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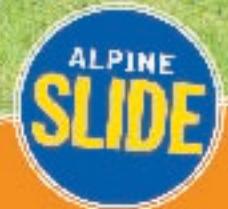
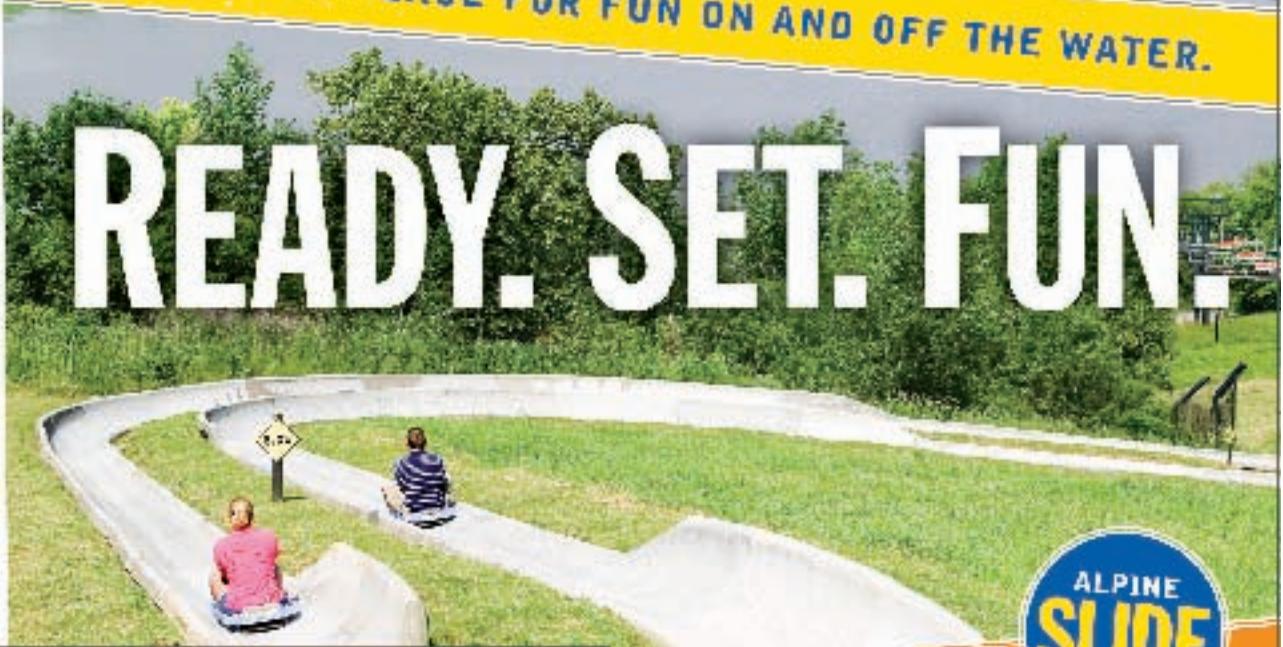
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July-August 2006

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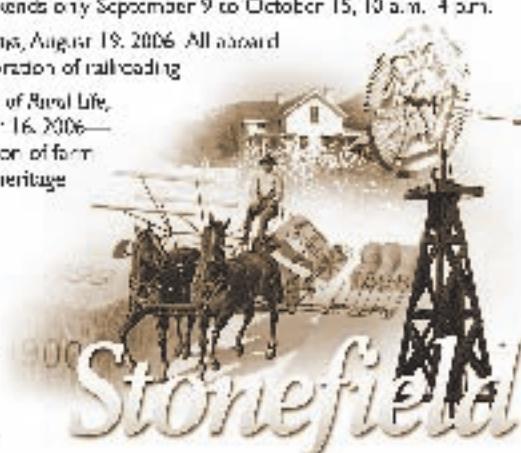


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From the Riverbank

Reggie McLeod
Editor/Publisher

PUNISHERS AND FREELoadERS

For centuries fishermen filled their boats with cod from the northwest Atlantic. Bigger boats, bigger nets and sonar led to overfishing, until the population collapsed in the early 1990s. The collapse killed an industry and a way of life, plunging many communities on the east coast of Canada and New England into poverty.

It didn't happen all of a sudden, and a lot of people saw it coming from a long way off. Had governments limited fishing to a sustainable level, those boats would be busy today, but individual greed overcame the collective greed, and a great resource was destroyed. At public meetings up and down the coast in the 1980s and 90s, fishermen fought the biologists tooth and nail. They won, then they lost.

As we bumble about trying to deal with problems like global warming and declining water quality, the sticking points often involve trying to balance the interests of individuals, organizations and the whole population. Research recently published in *Science* magazine (April 7, 2006) offered intriguing insight into patterns of behavior that affect how we take care of our collective interests.

A paper, titled "The Competitive Advantage of Sanctioning Institutions," described how a research project gave test subjects the choice of joining one of two investment groups that operated under identical rules, with one exception: one group allowed members to sanction other members, the other did not.

Each participant in the study was given 20 money units at the beginning of each round. Each then decided how many money units to invest in a common investment pool for the group. Then a fixed rate of return was added to the pool and the total was divided evenly among the members in that group. Members were free to switch groups at the end of each round.

The sanctioning group had one additional rule: At the end of each round they could use some of their money units to sanction other members of their group. Every dollar the sanctioning member spent cost the sanctioned member three dollars.

(Let's call the sanctioning group "the Punishers" and the nonsanctioning group "the Free Spirits.")

Initially, nearly two-thirds of the people joined the Free Spirits group, and quickly two types of human behavior were emerged. One type of human (We'll call them "Chumps.") put most or all their money units into the group investment. The other type of human (We'll call them "Freeloaders.") kept most or all of their money and collected a share of the group investment.

People quickly changed their behavior to optimize their profit. By the third round half the people belonged to the Punishers group. By the 17th round, 90 percent belonged to the Punishers. The Chumps switched first, after seeing their money units flowing into the the Freeloaders' accounts. After a few rounds mostly

(Riverbank continues on page 54)

Big River™

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COMING SOON

Restaurant Reviews

St. Paul's Big New Park

Folk Art

Minnesota Marine Art Museum

Contacts (800) 303-8201. For information about stories, columns and River News, contact Reggie McLeod, Pamela Eyden or Molly McGuire (editors@big-river.com). For calendar events, contact Kathy Delano or Molly McGuire (editors@big-river.com). For information about placing an ad in *Big River* or for information about selling *Big River* magazines contact Kathy Delano or Maureen J. Cooney (ads@big-river.com). We must receive calendar events by July 22 to get them into the September-October 2006 magazine. We must receive ads by July 10.

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River News

Bass-o-matic

Vicksburg, Tenn. — To test how an increase in the number of towboats on the Upper Mississippi may cause an increase in the number of fish killed by towboat propellers, the Engineering Research and Development Center (ERDC), an affiliate of the Army Corps of Engineers-Rock Island District, will send the 3,600-hp *American Beauty* towboat out to ply Pools 26 and 14 this summer and fall. The boat will drag a fishnet behind it to catch fish that get caught in the prop wash. Researchers from the ERDC will follow behind in small boats to collect the nets and dump their contents into their boats, where they will record the number and type of fish caught, whether they have wounds, the age and nature of the wounds, and the number of dead fish. (*Waterways Journal*, 5-29-06)

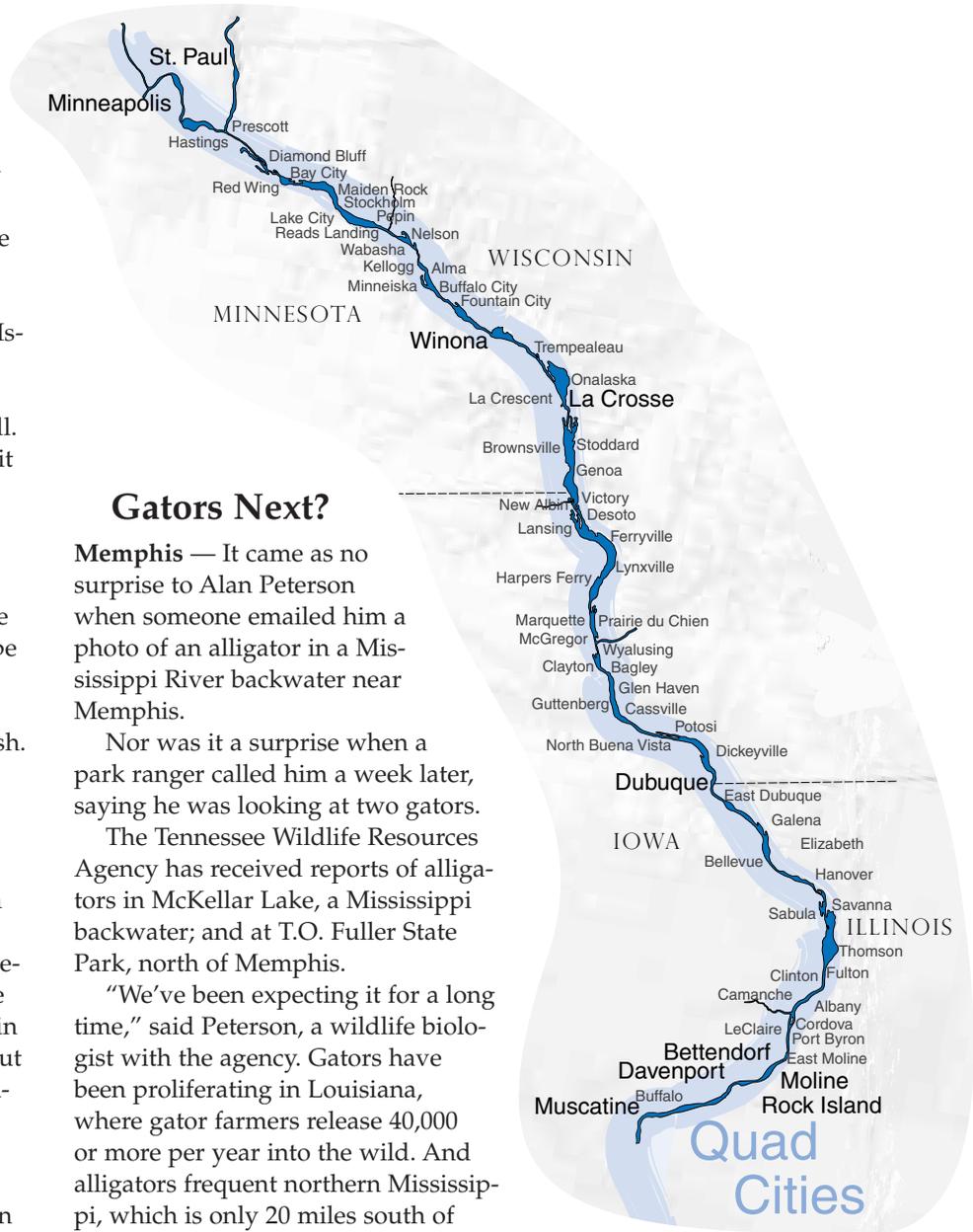
River Rat a Hit

Missoula, Mont. — “Mississippi: Tales of the Last River Rat,” the film about Kenny Salwey’s view of the Mississippi backwaters, drew rave reviews from a panel of viewers at the International Wildlife Film Festival in May. The festival featured films about African lions, rattlesnakes, bats, penguins, fur seals and termites.

Members of the all-ages panel, who were not connected to the wildlife film industry, participated in a focus group called, “What does Jan/John Doe Think of Today’s Wildlife Films?” They reportedly gave a boisterous “thumbs-down” to most, disliking them for their overbearing narrators, frenetic pace and exploitation of animals for their entertainment value. The Salwey film appealed to all.

“I liked the images of the wildlife and how he lived,” said a fifth-grader. “I wanted to see more.”

Visit www.big-river.com for links to information about stories marked with the mouse .



Gators Next?

Memphis — It came as no surprise to Alan Peterson when someone emailed him a photo of an alligator in a Mississippi River backwater near Memphis.

Nor was it a surprise when a park ranger called him a week later, saying he was looking at two gators.

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has received reports of alligators in McKellar Lake, a Mississippi backwater; and at T.O. Fuller State Park, north of Memphis.

“We’ve been expecting it for a long time,” said Peterson, a wildlife biologist with the agency. Gators have been proliferating in Louisiana, where gator farmers release 40,000 or more per year into the wild. And alligators frequent northern Mississippi, which is only 20 miles south of Memphis.

Dr. Omar Davis emailed the gator shot to Peterson. Dr. Davis, a Memphis physician, took the photo while fishing on McKellar Lake near Memphis.

An alligator was something new to Dr. Davis, a longtime resident. “That was the first one I’ve ever seen,” he said. “I didn’t think they came this far north.”

American alligators once grew to 18 feet but nowadays rarely reach 12 feet, according to the *World Book Encyclopedia*. Males can weigh 450 pounds. Females rarely grow to more than

nine feet or more than 160 pounds.

Hunted for their hides, gators became scarce and were declared endangered in 1967. Their numbers quickly rebounded and some hunting now is allowed.

