



Wisconsin Rivers

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Citizen Monitors: Feet In, and Eyes On, the Rivers

River Alliance has always supported the work of citizen advocates – individuals and local groups who act on behalf of the vitality of their rivers. Though that engagement has often had a policy reform purpose behind it, recent ventures into river monitoring exemplify our commitment to support citizen advocates who literally work IN the rivers as well as outside them.

Several of our projects rely on citizens to monitor water quality and keep track of aquatic invasive species. Laura MacFarland coordinates a project monitoring Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in streams statewide. (Most AIS monitoring heretofore has been for lakes.) Chris Clayton coordinates Citizen Based Stream Monitoring, a project in partnership with the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources aimed at using citizen-collected water quality data in the Department's river management decisions.

As the following stories show, monitoring is a tool used to help manage and protect streams. Citizens have monitored water bodies for decades, but River Alliance is helping shape citizen monitoring so that it is used for tangible, purposeful ends, and not merely for its own sake. River advocates are always looking to get some positive work done; these articles illustrate that there are many who monitor for a serious reason.



by Chris Clayton

From Milliliters and Milfoil to Managing the Rivers

Attending to the small things doesn't keep citizen monitors from seeing the big picture

It's a Saturday in September, and I'm traveling to Racine for a day in the field. I love it.

We ask that all participants of the volunteer stream monitoring program monitor their streams once per month from May through September. However, there is nothing in the manual stating that monitoring must occur on a weekday.

This late in the field season, most volunteers have their monitoring routine down just fine. I'm just along for the ride. Sure, I check to make sure instruments are properly calibrated and methods are followed to a T. In most every case, they are.

More importantly, I visit volunteers to support their monitoring endeavors. Everyone I meet has a story to tell of how and why they got into monitoring. I find that the reasons they give can only be explained at the source of their concerns – at home.

Teachable monitoring moment

This weekend, I'm visiting Scott and Maya Dizack who live near Wind Point, an area of land that juts out into Lake Michigan north of Racine. They paddle their kayaks up and down the Lake Michigan shoreline to monitor three creeks that flow to the lake. Like all other citizen monitors I work with, they use loggers which record hourly temperature data for five months of the year. Once a month, they measure dissolved oxygen, pH, and transparency; and in the spring and fall, they collect macroinvertebrates (i.e. insects, crustaceans, and mollusks) which help indicate overall stream conditions. Seven-year old daughter Maya has expressed an early interest in marine biology to her father, and Scott has used stream monitoring to help encourage her interest.

All citizen monitors participate in a training session where they learn the ins and outs to stream monitoring in partnership with the DNR. It's a challenge to cover all the bases at a pace and depth that suits each volunteer. In the end, each volunteer is given the tools necessary to strike out on their own. But I always offer assistance to those who need encouragement.

During a training earlier in the year, Maya let me know right where she stood. She asked more questions than anyone I've trained to date. In fact, I had to politely decline answering many of her questions so we could finish on time.

While Scott is involving his daughter in stream monitoring to expose her to a world outside the classroom, he, like most of the citizen monitors I've worked with, do monitoring for reasons beyond individual learning opportunities.



Galesville Ettrick Trempealeau High School students monitor Beaver Creek, near Galesville. *River Alliance photo.*

Leveling with the DNR

Over the past three years, the River Alliance has helped get citizen based stream monitoring up and running as a viable program within the DNR. At the beginning, DNR, River Alliance, UW Extension, and others recognized that the DNR alone simply cannot collect water quality data on all the surface waters around the state. A pilot project was launched to answer questions regarding volunteers' ability to meet expectations associated with the collection of high quality data DNR could use for its management decisions. Two years of positive results lent credibility to the volunteers' work and gave cause to form a DNR monitoring program for streams, similar to the time-tested citizen based monitoring program for lakes.

