



Wisconsin Rivers

Spring 2009 • Volume 15 • Issue 2

When is a Ditch a River?

Moving water around is never without controversy. There are myriad rules, regulations, laws, court decisions and ordinances governing that phenomenon in Wisconsin. One water management device – the drainage district – came to our attention in two very different ways this spring. Created to drain land for agriculture, drainage districts are obscure, single-purpose local governments, complete with taxing authority and appointed commissioners, and charged with draining water from farmland.

Our cover story tells of potato farmers Lynn and Justin Isherwood, their challenge of the assumptions of the Portage County Drainage District, and their vigorous defense of a once-upon-a-time stream on their land, now known as the Isherwood Lateral. Our sidebar on Page 2 describes the emerging controversy around forming a brand-new drainage district.

Lateral Move

Draining truths from a 120-year old water law

When talking streams and flowing water in central Portage County, south of the village of Plover, you have to suspend disbelief, take your mind's eye way back to the glacial epoch, and then not so far back to the late 19th century, when farmers were a few decades into farming this kitchen-table flat, seemingly featureless but intriguingly subtle landscape.

First, to suspend disbelief: The notion of “stream” here is other-worldly. It is not one of a waterway carving its sinewy course across the land, but instead of straight-line trenches hard by the grid, with prosaic names like “Ditch 2” and the “Isherwood Lateral.” There's nothing very natural anymore about these former streams that were ditched and straightened to hasten the evacuation of water so the land could be farmed. Looking at this area in the Wisconsin Gazetteer, you can almost bracket a basketball tournament on the hard lines of the drainage ditches that usher water west out of the farming areas and on to the Wisconsin River.

Glacial muck

Now, travel back in time, 10,000 or 15,000 years, to the days of glacial Lake Wisconsin, a Great Salt Lake-sized inland sea of glacial meltwater. It is on Lake Wisconsin's remnant sandy seabed and marshy shallows that central Wisconsin farmers grow phenomenal crops that thrive in sand – potatoes, sweet corn, canning vegetables, cranberries.

Which takes us to just past the turn of the 20th century, when farmers created the Portage County Drainage District (PCDD) in 1903. The muck soils, the legacy soggy shorelines of glacial Lake Wisconsin, full of organic matter, had to be, in the minds of the early tillers of those soils, drained to be at all useful. No doubt an Isherwood farmer was around at the time the district was formed, when the dredges came to rework the landscape.

Book of Plough, Lateral of Isherwood

The grandchild who lives down the road from Lynn and Justin Isherwood represents the Isherwood family's seventh generation on that land. The crow's feet etched along Justin's bright blue eyes speak to his six decades of gazing at those flat vastnesses, studying bird flights, watching irrigation rigs and eyeing aerial crop sprayers. They also sparkle with astute and wry observation of human beings, their institutions and their relationship to the land, observations Justin has made in countless essays and books, including *The Book of Plough: Essays on the Virtues of Farm, Family and the Rural Life*.

The bones of contention between the commissioners of the PCDD and the Isherwoods are ones of hard-headed pragmatism vs. notions of esthetics and beauty; of following the rules vs. rewriting the rules for future relevance; of a belief that land and water need managing against a belief that maybe they do not – that they might do fine if natural processes are fostered, not combated.

A drainage district commission, under state rules, can “restor[e] a drain or any part thereof as nearly as practicable to the same condition as when originally

constructed or subsequently improved, including resloping of open ditches and leveling of spoil banks or excavated materials, and such routine operations as from time to time may be required to ... preserve the efficiency of the drains.”

That is a loaded paragraph, in the minds of the Isherwoods. The PCDD has declared that the ditch carved in the 1910s on their farm – formerly Buena Vista Creek and known now as the Isherwood Lateral – needs “routine operations.” Specifically, it means carving out a wide access road along the ditch and through a woods so that the ditch can be re-dredged. The road would be maintained for over a mile, all the way to the stream's headwaters.

The commissioners' action galls the Isherwoods, for several reasons: They see more than a mere water evacuation ditch. They want to help the stream find its natural meander again, albeit within the confines of a big straight ditch. They believe the aggressive bank reshaping the commission wants only feeds the hand of an enemy the commission is bent on defeating (reed canary grass). They see the maintenance of the ditch as essentially unnecessary, because nothing in recent years indicates it's not working.

Most unhappily for them, there's a mentality that sees agriculture and conservation automatically at odds.

Justin's proposals are off the grid and out of the tidy boxes these ditches have defined. They are not counter to the wisdom of the ages of how water moves across the land, the field of science known as hydro-geomorphology, which if you unpack its Greek roots makes total sense – how water changes land.

