

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF RIVER STEWARDSHIP

How the Dramatic Shrinking of White Bear Lake Affects the Mississippi—And What We Can Do to Protect Both

by Jay Walljasper

White Bear Lake – celebrated in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s stories as a gala summer playground – now looks more like a recreational ruin. Docks are marooned many yards from the receding shoreline and a beach, now overrun by weeds, has been shutdown by local officials.

The second largest lake in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region has lost more than a quarter of its water volume over the past decade, according to a report from the Freshwater Society. Greg McNeely, president of the White Bear Lake Restoration Association, told the *Star Tribune* that recreational use of the lake is down 70 percent.

The consequences go beyond disappointed boaters, anglers, swimmers and beachcombers; homeowners around the lake have seen their property values plunge as much as 40 percent. Rep. Peter Fischer, who represents the area in the Minnesota House, says this “affects everybody in these communities” because they must make up the lost property tax revenues when those houses are sold.

Water, Water Everywhere?

There are two causes for this tragedy, says James Stark, water science director for the US Geological Survey in Minnesota. One reason is below average precipitation in recent years, which is outside of our control. The other reason is increased pumping of groundwater by fast-growing



A family inspects what was formerly the lake bottom of White Bear Lake. (Credit: Metropolitan Council)

suburban communities across the eastern metropolitan area, which has lowered water levels in the Prairie du Chien-Jordan aquifer that feeds White Bear Lake. This, however, is a problem we can do something about.

White Bear Lake is not alone in facing a groundwater crisis. A Freshwater Society report cites 16 areas around the state from Bemidji to Rochester where groundwater levels are seriously depleted due to overuse by

industry, irrigation or municipal water supplies.

“White Bear Lake is the tip of the iceberg,” says Ali Elhassan, water supply planning manager for the Metropolitan Council. “It’s a bellwether, showing us what will happen in other parts of the region if we continue current practices. We cannot continue ‘business as usual’ without inflicting irreparable harm.”

It comes as shock to boat- and beach-loving Minnesotans that the Land of 10,000 Lakes and birthplace of the Mississippi River might soon see water shortages. But as Jason Moeckel, section manager for ecological and water resources at the state DNR, explains, “We are increasing the amount of groundwater we withdraw every year by three billion gallons. Are we at risk of overuse? Yes, since all the growth of water use is groundwater.”

Most people aren’t aware of the ecological link between groundwater and the surface water in rivers or lakes. “The

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360 N. Robert Street, Suite 400
Saint Paul, MN 55101
651-222-2193 • 651-222-6005(f)
www.fmr.org • info@fmr.org

Mission

Friends of the Mississippi River engages citizens to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities region.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Will Scenic Protection for the River Be Weakened?

by Whitney Clark, Executive Director

2014 is a very important year for the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities. Whether it will be a good year or a bad year for the river is, at this time, very much an open question.



This is the year that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will finally finish writing rules for protection of the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area — a 72-mile corridor along the river stretching through the metropolitan area from Dayton to Hastings. While the new draft rules have not yet been released, a recent report to the legislature from the DNR signals their intention to weaken state protection of scenic resources saying “they are better left to the expertise in each local government.” Such a retreat from the basic management consensus of the last 35 years would be a major setback for our beloved river.

In 1979, Governor Al Quie issued Executive Order 79-19 which declared that “unregulated development and uncoordinated planning would threaten the public interest,” and that “coordinated planning would achieve development as a multipurpose resource, resolve the conflicts of use of land and water, preserve and enhance its natural, aesthetic, cultural and historical value for the public use, and protect its environmentally sensitive areas.”

The order established standards and guidelines including structure height and setback limits that local governments would be required to follow as land along

the river was developed or redeveloped. It acknowledged that the Mississippi River belongs not just to private interests who own the riverbank or the municipalities that have zoning authority but to all Minnesotans and indeed, to all Americans.

That’s a pretty simple concept and one that Congress, led by Representative Bruce Vento and Senator David Durenberger, had in mind when it passed public law 100-696 in November of 1988. That legislation established a new National Park — the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) following the boundaries of the Mississippi River Critical Area. This is America’s only national park focused on the Mississippi River and Congress chose our Twin Cities segment for designation due to both to its outstanding value but also because of the need to protect the river in a rapidly developing metropolitan region (see the article on page 3).

