



MISSISSIPPI River Fund

2008 – 2009 Annual Report

MISSISSIPPI River Fund

“America’s Best Idea,” the Ken Burns series on PBS, is a powerful reminder of how our National Parks came into being. Protecting our country’s natural treasures for everyone to enjoy is our touchstone to democracy, our magnificent legacy.

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is one of “America’s Best Ideas.” This urban National Park is “our Grand Canyon,” says Park Superintendent Paul Labovitz. “We have the Mississippi River, known internationally as one of the great rivers of the world.”

Kids don’t have to go to Yellowstone or Yosemite to have a National Park experience—they can do it right here in our urban National Park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Visitors only need to take the city bus to the river. Our aim is to provide experiences that transform the way people perceive the Mississippi River and its watershed.

On a practical level, a non-traditional National Park in the middle of a city has many advantages. As the National Park Service looks to the next century of service (NPS turns 100 in 2016), parks like ours will redefine the relevance of the park system to a new and changing population.

One thing is certain about the next 100 years: private philanthropy through organizations like the Mississippi River Fund will be crucial in connecting people with America’s treasures and protecting them for future generations. We can’t do it without you. Every year, private contributions to the Mississippi River Fund support education programs, habitat restoration, recreation opportunities, and clean water. These funds also leverage hundreds of thousands of local, state, and federal dollars to protect and preserve our treasure—the Mississippi River.

We would like to dedicate this annual report to the many brave individuals, past, present, and future, that will stand up for the Mississippi River. We also encourage you to discover all of Minnesota’s National Park units, and their citizen champions, by viewing a new production from Twin Cities Public Television. To view a schedule of “Minnesota’s National Park Legacy,” visit www.tpt.org/parks.

Sincerely,

Beth Dooley
Co-Chair

Ellen Sturgis
Co-Chair

Katie Nyberg
Executive Director



Beth Dooley and Ellen Sturgis



Katie Nyberg

Learn more about how you can support the Mississippi River Fund at missriverfund.org.

Photos Courtesy of Allison Newhouse

As I reflect on the past year as the Superintendent of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, two things come to mind: Never underestimate the power of partnerships and never underestimate the power of the river to change people. Thanks to our many partners in the community, especially the Mississippi River Fund, we have launched new programs that increase our knowledge of the river's ecosystem and provide the community with more experiences to enjoy this national treasure.



Paul Labovitz

Engaging urban youth and encouraging the next generation of Americans to appreciate National Parks is top of mind to National Park managers throughout the country. With a renewed focus on the value of urban parks to serve the community, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is positioned to play a prominent role in the National Park Service's next century.

We've been focusing much of our attention on getting people to and on the river; particularly young people who live in the city. Our partnership with the Mississippi River Fund and Wilderness Inquiry has delivered a great Mississippi River experience to thousands of Twin Cities kids through a new program, Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures. The Mississippi River Fund provides the critical funding piece for this program and we rely on dozens of other agencies like the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to provide access for the canoe and camping program.

In addition to the UWCA, I'm proud of the many collaborations we have engaged in over the past year. Together we have demonstrated the value and power of collaboration with parks and their friends. Our recent accomplishment with the Twin Cities Public Television "Minnesota's National Park Legacy" production brought together our great state's National Parks and programs. Riding the wave of the new Ken Burns series, we were able to bring this story closer to home in Minnesota and focus on the great places here that share national significance throughout the National Park system. This collaboration demonstrated that the parks and their friends can combine resources to accomplish incredible things in the community.

As we work towards the goals and actions identified in our strategic plan, it is satisfying to know that this park's best friends at the Mississippi River Fund continue at our side as our partner in protecting the nationally significant resources of our great Mississippi River.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Labovitz".

Paul Labovitz
Superintendent
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Volunteer Spotlight

Target Promotes Team Building Through Restoration

The Mississippi River Fund works closely with the National Park's Volunteers-in-Parks program to coordinate group volunteer opportunities along the river. Last year, 3,400 volunteers spent 18,000 hours restoring land in the National Park. For many corporate groups, the experience is a way to give back to the community and promote team bonding.



Photo Courtesy of Target

"Volunteering is a big part of Target's culture," says Wendy Darling, Project Manager for Target. "Volunteer activities for the Mississippi River are part of the legacy that we leave for the community."

