

Wisconsin Rivers

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Everyone deserves healthy rivers

Fan of the Branch

John Roberts Befriends a New River and Discovers a Hidden Gem

Denny Caneff

***Editor's note: This is another installment of an occasional series of stories featuring people and the rivers they love—what we've come to call their "home" rivers.*

There's one advantage to driving all over Wisconsin if you're a river aficionado like John Roberts. Driving by hundreds of streams gives you ideas about which ones to explore next, and maybe even you'll find a paddling companion.

John Roberts is a roving veterinarian for the Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and his travels take him to dairy farms across the state from his home base in Whitelaw, in Manitowoc County. Not only had he developed an eye for good rivers, he would tell his farmer clients he was a paddler and a river buff. One farmer pointed out that his daughter was also a paddler and was looking for a paddling partner.

Not one to turn down a good paddling lead – "I'll go paddling with anybody" – John gave Nancy Osterberg a call. It turns out she was not just anybody, but someone who shared more than John's passions for rivers. They were married in 2001, and Wisconsin's two Brule Rivers – the "border Brule" that forms the Michigan-Wisconsin boundary and the Bois Brule, that flows to Lake Superior – are significant in their relationship.

"The Bois Brule was our courting river, but the border Brule was our honeymoon river," John noted. And as true equal opportunity lovers of rivers, they had their marriage ceremony at Strong Falls on the Peshtigo River.

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Photo: River Alliance

◀ John Roberts was the perfect host for River Alliance's recent staff retreat on the Branch River - complete with a traditional fish boil and cherry pie.

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Stream of Thought

Flush With Manure

In a metal in-basket somewhere in the bowels of GEF II, the Dept. of Natural Resources' downtown Madison headquarters, are hundreds of comments, statements, observations, additions and subtractions submitted to the agency by citizens and organizations hoping to influence the rules DNR is proposing for the 140 or so large-scale livestock farms in Wisconsin.

The rules, known by insiders as "NR 243," propose to require these farms (those with over 1,000 animal units, or about 700 dairy cows) to be able to store manure in a pit or tank for six months, ban the spreading of manure in January and February, and other provisions to limit the possibility that manure, at least from these large farms, will continue to kill fish they way they have been in the past two years.

By and large, the River Alliance supports these proposed rule changes, which were hammered out over two years by an DNR-organized advisory group of farmers and conservationists. (See www.wisconsinrivers.org for our formal comments submitted to DNR.) Given the fact that there were over 50 documented "runoff events" (a bureaucratic term for when manure flows to a public waterway), in the past year or so, the rule changes seem long overdue.

NR 243 can't work miracles. If conditions are right and some trends continue, we will continue to find dead fish in Wisconsin's rivers from manure spills.

- Of the 52 documented "manure events" in the last year, just nine of them were caused by the large livestock farms that come under the scope of NR 243. That means the huge majority of these events are caused by farms smaller than the "factory farms" that are wrongly suspected of being the main culprit.

- Though winter manure spreading can be a deadly practice, and NR 243 attempts to limit it, there's no preventing manure from getting to rivers and streams in the summer months. Two big fish kills occurred in southwestern Wisconsin last summer. And late this summer, the notorious Maple Leaf Farms, in Manitowoc County, had a manure spill kill fish in storied Fischer Creek. (The dairy industry would do itself a great favor



by simply buying out the operator of Maple Leaf Farms, who single-handedly sets back any positive image the industry manages to muster for itself.)

The Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is taking smart strides in getting the state to think differently about manure. It has assembled a manure task force to examine the issues. DATCP assistant secretary Judy Ziewacz could be named Wisconsin's "manure czar" for her diligent efforts to find ways to make manure a revenue generator (energy, compost fertilizer) for farmers.

Still, we see at least two necessary steps, beyond NR 243, to keep manure from fouling our waters.

Barnyard easements – used by DNR sparingly under the Priority Watershed Program, use of this win-win tool should be greatly expanded. Many small livestock farms were situated near waterways for the express purpose of giving cows access to water. This practice has

got to go. An easement would compensate a landowner for keeping cattle away from a waterway passing through their farm. The landowner could use the money to improve the farm or build a retirement account, and the public gets permanent land and water protection.