Florida was rattled in May when gators killed three women in separate attacks. Gators eat fish, snakes, frogs, turtles, small mammals and birds. Large males may attack dogs, pigs, cattle — or humans.

Back-to-back mild winters may have drawn alligators up the Mississippi. “They’re expanding back into

their old range," surmises biologist Peterson. "I think it's just a matter of time before we've got 'em in a fair number of streams."

Alligators used to range almost to St. Louis, 240 miles upriver from Memphis. "Whether or not they'll go that far, who knows?" said Peterson. "Especially since the habitat has changed dramatically over the years."

Iowa Whoopers

Baraboo, Wis. — Eleven first-year whooping cranes were counted in Iowa this spring, an unusual sighting for crane watchers, although it was business-as-usual for the International Crane Foundation (ICF), in Baraboo.

"First-year birds tend to range widely," said Joan Garland, ICF outreach coordinator. "Groups break apart and wander around, but if they stay in Iowa through the end of June, there's a good chance they'll stay all summer and leave directly for Florida in the fall."

Six of the rare, endangered birds

were counted in Iowa river counties in mid May. Five more arrived in late May. All have radio transmitters on their legs, so ICF staff can monitor their movements.

Whooping cranes are larger than sandhill cranes. The total world population is only about 200. If you are lucky enough to see one, stay far away.

Whooping cranes are white with black wingtips, red forehead and cheeks. (International Crane Foundation)



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Carp Opportunities

Legislators, biologists and fishermen are struggling to find solutions to the problems posed by Asian carp (grass, bighead, silver and black), which have been wreaking havoc on the environment and on the commercial fishing industry. The large, bony fish were imported from China's Yangtze River in the 1960s and 1970s to clean algae and detritus from southern catfish farms. They escaped from Arkansas and Mississippi fish farms during floods in the 1980s and 1990s and have been spreading up the Mississippi River and its tributaries ever since.

Asian carp are efficient filter feeders — they consume as much as 40 pounds of plankton per day and can grow as big as 100 pounds. The silver Asian carp leaps out of the water when startled by a boat motor.

- Some have estimated the Illinois River may contain 65 million pounds of Asian carp. Commercial fishermen currently harvest 7,000 to 12,000 pounds of the fish per day, but only a few have invested in nets heavy enough for the job.

State Senator Mike Jacobs of Moline, Ill., proposed a \$750,000 state subsidy to Schafer's Fisheries, of Thomson, Ill., to buy equipment to turn Asian carp into processed, pressed, breaded fish patties. In early June the proposal was awaiting the governor's signature.

Schafer currently buys two million pounds of the fish from commercial fishermen. He wants to increase this to 10 million, which could make a dent in the river population. He currently sells the fish to Asian-American communities in New York, Toronto and Los Angeles, where it is a popular delicacy. Turning the fish into high-protein patties would probably create new markets. One possibility is to sell the patties to the Illinois Department of Corrections to feed to state prison inmates.

- Sections of the Illinois River have been overwhelmed by the invasive fish, which are outcompeting native fish for habitat and food. They become agitated when they hear boat

motors and rush, en masse, to attack the boat, like a herd galloping underwater. The fish are so plentiful, one town along the Illinois has reportedly begun hosting fishing tournaments in which fishermen don't use rods and reels — they just drive around in their boats and collect the fish that jump in.

- Bow hunters on the Illinois River have turned the Asian silver carp problem into an opportunity. Bowfishing is usually practiced on quiet water, but log-sized silver carp present a moving target as they hurl themselves several feet out of the water. Fishermen try to shoot them in mid-air.

"If I don't put 200 fish a night in the boat, I'm pretty disgusted with myself," said one bowfisherman. "That's because I usually get about 100 of them in the boat without even picking my bow up." (*Belleville News Democrat*, 5-31-06)

- In Washington, D.C., the House Judiciary Committee unanimously approved a measure in late March that would make it illegal to import or transfer Asian carp across state lines, but southern state representatives were expected to put up a fierce fight over the bill when it hit the House floor. They claim such a bill would cripple the fish farm industry.

- The United States is not the only country whose rivers are threatened by the invasive carp. Australia faces a similar threat. Researchers at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization in Hobart, Australia, have been working on genetically modifying Asian carp to produce predominantly male fish. By biasing sex ratios toward males using "daughterless carp technology," numbers of Asian carp could be drastically reduced within 20 to 30 years of their release. While the technique is species-specific and would not affect native fish, this is a major concern. Testing continues. (*River Crossings*, Vol. 15, No. 2, published by Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association)

- Meanwhile, a mass die-off of Asian carp was reported on the middle reaches of the Illinois River near



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Havana, Ill., in early June. Thousands of carp were found floating belly up. The cause was not known, although a virus that targets carp, called the spring viremia of carp, was suspected.

- The fish are continuing their northward spread this summer. A 45- to 50-pound Asian grass carp was caught in April by a commercial fisherman in the St. Croix River, a tributary of the Mississippi between Wisconsin and Minnesota. Although a few other grass carp have been found in Pool 4 (Lake Pepin) over the last two decades, there is no evidence that they are reproducing this far north, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Venetian Parade

Rock Island, Ill. — The Quad Cities' annual Venetian Night Lighted Boat Parade used to draw parade organizers and enthusiasts from around the country. The lights decorating the boats were so elaborate they outshone all the other parades in the

country. The parade has not been held for the last two years, but it may return this Labor Day weekend, just below Lock and Dam 15. The last one, in 1993, was the Quad Cities' largest parade ever, with about 40 boats. Normally, the parade attracted 20 to 25 boats.

While boats are commonly decorated by outlining them with lights or blinking lights, many of the Quad City boats had sequenced lighting that depicted elaborate themes. The high point was a 50-foot houseboat decorated with a circus theme and dubbed "Big Top Circus." Overall, the display was 54-feet long and stood over 30-feet high. Its collection of animated scenes required 12,000 Christmas lights. A trapeze artist swung 34 feet above the water from the bow of the boat to the stern. Below, a seal balanced a spinning ball on its nose and a clown pedaled a unicycle while he juggled balls. The stern of the boat featured an interactive scene in which a clown squirted water out of a flower boutonniere at an elephant,

who then lowered his trunk into a barrel, filled up with water, raised his trunk and squirted the clown, knocking the clown's hat off, but he quickly caught it before it fell.

The circus boat didn't even win first place that year. It shared that award with another boat that featured the sinking of the Titanic, while two competing boats depicted bowlers in a bowling alley, and dolphins jumping through a hoop from the front of a boat to the rear.

Many of these dazzling displays were designed by Lyle Haakenson of Davenport, Iowa, who has since gone on to design and build elaborate winter lighting displays for the Davenport park district. He said it would take just the right boat and a lot of help before he would commit to creating another entry.

Spokesman for the parade, Jack Tumbleson, said that as of June 1, they still needed to raise the \$2,800 event insurance fee, but he was confident that the parade would go on.

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This summer, River Action, Inc., a local nonprofit group that promotes public awareness and connections to the river, will offer a series of classes aboard the taxis from June through the end of August.

On July 6 and 11, and August 22 and 24, participants will get a short course in towboat dangers, lock-and-dam safety, and boating safety.

On July 18 and 20, and August 29 and 31, students will perform hands-on water testing, and learn about watershed practices and their impact on water quality from a state water quality supervisor.

On July 25 and 27, a retired Augustana College professor will tell stories about the Moline lock, the Rock Island Bridge, the Civil War, local city history and the battle of Campbell's Island.

On August 1 and 3, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist will talk about habitat diversity and productivity in a large ecosystem.

Photographers are invited aboard on August 8 and 10 to practice and learn local wildlife photography from a local freelance photographer.

On August 15 and 17, a marine operations chief will talk about the transportation industry while the class watches operations at a barge unloading facility.

Classes cost \$10 each and will be held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. For more information, see the River Action web site or call (563) 322-2969. 

Picking a New Bridge

Quad Cities — The amount of traffic on the I-74 bridge between Moline, Illinois, and Bettendorf, Iowa, exceeded design capacity a long time ago.

More than 75,000 vehicles a day pass over the spans. Accidents and breakdowns cause major bottlenecks because the bridge has no shoulders or places to pull off. Planning for its replacement has been going on for some time and in May took another large step forward.

Citizens were given a look at four alternate bridge designs and asked for their input by officials at the Iowa and Illinois departments of transportation, who are jointly developing the project. That input will help lead to a final design selection within the next six months, according to the schedule.

An environmental impact study based on the footprint of the chosen model should be done by June, 2007, and then right-of-way acquisition can begin. All of that should be completed between 2007 and 2010, then, if the local governments have met all the federal criteria, a record of decision will be put in place, which will lead to a request for more than \$650 million for the bridge and improvements bluff to bluff in the 2010 federal transportation budget.

The four designs were termed "a basket handle true arch twin bridges, a modified basket handle tied arch twin bridges, a basket handle tied arch twin bridges with vertical piers and hangers, and a cable stayed single bridge with semi-fan stay arrangement." The differences are difficult to describe but can be seen online. To date, the cable stayed single bridge was the most popular. It is similar to the bridge in Burlington, Iowa.

The bridge is an important transportation corridor in the Quad-Cities and one of the most traveled sections of road in that area. The existing bridge is scheduled to be removed after the new one is completed, although one citizen has suggested turning one span into a park with "a path, benches, plants, grasses, observation deck, restaurant and ice cream stand," while another suggested keeping one span to use as a bike path and pedestrian crossing, which might be cheaper than adding those to the new structure. 



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New Freedom Park

Prescott, Wis. — A new \$2 million Freedom Park and Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center opened this summer on a small bluff above the confluence of the St. Croix River and Mississippi rivers. The seven-acre park includes a bluff where an injured but rehabilitated bald eagle named "Freedom" was released into the wild in 1982. The site previously held a town park consisting of open space and a playground. The new park features a picnic pavilion, amphitheater and interactive displays about the Great River Road, and the history and economy of the area.

New Ethanol Plants

Buffalo, Iowa — The rivertown of Buffalo, population 1,321, will soon host a new \$100 million ethanol plant that will initially employ 35 to 45 people to produce 50 million gallons of ethanol per year. The plant is projected to grow to twice that capacity. All of the ethanol will be shipped by barge, using a barge loading facility

that is part of the plant. Quad-City-based River/Gulf Energy and Alter Barge Line in Bettendorf have joined forces on the project, which will occupy the former site of a fertilizer plant that closed several years ago.

Upriver, in Fulton, Ill., a newly formed group of businesspeople, called Fulton Ethanol L.L.C., announced plans to build an ethanol plant there that will use a combination of Illinois coal and biomass material. The group hopes to start construction this fall and finish within a year to 14 months.

A bit farther upriver, Carroll County Ethanol has announced it will build a 100-million-gallon-per year ethanol plant near the Mississippi River between Thomson and Savanna, Ill., both hard hit in recent years by the closing of the Savanna Army Depot.

More Power

Cassville, Wis. — Wisconsin Power and Light, an Alliant Energy Company headquartered in Madison, Wis.,

has selected Cassville, population 1,031, as the site of a power plant expansion. The company will increase the capacity of its Nelson Dewey Generating Station by 150 percent by building a new, 300 megawatt unit just south of the existing plant. It also plans to add equipment that would reduce emissions from the expanded plant to below 2004 levels.

In choosing Cassville over the other contender, Portage, Wis., Alliant cited the proximity of rail lines, barge facilities and transmission lines.

Increased rail traffic may affect town residents, but much depends on the direction from which the coal trains enter and leave town.

The company will hold open houses this summer to share information about the expansion.

Fish on the Net

Des Moines, Iowa — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has devised a new way to inform fishermen — it will email them the Iowa Fishing Report, with hot tips and cur-

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rent information gathered from bait shops and creel surveys, and organized by region, each Tuesday through July.

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Pool 5 Drawdown

Buffalo City, Wis. — The Army Corps of Engineers was scheduled to begin a drawdown on Pool 5 on June 12 this summer, reducing water levels near Lock and Dam 5 by a maximum of 1.5 feet.

Corps officials said the drawdown would have little effect on commercial shipping, because the Main Channel was dredged in the spring, but recreational boaters will be affected. Boat channels at Minneiska Public Landing, Weaver Bottoms Public Landing, Goose Lake Landing, Clear Lake Landing and Halfmoon Landing will be unusable or restricted to smaller boats. In Wisconsin, only the Upper Spring Lake Landing will be restricted.

The drawdown was approved by all agencies in the River Resources Forum.

If water levels stay low, the drawdown will continue through September 12.

Oxygen Monitoring

La Crosse, Wis. — Equipment to monitor water quality has been installed in several shallow backwater areas of Pool 8 this summer.

Researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources have teamed up on the project. They hope to learn more about the effect of water clarity, river stage, weather conditions and plant nutrients on dissolved oxygen concentrations. Dissolved oxygen is a critical factor in the health of backwaters. The monitoring stations are marked with reflective tape and flashing lights.