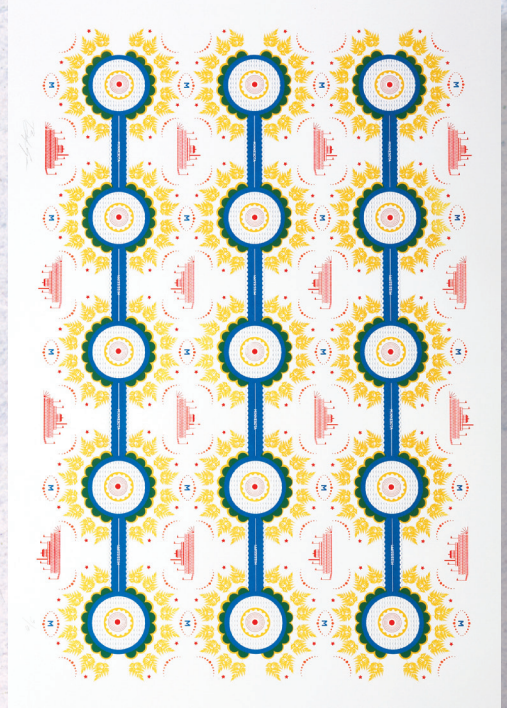
Program Highlights 2008 – 2009

Art for the River

On September 17, 2008, the Mississippi River Fund teamed up with Minneapolis design firm Duffy & Partners, who hosted an event celebrating art and the Mississippi River at the Mill City Museum. Duffy's nine designers each created an original piece of art inspired by the river. Limited edition prints were sold at the event, with proceeds benefiting the Mississippi River Fund. Mayors Rybak and Coleman, of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, who are trustees of the fund, welcomed guests and spoke of their shared dedication to our great river.

Water Quality Initiative

With generous support from The McKnight Foundation, the Mississippi River Fund has initiated a new water quality project with the National Park Service. The Mississippi River Forum kicked off on April 24, 2009, with a daylong conference that brought together more than 120 people whose work affects the Mississippi River. Now a monthly breakfast series, the goal of the River Forum is to ensure that those in the position of impacting water quality are sharing information, knowledge, and lessons learned about how best to achieve a healthy Mississippi River.



"Minnesota Mississippi" by Brooke Engdahl

CREATING FUTURE RIVER STEWARDS

We fear the national trend of declining participation in outdoor activities will result in negative consequences for America's future environmental stewards, the youth of today. In order to promote a better understanding of the world they live in we need to provide more opportunities for our children and their families to participate in meaningful experiences in the natural world.

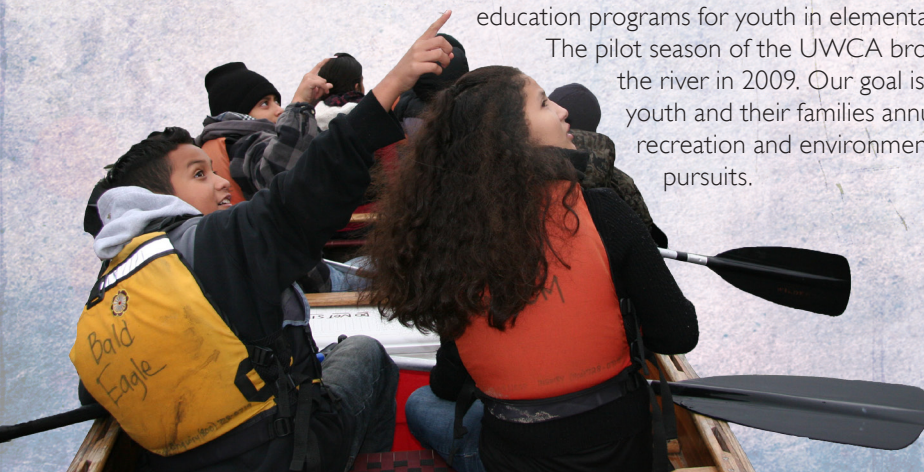
Big River Journey & Journey to the Falls

Now in its 13th year, Big River Journey continues to provide on-the-river learning opportunities for more than 5,000 area youth annually. For most of these students (nearly half of whom are on Mississippi River Fund scholarships) this is their first time on the river. Service learning activities take the program one step further, with students applying their new knowledge to clean-ups, habitat restoration events, and water quality projects. In 2009, Journey to the Falls, which focuses history and literacy, went from a pilot program to a permanent part of the Big River Journey program with the support of the Mississippi River Fund.

Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures: UWCA

Through a unique partnership between Wilderness Inquiry, the National Park Service, and the Mississippi River Fund, we have created an outdoor education and recreation program on the Mississippi River—complete with guided day trips, overnight camping, and environmental education programs for youth in elementary, middle, and high school.

The pilot season of the UWCA brought over 4,000 kids out on the river in 2009. Our goal is to reach more than 10,000 youth and their families annually—encouraging outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship as life-long pursuits.





MISSISSIPPI RIVER HEALTH WATCH

The Mississippi River faces many challenges, from pollution to invasive species to climate change. The National Park Service and its partners need to know more about the Mississippi River in order to protect the river in the future. To detect and address issues that may harm the river, we need to establish a baseline of data and engage in long-term monitoring of the river. The Mississippi River Fund has established a new Vital Signs program that will watch for early signals indicating that our national park could be experiencing environmental change. Early detection of potential problems like new invasive species allows National Park managers to take steps to restore the ecological health of park resources before serious damage occurs.

BioBlitz Kicks Off Vital Signs Program

In order to expand our knowledge about what's happening in the river, we need significant help from scientists, naturalists, and everyday citizens. In June we teamed up with the Bell Museum of Natural History to host a BioBlitz in the National Park. Designed as equal parts contest, festival, educational event, and scientific

endeavor, BioBlitz brought together scientists from across the state with the general public in a race against time to complete a 24-hour biological survey of Crosby Park on the Mississippi River. Volunteers of all ages worked alongside biologists and park rangers to collect plants and insects, and live-trap animals, which were identified before being released back into the wild. The survey counted 80 species of birds, 19 mollusks (including 2 endangered species), 110 species of insects, and 241 species of plants. The surprise discovery of river otters in Crosby Park's lakes spurred a summer monitoring project for the entire 72-mile boundary of the National Park.

