



Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission River Sweep: The event had 20 volunteers who picked up litter along the shoreline of the Ohio River and helped paint a river mural at the Thomas More University Biology Field Station in California, Kentucky. Photo: Chris Lorentz

Building Basin Identity Through Nature-Based Recreation: Lessons from the #OhioRiverBasinProud Campaign

by James Major and Risa Shimoda

While more than 30 million people live within the Ohio River Basin, most residents do not realize they are part of one of North America's most significant watersheds. Whether paddling Tennessee's Tellico Creek, hiking along Pennsylvania's Monongahela River, or participating in a cleanup on Kentucky's Elkhorn Creek, most people identify with their local river while remaining unaware of the larger system connecting these waters.

Recognizing this opportunity, the Ohio River Basin Alliance (ORBA), launched the #OhioRiverBasinProud campaign. The

initiative encourages organizations throughout the Basin to co-brand existing recreation and stewardship events as an Ohio River Basin activity, helping participants understand that their local waterways contribute to a larger interconnected watershed, supporting more than 30 million people across 14 states.

The Ohio River Basin Alliance (ORBA) is a collaborative that strives to "sustain healthy ecosystems and river communities and vibrant water-dependent economies in the Ohio River Basin... addressing water resource issues in the Ohio River Basin in today's changing environment."

(continued, page 6)



Main Office

Risa Shimoda, Executive Director
PO Box 5750, Takoma Park, MD 20913-5750
(301) 585-4677 / cell (301) 502-6548
executivedirector@river-management.org

River Training Center
River Studies and Leadership Certificate
Contact Risa Shimoda

National Rivers Project
James Major, Coordinator
(540) 717-3595 / james@river-management.org

Communications
Bekah Price, Coordinator
(423) 943-2000 / bekah@river-management.org

RMS Store / Merchandise
Judy Culver
(928) 443-8070 / waterlilyz@outlook.com

RMS Journal
Sera Janson Zegre, Editor / Design
(970) 201-6163 / sera@river-management.org

National Officers
Kristina Rylands, President, Mariposa, CA
(209) 761-6674 / kristinarylands@gmail.com

Tony Mancuso, Vice President, Moab, UT
(435) 210-0362 / tmancuso@utah.gov

Helen Clough, Secretary, Juneau, AK
(907) 790-4189 / hcloughak@gmail.com

David Cernicek, Treasurer, Jackson, WY
(307) 699 7701 / cernicek@clueemail.com

Chapter Liaison
(vacant)

Member At-Large
Chris Geden, St. Louis, MO
(314) 607-4803 / chris@rivercityoutdoors.org

Past President
Judy Culver, President, Taos, NM
(928) 443-8070 / waterlilyz@outlook.com

Ex-Officio Advisors
Bob Randall, Kaplan, Kirsch & Rockwell LLP
(303) 825-7000 / brandall@kaplankirsch.com

Nate Hunt, Kaplan Kirsch & Rockwell LLP
(303) 825-7000 / nhunt@kaplankirsch.com

Editorial Policy

All contributions submitted for publication should be original, or reprinted with approval. Authorship implies responsibilities that can only be attributed to and performed by humans, rather than generative AI.

Articles are not edited for content and may not reflect the position, endorsement, or mission of RMS. The purpose of this policy is to encourage the free exchange of ideas concerning river management issues in an open forum of communication among the RMS membership.

Executive Director's Eddy

While we all change our dress, hair color, gait, or beverage preference over time, some things never change. Those enduring touchstones in the river management community include enthusiasm for a brilliant sunrise, a splashless route through a set of rapids, a well-told river tale, and a recounting of a nicely-executed river project. These all accrue to mutual respect, new knowledge, and a fist bump.

I have just returned from an historic RMS river trip, as well as an excitingly informative conference from the perspective of our mission and programs. Quite different in character, each experience inspired discussion, storytelling, and learning that would not be possible through print or online—to dispel any lingering uncertainty about the value of meeting and sharing in person. Both the river trip and conference experience reinforced how shared views of grand cliffs, sandy beaches, a roomful of peers, and a few handshakes can fuel relationships and a sense of community like no two-dimensional methods can hope to accomplish.

While we collect photos and stories from the August RMS Longtimers' trip through the Gates of Lodore on the Green River, I can say without hesitation that the trip did more than meet expectations. Seeing Lifetime members alongside the spouses, siblings, and friends of “lifers” was gratifying for those who attended the brainstorming sessions for the trip beginning in early 2025. Participants included a few of our earliest members, whose experiences and accomplishments are embedded in the ethos and attitude of RMS (then ARMS, the American River Management Society), particularly the commitment to “getting things done.” Managing rivers running through hundreds of thousands—or more—acres of public land is daunting even today. In 1985, these rangers were often left to their own instincts and judgment. At the end of this inaugural Longtimers' trip, 24 individuals parted company with new or renewed understanding of the chutzpah required to thrive as river rangers in the early days of river management. They also now know or have been reminded of the priceless gift of best practices and protocols those individuals developed for the benefit of future generations.

Originally designed to allow long-time colleagues to see each other and reminisce, the discussions from the Longtimers' trip reminded participants that they hold a treasure trove of stories that should be shared. They informed us “latercomers” of river protocol-related experiment and discovery that allows us to experience the river, campsites, and hikes as we would have a hundred or more years ago.

As a testament to the value of the trip and RMS, several of the OARS river guides were super interested in the stories and the nature of the river management-related professionalism that was so well represented among us. As of late August, two of their cadre, Oscar Logan and Jack Leary, have joined RMS. Welcome, Oscar and Jack!

We are excited to share seminal stories of river rangering and management in the United States. Keep an eye out for them in future *RMS Journal* issues.



Risa Shimoda, RMS Executive Director

The States Organization of Boating Access (SOBA) held its annual conference in Boise, Idaho, in late August. They welcomed RMS as a partnership presenter, as they have for the last few years, to their members from across the country. I attended the conference with Darrell Bowman, our 2027 Symposium Co-chair, who presented as the Recreation and Access Coordinator for the Arkansas Fish and Game Commission after graciously let me snag a ride on his eight-hour drive from the Gates of Lodore trip.

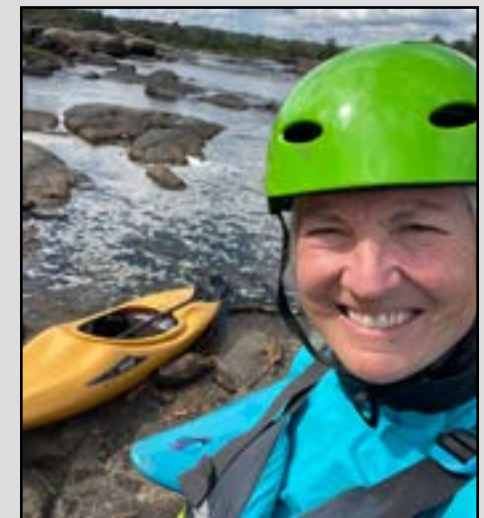
SOBA's Executive Director Hannah Holmes and Board of Directors President Nancy Stewart, a valued RMS member of the RMS water trails working group, were welcoming and accommodating. I cannot thank them enough for being wonderful hosts. They allowed Shannon Bassista, past RMS National Board Vice President, to present RMS programs with me. They also showed our video promoting the RMS 2027 Symposium, produced by Darrell's Arkansas Fish and Game colleagues, just a few hours off the press.

Sharing the video and reacquainting with boating access professionals initiated several conversations about common challenges that were discussed while floating the Green River and highlighted in Boise with specific stories, successes, and lessons learned.

I headed home thinking about the ever-more-overlapping Venn diagram of aspects of “recreational river/water access” by which agencies, municipal communities and water trails leaders (1) seek to appeal to wider swaths of the public; (2) must accommodate more frequently variable weather-related water levels and flow; and (3) need to evolve our expectations, infrastructure, and programming through sustainably innovative planning and design, working with like-minded partners committed to long-term resource protection. ❖

Risa Shimoda
Executive Director

President's Corner



Kristina Rylands, RMS President

Yesterday I attended the retirement gathering of longtime BLM Merced River ranger (and RMS supporter) David Greenwood and his volunteer wife Tracy who ran the visitor center at the Merced River Recreation Area just outside of Yosemite National Park. For over two decades, David and Tracy were known collectively as the “mayors” of this stretch of Merced River. They didn't want speeches or a big send-off, just a quiet picnic by the river with a few folks. Ultimately, it was a gorgeous afternoon of over 65 friends coming together to express a simple yet heart-felt *thanks* for their years of stewardship in a place that was not just a job but their home.

It got me thinking about the RMS folks in the last couple of years who have quietly retired from federal service, many of whom simply emptied desks and disappeared with maybe a week's notice.

How do you say *thanks* to people who make their professional—and personal—lives caring for our nation's rivers?

While the pages of this journal are poor substitutes for a riverside BBQ, I'd like to express deepest *gratitude* and give a STANDING OVATION to those who have moved on from their river careers. In doing so, I hope you will consider remaining at home in your RMS family and that we can celebrate you at an upcoming chapter event, symposium, or online talk/training. If we know anything from the hundreds of stories of how RMS members got their start, we know there is no retiring one's passion for rivers.

From all of us at RMS, *thanks* and *three cheers*. May there never come an end to the good that you have done. ❖

Kristina Rylands
RMS President

RMS Journal - Midwest Chapter Focus



Midwest by Ed Fite

There's 78,603 miles of streams in the state of Oklahoma and they're all as important to someone as the Illinois River is to me. Nestled in the rolling eastern hills of Oklahoma and the land of the Cherokee Nation, I live at a place on the Illinois River called the Swannanoa Ranch that's been in my family for four generations. The Illinois River has been synonymous with my life as far back as I can recall. Everywhere I went in my youth, I was exposed to water. In my walk, I spent all my time on this river, nurturing her and she's nurturing me. She is the lifeblood of the human soul. Fast forward 50 years, and I can say, I've dedicated my entire career to the protection of clean water.

My job is to make sure that the water quality in all the streams under Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) jurisdiction are protected to their best ability. In the 1930s, 40s and 50s we treated our rivers as dumps. We had waters that were being transferred from one river basin to another. We had many dams built by the US Army Corps of Engineers following the World War II era. We had wastewater issues from these communities where raw sewage was going into these streams and causing impairment and, in some places, making people sick. The 1960s is when everybody started changing and we started wanting to clean up our waters. The Clean Water Act (CWA) was passed,

and coupled with the CWA was a directive to the states: You shall clean up. Much of my career has been dedicated to this directive. As the Midwest becomes a popular paddling destination and dams are removed and streams are restored, I've witnessed changes in the human and riparian landscapes. If there's one thing that remains constant, it's what I call the *ice cream methodology*. If you can just sit down with someone and talk over an ice cream cone, you will likely find common ground—enough to help make positive change.

A river tells a story. It is choked full of memories, it is choked full of adventure. If you get away from civilization and focus on that river, you're connected. I hope you enjoy connecting with these rivers in the Midwest Chapter featured in this issue. From issues like drought to flooding, and solutions like increased access and connections, I hope you can visualize connecting

with others over common ground, ice cream cones, and river management. This also serves as my invitation to visit to the Illinois River. Too many folk fly over the Midwest with no idea the beautiful and floatable rivers and streams here. The 2027 Symposium is just around the corner and your chance to visit.

In closing, I leave you with thoughts for the future. All of us are connected to water. We just don't know it. There are way too many people in the world who sometimes lose sight of the fact that we're just borrowing from our grandparents and our parents and we're passing it on to our children and grandchildren. ❖

Ed Fite is past president of the Midwest Chapter with a rich history with RMS. Many of these thoughts and others are featured in a GRDA documentary available on YouTube: [Our Borrowed Water Documentary](#).

#OhioRiverBasinProud 2026 Awareness Events

- Nolichucky Restoration Project Tree Planting
- Third Annual Monongahela River Trash Sweep
- 2026 Beargrass Creek Clean Sweep
- Community Earth Day Celebration
- 2026 Friends of the Cheat Adopt A Highway Spring Cleanup
- Great Miami Riverway Summit
- Ohio River Islands River sweep at Buckley Island
- Great Miami River Clean up with Dayton and Kettering Rotary Clubs
- Ohio River Way Challenge
- Mayor's hike, bike, and paddle
- Four Rivers Clean Sweep
- The Boo Project - Stream & Environmental Cleanup Day
- Paddle for Pride
- ORSANCO River Sweep and Cookout
- 2026 Licking River Clean Sweep
- 2026 Hocking River Canoe Float
- Raisin' Hellbenders on the River: Concert for Conservation
- Pack A Dam Lock (P.A.D.L.)
- The GREAT Float - A Pirate Adventure
- Ohio River Paddlefest

#OhioRiverBasinProud Events: The 2026 Campaign included 20 diverse events co-branded across the Ohio River Basin. To read an article about the campaign, see pages 1, 6-7. Map: James Major

#OhioRiverBasinProud, continued from page 1)

Rather than creating new programs, #OhioRiverBasinProud demonstrates how a simple, shared identity can strengthen collaboration among recreation providers, watershed organizations, local governments, conservation groups, and community volunteers.

Recreation as a Gateway to Watershed Stewardship

ORBA’s Nature-Based Recreation Working Group was established by the ORBA Board of Trustees to advance several complementary objectives:

- Increase awareness of the Ohio River Basin as a connected watershed.
- Strengthen collaboration among water trail organizations.
- Encourage economic growth through outdoor recreation.
- Support stewardship of aquatic resources.
- Expand access to nature-based recreation.