Barge Backlog

There's a boom in the barge-building industry, and the nation's two primary shipyards are working overtime to

keep up with demand.

A lot of barges have been sold and put into service in South America. Others have simply gotten old and been scrapped. About 328 new barges were built in 2005, but 714 were retired.

Christopher Black, vice president of Jeffboat, one of the primary barge builders, said that he estimates 25 percent of all dry hopper barges need to be replaced. That's 4,500 new dry hopper barges. Each costs about \$450,000 to \$500,000, with tankers costing more and taking four or five times longer to build. (*Waterways Journal*, 5-15-06)

Important Bird Area

St. Paul — Audubon has designated the top half of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge, from the Chippewa River to the Iowa border, as an Important Bird Area, one of about 86 such areas from the Mississippi headwaters to the Gulf.

"This means we'll work to develop a conservation strategy on both sides of the river," said Dan McGuinness, Mississippi River Program director. "We will work with other partners to set up community-based site support groups to advocate for the habitat needs of all birds, not just waterfowl or migratory birds."

Audubon has already contacted many local groups and universities to participate as partners in the program.

McGuinness hopes the program will eventually lead to preservation of important habitats, such as the bluffs where peregrine falcons nest, and to an increase in the number and variety of birds using the Mississippi River. The Important Bird Area program promotes bird science, increases educational opportunities and works to inform public policy.

Formal announcement of the designation is expected in August. McGuinness said he expects the rest of the refuge will be added to the IBA within the year.

River Bluffs Violation

McGregor, Iowa — Concerned citizens in McGregor are keeping a close

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eye on developments at the controversial River Bluffs Resort under construction in the hills outside of town. The golf-and-condo development is going up near the headwaters of Sny Magill Creek, a trout stream and tributary to the Mississippi.

Watchful neighbors photographed mud and silt washing into the stream from an unnamed tributary near the construction site after several rainfalls in March and April, and sent the photographs with complaints to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). After its investigation at the end of May, the DNR found the developer and contractor had failed to comply with the Stormwater Permit; had not implemented adequate prevention measures to limit sediment runoff; and that trout and trout fishing were being adversely affected by the activity.

Developers had to stop work on the project while a new Pollution Prevention Plan was developed and reviewed, which is scheduled for early June. Mike Wade, Iowa DNR Envi-

ronmental Specialist, said that cleaning up the trout stream might be part of a penalty.

"It all depends on the magnitude of the violation and the history of the project," he said. "This one met our criteria for litigation, so it's in the hands of the legal department now."

Metro River Plans

Twin Cities — Both Minneapolis and St. Paul are updating plans for protecting the Mississippi riverfront.

Proposed plans are drawing criticism both from river advocates who want more protection and riverside residents and property owners who fear restrictions may make improvements difficult and costly.

Minnesota designated 72 miles of the river as a protected area in 1976. About one-third of that riverfront is in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The Minneapolis update to the so-called "Mississippi River Critical Area" plan gives priority to parks, trails and residential use along the river above St. Anthony Falls, an area

that now is primarily industrial.

An advocacy group, Friends of the Mississippi River, approves of converting away from industrial, but calls the Minneapolis plan's standards on building heights and set-

Homeowners fear that more restrictive zoning along the river will discourage improvements, causing the housing stock in St. Paul's oldest neighborhoods to deteriorate.

backs "vague and inadequate."

The group also criticizes the "lack of a strong tree and vegetation preservation plan for neighborhoods that line the gorge [the stretch between the two cities]."

St. Paul's plan allows industrial developments to remain, but envisions a riverbank that will become mainly residential.



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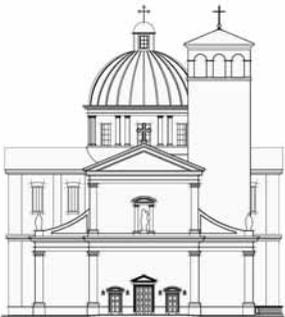
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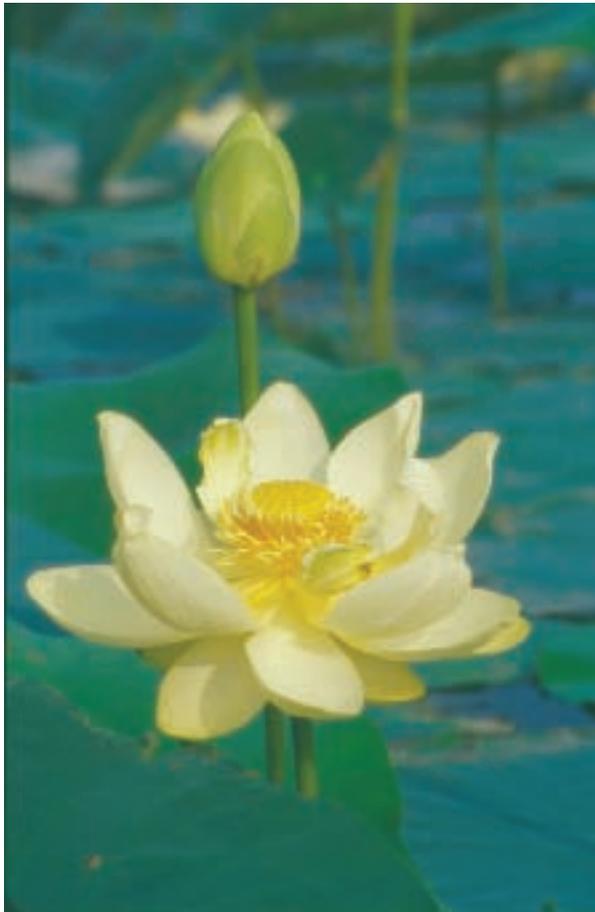
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This American lotus photograph by local photographer Kay Shaw appears in artwork on a new 40-cent postage stamp. (Kay Shaw)

Homeowners, however, fear that more restrictive zoning along the river will discourage improvements, causing the housing stock in St. Paul's oldest neighborhoods to deteriorate.

"The biggest worry is that the modest housing that we have will continue to deteriorate because of overly restrictive regulations," said Diane Gerth, an attorney and neighborhood activist.

For example, if a duplex owner in the critical area wants to widen a sidewalk for an older tenant, it "may require a vegetation survey by a certified landscape engineer for all the plants on the lot," Gerth worries.

She fears limits on improvements will cause deterioration or spur "midnight remodeling jobs" — without a permit.

The city's oldest neighborhood is dense with old houses on small lots. "We worry that the changes will make preservation of our housing stock more difficult," said Gerth, "and that historic properties won't be preserved."

Backwater Postage Stamp

Winona, Minn. — A Mississippi River lotus in full bloom is featured on a new first-class postage stamp, in a series called "Wonders of America." The postage stamp art is based on a photograph taken in the backwaters by Winona local photographer Kay Shaw. Her image, along with all the others on the 40-stamp pane, was given the shape and color of a 1930s picture postcard.

Theater on the River

Minneapolis — The grand opening of the new Guthrie Theater was scheduled for late June at its \$125-million-dollar new riverfront home, with fireworks, bands, family activities and performances.

The prominent regional theater, founded in 1963, moved from its original location south of downtown to a new structure near the uppermost locks and dams at St. Anthony Falls

(River News continues on page 41)

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The Colorful World of Dragonflies

Text and photographs by Gary Rodoc

People travel great distances to the Upper Mississippi to see bald eagles, the fall migration of tundra swans and the spring migration of songbirds, but most miss another world of nature that is just as fascinating: the “little things.” Through macro photography, I have a chance to see into this world and take photographs to share with others.

Dragonflies are some of my favorite little things. More than 100 species of dragonflies dart and hover along the Upper Mississippi River, and many of them are as colorful and beautiful as butterflies.

Dragonflies belong to the order Odonata (toothed ones). They have been called “devil’s darning needles,” a name that implies that they bite or poke humans. This is not true. A woman at an art show recently told me she loved dragonflies but was afraid of them. She said she and her husband got out of their boat and left the riverbank after they’d been fishing, when swarms of dragonflies began buzzing around their heads. They thought they were going to get bitten.

I explained to her that the dragonflies were being helpful, grabbing mosquitoes that really were out to bite them.

There are six families of dragonflies: darners, clubtails, spiketails, cruisers, emeralds and skimmers. Each family has specific habitat needs, such as slow streams, lakes, fast flowing rivers and marshes. They are very territorial — patrolling, guarding and defending their perch sites.



Widow Skimmer (*Libellula luctuosa*)

The male widow skimmer occupies a large territory, about 250 square yards. I watched this dominant male chase another skimmer away at least a dozen times before he lit on a blade of grass right in front of me, posing for his close-up.

Dragonflies spend most of their life (up to three years) as eggs, then as larva underwater, making them a valued asset for monitoring water quality. After the eggs hatch, the larva molts once and starts hunting for food. As the larva grows, it will molt many more times over the next

couple of years. A day or two before emerging from the water, the larva goes into a rest period while final changes are underway. Some will rest with part of their head above water to help them get used to breathing air. They usually emerge early in the morning and cling to a plant stem,

tree trunk or rock face. The skin at the back of the head cracks open, then the thorax emerges first from the larval shell, and the fly continues drawing itself out of the shell until it is free. It takes about an hour for its wings to dry and harden before it can fly.

The dragonfly is now a fully grown adult. It will not molt again. It is very vulnerable during emergence, and as many as 90 percent get picked off by fish, birds and other bugs during this time.

Dragonflies have existed for 300 million years. Some fossil dragonflies had wing spans of 2.5 feet. Today they are struggling to adapt to a constantly changing environment. A few dragonflies are on the threatened and endangered species lists, and others are of "special concern." Their survival is vital to a healthy river ecosystem. I really believe that through the power of photography, I can bring awareness to these special insects, one of the "little things" most of us miss in our day-to-day lives.

For more information, read Kurt Mead's *Dragonflies of the North Woods* and Karl Legler's *Dragonflies of Wisconsin*. 🍷

Gary and Deb Rodoc live in Nelson, Wis., where they operate Riverdoc Photography



Blue Dasher (*Pachydiplax longipennis*)

In the insect world, dragonflies are considered fearsome predators. As hunters, they consume massive numbers of nuisance insects, like gnats, flies and mosquitoes. This male blue dasher is only 1.3 inches long, but it eats about 300 insects per day, which is about 10 to 15 percent of its body weight. Both females and males defend their territories along the shores of weedy ponds. Males aggressively threaten each other with raised blue abdomen as they battle for position, like this little guy did with me, challenging me to stay off his turf.

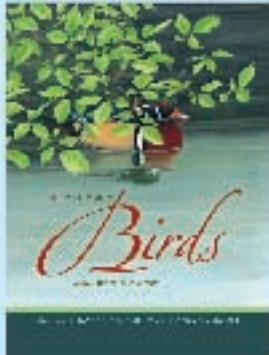
Larval Shell

The chances of finding an empty dragonfly larval shell are pretty small, since rain or wind usually knocks these delicate casings off their perch. I was lucky enough to find this one still attached to a reed in a backwater marsh, while I was searching for wetland native flowers.



Fifty Common Birds of the Upper Midwest

watercolors by Dana Gardner
text by Nancy Overcott



In this gathering of essays and illustrations celebrating fifty of the most common birds of the Upper Midwest, illustrator Dana Gardner and writer Nancy Overcott encourage us to take a closer look at these familiar birds with renewed appreciation for their not-so-ordinary beauty and lifeways.
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Eastern Pondhawk (*Erythemis simplicicollis*)

With large leg spines that help it hold its prey, the eastern pondhawk will eat anything its size or smaller, even other pondhawks. They also follow large animals and humans to feed on insects swarming around them.

The female eastern pondhawk was the first dragonfly I ever photographed. Anyway, that's what I thought. I started learning about these insects because they were incessantly following me around while I photographed native wildflowers, birds and butterflies. I knew that female hawks were green and the males were blue. I couldn't figure out why all I saw were green females early in the season. Where were all the blue males? As I learned more about dragonflies, I discovered that both male and female pondhawks start their adult life green, but as the males mature, they turn a powdery blue.



Eastern Amberwing (*Perithemus tenera*)

This male eastern amberwing is only 0.9 inch and the second smallest dragonfly in North America. Being so small, one of its defenses is to mimic a wasp by moving its abdomen up and down and waving its wings. I now wonder how many times in the past I walked by amberwings, thinking they were wasps.

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→ July 28
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→ August 5 & 6
- Nonsense
→ August 18 to September 3
- Wild Wings Gallery Fall Festival
→ October 6 - 8
- Jubany Appleseed Days
→ October 6 - 8
- Twilight Holiday Home Tours
→ December 2



Variegated Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum corruptum*)

Most dragonflies are permanent residents and survive our winters as eggs or larva. A few species migrate, including the variegated meadowhawk. This female is only 1.5 inches long.

They are very shy and wary, rarely allowing anyone to get near them. So I was completely surprised one day while exploring the Kellogg Weaver Dunes, when this female came out of nowhere and landed on a blade of grass right in front of me. She not only let me take numerous pictures of her, but also let me pet her on her abdomen.