First ditch effort

The water in Isherwood Lateral runs cold and breathtakingly clear. It is as fresh as water can be -- groundwater that just happens to flow on the surface. Even though the “stream” is carved into a straight trench east to west, you can still see the urge of the water to meander.

What the PCDD intends to do on the Isherwood farm has highlighted for them many underlying flaws of the whole drainage enterprise. Justin and Lynn say that the PCDD has no data to show that its methods work, and the commission ignores suggestions for exploring alternatives to blind dredging. Justin writes, “Many of the wrongs of the District are the direct result of the attitude they don't

continued on page 2...



Despite ditching and dredging and this large culvert in its path, Isherwood Lateral is capable of spawning trout at its headwaters. *River Alliance photo*

Breaking New Ground – Or Is it Old?

Nearly one-third of the farms in Wisconsin are on land that has been drained, in some cases “reclaiming” wetlands and marshes for crop production, in others flushing away high groundwater levels or low-lying areas prone to standing water after rains. There are 228 known drainage districts in 31 counties that manage the drainage ditches and tax land-owners who benefit. Most of these drainage districts and the legacy of ditches they created date back to the early part of the 20th century, but no new districts have been formed in recent memory.

After last spring’s flooding and increasing groundwater levels in the Spring Green area north of the Wisconsin River, farmers facing standing water and crop damage petitioned to form a new district with the intent of draining water to the Lower Wisconsin River. This has caused a lot of head-scratching about how to proceed and which rules to apply.

The first step in creating a drainage district is to form a County Drainage Board. The board is responsible for operating any and all drainage districts in the county. The actual drainage district is established through circuit court order, once the benefits of constructing drains are shown to outweigh the costs. The court order also establishes the boundaries of the district and the location of ditches. This old practice has not been used in so long, the circuit court was confused and created the Spring Green area district before the board was formed – an action that has since been corrected but highlights the potential difficulties ahead.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is responsible for approving drainage alterations within a district. In the past, this has mostly meant altering existing ditches in existing districts. Starting from scratch, forming a new district, deciding where to put the ditch(es) and what happens at the ditch outlet is, in more ways than one, breaking new ground.

Whatever structure is required where the ditch meets the Wisconsin River will likely require a permit from DNR, but the relationship between DATCP’s rules and DNR’s is a bit hazy. Any new “point source” discharge to a river requires permits from DNR to ensure the water quality of the receiving water is not compromised. But is a ditch a point source, like a sewer pipe is? The Lower Wisconsin River is designated an Exceptional Resource Water, which requires any discharge to be equal in quality to the river, but it’s unclear if this applies. An alternative to discharging directly to the river is to first discharge to Bakken’s Pond, a diverse wetland area, a portion of which is within a State Natural Area. Will impacts to this resource be assessed and addressed, or will the all-too-common exemption for all things farm-related come into play?

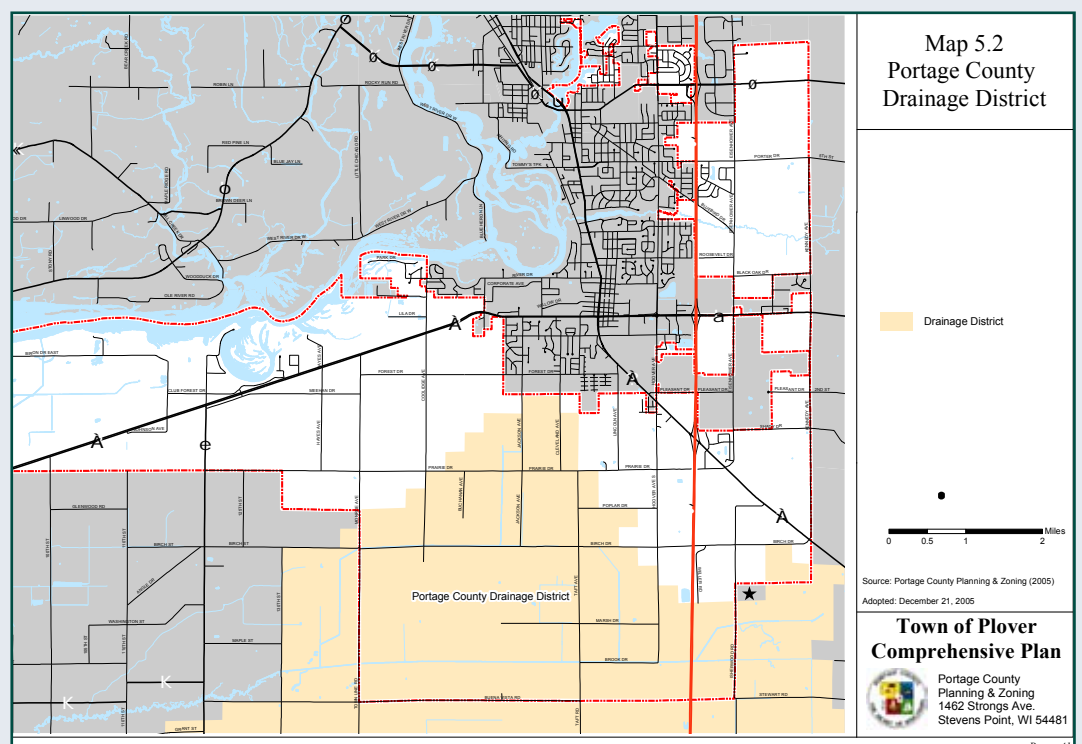
The new district is far from a done deal, and even if approved without DNR assurance that the quality of the Wisconsin River and/or Bakken’s Pond will be protected, local permits will also be needed for ditch crossings of local roads and publicly owned lands. We’ll be keeping our eyes on how this arcane practice proceeds under current rules, as it will set precedent for any future district proposals. ■