The Nature-Based Recreation Working Group campaign recognizes that recreation is often an individual’s first meaningful connection to a river. Whether through an Earth Day celebration, a cleanup, a paddle trip, or an outdoor concert, these experiences can create natural opportunities to spark conversations about conservation, water quality, and community stewardship.

Building on that connection in 2026, ORBA’s Nature-Based Recreation Working Group piloted the #OhioRiverBasinProud campaign, encouraging organizations throughout the Basin to add to their labeling and support for existing recreation and stewardship events with the phrase, “we are in the Ohio River Basin.” The approach was simple: add a second layer of identity by co-branding existing events as #OhioRiverBasinProud, connecting recreation and community experiences to a shared commitment to the Ohio River Basin.

Risa Shimoda and James Major from River Management Society (RMS), along with creative and committed colleagues Molly Pope from OhioRiverWay, Carrie Decker from West Virginia Rivers Coalition, and ORBA Chair Dr. Christopher Lawrence from Thomas More University and others helped participants understand that their local waterways contribute to a larger interconnected watershed supporting more than 30 million people across 14 states.

The ORBA Nature-Based Recreation Working Group team leaned on their colleagues, nearly two dozen organizations in the Basin’s 14 states, to ask their communities to co-brand existing events like a race, picnic, cleanup, or film night, with the hashtag and ORBA logo. What seemed like an easy lift had the goal to strengthen collaboration among recreation providers, watershed organizations, local governments, conservation groups, and community volunteers.

A Simple Collaborative Model

Participating organizations agreed to:

- incorporate #OhioRiverBasinProud branding into promotional materials;
- explain the campaign during events;
- notify elected officials about their participation;
- report attendance and share photographs following the event.



Event leads contributed their information to an interactive map that highlighted participating events across the basin, allowing organizers and event participants to visualize the geographic extent of the campaign and reinforcing the message that individual rivers are connected through the Basin. Organizers were mailed promotional items, a dry bag with the ORB logo as a “thank you” for co-branding their event and ORB decals to hand out to event attendees.

2026 Campaign Results

- Events occurred between March and August.
- More than 2,500 participants attended.
- 20 events were co-branded across the Basin.
- Events included tree plantings, paddling trips, litter cleanups, Earth Day celebrations, river summits, concerts, Pride events, community cookouts, scavenger hunts, and educational programs.

The diversity of activities illustrates an important characteristic of the initiative: there is no single “correct” way to celebrate or protect a watershed. Rather, the campaign provides a framework through which many different organizations can contribute toward a shared regional identity.

Measuring More Than Attendance

While attendance numbers demonstrate participation, organizer feedback suggests the campaign produced broader educational benefits.

“People didn’t realize the Mon is part of the Ohio River Basin! We loved teaching them while getting them out on the river—sometimes for the first time.”

—Eliza Siefert, Monongahela River Trash Sweep

“Connections were made, fun was had, and we are proud to be spreading Ohio River Basin awareness as we re-invest in our small Northern Panhandle communities.”

—Blake Flessas, Brooke County Earth Day Celebration

Some events incorporated discussions of ORBA, Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission, and watershed stewardship before volunteers began cleanup activities.

“[Participants left with] a greater understanding of native biodiversity and the importance of protecting the interconnected lands and waters of the Ohio River Basin.”

—Molly Pope, Raisin’ Hellbenders on the River: Concert for Conservation

Collectively, these comments suggest the campaign not only attracted participants but also in strengthened watershed literacy.



*Monongahela River Trash Sweep, Morgantown, West Virginia.
Photo: Phoebe Durst, ASCEND Program at West Virginia University*

Why Basin Identity Matters

Watershed management frequently occurs at multiple geographic scales. Residents often identify strongly with their local creek, river, or community but less with the larger basin that connects those waterways.

The #OhioRiverBasinProud initiative addresses this challenge by encouraging people to see local stewardship as part of a much larger regional effort.

This broader identity has practical value. Shared branding helps organizations discover partners beyond state boundaries, provides opportunities for coordinated messaging, increases visibility for local events, and demonstrates the collective impact of numerous community-led efforts.

In this way, recreation becomes more than an outdoor activity—it becomes an entry point for regional collaboration and watershed stewardship.

Looking Ahead

Healthy river systems depend on informed and engaged communities.

The 2026 #OhioRiverBasinProud campaign initiated an understanding that recreation, education, and stewardship can be woven together to create a stronger sense of place across one of North America’s largest watersheds.

When Ohio River Basin residents begin to recognize that their neighborhood stream, favorite paddling river, or annual cleanup is part of the larger Ohio River Basin, they become participants in a shared story—one that connects communities, ecosystems, and economies across thousands of miles of interconnected waterways.

The Nature-Based Recreation Working Group continues to incorporate #OhioRiverBasinProud into ORBA’s broader strategic planning and is encouraging participation from even more groups and events for the 2027 campaign. Future opportunities include increasing partnerships with municipalities and congressional representatives, enhancing water trail collaboration, and exploring recreational use of historic lock facilities.

Importantly, the initiative demonstrates that fostering basin-wide identity does not require large financial investments. We believe connecting existing events through shared messaging and common purpose will help ORBA achieve its awareness goal of its residents knowing they live in the Ohio River Basin!

The ORBA Charter is now being updated for 2026-2030: RMS will continue to contribute to the effort to establish relationships with Basin-based river professionals and partners. ❖

To learn more about ORBA and the #OhioRiverBasinProud campaign, visit: <https://www.ohioriverbasinalliance.org/>.



Brooke County Earth Day Celebration in Wellsburg, West Virginia, along the Ohio River. Photo: Alexis Oltmer (@alexisoltmer on Instagram)

Building Community *on the River*: The 2026 Illinois River Rendezvous



2026 Illinois River Rendezvous at WOKA: Front row (l to r): Lizz Waring, Northeastern State University; Cheyanne Olson, Northeastern State University; Rachel Hovel, University of Maine-Farmington; Andy Rost, University of Nevada-Reno; Billy Cantrell, Northeastern State University. Middle row (l to r): Madeline Wade, University of Oklahoma; Lily Thompson, University of Missouri; Leah Dudley, East Central University; Micheline Labrie, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; Sara Kamanmalek, Howard University; Cat McClure, Colorado State University; Matt Wilfong, St. Mary's College of Maryland; Bezaye Tessema, Rice University. Back row (l to r): Shubham Tiwari, University of California-Davis; Bradlee Wahid Cotton, Auburn University; John Henkelman, University of New Hampshire; Danny White, Colorado State University. Photo: Jared Skaggs

by Lizz Waring

The [River Field Studies Network \(RFSN\)](#) was created based on the simple idea that rivers are powerful places to learn. Supported by the National Science Foundation, the network brings together educators, scientists, and river professionals who believe that some of the best learning happens outside the classroom. Through the River Field Scholars Program, participants develop the knowledge, confidence, and community needed to create meaningful field experiences while contributing open-source lessons that can be shared across the network.

The highlight of the year-long program is the River Rendezvous, an immersive week where scholars and instructors come together to learn from one another, develop new field lessons, and spend time doing what brought them together in the first place: being on rivers.

This year's RFSN Rendezvous took place June 3–10 in the Illinois River watershed of northeastern Oklahoma. For many of us, there could not have been a better classroom. The watershed

offers an incredible diversity of river environments, from the clear waters of Baron Fork to the larger reaches of the Illinois River, while nearby Grand Lake and Keystone Dam provided opportunities to discuss river management on a broader scale. Equally important, the region is home to the Cherokee Nation, reminding us that every river has a story that extends far beyond its hydrology.

Over the course of the week, 12 River Field Scholars and four instructors from across the country explored the watershed by raft and kayak, practiced teaching field lessons, and shared ideas about what makes outdoor education meaningful. Each day, balanced hands-on learning was complemented with thoughtful conversations about facilitation, reflection, and experiential learning. Scholars taught lessons, received feedback from their peers, and left with new ideas that they could immediately bring back to their own institutions.

One of the greatest strengths of the Rendezvous was the people who made it possible. We were fortunate to learn from partners across the watershed, including the Grand River Dam Authority.

River Management Society members Jared Skaggs and Ed Fite shared their perspectives on river management and stewardship in the region's past, present, and future. *Cherokee Nation National Treasure* Robert Lewis reminded us that rivers are more than ecological systems; they are places of history, culture, and identity. As a community, the instructors and scholars worked together to help create safe and supportive environments where scholars could continue building their confidence in the water.

One of the highlights of the week was putting our newly developed paddling skills into practice. Early in the Rendezvous, the scholars worked with paddling instructors on a 4 mile trip to build confidence in river safety, paddle strokes, self-rescue techniques, and reading moving water. For some participants, this was their first time in a kayak, and the supportive instruction gave everyone the confidence to continue building their skills over the week. These lessons culminated in a paddle trip that began just across the Arkansas border near Siloam Springs and followed the Illinois River back into Oklahoma.

Our journey ended at WOKA (Waters of Oklahoma and Arkansas) Whitewater Park, a fitting destination for a week dedicated to river education. WOKA's innovative whitewater features welcome everyone from first-time paddlers to experienced boaters, making it an excellent example of how thoughtful investment in river infrastructure can strengthen connections between communities and their waterways. Finishing the Rendezvous at WOKA was more than the end of a paddle.

It was a reminder that building confidence on the water, creating accessible recreation opportunities, and fostering stewardship all go hand in hand.

A theme that emerged repeatedly throughout the week was accessibility. Good field courses do not happen by accident. They are intentionally designed so that every student has the opportunity to participate in the learning process. Through discussions with one another, a workshop led by Dr. Anita Marshall on accessibility in the field, and a workshop by the [Field Futures](#) initiative on gender-based safety in the field, we explored practical ways to make field experiences more welcoming, reduce barriers to participation, and help students work through the uncertainty that often accompanies outdoor learning.

By the end of the week, it was clear that the most valuable part of the Rendezvous was not any single lesson or paddle trip, but the community that developed along the way. Scholars left with new teaching ideas, stronger professional networks, and a deeper

Cherokee National Treasure is a distinction created in 1988 by the Cherokee Nation to recognize people who have made significant contributions to the preservation of the tribe's art, language, and culture.

appreciation of the role rivers play in connecting science, people, and place.

As field educators, we often say that rivers are classrooms. The Illinois River Rendezvous was a reminder that these are also places where partnerships grow, stories are shared, and future river leaders find their confidence. These connections may ultimately be the most important thing we take home from a week on the water. ❖

Dr. Elizabeth Waring is an Associate Professor of Biology in the Department of Biological Sciences at Northeastern State University and is currently the program chair for the Freshwater Science and Integrative Biology degree programs. She is also the RSLC advisor for Northeastern State University.



Paddling on the Illinois taken from the New Combs Bridge near the Edmondson Public Access Area. Photo: Lizz Waring

Five New Access Sites Along the Fox River

by Karen Ann Miller

The Fabulous Fox! Water Trail (FF!WT), which flows for 200 miles through southeastern Wisconsin and northeastern Illinois, was designated into the National Park Service’s National Water Trails System in June 2023. The Core Development Team who led the creation of the FF!WT continues to implement the National Water Trail System’s best management practices of recreation opportunities, education, restoration, community support, public information, trail maintenance, and planning.

Kane County, Illinois, is one of the eight counties along the Fox River. In 2023, the Kane County Board approved funding received from the American Rescue Plan for five new access sites along the Fox River. The project was named the FF!WT Kane County Access Improvement Project. Staff in the Kane County Development Department chose BoardSafe Docks after viewing a presentation at the Fox River Summit (see sidebar). BoardSafe Docks builds docks that provide access for all abilities. Hey and Associates, Inc. (Hey) was chosen as the engineering consultant per a request for qualifications process and Earthwerks Land Improvement & Development Corporation as the construction company as the result of a bidding process.

To kick off the project, the Development Department reached out to public landowners along the Fox River inviting them to attend a presentation to learn about this opportunity and possibly choose to apply for one of the five new access sites. Hey worked with the Development Department to develop a list of criteria that were then used to rank the landowners’ requests. As part of the selection process, a subcontractor of Hey, Dave Hanson, an avid paddler who uses an adapted kayak, toured the sites with us to provide his expert opinion on their feasibility. The five applications that ranked the highest regarding our criteria were chosen to receive an access site funded by Kane County, including: Carpentersville, East Dundee, South Elgin, Batavia, and Montgomery. Intergovernmental agreements between Kane County and each of the landowners were approved, stating ownership of the docks remains with Kane County, but maintenance became the responsibility of the landowners.

Hey developed engineering plans for each of the five sites, applied for and received the necessary permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and local government, and worked with BoardSafe to design a unique dock for each site. The permitting process took longer than expected and was slightly delayed by an eagle’s nest downstream of the access site in South Elgin. Fortunately, the timing worked out for all parties. Earthwerks then prepared each site according to the engineering plans, with the exception of the access site in East Dundee, where the angle of the concrete that the dock is attached to on the shore was poured incorrectly. Construction and delivery of the docks also took longer than BoardSafe anticipated. However, in August of 2025, the first dock arrived from Pennsylvania to the Montgomery site, and the other four followed in the coming weeks. As the docks were



Paddlers exiting the Fox River at the dock in East Dundee at the end of the El Cardunal paddle. Photo: Gilmore Marketing Concepts, Inc.

installed, it was fun to interact with passersby and paddlers who wondered what was going on. One of my favorite experiences was at the access site in South Elgin, which was chosen because it is next to a playground for children of all abilities. While I was sitting on and admiring our new dock, a group of preschoolers came by to check it out. Future paddlers, I hope.