Take the money or else – all counties, as part of developing their land and water conservation plans, identify "priority farms" – those farms causing the greatest harm to the resources. (These farms are what UW-Madison rural sociologist Peter Nowak calls "the 20 percent of farms who cause 80 percent of the problem.") Right now, county conservation staff can only urge and cajole and "educate" these poor managers; they have little to compel them to change.

We would propose a change in the polluted runoff rules that gives these "priority farms" full access to cost-share dollars and technical assistance, for one year only. If they haven't begun to make necessary changes to their operations, the public subsidy is taken away, they make the changes on their own dime, and face fines and penalties if they don't.

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Acting Locally

Happy Anniversary, Wild Rivers!

Lori Grant
Policy Program Manager

Introduced in 1965, a bill creating the Wisconsin Wild Rivers Program was passed in both houses without a single "nay." Governor Warren Knowles signed it into law in November of that year, making it the first law of its kind in the United States. Three years later, with Senator Gaylord Nelson leading the charge, the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson.

This November marks the 40th anniversary of Wisconsin's landmark, bipartisan legislation, and what better way to celebrate the occasion and the legacy of Gaylord Nelson than add two more rivers to Wisconsin's too-short list? In August, Governor Doyle announced his Conservation Initiative including his commitment to forward the designation of the Totogatic River and the Upper St. Croix Headwaters as the state's newest Wild Rivers.

A Short List For 40 Years

Despite the fact that the movement for establishing Wild Rivers began here, only three rivers have been designated as state Wild Rivers – the Pike,



The Pike River.

Popple and Pine Rivers in Marinette and Florence Counties. They were included in the original bill creating the state program back in 1965, and there haven't been any new designations since. The Wolf and the St. Croix were designated as Wild and Scenic Riverways early in the life of the federal program, and again, there haven't been any new federal designations in Wisconsin ever since. It's a bit of mystery why there haven't been any more designations – both the state and federal designations have become a status symbol and tourism draw. Paddling and fishing

outfitters and local tourism boards all readily tout the Wild River moniker in their advertisements and endorsements. After 40 years, the time has come to remember why the Wild Rivers program came to be, and to extend the additional protections provided through the designation to our remaining, truly wild rivers.

What Makes A River Wild

The primary goal of both the state and federal programs is the same: preserve free-flowing rivers and streams. To that end, both programs preclude new dams, limit development that intrudes on the waterways, and requires careful management of activities, such as forestry, that could impact scenic and habitat values. A very significant difference, however, is that the federal program encourages public acquisition of land along federally-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, allowing the selective use of condemnation where necessary. Land condemnations by the National Park Service were very unpopular along the Namekagon, and may explain why conservationists have been reluctant to mention "wild river" of any kind ever since. Wisconsin's program recognizes that public ownership along rivers is one of several useful protective measures, but does not authorize the use of condemnation for public acquisitions. The State Wild Rivers designation is not intended to chase riverside property owners off their land and does not prevent home construction, but does require maintaining the stream bank and bed in as natural a condition as possible.

And Toto(gatic) Too?

In 2004, representatives of the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association attending "Superior Days" at the State Capitol raised the idea of designating the Totogatic River as the next State Wild River. A tributary to the Namekagon River within the St. Croix Wild and Scenic Riverway, the Totogatic flows through five counties in northwest Wisconsin: Bayfield, Sawyer, Washburn, Douglas and Burnett. More recently, Friends of the Upper St. Croix Headwaters and the Douglas County Association of Lakes and Streams have proposed designating the headwaters of the St. Croix River, the only segment left out of the St. Croix Wild and Scenic Riverway, as a state



Wild River as well. A substantial amount of land bordering the Totogatic River and Upper St. Croix Headwaters is in state and county ownership, but there are also many privately owned properties along both waterways.

Scott Peterson, President of the Friends of the Upper St. Croix Headwaters, notes: "Local residents are the best long-term stewards of the river, and it is important that they understand and take ownership of this opportunity to gain the Wild River protective designation." Scott and his group have been working with local property owners, including Douglas County, to build an understanding of the benefits of the designation. Along the Totogatic, Cathie Erickson of the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association and John Haack of the University of Wisconsin Extension have likewise been working with property owners and the five counties traversed by the river. Both efforts began locally, a key to growing community support.