Lynn Isherwood shows Stu Grimstad the original route of Isherwood Lateral (a stream formerly known as Buena Vista Creek) on an 1890s plat map. *River Alliance photo*



A view of the Isherwood Lateral showing the “improvements” started by the Portage County Drainage District. Their plan calls for clearing trees alongside and in the stream for over a mile. *River Alliance photo*



Portage County Drainage District. The village of Plover is shown to the north. I-39 is the bright north-south line on the right side of the map. The Isherwood farm is marked by a star on the map. *Image courtesy Portage County Planning and Zoning*

...“Lateral Move” continued from cover.

need to know more than they do.” Whether or not they know it, the PCDD engages, directly or indirectly, in stream morphology, invasive species control, groundwater recharge, and cold water habitat. But those notions are simply not in their vocabulary.

Justin finds strange irony in the fact that what the drainage district wants to evacuate as fast as possible—water -- is the very thing area farmers need, and in huge quantities, to produce their crops under irrigation. He contends the Isherwood Lateral only drains a small portion of farmable land, and by cutting a swath through the woods to make a road in order to clean out the ditch only hastens the departure of a valued resource and reduces the groundwater recharge potential of the woods.

“Against such steadfast determination to be dredgers only, it is an uphill struggle to expand the mental options of the Commissioners,” he says.

Family, fellow farmer, foe

It’s not easy to be contrarian when the people you are challenging are neighbors, fellow professionals, and even family. (One drainage district commissioner is Justin’s cousin.) He and Lynn are good-humored about it all, and show remarkable magnanimity toward the Commission.

But, he says, “It’s my perspective that the Commission is out of sync with the spectrum of resources and their modern worth. What should be the goals of the PCDD in the new century? Are there methods within the range of values we now place on natural resources? What new frame of mind is necessary to meet their goals by non-traditional means? I don’t see this as a matter of choice for the District or its Commissioners.” ■



Denny Caneff
Executive Director

Stream of Thought

Well, well – water

One of the stigmas of growing up rural (there were a few) was that if you had a kid from town come out to stay for a few days, he always complained that the water tasted funny. My mother assured me it was my friends who were funny – “They just didn’t appreciate good, fresh well water,” she’d proclaim, and said they’d become soft by drinking that “chemical water” in town.

Ours was a rural well, and it had, well, that distinctive well water taste – a bit metallic, a hint of sulfur smell, a mineral aftertaste. After traveling some parts of the world where tap water simply could not be trusted, I always enjoyed coming home to a long draught from my parents’ well water. That it could have been contaminated never occurred to any of us. It simply wasn’t possible.

Despite the fact we were surrounded by agricultural land, there were no threats to our well water supply from farming, or from anything else. We were lucky, perhaps, or ignorant. Nonetheless, my parents spent 45 years in that house in rural southern Minnesota, and well water quality was never an issue.

The ideal of “good fresh well water” in rural America is largely illusory now. We are finding out what was dumped out back, spread on land, or land-filled and buried in the past few decades, as the nasty byproducts of this carelessness ooze to the water table and out of people’s taps.