The stream monitoring program is still a work in progress. Currently, about 150 volunteers monitor 165 sites statewide as a part of our efforts. Overall, stream monitoring programs offer volunteers three different levels of participation: educational

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Denny Caneff
Executive Director
Stream of Thought



The River Vote

As you river rats know well, there really is no such thing as a river vote, like there is the “black vote,” the “suburban vote,” the “veterans’ vote,” etc. Despite all we care about them, and all they do for us, rivers don’t get much mention by the political chattering class or become the grist of stump speeches in rural Ohio.

So, are the recent elections no referendum on rivers? Well, they just might be.

Listen to what DID get chattered about and stump-speeched this fall: Energy. Infrastructure. Government involvement in the private sector. Scratch a bit at any of these topics, and you will find a river running through it.

Candidates carried on about “energy independence” and green or renewable energy sources. In the current formulation of “renewable energy,” that may not be good news for rivers. Many see hydroelectric power as “green energy,” and over the years we have steadfastly reminded those who see green in them that dams that there is an ecological trade-off to hydro. (See Page 4 for more about how hydro is a very pale green.) There are also very serious social trade-offs for hydro development in developing countries, where China and some African countries have no qualms about forcing people from their villages, and putting ancient archeological sites under water (Turkey).

From the trading floor to the contractor’s trailer

The “infrastructure” candidates talked about was often a call for more roads and bridges – and that’s fine. But infrastructure includes how we move around and treat water, most of which ends up in rivers. Investment in infrastructure, such as sewage treatment plants and storm water control projects, would also be a fine thing. In the Milwaukee area alone, tens of millions of dollars could be spent preventing sanitary sewer pipes from leaking untreated sewage into that area’s rivers. (I wonder, though, about calls for job creation from green infrastructure: Can laid-off investment bankers run backhoes or manipulate a trowel?)

Government’s role in the economy had many guises in the campaign and general public discourse about the tottering financial markets. Whether we want it or not, we clearly have the federal government diving deep into banks and investment firms. Does a more active government in that sector translate to the public accepting more active enforcement of environmental regulations?

So much to do, so little money

Both developing infrastructure and more actively enforcing regulations will require money, and it is hard to find any government at any level claiming they have any, even for basic services. The challenge for us river and other environmental advocates will be to clearly tie our concerns back to the issues and concerns citizens got full doses of during this campaign season – public and personal health; long-term, healthy, sensible investment in the economy; independence; job creation.

Good-bye, good colleagues

We bid farewell this fall to two superb compatriots in the cause for rivers. **Mike Engleson** was our finance and office manager for over six years. We miss his good humor and patient demeanor. We also say good-bye to **Sarah Murray**, who took our event organizing to a new level and streamlined our communications media.

And we welcome **Megan Gibson**, who has picked up both Mike’s and Sarah’s tasks with alacrity. Despite the behavior of her colleagues at the annual River Alliance staff retreat – her first days on the job -- giving her plenty of reason to not ever come back, she has been coming back. (Perhaps it’s because we promise not to tell anyone that she brought two halves of different kayak paddles to a River Alliance paddling event.)

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Denny Caneff

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*On the cover: Allen Creek,
Jefferson County Wisconsin
(River Alliance photo)*



Megan Gibson flies down the Namakagon River with River Alliance colleague Allison Werner. *River Alliance photo.*

Bad Things in the Badfish



by Laura MacFarland

This year the River Alliance initiated an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) project, funded by the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, to assess the threat of invasive species to our rivers.

What have we found? Curly-leaf pondweed in headwater streams and springs, shores infested with Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife encroaching on our wetlands, and more.

We have spoken with many groups from Ashland to Stoughton and have found that this matters to many river enthusiasts. The River Alliance is working with agencies, groups and individuals who are interested in establishing a citizen scientist monitoring effort to assess what invasives are present in their rivers, set management priorities, and develop a plan of action. Groups around the state are taking the bull by the horns (or the plant by the roots as the case may be) and waging war on the invaders, starting with gathering intelligence on them.

