

ISSUE FIVE : WINTER 2017

OPEN RIVERS : RETHINKING THE MISSISSIPPI



**NETWORKS &
COLLABORATION**

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An interdisciplinary online journal rethinking the Mississippi
from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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The cover image is of a Healing Place Collaborative network diagram. Members are listed around the outside of the circle and each line between them indicates a collaboration or work done between those two members. Image courtesy of Mona Smith.

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INTRODUCTION

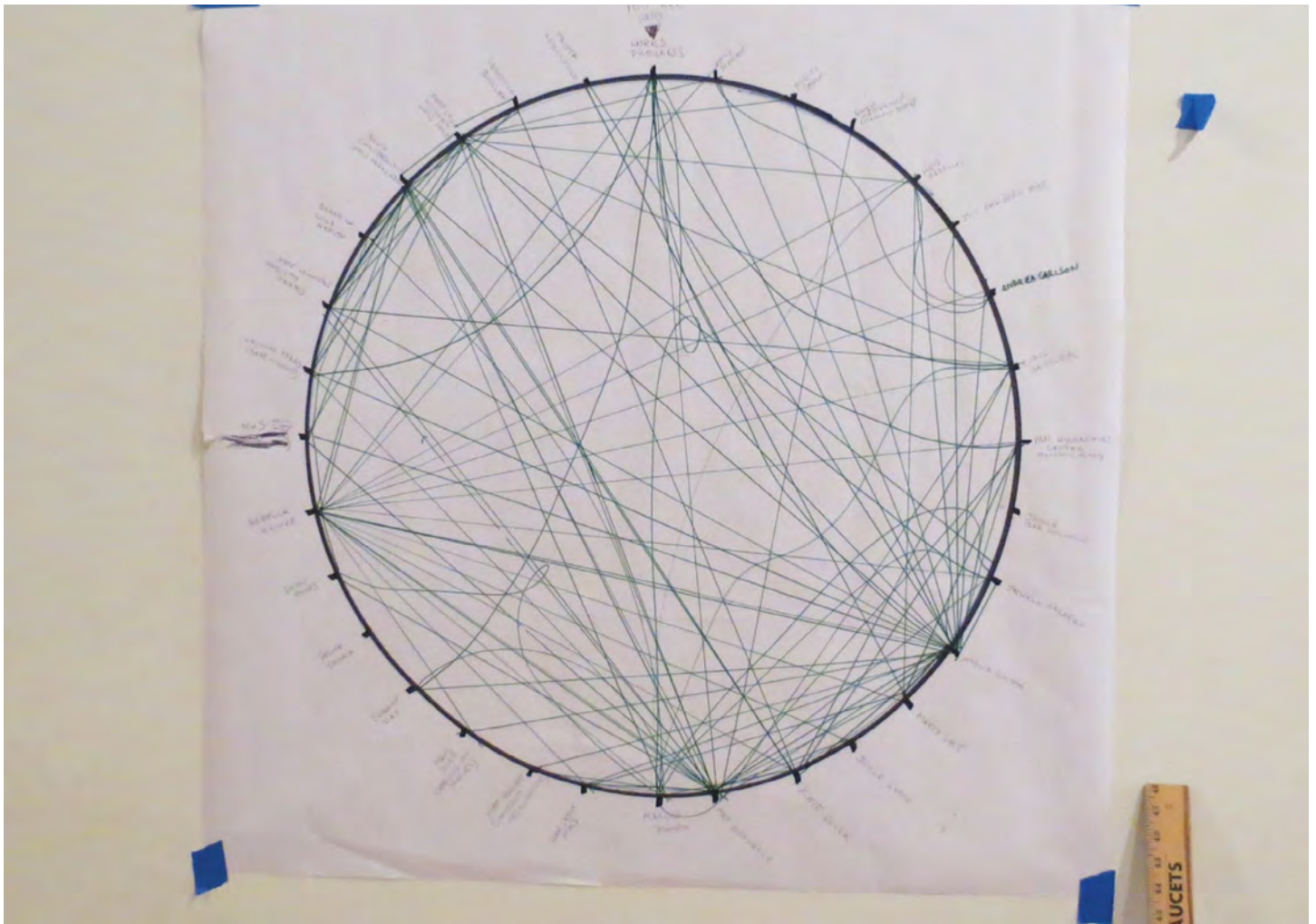
INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE FIVE

By Patrick Nunnally, Editor

When I got fully engaged with Mississippi River work, in the mid-90s, there was a lot of talk about public-private partnerships. That has ebbed and flowed and morphed over the years, but the idea of partnership has remained. Pretty much anyone in any sector—public, nonprofit, or corporate—understands that work

beyond a small one-time project rarely happens through just one entity.

The features in this issue celebrate partnership and collaboration. Taken separately or together, this issue's articles focus on community work as opposed to scholarship. They will, we hope, show



Healing Place Collaborative (HPC) network diagram. Each line represents work or collaboration between two HPC members. Image courtesy Mona Smith.

community folks the work of others that they can learn from. We hope also that campus people can see the range of community partners and what they do, and see possibilities for expanding their engagement in particular ways they hadn't thought of. These articles illustrate a range of ways to engage in collaboration; if you know of a great collaboration that is not mentioned here, let us know and maybe we can get that case written up for a future issue.

Our Minneapolis campus is almost completely within the boundaries of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park System that is known as a "partnership park." The feature by Superintendent John Anfinson (A U of M graduate, by the way) examines a number of the formal partnerships that enable the park to do the work that makes it successful. Our River Life program, as well as any number of individual researchers and instructors, has worked with park staff on a variety of projects over the years; we will have to figure out how all of that work can be rolled into a more formal agreement. That agreement would be a significant asset for the University and we trust it would be valuable for the park as well.

The work of the Healing Place Collaborative shares a geography with the local national park unit, but operates quite differently. The series of interviews offered here reflect the decentralized nature of the Collaborative's work, and the myriad ways that significant work is taking place by partners either individually or in various combinations, but all working under the aegis of "healing," "place," and "water." The Collaborative's November meeting perhaps exemplified the mutual strength members give each other; "How We Are Caring," a collection of reflections from that meeting, is included as a sidebar to the multiple voices in the article authored by Martin Case.

The river in our community is, of course, connected to the broader Mississippi River and,

through the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. Two additional features in this issue trace collaborative efforts that work toward the overall health of these waters. Kelly McGinnis articulates a number of the key principles underlying the collaborations among 50+ organizations of the Mississippi River Network. America's Wetland Foundation, as described in the article by Valsin Marmillion, works differently, by convening groups that don't normally work together into efforts that find innovative responses to seemingly intractable solutions.

Collaborations among multiple partners can achieve great things, but there will always be a need for good, old-fashioned river advocacy. John Helland describes the general perspectives offered by some of the most prominent national river advocacy groups; nearly all of them can be followed through social media if any in particular pique your interest. On the subject of national perspectives on rivers, Joanne Richardson reviews the current touring exhibit, "Water/Ways," which is anchored by the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street show on the importance of water in our lives.

Our final three columns bring us back to the campus of the University of Minnesota and its vicinity. Laura Matson offers an examination of the treaty provisions that underlie much of the conflict over the Dakota Access Pipeline and its crossing of the Missouri River near the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's reservation. The conflicts over water and the pipeline itself are fairly well known, but the treaty provisions are not. Hilary Holmes describes for us a quite different geography, Bridal Veil Falls, which formerly fell untrammelled into the Mississippi River near Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. Finally, Monica McKay gives us hope for the continuation of partnerships like those covered in this issue. Her account of various programs in the University of Minnesota's Center for Community-Engaged Learning indicates that collaboration can, perhaps, be taught.

It is appropriate in these times that we write intentionally about “hope” and teaching early career people about patterns of collaboration. As I discuss more fully [here](#) these are challenging times for people committed to issues of water, sustainability, place, and equity. I welcome your comments.

That is indeed a hopeful lesson for us all. Happy reading, everyone!