While installing the dock in Montgomery, it was discovered one of the hinges was attached to the dock backwards by BoardSafe and needed to be adjusted by Earthwerks. The mistaken angle in the concrete at the East Dundee dock was not discovered until after the dock was installed, causing the far end of the dock to sit too close to the shore. In order to correct the angle issue, BoardSafe designed a bracket that was attached to the concrete that swung the dock out into the river as it was intended. The Fox River fluctuates quite a bit in water level. The docks are designed with hinges that attach to the concrete shoreline and allow the docks to raise and lower with the river by up to 30 feet. In the spring of 2026, the Fox River flooded, and the docks in the water adjusted with the flow.

BoardSafe recommends that the docks be removed in the winter to avoid issues with potential ice flows, but this was not

necessary. Hey designed each access site with a stream barb of rocks slightly upstream in order to buffer the dock from large branches or other objects.

Kane County is very pleased with the design of the access sites and the docks. As soon as they were open for use, paddlers were using them. The Fox Valley Special Recreation Association is across the river in South Elgin. Their participants have enjoyed the dock as has the local fire department. The fire department’s inflatable rescue boat fits nicely on the canoe chute. Communities are adding landscaping, reconfiguring streets, and improving parks. East Dundee is the first community to contract with Rent. Fun, self-service equipment rentals, for a kayak rental kiosk. Ribbon cuttings are underway. In June, the FF!WT partnered with Friends of the Fox River to host a paddle to celebrate ten miles of free flowing Fox River through an area where a dam was removed almost two years ago. Eighty boats exited the river at East Dundee that day, and the new dock was no worse for wear.

Thanks to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Kane County Development Department has received three grants over the past few years to market the FF!WT. The tourism potential associated with having a National Water Trail is particularly appealing to the Kane County Board. To celebrate the 250th birthday of the United States Kane County marketing consultant, Kim Gilmore, designed the Log 250 campaign. After participants register on Kane County’s website, they log their miles doing any non-motorized activity on or near the Fox River and earn rewards as they go. So far, we have over 525 participants.

As we continue to implement the National Park Service’s best management practices, the FF!WT Core Development Team will continue to seek funding to improve access to the Fox River along all 200 miles and meet new partners along the way. ❖

Karen Ann Miller, AICP, is the Executive Planner for the Kane County Development Department and the Illinois Co-chair for the Fabulous Fox! National Water Trail.



Dock at SEBA Park in South Elgin. Photo: Hey and Associates, Inc.

15th Annual Fox River Summit

by Tom Slawski

In 2013, the Southeast Fox River Partnership established an annual conference to cater to individuals and organizations interested in the Fox River watershed, a river shared between the states of Wisconsin (926 square miles) and Illinois (1,722 square miles), and home to some of the most densely populated regions of both states.

Fifteen years of annual Fox River Summits later, the event continues to examine watershed management issues and dialogue between stakeholders, promoting intergovernmental cooperation within and between Wisconsin and Illinois communities. The next conference entitled “Fox River Summit–Celebrating Success and Addressing Challenges” will take place March 18, 2027 at Echo Park in the City of Burlington, Wisconsin.

Shared topics include recreation, economics, sustainable flows, flooding, fishery issues, dam removal, water quality, and pollutant loadings. Typically, 150 people attend this all-day event—it gets a little bigger each year. Those interested can view all archived presentations recently uploaded to [YouTube](#).

The Fox River Summit is an opportunity to collaborate and reaffirm our nonbinding commitments made on March 22, 2013, identified in the [Declaration of Partnership](#). The Summit helps advance integrated approaches to managing resources to meet human needs while maintaining aquatic ecosystem integrity and addressing emerging concerns. This event is organized by the Southeast Fox River Partnership in collaboration with the Fox River Ecosystem Partnership, Fox River Study Group, Friends of the Fox River, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, and the Fox Waterway Agency with financial support from the Southeastern Wisconsin Fox River Commission.

This is a working conference designed to both educate and inspire participants to learn more about the resources of this watershed shared between our two states and the dedicated individuals, communities, organizations, and government agencies at the center of this initiative. Past attendees have included recreational users; property and business owners; developers; lake, river and other environmental organizations; federal, state, county and local units of government; environmental and water resource professionals including scientists, engineers, managers, wastewater treatment plant operators, planners, consultants, educators, and attorneys; academics; including, faculty and students; economists; and tourism representatives.

Increasing demands on the limited water resources of the Fox watershed have required water resource agencies to make difficult decisions to balance ecosystem health with competing municipal, agricultural, and recreational needs in Wisconsin and Illinois. This challenge requires top-level leadership. Hence, we have purposefully and consistently invited elected

officials to both affirm that the Fox River is a critical resource shared by two states and legitimize our efforts to integrate our collaborative management approach in meeting human needs and maintaining aquatic ecosystems and their services for present and future generations.

Some of our most notable accomplishments that developed through the annual Summit’s over these past 15 years include:

- Gaining National Fabulous Fox! Water Trail status in 2023.
- Completing the Fox (Illinois) River Watershed Mitigation Plan in 2023, prior to any disaster, aimed to address water-based hazards such as flooding, dam failures, and drought at a watershed level. It conducted vulnerability assessments for these issues and proposed mitigation strategies and projects. The primary objectives included coordinating flood hazard mitigation, improving risk assessment and flood forecasting, promoting regional community and infrastructure protection efforts, developing a resilient long-term plan, and identifying potential funding sources. Mitigation planning efforts with partner agencies within a watershed is the first of its kind in FEMA Region V.
- Completing A Watershed Approach to Population Research and Augmentation of Declining Mussels in the Fox River Watershed of Illinois and Wisconsin report in 2025. This work was done through a partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Natural History Survey. This integrated, collaborative effort not only generated robust, contemporary data on mussel biodiversity, abundance, and genetics, but also provided a foundation for long-term species recovery, targeted augmentation, and adaptive management within the Fox River watershed.
- Expanding “It’s Our Fox River Water Day” events along the entire river systemwide, and
- Maintaining the continued confidence and trust among partners in both states by demonstrating that dedicated individuals and organizations are working collaboratively to protect and improve this fabulous shared resource.

I never imagined that we would continue to meet for 15 years and counting. The experience has been very rewarding and I encourage others to consider establishing a similar annual event in their respective watersheds to convene in person to grow trust and build consensus to protect our rivers. ❖

Tom Slawski is Chief Biologist of the Southeastern WI Regional Planning Commission and President of the Southeast Fox River Partnership.



Photo: Tom Slawski

Every Olympic Journey Starts Somewhere – Why Not Watts, Oklahoma?

Article reprinted with permission. Originally published [online](#) by American Canoe Association [ACA Paddlesports](#) July 19, 2026.

by Kaycee Maas

From July 13-19, the American Canoe Association (ACA), in partnership with the Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) and Friends of WOKA, hosted the 2026 WOKA Development Paddling Camp at WOKA Whitewater Park in Watts, Oklahoma. The camp welcomed paddlers age 10 and up, from first-time boaters to athletes with their sights set on racing in a National Championships or earning a spot on a Junior National Team.

A Venue for Every Stage of the Journey

For some participants, the week meant getting in a boat for the very first time, learning to feel comfortable on moving water, and working toward their first combat roll. For others, it meant refining the technical skills that separate a good slalom run from a great one. Thirty athletes participated in the camp, 10 who were local to Oklahoma, and others traveling from Massachusetts, Maine, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Colorado, Texas, and Canada.

“WOKA is one of the best junior paddling venues in the United States,” said ACA Competition Director Jed Hinkley. “We plan to continue this development camp annually, and we hope to host a national-level competition at the WOKA whitewater park on the Illinois River next year.”

WOKA’s own story is nearly a century in the making. The site traces back to 1926, when a Tulsa businessman purchased 1,200 acres along the Illinois River with plans for a resort, and a dam soon after created a 70-acre lake known as Lake Frances. The lake drew generations of swimmers, anglers, and sailors, but decades of wear, economic hardship, and structural damage eventually led to the lake being drained in 1989-90 to prevent a dam failure.

The idea for a whitewater park on the site took root in the 2010s, championed by local water-quality and city leaders alongside the Walton Family Foundation, and picked up momentum once the Grand River Dam Authority took over stewardship of the Illinois River corridor in 2016. Construction began in 2020, and WOKA Whitewater Park opened to the public in August 2023 — transforming a century-old dam site into a world-class, free-to-access whitewater course. Today, admission to WOKA is free, with only a \$10 parking fee, making it one of the most accessible whitewater parks in the country and a natural home for programs designed to grow the next generation of paddlers.

From the Illinois River to RIVERSPORT

The penultimate day of camp brought the journey full circle.

Participants, coaches, and families made the three-hour drive east to Oklahoma City, where the world’s top slalom paddlers are training for the 2026 ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships, set to run July 20-25 at RIVERSPORT. On Saturday, July 18, camp participants met athletes from the U.S., Canadian, and Australian national teams at a poster-signing event before getting on the water themselves at RIVERSPORT.

Among them was Rory, a camp participant who lives less than 10 minutes from RIVERSPORT and dreams of competing at the 2032 Olympic Games in Brisbane, Australia. Rory is one of only two girls on her slalom team and loves nothing more than showing fellow paddlers her home whitewater course.

“This is my sport,” Rory said. “When I flip or swim, I tell myself, ‘You can’t succeed without failure,’”—then she gets back in her boat for another run.

With so few women’s slalom paddlers in Oklahoma, Rory looks to North Carolina’s Evy Leibfarth—a two-time Olympian and [2024] Olympic bronze medalist racing at [the July 2026] World Championships—and Ivy Lenz, a member of the USA Canoe/Kayak Junior National Team who won a bronze medal in the C1 team event at the Junior World Championships in Kraków, Poland, earlier [in July].

Rory loved meeting other young slalom paddlers her age, especially the girls, and hopes to see her home club grow in the years leading up to LA28, when Olympic slalom events will be hosted right on her home course in Oklahoma City.

Building the Pipeline

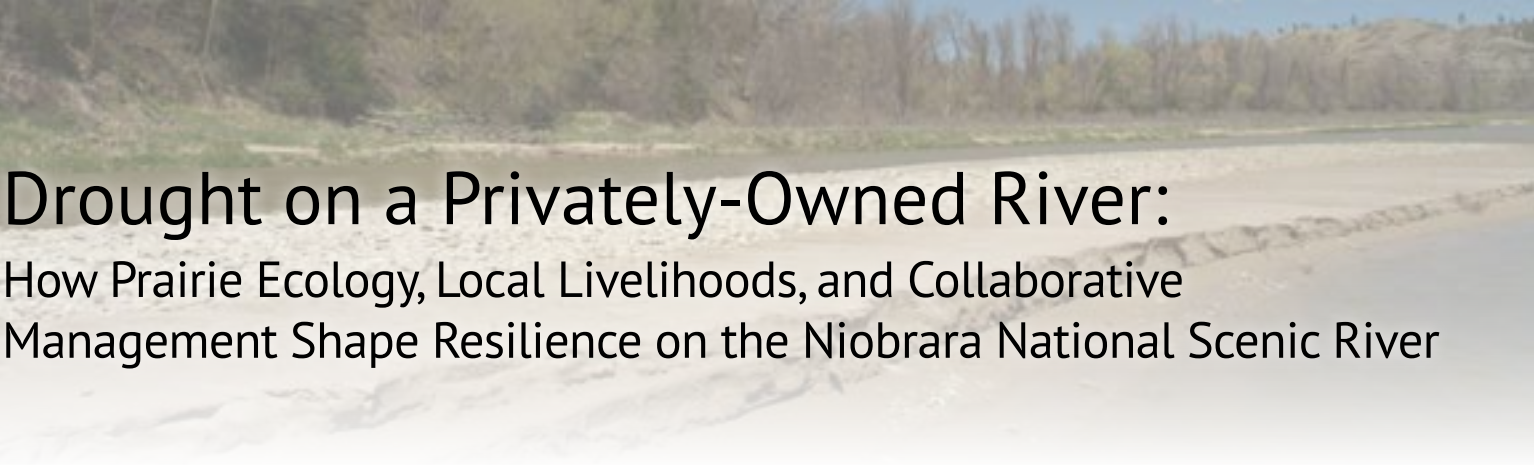
From a first roll on the Illinois River to a poster-signing with Olympic and World Championship athletes, the WOKA Development Paddling Camp gave 30 young paddlers a glimpse of where the sport can take them and a reminder that every Olympic journey starts somewhere. ❖



For 30 paddlers from nine states and Canada, the road to the Olympic Games began on the Illinois River, at a whitewater park that didn’t exist just three years ago. Photo: Allison Lenz



WOKA Whitewater Park in Watts, Oklahoma. Photo: Allison Lenz



Drought on a Privately-Owned River:

How Prairie Ecology, Local Livelihoods, and Collaborative Management Shape Resilience on the Niobrara National Scenic River

by Bobbie J. Roshone

Across the Great Plains, drought is no stranger. It arrives slowly, reshaping communities, landscapes, and waterways with a persistence that can last for seasons or years. Yet on the Niobrara National Scenic River—a 76-mile corridor flowing through northcentral Nebraska—the impacts of drought reveal something unique. Here, resilience is woven not only into the river’s groundwater fed hydrology, but into the prairie that surrounds it and the people who depend on it. Because most of the river’s boundary is privately-owned, resilience is also a product of relationships: ranchers, outfitters, state agencies, nonprofits, the National Park Service, and tribal partners working together across a landscape where stewardship has always been a shared responsibility.