The Friends of Badfish Creek in Dane and Rock counties are just one example of a local group monitoring their creek for invasive species in preparation of the next step – control. They participated in the River Alliance’s AIS monitoring project, learning to identify and detect invasive species by canoe and report their findings to the Wisconsin DNR. During this exercise they identified purple loosestrife and a large patch of Japanese knotweed at a recently built bridge abutment.

As a result, the Friends of Badfish Creek and the River Alliance hosted a workshop to learn how to identify resources and partners for monitoring and control in their area, and to figure out their management approach. They will continue to monitor the creek and shore while preparing to eradicate that stand of knotweed.

Other groups, such as the Friends of the White River in Marquette County, have already identified purple loosestrife as a threat in their

watershed and are partnering with Wisconsin DNR and UW Extension to raise and release *Galerucella pusilla* (Cella beetles) to control the spread.

In Wisconsin over 600 citizen groups have raised and released over 23 million beetles at almost 1,500 sites. This valuable program has been effective at knocking down the population of loosestrife and engaging people in protecting our rivers and wetlands. If purple loosestrife is present in your watershed, catch Beetle-Mania! Please contact Brock Woods at Brock.Woods@Wisconsin.gov or 608-221-6349 for information or to get involved.



Terri Lyon, Sheboygan County master gardener, records a large infestation of Japanese knotweed (in background) during a River Alliance training event on the Sheboygan River. *River Alliance photo.*

Get off your AIS

The River Alliance encourages you to contact our AIS coordinator Laura MacFarland at lmacfarland@wisconsinrivers.org if you are concerned about invasive species along your rivers and streams. Invasive species can be intimidating, but our focus is to empower local citizens to make a difference. We can

- help train your volunteers to monitor for invasive species
- assist in prioritizing resources to control infestations
- provide technical support.

Protecting your stream from invasive species is vital, but it’s also a great opportunity to build new partnerships and recruit new volunteers.

The Next Invader: from the Planet Zealand

In the fall of 2005 the New Zealand mudsnail was discovered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the Duluth-Superior Harbor and St. Louis River Estuary. It is likely they will eventually find their way into Wisconsin’s rivers. They have the potential to replace all native bugs in a stream, and they don’t offer enough nutritional value themselves for fish, resulting in plummeting fish populations.



The Wisconsin DNR and the River Alliance are partnering to develop a monitoring protocol for citizens to help us detect their migration into our streams early so we may prevent further spread. Please visit the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant website (<http://seagrant.wisc.edu/ais/>) for a fact sheet including pictures of the mudsnail. We need you to be on the lookout!

...continued from page 1, From Milliliters and Milfoil to Managing the Rivers



Volunteer monitors with the Valley Stewardship Network, Vernon County. *River Alliance photo.*

(Level 1), status and trends (Level 2), and project and research (Level 3) monitoring, which usually targets a particular pollutant. The pilot project focused on Level 2 monitoring, and participants use DNR methods and equipment to monitor. More complicated Level 3 monitoring depends on the formation of a trusted relationship between experienced volunteers and DNR or county staff.

The baton will be passed

The DNR added a part-time data manager to the program this year, and the Department has committed to making the program coordinator position (now managed by River Alliance) permanent, at the agency, starting in 2009.

Since partnering with DNR on this project, our bottom line purpose has been to improve

river protection statewide by figuring out how citizen-gathered data can fill data gaps so that DNR statutory responsibilities can be met. We’ve learned that citizens are indeed able to collect credible data. Given the many lessons from our three-year involvement in the project, we want to see Level 2 monitoring as a fully DNR-supported program.

DNR staff use citizen monitors in many different ways to assist them in their work. We’ve also learned that while most of the Level 2 volunteers are interested in continuing, some do not feel the water quality parameters monitored are advancing their goals. For example, a group in northern Wisconsin has realized that Level 2 monitoring can’t help them identify problem pollutants in their watershed, and target their advocacy efforts accordingly.