Yellow-legged Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum vicinum*)

The last dragonfly of the season is the yellow-legged meadowhawk. It is just 1.3 inches long. I have spotted them in November around bogs and marshes. They are even capable of surviving a week of autumn frost. When they are the only dragonflies I see around, I always feel a little sad, knowing the end of another season is near, and winter is around the corner.

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Nuns on the Right, Cans on the Left — Where the Buoys Are

By Pamela Eyden

The Mississippi's quiet speed and deceptive power can get you in trouble before you know it, especially if you don't keep an eye on buoys, lights, daymarks and other helpful signs of river navigation.

The U.S. Coast Guard places and maintains the system of signs and symbols on the navigation channel to give all boaters — from canoe paddlers to towboat pilots — a glimpse beneath the surface and around the next bend. Every sign has a meaning — sometimes more than one.

First, a few definitions:

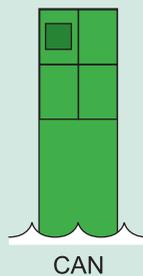
- **Lights or beacons** are permanently anchored lights. Most are solar-powered.
- **Buoys** are floating markers, anchored to the river bottom. A lot of them sit at the end of wingdams.
- **Daymarks or dayboards** are unlighted, reflective graphic signs anchored to posts in the river. They are what tow pilots are looking for when their searchlights scan the riverbanks at night. On the river charts daymarks are named, usually for a nearby river feature. Most daymarks have smaller mile-marker signs below them that indicate the number of miles to Cairo, Ill., where the Ohio River joins the Mississippi.
- **Port** means the left side of the boat.
- **Starboard** means the right side.

The 3-R Rule

The 3-R Rule is a mnemonic device to help you remember the order of marker colors and positions: "Keep the red on your right as you return from the sea," or "Red, right, returning."

Seeing Green

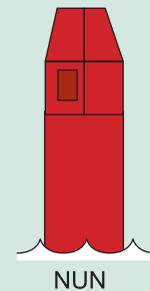
Buoys and markers that are green or have green lights mark the edge of the channel on the port (left) side as you head upstream.



Cans or can buoys are cylindrical.

Seeing Red

Buoys and markers that are red or have red lights mark the edge of the channel on the starboard (right) side as you head upstream.



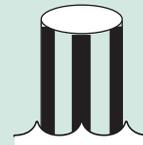
Nuns or nun buoys are narrow at the top and wide at the bottom.

Red and Green Together

A marker with both red and green means the channel is splitting in two, which happens where a major tributary river enters the Mississippi. The color on the top marks the primary channel, which the big Mississippi would be. For example, if you are headed upstream and green appears atop red, the Mississippi's channel is to the right of the marker. If red is on top, the Mississippi's channel is to the left.

(If you see a yellow marker, it means you have slipped all the way downriver to the Intercoastal Waterway that runs between the mainland and the islands fronting the Gulf.)

Obstruction Marks



Vertical black and white stripes on a buoy indicate an underwater obstruction that extends to the nearest shore — avoid passing between the riverbank and the buoy!

Other Signs

A variety of other signs alert boat operators to special areas or regulations.



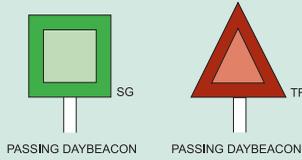
No-wake zones, swimming areas, danger-keep-out areas and piles of rocks may be marked by other unlighted graphic signs.

Flashing Lights

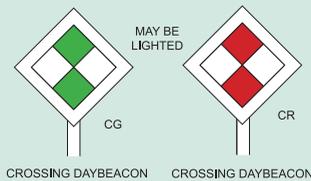
Red buoys and daymarks have red or white lights and a double flash. Green buoys and daymarks usually have green lights and a single flash.

Daymarks

Daymarks are unlighted signs that mark the channel. Triangles, squares and diamond shapes are most common.



Green square signs are like can buoys; they mark the port side of the channel. **Red triangle signs** are like nun buoys; they mark the starboard side of the channel facing upstream.



Checkerboard diamond signs indicate that the channel is shifting from one side of the river to the other. As above, green marks the left facing upstream and red marks the right.

An Evolving System

The current U.S. navigation aid system has evolved since 1848, when Congress adopted the system of colors, shapes, numbers and markers called the Lateral System. Before that, all buoys were manufactured and positioned by independent contractors, which meant that they were all different and impossible to read unless you were a local. Of course, if you were a local you probably didn't need them.

In the 1970s, testing showed that the color green was easier to see at greater distances than black, so the black "cans" became green.

Lights and sound were added to buoys in the early 1900s. Some of these early inventions were pretty strange — one electric buoy was equipped with a motion detector that sounded an alarm, set off a rocket flare and lit a lamp when a ship passed close by.

Lighting technology was a problem for many decades. Buoys lighted with compressed gas were common for about 30 years, in the early 1900s, but they were never safe, having a tendency to blow up when workers checked the pressure. Today most buoys are lit with power from batteries charged by solar panels that are sensitive enough to work with or without the sun. Channel-crossing markers are usually powered by on-shore lines.

Tender Work

The job of maintaining the navigation system is the work of special vessels called river tenders. These consist of a tow pushing a barge equipped with a boom, a pile driver and two to four spuds. Spuds, which are large, telephone-pole sized timbers, drop down through slots in the barge to hold it in place while the markers are replaced or fixed. In recent years, Global Positioning System (GPS) has allowed more precise positioning of important navigation aids.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, most aids to navigation are visited by a tender at least once a year, and more often if floods or tow-boats drag them off position. Some of the river tenders that work the Upper Mississippi are the *Wyaconda*, the *Scioco* and the *Sangamon*.

The Coast Guard only marks the navigation channel, so if you venture into the backwaters or a side channel, you're on your own. Dangerous rock piles and closing dams may lie unmarked just below the surface. That's why it's a good idea to consult locals.

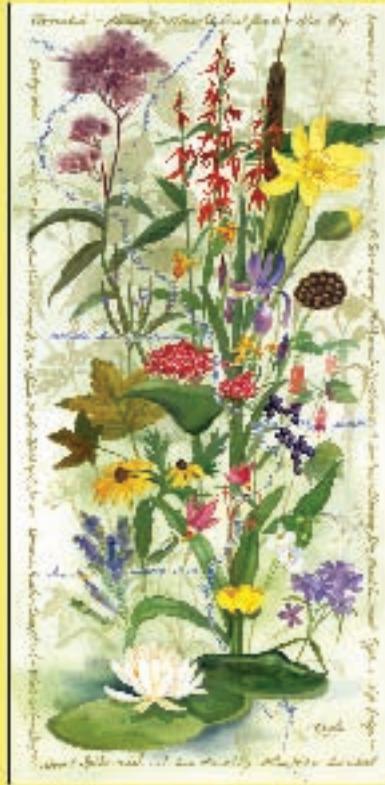
Marinas that are off the Main Channel sometimes mark the way with small buoys. Proceed carefully when following them.

The next time you're out boating, look at the buoys and daymarks and see if you can read the messages they carry. To learn about signs not in this story, call the U.S. Coast Guard for a copy of its booklet on navigation aids. Or visit its website. 

Pamela Eyden is news editor of Big River.

The advertisement features a vertical image of a tree with a dark brown trunk and green leaves. The text 'FINE FOOD SERVED DAILY' is written vertically in white capital letters along the right side of the tree. Below the tree image, the word 'Signatures' is written in a large, elegant cursive font. Underneath that, in smaller capital letters, is 'RESTAURANT & EVENT CENTER'. At the bottom, the address 'Winona, MN 55745-3737' and the website 'www.signatureswinona.com' are listed.

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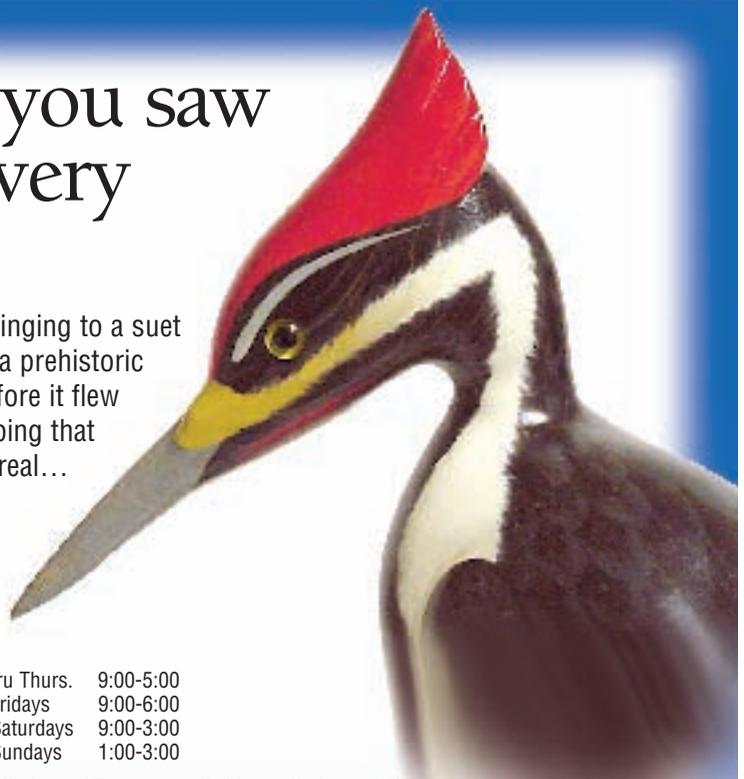
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Eagle Bluff Park, a protected public park, lies just beyond a new residential development in La Crescent, Minn. (Minnesota Land Trust)

Blufflands Alliance

By Lauren Elizondo

A bald eagle floats above the Mississippi River as the sun sets behind the bluffs above U.S. 61. The darkened outline of the rocky ridge lined with trees presents a striking contrast to the mauve-tinted sky. If taken care of, these blufflands can provide both scenic beauty and valuable habitat for wildlife for generations to come.

The Blufflands Alliance is a coalition of land trusts that have protected thousands of bluffland acres along the Upper Mississippi River Valley. Six land trusts in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois form the Blufflands Alliance: the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Minnesota Land Trust, Natural Land Institute (Ill.), Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (Ill.), Mississippi Valley Conservancy (Wis.) and West Wisconsin Land Trust.

Mark Ackelson, president of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), and Dan McGuinness, who is now the director of the Audubon Mississippi River Campaign, were part of the group that helped form and introduce the Alliance at a kick-off conference in 1993 held in Winona, Minn.

Ackelson said he and the other Blufflands Alliance founders knew that the river couldn't be protected without protecting the adjoining lands, and that one state or organization couldn't do it alone.

Clint Miller, the southern region conservation director for the Min-

nesota Land Trust, said the land trusts work together to preserve the scenic, agricultural, natural and historical value of land. They have already protected more than 17,000 acres of land in 35 counties.

The Alliance has no staff. Members of each land trust follow basic rules set by the national Land Trust Alliance regarding planning, evaluation, outreach and ethics, while members share their skills and resources to reach common goals.

"The Blufflands Alliance is the umbrella under which the land trusts work together," said Ackelson.

Miller said the Minnesota Land Trust shares procedures with its Alliance partners on how to monitor and enforce conservation easements as well as other procedural duties.

"We helped, advised and shared documents with the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation a couple years ago when they had no staff," said Miller.

Dave Skoloda, vice president of the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, said, "The Blufflands Alliance was instrumental in helping us get started. It provided structure, discipline and help meeting standards for financial



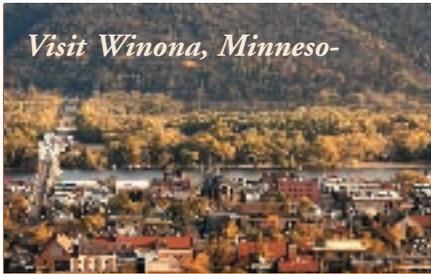
Eagle Bluff Park has a great view of Apple Blossom Drive and the river. (Marc Wood)

assistance from the McKnight Foundation."

The Blufflands Alliance is largely funded by the McKnight Foundation, a charitable organization based in Minneapolis. The foundation has a grant program dedicated to environmental support of the Mississippi River. The Alliance is presently being funded by a two-year grant of \$880,000 from the foundation.

"The McKnight Foundation is the primary reason why the Alliance is alive," said Miller. The Alliance also receives funding from other nonprofits, private donors and governmental sources.

Currently, Alliance members are working together to create a series of educational workshops. At press



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time, a June workshop and field trip focusing on land protection and management to benefit neotropical migratory birds was scheduled in the Lansing, Iowa, area. Speakers included Audubon Mississippi River Campaign Program biologist Jon Stravers.

When evaluating land to protect, Miller said the Alliance evaluates certain conservation priorities, including whether the land has natural, scenic or cultural resources; threats to preservation; and the significance of the threat, if any.

One of the land trusts' biggest challenges is balancing land protection with rural residential housing around metropolitan areas, such as Prairie du Chien and La Crosse, Wis.; Winona and Red Wing, Minn.; and Dubuque, Iowa.