This article explores how prairie ecology, cultural landscapes, and collaborative management intersect to support drought resilience on the Niobrara—and what lessons this unusual river corridor offers to the national river management community.

The Niobrara flows through one of the most ecologically diverse regions in North America, where boreal forest species, eastern deciduous plants, Great Plains grasslands, and Rocky Mountain outliers mingle within the river valley. In dry years, that diversity becomes even more visible. Native grasses respond quickly to moisture deficits, altering ground cover and soil stability. In the Sandhills, this can lead to “blowouts” where the sand is exposed. Once these grasses recede, the largest stabilized sand dune in the northwestern hemisphere becomes unmoored. Reduced vegetation initially can increase sediment movement on tributaries, influencing water clarity and bank conditions downstream. Shrinking seeps and springs—critical microhabitats fed by the Ogallala Aquifer—change temperature and flow patterns that sustain sensitive species.

The river and prairie function as one system. A dry upland can lead to warmer, clearer, or slower-moving water. Wildlife shifts its movement patterns, concentrating near the river corridor in ways that increase pressure on riparian habitats. Under these conditions, the Niobrara becomes a refuge for some species, a challenge for others, and a classroom for managers observing climate stress in real time.

The cultural landscape of the Niobrara is as important as the natural one. Families have ranched along the river for generations, managing grasslands in ways that deepen the valley’s

ecological resilience. Many outfitters are long-established local businesses with intimate knowledge of the river’s seasonal rhythms. When drought tightens water supplies, these working landscapes and livelihoods feel the effects immediately.

- Low-water years influence:
- Grazing rotations and forage availability
 - River recreation patterns and visitor safety strategies
 - Tourism related income for gateway communities
 - Capacity of local organizations to support stewardship projects

These impacts are not isolated; they ripple across the community, making shared communication and planning essential. On a river where landownership varies parcel by parcel, cooperation is often the only way to ensure access, safety, and resource protection during drought.

Unlike many National Park Service river units, the Niobrara National Scenic River includes very little federally-owned land. This defining characteristic makes drought planning both challenging and deeply community driven. Every decision—about land use, stewardship, water access, or recreation—depends on relationships with partners who share responsibility for maintaining the river’s vitality.

- Key collaborators include:
- Local ranchers and landowners
 - River outfitters
 - Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
 - Natural Resources Districts
 - Conservation organizations and tribal partners
 - The Niobrara Council
 - The National Park Service

During drought, these partnerships become even more essential. Whether adjusting recreation messaging, coordinating water safety programs, responding to wildlife impacts, or working through access concerns, decisions must reflect local realities and priorities. The Niobrara River’s long-standing culture of cooperation allows managers to respond quickly and adaptively—an approach especially valuable when conditions change rapidly.

Drought conditions significantly affect both the quality and quantity of water resources. Typically, drought is characterized by minimal precipitation, elevated temperatures, and increased wind activity. Trends observed on the Niobrara River indicate

that air temperature and water temperature are closely correlated, whereas water temperature shows an inverse relationship to dissolved oxygen levels. As air temperatures increase, water temperatures rise correspondingly. An additional factor influenced by drought conditions is the rise in water temperatures, which leads to increased evaporation. This process reduces the volume of water in the river, resulting in progressively lower water levels as the drought persists.

The cycle of daily drought leads to an enhanced rise in water temperatures compared to previous days. Shallow waters are especially vulnerable to environmental factors, which intensifies these effects. This pattern was evident in the Niobrara River this past July. A record high water temperature of 91 degrees Fahrenheit was documented, attributed to several consecutive weeks with temperatures reaching 95 degrees and multiple days exceeding 100 degrees. Under these conditions, aquatic organisms experience considerable stress and tend to drift to tributaries, where cooler water temperatures and higher dissolved oxygen concentrations—usually between 6 and 8 mg/L—provide more suitable habitats. River levels and flows also fell below average.

As many river systems across the country face increasing drought frequency, the Niobrara offers an instructive model of resilience built not just on hydrology, but on relationships. The prairie teaches managers about long-term ecological responses. The community demonstrates how shared stewardship can sustain recreation, livelihoods, and resource protection in a variable climate.

Other river managers—especially those overseeing landscapes with complex ownership patterns—may find lessons in:

- Integrating local knowledge into drought planning
- Using interpretation and education to support responsible recreation during low-water years
- Leveraging multi-agency partnerships for adaptive management
- Recognizing cultural landscapes as part of hydrologic resilience
- Emphasizing collaboration over control when federal landownership is limited

On the Niobrara National Scenic River, drought is not only an environmental challenge—it is a catalyst for connection. The river’s resilience grows from its prairie roots, its people, and its partners, each playing a role in sustaining a corridor where ecological diversity and cultural heritage are deeply intertwined. As climate variability increases across the Plains and beyond, the Niobrara’s story of cooperative, landscape-level resilience offers valuable insight for river managers everywhere. ❖

Bobbie Roshone is the Program Manager of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers and a Park Ranger at the Niobrara National Scenic River. Bobbie has spent ten years at Niobrara and previously worked as a seasonal ranger at both Ozark National Scenic Riverways and Niobrara. Drought data for this article was contributed by Travis Connot, Program Manager for Resource Management at Niobrara National Scenic River.

Photos: NPS / G. Warrick



Source to Steward

River professionals are just as diverse as the rivers they manage. There are countless ways to channel a passion for rivers into a career.

Source to Steward celebrates the unique paths that river professionals have followed to study, protect, and manage rivers.

RMS Q&A with Emma Mills

What are your daily tasks you do for river management?

My daily tasks of river management involve elements of water quality, environmental education, and habitat protection. Blue Thumb is the education arm of the Water Quality Division of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, with the mission of stream protection through education. Our volunteer stream monitoring program implements baseline water quality data testing. Once a month, I monitor Rock Creek in my hometown of Sapulpa, Oklahoma (OK). Alongside water testing, we sample stream's fish and macroinvertebrate populations. Mostly, I assist with training and experiences to enhance the public's knowledge of nonpoint source pollution and stream health through hands-on conservation and water education.

What is your (upstream) story?

As a teen, I worked as a gardener, while exploring the exciting world of Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H programs. This was the starting point for my passion and desire for more in the natural world. After high school I quickly turned my studies towards biological sciences and got my B.S. in



Emma Mills

Blue Thumb Field Education Coordinator Emma Mills showing a volunteer a baby soft shelled turtle. Photo: Hunter Hodson

Integrative Biology from Northeastern State University (NSU) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. While obtaining my degree, I formed a relationship with NSU's botany professor, Dr. Lizz Waring. She guided me towards new opportunities with the local Grand River Dam Authority, which I proceeded to have various internships and research opportunities with. (One of which resulted in a publication!) Dr. Waring guided me through the new River Studies and Leader Certificate Program (RSLC) at NSU further adding to my experience in the field. Following graduation, I was accepted into the Oklahoma Network-Research and Mentoring for Post-Baccalaureates program (ON-RaMP) at Oklahoma State University (OSU) where

I was mentored by Dr. Noha Youssef and studied harmful algal blooms in lake ecosystems. ON-RaMP helped bridge the gap from education as a student to the professional world in biological sciences

Eventually, I found myself serving with Americorps in the Oklahoma Conservation Corps as a crew lead for a conservation and disaster relief team. Through this ever changing position, I was able to give back to my community and the environment while discovering, for the first time, what leadership truly looked like within myself. Since March 2026, I have been with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), I credit each and every previous experience to my success today.

How did you spot the opportunities that propelled you forward?

It took a village, from friends and family sending me job announcements on Facebook to my professors alerting me of a niche job within my scope of research. Networking, especially at conferences like the RMS Symposium, may not have led me to an opportunity specifically, but helped me realize where, when, and how I should be looking for them.

Who are the mentors along the way that helped illuminate paths you may not have thought possible?

Without Dr. Lizz Waring and her advising, I do not think I would be where I am today. We both started at NSU in 2019; she became my mentor, and since graduating, I would call her a good friend. She works incredibly hard to ensure her students have the best education, opportunities, and mentorship. My brief time spent with Dr. Christine Hallman, a.k.a. Doc Hallman, at NSU and Dr. Noha Youssef at OSU helped me see the interdisciplinary side to river management, through GIS education and microbiology research.

What is your biggest challenge you see facing your river reach now?

The biggest non-regulatory challenge we see at Blue Thumb is the lack of connection between humans and the natural world. This creates a lack of empathy to the streams and rivers that provide much more than we could ever know. Our world is being created to separate us from animals and nature, from the wild. The side effect is pollution and degradation of the environment we all so heavily depend on.

What do you love?

I love the earth and nature, and the special connection between ourselves and the planet. I love learning and the fond memories that come with new experiences.

What river has shaped you most?

The Illinois River in Northeastern Oklahoma helped shape me for many years, and will continue for many more. I grew up sitting on the riverside during hot summer days with my grandparents and sisters, collecting rocks or trying our hardest to fail at catching fish. Those times were pivotal to form a connection that carried into my young adulthood. Attending NSU in Tahlequah drew me closer to the Illinois river. I hosted a birthday float each year, and even chose it as the topic of study for my undergraduate research fellowship. Though I have since moved away from the Illinois River Watershed, I hold high its cultural and community value with me when I visit for work with the OCC and Illinois River Watershed Partnership.

What advice would you give to aspiring river professionals?

Everyone's path is different. Yours will be different, and that is okay. My upstream path includes so much more than I could ever get on paper.

Don't devalue experiences that might not look entirely relevant. My unmentioned time spent as a substitute teacher taught me skills I use with kids in informal education settings, and made my confidence what it is today. At the time, I thought I was wasting my time. Little did I know, it was well spent and got me where I am now, teaching environmental education to the next generation and leading water quality monitoring efforts in Oklahoma. You never know what you'll really need, take that random free training, pick up a weird hobby, go experience life. ❖

Emma Mills is the Blue Thumb Field Education Coordinator for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission in Bristow, OK.



Emma (left) with some of the Blue Thumb Crew, including Emma Mills, Cheryl Cheadle, Candice Miller, and intern Hailey Amicarelli, after the Coal Creek Morris Park Fish Collection in Glenpool, OK. Photo: Emma Mills



2027 Symposium Field Sessions Will Bring “Balancing Ecology, Experience, and Access” to Life

Join river professionals, watershed leaders, and outdoor recreation experts from across the country at the River Management Symposium in Fayetteville, Arkansas, April 13–15, 2027. Attendees will learn about innovative projects and explore practical solutions to today’s river management challenges. In addition to presentations, workshops, and exhibits, attendees will have the opportunity to experience the region’s rivers firsthand through a variety of guided field sessions.

These field sessions bring the Symposium theme to life by showcasing real-world examples of how river managers balance ecology, experience, and access. Participants involved in river

conservation, restoration, and recreation programs will leave with practical ideas, fresh perspectives, and case studies they can apply on their own rivers.

RMS is excited to share this slate of field sessions and extends its appreciation to the many local volunteers and program partners helping coordinate these experiences.

Interested in contributing to the 2027 Symposium?

Opportunities are available to share your expertise as a speaker, poster presenter, and sponsor. Learn more at www.river-management.org/2027-symposium.

Outdoor Dinner Reception at Pack Rat Outdoor Center



Past Pint Night at Pack Rat Outdoor Center
Photo: Pack Rat Outdoor Center

Join us Wednesday evening at Pack Rat Outdoor Center, a Fayetteville treasure since 1973, for an evening of great food, local beer, live music, and camaraderie with fellow river professionals. Known for bringing the outdoor community together through its popular Pint Night series, Pack Rat has raised tens of thousands of dollars for local nonprofits over the years.

Our reception continues that tradition, with raffle prizes benefiting the River Management Society and its mission to support the professionals who study, protect, and manage North America’s rivers. Admission is included with full Symposium registration, and additional raffle tickets and beverages will be available for purchase.

West Fork White River Exploring River Restoration in Fayetteville’s Backyard

Journey through Fayetteville to experience innovative projects that reconnect people with their rivers. This bus and walking tour includes the Fayetteville Ramble, restoration sites along the West Fork of the White River, and a visit to Combs park where a future dam removal project will take place. Learn how these efforts are improving aquatic ecosystems and fisheries, expanding public access, and creating meaningful outdoor experiences while restoring the river’s natural function in the heart of the community.

Program Partners: Fayetteville Parks & Recreation, Watershed Conservation Resource Center, Beaver Water District, City of Fayetteville, Flow State, LLC



Fayetteville Ramble, a 50-acre public park in Fayetteville. Photo: City of Fayetteville

Buffalo National River America’s First National River

Discover one of the nation’s most iconic free-flowing rivers on a guided exploration of the Buffalo National River. Land- and water-based itineraries will be offered as we hear from federal, state, and local partners about their work to balance preservation, conservation, recreation, and public access while protecting this nationally treasured resource. From a storied history to current protection efforts and collaborative management strategies, this field trip offers a firsthand look at the challenges and successes of stewarding a world-class river for future generations.