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About the Author

Patrick Nunnally coordinates the River Life Program in the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota. He serves as editor for *Open Rivers* and was one of the lead scholars for the University’s John E. Sawyer Seminar, “Making the Mississippi: Formulating New Water Narratives for the 21st Century and Beyond,” funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

FEATURE

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A “PARTNERSHIP PARK” - THE MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA

By John O. Anfinson

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area touts itself a “partnership park,” but what does that mean, especially in the context of the National Park Service (NPS) overall? When

most people think of national parks, they imagine Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, the Everglades, the Statue of Liberty, or some other iconic park or place. I realize this is a gross generalization. Most



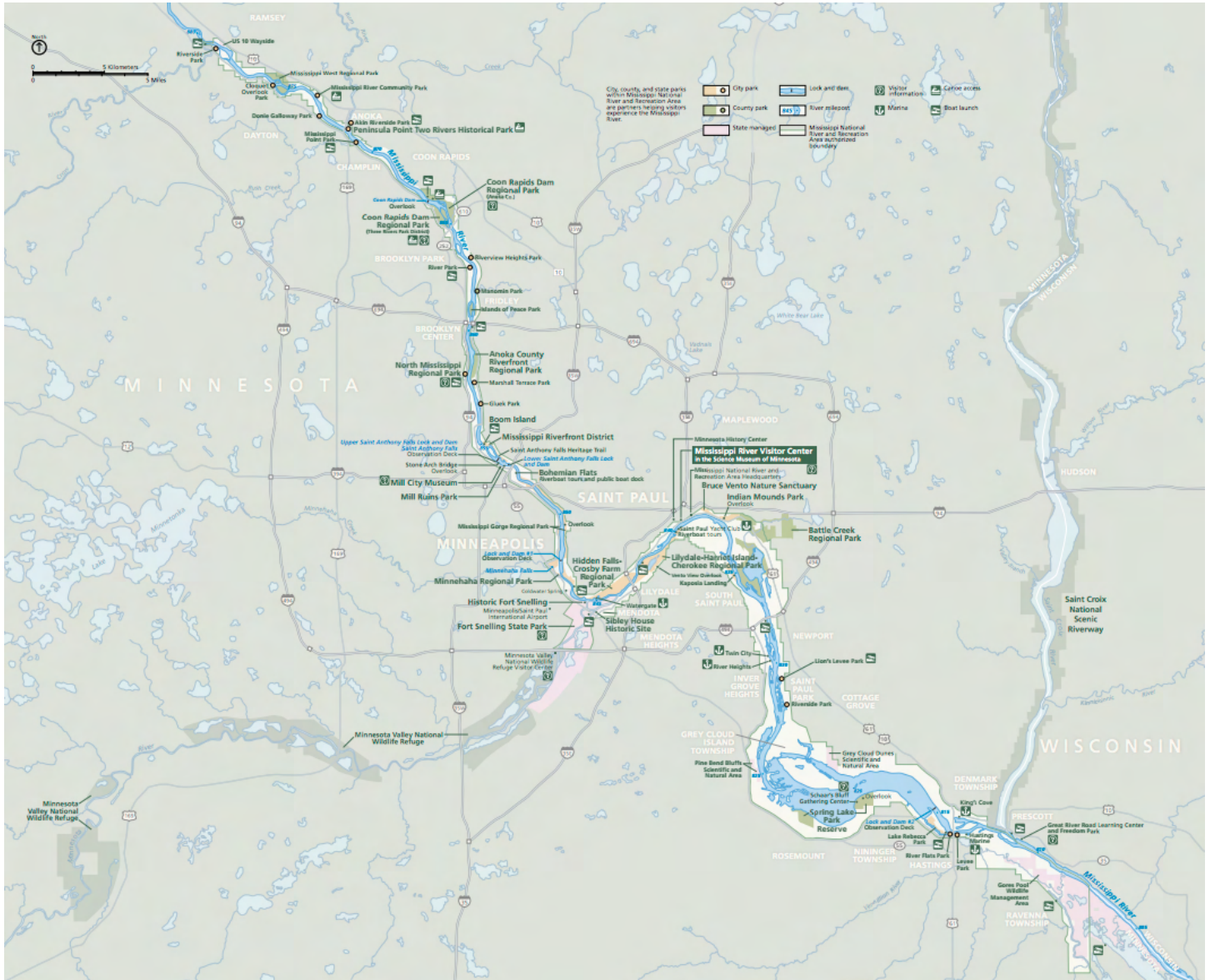
Canoeists on the Mississippi River in the Mississippi River National River and Recreation Area. By National Park Service [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

people probably know the national park unit they grew up visiting. Having just celebrated its centennial, the NPS has 417 units, and there is no typical park.

So let me contrast the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (NRRA) to those parks that own all their land and have a formal entry gate, where visitors stop to take their picture or a selfie. Those parks have partners but do not inherently

need them. Other than complying with a myriad of laws and regulations, they do not need permission to manage the land or to carry out a program or project.

When Congress established the Mississippi NRRA in 1988, it gave us less than 50 acres, all on islands. While it established the possibility of a grant program, that has never been funded. Of the 54,000 acres within our boundary, we now



Map of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area showing the entire 72-mile reach from Dayton and Ramsey down to the southern border of Dakota County, below Hastings. Map by National Park Service.

[Download a PDF of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area \(4.1 MB\)](#)

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own 64. In our 72-mile reach from Dayton and Ramsey down to the southern border of Dakota County, below Hastings, there are 21 cities, four townships, and five counties. Much of the land is privately owned. Other federal agencies and the State of Minnesota also own and manage land within our boundary. If we want to do anything just about anywhere, we need to partner with some entity or organization and most often with many. We are a partnership park out of necessity. So how do we accomplish anything when we do not have a carrot or a stick? The best way to answer this question is to highlight some of our successful partnerships.

We do not have our own classroom space, so we rely on partners to host our programs and events.

The Padelford Packet Boat Company, which hosts our Big River Journey program, provides one of our more unique partner classrooms. Through this partnership, we have brought over 70,000 students to learn about the Mississippi on a riverboat. At stations hosted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the Audubon Society, and the park, students learn about the Great River's history, nature, and water quality. We do not have much equipment, as we have no place to store it. So, we work with Wilderness Inquiry to put nearly 10,000 middle and high schoolers on the river each year in their 10-person voyageur canoes. In addition, we use partner parks, like those run by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and Fort Snelling State Park.



Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman paddling with Wilderness Inquiry in 2016. Via Twitter, @SecretaryJewell.

Since we pay rent for our Mississippi River Visitor Center space in the Science Museum of Minnesota, you could argue that our arrangement is not a partnership, but it is or has developed into one. With a one-week notice, we learned that Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell decided to make the Mississippi NRRA one of her few stops for a Centennial tour the week of the official NPS 100th Birthday. Her staff told us she had time to paddle a short reach of the Mississippi in voyageur canoes with a diverse group, but she had to be off the water in time to have a live conversation with the American astronauts on the international space station. Only our deeply rooted partnerships saved us. Wilderness Inquiry quickly agreed to provide the canoes and the staff to stern them. Outdoor Afro brought their national and local leaders and members to paddle with us. The Science Museum spent a week talking to communications staff at NASA to work out how the Secretary could Skype with the astronauts from the museum. The day was beautiful and every aspect came off as if we had been planning it for months. Only close and well-seasoned partnerships made that possible.

In 2014, we began exploring the idea of revamping our Mississippi River Visitor Center in the Science Museum and then decided to make the grand re-opening one of our signature Centennial events. After over a year of planning, we closed our visitor center on June 6, 2016. We reopened on August 25, the anniversary of our founding, to a large audience that included Representative Betty McCollum and St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, our funders, and many other supporters. The Mississippi Park Connection (MPC), our philanthropic partner, raised over one-half of the \$630,000 needed to redo the center. Without the MPC, we would not have considered the project. We contracted with the Science Museum, one of the premier exhibit design companies in the country, to complete the design and construction, but we worked together more as partners than business relations.

In 2016, we developed a closer partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to manage visitation at their Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam. Since the facility closed to navigation in 2015 and no longer served commercial navigation, the Corps decided not to open the visitor center and offered us the chance to manage it. This was possible, in part, because we have been working with the Corps for years on our Journey to the Falls program. After several months of negotiations, we signed a five-year agreement to operate the visitor center and give tours of the lock. Because we do not have a maintenance staff and the Corps did not want to continue managing their restroom, we negotiated and signed another agreement with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to clean the bathrooms, as long as we provided the supplies. Staffing was also a concern, but the MPC sought and received a \$50,000 grant to help pay for one of our interpretive rangers and supplied one of their volunteers to augment our regular staff and volunteers. Whereas the Corps had seen about 2,000 visitors per year between Memorial Day and Labor Day from 2005 to 2015, we hosted over 15,000 in our pilot season.

Congress specifically established the NRRA to help guide development along the river throughout our 72-mile corridor. This has been one of our hardest challenges. Despite the National Park designation, Congress relied on State Critical Area Executive Order 79-19 to protect the corridor's resources rather than instituting a separate layer of federal regulations. Over time, we learned that the Executive Order did not work well. Communities throughout the corridor implemented it in different ways or failed to do so at all. We had little hope of addressing this problem on our own, but our primary advocacy partner, Friends of the Mississippi River, stepped up.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) was born as our champion and the river's, in 1993. They

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helped guide the writing of our Comprehensive Management Plan, which the Secretary of the Interior and the Governor of Minnesota signed. Today, FMR's budget and staff are nearly the same as ours. FMR led the effort to revamp the Minnesota Critical Area regulations for our corridor. While it took many years and nearly did not happen, FMR persisted. The result is a new set of rules that will apply equally throughout our corridor.