Cracks in the karst

In areas of northeastern Wisconsin, it’s not the dumping of decades past that is contaminating drinking water wells, it is the real-time spreading of manure and other liquid wastes. It has become an almost annual ritual in the so-called “karst” areas of northeastern Wisconsin that some people’s wells end up with a dose of manure in it.

Wells in that part of the state are more vulnerable to contamination because of the porous carbonate bedrock underlying very shallow soils in some places. In fact, there are cracks and holes in the bedrock which, if manure or sludges are spread nearby and it rains, act as direct conduits to the groundwater aquifers. Research by UW-Oshkosh hydrogeologist Maureen Muldoon shows just how quickly contaminated water travels from the surface and through the ground to water supplies.

People like Judy Treml, Chuck Wagner and Pat Laughrin don’t need scientific proof that manure gets into drinking water. These

articulate, and very patient, voices from that region have sounded the alarm for years, and understand this is clearly a public health issue, not a farming issue.

The smell of water

But you’d never know that by the sound of the debate about proposed legislation designed to protect drinking water AND allow farming to continue. The River Alliance is among several groups actively promoting this legislation, with over 80 groups endorsing it as a priority issue through the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters. Despite sitting down and presenting the goals of the legislation with leaders of the Dairy Business Association, a prominent trade group, DBA and its members have ignored what the legislation actually proposes to do, and instead have peddled misconceptions and innuendo about it. They do have one thing right: there could indeed be tougher regulation of manure spreading. Normally known for their ingenuity and innovation, farmers in this case have failed to offer any ideas or strategies that would keep what they spread on their fields out of people’s wells.

Meanwhile, the issue seems a bit too smelly – or maybe not smelly enough? – for elected officials to get behind this proposal. Area legislators and county supervisors seem to fear the “all-powerful farm lobby.” While farmers are clearly outvoted by their non-farm neighbors, their organizations are very adept at protecting their interests. Unwillingness to act is tantamount to declaring the region’s drinking water a state sacrifice area.

Probably the most disheartening development, as I see this issue unfold, is how inured many residents of this area have become to well contamination. Worse yet, many are skeptical, even flat-out cynical, about any kind of groundwater protection plan ever being implemented. They see that the Dept. of Natural Resources is way undermanned and politically timid, that county conservation offices are overworked and reluctant to call out their clients, and that elected officials are beholden to industry.

Most sadly, many people are afraid to speak up, for fear of offending a neighbor or being ostracized publicly for attacking a Wisconsin icon (the dairy farmer).

Keeping manure away from cracks and holes in the ground is far more complicated than you might think.

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Denny Caneff

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On the cover: Lynn and Justin Isherwood explain the intricacies of drainage ditches to Stu Grimstad. River Alliance photo

Van Zile, Schlaefer, Stelljes on board

We’re very pleased to welcome three new directors to the River Alliance Board. Their arrival brings some exciting new dimensions for the organization, and we’re pleased they are among us.



Bev Stelljes lives near Fall Creek, Wisconsin, on the Eau Claire River. A native of Nebraska, Bev and her husband Kevin have paddled remote wilderness areas from Canada to Chile, Alaska to New Zealand. Bev runs a horseback riding training school. She has served on a number of committees in her

community involving conservation and river corridor protection.



Mary Schlaefer is a lifelong resident of Wisconsin and an avid participant in the natural world. She is blessed to have work that feeds her soul, serving as executive director of the Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation, a non-profit company that designs and implements programs to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy. She is an avid hiker, biker and angler, as well as a novice paddler. Mary previously served as

executive assistant and deputy secretary of the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources.

Tina Van Zile is a member of the Sokaogan Chippewa Community of Mole Lake, Wisconsin. She has worked for the tribe’s environmental department for 15 years, the last 10 as director. She has also served as tribal vice chair and tribal secretary. She is recipient of the Michael Frost Award from the National Tribal Environmental Council. Tina looks forward to bringing tribal water issues and people to the River Alliance’s statewide river agenda.

Make A Date With A River!

From north or south, small or big, two hours or two days, urban or wild – there is a river for YOU this summer with the River Alliance

These events are sponsored and organized by the River Alliance and intended for anyone interested in experiencing a river and mingling with the people who love them. Registration is simple: fill out the form on

this page and mail it to us with your payment (the sooner the better, but you can register a few days ahead of an event). Or download a form from our web site, fill it out, and mail or email it in with your payment. (www.wisconsinrivers.org, then click on "Make A Date With A River.") For more information about each event, contact the coordinating staff person by email or call 608/257-2424.