"The pressure for rural development is much higher in metropolitan areas, because there are more commuters and people living in larger cities," said Miller.

Rural residential housing creates pressure to divvy up the land in ways that disrupt the integrity of the forests. This harms wildlife, including migratory birds and bald eagles.

How It Works

Alliance land trusts work with landowners who donate or sell conservation easements on their land. The easement includes permanent deed restrictions that prevent some land uses, such as development, though landowners continue to own the property. Landowners are free to sell the land, but the easement stays with the land. Easements often reduce income and estate taxes for the landowners. Land trusts also protect land by acquiring it through donation or sale at less than its fair market value, providing tax benefits for landowners as well.

For example, Miller said that through conservation easements, the Minnesota Land Trust has protected nearly 600 acres of land along the Apple Blossom Drive, an officially designated scenic byway between La Crescent and Dresbach, Minn., on County Highway 29. The 17-mile drive rises out of La Crescent into bluff country

through forested ravines and hills covered by apple orchards, meadows and farmland.

Once the conservation easement is negotiated and settled between the landowner and the land trust, the landowner continues to manage the land as long as he or she does not violate any of the contract provisions.

"The easement stays with the land, not the landowner — meaning it permanently restricts and protects property," said Miller.

However, land easements do not open the protected land to public

Miller said the land trusts' biggest goals are protecting larger parcels of land from being subdivided and sold for housing.

recreation unless landowners give their consent.

Miller said the Minnesota Land Trust only works with willing landowners who are interested in long-term protection; the land trust cannot forcefully take people's property.

Special Projects

In addition to the Alliance's collective endeavors, each land trust works on individual projects.

This year the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation reprinted *A Bird's Eye View: A Guide to Managing and Protecting Your Land for Neotropical Migratory Birds in the Upper Mississippi River Blufflands*, which was originally printed in 2003.

Cathy Engstrom, INHF communications director, said the book helps landowners prepare and maintain their land in a way that will benefit birds, like the cerulean warbler, ruby-throated hummingbird and other neotropical migratory birds, which migrate to Central and South America and the Caribbean for the winter.

"Some birds are generalists — they'll eat anything, but other birds only eat one type of seed or berry," explained Engstrom. "If one link in the chain is broken, it can spell disaster for that species."



Thanks to the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, this newly-acquired land connects the Effigy Mounds National Monument to a part of the Yellow River State Forest, forming an unbroken corridor for wildlife. (Effigy Mounds National Monument)

The book is free and can be ordered or viewed on the website.

Another example of land trust work is the recent acquisition by INHF of 1,045 acres of land adjoining the Effigy Mounds National Monument near Marquette, Iowa. The land connects the monument to a part of the Yellow River State Forest. INHF purchased the land from private sellers with federal funds, two state grants and more than 1,300 private donations, then transferred the property to the National Park Service in December 2000.

The monument includes dozens of Indian mounds — some in the shape of animals — on the bluffs above the Mississippi.

Engstrom said the acquisitions expanded Effigy Mounds National Monument by 70 percent and helped connect more than 4,000 acres of public land.

“Bigger is always better [when protecting sections of land]. It helps support more species,” said Engstrom.

Another Blufflands Alliance partner, the Wisconsin-based Mississippi Valley Conservancy, acquired 450 acres last winter for the La Crosse Blufflands Protection Program.

The conservancy created an agreement with the City of La Crosse in 2001 to protect an eight-mile strip of blufflands surrounding La Crosse,

said Skoloda, who was the first Mississippi Valley Conservancy president from 1997 to 2000.

Of the 3,000 acres of blufflands the conservancy intends to preserve, Skoloda said it has already protected nearly half.

“It has been such a successful program that neighboring cities have been interested in it,” said Skoloda.

For instance, Miller said he has provided land trust information to Winona’s environmental quality committee, which has showed an interest in the La Crosse Blufflands Protection Program.

As for long-term goals, Miller said the Blufflands Alliance land trusts will continue to protect natural and scenic features of the blufflands.

Miller said the land trusts’ biggest goals are protecting larger parcels of land (320 acres or more) from being subdivided and sold for housing, and drawing more attention to the blufflands region to attract federal programs to help defray the cost of protection.

“As an alliance, it gives us a lot of flexibility and power. We can effectively promote the blufflands as an important place to protect,” said Miller. 🌊

Lauren Elizondo is a recent graduate of Winona State University, who now lives in the Twin Cities. This is her first story for Big River.



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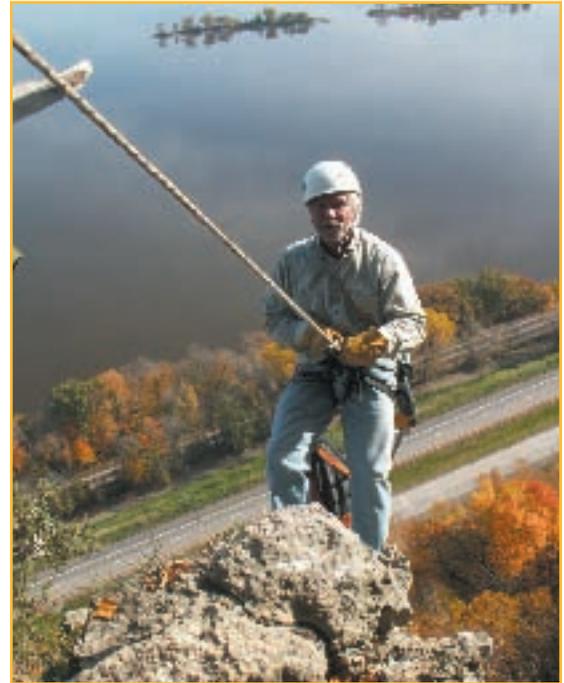
Back to the Bluffs



Doug Wood



These chicks were banded at Great Spirit Bluff this year. (George Howe)



Bob Anderson rappels down Great Spirit Bluff outside La Crescent, Minn. (Dave Kester)

By Fran Howard

Peregrine falcons, top predators of the skies, continue to reclaim ancient nesting sites in three states on the Mississippi River bluffs. Nest sites stretch from Lynxville, Wis., to Maiden Rock, Wis. Bob Anderson, head of the Raptor Resource Project in Bluffton, Iowa, said eight of last year's nine productive cliff nests supported nesting pairs again this

"Maiden Rock is the matriarch of the cliffs," said Anderson. "It overlooks Lake Pepin and is a wonderful place to watch falcons."

year. He sees potential for at least two new nest sites along the corridor next year — one pair of peregrines has been seen at a cliff near Homer, Minn., and another near Lock & Dam 9 at Lynxville. That's big news for both the species and the river valley.

Before widespread use of the pesticide DDT wiped out the species in the eastern United States in the 1950s

and early 60s, peregrine falcons raised their young in nests, called eyries, high on the ledges of bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. A captive breeding program, which Anderson began in 1971, helped estab-

lish a nesting population on power plant smokestacks. The first successful smokestack nest was occupied in 1989 in Bayport, Minn., on the St. Croix River. Since then, 14 smokestack nests, stretching from Cohasset,



A peregrine perches near its eyrie on Maiden Rock. (Allen Blake Sheldon)



Above: Peregrines can fly over 180 miles per hour.

Right: Bob Anderson and crew band a peregrine chick.

(All photos this page courtesy of the Raptor Resource Project.)

Minn., to Cassville, Wis., have fledged more than 500 young. By 2000, smokestack peregrines had begun to successfully reclaim the river bluffs. Since then, 81 peregrines have fledged from the bluffs.

Last year, peregrines established three new eyries: at Minnesota's Great Spirit Bluff, just outside La Crescent, on privately owned land protected by a Minnesota Land Trust conservation easement; Iowa's Waukon Junction eyrie in Allamakee County, the state's first cliff nesting in more than 40 years; and Wisconsin's West Bluff in Pepin County.



Nesting pairs returned to six other cliffs last year. The two in Minnesota — Queen's Bluff and John A. Latsch State Park — are both owned by the Min-



A falcon perches above power lines at Xcel Energy's Blackdog Power Plant at Eagan, Minn.

nesota Department of Natural Resources. The others are in Wisconsin: Lynxville cliff in Crawford County; Castle Rock Cliff in Trempealeau County; Maassen's Bluff in Buffalo County; and Maiden Rock in Pierce County. In Wisconsin, all of the cliffs occupied by falcons are privately owned, except Maiden Rock, the last cliff in Wisconsin to report nesting falcons in the 1950s. The West Wisconsin Land Trust recently purchased this bluff.

"Maiden Rock is the matriarch of the cliffs," said Anderson. "It over-

(Peregrines continues on page 60)

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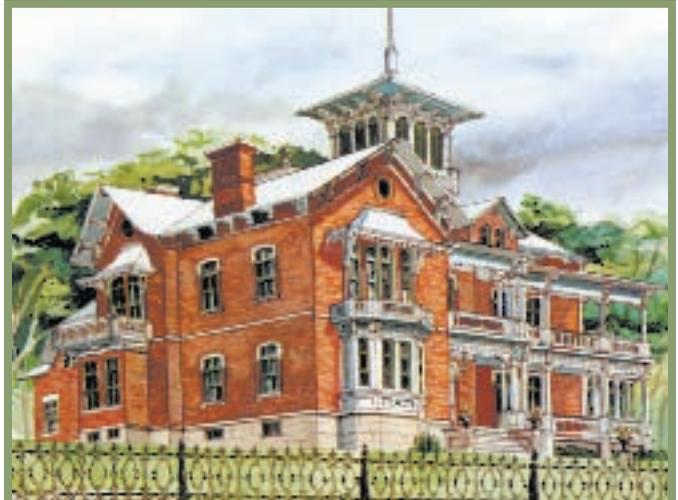
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Manley Dahler, First Place, People on the Refuges

Capturing the Refuge

This year's Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Refuges Annual Photography Contest (the ninth) drew dozens of entries from photographers of all persuasions — amateur and professional, adult and child. They submitted photos in three categories: People on the Refuges, Refuge Wildlife and Refuge Landscape.

Some of those photographs are reproduced here. First, second and third place winners were chosen from each category, and 10 were selected for honorable mention.

The colorful show of winning photographs has been on tour since February. In July, you can see it at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa. In August it will appear at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office at Fort Snelling in St. Paul. Plans for September were still tentative at press time, but the show is likely to be on display at Krueger Library on the campus of Winona State University in Winona, Minn. For more information, call Cindy Samples at 507-494-6216.



Stan Bousson, Second Place, Refuge Wildlife



Brian Thompson, Third Place, People on the Refuges



Mike Earley, First Place, Refuge Wildlife

Capturing the Refuge

The Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Refuges (FUMRR) is an independent, nonprofit organization that works to support and improve the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge and the Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge. Members join one of four chapters — in Savanna, Ill.; McGregor, Iowa; La Crosse, Wis.; and Winona, Minn. FUMRR is part of a nationwide Friends organization of more than 250 chapters.



John Zoerb, Honorable Mention, Refuge Wildlife



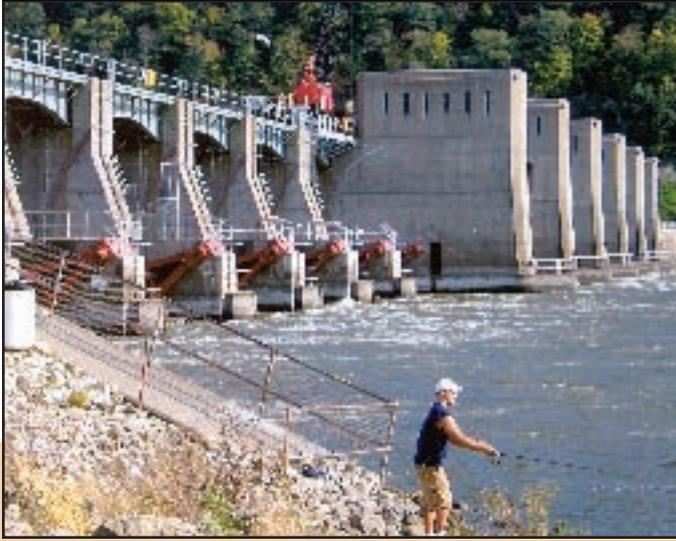
Doyle Gates



Les Zigurski, Honorable Mention, Refuge Wildlife



Doyle Gates, Second Place, Refuge Landscape



Lisa Brainard



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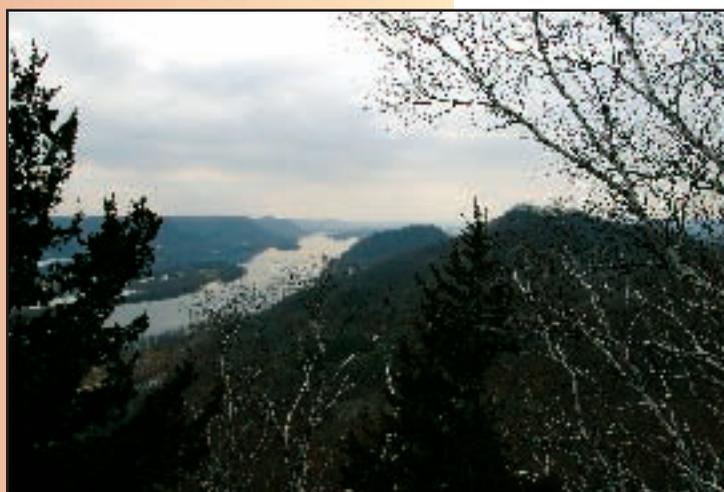