We see our future participation serving as liaison between DNR and local groups to develop higher-level stream monitoring projects (i.e. Level 3) of mutual benefit – projects which put local group data collection to good use.

Monitoring: a means to other ends

Time and resources will determine the overall success of the program. In the meantime, the volunteers – individuals and members of local watershed groups – are monitoring to ensure positive gains in all different manners of advocating for rivers and water quality across Wisconsin.

- Scott Dizack is monitoring to gauge the effect of new stormwater practices put in place by his condo association.
- In Jefferson County, a couple of folks happened to find out that the threatened Blanding’s Turtle lived in the marsh on their property. That chance event led to the formation of the Friends of Allen Creek Watershed which conducts Level 2 and 3 stream monitoring as part of an overall assessment of that basin’s water resources in the face of increased development pressures.
- Jay, Mary, and Anna Jocham monitor five locations with the Adams County Land and Water Conservation Department as part of the county’s ongoing assessment of surface waters. Their knowledge of the streams they monitor told me just how much time they spend walking along, paddling, and fishing those streams.

Each time I head out for a visit, volunteers tell stories which clue me in on the concerns they have for their favorite streams and what they are doing about it. I am always awed by the motivations of everyone I work with. Citizen stream monitors represent dedicated individuals and groups, and they understand that monitoring is simply a means to greater ends.

It's Not Easy Being Green

The environment was not a focus of the recent elections, but the general public is more aware than ever that business as usual is not an option. As the new guard settles into office, we can expect a slate of new government proposals to address our problems – global warming, energy and water shortages, not to mention the state of the economy. We will be bombarded with dire warnings and tough choices, especially regarding energy.

- Ethanol was touted as the next best thing and heavy government subsidies followed, but the push to plant more corn undid years of streambank and wetland conservation.
- What about hydroelectric power? It's clean, it doesn't pollute. But is it the "green" solution?
- Are there ways to use water in a "greener" way? (and we're not talking about the Chicago River on St. Patrick's Day)

Making it even harder is that being "green" is cool these days – nearly every magazine has done their "green" issue and corporations are marketing their goods and services as "green," whether or not they truly are. With all the spin and sometimes flat-out propaganda coming at you, we want to give you our perspective on what constitutes "green," or at least "greener." Hopefully our views will help you decide which solutions to support, or at the very least, provide some fodder for conversation at the Thanksgiving table!

Hello, hydro, my old friend

The River Alliance is not against hydropower. We believe that hydropower has an important place in the Wisconsin energy landscape. We have supported and participated in years of work on the relicensing of federally regulated dams in Wisconsin, and have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with utilities, state and federal governments, and other stakeholders as licenses were re-issued for existing hydro dams.

We recognize that many utilities operating dams in the state have made significant strides to operate their dams in an environmentally sound manner -- one of the most important outcomes of the federal relicensing process.

As the planet warms up, however, fingers are pointing to hydropower as a "green" solution to our reliance on carbon-based energy. This year, the Wisconsin Public Service Corp. announced it would be purchasing 500 megawatts of power from Manitoba Hydro mega-dams. In May 2008, the Winnipeg Free Press reported that during his visit to Manitoba, Governor Jim Doyle stated he was confident that purchased energy would count towards Wisconsin's "25 by 25" campaign (which commits the state to obtaining 25% of its power from renewable sources by 2025).

Currently, 2005 Wisconsin Act 141 is worded to prevent the inclusion of hydropower from projects larger than 60 MW, which Manitoba Hydro definitely is. In fact, rolling back this requirement would be a huge disincentive to develop our local renewable resources, since most utilities could hit their quota with hydropower shipped fast and cheap from up north. But can hydropower be a viable part of the renewable energy mix in the state? Is hydropower "green" and can it be sustainable? We feel it's a good time to take a look at truths and myths about hydropower a little more closely.