Let’s be honest, the DNR writes rules in a political context. Cities and landowners regulated by the DNR often would prefer not to meet state standards, and some of them put pressure on the agency to weaken those standards. However, state law requires the DNR to develop guidelines and standards that “must protect or enhance” among other things “scenic views and vistas” and “significant existing vegetative stands, tree canopies and native plant communities.” FMR believes that the DNR cannot pick and choose which parts of the law they want to follow and which they do not. Minnesotans expect the DNR to use their full authority under the law to protect all the public values of the river. One of FMR’s top priorities for 2014 will be to hold the DNR accountable for that.

Help FMR in Our Third Decade of Protecting the Mississippi

Friends of the Mississippi River is now entering the second half of our 20th anniversary year. This milestone shows we’re in this for the long haul, as witnessed by how many of you members, volunteers and advocates have already stepped up to help launch our third decade of protecting the river and its watershed. Thank you to everyone who has made a planned gift, given a gift membership, become an FMR member, increased your support, volunteered on river projects, or taken other actions for the Mississippi.

Help FMR In Our 3rd Decade, continued on page 7

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Keeping Minnesota's Promise to Our National Park

by Irene Jones

Established almost 40 years ago by Governor Wendell Anderson, the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) aims to protect and preserve the scenic, natural, cultural, historical, mineral, economic and recreational resources of the 72-mile section of the Mississippi River flowing through the Twin Cities from Dayton to Hastings. It was enacted a decade before the corridor was designated a National Park – the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA).

So why did Congress choose the Twin Cities to designate the only National Park focused on the Mississippi River? What's unique here is the river's changing topography—this is where the Mississippi flows over a waterfall and through a gorge to become the broad floodplain river known across the globe. On top of that, the rich history and culture of our river towns give the corridor further national significance.

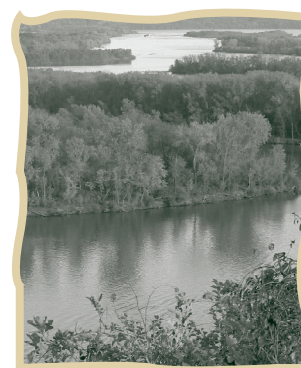
After the National Park was established, the Minnesota DNR assumed oversight for the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area's development guidelines. With no federal authority, MNRRA counts on the DNR to provide state regulations for the corridor.

"The State of Minnesota made a promise to MNRRA to provide management and oversight of the river corridor and

help achieve the goals of the National Park," said MNRRA Superintendent Paul Labovitz. "It's a 20-year-old promise, but the river needs protection now more than ever, and we are still counting on Minnesota to come through."

That's why FMR worked with State Legislators in 2009 and 2013 to authorize and fund the long overdue MRCCA rulemaking process. Although FMR was largely satisfied with the rules drafted in 2010, we are troubled by a 2014 report to the Legislature suggesting the DNR intends to weaken protections for scenic views, as well as open space and cultural and historic features, because they do not fit within the DNR's core mission to protect natural resources.

The DNR report provides a glimpse at the changes being made to the draft rules, which are still on track to be released to the public with an official call for comments in March. It will be extremely important for citizens and other stakeholders to weigh in when the rules are released.



New rules for the Critical Area must protect scenic river vistas, like this view from the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area in Inver Grove Heights.

Momentum Growing to Phase Out Toxic Triclosan

by Trevor Russell

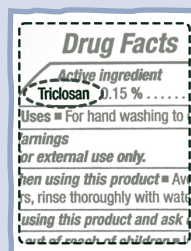
So, what's in my soap?

That's not a question we ask ourselves often, but new research on the impacts of triclosan – a common ingredient in many antibacterial soaps and personal care products – is leading Minnesotans to take a fresh look at some common household products.

Triclosan is an antimicrobial agent developed in the 1960s that is now added to a variety of products including liquid hand and dish soap, toothpaste, deodorant, kitchenware, and cosmetics. As a result, human exposure is now common; about three-quarters of Americans test positive for triclosan.

The Minnesota Department of Health recommends against using antibacterial products like triclosan because they may contribute to the emergence of resistant strains of bacteria. Studies also indicate that triclosan presents multiple risks to human and animal health.