Program Partners: 37 North, University of Arkansas, Buffalo River NPS, USDA Forest Service



Buffalo National River. Photo: James Vonesh

Illinois River & Regional Whitewater Parks Where Recreation, Restoration, and River Communities Converge

Experience how WOKA Whitewater Park and Siloam Springs Kayak Park are transforming the Illinois River into a vibrant community asset while supporting ecological health. Explore innovative approaches to river recreation, habitat enhancement, and economic development. On this full-day kayaking trip, attendees will hear from local leaders about designing projects that create exciting river experiences while improving access and respecting the natural character of the Illinois River watershed. Lunch on the river will be provided.

Program Partners: Grand River Dam Authority, Illinois River Watershed Partnership, Friends of WOKA, Siloam Springs Parks & Recreation, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission



WOKA Whitewater Park on the Illinois River. Photo: WOKA

Little Sugar Creek in Bentonville Restoring Urban Streams, Connecting Communities

See how Bentonville is redefining urban waterways through thoughtful stream restoration and public access as part of the largest dam removal project in Arkansas. Along Little Sugar Creek, discover projects that improve water quality, restore habitat, reduce flood impacts, and create inviting spaces for residents and visitors alike. This bus tour showcases how ecological restoration, dam removal, streambank stabilization, and community investment can work hand in hand with recreation enhancements to build healthier, more connected communities.

Program Partners: Bentonville Parks & Recreation, Watershed Conservation Resource Center, Trailblazers, Ecological Design Group



Little Sugar Creek Restoration in Bentonville, Arkansas.
Photo: Friends of Little Sugar Creek

An East Side Story

by Cheyenne Morgan

I grew up in a floodplain. Not adjacent, not close to, but in one—the floodplain of the Pecatonica River located in Freeport, Illinois to be exact. I was raised in a historically Black, redlined community that thrived on the eastern side of the town. We were a people of the floodplain—we fished the streams, hunted the woods, and erected our homes on stilts in its deep dark soils. We grew gardens, stabled horses, raised chickens. I was one of the fourth generation of children that had played along the tributaries of the river and was fed from the floodplain’s bounties.

During the 1980s, our neighborhood, called the East Side, was thriving. We all were swirling from the fortuitous rewards of the times. Larger factories with active unions had come in with more and higher-paying jobs. Men were blue-collar proud as they watched in real-time the fulfillment of the American Dream in their own lives. Women had started their own businesses or were being hired to positions that had historically been reserved for others. The first wave of college graduates had come home to teach and mentor the next generation. Our community thrived as the nation thrived but everything changed with the summer of 1990.

As children, we were told to never swim or fish from the Pecatonica. “It’s bad, the water is bad,” were the words my father would say. He knew of a history that we could not see but the 1990 flood brought it to life in a way that made it visible to all. Literally. As the floodwaters turned streets into canals and our homes became islands perched above the waters, the flood released a chemical slurry of historical grievances.

A few weeks after the flood first came, we started to hear rumors of kids with strange rashes and sudden asthma attacks. My sister and I watched as the adults went from concerned, to frightened, then angry. But we were young and didn’t understand. We didn’t understand that while the East Side prospered there had been a growing danger accumulating beneath our feet. And to fully understand how this came to be, we need to go back to the beginning.

Freeport was founded in 1835 as a settlement along the western banks of the Pecatonica River in northwestern Illinois. Publicized as one of a handful of free river ports in the region, the town grew slowly and remained a relatively sleepy rural community until the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution (circa 1870). Freeport, along with the rest of the world, tumbled towards the 20th century in full steam. An explosion of investors and entrepreneurs streamed into the city and the riverbanks of the Pecatonica became the industrial and economic nexus of the town. The river supplied not only water for manufacturing processes but also provided means to transport goods throughout the region. As the factories sprang up the railroad was improved and expanded to haul not only commodities but people. It was impeccable timing.

The Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914) and the first World War prompted the largest migration of people in the nation’s history, the Great Northern Migration, where African Americans left the South to find work and better living conditions in northern states. It isn’t clear if it was by Pullman Porters’ word-of-mouth or Freeport’s history as a stop along the Underground Railroad, but Freeport had gained a reputation as being a safe place to work and raise a family. The first Black families that moved to Freeport built homes nestled along the western bank of the Pecatonica crammed between the factories, the river, and the moneyed elites they worked for. The western shores of the river were set slightly higher along banks of Galena-Platteville Dolomite and were a shallow buffer to the annual flooding of the river. Those families with less built their homes closest to the river’s edge.

As more families arrived and the Black population of Freeport grew, homes began to be built east of the river within the floodplain itself. Due to the intense, nearly annual flooding that would occur, families built their homes several feet above ground. My childhood home, a small blue house built on a low-lying hill near the eastern boundary of the neighborhood, was built in 1901. Though it rested on

a hill, the home was elevated a further three feet by large cinder blocks. Every home was different in size, structure, and composition because they were all built by the hands and means of the first families. In spite of the challenges of their environment, those same families built the East Side community complete with churches, grocers, and a school.

The men of the East Side predominantly worked in the factories that fortified the Pecatonica River. Fathers, sons, brothers, and cousins worked along the same assembly lines. Family names became tied to an individual’s work ethic and dependability. But in the mid-twentieth century, the industrial landscape shifted from local factories owned by local families to industrial complexes owned by corporate entities. The old businesses that had spurred Freeport into an era of wealth sputtered and died. Factory owners simply padlocked their doors and walked away. The buildings became no more than concrete and wood statuary along the river’s edge.

What we didn’t know was that those massive, dilapidated structures had their own legacies. We didn’t know that many of those buildings had barrels and barrels of toxic waste set aside in them. We didn’t know that those barrels had already started to seep years before. We didn’t know about the illegal dumping that had occurred for decades. And the few who did know—the ones who had been paid to help dump the waste—had never been told what they were dumping. Sometimes they were told to simply dump it in the karstic pits or shallow ravines behind the buildings. Oftentimes, they were told to dump the waste in the river.



Kids playing baseball in Taylor Park during the 1950s.
Credit: Johnson, J.S. 2010. *A Hundred-Year Journal: A Pictorial History of the Early Black Settlers of Stephenson County, Illinois: 1830-1930.*



Opening of St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, 1918.
Credit: Johnson, J.S. 2010. *A Hundred-Year Journal: A Pictorial History of the Early Black Settlers of Stephenson County, Illinois: 1830-1930.*

Redlining and Redlined Communities:

Redlining was the discriminatory practice used to deny individuals loans, credit, or insurance based on their race or ethnicity. Banks and lenders would use internally-circulated real estate maps that were color coded to identify areas most desirable for white homebuyers. The redlined areas, which were predominantly composed of minority communities, were deemed the least desirable neighborhoods. Minorities were forced to live within redlined communities as they were often denied the credit and insurance to move. This practice made it impossible for members of these communities to build home equity as a form of generational wealth. In addition, redlined areas were also the only regions zoned for industrial use. Though the practice has been illegal since 1968, the ramifications have persisted to the modern day. Due to the lack of infrastructure and investment, alongside co-habitation with industry, those currently living in historically redlined communities continue to suffer from ongoing air, water, and noise pollution.

Photo: Cheyenne Morgan

As many of us know, the land has a way of holding onto its memories. And so it was with those beautiful dark soils of the Pecatonica’s floodplain the summer of 1990. I remember sulking on the front steps to our home one morning, furiously watching the other children playing in the floodwaters. A veritable pool of endless fun before me and my father had forbidden us from even touching the water. It was early, the sunlight just peeking up over the trees and that’s why I didn’t see it at first, they had been masked by the buttery gleam of the sun. They came from the direction of the river, rivulets of yellow swirling as the waters flowed past our home and into the woods. I had seen that sickly yellow in a trench beside the abandoned plating factory the summer before. Years later I discovered that those yellow swirls had been hexavalent chromium compounds stored for years in rusted out barrels at the plating factory less than a quarter mile from my home.

Hexavalent chromium:

Hexavalent chromium is the most toxic form of the metallic element chromium. It is widely used in industry; sources include pigments, anti-corrosive agents, and chrome plating. Exposure can cause lung cancer; irritation or damage to nose, throat, lung, eyes, and skin; allergic reactions and rashes; and non-allergic skin irritation and ulcers.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration factsheet.

Numerous local and state agencies became involved after the reports of children becoming sick. But the mitigation and remediation efforts rang hollow. We watched as disaster relief money was allocated to public parks and fixing roads in more affluent neighborhoods while my father and our neighbors received a bucket and a mop. The city refused to consider a proposal from the United States Army Corps to construct flood mitigation features within the Pecatonica floodplain that would drastically reduce the impact of flooding to the East Side. At the factories, the barrels were removed while much of the contaminated soil was allowed to



St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, original building with replaced roof: The church was permanently closed and boarded up due to flooding. Photo: Cheyenne Morgan

remain in place. The plating factory was torn down and fences were erected to keep people out yet over the next 25 years, nearly three dozen brownfield sites have been identified throughout the 0.5-mi² area comprising the East Side.

And as the people of the East Side raised their voices and created far-reaching partnerships and collaborations to demand their right to live in an unpolluted space—the floodwaters continued to come, increasing in frequency and duration. Between 2017 and 2020, the East Side flooded seven times. In 2018, the Pecatonica flooded for 212 days. In 2019, the river was out of its banks for 182 days. Homes filled with mildew and rotted from the ground up.

By the end of 2019, nearly 80% of the East Side population had been dislocated, forced to live with friends and families outside the neighborhood. This had devastating repercussions with the arrival of COVID-19, as what were once single-family homes had suddenly become multi-family residences. At the beginning of 2020, my father had been living with another family in western Freeport because my childhood home was no longer habitable. Inevitably, my father contracted COVID-19 during those first few terrifying months of the pandemic. Having struggled with diabetes for years, he succumbed to COVID-19 within ten days.



Author’s family the winter before the 1990 flood: (from right: Ashanti Morgan, Cheyenne Morgan, and Glynn Morgan) at an NAACP event at the local Masonic Temple. Photo: Cheyenne Morgan

Today, the thriving community that I grew up in no longer exists. Due to the devastation caused by the continual flooding, the City of Freeport applied for and was awarded a FEMA Flood Mitigation grant to buy out the homes of the East Side and return the floodplain to the river. Now, the community is a shell of what it once was with only a few dozen people still remaining when there was once over a thousand. Most of the homes and many of the buildings have been torn down. The old factories are slowly being “returned to nature.” Bike paths have replaced where the railroads once were.

Though most of us have moved on, many of us still fight for the East Side, for what it was and what it could still be. The floodplain, the river, is in our blood. I do not blame the river for flooding or the people who built their homes in the only place they could. I do not blame the industrialists of another age or the current city administration for doing their best. I, instead, find myself filled with pride to be connected to the history of our home and the ingenuity of its people. Through struggle and triumph, our lives have been formed and shaped by the Pecatonica. We, the children of the East Side, are a river people and forever shall be. ❖

Cheyenne Morgan, PhD, is a hydrogeologist for Green Earth Blue Water, LLC, and is based in Oklahoma. She has focused her career on better understanding contaminant flow in karstic and alluvial aquifer systems. She holds several master’s degrees in environmental geology, anthropology, and hydrogeology. After spending a decade in the private sector, she recently received her PhD in environmental science from the University of Oklahoma where her research focused on soil phosphorus retention and mobilization within dam-associated legacy sediment floodplains. Today, Cheyenne talks with everyone about water, sharing her interests in groundwater, nature-based solutions, and community resilience.

One of the many old factory buildings that once dotted the East Side: an abandoned factory along the bank of the Pecatonica River in Freeport, Illinois, in 2024. Photo: Cheyenne Morgan

Editor’s note
Sera Janson Zegre, Editor

It’s as rich as a floodplain’s soil for readers to know a little backstory, as well as an emotional epilogue. We originally reached out to Dr. Morgan to see if she had new science to share in the *RMS Journal* from her recent doctorate research on floodplains. That work is forthcoming in a peer-reviewed journal, and will be shared when that work is out. Instead, our author committed to taking the time to reflect on floodplains from a more personal perspective, which became this narrative piece. In the process of layout and design, I asked her for old photos to place alongside the text. She obligingly reached out to a local author-historian who published a book with photos, asking to use a few of them with credits. You see a few of them here.

Here is the surprising part. In the process of getting in touch with JS Johnson, both authors found out they are related. So the family history written by JS Johnson is also *our* author’s family’s story! For perspective, although family history is not forthcoming for all folks, Black families in the United States have far less origin information. Our author writes: it’s “different, so many Black people in the States, we don’t know our history, where we came from.” So this epilogue is emotional because an entire family history has been written and published in books that our RMS author can pass on to her children—and the next generation. She reflects:

My great-great-great-grandfather was a member of the historic Black army regiment out of Massachusetts that fought in the Civil War. He and others purchased land as freedmen and called their home Good Hope (Mississippi). My mother’s people still live there and we all own the land. So this article was more of a gift than you could imagine. It helped me find a history and family that goes much deeper and further.
—Cheyenne Morgan

I am grateful for Dr. Morgan’s efforts to create this piece and courage to share it with RMS. We are honored to present this backstory, story, and epilogue to share in the layers of emotion that human connectedness to rivers can evoke. I hope readers will be moved by these layers and inspired to continue their great work.



River City Outdoors Wants to Provide ‘Recreation for All’



Big Muddy Adventures on the Mississippi River. Photo: River City Outdoors/Terrain Magazine

Article reprinted with permission. Originally published in Terrain Magazine January 2024.

by Terri Waters

A golden sunset on the Mississippi River viewed from the back of a canoe. The crunch of fallen leaves underfoot as you navigate a dirt path in Pere Marquette State Park. The rhythm of wheels turning as you roll along a greenway that connects multiple St. Louis neighborhoods.