Low-emission does not equal low-impact

It's true that most of the hydropower produced in Wisconsin is low in emissions compared to coal-fired power plants, hence the desire to label it "green." However, just because it doesn't spew greenhouse gases into the air doesn't mean it has no impact. Hydropower can be a significant source of water pollution. Many of the problems associated with older millponds – sedimentation, nasty algae blooms, overheated water and unpleasant odors – are the direct result of water, sediment and nutrients being blocked by dams.

How a dam is operated can also have serious consequences for our public waters. Hundreds of miles of streams have been alternately flooded or completely drained dry, leading to the widespread decline of aquatic wildlife. These dewatered rivers also affect people's enjoyment of rivers for paddling and fishing. Dams without proper safeguards in place can kill thousands of fish that accidentally pass through the turbines. Spread over thousands of miles of Wisconsin rivers, these impacts add up to a serious problem.

Dams are the biggest threat to fisheries in particular and biodiversity of aquatic species in general. For all these reasons, the river ecosystems used and altered for hydropower are not "renewable." If we redefine "green energy" to mean that how we generate power doesn't undermine the resources we depend on for our existence, then hydropower cannot get a free pass.

Can there be environmentally sound hydropower?

Much of the damage from hydropower dams can be greatly reduced or

avoided with some pretty simple changes. These include:

- Change the timing of power generation to mimic the natural flow patterns of the river
- Use "drawdowns" of water behind dams to stimulate natural vegetation that provides habitat
- Stabilize lake levels to protect shorelines and riverbanks from erosion
- Provide fish ladders or other safe upstream and downstream passage for fish around dams
- Replace antique turbines and generators with modern equipment to make more energy with less water
- Install equipment to measure and maintain appropriate temperature and oxygen levels in rivers
- Provide public access and adequate instream flows back into rivers so people can fish, boat and swim.



Wisconsin Power & Light's federal license requires it to develop ways for fish to pass up - and downstream at its Prairie du Sac hydroelectric dam on the Wisconsin River. *River Alliance photo.*

With all the spin and sometimes flat-out propaganda coming at you, we want to give you our perspective on what constitutes "green," or at least "greener." Hopefully our views will help you decide which solutions to support.

Implementation of these changes need not result in much lost power generation either. When the federal government studied more than 240 hydro facilities that had been brought up to modern environmental standards through the federal relicensing process, it found that these improvements resulted in an

average power generation loss of only 1.6%, about the same to what is lost through the installation of scrubbers on coal-fired power plants.

If it is financially feasible to retrofit these facilities to produce hydropower, and if they are designed and operated in a truly low-impact way, then this is one scenario where hydropower may be a good idea.

LIHI dams

In order to be called sustainable energy, these dams must demonstrate that they are small in impact, not small in size. One way to achieve this is to require accreditation from the Low Impact Hydro Institute (LIHI, www.lowimpacthydro.org), a nationally-recognized certification program that accredits facilities as low-impact based on the above objective environmental criteria.

There are innovative, hydrokinetic turbine technologies being developed in the United States that warrant a closer look because of their potential to generate hydropower without the need for a dam. Such approaches have been termed free-flowing hydro. We hope these new technologies may one day allow us to harness the power of moving water in a way that is not as devastating to rivers as building dams.

A sustainable energy strategy should provide incentives or additional subsidies to truly renewable technologies that are emerging, in their infancy, and where the public return is the greatest. The hydropower industry already enjoys significant subsidies through the use of a "free" source of fuel—the public's rivers. Any new hydropower facilities should stand on their own economically and if they are to be touted as truly low-impact and renewable energy, they should be certified as low-impact facilities.

(Note: Portions of this article were based on testimony of Andrew Fahlund of American Rivers submitted to the Committee on Natural Resources, US House of Representatives) (June 2008).