The Glades of the Wisconsin River and Louis' Bluff – A Paddling and Hiking Excursion



The view from Louis' Bluff, high above the Wisconsin River. Come to get this high May 30! River Alliance photo

This is the third year that the River Alliance has teamed up with Frank and Mariana Weinhold to experience the Wisconsin River both "by land and by sea."

We'll start and end the excursion at Frank and Mariana's riverside retreat north of Wisconsin Dells, where Louis' Bluff, the highest point on the Upper Wisconsin River, is found.

Frank and Mariana protected the bluff forever through a conservation easement with the Natural Heritage Land Trust.

We'll paddle first, heading upriver (in fairly easy current) along the shore of the main channel, then turn around and head downstream through what locals call "the glades," the watery wooded area along the river's western shore that makes for fascinating paddling. This is Mariana's "daily bread" outing, and she's happy to share it with us.

Returning to the Weinhold home, we'll then hike to the top of Louis' Bluff. Along the way, Frank will offer his incredible knowledge of the cultural and geologic history of this magnificent land form. And the view from the top is breath-taking.

When: Saturday, May 30, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Where: Louis' Bluff, 8 miles north of Wisconsin Dells, in Adams County.

Cost: \$25 (includes lunch)

Staff Contact: Denny Caneff
dcaneff@wisconsinrivers.org

All paddling experience levels welcome. The hike to Louis' Bluff is fairly rigorous, and optional.

Whitewater Rafting on the Menominee

Join the River Alliance for an afternoon of whitewater rafting on the Menominee River offered by Kosir's Rapid Rafts, a River Alliance "River Trader" business member. The trip starts out slowly, but culminates in a Class IV section of the river. We'll raft through Piers Gorge not once, but twice!

When: Saturday June 13th (2:00 p.m. check-in; 3:00 p.m. trip start)

Where: Menominee River Niagara, WI
For directions: www.kosirs.com

Cost: \$25/person (no food will be included)

Staff Contact: Allison Werner
awerner@wisconsinrivers.org

REGISTER BY
Wednesday, May 12th!

You too could be rock sculptor!
Construct a cairn on the Menominee River July 25-26.
Photo courtesy John Roberts.



Blue Solstice

Join world-renowned UW-Madison ecologist Steve Carpenter at his property in the Blue River watershed to witness the healing of a landscape through both in-stream and upland restoration. This is a unique opportunity for amateur fly anglers, bird watchers, and botanists. Led by local guides through scenic valleys, those of you who want to wet a line will wade in cool spring waters, casting for wild brook trout. If you are not interested in fly-fishing, join us for the alternative – a hike through the spectacular uplands of the Blue River watershed along unique bluffs led by a local naturalist. No fishing equipment will be provided.



Steve Carpenter will show his Blue River restoration project during Blue Solstice June 20. Photo ©2007 David Medaris

When: June 20, 2009 4:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Where: Blue River, Grant County WI

Cost: \$75/person

Staff Contact: Laura MacFarland
lmacfarland@wisconsinrivers.org

Explore Wisconsin's Newest State Wild River

Come explore and help celebrate! Paddle the Totogatic, a river that is very close to becoming the state's next Wild River. Join individuals who have worked to protect this wild river of the North. We hope that this event will be a celebration as well as a great day on the river.

The Totogatic River flows from Bayfield County to its confluence with the Namekagon River in Burnett County. We will paddle the sandy-bottomed Lower Totogatic as it wends its way through oak-pine forests. Our trip on the Totogatic will laze through canyons and floodplain forests.

This is a full-day paddle on the Lower Totogatic River in Washburn County. We will put in at Nancy Lake Road, below the Minong Flowage, and take out about 8 miles downstream at Bridge Road. (Limited paddling experience is fine.)

When: Saturday, June 27, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Where: Totogatic River, 6 miles west of Minong, WI

Cost: \$25/person

Staff Contact: Chris Clayton
cclayton@wisconsinrivers.org

Overnight on the Border: the Menominee River by Paddle

Join veteran canoeist John Roberts as we explore the confluence of three rivers that creates a fourth – the Wisconsin-Michigan border river, the Menominee.

You'll experience the Paint River gorge, then roll through some exciting Class 2 rapids at the very top of the Menominee before camping on islands that could have you literally sleeping in two states at once. You'll explore the islands and nearby shores and try your hand at the ancient art of cairn-building – impromptu rock sculptures ...

continued on page 5...

Ducks Love Rivers, River Alliance Loves Mallards



Join the River Alliance of Wisconsin on June 16th for River Alliance Night at the Mallards!

