



**MISSISSIPPI PARK
CONNECTION**
Discover your river

Annual Report
2016-2017



We go to the river to find tranquility, healing, and fun. The focus of much of our work over the past year has been to create access to river-inspired experiences, whether they are on a quiet stretch of the river or in the bustling heart of downtown Minneapolis.

Perhaps no program exemplifies our commitment to access quite like Mississippi River Paddle Share. A ground-breaking partnership with the National Park Service allows people to experience kayaking on the Mighty Mississippi without their own equipment or transportation. Thanks to the incredible partnership with local government as well as philanthropic support from the outdoor recreation industry, 2,200 people have experienced the joy of paddling on our country's most iconic river this year.

But when we talk about access we are not just talking about trails, boat launches, and other recreational opportunities. We also mean access to high quality public programs on the river that serve thousands of people each year. We are proud to support national park visitor center operations at the Science Museum in St. Paul and at St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam in Minneapolis. Financial contributions from our community along with great partnerships with businesses like Padelford Riverboats and the Minneapolis Queen make it possible for 18,000 kids in our community to have ranger-led experiences as well.

We seek to inspire people of all backgrounds to discover, explore, and cherish our national park. We believe that by empowering others to develop their personal relationships with the river, we cultivate dedicated visitors, advocates, and stewards of our national park. And you, in turn, inspire us.

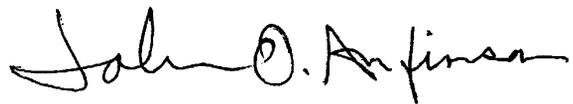

Katie Nyberg
Executive Director


James Eastman
Board Chair

What's your favorite spot on the Mississippi River? Maybe you look forward to hearing the rush of Saint Anthony Falls? Maybe you love a quiet hike by Coldwater Spring in the early morning, as the sun's first rays hit the tops of prairie wildflowers. Perhaps you start your daily commute by walking over a river bridge and watching the barge traffic. It is the simple moments like these that remind me why I treasure this park.

For many in our community, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area may be one of the only national parks they ever visit. It is their reference point for what National Parks are and how we should care for them. They can certainly recognize that America's greatest river deserves a national park, given its importance to our national heritage and identity. Volunteering to remove buckthorn and contributing to the future health of our forest canopy can deepen their sense of belonging to this place. For others, visiting the Mississippi River is a lifelong dream fulfilled. By visiting the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam Visitor Center they can learn about the Mississippi's navigation system or the origins of General Mills and Pillsbury Flour.

No matter their background or interest, the National Park Service is here to be a guide, teacher, and public servant to people on the river, and this work is richer because of our partnership with Mississippi Park Connection. Through MPC, we can increase equity of experience and access at our visitor centers and through educational, cultural and volunteer programs. MPC provides the connection for new generations to find a favorite destination that will bring them here again and again. And together, with you, we share a commitment to steward the river that is our common ground.



John Anfinson

Superintendent, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area



Photo by Eric Haugen.

Highlights and Accomplishments



Student Art inspired by the Mississippi River

630 students submitted works of art to the annual Big River Journey art contest. Winners of the contest celebrated with their families at Fort Snelling State Park.

Seedsters Plant for the Future

A new volunteer program brought volunteers young and old to the park to start seeds during the winter months that we later planted in parks along the river. Volunteers gave nearly **1,000** hours to the endeavor and grew plants such as Cone Flower, Prairie Onion, and even Kentucky Coffee Tree.

seedsters

“Explore, Learn, and Protect!”

3,872 kids became junior rangers in 2017 by completing activity books at an NPS Visitor Center or partner site. The program, geared to 5-12 year olds, earns young park stewards a special badge and certificate to honor their commitment to explore, learn, and protect the Mississippi River.





Centennial Celebration at Carousel Park

On August 25, 2016, the National Park Service turned 100, and celebrated by taking over Carousel Park at the Minnesota State Fair. Fair-goers enjoyed dance shows, musical events, trivia, games, and more—all to celebrate the Centennial birthday.