Unfortunately, the risks don't end there. As triclosan moves through the wastewater treatment process and into the river, it is exposed to chlorine and sunlight, which cause it to transform into dangerous dioxins and other carcinogens. Tests show that triclosan-derived dioxins, measured in Lake Pepin, have increased by 200 to 300 percent.



Many antibacterial products contain triclosan, which causes toxic dioxins to build up in the Mississippi River. (Credit: The U.S. Food & Drug Administration)

Despite the Food & Drug Administration's conclusion that triclosan provides no health benefit (it is no more effective than normal soap and water), triclosan remains in a variety of soaps and other household products.

FMR and our partners, including the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, are working to advance legislation that phases out the sale of some triclosan-based products in Minnesota. This legislation is critical in helping reduce the unnecessary build up of toxins in our waters (and ourselves).

This legislative effort comes on the heels of Governor Mark Dayton's Executive Order barring state agencies from purchasing triclosan-based products. And while several high-profile companies have pledged to get rid of triclosan, others (primarily Colgate Palmolive) and their allies in the chemical industry are fighting to keep it on store shelves.

Luckily, the people of Minnesota support a phaseout. In a non-partisan statewide poll of Minnesota voters conducted in February 2014, 69 percent of Minnesotans supported action by the Minnesota Legislature to phase out the sale of consumer products that contain triclosan.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Stopping Asian Carp on Capitol Hill



Congress may soon close the locks at St. Anthony Falls to protect the upper river from Asian carp.

By the time you read this article, federal legislation to close the Upper Saint Anthony Falls Lock in Minneapolis will (we hope) have passed into law. In an act of cooperation rarely seen these days in Congress, legislation to retire the uppermost lock on the Mississippi River Navigation System passed in both the U.S. House and U.S. Senate last year.

Although originally introduced by Rep. Keith Ellison and Sen. Amy Klobuchar as a stand-alone bill, the provision was amended into the Water Resources Reform & Development Act (WRRDA) of 2013 with strong bi-partisan support. The legislation has now moved on to a conference committee with the rest of the WRRDA bill.

Meanwhile back in Minnesota, the fight to stop Asian carp and other invasive species is getting some well-deserved attention and funding. The recently established Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) has been ramping up its efforts with the promise of increased funding. The Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) has recommended 2015 funding for MAISRC, as has Governor Mark Dayton in his 2014 Bonding Request. If fully funded, these measures will provide almost 15 million dollars to conduct research on Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), including exploring methods to eradicate Asian carp in the river and the potential for deterrent technology to be used at Lock 2 in Hastings and Lock 5 in Winona.

A New, Natural Greenway Connects to the River

by Tom Lewanski

The City of Maplewood has permanently protected 62 acres in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway, located along the Mississippi River bluff line.

This project, which was completed late last year, is significant for a number of reasons. The property is surrounded on three sides by Ramsey County open space, thus creating a sizable stretch of protected bluffland in the area. It offers the public great views of the Mississippi Valley, and forever protects habitat for animals using the river corridor, especially migratory birds.

Natural and open space areas adjacent to the Mississippi River and its tributaries are extremely important for the health of the river. FMR works with many communities to safeguard these vital areas to help achieve our goal of creating an interconnected system of natural corridors associated with the river.

“The City of Maplewood really stepped up to their responsibility to be good stewards of their blufflands. We are honored to play a role in helping with this wonderful project,” said FMR Executive Director Whitney Clark. FMR was a partner on the Fish Creek project, contributing funds from a grant provided by the Minnesota Environment and



Fish Creek in Maplewood is now part of a network of natural corridors connecting to the Mississippi River.

Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. FMR also contributed funding from our own Land Protection Fund.

Other partners in the protection project included Ramsey County, Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District and The Conservation Fund.

Minnesota's Impaired Waters

by Trevor Russell

Minnesotans deserve to know if our waters are clean and safe. That is why, every two years, the state releases a comprehensive list of rivers, lakes, and streams throughout Minnesota that violate the state's water quality standards.

This list, called the "Inventory of Impaired Waters," offers insights into the condition of our freshwater resources. The 2014 inventory includes a whopping 4,122 individual impairments in bodies of water in every corner of the state.

Since 2012, the state has added 468 impairments to the inventory. Meanwhile, the state removed just 30 waters from the list. Approximately 50 percent of lakes and 62 percent of streams used for aquatic recreation remain impaired statewide.