The Governor and the Department of Natural Resources have committed to work with both communities to select the river segments most appropriate for designation. Senator Robert Jauch and Representative Frank Boyle, whose districts include both rivers, will hold public listening sessions this fall and have committed to support legislation to complete the Wild River designation process. As Kathy Bartilson, DNR Basin Supervisor in Spooner so eloquently states: "The principle of bipartisan support for protection of our riverine crown jewels is as important today as it was 40 years ago." We have high hopes our current Legislature will recognize the wisdom of preserving some of our wildest rivers just for their wildness, and will join us in celebrating the anniversary of Wild Rivers with decisive action next spring.

Acting Locally

Holding Hands and Hostile Takeovers

Can river protection groups "build community" if the community is divided about their purpose?

Jay Kreinitz

Local Group Assistance Program - Assistant Manager

You would be hard-pressed to find someone who advocates for dirty rivers or ugly, habitat-destroying development. So, if everyone agrees that protecting rivers is better than degrading them, does that mean that everybody gets along? Clearly not.

The paradox for many local river protection groups is that though they need the support of fellow community members to help protect the river they are organized to defend, many of those same community members see the group's presence as a threat to property rights and economic development. Conflict over conservation is not a new phenomenon, of course, but it is a very real struggle challenging many local watershed groups the River Alliance works with – even threatening the existence of a few of them.

Aldo Leopold was no stranger to such conflicts. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold suggests that "the land ethic" must be the cornerstone of conservation, starting with how we think of "community":

"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

"In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."

Early Misperceptions Hard to Overcome

There are many local groups who embody Leopold's land ethic and attempt to build community while conserving land and water. But sometimes Leopold's lofty notions collide head-on with local politics, personality conflicts and conflicting values and visions.

"We're a quiet group," says Jean Brown of the Ahnapee River Watershed Alliance. "People used to fear that we were a group of radical

environmentalists. We work with the local high school and host a river cleanup every spring. When people finally figured out we weren't bad, they stopped monitoring our meetings." Jean and her group are not unusual in the fact that some uninformed community members are suspicious and fearful of local conservation groups.



Aldo Leopold

Small town grassroots community conservation is the kind of work that takes years and years of commitment to make good progress with. Working for better environmental protections in small communities often initially draws out fear and negativity. Small towns fear change, and local conservation groups can be perceived as unusual. Ironically, these local groups fear change too. They fear the loss of clean rivers, open land, and healthy ecosystems that have been part of community life throughout history. This is where the work needs to focus its energy, where seemingly opposing groups meet.

Beth Bettenhausen, of the Rusk County Waters Alliance (RCWA), has been working for years to create positive inroads in her community – and it hasn't been easy. "People felt threatened that the RCWA would lobby so people couldn't do anything on their land. They feared unreasonable restrictions." Beth and others have worked to be both non-political and educational in nature regarding the group's official work. "The harder people worked against us, the more it motivated us to become stronger and to do good public relations." Dedicated to putting out their message in the local paper, brochures, and public events, "things are getting better."

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Some groups, as strange as it may seem, even have to worry about "hostile takeovers" by opposition groups. Last year, the South Fork Flambeau Association battled for their organizational existence. During their first organizational election, a group of misinformed property owners attempted to elect a board of property rights/anti-environmental candidates to replace the moderate interim board. This would have rendered the group ineffective as a river advocacy organization. Thanks to support from other conservation groups in the region, including River Alliance members and staff, the South Fork Flambeau River Watershed Association successfully out-voted the opposition. Bylaws are now in place that will safeguard against hostile takeover, and the group will focus on making their organization stronger and more effective. And a lot more fun!

Gail Gilson Pierce, the River Alliance's Northern Rivers Advocate, agrees with a foundational pillar of Aldo Leopold's land ethic – respect. "Local groups need to work with their local officials and their neighbors. Often issues are polarized with 20% of the community being on one side and 20% being on another. Problem is, that leaves a 60% majority in the middle that usually value environmental protections, but are afraid to speak out."

This is where the River Alliance of Wisconsin can be particularly useful, and is willing to offer support. "We could help mediate and provide a safe atmosphere where people can talk to each other without fear of ridicule," says Gail.

Gail will offer her services to mediate with local stakeholders. Her 25 years as environmental educator and group facilitator has taught her how to create an atmosphere where all perspectives can be seen as having equal value. This is where issue resolution can take place. Ideally, working in this way can lead people towards informed decisions to protect our environment and our community relations.