These are just some of the sounds and experiences of the outdoors. Not just any outdoors but our outdoors, here in Missouri and southern Illinois. These are the reasons we venture into nature. Why we bundle up for a hike in winter. Why we invest in running shoes, camping gear, and adaptive equipment. Why we take classes and join affinity groups.

But not everyone is aware of the incredible outdoor opportunities our region offers, including those who live here. Some don’t know how to access them, some don’t have the gear or resources, and still others don’t feel safe and welcome in them.

All of these are reasons why the River City Outdoors was launched in late

2023. The nonprofit foundation brought the entities Big Muddy Adventures and Terrain Magazine under one (ahem) tent to maximize the collective impact of the organizations and to create a rallying point to support, promote, and advocate for outdoor recreation.

“It’s very exciting to get these programs together, and we’re looking forward to doing more to build the outdoor community and make St. Louis a healthier and more active place to live,” said Roo Yawitz, president of River City Outdoors. “Our vision is getting people outside and having everyone in the St. Louis region appreciate our assets and use them regularly.”

Of course, challenges exist. St. Louis is typical of many midwestern communities in that it does not have a mainstream active living culture. Its natural resources are largely underappreciated. And the region faces deeply rooted racial and socioeconomic challenges that serve as barriers for marginalized populations to benefit from outdoor recreation.

“We have a great opportunity here to change lives through increasing the number of outdoor opportunities in our region, making it easier to access those

opportunities, and then sharing stories about those successes,” Yawitz said.

“Outdoor recreation can be a driver of many things you want in a great city, like positive health outcomes, economic development, and cultural vibrancy,” Yawitz continued. “A culture of active living can be a key to making St. Louis a better place to live.”

The characters in this story are the three “programs” that now operate under River City Outdoors, but the hero is the collaboration between them to make St. Louis a thriving outdoor recreation community for everyone. Let’s look at how Big Muddy Adventures, River City Outdoors, and Terrain Magazine are building a collaborative, community-centered outdoor ecosystem and what it means to those impacted.

The Educator: Big Muddy Adventures Thirty schoolkids chatter and goof around as Mike Clark goes over his mental checklist. Radios to communicate with boat traffic—check. Personal flotation devices (PFDs) and paddles—check. Coolers of water and food for the afternoon cookout—check.

No one is stepping foot into a canoe, though, until they’ve listened to Clark’s safety talk, which, among other things, includes demonstrating the correct way to hold and use a paddle and the proper fit of a PFD (“Snug like a grandma’s hug”).

Clark is an authority on paddling the Show-Me State’s big rivers: the Missouri and Mississippi. He founded Big Muddy Adventures (BMA) over 20 years ago to help people experience our iconic waterways from a canoe or kayak. He knows barge captains by name. He knows the depth of the rivers at any given time. And he’s trained his staff to know this stuff, too.

Relieved that the safety talk is over, and strapped snugly in PFDs, the kids scamper down a grassy bank and squish through thick mud to the river’s edge, where three canoes are waiting. Each 29-foot vessel can hold up to 14 people, seated two by two.

Most of the kids have never been in a canoe, and many cannot swim. Naturally, there’s some trepidation. But there’s also excitement: A new adventure is underway, and it includes the chance to explore a deserted Mississippi River island and to then paddle nine miles downstream to the foot of Gateway Arch National Park.

The kids may not know it, but experts say outdoor adventures broaden their appreciation of nature, help them develop confidence to enjoy the outdoors, and build lifelong skills like teamwork and problem-solving.

For kids with few outdoor opportunities, this day will be burned in their memories. And now that the canoe outfitter is a part of the River City Outdoors, more days like this will be possible, says BMA Director Matt Green.

“Big Muddy Adventures, at its core, has always been a mission-based company. But over the years, in order to be sustainable, we’ve had to make business decisions that slightly pull us away from our foundational mission,” he said. “Now though, being a part of the River City Outdoors, we can refocus our activities towards advancing our mission rather than serving our bottom line. We still have to be fiscally responsible, but our core focus can now be impact rather than revenue.

“And as a part of the River City Outdoors, we’ll have a much louder megaphone to get residents and visitors outside and on the water in St. Louis, which is really exciting for us,” Green said.

The Collaborator: River City Outdoors The schoolkids described above enjoyed their Mississippi River excursion thanks to the organizing and collaboration efforts of River City Outdoors (RCO), which is now part of the same foundation as BMA.

RCO staffers regularly meet with nonprofits, school leaders, community groups, and organizers to promote,

support, and coordinate outdoor excursions. They’ve worked with more than 100 area groups such as the Boys & Girls Club of Greater St. Louis, Lift for Life Academy, Ujima STL, and Black Trans Bike Experience.

RCO recently created an opportunity for youth to climb giant trees in their own neighborhood park, with local business



Big Muddy Adventures safety talk. Photo: River City Outdoors/Terrain Magazine

partner Vertical Voyages providing the equipment and instruction. “The kids loved it,” said Chris Geden, RCO’s Thrive Outside program manager. “They were able to experience their park in a way they haven’t before.”

RCO has worked with its network partners and program providers to offer activities ranging from paddling and climbing to overnight camping and birdwatching to snow skiing and biking. It provided close to 3,000 youth with outdoor experiences in 2023.

RCO also has launched a Gear Library, which offers free rentals for camping and hiking equipment to St. Louis regional organizations and individuals. “One of the most common barriers we see when it comes to outdoor recreation opportunities is the availability and access to gear and guidance on how to use that gear,” said Geden. “We are committed to increasing

equitable access to outdoor recreation in the region, and these resources help us to achieve our mission.”

Flint Fowler, president and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater St. Louis, says the collaboration with RCO has allowed them to offer outdoor adventures without needing to have all the expertise within their staff.

“That speaks to the value of a partnership and what they bring,” Fowler said. “It helps us deliver better on our mission. The broader experiences you can provide to young people, the more they’ll benefit. It’s exciting to have an organization that focuses on the outdoors.”

As a kid, Fowler spent a lot of time outside, camping for weeks at a time with the Boy Scouts and playing sports and games in his neighborhood. Now, he says, many neighborhoods in marginalized areas have vacant buildings and overgrown lots that aren’t safe. The Boys & Girls Clubs provide playgrounds and fields for kickball and other sports, but adding adventures in nature through RCO has been a bonus.

“In under-resourced neighborhoods, there’s not a lot of positive stimulation outside. The mind doesn’t grow,” Fowler said. “Going to a place with flowers and trees is a lot more engaging.” He says outdoor adventures promote leadership and character development, which are core values at Boys & Girls Clubs. These opportunities “reinforce what we’re doing to make kids successful in the present and future.”

The Storyteller: Terrain Magazine As publisher of Terrain Magazine, Brad Kovach has a pulse on what RCO and BMA are doing to cultivate outdoor culture on any given day, as all three organizations are now housed in the same office in Midtown St. Louis.

When he launched the magazine in 2014, though, it was more of a solo act. Back then, he says, the magazine’s theme was essentially “outdoor recreation is fun.” The idea was to feature folks having amazing adventures in our region: running, biking, hiking, camping, climbing, or paddling.



Terrain Magazine was founded in 2014 to give voice to the St. Louis outdoor community. Photo: River City Outdoors/Terrain Magazine

Yet, as he met more people in the outdoor ecosystem, Kovach saw opportunities to help bolster St. Louis as an outdoor recreation destination and, even further, to make it an inclusive environment that everyone can enjoy.

“Outdoor recreation can be a pathway to change, economically and socially. Knowing this, and now as part of River City Outdoors, we’ve evolved *Terrain* into a publication to help make St. Louis a better place through outdoor experiences,” he said. “We’re growing the publication in an intentional way with a focus on the bigger picture.”

Luis Benitez is a big supporter of *Terrain*’s goals of building an outdoor brand for St. Louis. He launched Colorado’s Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, and following six years of success there, now advocates for the use of public lands to improve public health and equitable access to the outdoors. He is also involved in efforts to launch a federal recreation office in the Department of Commerce.

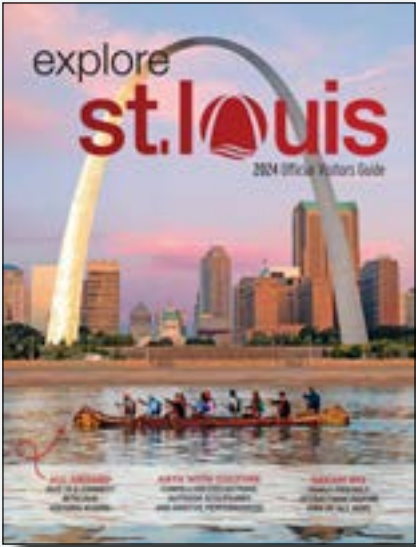
A St. Louis native, Benitez spent his childhood exploring Johnson’s Shut-Inns and Elephant Rocks State Parks. He went bird hunting and fly fishing; he developed a love of orienteering and mountain climbing on trips with his father. His grandfather owned Kelly Sporting Goods, so he learned to appreciate quality outdoor gear.

Benitez says that Missouri needs to better leverage its outdoor assets, as Arkansas and other Midwest states have done. “Missouri has a lot going for it. The

glacial boulders at Elephant Rocks are just wild, mind blowing. We have rivers second to none for canoeing and stand-up paddleboarding. Arkansas has the Ozark Mountains, so we’ve got what they’ve got,” he said. “Arkansas has an outdoor industry office. My question to Missouri is: What are you waiting for?”

Nationally, the outdoor industry is on pace to be a trillion-dollar economy employing 5 million people. Businesses are looking closely at different regions for opportunities to grow, Benitez says.

“REI doesn’t have a store everywhere. They do their homework and see the percentage of folks getting out and



Big Muddy Adventures on the cover of the 2024 Explore St. Louis Visitors Guide. Photo: River City Outdoors/Terrain Magazine

recreating,” Benitez said. The St. Louis area now has two REI stores, which is a good sign, he says.

“This is why *Terrain* is so important,” Benitez said. “Other states wait for Outside magazine to do a piece on their outdoor industry, but it’s better to have a local publication consistently writing about what’s happening in your area. And the collaboration [with Big Muddy Adventures and River City Outdoors] is fantastic. I look at that as growing a voice, growing social and political capital.”

Kovach feels the formation of RCO and its merging with BMA is worthy of a headline, but “the real story is there’s now a foundation championing outdoor recreation in St. Louis. That’s never happened. There are organizations that do work in a specific segment of the outdoor space, but the purpose of River City Outdoors is to advocate for the entire St. Louis outdoor community. At *Terrain*, we’re happy to tell the stories around that purpose.”

The Future: River City Outdoors

As Roo Yawitz considers what the entities that make up RCO have achieved, he thinks of the many people who have told BMA guides that enjoying a full moon float on the Mississippi or paddling into downtown has changed their view of St. Louis.

“I think we’re having a positive effect on individual people. People are appreciating our region more,” he said. “We want people taking advantage of all the unexpected things you can do in St. Louis, especially outside, so that more see it as an active, vibrant place to live.”

Leaders at Explore St. Louis agree, so much so that the cover of the tourism bureau’s 2024 visitors guide featured a photo of a BMA canoe in front of the Arch. The guide is seen by hundreds of thousands of people every year, as it is distributed in hotels and city attractions and mailed to out-of-town guests planning a trip to St. Louis.

“We’re proud to feature a picture of Big Muddy Adventures on our cover,” said Brian Hall, retired chief marketing officer of Explore St. Louis. “We want to tell stories of all the assets we have, so that

visitors can experience the outdoors, not just museums. When you consider the number of parks and green spaces and our region’s topography with rolling hills, it’s so great for hiking and biking. It helps when we can offer tourism experiences on water and trails and greenways.”

Hall continued: “For entirely too long, St. Louis has turned its back on the river. We love attaching the river back to the city and motivating tourists to explore it. The river tells the story of the more ecological side of St. Louis. It creates an entirely different orientation to what St. Louis is all about. It’s an experience for both tourists and residents.”

But it’s more than just getting butts in canoe seats, says Yawitz. It’s all the outdoor programs, events, businesses, organizations, and outreach that matter.

“I’m very happy with the work we’re doing at River City Outdoors,” Yawitz said. “I also think there’s a ton of potential for us to expand the work.”

Get Involved

For more about Big Muddy Adventures, visit: 2muddy.com.

For interest in collaborating, contact River City Outdoors at rivercityoutdoors.org.

Stay informed and inspired by subscribing to *Terrain Magazine*. Also, mark your calendar for the Gateway Outdoor Expo and Gateway Outdoor Summit, two annual outdoor-themed events produced by the organization. Visit terrain-mag.com and gatewayoutdoorexpo.com. ❖

Chris Geden (mentioned in this article) is an At-Large member of the RMS Board of Directors.

RMS Chapter News

Northwest

River Fest- Here’s to 50 years WSR!

by Hannah Burgstaler

On July 10th, Flathead Rivers Alliance (FRA) hosted River Fest, the 50th anniversary of the designation of the North, Middle, and South Fork of the Flathead River in northwest Montana as Wild and Scenic under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. River Fest was held at Marinette Park in Columbia Falls, Montana, and featured food trucks, music, and partner booths.