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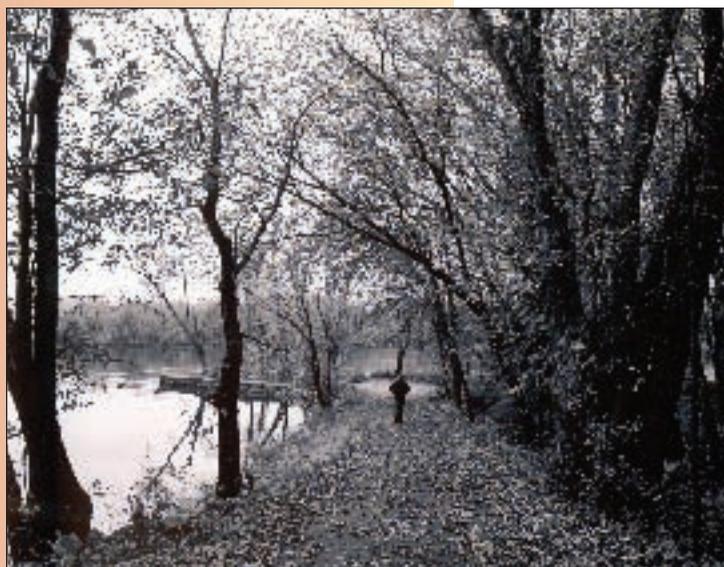
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Les Zigurski (detail)



Richard Neumann, First Place, Refuge Landscape



Natalie Barnes, Honorable Mention, People on the Refuges



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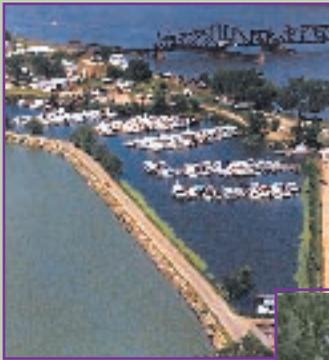
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September 14-18th, 2006



Letterboxing

Hobby, Pastime, Puzzle and Another Way to Explore the River

By Pamela Eyden

Some people never outgrow the need to look for hidden treasure. "Letterboxing" is a treasure hunt involving clues, orienteering, hiking, exploration and art. It's an outdoors game you play with people you never meet. Letterboxing along the Upper Mississippi will take you to some scenic and interesting destinations. Finding the letterbox is an added treat.

Looking to ramble along the river one afternoon, we decided to try hunting for our first letterbox. We downloaded clues from a website and headed to a nearby rivertown. After driving a switchback road to the top of a bluff, we paused to admire the view, took a compass reading and walked until we located the head of a trail. We'd never noticed this slight break in the trees before.

"Walk 50 paces down the trail," the clues said.

"Down" was the key word.

"Find the wiry tree," the clues said.

This was odd, as most of the trees stood straight and tall. However, the clue had another meaning and when we found the right one, we used the compass to set another heading. With socks pulled up over our pants legs to keep the ticks out, we charged off into the bush, looking for a rock ledge and then two fallen trees that formed an "X."

A short time later, hidden under some sticks and leaves, we found the

letterbox — a plastic box inside a plastic bag. Inside the box was a hand-carved stamp and a small notebook. The notebook pages were half-filled with bright-colored hand-carved stamp artworks and messages from people who'd found the box before us. It truly was a treasure!

Following tradition, we read the other messages, put our own stamp in the book and wrote a message. Then we used the letterbox stamp in our logbook, recording the date and place. Hiding the box again, we retraced our steps, taking time to cover our trail.

It Came from the Moor

For a lot of people, finding that first letterbox launches a new hobby. This pastime can become addictive.

According to the letterboxing.org website, letterboxing began in 1854, when a gentleman hiker left his card in a bottle at a remote location in the Dartmoor region in England. There are said to be thousands of letterboxes in Dartmoor National Park now. The clues are complicated, and people spend weeks tramping around the moors looking for the boxes.

The game jumped the Atlantic in the late 1980s. *Smithsonian* magazine



When you find a letterbox, you can read messages from those before you and leave your thoughts for those who follow.

wrote a story about it in the April 1998 issue, which gave the hobby a big boost. Aficionados refer to the Pre-Smithsonian Era and the Post-Smithsonian Era of letterboxing. There are more than 5,000 Post-Smithsonian Era letterboxes hidden in the United States. A few years ago there were only one or two letterboxes near the Upper Mississippi River; now there are dozens.

To search for letterboxes you need the clues, which you can find a number of ways, although the most accessible is on a website devoted to the game. You'll also need a hand-carved rubber stamp, an ink pad, a log book, a pencil, shoes on your feet and a little time on your hands.

(Letterboxing continues on page 63)

Two young girls are shown from the side, focused on drawing the KFAI logo on a dark chalkboard. The board is filled with several instances of the logo, some complete and some in progress. The girl in the foreground is wearing a pink shirt, while the one behind her is in a purple shirt. The KFAI logo consists of the call letters 'KFAI' inside a circular emblem.

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THE John Deere Legend LIVES ON

The John Deere Pavilion is a large, modern building with a prominent glass facade and a curved roofline. It is surrounded by greenery and other structures, including a large yellow John Deere building in the background.

The legend of John Deere lives on at the world's most comprehensive agricultural exhibit, the John Deere Pavilion in Moline, IL. Shop the John Deere Store for unique Deere merchandise and also visit the John Deere Collectors Center, Deere Historic Homes and Gardens, and the Deere & Company World Headquarters. And, see the Grand Detour Historic Site in Grand Detour, IL. 309-760-1000

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(River News continued from page 15)

in Minneapolis.

The indigo-blue building, designed by French architect Jean Nouvel to mirror the shapes of the grain mill and elevator buildings nearby, incorporates three separate theater venues and gives theatergoers a spectacular view of the Minneapolis riverfront.

Monster Poison Ivy

Chapel Hill, N.C. — If you've ever seen a big poison ivy plant — a really big one, thick as a strong man's arm, winding around a tree trunk and fanning out onto the branches — then you've got an idea what the future may hold for the Upper Mississippi River.

Poison ivy is naturally lush and thick on most islands and floodplain forests. Global warming conditions may give it a big boost.

Researchers from Duke and Harvard University have found that poison ivy thrives when carbon dioxide (CO2) levels are high. An experiment used a system of pipes to pump CO2



The new Guthrie Theatre was designed to harmonize with the industrial buildings on one side and the cylindrical grain elevators on the other. (Guthrie Theatre)

in a forest plot to levels that are likely to be found in northern temperate forests in the year 2050. The vine grew 150 percent faster than normal, spread more rapidly and produced a stronger concentration of urushiol, the compound that is the "poison" part of the ivy.

More than 350,000 Americans each

year seek treatment for the itchy rash and weeping red blisters caused by contact with poison ivy.

Poison ivy and its relatives are not the only plants that would be favored by global warming; all woody vines would grow faster, which would change the nature of northern forests. Many woody vines strangle the

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solitude Ridge, is a secluded area located on Villa St. Joseph property in the village of St. Joseph.

Three individual hermitages are built on the edge of the wood and area provide the peace and quiet of the rural setting.

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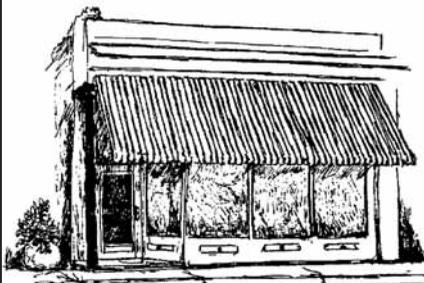
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Winner of the River Lovers' Photo Contest



Drew Cooney took this picture in Minneapolis on a cold winter's day. Drew will be entering the photography program at the Art Institute of Chicago this fall.

Send entries for the next contest to *Big River* by the deadline below. If we select your photo to print in these pages, we'll send you three free copies of the magazine. The contest is open to amateurs and professionals, adults and kids. Email a digital JPEG (.jpg) photo file — high-resolution photos only, please! — to photos@big-river.com. Write "PHOTO CONTEST" in the subject line.

Or send a print to Photo Editor, Big River, P.O. Box 204, Winona, MN 55987. (We cannot return photographs, though.)

Include your name, address, phone number and a short description of the photograph — who or what it is, when and where it was taken, etc.

The deadline for the September-October issue is July 19, 2006.

plants they climb on.

"Our results indicate that *Toxicodendron taxa* will become more abundant and more 'toxic' in the future, potentially affecting global forest dynamics and human health," said the research report. (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 5-30-06)

Peregrine Attacks

Sartell, Minn. — Keep your wits about you and wear a helmet if you're going to cross the Mississippi River bridge in Sartell, upriver of St. Cloud, Minn., in early summer.

That's what a half dozen pedestrians discovered in early June as they got to the middle of the bridge.

Cathy Copa said she never saw the bird coming.

"It felt like a full body hit to me. She hit me on the side of the head, and I just flew forward a little, stumbling." The irate mama peregrine hit her three times before Copa escaped into the cab of a pickup truck, according to a report on WCCO-TV.

A few days later, a pedestrian was injured when the falcon dive-bombed his head eight or nine times in the middle of the bridge.

The falcon's nest was mounted high on a nearby smokestack and she was protecting her young from trespassers she thought were coming a little too close.

The city considered removing the mother bird or removing the whole nest. After consulting with University

(*River News continues on page 55*)

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- **Saturday & Sunday, September 23 & 24 Don't Forget Zeb Pike Cruises**, depart Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin at 2 p.m.
- Or schedule any of Duke's River Tales presentations on a Chartered **Mississippi Explorer** Cruise for your group.

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Guttenberg Eagle Watch, January 13-14, 2007

The 20th Anniversary Sauk Prairie Bald Eagle Watching Days, January 20-21, 2007



- Ride along with Duke on his regularly scheduled eagle watching van tours at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Bloomington, Minn., or schedule one of Duke's tours for your group. (952-858-0740)
- Attend or schedule one of Duke's presentations at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minn., and view both wild and captive eagles there. (651-565-4989)
- Attend on July 27 at their Family Night one of Duke's presentations at the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul and view the captive eagles with him there. (612-624-4745)

- Select an eagle-watching location and meet Duke there with your group or make Duke's presentation part of your community or organization's eagle-watching events and environmental education programs.

- **INFORM YOURSELF ABOUT WILD EAGLE WATCHING.** Duke has a new website containing all Duke knows about Watching Wild Eagles, including the considerable knowledge gained from his experience and training at the Raptor Center and the National Eagle Center.

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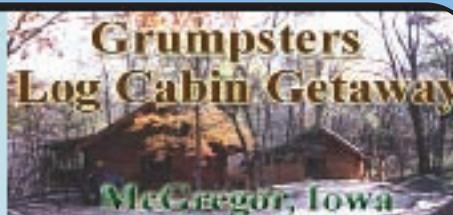
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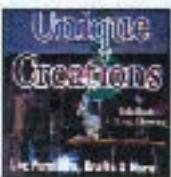
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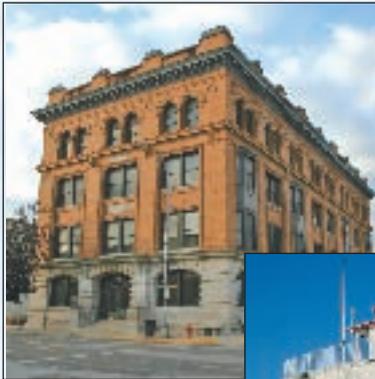
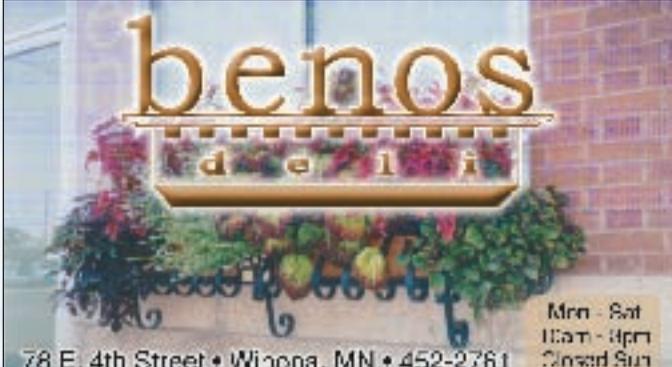
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Much to do on the Mississippi

Get Festive

Riverboat Days in Wabasha, Minn., July 28 to 29, will feature a Grumpy Old Men fishing tournament and offer, for the first time, rowing shell rides.