"I believe that much of the anger that can come up around local conservation issues is a result of differing values," Gail says. "Every user group values the resource, but it is how they choose to live on the land that is different."

Dams Program

REMOVED!

Spitzer Dams, Millhome Creek, Manitowoc County

Helen Sarakinos

Dams Program Manager

With the help of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, River Alliance, DNR, Manitowoc County Parks Department and Trout Unlimited, the headwaters of a coldwater stream are breathing a little more freely today. In late August, DNR work crews removed the remains of several dams and concrete raceways from the headwater springs that feed Millhome Creek, a tributary of the Sheboygan River.

The restoration work (removal of several small dams and concrete remnants and the narrowing and re-meandering of channels) is taking place entirely within Walla Hi County Park, a small jewel in southern Manitowoc County surrounding a lush floodplain forest and brook trout stream. The property was purchased by Manitowoc County in the 1970s from a private owner who took advantage of the spring-rich area to build a fish hatchery, encapsulating springs and channelizing streams in the process. After the County purchased the park, they worked with DNR to remove some of the concrete channels and renaturalize the streams in the park with the help of the Wisconsin Conservation Corps and a little bit of dynamite. The work was never completed and the site remained unchanged until the River Alliance contacted the County in 2003 about removing the remaining dams in the park through our Lake Michigan Dams Prioritization project. "I think it's just wonderful," says Mike Demske, director of Manitowoc County Parks Department, about the restoration and dam removals. "We certainly could not have done it without River Alliance's assistance. County budgets have been cut all over the place. The Parks budget has been cut every year for the last five years." The restoration project is estimated to cost about \$50,000 and funding will come from the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program and from the Department of Natural Resources. The Lakeshore Chapter of Trout Unlimited will provide volunteer labor.

MOU should be DOA

The St. Croix Falls Dam, owned by Northern States Power/Xcel is a 24 megawatt hydropower dam located on the St. Croix River, a National Wild and Scenic River. The St. Croix River downstream of the dam is home to 39 state and federally listed

species, among them the winged maple-leaf mussel. The last global population of this critically endangered animal lives just downstream of the dam. A multi-agency team drafted a recovery plan for the mussel, and one top recovery recommendation was to change dam operation from the current peaking mode to a more ecologically benign run-of-river flow mode. This dam is also unique because it is not regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). DNR believes it has the right to regulate this dam while the utility disputes this. As the regulatory agency,



Spitzer Dam was no match for this backhoe - and restoration begins.

Photo: River Alliance Staff

the DNR has the responsibility to protect these endangered species, and has been "negotiating" with the utility to establish protective flows since 1990.

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Hydro Watchdog

Denny Caneff

What a difference a half inch makes. The half inch in question is the width between the bars of a big underwater grate that keeps debris, and living fish, from getting sucked into the turbines of a hydro-electric dam.

Attending to these arcane details, but also monitoring large-scale plans and designs for hydro dams, is the rare and highly valued expertise that Jim Fossum brings to the River Alliance. A retired fish and wildlife biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jim is the River Alliance's hydro dam consultant. The organization is party to several "settlement agreements" between conservation groups and government agencies, and the utility companies that own and operate the dams, and Jim represents us in the negotiations.

Jim is a self-described "river rat" who grew up on the Mississippi River. "I grew to love rivers, and that's what led me to my profession of river ecology," he said. "With the Fish and Wildlife Service, I got to realize how profoundly dams affect rivers and the fish in them, and I devoted my career to doing all I could to improve things for fish by getting them around dams. I'm especially proud of my participation in the Wilderness Shores and Lower Chippewa settlement agreements, and I'm glad to remain involved through the River Alliance to see these agreements through."

These agreements are often conditions developed with the dam operators when their federal license was up for renewal. For example, the River Alliance was party to the so-called Wilderness

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Fan of the Branch

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New Home, New Home River

“Relationship” is the right word to use when talking with John Roberts about rivers. His cumulative wisdom and knowledge of and experience with a river (even total immersion in it, in a non-baptismal sense) comprise John’s sense of a river – his relationship to it.

“It’s how I landed in Whitelaw after I moved from Sturgeon Bay,” John recalls. “I was looking for a community with a river, and I liked the way the Branch River wraps itself around the town.” It wasn’t long before the Branch became John’s “home river.”