The Mallards are Madison's entry in the Northwoods League, a summer baseball league made up of top tier college players. The Mallards will battle the Waterloo Bucks that night at the Warner Park "Duck Pond," with the first pitch at 7:05.

Tickets are \$6, with \$2 from each ticket sold going to support the River Alliance. Join us at the ballpark with our special guest, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, throwing out the first pitch. For tickets, call the Mallards or go to their box office; be sure to ask for "River Alliance tickets." On-line, go to www.mallardsgroups.com and enter the password "rivers."

For more information on the Madison Mallards, or to get directions to the ballpark, go to www.madisonmallards.com. See you at the Duck Pond!

Overnight on the Border: the Menominee River by Paddle continued...

for which the river provides the raw materials, then “recycles” when high water washes them out.

This is a two-day excursion with overnight camping. You should have camping equipment and a boat capable of carrying provisions. Some paddling and camping experience required.

When: Saturday and Sunday, July 25 and 26 (Meet early afternoon 7/25 to put in; take out around noon 7/26)

Where: Menominee River, near Wisconsin/ Michigan border

Cost: \$150/person (River Alliance will provide three meals and the shuttle)

Staff Contact: Denny Caneff
dcaneff@wisconsinrivers.org



See the moon rise over the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan August 5. River Alliance photo

Milky Moonlight in Milwaukee

It’s our fourth annual moonlit excursion through Milwaukee’s downtown, co-sponsored by Milwaukee Riverkeeper. This hugely popular event is a great way to see the heart of the city by boat and catch a glimpse of the full moon rising over the Lake Michigan waterfront. We’ll start out the evening with a picnic spread. As sunset approaches, we’ll get in the water and enjoy a leisurely paddle down through the heart of downtown Milwaukee as the moon rises. The paddle is technically easy; experience with basic steering techniques is all that’s required. Space is limited, and this event has sold out yearly, so register today!

When: Wednesday August 5th, 6:45 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Where: Milwaukee River

Cost: \$25/person (includes food)

Staff Contact: Helen Sarakinos
hsarakinos@wisconsinrivers.org

History, Old and New: Seeing the Brunswelier Through “Wild” Eyes

Come celebrate the first new Wisconsin Wild River in over 40 years! View the remote Brunswelier River in Ashland County by foot and pontoon boat. This is a rare opportunity to experience the river that inspired lifelong conservationist Martin Hanson, hosted at Martin’s home by his nephew, Thom Rossberger. We’ll hike the property along the river, and view the rocky gorge of Beaverdam Lake from the deck of Martin’s pontoon boat as Tia Nelson regales us with tales of Martin, her father Gaylord, and the movers and shakers of the day who pattered around the lake and brainstormed groundbreaking conservation efforts such as the protection of the Apostle Islands. Perhaps we’ll raise a glass or two to Martin along the way.

When: Saturday, August 22, 3:00 p.m. – 6:00p.m.

Where: Near Mellon, in Ashland County

Cost: \$25/person

Staff Contact: Lori Grant
lgrant@wisconsinrivers.org

Whitewater on Foot: the Falls of the Pine River



Paddle and hike to enjoy the Pine River Falls September 12. Photo courtesy John Roberts.

Veteran canoeist and explorer John Roberts leads this journey by boat and on foot to some of the best watery eye candy in Wisconsin, the Pine River rapids and LaSalle Falls, at a time when the Northwoods fall colors will just begin to emerge.

First we’ll learn about the future fate of an old hydro dam on the river, and the gorge that it flooded. Then we’ll paddle upstream in the flowage (very easy current) to a point where we’ll do “whitewater on foot” by hiking alongside several rapids and falls and eventually to the roaring LaSalle Falls.

John will also demonstrate using a pole for propelling a canoe, and he may just offer a ride down through the rapids (NOT the falls!) to a willing rider.

Very modest paddling experience is required for this trip, but you should be prepared for a short but vigorous hike along the rapids and falls.

When: Saturday, September 12th Noon – 3:00 p.m.

Where: Pine River, Florence County

Cost: \$25/person

Staff Contact: Denny Caneff
dcaneff@wisconsinrivers.org

2009 Make A Date With A River | Registration Form

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: (Best number to contact you day of) _____

E-mail: _____

Registration

Event name	Date	Price/ person*	# of people	Total amount
Louis’ Bluff Hike and Paddle	May 30	\$25		\$
Whitewater Rafting on the Menominee	June 13	\$25		\$
Blue Solstice (Fly Fishing on the Blue)	June 20	\$75		\$
Exploring the Totogatic, a Wild River	June 27	\$25		\$
Overnight on the Border: Menominee River by Paddle	July 25 & 26	\$150		\$
Milky Moonlight in Milwaukee	Aug 5	\$25		\$
History, Old and New: Seeing the Brunswelier Through “Wild” Eyes	Aug 22	\$25		\$
Whitewater on Foot: Waterfalls of the Pine	Sep 12	\$25		\$
TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED				

* Note: children under 12 are free for all events, but please include names for our head count.