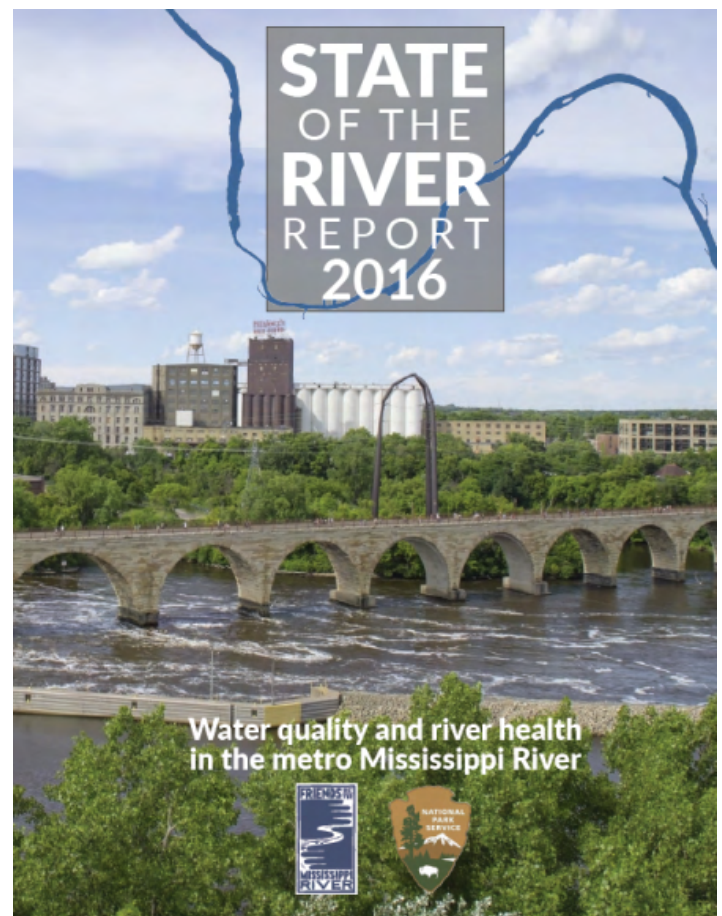
As the Mississippi River is our principal resource, we care deeply about its water quality. To better understand and protect the river, the NPS initiated a partnership to promote public engagement in everyday actions for clean water. Called Metro Watershed Partners, this partnership includes over 70 organizations, representing local, state, and federal agencies; non-profits; educational institutions; and watershed management groups. Together, the partners have touched millions of people through exhibits, broadcast media, and now social media.

We also collaborated with FMR on a second State of the River Report. Led by Lark Weller of my staff and Trevor Russell of Friends of the Mississippi River, we announced the new report on September 22, 2016 to a large audience at the Science Museum of Minnesota. The report focuses on old issues, such as sediment, flow, nitrogen, and phosphorous, and new ones, like microplastics. The report provides the public and policy-makers with rigorous scientific information presented in a very readable and understandable format.

One of our newest and most exciting partnerships debuted late last summer. PaddleShare is a program that allows people to check out a kayak, paddle downriver, check it back in, check out a Nice Ride bike, and pedal back to their car. One of the stations is located at Bohemian Flats near the University of Minnesota. Through federal transportation funding, we brought the seed money to acquire the kayaks and check out

stations, but we needed the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, City of Minneapolis, the Three Rivers Park District, the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, REI, and the Mississippi Park Connection to make it happen.

The University of Minnesota's main campus straddles the Mississippi River and, therefore, the national park. So it is not surprising that many NRRA staff have worked with faculty from the University on programs and projects and in the classroom. Most recently, Lark Weller, our water quality planner, and researchers from the University, Metropolitan Council, and Minnesota Department of Health received a University of Minnesota Serendipity Grant to explore the roadblocks to providing equitable access to water resources and services. Once roadblocks are identified, the goal is to make this research available through an "institutional equity toolkit" that will help address the disparities. Minnesota



is one of the richest water resources states in the country and how it manages those resources is truly a “grand challenge.”

These few examples demonstrate the range of our partnerships. While we do not have much of a stick and no large carrots, we do have something to offer our partners: the NPS arrowhead and the national and international reputation it brings. Like the founders of the Mississippi NRRA, cities around the country are mounting campaigns to get their treasured resources designated as units of the National Park system. With the NPS stamp on their resources, they know long-term preservation is more feasible, and that we will incorporate their story more effectively into the national narrative.

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Mississippi NRRA in 2018, we can reflect on what being a partnership park has meant. Partnerships create opportunities. While many saw and still see our lack of landownership as a liability, we have captured opportunities we could not have done alone, even if we owned the land. Partnership means buy in. Our partners have to see the value we add before they work with us. We succeed because we can leverage what they care about and what helps us fulfill our mission. We share every accomplishment with someone else; it is never just about us.

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About the Author

John Anfinson is superintendent of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (NRRA) for the National Park Service. He is the author of *The River We Have Wrought: A History of the Upper Mississippi* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), *River of History* (2003) and many articles about the Mississippi River. He has been researching, writing and speaking about the upper Mississippi River for over 25 years.

FEATURE

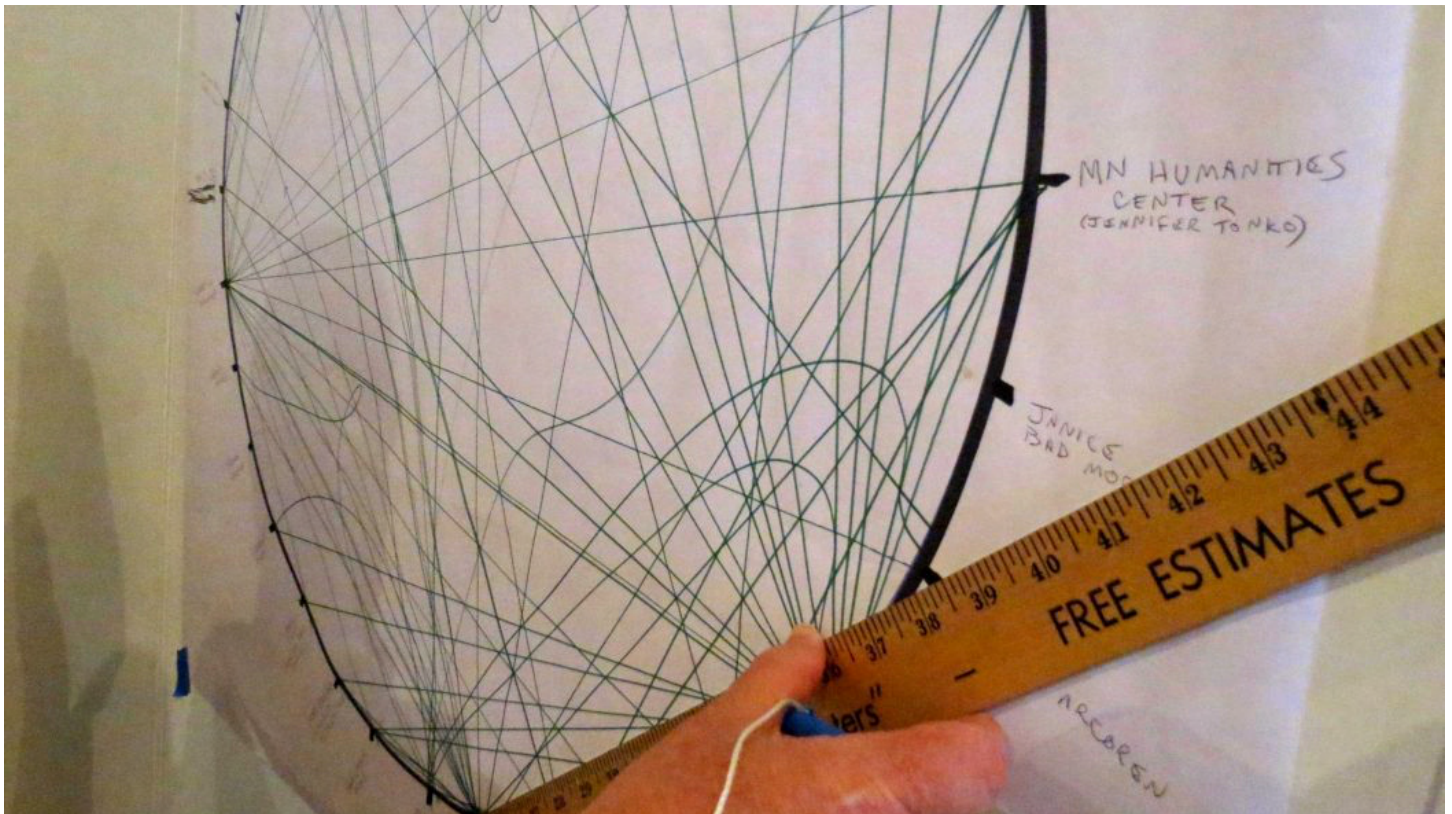
HEALING PLACE COLLABORATIVE

By Martin Case

Healing Place Collaborative (HPC) is an association of 40 professionals from many fields who share an interest in the Mississippi River as *a place of healing* and *a place in need of healing*. Indigenous-led and artist-led, the group includes language activists, educators, environmentalists, scientists, therapists, community organizers, public officials, and scholars.