“The Branch endeared itself to me on my first paddle. It was a crisp spring day and the water was bubbly and fast. It’s a delightful river to paddle, coming off the Niagara Escarpment and passing through some nice hemlock forests on its way to Manitowoc. It’s a corridor of beauty and wildness in a very settled place.”

That Water Over There is a River

Because it flows through a lot of farmland, it is also a very compromised stream. But John insists poor water quality isn’t the Branch’s biggest problem. In fact, he believes that river water quality generally may be a symptom of a much more fundamental problem – that people don’t connect to or understand rivers.

“‘Awareness’ of a river sounds simple, but it’s very powerful and profound,” he observes, saying you can’t improve or restore a river unless you understand it, connect to it, engage with it. What he found was benign neglect of a lovely river in an area where people are focused on a body of water

that can’t help but grab your attention – Lake Michigan.

Undaunted, John put out a mailing to people in his community in the late 1990s about forming a friends’ group for the Branch River. Just five people came to that first gathering, but since then the Friends of the Branch River



Left: Roberts educates River Alliance staff on the history of the Branch River and its watershed. Above: River Alliance staff learn the art of netting rusty crayfish – which made for a tasty snack on the following day’s paddle.

has grown to be one of the most effective local watershed organizations in the state, due very much to John’s leadership and vision.

“We went forward without an issue,” John recalls. “An issue that’s a catalyst often gets a group going, but we didn’t have that. We didn’t want to be controversial, but we wanted to find solutions in the community, to be well integrated, and to spread those tendrils of interest throughout.

“I have to credit the River Alliance for being the driving force why the Friends of the Branch has developed into a well-integrated community organization,” he says. “There were trainings River Alliance and Gathering Waters Conservancy offered that were beneficial, and your Annual Dinner showed me how to run a community-building event. Then we got Diana Toledo’s assistance with strategic planning, which really helped propel the organization.”

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The Kings of Crabbing

With his conviction that simple awareness was the key to building the organization and ultimately restoring the river, John and others developed activities to get people engaged in the Branch. And nothing engages people in a river like wading in and pulling out junk. Friends of the Branch have organized several river clean-ups.

On a recent River Alliance staff retreat to the area, John treated River Alliance staff members to the very same “engagement” with the Branch that he saw as important for people living in the watershed. And engagement, in John’s hand, is not passive observation.

Though we were interested in the Friends’ water quality

monitoring efforts, John took us a bit deeper – to the historical and cultural threads that the river weaves through this community. One biological thread – a prolific invasive species known as the rusty crayfish – had a cultural element to it, and we experienced that “hand to mouth,” as it were.

Known by locals as “crabbing,” John showed us the high art of corralling or snagging rusty crayfish with nets, and the dexterity-demanding exercise of cleaning them for eating. John and other friends watched with amusement the carnage River Alliance staff was wreaking upon these squirming critters, then shooed us away so they could take over the cleaning. We enjoyed the delectable critters the next day after John prepared them in the traditional way – boiled, with heavy doses of salt, caraway and dill. They were surprisingly delicious, and we’d done the

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river a favor by taking out a few hundred invasive crayfish.

“The Friends of the Branch are the world’s most accomplished experts on all aspects of crabbing,” John boasts. “We’ll challenge anybody. And I’ve learned that fundamental element of river group success is to have fun and eat good food.”

Next, A Quest

The Friends of the Branch may be well beyond the biggest challenge most small, volunteer-led community organizations face – a ongoing sense of purpose and how to achieve it. They’ve cleaned the river, walked it, flown it, paddled it. They’ve monitored the water for the vital signs of temperature, flow and macro-invertebrates. They’ve surveyed area residents for their opinions about the Branch.

“We have very intensely studied this river, and now, whatever we do next, we want to go forward with wisdom,” John says. “We want to do know what will enhance the river through our works.”

John Roberts is clearly comfortable in the public realm of community organizations (he also helped found the Lakeshore Natural Resources Partnership), but he’s totally comfortable, and probably requires, being alone on the water too. He plans to leave his home river and set out on a six-month paddling journey that will take him into Lake Michigan and over the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, with a few rivers in between.

“It’s hard to describe what really will be a spiritual journey,” John says, “But you have to explore your passions, and understand them more than just a dream or a desire and how they work into the deep joys of your life. That’s what this quest is all about, for me.”