Payment method

Check enclosed (make payable to River Alliance of Wisconsin)

Credit card Visa/MC # _____ Exp. _____

Name on the card: _____

SPRING! Rivers are flowing, citizens monitoring, invaders thwarted, dams doomed

Restoration taking root in Racine

The River Alliance has been awarded three grants to continue our work with urban river restoration in Racine. Root-Pike WIN, The Racine Community Foundation and the City of Racine Community Development Block Grant Program have funded us to continue our partnership with Root River Council and the City to implement the recommendations of “Back to the Root: An Urban River Restoration Plan.” The plan was the result of a year of conversations with stakeholders and the community about how the former industrial river and waterfront can be revitalized to create a sense of place, stimulate economic growth and ensure public access to clean water.

The plan was formally adopted last summer by the Racine Common Council and these grants will enable us to work with its partners in researching policy options for the plan. The citizen-led Root River Council has moved forward the recommendations of the plan and we are really looking forward to continuing to work with them, the City and the many other engaged partners on the river. Stay tuned for more updates, or visit www.backtotheroot.org for more details.



Volunteers from Central Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited get ready to take water quality samples. *River Alliance photo*

Slow the Spread by Sole and Tread

June is Wisconsin's Fifth Annual Invasive Species Awareness Month. Visit www.invasivespecies.wi.gov/awareness to participate in an event in celebration: pull garlic mustard, participate in a Project RED training, plant a native prairie.

This year's motto is “Slow the spread by sole and tread.” Recreational boaters, hikers, fishermen, horseback riders, and ATV users are common vectors spreading both upland and aquatic invasive species on the soles of their shoes, treads of their tires, and other equipment.

There are newly written best management practices (BMPs) for recreationists to prevent the spread of invasive species. The BMPs provide general as well as activity-specific guidelines. They include suggestions such as: making sure clothing, shoes, and equipment are free of invasive residue; avoiding areas that appear to be infested with invasive species; encouraging individuals to report invasive species to the appropriate land manager/property owner; including invasive species prevention into event planning; and taking care to stay on trails. To learn more visit <http://council.wisconsinforestry.org/>

VSN, GET, TU are all CWMs

By mid-May, about 50 new volunteers will be added to a group of citizen monitors already 150 strong. New volunteers hail from Wolf River Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU), Milwaukee Riverkeeper, Adams County, Galesville Ettrick Trempealeau (GET) High School, Oregon High School, and Valley Stewardship Network (VSN). Citizen interest in stream monitoring increases every year.

Equally good news is that DNR biologists' interest in citizen stream monitors is also high. This was evident from this year's proposals from DNR biologists to work with citizen groups to complete special monitoring projects around the state. Project funds will go toward

- Water chemistry sampling by Valley Stewardship Network volunteers on the North and South Fork Bad Axe River before and after the installation of a hog CAFO
- Equipment for Galesville Ettrick Trempealeau High School to help assess tributaries to Marinuka Lake for inclusion on the state's list of Impaired Waters
- Water chemistry sampling by a volunteer to assist with TMDL monitoring on tributaries to the Big Eau Pleine flowage
- Water chemistry sampling by Central Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited to assess three headwater streams for future restoration efforts

These and other projects funded by the Citizen Based Stream Monitoring program represent the next step in encouraging the use of citizen collected data for management purposes.

Even though the program gains legitimacy and appreciation, the quality of citizen collected data continues to be questioned by those who have little to no experience with citizen science or volunteer programs. To chip away at these biases, we will promote the program's data quality to any potential data users. We will continue to emphasize to the citizen monitors the value of their endeavors and show that data collected in this program is high quality.

A crew of volunteers attacks a stand of invasive Japanese knotweed along Badfish Creek in Rock County in April. *River Alliance photo*



Dam Spring Fever

It seems like a blazing case of spring fever has descended upon Wisconsin's rivers. We've learned that the village of Campbellsport, in a recent referendum, voted three to one to remove the Campbellsport Dam on the North Branch of the Milwaukee River and restore that stretch of cool water habitat. Meanwhile, on the Bark River, an administrative law judge has upheld the permit DNR granted to Margaret Zerwekh to abandon the Nemahbin Roller Mill Dam, allowing her to continue the work of removing the failing structure and restoring a beautiful section of the Bark running through the city of Delafield.