Each HPC member is engaged in healing (broadly defined) on some level—individual, cultural, communal, environmental. Their work is often

intense and frequently frustrating. HPC meetings start with members simply stating what they are doing, and commenting on each other's work in a congenial, collegial atmosphere. The meetings provide a rare chance for highly motivated change agents—who typically run at full speed with their noses to the ground, isolated by specialized languages—to consider their work as part of a larger community where people bring diverse approaches to addressing a common purpose.



Networks diagram of the Healing Place Collaborative. Image courtesy of Mona Smith.

HPC emerged from the intersection of two groups.

- In 2013, the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board completed a plan for the cultural and historical interpretation of the east bank of the Falls (one of Minnesota's most significant physical sites). Core members of HPC were drawn from the Advisory Committee of that project.
- Other core members are part of Mapping Spectral Traces, a “trans-disciplinary, international group of scholars, practitioners, community leaders, and artists who work with and in traumatized communities, contested lands and diverse environments” (as stated on their website).

Dakota media artist Mona Smith, a member of both groups, invited people from these groups to meetings that resulted in HPC; since then, other individuals and organizations have joined.

The deceptively simple operations of HPC—regular meetings without agendas, for whoever can show up—are founded in several complex cultural and academic concepts.

- The central image of HPC is *bdote*, a Dakota word that means *confluence*—of rivers, and more broadly of ideas. The Twin Cities are located at one of the most important *bdotes* in Dakota culture, the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. Grounded in this physical place, HPC operates as a philosophical *bdote* for the work of its diverse membership.
- Members of Mapping Spectral Traces bring the concept of “deep mapping:”

interdisciplinary explorations of human relationships to places of trauma. HPC is itself a deep mapping project.

- In general, HPC exemplifies the concept of “broad cross-field pollination,” an idea introduced at the group's inception by member Patrick Nunnally of the River Life program.

In the course of three years of regular meetings, members have invited each other to contribute to each other's work. The River Life program at the University of Minnesota, for instance, included HPC members as presenters in a national symposium on water. Dakota Language Society leaders guide visitors to cultural historic sites for the Minnesota Humanities Center, based on Mona Smith's Bdote Memory Map (key participants in all these organizations are HPC members). These intersections have emerged organically rather than from agenda-laden planning. Several home-grown collaborative projects have also developed, such as the construction of a “Dakota Language Table” by member artists, landscape architects, and language activists. St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board and the Knight Foundation have provided major support to sustain HPC.

Responding to Three Constellations of Questions

Since October, 2016, members have been considering how HPC can serve as a model for motivating, sustaining, and strengthening social change efforts, by responding to the three constellations of questions presented here.

HPC members who have responded to these questions include:

- **Jewell Arcoren**, Sisseton-Wahpeton, graduate student in therapy and director of Wicoie Nandagikendan, a pre-school Indigenous language immersion program.
- **Christine Baeumler**, environmental artist, Director of Graduate Studies in Art, University of Minnesota; member of Mapping Spectral Traces.
- **Martin Case**, independent scholar/ researcher focused on U.S.-Indian treaties and narratives that shape public discourse.
- **Heid Erdrich**, Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, award-winning author, collaborative artist, performer, educator, and curator.
- **Kate Flick**, doctoral candidate in natural resource science and management/landscape architecture and research assistant in the Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota.
- **Colin Kloecker**, artist, designer, and filmmaker who works at the intersection of civic engagement and public art-making; co-leader of Works Progress Studio.
- **Rebecca Krinke**, artist, designer, and faculty member in the University of Minnesota's Department of Landscape Architecture; member of Mapping Spectral Traces; artist team leader for the Dakota Language Table.
- **Kate Lamers**, Minneapolis Parks and Recreation, landscape architect, manager of three parks on the central and upper river-front.
- **Joyce Lyons**, internationally recognized artist and educator.
- **Shanai Matteson**, writer, artist, filmmaker and arts organizer; co-leader of Works Progress Studio.
- **Ethan Neerdaels**, Bdewakantunwan Dakota language activist, director of Dakhóta Iápi Okhódakičhiye, educator in public schools.
- **Patrick Nunnally**, coordinator of River Life program, Institute for Advanced Study, University of Minnesota.
- **Piero Protti**, graduate student in Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota.
- **Laura Salvesson**, Director, Mill City Museum.
- **Mona Smith**, Sisseton-Wahpeton media installation artist, founder of Healing Place.
- **Dan Spock**, Director, Minnesota Historical Society Museum.

- **Dave Stevens**, public programs specialist, [Mill City Museum](#).
- **Jennifer Tonko**, program officer with the [Minnesota Humanities Center](#), project lead for the *We Are Water MN* partnership.

What is your work and how did you come to be part of Healing Place? How does the term “Healing Place” describe your work?

[Jewell Arcoren] I work in non-profit arts and behavioral health. I work as a program director for a language revitalization program for American Indian babies sixteen months to five years of age, to teach them the language, to make it accessible. I was invited to be part of HPC to help the group grow, to help it move toward sustainability.

Dakota language is a key or pathway for me and for my community to begin to recover from historical trauma. It is a key connector. In my opinion, the Dakota language is a keystone species [a species on which others in an ecosystem depend]. This land, and the people here, need our Dakota language to recover so that we can all heal. We need our songs to be alive: our planting songs, our coming of age songs, our end of life songs, our ceremony songs.

[Ethan Neerdaels] I came to be involved with Healing Place through the work we do in bringing our stories of place back to the *Oyáte* through our language. I came to this through sacred sites tours. [The Minnesota Humanities Center provides guided tours of sites that are significant to Dakota people, based on Mona Smith’s *Bdote Memory Map*.]

The work I do is about re-strengthening of Dakota way of life, Dakota language, and relating to Dakota *Makoce*. It’s about giving people back the language they have, and about the continual rapping of our grandmother earth. Our language is

the only language that originates there; there are words that define the relation and processes in that place that are not accessible in science. Star knowledge as another way of looking at the stars and bringing language back.

The term “Healing Place” describes the work I do with Dakota language in a way that is reminiscent of the teachings from some of our elders. The elders say that our people are exemplified through the tripod of the *Othí* (tipi). If you remove one of the three poles from the structure, it all collapses. These three poles of Dakota identity are our language (*Dakhód íápi*), way of life (*Dakhóta Wičhó’ǰan*), and our aboriginal territory (*Dakhóta Makhóčhe*). Through the re-strengthening of our language, the people thrive!

[Piero Protti] I have been working with Rebecca Krinke and Alexandra Olson to develop a Dakota Language Table for Healing Place that can act as both a physical item and a symbolic item in bringing Dakota language and culture to the forefront of collective awareness.

[Rebecca Krinke] I am a multi-disciplinary artist and designer working across sculpture, installations, social practice, and public art. In broad terms, my creative practice and research deals with issues related to trauma and healing—moving from body to space—exploring trauma as it moves from individuals to societies to ecosystems and back again.

My sculpture has focused on embodying trauma—often using the body, furnishings, and aspects of domestic architecture as a starting point. My installations and site works often focus on ideas of recovery—through contemplative, transformative environments. So perhaps what this means is that I am interested in healing, and in working as an artist to ask questions about / consider aspects of healing.

[Heid Erdrich] Mona asked me into Healing Place. My work grounds itself in my witness of language as medicine. Words, speech, expression—all allow truth-telling, connection, recovery. My work with visual art centers on how we assign meaning and how that harms and heals. My work is poetry, on page, stage, in collaboration with filmmakers, animators, dance makers, artists.

**Words, speech, expression—all allow
truth-telling, connection, recovery.
- Heid Erdrich**

[Dan Spock] Mona [Smith] and I collaborated on the first iteration of “Cloudy Waters” [a multi-media installation at the Minnesota Historical Society] and other things. My work as a museum exhibition maker and congenial provocateur provides opportunities for historical truth-telling as a platform for embracing the challenges of the future and healing historical trauma.