“This fall I got the opportunity to be a river educator fellow with NPS, and it’s been eye opening and truly the best part of my summer. Inspiring inner city youth to get into our outdoor space is such a satisfying feeling. Mainly because I was once that youth and know exactly what it’s like to have my eyes opened to this new world.”

—Talon Benavides,
Mississippi River Educator Fellow

Mississippi River Educator Fellowship

With the long-term goal of making the outdoor industry representative of the diversity of our communities, the Mississippi River Educator Fellowship opens access to outdoor careers to the next generation of leaders of color. Now in its fourth year, the Mississippi River Educator Fellowship employed **3 college-aged interns** to work with middle and high school students during the summer 2017 season.

Mississippi River Visitor Center

New exhibits at the Mississippi River Visitor Center welcomed **191,448** visitors, increasing 300% between 2015 and 2017. The new exhibits at the Mississippi River Visitor Center were honored with a national award from the Public Lands Alliance for Outstanding Public Engagement.



Photo by Joey Tichenor.

Mississippi River Paddle Share

is a first-of-its kind opportunity for people who don't own a boat and want a safe and enjoyable river experience. Thanks to the leadership of the National Park Service and many partners, the program was open for its first full season in 2017.



“It’s brilliant,” says Bill Kueper, Vice President of Wenonah Canoe, Inc., “putting the paddle share stations near bike-share so that you can run your own shuttle, so that you can get back. I love the fact that it is point-to-point because doing loops is boring. We want to make sure that people have a great experience on the water. If people have a horrible experience on the water, then the activity will never turn into a pastime, the pastime will never turn into a passion, and the passion will never turn into a lifetime pursuit. So that first point of contact has to be a quality experience that they walk away from saying ‘wow, that was fun!’

This experience is here in Minnesota, in their backyard. It’s a really, really cool thing. We are just continuously excited to have been involved.”



2,179 Participants paddled during the 2017 summer season

(From a survey of 192 of those Mississippi River Paddle Share participants)

87% 1st time paddling on the Mississippi River

90% Say they feel more comfortable around the Mississippi River as a result of the Paddle Share program

99% Say they would recommend Mississippi River Paddle Share to a friend

Special thanks to our philanthropic partners who made Mississippi River Paddle Share possible in its first year: Current Designs and Wenonah Canoe, MTI Adventurewear, the National Park Foundation, NEEF, and REI. Also, a word of gratitude to our operational partners: City of St. Paul, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, Nice Ride MN, Three Rivers Park District, Wheel Fun Rentals, and to the outstanding initiative of our partners at the National Park Service.

“I love running along the river and picnicking along the river, so of course I loved paddling it too. It’s such a unique opportunity to get onto the water.”

—Paddle Share Participant



"Working with Mississippi Park Connection, the National Park Service and Saint Paul Forestry to create and operate a demonstration tree nursery on the Science Museum of Minnesota's Kellogg Plaza has been vital in helping to raise awareness of the importance of accelerating urban forest replanting efforts in the face of the emerald ash borer infestation."

—Pat Hamilton
Director of Global Change Initiatives, Science Museum of Minnesota



Plant for the Future

is a three-year initiative to address the loss of ash trees along the Mississippi River. By adding diversity to the forest, we will support the canopy through major shifts that are occurring in our environment.

Remaining flexible and embracing change are key to successfully navigating major shifts that are occurring in our environment. This is what drives our optimism for the Plant for the Future Campaign. The three-year initiative is addressing the loss of ash trees in Minnesota as emerald ash borer takes hold across the landscape. By reforesting and diversifying of our urban forest, we build resilience for its future.

“The Mississippi River’s majestic floodplain forests sequester hundreds of thousands of pounds of carbon right in our backyard, improve water quality, create habitat, and provide a backdrop to an urban national park that is worth saving for current and future generations. Planting trees with a clear plan for maintenance and community engagement is the best way to support the future of the floodplain canopy and to create resilience in the floodplain that will help our community to navigate the many challenges that lie ahead for the natural world.

Our partnership with Mississippi Park Connection was inspired by its active and collaborative approach to enriching the tree canopy along the Mississippi River. The Plant for the Future Campaign is a unique approach that engages local community and landowning partners, research scientists at the University of Minnesota, the National Park Service, and community members. We were proud to be the lead gift on this project and look forward to seeing its progress over the next three years.”