And speaking of the Bark River, by the time you read this another dam on the Bark River, Cushman Dam in neighboring Jefferson County, will have been removed. Finally, the engineering plans are being developed for the removal of the decrepit Stebbinsville Dam on the Yahara River in Rock County. That removal is likely to begin this summer. It sounds like summer will be a good time to slip our canoe into some newly singing waters around the state.



The days of the decrepit Nemahbin Dam, on the Bark River at Delafield, should be numbered after a last-gasp legal fight. *River Alliance photo*

TRIB-bing Your Trigger

River Alliance has a new e-newsletter for local river advocates. The TRIB provides information about funding opportunities, trainings, events, and other topics related to helping river organizations operate sustainably. Recent topics have ranged from how to deal with the IRS Form 990 to highlights from Conservation Lobby Day.



We intend to send out The TRIB monthly, unless there are additional pressing issues to share. River groups are also welcome to send us announcements to include in The TRIB that are appropriate for our subscribers. To sign-up for The TRIB or submit an announcement, send an e-mail to localgroups@wisconsinrivers.org. Back issues can be found in the newsletter section of our website, www.wisconsinrivers.org.



The River Alliance's Allison Werner explains the Root River Revitalization Plan to the Common Council of Racine last August. *River Alliance photo*

Local Watershed Groups, We're Here For You

The Communicating Environmentally Workshop will help you wade through the decision-making process for local governments and understand how you can influence environmental policy decisions. Speakers include Representative Steve Hilgenberg, Eric Olson of the UW-Stevens Point Center for Land Use Education, and Dorothy Lagerroos, retired professor of environmental studies and government Professor at Northland College.

Workshop Details

Saturday, May 9, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

River Arts Center, Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin

Fee: \$10, includes lunch

Register online, www.wisconsinrivers.org,

or e-mail or call Lori Grant,

lgrant@wisconsinrivers.org,

608-257-2424 ext. 111

**REGISTER BY
Monday, May 4th!**

I Think I Smell a Rat...



Wisconsin Rivers and Word on the Stream not enough to quench your thirst for River Alliance news and information? Then paddle yourself to The River Rat, the River Alliance's new blog. The Rat's identity is classified, but its opinions are not. With a sharp eye and sharp pen (well, keyboard), the River Rat will offer pointed and prescient insights about the state of Wisconsin's rivers, streams and watersheds, and even sometimes things only sort of related to rivers.

You can start enjoying them—and forwarding them to your friends—today at www.wiriverrat.blogspot.com.



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Your new issue of *Wisconsin Rivers* is here!

Online at www.wisconsinrivers.org

Keep Wild Rivers Coming

It may have taken 44 years to get to this day, but we're pleased it happened. On April 14, Governor Jim Doyle signed a law designating the Brunswiler River as a Wisconsin Wild River – the first designated since the program's inception in 1965.

The designation honors the late conservationist Martin Hanson, who owned property along the Brunswiler and advocated for its protection for years. Hanson's property was a haven for

progressive political and conservation types, including Gaylord Nelson.

Nelson's daughter Tia enjoyed many moments, raucous and reflective, at the Hanson compound. Tia will be writing to River Alliance members soon, making a special appeal to you to support the river advocacy for which River Alliance is known and appreciated – the kind that will give us not one, but two, new Wild Rivers this year. (The Totogatic is next.)



Joining Governor Doyle for the bill signing were Bill Schultheis (River Alliance board member); Rep. Gary Sherman; Rep. Nick Milroy; Sen. Bob Jauch; Denny Caneff (River Alliance executive director); Bud Jordahl; Lori Grant (River Alliance program manager); Dave Martin (original author of Wisconsin's Wild Rivers program); and an unidentified friend of rivers. *Photo courtesy Brent Nicastro*

Your support and the support of donors like you makes this advocacy happen.

In this challenging environment, this appeal is important. We want to raise \$10,000, which will help us remain the strong river advocates you have come to expect. Without your support, that goal will be difficult to reach. So please, fill out the donation envelope included in this newsletter, respond to Tia's letter (coming soon to a mailbox near you), or visit our website and click the "Donate Now" button. Your support is always vital to us, but now it is more important than ever.

Even in tough times, everybody deserves a healthy—and wild—river.



Wisconsin Rivers

Everyone deserves healthy rivers

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Lateral Move: The Isherwoods' Ditch

Pronounce This (Totogatic)
and Paddle It

River Rat Sighting



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