[Laura Salvesson] In both of my jobs—director of Mill City Museum and coordinator for the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Board—I’ve found engagement with groups of people to talk about this place to be essential to my work. My participation in the Healing Place Collaborative deepens my awareness and connection to this place at St. Anthony Falls.

[Martin Case] I spend a lot of time researching and presenting the connections among men who signed US-Indian treaties on behalf of the federal government. It gives a picture of how one relationship among people and the natural world—property—works to supplant other relationships. I think of my work as “remedial” history, in both senses of the word. It presents basic information that a lot of people don’t have at their fingertips. And it lays out the geography at this important cultural and historical fault line, which reframes the questions we ask about how we all got to where we are. Reframing, though

painful at times, is necessary to healing, as for example in healing a broken bone (I got that idea from Mona).

[Shanai Matteson] I’m concerned with how we move from ownership to relationship. I think about this as someone who is a storyteller; it’s an interior question, how we individually move from colonialist to relational frameworks. I come from science education and art, which both have a colonialist origin. Through our studio, and through the Water Bar, we try to do things that are useful, starting from the place where we are, asking how we can help people think and practice differently. It starts with paying attention to local and Indigenous knowledge. Healing Place Collaborative is about my own journey, learning, and experience.

[Colin Kloecker] With the Water Bar, we find that people don’t know where their water comes from. You can’t have healing if you don’t understand the challenge. These meetings underscore the value of coming together, sitting in a circle and becoming rooted in place and purpose. Purpose is a kind of healing; it’s really important to us.

**These meetings underscore the value of
coming together, sitting in a circle and becoming
rooted in place and purpose.
- Colin Kloecker**

[Kate Flick] I wrote my graduate school application essay about healing landscapes. My focus is on learning to work in a culturally relevant way, which is a big step forward for people with an academic lens, who tend to think of place as a locator. We typically have a paradigm of capital and ownership with land; why not a healing paradigm with landscape? I’m shaped by my work at the Menominee Forest, a differently managed forest that is older, that has many species being harvested, relationships based on reciprocity. They know there who the place wants to be, respond to

what the place wants to be in terms of intentional plantings. I didn't realize that other places didn't know what they want to be until I went to Itasca; which is such a young forest.

[Joyce Lyons] One answer is that I am moved and inspired by the people I meet here. My work is about place in ways that resonate with what is said here. I am an artist. I was part of an exhibition at All My Relations gallery (part of the attempt to get the State Capitol to change its art) and learned that I was the first non-Native person to have work on the gallery's walls. In considering the perspectives of First People in my work, I am learning much and have much yet to learn.

[Christine Baeumler] One challenge in my work is that it's not mine, but is community, with a lot of partners. I work with communities on healing urban places that have been contaminated through industrialization and the extreme violence that has been done. There are so many echoes here to my work at Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and Wakan Tipi, where we see the effects of militarization and the complicitous relationship to railroads and pipelines. It creates a disorientation with time; this seems like the 1860s.

I met a number of people here through Mapping Spectral Traces, and I feel this has reoriented me in relation to this place, to history and this country. It's important to make space for other beings that share our corridor, like pollinators. Thinking about this emergent process—what else wants to be present—is something I get from this project.

[Kate Lamers] I am a landscape architect, more specifically a planner and designer of Minneapolis Parks, and more specifically still—managing three parks on the central and upper riverfront. A landscape architect 130 years ago helped ensure that there is a lot of public space, but that's lacking in the upper river. The park board is working on this, and on ancient waterways that now flow

through pipes. We are trying to use the power of public and water to bring these places back.

My hope is that the city refocuses on the Mississippi River so that it is seen as a most vital corridor through the city—green and healthy and alive and cherished.

- Kate Lamers

My hope is that the city refocuses on the Mississippi River so that it is seen as a most vital corridor through the city—green and healthy and alive and cherished. I think different communities within Minneapolis have, and could have, different relationships with this river and I want to understand how this river can become important to them. The park board is mostly involved with physical changes, resulting from discussion with people who use or might use the parks. We hear young people talk about wanting to do something good in the world; we can't start healing ourselves until we start working on what is wrong with the earth.

My understanding is that the Mississippi has always been sacred and vital for the Indigenous community, but I suspect much of that relationship has been damaged or taken away. I think the creation of public parkland on the central and upper riverfront has the potential to help heal some of the damage done in the past.

[Dave Stevens] The Mill City Museum's work aspires to be like Healing Place, in making the case for what happened here at St. Anthony Falls. We want our programs to balance the story that is told in the permanent exhibits, enrich the stories that are told about St. Anthony Falls. We want balance to the celebratory tone of historical interpretation by including Indian removal, labor history, changing relations to land. We are taking baby steps, but these are goals. My own work is about coordination, not so much delivering programs myself. I want the museum to be a gathering space, like Healing Place, creating

opportunities for people to meet and talk to each other.

[Patrick Nunnally] I want to be part of something that is healing and placed. All people here need to think about and understand that we are on Dakota homeland and on the Mississippi River. Our work [at River Life] is relationship based, and we need multiple relationships and perspectives on this place. HPC is a natural fit.

[Jennifer Tonko] I'm the project lead for the *We Are Water MN* partnership, formed to tell Minnesota's water stories collaboratively, bringing together personal narratives, historical materials, and scientific information. By bridging many different ways of learning about and thinking about water, we strengthen Minnesotans' relationships with water. Healing place is a way of describing one of the main goals of the *We Are Water MN* partnership: "building Minnesotans' relationships with water." Being in relationship with a place is a constant dance of working to heal the place and letting the place heal you.

By bridging many different ways of learning about and thinking about water, we strengthen Minnesotans' relationships with water.
- Jennifer Tonko

I came to Healing Place because I was asked to by the Humanities Center, and because of the Humanities Center's and my ongoing relationship with Mona Smith. And I'm becoming part of the group because of all of the wonderful members and the lessons they have to teach me.

I think "Healing Place" describes more than my work, more than just what I get paid to do. It's true for more of my life. Thinking about place healing is something that I now do often. It's still not quite the first place my mind or my heart goes when I'm confronting a problem or a stressor, but I'm working on it!

How has Healing Place contributed to the work you are doing? How do you benefit from your association with HPC? Why do you stay with it?

[Rebecca Krinke] I "stay with it" because I am a core member and made a commitment. I also originated the idea at a core member meeting of creating a sculptural "Dakota Language Table," so I will deliver on this commitment. On the meta-level, I am interested in learning from Dakota people about Dakota worldview. I feel it is so necessary for every human being to question/enlarge their sense of self and the world.

[Piero Protti] The interaction with people from such a diverse background of expertise and points of view is certainly enriching both for professional focus and for personal awareness of all the good resources and forces that we have in the region. I plan to maintain a line of work that is relevant to the work done by the collaborative. We can all do our part in creating the world we want the next generations to have.

We can all do our part in creating the world we want the next generations to have.
- Piero Protti

[Laura Salvesson] I think awareness and connection to place and to the process of healing is beneficial, and inspirational. I am energized by hearing of others' work in the Collaborative, and by being able to offer what I can in terms of time, talent, and space to allow some of the collaborations to grow. I have been honored to have some Healing Place events take place at Mill City Museum, and those gatherings and public events are healing for people and for this place.

[Heid Erdrich] My entry has been slow, so I can only say that knowing this group exists gives me hope and a sense of belonging that an introvert actually needs. I know you all are here to reach out, especially as things grow troubled. I

stay with it out of respect for the vision of Mona, Jewell, Martin, and all.

[Dan Spock] I need other perspectives, outside of my work and family. Healing Place provides new perspectives, memory in action, healing, enrichment, companionship.

[Ethan Neerdaels] Through working with Healing Place, we have been able to bring awareness to the historic and ongoing problem of Dakota language loss in Minnesota, while at the same time promoting the values, history and sovereignty of *Očhéthi Šakówiŋ* to an audience we may not have reached otherwise. It is every American's responsibility to understand the legal agreements between the Dakota people and the United States, as evident while reading article VI of the U.S. Constitution.

[Kate Lamers] I have had very little contact with Native Americans in the past, or any people with a history of historical trauma. So just being around people who have been deeply immersed in the Indigenous community is helpful. I think the best way to learn about people and their feelings and relationships is to spend time talking with them. The fact that everyone is doing work around the river and with community is also really a helpful way for me to start to create a larger and more diverse picture of what is happening with water in our community. I hear about some really great projects and also news about very concerning things. Now that I have gotten to know the people, I would want to stay with it even if I wasn't working on directly applicable projects. I benefit right now because it gives me insight into conversations I wouldn't otherwise have. I expect I am benefitting in other ways that aren't clear yet.