Groundwater – the Other Great Lake

We are still rejoicing about the recent passage of the Great Lakes Compact, assuring Great Lakes water will forever remain in the Great Lakes Basin and never be siphoned off to water golf courses in Arizona. But while a number of cities near the lakes draw lake water for municipal use, 70% of Wisconsin residents, and nine out of 10 Wisconsin communities, rely on groundwater. It is also the primary source of water for irrigation

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Winter is Learning Season

Offerings for local groups and conservation activists to improve themselves

Snow and ice will soon settle in on the river or watershed you care about, but don't let your activism hibernate. Winter is a good time to reflect on your past success and dream and scheme for more success next year. The River Alliance provides support to river and watershed groups and individual activists in many ways:

Your group's got issues?

We can help you with organizational issues from managing your board, staff, and volunteers to creating bylaws and policies. We can also advise on issues important to your river, help you decipher pertinent regulations, and connect you with information, resources and other groups working on similar issues. These services are just a phone call away, and we will match the right River Alliance staff member, or perhaps another knowledgeable river activist, with experience in your issue.

Advice and counsel

If your organizational issue is more complex than can be handled by phone or e-mail, an in-person, one-on-one consultation can be arranged.

Tooling up

We have assembled a toolkit to provide quick guides to a number of issues important to watershed groups and nonprofits in general. They are divided into two categories, organizational development (e.g. forming a nonprofit, writing bylaws) and program tools for river conservation (e.g. organizing river clean-ups, reducing construction site erosion). They are available by contacting us directly; many are available on-line.

Get aboard the train(ing)

Our acclaimed trainings will help your group set and implement goals to improve your watershed. They are based on the best management practices for nonprofit river and watershed organizations and they can be tailored to your organization's needs. The first step is to set up a consultation with our staff to determine the priorities for your group.

If your organization has a specific need not addressed by these trainings, call us and ask about additional options for your group. Other topics we can assist with include starting a new organization, nonprofit administration, and communicating your message. Our four organizational trainings are:

- Mapping Your Future (organizational assessment and planning)
- Making Your Board Effective (step-by-step board trainings)
- Raising Funds to Reach Your Goals (individual giving and fund development plans)
- Sustaining Your People Power (strategically developing leaders and volunteers)

Go to the Assisting Local Group page on our website, www.wisconsinrivers.org to find the details about how we can help your river or watershed group or contact Allison Werner, awerner@wisconsinrivers.org or 608.257.2424 ext. 113.

Making Their Mark

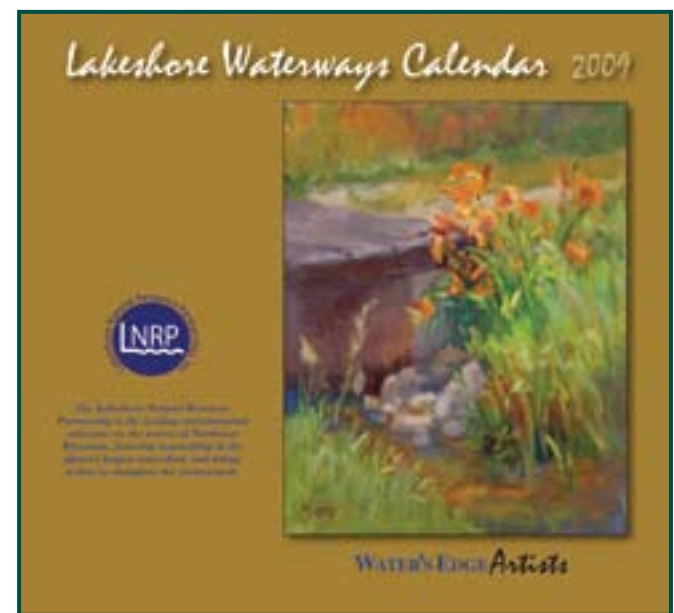
There are well over 100 organized watershed and river friends groups around the state. We try to keep in touch with and track of their doings and accomplishments. A few especially caught our attention this year with how they have developed or the impact they are having.