New Passengers On Our Bus

River Alliance welcomes three new members to its Board of Directors

Every fall, the River Alliance invites new people to its Board of Directors, and we are pleased to announce the candidacy of two capable and talented river advocates: **Jeff Weidman** of Madison, and **Rick McMonagle**, of Pierce County. Rick and Jeff will be elected to the Board at the organization’s annual meeting December 9.

Jeff is co-owner of Rutabaga, a paddlesport shop and host of the country’s biggest silent water sports expo, CanoeCopia. Jeff is a member of the Board

On Being In Love With One River

Darren Bush

***Editor’s Note: Darren Bush is co-owner of Rutabaga, the Madison-based paddlesports shop that annually hosts the CanoeCopia Paddlesport Expo every year, the largest event of its kind in the country. Rutabaga, and Darren, have been extremely generous to the River Alliance over the years, and we asked Darren recently what we could do for him for a change. He said he’d like to tell people why he supports the River Alliance. Quite simply, it is because, as he says, “I love all rivers,” but one in particular....*

I set foot in Wisconsin for the very first time on April 20, 1984, two days before my wedding reception. Out west I met and fell in love with a wonderful Wisconsin native, but little did I know I was marrying into an ecosystem as well as a family. Having been raised in a parched climate where there were two seasons, green (short) and brown (long), I was immediately struck by the transformational power water has on a landscape. Ferns grew spontaneously, lawns were green, sprinklers were not running, and everything was lush. It’s all because of water.

I love all rivers. Little streams, babbling brooks, raging Class V torrents and broad, expanses of water. If it’s wet, I love it. I have such affection for every river I have ever crossed or paddled or swam. I had it so bad that I used to play in the storm drains in the California desert town where I grew up. A green, slimy trickle of water in the bottom of a huge concrete canyon

was what flowed through the Los Angeles River 99% of the year.

I say that I love all rivers, but I am in love with just one river. We met back in 1986, the first time I drove to Spring Green to American Players Theater. As I drove down Highway C, I saw a few glimpses of beautiful water through the trees, and I pulled into a turnout, slid down the steep bank and stuck my hand in the water. I watched the surface swirl and mix as it ran up against a large sandstone cliff, covered with the smallest ferns I’d ever seen. I was smitten.

Since then I have paddled the Lower Wisconsin River dozens if not hundreds of times. Simple day trips, overnights with my kids or friends, a date with my wife, or sometimes a solo trip for a few days just to spend some time with my river. It is the place I feel most comfortable, the place I find the most peace.

The love I have for the Wisconsin River was probably one of the forces that pushed me out of the fairly deep and rutted academic track I was on for over a decade. No one I know ever thought I’d end up as a small business owner. I feel like my work is a calling, not a job, and that part of my calling is to protect all rivers to the best of our ability. That is why Rutabaga supports the River Alliance of Wisconsin. We are proud to be contributors, because we love all rivers.

But I am in love with one river, and I always will be.



of Directors of the Outdoor Industry Association, which he serves as secretary and chair of its member services committee. “I care about the recreational economy of this state, and that’s why I’m interested in joining the board of the River Alliance.”

Rick McMonagle is former executive director of the Kinnikinnic River Land Trust, based in western Wisconsin. Previous to that, he was executive director of Friends of the Mississippi, a St. Paul-based river advocacy organization. The land trust received

the River Alliance’s “Local Group River Champion of the Decade” accolades in 2003, during Rick’s tenure.

Another new member who joined the board this summer is **Cory Mason**, government relations director for AFT-Wisconsin, a labor union representing state workers and educators. Cory fills a vacancy on the board with the departure of Sean Dilweg.

We’ll provide meatier profiles (with memorable photos) of the three men in our next newsletter.

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Local Group Assistance Program

150 and Counting!

Watershed Groups Continue to Organize

Diana Toledo
Local Group Assistance Program Manager

As we've described in recent articles, the number of citizens interested in protecting their local watersheds continues to grow. Since 2000, when the Local Groups Assistance Program was created, nearly 35 new local watershed organizations have formed in Wisconsin, bringing the number of groups working for watershed protection to over 150.

If you are interested in joining the two newest groups, described below, please contact our staff and we will connect you with the local organizers.