The fact that everyone is doing work around the river and with community is also really a helpful way for me to start to create a larger and more diverse picture of what is happening with water in our community.
- Kate Lamers

[Jewell Arcoren] I love the way it is a creative movement; we are all aware that we are shift shapers. We are stronger together. It is a mutual and co-beneficial association; it is reciprocal. HPC members have collaborated with Wicoie, whereby we have been able to bring children from language programs to sing for various events. This in turn is positive reinforcement from a broader community around language revitalization for our children.

I love the way it is a creative movement: we are all aware that we are shift shapers. We are stronger together. It is a mutual and co-beneficial association: it is reciprocal.
- Jewell Arcoren

[Jennifer Tonko] With the *We Are Water MN* partnership, we're constantly working to build relationships with people who are working to protect water and for racial justice, who are community organizers, writers and thinkers and influencers. I've met or deepened my relationships with so many wonderful people through Healing Place who are exactly these people! I know that some Healing Place members will become collaborators on this or future projects. I know that some Healing Place members will be advisors and mentors to me.

Healing Place has provided a space for me to learn from others who are striving to build relationships with the natural world, including the people that inhabit it. This is sometimes a professional experience—helping me build strategic connections or learn from others' professional ways of working. This is sometimes a personal experience—for me, at least, it's an almost spiritual space where I can work

...we're constantly working to build relationships with people who are working to protect water and for racial justice...
- Jennifer Tonko

out what I'm thinking and feeling about what "relationship" and "kinship" and "learning from" really means—especially in relationship with Indigenous people. This is complicated for me. I am not an Indigenous person myself. So I want to learn from others without taking; I want to speak truthfully in my own language and acknowledge when I'm learning from another language. And Healing Place provides me a place to wrestle with and practice these things.

I stay with it because I love the people, I'm fascinated by the projects everyone's working on, and because I have a lot of learning to do!

[Martin Case] A lot of my work is done in isolation, so I really appreciate the chance to share my work with intelligent, big-hearted people, and to have my work informed by them. I'm especially appreciative for the richness of the languages represented by Healing Place members—the Dakota concepts and vocabulary, and the rich metaphors of "natural science."

Is Healing Place more than the sum of its parts? If so, what? Is Healing Place in existence when we are not around the same table? Is the group something beyond just the people when they are together? What do you see as the direction of your work with Healing Place?

[Piero Protti] Healing Place is more than the sum of its parts, yes. The strongest actions can come from putting together all the good work the HPC members do in their own professions. Once this all comes together in an organized way, we can create a community that celebrates its greatness based on the strengths of its members and how they enrich the whole, and not just as specialists. Hopefully my work (after graduate school) will maintain a line of values relevant to the goals of the collaborative. We can't do it all alone.

[Heid Erdrich] Exactly, the "more than the sum of the parts" is what feels so good—knowing a larger group aligns with one another's work—and our own. Our relations. My vision is not clear—but I am hopeful, and, well, kinda faithful—this will make itself known—a path will open. I'm open. Most likely, I think I will bring others to this work.

[Rebecca Krinke] I do not know the direction of my work. It reveals itself in each unfolding moment.

[Laura Salvesson] It seems that a new connection is made at every gathering or meeting in which I participate. It is exciting to see artists and others connect and be energized by one another's ideas and commitment.

[Dan Spock] Yes! Emphatically more than the sum of parts. Because of Healing Place, we get support, offers of resources, and strengthened capacity.

[Christine Baeumler] I think it's an ecosystem: each of us has our own projects, but there's something that happens when we get together. As Ian Biggs [co-founder of Mapping Spectral Traces] would say, we have mycelium connections [a vegetative network], which persist even when we are not together. It's an ecology rather than an organization.

I think it's an ecosystem: each of us has our own projects, but there's something that happens when we get together.

- Christine Baeumler

What is sustaining here? What you end up doing is sometimes different from what you thought you would be doing. I don't get this from the other things I belong to, in which agendas are more specified. It's beyond just the five or however many steps, but affects how those other links happen.

A value for me is that it feeds into teaching and other projects that I do. It has been great to have a mix of ages and experience, and it would be good to keep that going and expand the effort.

[Joyce Lyons] Thinking of a group as an entity [rather than a process] is a more linear, older model. This might just be a groundbreaking approach, which might make us nervous. There is something happening that emerges in how we talk.

[Martin Case] The absence of an agenda is a strength. Anything that happens here is organic, not official or pre-designed. On the other hand, Healing Place, with its minimal organization, is creating a space for these things to emerge. It's not about driving an agenda, but strengthening what people are doing.

[Mona Smith] That leaves me both concerned and excited about having a staff. This is supposed to be like the river, unchanneled, flowing lots of different ways.

[Kate Lamers] I believe so. . . it's a very positive group. Even when I am feeling down about my work, I feel very supported and hopeful when I think about how positively the people in HPC view my work and have high hopes for it. I am not sure what the future for my work with Healing Place will be, but am comfortable with not being sure at this point. I am hoping the group will stay involved with my projects and help offer feedback and ideas and connections that will help me improve them. I would also love to see someone (ideally the Park Board) do a project on race, ethnicity, the river (or a river), and green space that would help inform all of our river projects.

[Jewell Arcoren] HPC moves in social justice circles and reshapes narrative; it addresses stereotypes, it listens, it responds. It is developing an Indigenous-led model. I love how Patrick Nunnally was leading the way with the water symposium [a River Life project that included presentations from HPC members]. That was a powerful example.

[Jennifer Tonko] Healing Place is more than the sum of its parts, but it is what it is because of the people who are in it. What it means to me can't be easily summarized. Healing Place is not just Collaboration of Person A + Person B and Collaboration of Person C + Person D. It's the relationships of the people; it's the connectivity of the ideas; it's the influence of the hundredth drop in your bucket that finally reinforces a concept in a way that you can understand it.

I would like to keep participating, certainly. I'd love to do something that [HPC member] Bruce Chamberlain spoke about where we go to each other's places/experience each other's project and ask for feedback and get some "in place" perspective.

Healing Place is an example of how people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences can come together around a common dream and begin to make healing relations with one another.
- Ethan Neerdaels

[Ethan Neerdaels] Yes, Healing Place is an example of how people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences can come together around a common dream and begin to make healing relations with one another.

HPC is “open-ended.”

As seen in the responses above, Healing Place Collaborative is “open-ended.” Members join through a variety of mechanisms and from a variety of motivations; connections to the group, what members bring and what they take away, vary among individuals; and even the vision of what Healing Place is might be described more accurately as a kaleidoscope than as a portrait painting.

Yet members have no problem in describing their work as “healing” in nature, whether that work is language revitalization, landscape architecture, history, program planning, therapy, or art. And a strengthened connection to place is a highly valued result of participation in HPC.

The innovative nature of the HPC model is indicated by the reluctance of members to describe the group as a distinct institution. Phrases such as “mycelium connections,” “ecosystem,” and “common dream” point to the importance of HPC as a relationship rather than an entity – a value of both indigenous and artistic perspectives that provide leadership.

During November 2016 discussions about HPC, member Shanai Matteson noted concepts that she heard emphasized by participants, presented here as “How We Are Caring.”

How We Are Caring
From members of the
Healing Place Collaborative
November, 2016

**Listen,
Prepare,
Keep Hope,
Find Each Other,
Sit Still,
Remember,
Rage,
Resist,
Take Care,
Give Care,
Work,
Create,
Redefine Commitments,
Walk,
Write Your Story,
Witness,
Allow Grief,
Be Tender,
Forgive,
Grow,
Raise Children,
Tend,
Learn New Ways,
Choose Relationships.**

Recommended Citation

Case, Martin. 2017. “Healing Place Collaborative.” *Open Rivers: Rethinking The Mississippi*, no. 5. <http://editions.lib.umn.edu/openrivers/article/healing-place-collaborative/>.

About the Author

Martin Case researches and present information on American signers of “U.S.-Indian” treaties, and on the master narrative that dominates American public discourse. He has worked as a planning and writing consultant to more than 30 widely diverse organizations.

FEATURE

MISSISSIPPI RIVER NETWORK: HEADWATERS TO GULF

By Kelly McGinnis

How can dozens or even hundreds of organizations working on the Mississippi River be harnessed into a powerful body that has demonstrable influence in our nation's capital, in capitals of states along the river, and in other places where

the health of the river is decided? To answer this question, we can look at The Mississippi River Network: Headwaters to Gulf (MRN), a coalition of 53 organizations dedicated to protecting the Mississippi River for the well-being of the land,



Mississippi River Network members on a field trip walking across the newly opened Harahan Bridge in Memphis crossing the Mississippi River.

Photo credit: Rebeca Bell. Courtesy Bluestem Communications.

water, wildlife, and people of America's largest watershed. By coordinating efforts and having a shared agenda and a common goal—a healthy Mississippi River—MRN has been able to affect policies that have an impact on the river.