Photo: Cannon Colegrove

River Management Society (RMS) members, FRA partners, Glacier National Park Service river rangers, and U.S. Forest Service river rangers enjoyed the whitewater stretch on the lower Middle Fork of the Flathead the afternoon before River Fest. The conversation flowed about the monitoring methods and daily life for land stewards in the area.

Partnerships are an essential component to the influence of the Three Forks of the Flathead River, and this event celebrated their accomplishments. Each booth featured information about the group, merchandise, and some activities for kids. RMS also hosted a booth with the Environmental Sciences Department from the University of Montana.

The band Boot Juice took center stage for a majority of the event, and Sacred Waters Brewing provided beer. Flathead Rivers Alliance offered ice cream, water, and kombucha. Raffle tickets were provided and the prizes were announced later in the night. Prizes included Sawyer Oars, Wild West Chocolates, Bedrock Sandals, and a flight to Schafer Meadows.

Partnership booths included: American Rivers, Badger-Two Medicine Alliance, Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, DREAM Adaptive Recreation, Flathead County Library, Flathead National Forest, Flathead Rivers Alliance, Gateway to Glacier Trails, Glacier National Park Conservancy, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Montana Kayak Academy, North Valley Search & Rescue, Redside Foundation, River Management Society, Western Montana Conservation Commission, Wild Montana.

Special thanks to everyone who helps support the Three Forks Wild and Scenic Rivers community. ❖

Hannah Burgstaler is a river ranger for the USDA Forest Service Hungry Horse Glacier View District Flathead National Forest.

Congratulations 2026 RMS Award Winners

River Management Society (RMS) has four annual awards recognizing individuals or groups who have made outstanding contributions to river management and the organization. The awards—and this years’ awardees—include:

- Frank Church Wild and Scenic Rivers Award—**Hector Santiago**
- River Manager of the Year Award—**Sheena Pate**
- Outstanding Contribution to the River Management Society Award—**Cannon Colegrove**
- Outstanding Contribution to River Management Award—**Leslie Steen**

This year the awards were presented at three different events appropriate to the award winners.

Frank Church Wild and Scenic Rivers Award

Hector Santiago of the National Park Service (NPS) was recognized with the Frank Church Wild and Scenic Rivers Award during a meeting of the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council in Fort Collins, Colorado, on April 22, 2026. Council members were present on site and RMS President Kristina Rylands joined by videoconference to help present the award. As the actual plaque was still in fabrication, resourceful Corita Waters, assisted by Lucy Nentwick, fabricated a temporary plaque. Hector has since received his lovely wooden plaque.

For almost 20 years, Hector Santiago has been an exceptional leader and tireless contributor to NPS’s Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Program, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to river protection, agency and state collaboration, and advancement of professional river management. His work reflects a rare combination of technical expertise, relationship-building, and a deep dedication to the long-term health of rivers and river staff.

His leadership extends nationally. Hector has served as an advisor on NPS Section 7 peer-to-peer calls, where he shares techniques not only for project review but also for building relationships and planning proactively for long-term river stewardship. He consistently champions field staff participation in broader WSR networks, encouraging involvement in the WSR Steering Committee and nominating colleagues to serve on agency and interagency teams. Through these efforts, he helps ensure diverse perspectives strengthen river protection and stewardship.

Hector works closely with his states to help them understand and implement WSR mandates. He invests in building relationships. Hector is also a steadfast advocate for making the WSR Act and its tools meaningful and effective for partners, colleagues, and the public. His dedication extends to Tribal engagement as well. Hector has played a key role in NPS efforts to explore potential Wild and Scenic River designations with Tribal nations.

Hector has been a cornerstone of national WSR leadership for almost 20 years. As a long-standing member of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Steering Committee since 2008, his contributions have significantly shaped NPS policies and advanced the stewardship of designated rivers nationwide. His colleagues across agencies routinely seek him out for his perspective and expertise.

Hector never tires of speaking about and up for river resources. Whether it is about a small darter or a large bridge project, he understands that his work matters. His long-standing commitment, interest in talking through problems and solutions, and joy for the work exemplify the highest ideals of the river management profession. His contributions have strengthened national policy, empowered field staff, expanded public and partner awareness, and elevated the practice of river stewardship across the NPS and beyond.

Frank Church Wild and Scenic Rivers Award

This award recognizes contributions focused on the management, enhancement, or protection of designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. It recognizes a history of contributions with a broad geographic scope. Award winners have advanced awareness of Wild and Scenic Rivers through contributions in areas such as education, research, technology, training, public contact, interpretation, and/or law enforcement. Some of the criteria considered include working effectively and cooperatively to build partnerships with other agencies, scientists, user groups, private landowners, and/or general public to promote, protect, enhance, or manage WSRs; and demonstrating, developing, or creatively adapting innovative WSR management techniques; and organizing events which involve and advance WSRs.



Frank Church Wild and Scenic Rivers Award:
*Kristina Rylands, RMS President, Hector Santiago and Corita Waters.
Hector is holding the temporary award.*

River Manager of the Year

Sheena Pate, River Manager of the Year and Executive Director of Flathead Rivers Alliance (FRA), is a perpetual motion machine working towards management goals on the Flathead Wild and Scenic River. She leverages partnerships, agencies, and volunteer programs to reach common aims. Sheena built a career protecting the Crown of the Continent region’s world-class natural resources and has spent the last 5 years with FRA, juggling complex partnerships and programs.

The Forks of the Flathead have their own cultures and struggles—encompassing wilderness areas, historic inholdings, private properties, guides and outfitters, and a public ravenous for recreational opportunities. FRA’s work requires collaboration with Flathead National Forest (FNF), Glacier National Park, Montana Fish & Wildlife, and the Army Corps of Engineers and many community partners. The organization relies on support and expertise of the four major rafting outfitters in the area, along with more than a dozen commercial and business partners. A significant portion of FRA’s activities during the summer boating season are carried out by a volunteer core of up to 300 individuals, who were managed until last summer directly by the Executive Director Sheena Pate, on top of her other roles managing agreements, operations, and fundraising.

Following federal staff reductions last year, Sheena spearheaded a series of meetings to forge operational agreements between FRA and FNF’s Ranger Districts, taking on necessary responsibilities during a challenging couple of years for the agencies. These agreements centered around FRA’s volunteer programs helping educate the public on river regulations and norms but often involve more specific roles, too. FRA’s recreation monitoring program took a larger role following the elimination of several river patrol positions on the National Forest. Within one year, Sheena established a pilot program to help offset some of the personnel eliminated from the Spotted Bear Ranger District and South Fork Flathead by having trained nonprofit personnel contribute directly to USDA Forest Service River patrol data sets. This program operated for the first time in the summer of 2026, with minimal to no additional costs incurred beyond personnel hours for FRA and USDA Forest Service.

Sheena is a supportive collaborator and has contributed to a successful workplace for eight board members, several Big Sky Watershed Corps members, a development coordinator, and a volunteer coordinator. She is forthcoming with feedback, and she adapts her work strategies to draw out the best characteristics of the people around her. Sheena embodies the drive, leadership, and versatility we seek in leaders managing resources as widely braided and deeply channelized as our rivers. She is equally confident leading an educational program connecting third graders to their rivers as she is managing a national grant application under a midnight deadline.

River Manager of the Year

This award recognizes contributions that are field-oriented and location-specific, with a focus on recent accomplishments.

Outstanding Contribution to the River Management Society

Cannon Colegrove, RMS Northwest Chapter President, has made exceptional contributions to national policy, planning, and program development, bringing recognition to RMS as a leader among river and professional organizations. His demonstrated leadership, both professionally and as an RMS officer, has brought significant positive change to the field of river management and to River Management Society. His willingness to show up, participate, and add value to every RMS activity in which he participates exemplifies his commitment to advancing the profession. He leads the most populous chapter, represents a new generation of motivated river managers, and consistently brings valuable perspectives and contributions to the table. If help is lacking, Cannon bows his head and plows through getting what is needed accomplished often with nobody noticing his quiet efforts to improve situations and accomplish challenges.

Cannon has donated considerable time, money, and effort that has resulted in advancement of RMS as a unique and robust institution. In 2025, Cannon led the effort to organize one of the most successful and satisfying RMS events. He was instrumental in creating session topics, coordinating a planning team, finding and scheduling subject-matter experts to present and share their knowledge, developing an agenda, coordinating logistics, and ensuring all participants were prepared and ready to engage prior to the event. He single-handedly organized a group menu for over 30 people, accommodated special diets, purchased and organized the food, and also prepared, served, and cleaned up all meals, both on and off the river, for four days. He fully participated in the event and sessions sharing his knowledge and making sure all participants were heard and felt relevant. Cannon has brought and continues to provide new and positive private and public awareness of RMS by quietly singling out members to get to know them, finding their strengths, encouraging continued RMS membership and inspiring others in filling roles in the organization. Cannon sets the standard for the incredible contribution a member can make to the field of river management and sustaining the RMS mission.

Outstanding Contribution to the River Management Society

This award recognizes contributions to the success of the River Management Society, including contributions at the national or regional level that result in greater organizational effectiveness, efficiency, growth, positive change, or enthusiasm. This award focuses on impact in the organization as a whole, rather than a particular length of service.



Outstanding Contribution to River Management

Leslie Steen, Trout Unlimited Wyoming State Director and former Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited Director, has spent over a decade creating partnerships, securing financial support, inspiring youth, steering community efforts, and partnering with state and federal agencies to make possible watershed improvements once considered unobtainable. Her efforts have directly benefitted the 415 miles of designated and 396 miles of eligible WSRs and their tributaries in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

In April of 2016, Leslie and Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited (TU) launched the Trout Unlimited Snake River Headwaters Initiative, an ambitious effort to leverage TU’s long history of successful conservation work in the Jackson Hole area and expand its capacity to complete restoration and reconnection projects on a larger scale. This initiative aims to ensure this unique native cutthroat trout fishery remains intact and thrives long into the future.

Since its 2016 launch, the Snake River Headwaters Initiative has reconnected over 36 miles of streams, restored 14.5 miles of streams, invested \$9.2 million into projects, and reached 1,525 students through education efforts.

Leslie has advanced awareness of WSRs through contributions in areas such as education, research, technology, financing, and watershed leadership. Leslie has worked effectively and cooperatively to build partnerships with other agencies, scientists, user groups, private landowners, and/or the general public to promote, protect, enhance, or manage WSRs.

In 2023, Leslie played a key role in establishing the Snake River Headwaters Watershed Group (SRHWG) and continues to provide strategic direction to a broad coalition of partners. The group works to ensure a resilient and healthy Snake River Headwaters ecosystem with clean and ample water to meet the needs of current and future generations. Members and their various perspectives are at the core of this collaborative effort. Since its inception, the SRHWG has attracted more than 100 organizations and 300 individual members representing government agencies, nonprofits, private businesses, local ranchers, irrigators, universities, and more. The highly-successful

Outstanding Contribution to River Management

This award recognizes a longer history of contributions to the greater field of river management. The award winner has advanced the field of river management through contributions in areas such as science, education, interpretation, and/or research. The individual has developed innovative (or creatively adapted) river management techniques; organized events that advanced river management as a science and as a profession; developed or implemented new communication techniques to coordinate and connect managers; provided opportunities for increased awareness by citizens and river visitors regarding their role in caring for rivers and watersheds; and/or was an outstanding advocate for professional river management.

group is led by a steering committee of 15 representatives who guide the direction of SRHWG activities and ensure ongoing stakeholder involvement.

Leslie has demonstrated, developed, and creatively adapted innovative WSR management techniques. She is frequently called upon by the State Game and Fish, Grand Teton National Park, and Bridger-Teton National Forest to assist with critical projects, including managing river dewatering for irrigation, removing nuisance dams, and to preventing a critical roadway from falling into a Wild and Scenic River with a WSRA-compliant intervention. In each instance, agencies had limited capacity to address an emergent issue because of constraints in funding, expertise, equipment, and personnel. In all cases, Leslie has called on partners, donors, and engineers to address the challenge and enrich the river.

Leslie has organized conferences and training involving and advancing WSRs, exhibiting leadership in promoting and protecting WSRs. This has been done within the context of the established corridors and beyond designated lines on a map and hosted community events to bring attention and appreciation of the Snake River Headwaters designated streams. She has worked with large ranches to reconstruct antiquated irrigation diversions that have been harming headwaters streams and fisheries. Her organization has brought partners together to float streams to further understanding of critical projects, instigated vital research projects with the University of Wyoming. In April, she was a key player in putting on the Snake River Headwaters Symposium Friday, April 17, 2026, a first-of-its-kind experience. ❖

The Outstanding Contribution to River Management Award was presented by Dave Cernicek to Leslie Steen, Wyoming State Director of Trout Unlimited, at an event in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, on August 8, 2026.



Awards for River Manager of the Year and Outstanding Contribution to the River Management Society were presented to Sheena Pate and Cannon Colegrove during the Flathead Rivers Alliance’s River Fest celebrating the 50th anniversary of the designation of the Flathead River as a Wild & Scenic River. L to R: Dave Cernicek (RMS Treasurer), Cannon Colegrove, Sheena Pate, Lisa Ronald (American Rivers), and Geoffrey Gill (Flathead River Alliance). Photo: Aaron Agosto.

Thank You, Dennis

Every year the lovely wooden plaques presented to award winners are fabricated by a workshop in Utah. Past RMS President Dennis Willis has overseen the production and donated the awards annually as part of his long-term commitment to the River Management Society.



Course Reminder:

“I took all four of Rosgen’s short courses on fluvial geomorphology and stream restoration but did not really understand the concepts until I took Dr. Field’s three day course.”