Kate Wolford
President, The McKnight Foundation



Plant for the Future—Year One Progress

Plant for the Future is supported by the following generous donors: The Alces Trust, EcoAdapt, The McKnight Foundation, the McNeely Foundation, the Mortenson Family Foundation, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency—Environmental Assistance Fund, the National Park Foundation, the National Park Service, Patagonia, Plantra, Inc., Tree Trust, and many Mississippi Park Connection members.

Students explore the Mississippi River

in a variety of programs with national park rangers, with support from a Mississippi Park Connection Ticket to Ride Scholarship.



22,402 Students explored the Mississippi River through a National Park program

64 Ticket to Ride Scholarships to schools provided **4,443 students** with opportunities to explore the river, a 30% increase over 2016

48 New teachers received training on river activities for the classroom

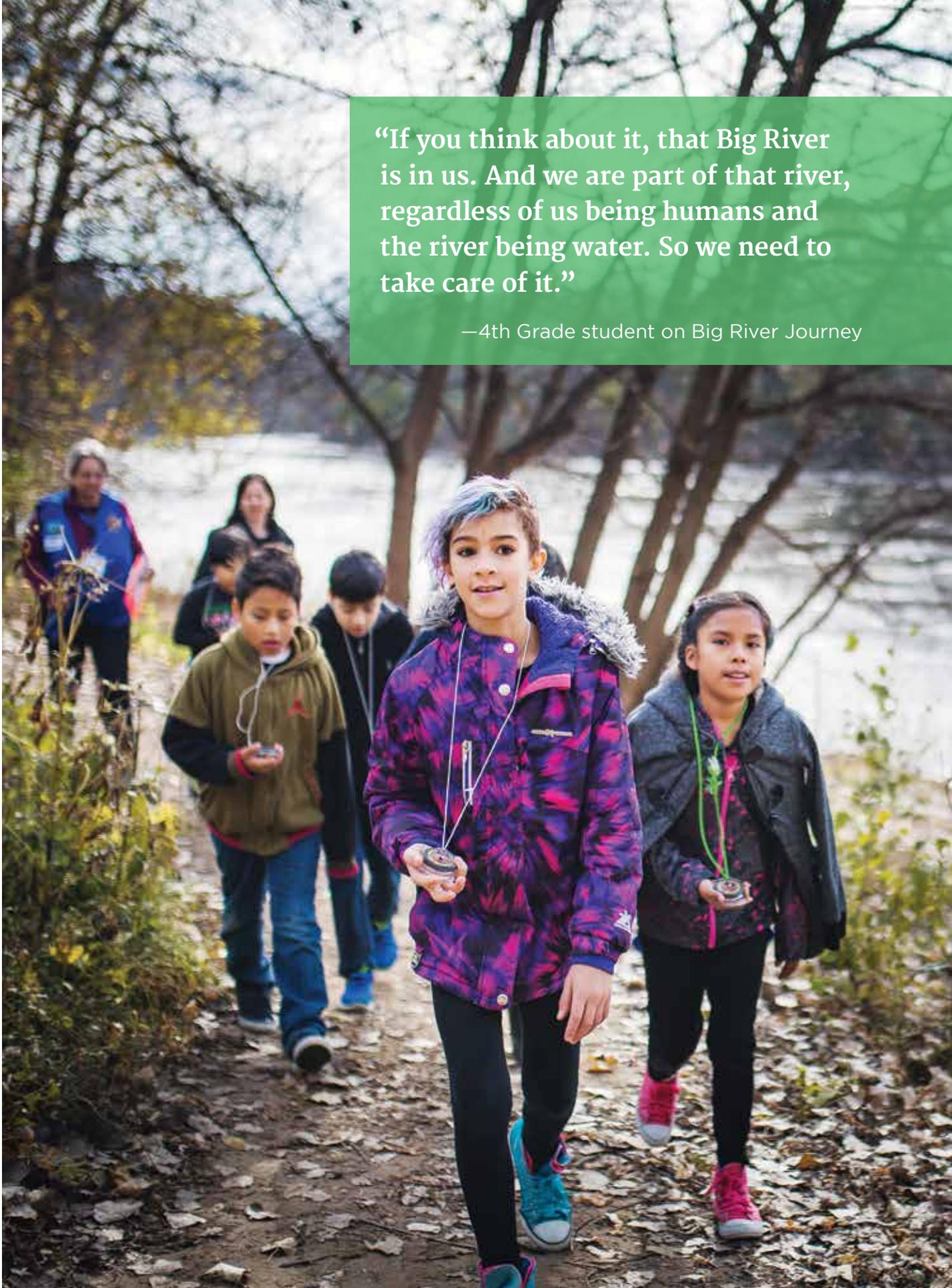
Students participated in the Big River Art Contest