Overall, about 39 percent of the inventory's impairments are due to mercury in fish tissue. Excess nutrients account for about 14 percent of the impairments, while *E. coli* bacteria (12.9 percent), turbidity (8.9 percent), poor macroinvertebrate assessments (7.2 percent), and poor fish assessments (6.7 percent) are other major sources of impairments. There are also some surprising findings, including five bodies of water tainted with DDT, a chemical banned in 1972.

The 2014 Inventory of Impaired Waters is far from good news. We know that we didn't get into this problem overnight, and it will take some time to restore our state's waters. But working together with industry, agriculture, and communities across the state, we can clean up our waters and pass them on to future generations.

For more information on the MPCA's 2014 Inventory of Impaired Waters, visit: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us>



The Mississippi gorge flowing through Minneapolis and St. Paul, popular with boaters, is one of the many waterways in Minnesota impaired with excess bacteria.

New St. Paul Master Plan for West Side Flats Raises Concerns

by Alicia Uzarek

The City of St. Paul is updating their 2001 West Side Flats (WSF) Master Plan to guide private development and public infrastructure projects in the unique area across the river from downtown St. Paul.

Set on a bend in the Mississippi surrounded by bluffs, the West Side Flats is a historically and culturally significant landscape of great beauty, considered sacred by the ancient Hopewell and today's Dakota people. They buried their dead on the bluffs to gaze eternally at the river — inspiring views that later generations of St. Paul residents have cherished.

Today, the views may be in danger. One of the proposed changes in the draft Master Plan is to raise maximum building heights from six to 11 stories. FMR is concerned that this will block iconic views to and from the bluffs from throughout St. Paul's river valley.

Positive changes within the WSF draft Master Plan include the expansion of the plan area by 60 acres from Robert Street to Lafayette Road/Highway 52 and inclusion of a comprehensive area-wide stormwater management plan. FMR believes both of these changes will better protect the river and surrounding landscape.

The draft Plan will likely be finalized within the first half of 2014. The process will include a WSF Community Task Force meeting for final changes, a West Side Community Organization hearing, and then formal approval by the St. Paul Planning Commission and City Council. Follow the process on the City of St. Paul's website: <http://www.stpaul.gov/index.aspx?nid=5166>.

idea that groundwater flows upward to fill a lake didn't make sense to people until this happened," notes Deborah Swackhamer, co-director of the University of Minnesota's Water Resources Center and professor of Environmental Health Science.

FMR Executive Director Whitney Clark explains that groundwater even feeds rivers and streams. "We think of them as different, but underground aquifers provide the base flow for surface water—that's the water you see flowing in a stream even when it hasn't rained for six weeks."

The High Price of Cheap Groundwater

"Our groundwater use is growing faster than the population," FMR's Water Program Director Trevor Russell points out. In the 1940s, he says, 90 percent of the metropolitan area relied on the Mississippi River and other surface sources for water, which is replenished by rainfall. Faucets in Minneapolis, St. Paul and 14 adjoining suburbs still flow with safe, treated river water, but more than 70 percent of the metropolitan water supply now comes from groundwater, which is easily depleted.

Newer communities find it cheaper to drill into aquifers rather than share in the Minneapolis or St. Paul regional water utilities, which have plenty of extra capacity. After the initial construction of a new well, it costs very little to pump out water, which means communities can make a profit on water services.

"Pumping groundwater generates local revenues, but at a great ecological and economic cost," says Russell—a fact that wasn't apparent to most people until water levels in White Bear Lake began to fall. Now there's an intense discussion around the region, from bait shops to the State Capitol, about how best to save White Bear Lake and ensure that Minnesotans everywhere don't have to choose between safe drinking water and the health of our lakes, rivers and streams.

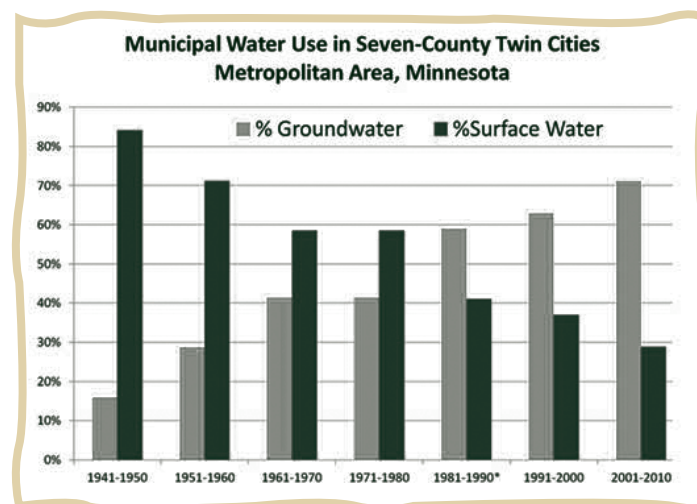
What Can We Do?