—Scott Wixom, USDA Forest Service

Using Fluvial Geomorphology to Improve Stream Restoration and Watershed Management

November 16-18, 2026 Virtual Short Course
November 19, 2026 Optional Virtual Field Trip

The course is designed for government officials, environmental and engineering consultants, non-profit watershed groups, construction contractors, educators and students, and others trying to sustainably address flooding, erosion, habitat, and sediment and nutrient loading issues along rivers and streams. Participants will explore the principles of fluvial geomorphology, stream restoration, and watershed management.

Early registration closes October 16! RMS members, students, and tribal members enjoy additional savings. Group rates are available.

Credits: 10 SER Continuing Education Credits

Learn more and register: <https://bit.ly/rms-fluv-geo-2026>

You can create your will, on us. And leave a legacy, with us.

August was Make-A-Will Month, and we want to congratulate the members who took a few minutes to create their wills. If you don't have a will, or if you haven't updated yours in a while, we encourage you to take this important step to protect the people and causes you care about.

As a River Management Society (RMS) member, you have access to Life Legacy, an easy-to-use online estate planning platform that helps you create a legally valid will in as little as 20 minutes. The service is available year-round at no charge to RMS members. If you'd like to meet with our Life Legacy advisor for additional estate planning assistance, please email Risa at rms@river-management.org.

Creating a will is also an opportunity to think about the causes and organizations you want to support for years to come. Some RMS members choose to include a gift to RMS in their estate plans, and these legacy gifts play an important role in helping ensure the long-term sustainability of our organization.

With a volunteer board and a staff of three serving thousands of river professionals across the country, RMS depends on the generosity and commitment of our members. Legacy gifts help ensure that future generations of river professionals have access to the knowledge, connections, and resources they need to wisely manage our rivers.

Whether you're creating your first will or updating an existing one, you can use Life Legacy at no charge as an RMS member. Learn more and create your will at <https://www.river-management.org/life-legacy>. ❖



Photo: Cannon Colegrove

"Upon joining RMS, I have been gratified by the range of professionally and personally enriching opportunities my membership has exposed me to. I've found the RMS community to be supportive, one I want to stay engaged with and also enable others to benefit from and enjoy. I'm planning that portions of my estate will be distributed to several small but impactful organizations, including RMS. It makes me excited to think that RMS and others will continue on with the good work of river stewardship by my eventual contribution."

- A member who included RMS in her estate plans

"It was pretty easy and straightforward. It prompts you for all the information you need to include."

- RMS member who used Life Legacy to create her will

"RMS' mission is touching people's lives in so many ways, and with this estate gift I hope to contribute to keeping that mission going in the long term. Thank you for all that you and RMS have done for me and for the work you are doing to support people and the rivers they serve, it has been (and continues to be) life changing."

- A member who included RMS in her estate plans

Upcoming River Trips

Find more in our [Calendar](#) and list of Upcoming Events:
<https://www.river-management.org/upcoming-events>

Meet the Owen's River-Pacific (October 23-25)

Kayak and Canoe Rendezvous
Bishop, CA



Owens River under Mount Whitney, site of the proposed Owens River Water Trail. Photo: Larry Freilich

Join us for a weekend on one of the West's most unusual and least-known rivers. We're bringing together river managers, outfitters, agency staff, and academics with an interest in water to introduce them to the Owens River--a river shaped as much by politics as by geology, and one that doesn't look or act like anything else in California.

Days will be spent on the gentle water, paddling by canoe and kayak through the river's sinuous channels under willows and cottonwoods that should be near or at peak fall color. Evenings shift to presentations and conversation back at the station, covering the Owens River Water Trail, the Lower Owens River Project, the Long-Term Water Agreement, and the current state and management of the fishery. Plenty of time built in for informal talk with people who work on these issues from very different angles.



Chapter Float-Midwest (October 3-4)

Float & Dinner with Board & Staff
St. Louis, MO



Paddling at Forest Park. Photo: Big Muddy Adventures

Midwest Chapter members and friends are invited to join the RMS Board and staff! On Saturday evening, we'll cook up dinner and share suggestions for an awesome Midwest Chapter and national trajectory. Dinner will take place in St. Louis. On Sunday morning at 11 a.m., attendees will paddle around Forest Park in St. Louis on kayaks, canoes, pedal boats, and standup paddleboards, courtesy of River City Foundation and Big Muddy Adventures. Before dinner, attendees will have the opportunity to explore nearby art and history museums or the (free) St. Louis Zoo. All are invited to dinner that evening provided by Chris Geden and River City Foundation.

Wolf & Hatchie Rivers-Southeast (Oct. 23-25)

Wolf R. & the Lost Swamp-Hatchie R. & the Bolivar Section
Middleton, TN

Join RMS Southeast Chapter, local river managers, and partners to explore two of southwest Tennessee's prettiest and most diverse rivers: the Wolf and the Hatchie, a recently designated state water trail.

Learn about the new Tennessee Office of Outdoor Recreation and its statewide water trail program called BluewaysTN, the Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association, RMS, as well as local river management and access development.



Photo: Visit Brownsville TN

New Members

Associate

Elaine Powers
Retired BLM River Ranger/Recreation Planner,
Current Volunteer River Ranger
Rossland, BC

Lisa Caruana
Nonprofit Consultant, GIS Analyst,
and Ecological Landscape Designer
Written Root
Denver, CO

Organization

Saline River Canoe
Michael Sacomani
Benton, AR

Allagash Wilderness Waterway Foundation
Daniel Dinsmore
Casco, ME

City of River Falls
Brooks Ostendorf, Conservation and Parks
Manager
Levi Myers, Natural Resources Coordinator
River Falls, WI

Student

Colbi Heineman
University of Northern Colorado
Greeley, CO

Madeline Wade
University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK

Eowyn Martinich
Western Washington University
Bellingham, WA

Individual

Sensairanay Dutystone
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA

Richard Hudson
Florence, MA

Peter Skinner
CEO, New York Rivers United
East Chatham, NY

Joseph Thomason
River Restoration Coordinator
State of Utah - DNR
Moab, UT

Ashley Konon
Butler, TN

Alexa Bayne
River Ranger - Smith River
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
Lolo, MT

Ellen Meyer
Park Ranger - Bureau of Land Management
Moab, UT

Karen Pettinelli
Principal Natural Resource Planner
Sudbury, MA

Jenna Dodson
Conservation Planner, Texas Conservation and
Sustainability Initiative
El Paso, TX

Amy Peterson
Community Development Director
City of River Falls
River Falls, WI

Rose McLean
Environmental Planner
Ohio Environmental Protection Agency
Columbus, OH

Ryan Schreiner
Upper Clark Fork Recreation Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Missoula, MT

Oscar Logan
River Guide - OARS
Indianapolis, IN

Matthew Cowan
Wilderness, Trails, and Wild & Scenic River
Program Manager - USDA Forest Service
Fort Collins, CO

Jack Leary
River Guide - OARS
Vernal, UT

Chapter Officers

Become a Member

ALASKA

(vacant)

PACIFIC

Leigh Karp, President
BLM California Desert District
1201 Bird Center Drive
Palm Springs, CA 92262
(951) 697-5291 / lkarp@blm.gov

Spencer Nicholas, Vice President
Friends of the River
3336 Bradshaw Rd, Suite 335
Sacramento, CA 95827
(206) 919-5175 / spencer@friendsoftheriver.org

Larry Freilich, Secretary
Inyo County Water District
PO Box 337
Independence, CA 93526
(760) 920-1169 / lmfreilich@gmail.com

Emmett Cartier, Events Coordinator
Forks Guides / Retired Bureau of Reclamation
8914 Genoa Avenue
Orangevale, CA 95662
(530) 504-8505 / LimeParfait@gmail.com

NORTHWEST

Cannon Colegrove, President
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
4600 Giant Springs Rd, Great Falls MT 59405
(406) 454-5854 / cannon.colegrove@mt.gov

Chris Elder, Vice President
Whatcom County, WA
PO Box 43, Acme WA 98220
(360) 840-3064 / celder@co.whatcom.wa.us

Echo Miller Barnes, Secretary
Hungry Horse Ranger Station
10 Hungry Horse Dr, Hungry Horse MT 59919
(971) 940-3583 / emillerbarnes@gmail.com

Lelia Mellen, Events Coordinator
National Park Service
2310 Flourhouse Way, Bozeman MT 59715
(406) 224-3509 / lrm.nps@gmail.com

MIDWEST

(vacant)

SOUTHWEST

President
(vacant)

Vice President
(vacant)

Corrine Servis, Secretary
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
307 W. Sackett Ave., Salida, CO 81201
(719) 539-7289 / corrine.servis@state.co.us

Cameron Joseph Stark, Events Coordinator
BLM UT - Price
440 West 200 South Suite 500
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
(435) 636-3600 / cjstark@blm.gov

NORTHEAST

(vacant)

SOUTHEAST

James Vonesh, President
Virginia Commonwealth University
1000 W. Cary St, Richmond VA 23284-2012
(804) 426-8553 / jrvonesh@vcu.edu

Leif Kindberg, Vice President
Illinois River Watershed Partnership
221 S Main Street, Cave Springs, AR 72718
(479) 422-5676 / leif@irwp.org

Elise Chapman, Secretary
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
615 McCallie Ave, Holt Hall, Room 328
Chattanooga, TN 37403
(423) 227-6131 / elise-chapman@utc.edu

Jack Henderson, Events Coordinator
French Broad Paddle Trail
P.O. Box 1242, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768
(703) 638-3616 / hendersonjc3@gmail.com

Canadian River Management Society

(vacant)

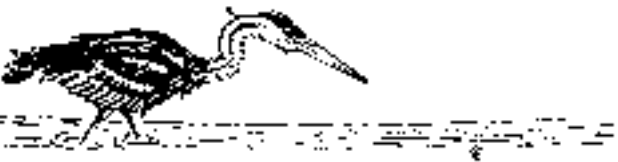
RMS Membership Auto-Renewal Now Available

Whether you're renewing your membership or joining for the first time, you can now opt in to auto-renewal. It's a simple way to save yourself time, stay connected, and continue supporting the River Management Society without interruption.

We appreciate your membership, the time and expertise you contribute to our community, and everything you do for our rivers.

Give the gift of membership
to a colleague, student, retiree or friend!

RMS is a nonprofit organization.
All contributions are tax-deductible.



Name _____

Home Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Organization _____

Office _____

Work Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Work Phone _____

Email _____

Job Title _____

Duties/Interests _____

Rivers you manage _____

Membership Category (please check one)

- ☐ Individual \$60/yr (\$240 for 5 years - save \$60!)
- ☐ Associate \$40/yr
- ☐ Student \$30/yr
- ☐ Lifetime \$750 (for individuals only)
- ☐ Organizational (1-2 people) \$75/yr
- ☐ Organizational (3-4 people) \$150/yr
- ☐ Organizational (5-8 people) \$300/yr

Membership benefits are described online:
www.river-management.org/membership

Who referred you to RMS? _____

Make checks payable to "RMS" –
RMS also accepts VISA or Mastercard:

Card #: _____

Exp date: _____ Amount: _____

Send this form, with payment, to:
RMS, P.O. Box 5750, Takoma Park, MD 20913-5750
(301) 585-4677 • rms@river-management.org

2026 River Ranger Rendezvous

October 12-16, 2026

Labyrinth Canyon on the Green River in Utah

photo: BLM

The River Management Society's Southwest Chapter is excited to host the annual River Ranger Rendezvous on Labyrinth Canyon National Scenic River on Utah's stunning Green River!

For decades, the River Ranger Rendezvous has brought together professionals responsible for the day-to-day management of our nation's rivers to share practical ideas, build leadership and technical skills, and learn from one another in the field.

Open to all river and resource professionals, not just those with the title "river ranger," the Rendezvous provides participants with new skills, fresh perspectives, and a network of colleagues on whom they can rely long after the trip ends.

For more information and to register, visit the [RMS website](https://www.rivermanagement.org).



Non-Profit Org.
US Postage PAID
Permit 536
Missoula MT 59801

RMS, P.O. Box 5750, Takoma Park MD 20913



Like and Follow Us! @rivermgt society



*White River Canoe and Kayak Race.
Photo: Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation*

RMS Journal Submission Deadlines

Winter 2026	Vol. 39, No. 4	Southwest	Nov
Spring 2027	Vol. 40, No. 1	Northwest	Feb
Summer 2027	Vol. 40, No. 2	Northeast	May
Fall 2027	Vol. 40, No. 3	Pacific	Aug
Winter 2027	Vol. 40, No. 4	Alaska	Nov
Spring 2028	Vol. 41, No. 1	Southeast	Feb

Midwest Chapter Focus

#OhioRiverBasinProud Campaign.....	1
The 2026 Illinois River Rendezvous	8
Five New Access Sites Along the Fox River.....	10
Annual Fox River Summit.....	11
Every Olympic Journey Starts Somewhere – Why Not Watts, Oklahoma?	12
Drought on a Privately-Owned River.....	14
Source to Steward: RMS Q&A with Emma Mills.....	16
2027 Symposium Field Sessions Will Bring “Balancing Ecology, Experience, and Access” to Life.....	18
An East Side Story.....	20
River City Outdoors Wants to Provide ‘Recreation for All’.....	24
River Fest-Here’s to 50 years WSR!	27
Congratulations 2026 RMS Award Winners.....	28
RMS News	32