emulating. We must also make a distinction between talking about a species in general versus a specific occurrence within a particular habitat. An example in our park is sumac. When we remove sumac in certain prairies, we are emulating the natural fires that would have kept it in check that no longer take place. Sumac belongs in our park. A species’ native status alone shouldn’t determine how we manage it.

Partners at Lower Phalen Creek Project realized their habitat-restoration language was affecting them negatively, so they changed it to have better relationships with what they call their plant relatives. We could benefit from doing the same as we work in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. This is not a call to change what we are doing but rather to adjust how we talk about it and share the history that brought the species here in the first place. We should retire the phrase “invasive species” because it suggests a conscious effort to be malicious, a trait that very few



Sumac growing at Grey Cloud Dunes SNA. Photo courtesy of Cory Mohn.

species actually possess. An alternative phrase could be “potentially problematic species,” while only referring to it as a “problematic species” in situations where it is causing harm. Some prefer the term “displaced species” to acknowledge the role people played in the situation.

Changes to language can shift attitudes and behaviors. There is an effort right now to rebrand “invasive carp” to “Silverfin” in an effort to make the fish sound more enticing as a potential food source. This comes on the heels of another change that was led locally by members of the Asian American community to change the name of the fish from “Asian carp” to “invasive carp.” The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service changed the name at the federal level last April.

Choosing words that encourage empathy and belonging in parks will help make programs and parks more welcoming and inclusive. Everyone should be comfortable doing the work that brings us closer to the Mississippi River.

DAYTON

RAMSEY



MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA

SITES ALONG THE RIVER

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

ICONS



Mississippi River Paddle Share Stations
Rent a kayak at www.paddleshare.org

MINNEAPOLIS

SAINT PAUL

MINNESOTA
RIVER

HASTINGS





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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