River Studies

In an effort to boost monitoring of the park's wildlife, the Mississippi River Fund supported three river studies this year, focusing on bald eagles, river otters, and waterfowl. By partnering with the National Park Service, Audubon Minnesota, and "citizen scientists" from the community, the fund is able to focus more attention on the river. Animals that rely on the river for food and habitat can tell us much about the health of the National Park.



The Bald Eagle study found 25 active nests in the park boundary in 2009, up from 14 just three years earlier, marking a significant and exciting increase in the eagle population on the river.



This spring, the Mississippi River Fund kick-started the Vital Signs program by purchasing a boat to be used for conducting river studies, stewardship, and education programs that help monitor the health of our National Park. Many thanks to our donors who made a special gift in support of our "Jon Boat Campaign" this past spring, finally putting park rangers on the river!

Contributors July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009

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The McKnight Foundation

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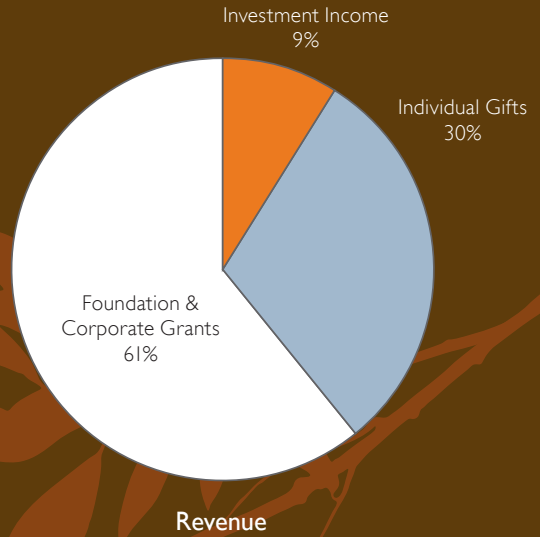
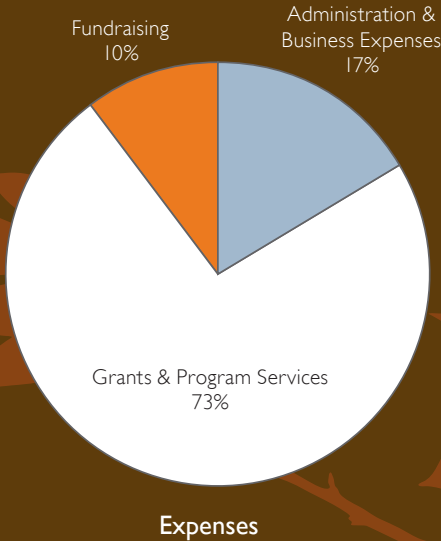
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Financials



Expenses

Administration & Business Expenses	\$46,600
Grants & Program Services	\$206,504
Fundraising	\$28,515
TOTAL	\$281,619

Revenue

Investment Income	\$19,469
Individual Gifts	\$64,447
Foundation & Corporate Grants	\$130,180
Court-ordered Restitution Payment*	\$252,501
TOTAL	\$466,597

* The fund received a court-ordered restitution that resulted from a Clean Water Act violation. Funds will be used to support new stewardship and education programs, including Vital Signs and the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program.

Donor Spotlight

REI: 360 Degree Partner with the Mississippi River Fund

REI has been a strong partner with the Mississippi River Fund over the past several years. REI is often one of our first partners on a new project, providing start-up funds and assistance for Seed Starters and the volunteer program. REI's early support also helped us launch the UWCA project with Minneapolis summer schools and gave a big boost to our Bike with a Ranger program.

In addition to providing crucial support for the fund and many other groups, REI provides in-store promotion for events, as well as donations of in-kind gear. REI staff is also on the ground with us during many of our habitat restoration events, providing cool t-shirts and food for volunteers.

"The Mississippi River Fund's effort to get people out on the river is a strong match with REI's community focus," says Mikaela Kramer, Outreach Specialist at REI. "We want to ensure that the next generation has a connection to the natural spaces we all enjoy. In addition to providing grants, our stewardship work involves employees and members, and extends into the larger community through partnerships."



Photo Courtesy of REI

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About the Mississippi River Fund

Our mission is to strengthen the enduring connection between people and the Mississippi River and build community support for our National Park.

We support stewardship and community engagement programs that fill the gap between federal funding realities and core programs of the park, including:

- **Education Programs** that enhance understanding and appreciation of the river.
- **Water Quality** protection that is vital to the health of the river and our community.
- **Habitat Restoration** that preserves and protects the park's globally significant resources.
- **Our Shared Heritage** and the significant role our National Park plays in American history and culture.

Sign up for e-news and learn more about the Mississippi River Fund at missriverfund.org!