Friends of the Little Plover River

Although only 6 miles long from its headwaters to its mouth at the Wisconsin River, the Little Plover River has recently become a "poster river" for what many fear is a fate that awaits other Wisconsin streams. This past August, a section of this stream completely dried up, leaving local citizens wondering what to do. Although the strong connection between increasing groundwater withdrawals and diminished stream flow in the Little Plover had been documented by area scientists, the stark image of a dried up creek bed galvanized local citizens to take action.

Friends of the Little Plover River is a new group that quickly organized as a result of this tragic event. With the assistance of the River Alliance's Jay Krienitz, this small band of local advocates has been meeting in recent weeks to organize and determine how they can be most effective. For them, this effort is essentially about protecting their local jewel. Barbara Feltz, local riparian landowner and one of the group's founders, describes the Little Plover this way: "(It



Photo: River Alliance

The Friends of the Little Plover River meet to discuss strategies. From back left—Jen Kingsley, Barbara Feltz, George Kraft (advisor), Paul Bergman, Jake Macholl. From front left—Barbara Gifford, Jennifer Hurt, Jay Krienitz (River Alliance).

is a place of solitude, comfort, one of those places where the soul can connect with nature and retreat from the stresses of the world in which we live. It hasn't changed all that much over time. It is an entire ecosystem that lives intertwined with middle class suburbia. The Little Plover is just as beautiful as any mountain stream, right here in the center of the prairie heartland."

Friends of the Platte River

"Our river needs help." That realization, simple and powerful, has motivated Tammy and Daniel Enz to begin talking with their neighbors about organizing a river group around the Platte River in Grant

County. Last month a group of over 20 area residents invited the River Alliance's Diana Toledo to speak about the role citizens can play in restoring their local streams. The group was made up of residents living along the mouth of the Platte River where it joins the Mississippi. Water quality there is low, due in large part to its location at the bottom of a large, mostly agricultural, watershed.

In conversations with her neighbors, many of them long-time residents, Tammy Enz heard "a heart-breaking story... about the river. They were eager to recall the river from a decade or more ago. They spoke of deep clear waters that provided for swimming and skiing, a river teeming with bass and catfish. They bought and improved beautiful homes and quaint cottages and hoped to pass on to their children and grandchildren these breath-taking views and relaxed recreation. Today they see the state of the river and are filled with anguish." She goes on to describe the impacts of sedimentation on the quality of this stretch of the Platte.

The Enzes and their neighbors are now in the beginning stages of forming a river group, meeting with staff of the DNR, the Army Corps of Engineers and the county Land Conservation Department in an effort to identify ways they can begin the process of restoring their local stream.

Save the Date(s)! River Conferences Coming Next April

The River Alliance and Friends of Wisconsin State Parks will co-present *Conservation in Common- Actions and Strategies to Protect Your Rivers, Parks and Trails* next spring. If you are interested in learning more about becoming an effective river conservationist and want to meet other land and river advocates, mark your calendars for this fun training and community-building event.

Conservation in Common will be held in two different locations to facilitate participants' travel:

Northern Conference: March 31-April 1 at Holiday Acres, outside Rhinelander.

Southern Conference: April 28-29 at Kettle Moraine State Park (northern unit), north of West Bend.

Dams Program

REMOVED! continued from page 5...



Three River Alliance staff members relax on a tour of the Spitzer Dam site on Millhome Creek. Photo: River Alliance

Fourteen years later, the DNR is pursuing change in dam operations through a voluntary memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the utility in lieu of a flow order - a proper regulatory channel which has statutory authority and enforcement mechanisms. The DNR states that the MOU will fulfill the requirement of establishing a protective flow for the mussels and other species. The River Alliance, however, has deep concerns about this extra-regulatory approach to dealing with protecting the public trust. Specifically, we are concerned about:

1) Enforcement Issues – While NSP/Xcel voluntarily agrees to increase flows to more sustainable levels below the dam and to change operations to run-of-river, the MOU is a voluntary agreement. There are no provisions on how DNR would actu-

ally enforce this agreement, no requirements to monitor the flows beyond an initial test period, and no consequences for the utility if it violates the terms of the MOU.

2) Lack of public input process – the MOU process undermines public input in an action that affects public resources. This contract between DNR and Xcel effectively cuts out the public.