The Tug in LeClaire, Iowa, and Port Byron, Ill., August 10 to 13, halts river traffic to pit teams from each city in tugs of war across the Main Channel.

Eat a catfish sandwich at **Catfish Days** in Trempealeau, Wis., July 7 to 9, and take in a craft show, flea market, parade and fireworks.

Thousands of bicyclists will roll into Muscatine, Iowa, at the end of RAGBRAI, on July 29, during with the city's **Great River Reunion** fest, featuring a craft show and Jamaican music.

Enjoy Lamont Cranston and the Siegel-Schwall Blues Band at the laid-back **Prairie Dog Blues Festival** on historic St. Feriole Island, Prairie du Chien, Wis., July 28 and 29.

Step back in time at the **Barron Island Rendezvous** at Pettibone Island, La Crosse, Wis., July 28 to 30, with re-enactments and old-time arts and crafts.

The **Celtic Highland Games** in the Quad Cities on August 26 promises Scottish athletic competitions, dancing and bagpipe competitions, lots of Celtic music, and sheep herding demonstrations.

The venerable and always popular **Stockholm (Wis.) Art Fair** is on July 15.

"RiverWay 2006: Bridging the River – Connecting the Continent" will celebrate the first railroad bridge to cross the Mississippi, from September 14 to 18. In addition to trips on a steam locomotive and steamboat, an image of the original bridge will be projected over the river.

Move that Body



In July and August join a **free Mississippi biking or walking tour** led by a Park Service ranger in the Twin Cities. Register for bike rides; just show up for scheduled walks at the Mississippi River Visitor Center at the Science Museum. The Park Service is also offering programs at St. Anthony Falls this summer. Call (651) 293-0200 for times or view online.

Canoe or Kayak down the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers on the **Great River Rumble** from Sauk City, Wis., to Dubuque, Iowa, July 29 to August 5. Sign up online or call (708) 747-1969



Paddle a canoe or kayak with the **Mississippi River Challenge** in the Twin Cities on August 5 and 6. Saturday will take paddlers through Minneapolis, and Sunday will begin at the Mississippi-Minnesota River confluence and travel the St. Paul reach of the river. Call (651) 222-2193, ext. 19, or register online for Saturday or both days.

Sign up for the two-hour **Wildflower Walk** at Grey Cloud Dunes in Cottage Grove, Minn., on August 10, cosponsored by the Friends of the Mississippi River and the Minnesota DNR. Call (651) 222-2193.

Pedal along rivers from Rockford to Alton, Ill., on the **Great Rivers Ride**, September 10 through 16. Bike the whole stretch or for just a day or two. Call (877) 477-7007, ext. 217, email info@illinoisgreatriversride.com or visit the website.

Visit the Big River website for links to these events.
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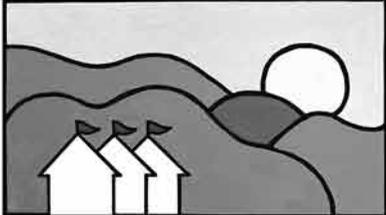
Learn Something New

Ernie Boszhardt will speak on **archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River** at the Whitewater State Park visitor center, Elba, Minn., on July 2 from 8 to 9 p.m. On July 8, **Kenny Salwey, The Last River Rat**, will speak from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. Call (507) 932-3007.

Learn about the hidden history of Minneapolis in **"Underground Minneapolis : Archaeology in the Mill City,"** at the Minneapolis Public Library, with sessions on August 14, 21 and 28. Free, but register early, (612) 630-6155 or online.

Living Lands & Waters is holding workshops for teachers and interested citizens, including **"The Mississippi River: Shifting Currents,"** in Rock Island, Ill., on July 31 to August 2. Call (309) 236-0725 or email tammy@livinglandsandwaters.org.

Learn about controlling asian carp at a forum in Peoria, Ill., **"The Invasive Asian Carps in North America,"** August 22 to 23. Visit the website or email dchapman@usgs.gov.



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(Riverbank continued from page 5)

Freeloaders remained in the Free Spirits group.

Initially, the Punishers group members did a lot of punishing to force Freeloaders to kick in more units.

Initially, members of the Free Spirits group profited more than the Punishers group, but by round 4 both groups were about equally profitable. Then the Punishers' fortunes quickly climbed as those of the Free Spirits quickly declined.

With the reversal of fortunes for the two groups, nearly all the remaining Freeloaders abandoned the Free Spirits group for the Punishers group. After they joined the Punishers, Freeloaders quickly started investing like Chumps, and they embraced sanctions more enthusiastically than the typical Chump did.

Overall, in the Punishers group, big contributors tended to be big punishers. As the experiment progressed, less punishment was used, as more members changed their behavior to optimize everybody's profit. By about the 20th round the systems had stabilized, with the high contributing Punishers members now making more money units than the Freeloaders in the Free Spirits group made in their heyday during the first few rounds.

I am interested in this and similar studies, because I often find myself trying to figure out why societies seem unable to maintain or increase the value of those things that everybody owns in common and needs to survive: air and water being the most obvious. It should be easy to recognize the benefit to every individual and to the community as a whole if the groundwater is clean. Clean water is nice, of course, but everybody saves an enormous amount of money if we don't have to dig deeper wells, filter our water and buy bottled water. Everybody is healthier, if they have clean water to drink and clean air to breathe. Why, I ask myself, are these issues so difficult to figure out?

Or consider the Upper Mississippi River. We all invest in and profit from the river, though more of that profit

might be in pleasure units than in money units. The important point is that studies like this one give me hope that we are capable of creating situations in which we can exercise our judgment and act in ways that promote the common good, while making the system as a whole more efficient.

The real world is much more complicated, of course, but the same principles that apply to the experiment should apply to other human endeavors. Sanctions, for instance, are votes for or against politicians; they are dollars spent or withheld from a marketplace or product; they are activities that we participate in or avoid. We are all, however, stuck in the same group with the same resources. People rarely move from one state to another or from one country to another for philosophical reasons.

People also do not have a lot of time to investigate the products they buy or the companies that make them or the companies that make the materials that go into making the products. Despite all the talk these days about "partnering" and "incentives," the simplest and most effective way to protect the value of the resources we all share and depend on is to create clear limits on what any individual or organization can do to degrade their value. When an individual or organization crosses the line and destroys the value of a resource, they should face sanctions that cost more than enough to repair the damage and are more expensive than any financial advantage the violator may have gained. This not only protects our common property and the health of society, it also creates a level playing field for all the players by taking away any possible advantage to consuming or spoiling the common wealth.

We all have a bit of the Chump and the Free Loader in us. We would just as soon avoid all the sanctions we can, but we also want to be protected from those who would take advantage of us. We could all just wait for widespread enlightenment, or we can reach for the sanctions. ☰

(River News continued from page 42)

of Minnesota Raptor Center experts, though, they decided to leave the birds alone and put up warning signs for pedestrians, instead.

"Basically, you travel at your own risk if you cross this bridge," said police chief Jim Hughes.

Raptor Center experts said the attack was unusual. Most falcons are aggressive only within a few hundred feet of their nests.

Since falcons generally return to the same nesting territory every year, the city of Sartell should probably save those warning signs.

Peregrines can reach speeds of up to 180 mph when they dive in pursuit of smaller birds.

Zebras of the North

St. Paul — The Upper Mississippi River, from its confluence with the Pine River north of Brainerd, Minn., all the way to the Iowa border, has been formally declared infested with zebra mussels. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced in May that the invasive mussels had been found in Rice Lake, a backwater lake north of Brainerd, meaning that the river above the Twin Cities is infested. Previously, just the river extending from the Twin Cities to the Iowa border was infested.

To slow the mussels' advance, the DNR is still advising boaters to remove all visible aquatic plants; drain all water from live wells, bilges and bait buckets; and spray or rinse boats and let them dry thoroughly for five days before putting in at another body of water. The fact that mussels have spread to the whole river increases the likelihood that they'll be spread by boaters to other unconnected waters.

Zebra mussels are small shellfish named for the stripes on their shells. They are native to the Black, Azov and Caspian Seas. They have infested the Great Lakes region from Vermont to Minnesota, and the Missouri, Ohio and Illinois rivers, as well as sections of the Mississippi. 🌊

Greener Boating with a Bilge Filter

By Gary Kramer

The nastiest stuff on a boat is usually found in the bilge. Motor oil, transmission oil, sometimes hydraulic fluid and everything else makes its way to the lowest level. All of that gets mixed with water that seeps into the boat or finds its way down there after a rain or a washing.

As the bilge fills, a float rises and activates a bilge pump that pumps the nasty fluid overboard, into the river. This could earn the boater a \$5,000 fine, because discharging oily waste from the bilge is illegal.

To reduce oily discharges, many boaters put oil absorbing pads, or "socks," in the bilge that soak up oil but not water, but only oil that

The results were so impressive that the city council required all boats in the city harbor to have some type of bilge cleaning system.

comes into direct contact with the sock. They get replaced when they can't hold any more oil.

A few years ago, pollution from boats in the city harbor at Pass Christian, Miss., was ruining nearby oyster beds. Most of the fishing and workboats were wood and over 25 years old. Their bilges were virtually impossible to clean, because oil had saturated the wood over the years. As the boats leaked water in and then pumped it out, the oil became part of the discharge, according to literature from Centek Industries, which makes the BilgeKleen system.

The harbormaster saw an ad for a bilge filter system and had them installed on some of the worst offenders. The results were so impressive that the city council required all boats in the city harbor to have some type of bilge cleaning system. Soon there was not only less sheen on the water, but the water quality in the

oyster beds improved considerably. Now agencies throughout the country are studying the use of bilge filters.

The Marine and Environmental Education Foundation (MEEF) is a national group whose mission is to create programs that will help provide cleaner water for the boating public. While not endorsing any commercial products, it sent a letter to Centek acknowledging that the BilgeKleen system makes for cleaner boating.

I cruised the Mississippi last summer from Alton, Ill., to Minneapolis, reviewing all the marinas for *Quimby's Cruising Guide*. For that trip, I installed one of Centek's BilgeKleen filters. Centek is primarily known as a leading manufacturer of wet marine exhaust systems, but also makes marine environmental products.

Installation is simple. The hose from the pump to the thru-hull is cut and the filter is spliced into the line. The assembly consists of a clear, plastic canister containing a replaceable filter. This sits in a bracket mounted to a solid surface. This "hydrocarbon removal matrix cartridge" removes 100% of all hydrocarbons without restricting bilge pump flow rates. After I installed it, I flooded the bilge with water to check the flow. It did not seem to be affected.

I forgot about it until I had major engine problems and started dumping oil into the bilge from one engine. The system worked. The yellow filter turned black and oily, but my discharge didn't.

It seems to be a simple, reliable system. For my 32-foot boat, I needed the unit that retails for about \$100. The filters come in a variety of sizes to accommodate different sized boats. 🌊

Gary Kramer is a boater and freelance writer who lives in Rock Island, Ill. His last article was "Bob Myers, Boat Builder," May-June 2006.



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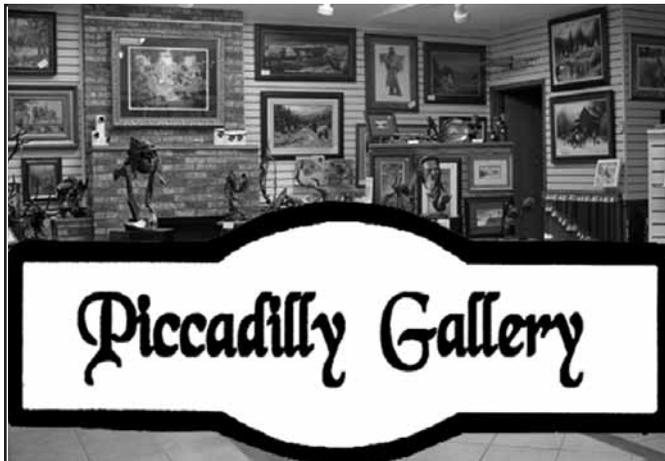
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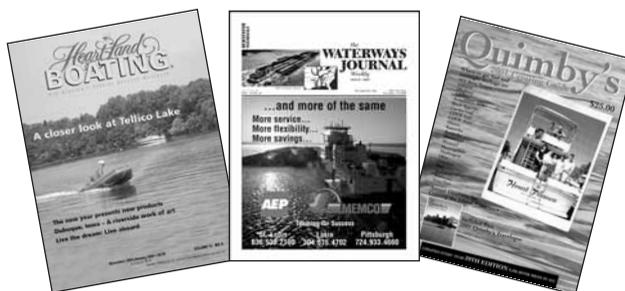
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(Donald Sweeney continued from page 64)

careers. Laws that protect whistleblowers from retribution aim to protect the public and taxpayers from government misconduct.

"The odds were somewhat daunting before," explained Ruch. "The numbers are so embarrassing now, they are being omitted from Congressional reports."

When the current Special Council, Scott Bloch, took office in January 2004, he inherited a backlog of about 700 disclosures pending investigation. He dropped them all without review,

"I think it's worse now than when they were doctoring the numbers outright," Sweeney said. "It's embarrassingly laughable."

to clear up the backlog, according to Ruch.