"There is no magic fix for the problem," explains Swackhamer. "The root of the problem is an overuse of groundwater. Finding another source of drinking water is the best solution and the most sustainable, but it will take time and cost money."

Some people are urging that billions of gallons of Mississippi River water be diverted to White Bear Lake each year to restore water levels. This is known as the "augmentation" option.

However, it will cost \$50 to \$55 million to create a new system to treat and pump river water to White Bear Lake, and \$325,000 a year to operate it, according to preliminary findings from the Metropolitan Council's "Feasibility Assessment of Alternative Water Supplies in the Northeast Metro" (due out in October). These costs will jump sharply if it turns out river water also needs to be treated for nitrates and phosphorous to keep White Bear Lake and the entire aquifer clean—adding \$40 million more in construction and \$600,000 more annually for operations.

Even with this steep investment, "the effectiveness of such a system is not certain," said Metropolitan Council's water supply planning manager Ali Elhassan in an e-mail to local leaders on February 20.



Groundwater now supplies more than 70 percent of municipal water in the Twin Cities.

"Augmentation does not solve the problem," notes FMR's Whitney Clark. "It's like buying a very expensive raincoat because your roof is leaking."

He adds, "It sets an unwelcome precedent. Every time there is a water shortage somewhere, you can just take more and more water out of the Mississippi River for the mistakes you've made."

A Sustainable Solution

FMR is one of a number of organizations pushing for a sustainable solution for the northeast metro known as conjunctive use, which relies primarily on surface water with groundwater wells as a backup for dryer parts of the year and droughts.

Swackhamer compares conjunctive use, which is used in many other parts of the country, to sound family finances. "Surface water is our checking account and groundwater our savings account," she says. "We should be mindful about the future by using our checking account as much as possible and using our savings as a rainy day fund—or in this case, a dry period fund."

Here's how it would work. Suburban communities in the northeast metro, which are now draining White Bear Lake through overuse of groundwater, would switch to surface water for their primary water use, while retaining existing wells as a backup system. Surface water could come from either the St. Paul regional water system (which could treat 40 percent more water daily with existing facilities) or a new treatment facility built for the Northeast Metro.

In either scenario, the water is drawn from the Mississippi and then passes through a series of lakes and into a lake reservoir before it is treated and pumped to nearby communities.

"We think conjunctive use is the best option for the future," says Elhassan. "Our modeling shows we can reverse current groundwater trends if more communities in close proximity to the central cities switch from groundwater to surface water use," he adds.

The Dramatic Shrinking of White Bear Lake, continued on page 7

Water Conservation, 21st Century-Style

Water conservation measures would also be deployed as part of the conjunctive use approach. Jason Moeckel of the DNR notes, “our rate of water consumption is high compared to a lot of states.”

Moeckel points to innovations such as capturing more rainfall in urban areas to put back in aquifers to recharge groundwater, and detecting leaks in the existing pipe systems, which can account for as much as 40 percent of water use. He notes that Rochester, which has vigorously scrutinized its system for leakage, now loses less than five percent of water on the journey from the treatment plant to the kitchen sink.

Water use in the City of White Bear Lake decreased 21 percent from 2000 to 2011 says Janice Hallman of the White Bear Lake Conservation Committee. “Water conservation works,” she observes, noting that overall usage of water from St. Paul Regional Water Services has also dropped 25 percent since 1988.

For all of its advantages in solving the groundwater crisis in the Northeast metro rather than adopting a band-aid approach, conjunctive use will mean higher water bills for residents of some communities who have benefitted from

artificially low prices made possible through depletion of precious aquifer resources.

A Sustainable Future for Groundwater, Lakes and Rivers

The biggest obstacle to conjunctive use is that some communities currently have cheap water and are unwilling to pay more. However, Clark says that over the long run, conjunctive use is the least expensive option. “We’ll be escalating the costs to future generations if we don’t do something.”