MRN's overall goal is a healthy Mississippi River for land, water, wildlife and people. The Network seeks to influence not only policies that affect the river, but people's perceptions of the river, as well, and to deepen people's connection to the river. By unifying our messages throughout the ten-state region, the Network motivates citizens and also advocates to educate decision makers for river protection. MRN's policy campaign works in tandem with the public campaign to urge decision makers to create federal and state policies that reduce agricultural nutrient pollution, as one example. MRN educates both its member organizations and the public on how river-friendly policies can promote a healthier Mississippi River and it provides the opportunities to reach decision makers and advocate for these policies. MRN supports agricultural conservation programs that help reduce nitrogen and phosphorous runoff into the river and its tributaries and other measures to improve water quality and prevent

harmful algae blooms. We promote working with nature by using green infrastructure solutions to water resource projects that reduce upfront and long-term costs, while improving water quality, increasing public recreation access, and enhancing wildlife habitat.

For years, many organizations have worked to restore the long-damaged Mississippi River, but the problems facing the river are too big and too interconnected for any one organization to solve on its own. Recognizing the need for a region-wide effort to achieve large-scale, high-impact success, the McKnight Foundation founded the Mississippi River Network in 2005 as a collaborative effort to protect and restore the entire river. MRN plays a unique role in convening groups and getting them to work together on advocacy initiatives and education and outreach activities. The Mississippi is truly America's River—a critical source of water for 18 million people, a diverse and critical habitat for wildlife, the backbone of our economy, and a rich part of our heritage. We want to make the Mississippi River a national priority for restoration and protection.

Member Organizations

MRN's member organizations are varied. The Network has members in all ten river states, as well as national organizations that are based in Washington, D.C. Members are nonprofit organizations like the [National Wildlife Federation](#), [Friends of the Mississippi River](#), and [Missouri Coalition for the Environment](#); they are institutions such as the [National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium](#) that share the common goal of a healthy river and want to work toward that together. The varied membership is one of the Network's greatest strengths—having organizations with varied areas of focus broadens the Network's perspective as a whole. We have

members who focus on policy issues, who work on public advocacy issues, who are on the ground leading river clean-ups and canoe adventures, members who work on the science of wetland form and function and water quality issues, who focus on public outreach and campaigns and more. Members bring their personal and organizational area of expertise to the Network and contribute in the way that best serves both.

With 53 members and growing, a framework is required to clearly state how the Network is governed. To join MRN, an interested nonprofit organization or institution fills out a simple

one-page application. Once the application is approved by the Steering Committee (more on that below) the new member signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that states expectations of membership and then is part of the Network. There is no cost to being in the Network. Organizations can engage as much as they are able or is appropriate for them.

Members can serve on three different committees. The steering committee guides the Network overall and helps with big picture thinking, yearly goals, and advising on grant writing and the direction of the Network. The steering committee is managed by the MRN program manager. The policy committee sets the Network's policy priorities that are approved by the entire Network on a yearly basis and works on each policy priority at the federal or state level. The policy committee is managed by the MRN policy manager. The

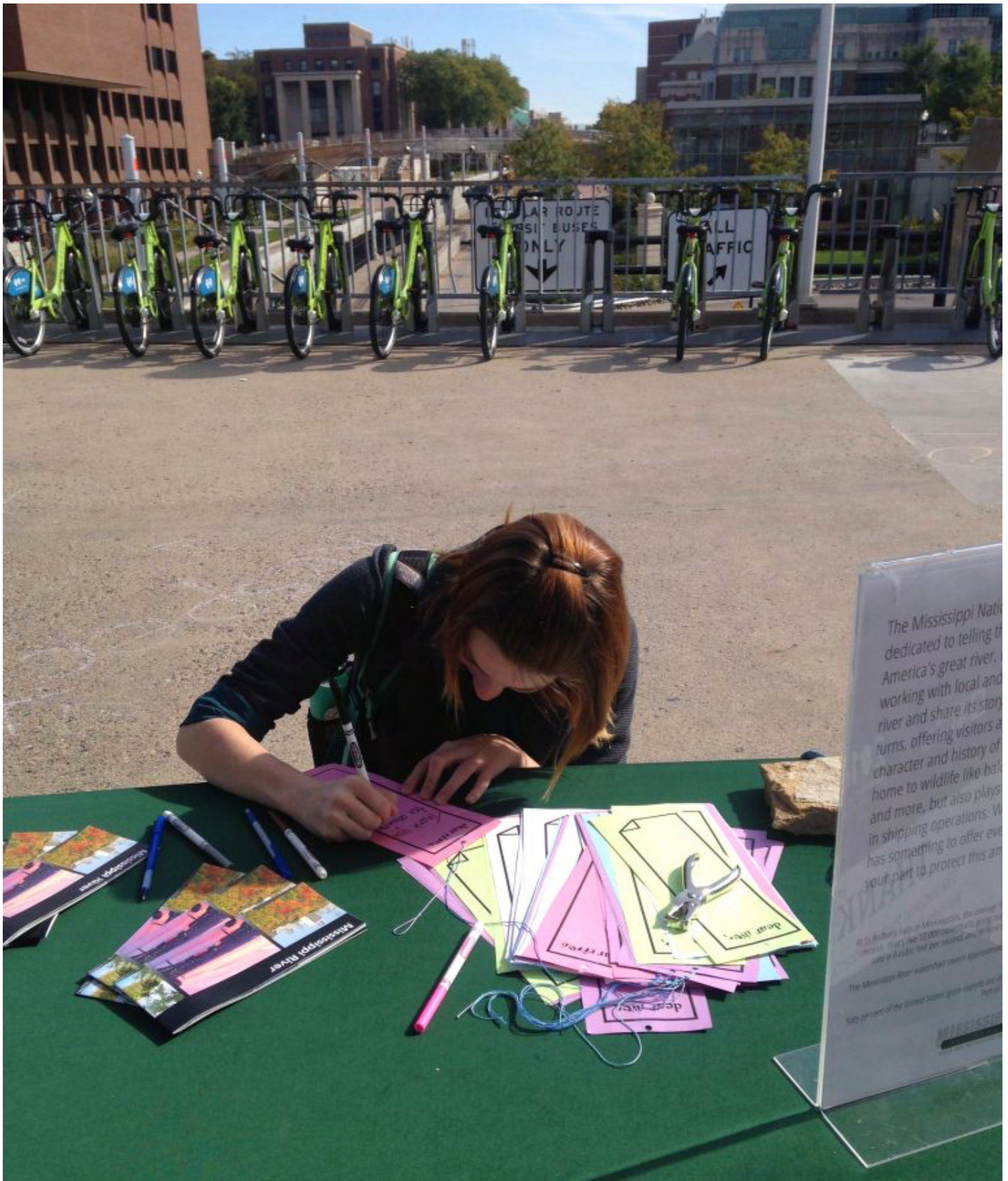
campaign committee oversees the *1 Mississippi* Campaign and is managed by the MRN campaign coordinator.

One way that MRN is able to be inclusive and effective is that we do not let differences divide that which we have in common. One way we approach our work cohesively is by working together through committees. Each year the 12-member policy committee, which is open to any member, sets the Network's policy priorities through consensus. The policy committee shares the recommendations with the steering committee to approve, then the entire Network has the chance to voice their thoughts and concerns about the policy priorities at MRN's Annual Meeting, where the priorities are formally approved. Those policy priorities guide the work we focus on for the year, allowing space for emerging issues to arise and be tackled if needed.

1 Mississippi

An essential component of MRN is the public communications campaign titled "*1 Mississippi: Can the River Count on YOU?*" The campaign was created using public opinion research gathered in 2007, then sampled again in 2015, so that the messages used could connect with the values of people living near the Mississippi River. The campaign raises awareness about the river, educates people about its current health, and motivates people to take one of ten specific actions to protect the river. Central to the campaign are its River Citizens, people who have taken a pledge to speak up for the river and care for it in simple ways that make a big difference. In the first seven years of the campaign, a cohesive group of close to 20,000 River Citizens residing throughout the basin, as well as nationwide, has been recruited. But MRN doesn't just recruit River Citizens, the Network regularly engages with this group of

people through newsletters, social media, and in-person engagement events to continue to educate them about issues affecting the river and ways they can help. Members are able to engage with the campaign in a variety of ways. They are encouraged to share advocacy actions like contacting elected officials about specific issues facing the river if appropriate for their organization and sharing the messaging created about the river. MRN member organizations can host events to recruit or engage River Citizens. A few members host a *1 Mississippi* outreach assistant, whose job is to recruit and engage River Citizens by attending events, hosting presentations, and writing blogs.