“Many of our students’ parents work multiple jobs or don’t have transportation. Any field trips have to be funded outside of our school either through our own fundraising or by writing grants. I had a student last year tell me that he’d never been to the woods before going on the field trip, and so giving our kids, even in the city here, an experience that is outdoors, is important. We really appreciate the opportunity.

Some of the students who have a harder time in school, in terms of behavior, were totally engaged with the outdoor activities. Everyone was interested in building a shelter. It’s just great to see students who sometimes struggle in school or follow basic rules at school really wanting to be involved.

We have found that we’ve been asked to spend more and more of our time, more and more of our day, on writing. Things like science get squeezed out. Hands on ways to get our kids involved in any of the science concepts is definitely something that we look for in choosing a field trip.”

Whitney Ramirez
4th and 5th Grade Teacher
Wellstone School



“If you think about it, that Big River is in us. And we are part of that river, regardless of us being humans and the river being water. So we need to take care of it.”

—4th Grade student on Big River Journey

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Mississippi Park Connection thanks the 5,016 volunteers who gave their time and talents for the betterment of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area in 2017.



Artists Aaron Dysart and Andrea Carlson brightened the 49-foot wall of the St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam during Illuminate the Lock this fall.

Thanks to support from [Northern.Lights.mn](#), the National Park Service, and The Soap Factory, with support from the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board, and the US Army Corps of Engineers for making these special events possible.

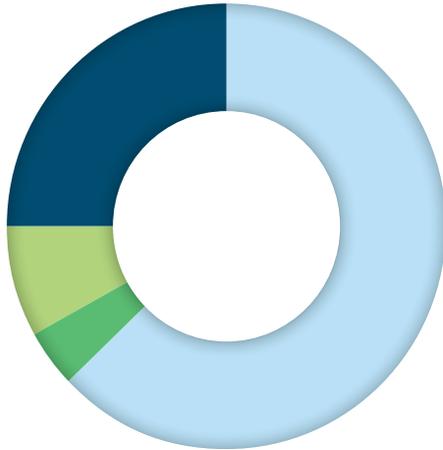
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Photo by Dan Marshall Productions.

Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

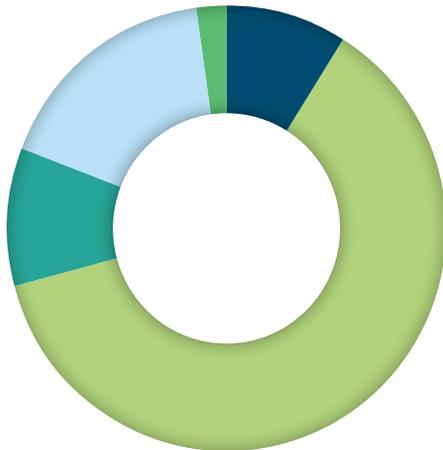


Financials



Expenses

■ Program Services	\$515,580
■ Fundraising	\$30,864
■ Administration	\$66,447
■ Capital Expenses (Paddle Share)	\$199,623
TOTAL	\$812,514



Revenue

■ Individual Gifts	\$73,886
■ Foundation and Corporate Grants	\$527,708
■ Government Grants	\$81,962
■ Endowment Distribution	\$141,787
■ Other	\$22,476
TOTAL	\$847,819

Some contributions will be used for projects in the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

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