He also raises the issue of who should pay to fix the problem. Should we all pick up the tab for unsustainable decisions in some communities that allowed residents to benefit from cheap water?

Clark remarks, “Any decisions about the future of our groundwater, lakes and rivers must be guided by the principle of sustainability, which means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. That’s the essence of stewardship. Let’s set our water policies in a way that our downstream neighbors and future generations will respect and appreciate.”

Help FMR in Our 3rd Decade, continued from page 2

As the staff and board of FMR develop long-term strategies to ensure that our land and water resources are protected for generations to come, we encourage you to invest in this work by joining us as a member, increasing your current membership contribution, becoming a member at the Mississippi Riverkeepers level, giving a gift membership to a fellow river lover, or making a planned gift as part of the Mississippi River Legacy Society.

We invest the resources we receive from our members and donors strategically and wisely to make measurable achievements for our great river and for our community. Donations can be made by using the envelope enclosed in this newsletter or online at <http://www.fmr.org/support>. If you have questions about making a gift to FMR, please contact Heather at 651-222-2193 x20 or hhaynes@fmr.org.

Welcome Alicia Uzarek

by Irene Jones

Alicia Uzarek joined FMR last fall as our new policy advocate. Splitting her time between our corridor land use program and water quality protection program, Alicia is involved with a variety of outreach, advocacy, and technical assistance efforts aimed at strengthening local and state policies to protect the Mississippi. She has jumped right in on important issues, including the Mississippi River Critical Area Rules, the West Side Flats Master Plan Update and the Blue Star Cities Award Program. A key part of her role is helping meet FMR’s mission of collaborating with local communities and bringing plentiful citizen voices to our advocacy efforts.

Alicia brings a strong academic and organizing background to the position with a master’s degree in urban & regional



Alicia Uzarek: FMR's new Policy Advocate.

planning from the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs, as well as frontline experience with the West Broadway Coalition in North Minneapolis and other neighborhood organizations.

“I am very excited to have the opportunity to work for Friends of the Mississippi River,” says Alicia. “I look forward to meeting and working with river stakeholders, as well as FMR’s members, volunteers and partners to protect and improve this amazing river.”

Alicia’s passion for the Mississippi was sparked as a child exploring the river in the Twin Cities. She continues to enjoy running, biking, and canoeing in the Mississippi River corridor.

Alicia can be reached at auzarek@fmr.org or by phone at (651) 222-2193, extension 29.



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The Mississippi River Legacy Society—ensuring the health and beauty of the river for future generations

20 years ago, community leaders had the foresight to create the Friends of the Mississippi River, recognizing that the new National Park along our treasured river needed an organization committed to its protection and revitalization. Today we celebrate our Mississippi River Legacy Society members who have expressed this same foresight, vision and desire to protect and conserve the river by making a planned gift commitment to FMR.

"Living along the Gorge of the Mississippi, we experience and enjoy this great river every day. We've participated in FMR volunteer events, including river cleanup days and the Mississippi River Challenge, for many years. When it was time to revisit our estate plan, it made sense to look first at the organizations in which we had committed time and energy, and let our financial assets follow suit. With our gift, we are confident FMR will continue to do the valuable work to ensure this priceless asset will remain protected long after we're gone." - Marjean Hoeft and Lisa Vecoli

To learn more about creating a river legacy in your name by making a deferred gift to benefit FMR, please contact Jeanine Holden at 651-222-2193 x22 or jholden@fmr.org.



Lisa Vecoli (left) and
Marjean Hoeft.

Thank You Volunteers!

by Lindsay Hefferan

Thanks to everyone who put FMR's mission into action last year! About 1,900 people volunteered 5,385 hours to help the river through FMR volunteer events in 2013. Volunteers planted native species, removed invasive ones, monitored streams, picked up trash, stenciled storm drains, and more. This included restoration of special places where FMR has worked for years, such as Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area and St. Paul's Crosby Farm Park, as well as new sites such as the Hastings Scientific and Natural Area, where we salvaged native plants from a road construction project, and the Rock Island Swing Bridge Park in Inver Grove Heights, where we planted willows and cottonwoods in the Mississippi River floodplain.

Thank you all and we look forward to seeing even more of you this year!



A young volunteer
helps restore a rare
tamarack bog.

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