These kinds of cozy, privately-negotiated contracts between the state and regulated parties start us down a slippery slope of working around state regulations that exist to openly balance resource use and resource protection. In a recent letter to the DNR, the River Alliance stated that we must "withhold support for the MOU and, if it is signed, will consider further actions, including legal challenges, to see that the Department fulfills its duties to protect the affected resources and upholds the public trust." We will keep you informed on further developments with this important issue.

Hydro continued from page 5...

Shores Settlement Agreement, a 1996 pact (which Jim helped negotiate for the federal government) that obliged WE Energies to change how they operated their dams on the Menominee River and tributaries, including making it possible for fish to pass up- and downstream through those dams.

Keeping fish out of a hydro dam's turbines, and helping fish pass through or it, are the most common concerns for river conservationists. Fish need to migrate in order to spawn, and dams are no small obstacle. Fish also get "entrained" (a euphemism for "mutilated") in turbines.

And that brings us back to the half-inch. Jim is the River Alliance's observer and consultant on a fish passage plan for the Prairie du Sac hydro dam on the Wisconsin River, operated by Alliant Energy. Last month, officials from the utility, Wisconsin DNR, the Fish and Wildlife Service and an engineering consulting firm met to figure out how to get fish safely and effectively downstream through the dam. (The upstream passage is trickier, but also under consideration.) But the negotiators got hung up on the width of the bars on the grates over turbines (technically, "trash racks") because if the bars are too wide, fish will too easily get sucked into the turbines. If they're too narrow, the grates will slow down the passage of water to the turbines, and require more maintenance.

"Figuring out these details is what these meetings are all about," Jim observed. "It's fascinating, but it can be tedious."

It may be several years before a lake sturgeon can make its way past the Park Mill Dam on the Menominee River, or a shovelnose sturgeon around the Prairie du Sac Dam. But without Jim Fossum's skilled and watchful eye, it would be much longer, and maybe never.



Jim Fossum relaxing from meetings while helping to negotiate the Lower Chippewa River Settlement Agreement. Red Cedar River near Menominee, WI 2000.

Thank You!

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The River Alliance will be your host on this exploration of the Sarapiquí and San Juan Rivers in the heart of Central America. This 9-day trip will introduce you to Costa Rica's rain forests, cloud forests, mangrove swamps and volcanoes as well as a myriad of unique animal species.

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- a rare chance to assist researchers as they patrol the beaches for huge leatherback turtles
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View the complete itinerary at:
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Join the River Alliance of Wisconsin on an Exploration of

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The expedition cost is \$2,295/person and includes all lodging (based on double occupancy), all but two meals, private ground transportation, a professional naturalist guide (assigned exclusively to our group), guest lectures and special activities. The trip cost includes a \$150 tax-deductible donation to the River Alliance of Wisconsin and a \$50 tax-deductible contribution to a Costa Rican conservation organization (to be determined by the group). Airfare is not included.

Hurry! This extraordinary experience is limited to 14 persons!

To register: Call Debbie Sturdivant, our tour coordinator at Holbrook Travel, at (866) 748-6146 and request registration materials. Or visit <http://www.holbrooktours.com/RiverAllianceCR2006> and download an enrollment form directly. Completed enrollment forms should be mailed to Holbrook Travel, 3540 NW 13th Street, Gainesville, FL 32609.

Tour Cost Per Person: \$2295 (does NOT include airfare). Based on 10-12 persons, double occupancy. Rate is based on double occupancy with a minimum of 12 participants; with 14 participants the price will be \$2195. Single rooms available for an additional supplement of \$325.

Program Includes: all in-country transportation, accommodations, an expert guide, meals and activities as stated in the itinerary. A \$150 donation for the River Alliance of Wisconsin is included, in addition to \$50 per person which will be pooled to directly support Costa Rica conservation efforts on site.

Program does not include: international airfare, additional activities, beverages, gratuities, and the \$26.00 Costa Rica airport departure tax. Estimated airfare from Madison is \$775.



Note: There is a 25-pound luggage weight limit, plus carry-on, as space is limited on the boats.

Payment: In order to secure your space on the trip, a \$200 deposit and completed enrollment form is required no later than 120 days before departure (November 18, 2005). This deposit is refundable until 75 days before departure with the exclusion of a \$100 cancellation fee. Final payment is due 75 days prior, on or before January 2, 2006. Within 75 days moneys are non-refundable. Trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. For more information about insurance coverage, see <http://www.travelinsured.com>. Holbrook's Agency number is 15849.