Lower Chippewa River Alliance – their initial concern was how Xcel Energy was managing its property along the Lower Chippewa (for invasive plants and for invading ATVs). They are formalizing their organization with bylaws, regular meetings and an interim board of directors. The Chippewa is an important Wisconsin river and we're pleased to see local people come to the defense of its lower stretches.

Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership – LNRP is connecting to new audiences and celebrating accomplishments in their watershed -- tasks local groups often overlook. They partnered with The Waters Edge Artists, who chose prominent and overlooked creeks, streams, lakes, rivers and wetlands to feature in their paintings, which were then auctioned at a special event and featured in a 2009 calendar. Sales of the calendar go directly to LNRPs efforts to protect and restore the waterways of the Lakeshore Basin. Calendars can be ordered online, www.lnrp.org, or purchased at the River Alliance office for \$20.

Friends of the St.Croix Headwaters – FOTSCH is the latest recipient of a River Alliance Organizational Development Grant. An action plan created during their Mapping Your Future training identified reaching out to youth in their watershed as a priority. FOTSCH realized many

local high schoolers have never had a paddling experience, yet the community is counting on them to be the next generation of stewards of our natural resources. The group is launching a "Canoes on Wheels" program, in partnership with schools, designed to provide activity-based outdoor natural sciences education. For more information, see www.fotsch.org or contact Scott Peterson at 715-520-7732, scott@fotsch.org.



The Lakeshore Natural Resources Partnership is offering a 2009 calendar for sale as a fund raiser, in collaboration with northeastern Wisconsin painters.



Friends of Allen Creek in the midst of strategic planning. River Alliance photo.

Special offer for River Alliance organizational members.

River Alliance of Wisconsin organizational members may receive **one complimentary organizational training** through June 30, 2009. To become a member, simply return the enclosed envelope with your \$100 membership.



Thank you for your generous support!

We are grateful to all of you – individuals, organizations and businesses -- who have supported our efforts.
Listed here is everyone that has contributed to the River Alliance since July 2008.

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...continued from page 4, It's Not Easy Being Green

and industrial uses throughout the state. With tighter controls on Great Lakes water, the reliance on groundwater will only grow. Other than the occasional, miraculous artesian well, most of us never see groundwater – it's not nearly as photogenic as Lake Superior – but if we want to make sure there is enough to sustain us into the future and to maintain the lakes, streams and wetlands fed by groundwater, we have to start thinking about it as our third Great Lake, and give it the same consideration.

Waukesha's water woes have made news for several years, highlighting for all of us that this unseen treasure is not inexhaustible. There are many facets to careful management of groundwater resources:

- Thoughtful planning for new growth and development based on the availability of water instead of assuming it will be there for the taking
- Evaluating the impact of new wells on surrounding surface waters before they're approved
- Getting religion on conservation.

Conscientious everyday water use is an easy habit to adopt, and water saving appliances and fixtures are getting better, cheaper and more readily available. Throughout the country, communities that have made a concerted effort to conserve water have reaped huge savings by delaying or eliminating the need for expensive new water sources and infrastructure improvements. And conserving water conserves energy and reduces air quality impacts – pumping water out of the ground and moving it to homes and businesses requires energy. The City of Madison's new Water Conservation and Sustainability Plan estimates that every 1 million gallon of water the utility avoids pumping saves about \$175 in electricity costs and prevents release of over 4,000 pounds of greenhouse gases – both substantial savings, considering the utility pumps over 11 billion gallons of water per year.

In our view: Don't walk all over groundwater – demand thoughtful management of groundwater resources and support efforts to conserve, conserve, conserve!