In 2001, Sweeney was given two awards: Public Servant of the Year, from the Office of Special Council, and the National Environmental Quality Award from the Natural Resources Council of America. He was the first recipient of the Environment, Science and Technology - Service to America Medal from the Partnership for Public Service in 2002.

He always accepts awards on behalf of all other Corps employees.

"I got almost unanimous support from almost all the Corps employees I knew who were GS 13 or below," he said, referring to the ranking system for federal employees.

However the reaction from higher ranking Corps employees was just the opposite. Sweeney said their attitude was, "No matter what you do, you never take it outside the organization."

The situation is especially frustrating for the many hard-working, rank-and-file employees who want to do good work.

Michael Grunwald, national staff writer for the *Washington Post*, covered Sweeney's story and Corps corruption in depth.

"It was huge," he noted. "It certainly convinced my editor that we needed to go deeper."

Sweeney had strong documentation to back up his claims. Grunwald went on to write about broader problems in the Corps. He also covered the Corps' Everglades project for the *Post* and recently wrote a book about it, *The Swamp*.

His stories told how Corps bosses formulated a plan to grow the Corps' budget by pushing more projects, including environmental rehabilitation. Most senators and members of congress go along with it, because many of the projects supply jobs and money to their constituents, whether or not they have any real value to the nation. Only a handful of legislators — mainly environmentalists and conservatives — have been pushing for Corps reform.

Grunwald said he wishes that he could claim that his revelations about the Corps helped clean up the agency, but it appears to have just closed ranks and carried on. Even the deaths in New Orleans have had little impact.

Often the Corps is paid millions of dollars to study the feasibility of a multi-million-dollar or multi-billion-dollar project that they would oversee.

"Sort of like giving a new car dealer some extra money to evaluate for you if you should buy his already very expensive new car rather than continuing to drive your older, slower, but perfectly functional (and paid for) car, isn't it?" Sweeney said.

Shortly after the original Navigation Study was discredited and abandoned, the Corps began another, more expensive Navigation Study, which recommended new locks.

"I think it's worse now than when they were doctoring the numbers outright," Sweeney said. "It's embarrassingly laughable."

Many of the locks have been rehabilitated since the 1990s, but shipping on the river is on a steady decline anyway.

"I see a 40-percent decline in traffic since the [first] study started. You would get a return of less than a dime

on a dollar on your investment."

The new Navigation Study asked for \$2.4 billion for new, longer locks and \$5 billion for environmental programs on the rivers.

"It's a clever policy ploy, but I think it's transparent," he said, citing also the \$8 billion Corps project to restore the Everglades.

Nevertheless, Sweeney's case has had long-term effects, both positive and negative.

"His case is still talked about like it happened yesterday," said PEER's

"I don't see how to break this cycle." Sweeney said. "Someone down the road may end up having to do this again."

Ruch. "I have people come up to me and say, 'I want a Don Sweeney deal.'"

And more people are filing cases with the Special Council, even if they are not being investigated.

"The Corps has become better at cheating," Ruch admitted. "All Corps decisions are done by teleconference, and all participants are forbidden to leave with notes."

"I don't see how to break this cycle." Sweeney said. "Someone down the road may end up having to do this again."

Looking back, Sweeney is still comfortable with his decision.

"I have no regrets, other than that I had to do it," he said.

"I'm enjoying my retired life. I'm very happy to be back in academia. I enjoy working with the students."

"I've become a beacon of false hope for thousands."

Reggie McLeod is editor of Big River.

For more background, see the Big River website for a series of stories on the Navigation Study published in Big River in 2000 and 2001.

(Peregrines continued from page 30)



Watch for peregrines in flight around Maiden Rock. (Raptor Resource Project)

looks Lake Pepin and is a wonderful place to watch falcons."

Three sites are ideal for falcon watching. A wayside rest is conveniently located below Maiden Rock. "If you turn off your car, you can sit in the parking lot and hear the falcons talking to each other, courting each other," Anderson notes. The Lynxville nest is also located by a wayside rest, but perhaps the best place to watch the birds is Waukon Junction. "There's no traffic," Anderson said. "It is so quiet."

The best opportunity for peregrine watching is when the birds first return from South America in early February until they lay their eggs in April. During this time, the birds are courting and protecting their nest sites from other large raptors migrating up the river. "Any time a hawk or eagle ventures near the nest site, you can see why peregrines are top dog,"

explained Anderson. "They come out like kamikaze airplanes and beat up the other birds."

It's also fun to watch falcons when the young fledge in late June or early July. The young falcons taking their first flights tend to stay within a mile or two of the cliff where they were born.

"They are quite vocal when they

are begging for food from the adults," said Anderson. "You can hear them from a mile away, if there is no traffic."

In mid-October, the birds begin their long migration to South America.

Anderson estimates that the river bluffs from Red Wing, Minn., to Cassville, Wis., can support between 20 and 24 nesting pairs of peregrines. Besides, there's another population that could also be restored.

"We used to have a tree-nesting population that nested in original growth trees lining the riverbanks," he said. These birds used old eagle, osprey and crow nests. "By the mid-to-late-1800s, we lost the tree-nesting population. I think the time has come to restore the tree-nesting population. If the cliffs become too populated with houses, a tree population would help assure the perpetuity of the river population." 

Fran Howard is a freelance writer, based in St. Paul, who specializes in writing about conservation and wildlife, among other topics. This is her first story for Big River.



Locations of peregrine cliff nests are shown in blue. You can track the status of the falcons at many of these nests on the Raptor Resource Center website.



This nest box sits high over the river near Red Wing, Minn. (Raptor Resource Project)


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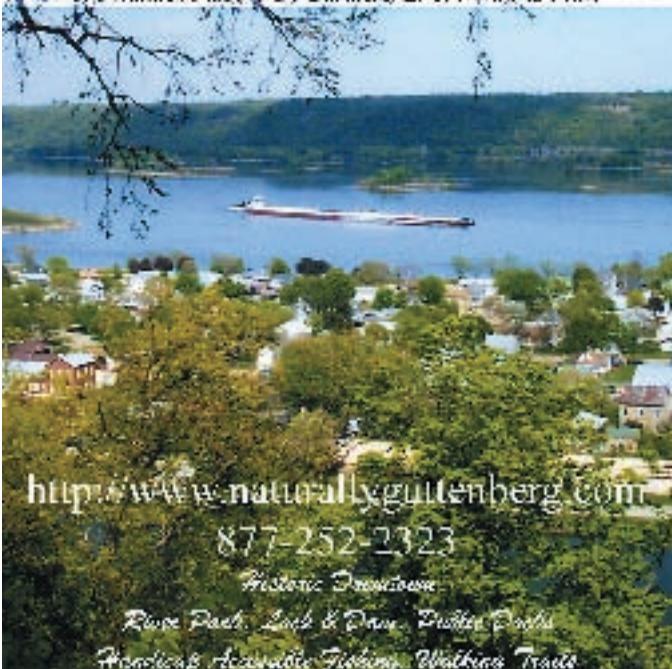


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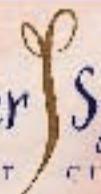
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Letterboxers

Dan, a 24-year-old computer programmer, found his first letterbox last summer, but already he's got the stamps of 87 letterboxes in his book.

"Letterboxing to me has been a good way to get exercise and get out to places I wouldn't normally go, but mostly I like solving the clues. It's like an endless treasure hunt that has parts everywhere. Plus, I just like collecting the stamps and keeping a record of where all I have been," he explained.

John, an art teacher, and his fiancée Sara, look for letterboxes everywhere they go.

"Sometimes we plan whole trips around letterboxing," John said. "One of our main trips was to Michigan, where we found 64 letterboxes in one weekend. We did a lot of hiking that weekend."

They've found 300 letterboxes so far, and have placed quite a few in what they call the "Upper Mississippi River Series," the "Wizard of Oz Series" and the "Popeye Series" of boxes. They once drove across the country, placing boxes in their "Route 66 Series." Sara writes stories that have the clues in them. John carves the stamps.

"We're getting married soon, so we have had to cut back on the letterboxing, but I'm working on clues and ciphers to make it more challenging," John said.

Beginners usually start with hunts that have simple, explicit clues. Advanced letterboxers prefer more of a challenge. Some clues are purposely vague. Other clues may be mathematical, written in a foreign language or a code. Some may have you look for one box in order to find the clues to a second one. Sometimes a series of letterboxes is only available for a short time, like the "Twelve Days of Christmas Series" last year. Letterboxes aren't always even boxes — you might have to find a certain person at a certain flea market and say a secret word in order to get the stamp.

Some people play an elaborate game, while others keep it simple.

Things you'll need

- Clues from letterboxing.org
- Carved rubber stamp
- Ink pad
- Log book
- Pencil
- Shoes on your feet
- Time on your hands

What's in a Clue? (excerpt)

"With a bit of huffing an' puffing, you'll have a great view of the Mississippi River. Enter the park that has all those steps. No complaining :). It's worth it! Start stepping. Pass "The Silvers" on your right. ... When you reach the end of the first long flight of stairs, an outcrop gives you a great view..... Get to the spot where you have a sprawling birch at 158°, a cedar at 296°, and the point of the bluff due north of you. About ten paces off the trail look for an outstretched arm beckoning you to search the hole in its trunk. There you will find the steamboat. Please wedge the box back in the trunk. Good luck!"

Terri, who's found 61 and placed six boxes, was simply looking for a family activity last summer, when she heard about letterboxing.

"Probably the best part of this hobby is that it makes you stop and spend a little time discovering waysides and points of interest, nature trails, parks and even places in the city that you've sped by in your car," she said. "But learning to use a compass and learning the types of trees, like shagbark hickory, is really neat, too." 🌲 🍷

Pamela Eyden is news editor of Big River.



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Donald Sweeney

Holding the Corps Accountable

By Reggie McLeod

In 2000, revelations from Donald Sweeney, an Army Corps of Engineers economist, shook the Upper Mississippi and rattled politicians and civil servants in Washington, D.C. However, although two generals and a colonel implicated in the scandal quickly announced their retirements, the course of the Corps' policy only hesitated for a short time before resuming, according to Sweeney.

"The organization is dysfunctional," he said. "You get waste from this dysfunctional system, and at worst, people die, as in New Orleans."

Sweeney began working for the Corps in February 1978, when he was a graduate student at Washington University, in St. Louis, where he earned a doctorate in economics. He worked on economics and study management for the Corps' St. Louis District, but was often involved in studies in other districts as well. He was assigned the job of technical manager of the economics workgroup for the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway Navigation System Feasibility Study — better known as the Navigation Study — when it began in 1993, and he helped oversee the entire study. Congress launched the study to consider ways to increase the efficiency of shipping on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

By the late 1990s, the economics workgroup was finding that expanding a handful of locks from 600 feet to 1,200 feet to speed up shipping did not make economic sense, because the cost would be much higher than their benefit to shipping, even over a 50-year period. Sweeney's bosses were not happy with that discovery.

Col. James Mudd, who headed the

Rock Island District and the Navigation Study, wanted the study to recommend the immediate construction of new locks. He changed some of the numbers in the economics section of the study to make lock construction appear to be economically feasible, according to Sweeney.

"I was suspended when I stepped in and confronted Col. Mudd," Sweeney recalled.

He was taken off the study and replaced by an engineer in late 1999.

"I filed my disclosure with the Office of Special Council in January 2000," said Sweeney.

The Office of Special Council is responsible for protecting whistleblowers from the federal government. It

The study, which had cost more than \$50 million, was declared ruined and was scrapped. Stories about the Corps "cooking the books" ran on the front page of major newspapers.

found in his favor and recommended that his charges be investigated. The Army's Inspector General and a committee appointed by the National Academy of Sciences each investigated his charges and both backed up his claims and pointed out deep systemic problems in the Corps. Two generals



and Col. Mudd were reprimanded and soon after announced their retirements. The study, which had cost more than \$50 million, was declared ruined and was scrapped. Stories about the Corps "cooking the books" ran on the front page of major newspapers.

Sweeney received a leave from the Corps and took a teaching post at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He retired from the Corps on Jan. 1, 2005, and now teaches full time and serves as assistant director of the university's Center for Transportation Studies.

A national group, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), worked with him on his whistleblower case. PEER's executive director, Jeff Ruch, told Sweeney that he was "a beacon of false hope for thousands," because the odds were so stacked against whistleblowers. Very few cases went anywhere.

Employees who expose misconduct risk damage to their job security and

(Donald Sweeney continues on page 59)

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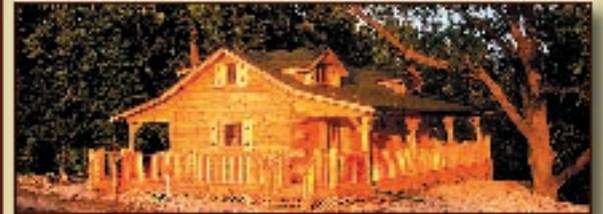
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