Bio-fuels

The election campaigns brought much hoo-ha about “growing our own energy” and “energy independence.” We learned that even if Baby Drills offshore, our domestic oil supply cannot keep up with our profligate, oil-eating means of transporting ourselves in individual cars.

These facts make ethanol from crops and plant residues tempting. Why not grow our own gas in the fertile fields of the Midwestern corn belt?

This is a decidedly short-term temptation that should be resisted over the long term of ultimate energy independence. After a near decade-long intensive push to produce ethanol, from generous federal subsidies and



Dane County corn as far as the eye can see. If it ends up in gas tanks, it's possible the soil underneath it will end up in a nearby river. *River Alliance photo.*

fast-tracked ethanol plant construction to developing “flex-fuel” engines, the decided downside of corn-based ethanol is now more apparent. Much of the negative news about ethanol in Wisconsin has come from the sloppy operations of the ethanol plants themselves. But the corn ethanol boom has done its damage before the corn ever leaves the fields, by pushing up the use of energy-intensive fertilizers, hastening soil erosion (and thereby polluting and silting up streams), and draining aquifers ever faster through intensive irrigation.

Even corn ethanol's supporters are beginning to call it a “bridge technology,” but the industry continues to furiously build that bridge. A direct cause-and-effect cannot be traced to ethanol production, but the size of notorious “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico, where the Mississippi River issues its fertile load, was the largest on record this year, with corn acreages up substantially from five years ago in the corn belt.

A bio-fuels version of the Manhattan Project is happening on the UW-Madison campus, which received a nearly \$150 million grant from the Dept. of Energy, essentially to figure how to unlock plant sugars hiding behind the cellulose of woody plants and grasses. Done right, producing woody plants and grasses for energy production has a lot of promise. “Done right” is the watchword: such plant production could actually protect soil and recharge groundwater, done right. It could provide wildlife habitat and perhaps flood control, done right.

We will need more public investment in researching and developing not just the plants themselves but also the processing, transport and energy generation, and a good understanding of the ecological trade-offs of various kinds of bio-fuels. Meanwhile, beware of the farm commodity organizations and big grain companies touting their answer to energy independence.

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Voyageur Profile: John Roberts and Nancy Osterberg

John and Nancy are Voyageurs, members who commit a significant gift to the River Alliance (see Page 6).

What made you decide to become Voyageurs?

Because of the importance of rivers to how we live, supporting River Alliance has been an annual priority. Becoming a Voyageur was an extension of what we had already committed to – returning something to the very rivers that bring us such joy.

What issue facing rivers is of the biggest concern to you?



Nancy Osterberg and John Roberts on the Menominee River.

or the sludge that comes when river-bank buffers are compromised from overuse, overdevelopment, or lack of awareness. It could just simply be when sadness replaces beauty. From when Nancy and I first dip our paddle into a river to when we



come to know its personality, to us, the experience of a river is one of wholeness, and that which wounds its wholeness becomes our biggest concern.

What draws you to rivers?

It is the poetry of fluid movement and the potential, through canoeing, to become an intricate part of its, unique and perhaps hidden, verse.

Do you have a favorite Wisconsin river?

We have had a number of favorite rivers, mostly depending on where we are living. Right now close to where we call home in northeastern Wisconsin, the Border Brule is one we paddle on our anniversary. Of the many wild rivers that we also enjoy in this area, the Brule will more consistently have adequate water for canoeing, remoteness, and the degree of challenge more suited for canoe-camping trips.

Describe your perfect day on a river.

Nancy and I have been dumped into icy water, braved the high waves on the Big Lake, paddled through the darkness of night, gone up rivers and down, but five canoes and three kayaks after our very first tandem trip down a river we still are our own, first, best choice for paddling together.

Wisconsin Rivers

Everyone deserves healthy rivers

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Monitoring the Monitors

Corn is Green – But is it “Green?”

Unwanted Immigrants from New Zealand

Voyage with John Roberts and Nancy Osterberg