Dear River, a River Citizen recruitment event at the University of Minnesota in which participants were invited to write a letter to the Mississippi River. Image courtesy of Maria Lee.



Dear River, a River Citizen recruitment event at the University of Minnesota in which participants were invited to write a letter to the Mississippi River.

Image courtesy of Maria Lee.

Collective Impact

One way to view the Network and how it functions is through the lens of collective impact, the concept that a group of organizations work together on a common agenda through collaboration. It hinges on the idea that, in order to form lasting solutions to issues, people need to work together toward a common goal. The Network seeks to be an umbrella group and identify the common goals that unite us and focus on that instead of the issues that we differ on. The common agenda is the first tenet critical to collective impact. All participating organizations have a shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem. A Network policy priority illustrates this. The Network focused on the implementation of the Clean Water Act, a federal piece of legislation that covers the discharge of pollutants into our water bodies. Together, MRN supported the clarification of this act and wanted to see it implemented by Congress. We held weekly calls to strategize, created a tool kit of materials to educate the general public and decision makers on the importance of this rule and how the Mississippi River would benefit, and created action alerts for our River Citizens to let Congress know they also supported the implementation of the Clean Water Rule. We saw wild success in people taking advocacy actions because people care about clean drinking water, which the Clean Water Act protects. And we saw measurable success by seeing Congress not block the implementation of this rule, instead allowing the objections to play out in court.

The next tenet to collective impact is to have a shared measurement system for success and how it will be reported. Being funded by foundations, we have a built-in measurement system that comes in the form of grant reporting. Additionally, the MRN steering committee

tackled this by agreeing on ways to measure internal Network success by looking at member engagement across key areas: participation in a committee, participation in meetings, participation in policy actions, and participation in the *1 Mississippi* campaign.

The third tenet for collective impact is mutually reinforcing activities, which means having coordinated engagement through various activities to support the common agenda. Again, we can look to the Clean Water Act policy priority to see how this works in practice. As mentioned above, various member organizations worked together on this priority and created a myriad of tools—letters to the editor, fact sheets, action alerts, blog postings—for any interested organization, MRN member or not, to use to encourage Congress to implement the Clean Water Rule.

Another tenet essential to collective impact is the existence of a backbone organization with an independent staff dedicated to the coalition. The staff plays six roles to move the initiative forward: guide vision and strategy, support aligned activity, establish shared measurement practices, build public will, advance policy, and mobilize funding. This support helps build out success instead of expecting volunteers to make time to manage all the aspects of a large network. The staff writes the grants and reports, manages all aspects of the campaign and the policy work, and makes sure that the work of the campaign and policy priorities are aligned and moving on parallel tracks to achieve the same result. Staff also manages the grant budgets, manages the measurement tracking and success sharing, guides the building of public and political will, and is always looking for and applying for new funding opportunities. Staff is also responsible for communicating with the Network and providing avenues for MRN

member organizations to more easily connect and communicate with each other. This satisfies the last tenet of collective impact—continuous communication. Within the organization, this includes monthly committee calls, weekly emails, and use of an online communication tool. Communication with River Citizens comes in the form of a monthly e-newsletter, blog posting,

social media postings on Facebook and Twitter, posting of volunteer and education and engagement opportunities through our events calendar, or direct contact with campaign staff and emailed action alerts when there is an important petition to sign or a decision maker to reach out to about an issue facing the river.

The Principle of Give-Get

Fundamental to MRN is a basic principle by which we operate, the sense of give-get. What does that mean and how does that work? Give-get is the idea that members not only get benefits from being in the Network, but also give of their time, capacity, and strengths to engage in the Network. It is a two-way street of engagement that overall makes the fibers of the Network stronger. When members are actively engaged and also benefiting from their engagement, the result is a stronger, healthy, functioning coalition.

Working together with 53 organizations to achieve health of the Mississippi River is not always easy—both because of the vast membership and the magnitude of the river—but we continue to see how very worthwhile it is. When we have success on a major issue like the Clean Water Act implementation, it reinforces that this work is important and worthwhile. It gives us the energy to keep pushing forward with the vision of a healthy Mississippi River for all.

Recommended Citation

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About the Author

Kelly McGinnis, Mississippi River Program Manager, joined the Network in September 2014. She works directly with network members in the ten-state Mississippi River region, building the coalition with the goal to protect and restore the river. Kelly comes from a diverse professional background, starting her career as a fisheries biologist and freshwater ecologist in Washington state before moving back to the Chicago area where her focus shifted to sustainability in the built environment and coalition building.

FEATURE

AN ORPHANED RIVER, A LOST DELTA

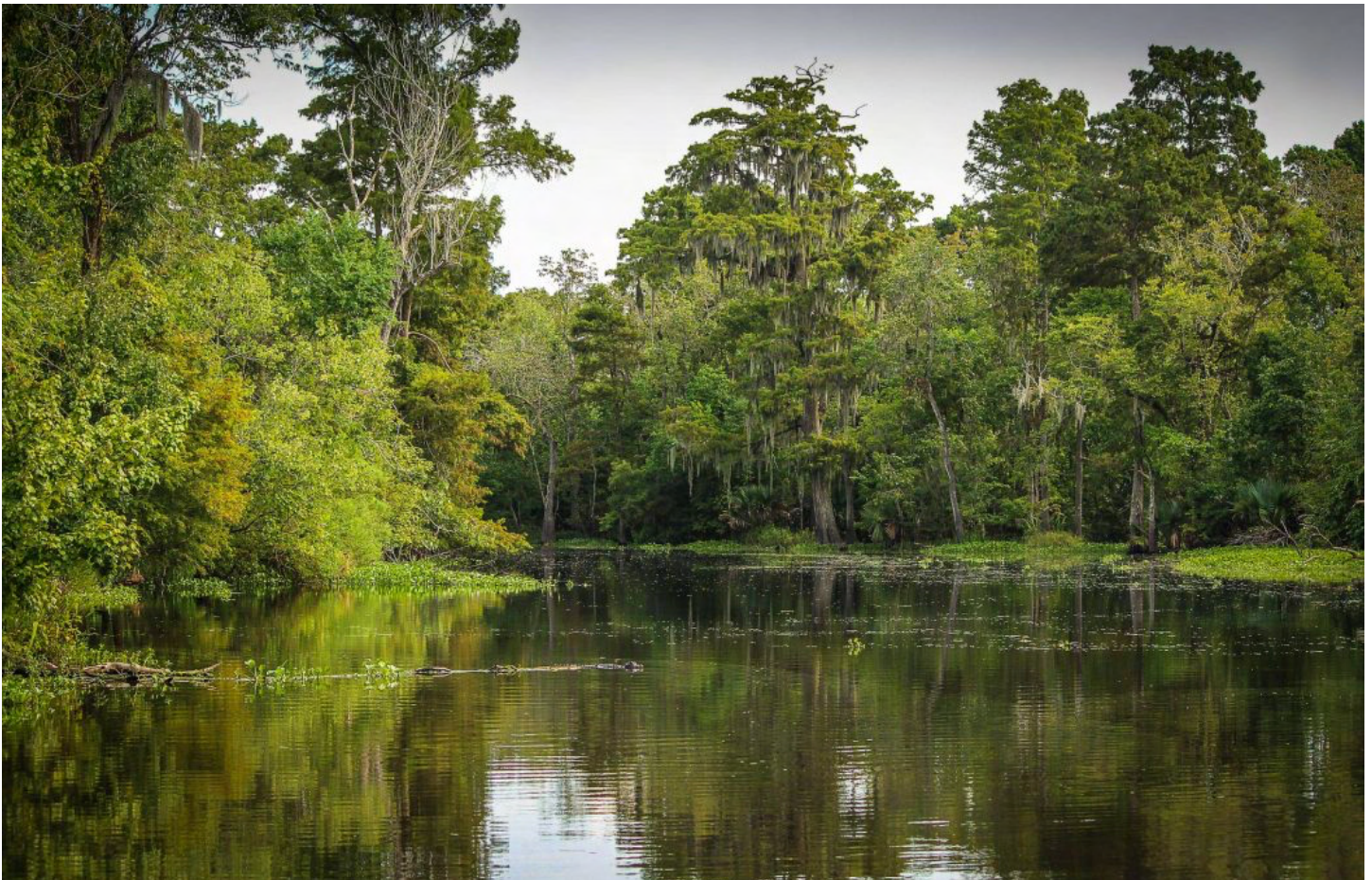
By Valsin A. Marmillion

Over thousands of years the Mississippi River deposited fresh water, nutrients, and sediment through a vast American territory to form one of the world’s grandest deltas. Today, Louisiana’s coastal wetlands—a critical ecosystem in this delta and a place we call “America’s Wetland”—is dying.

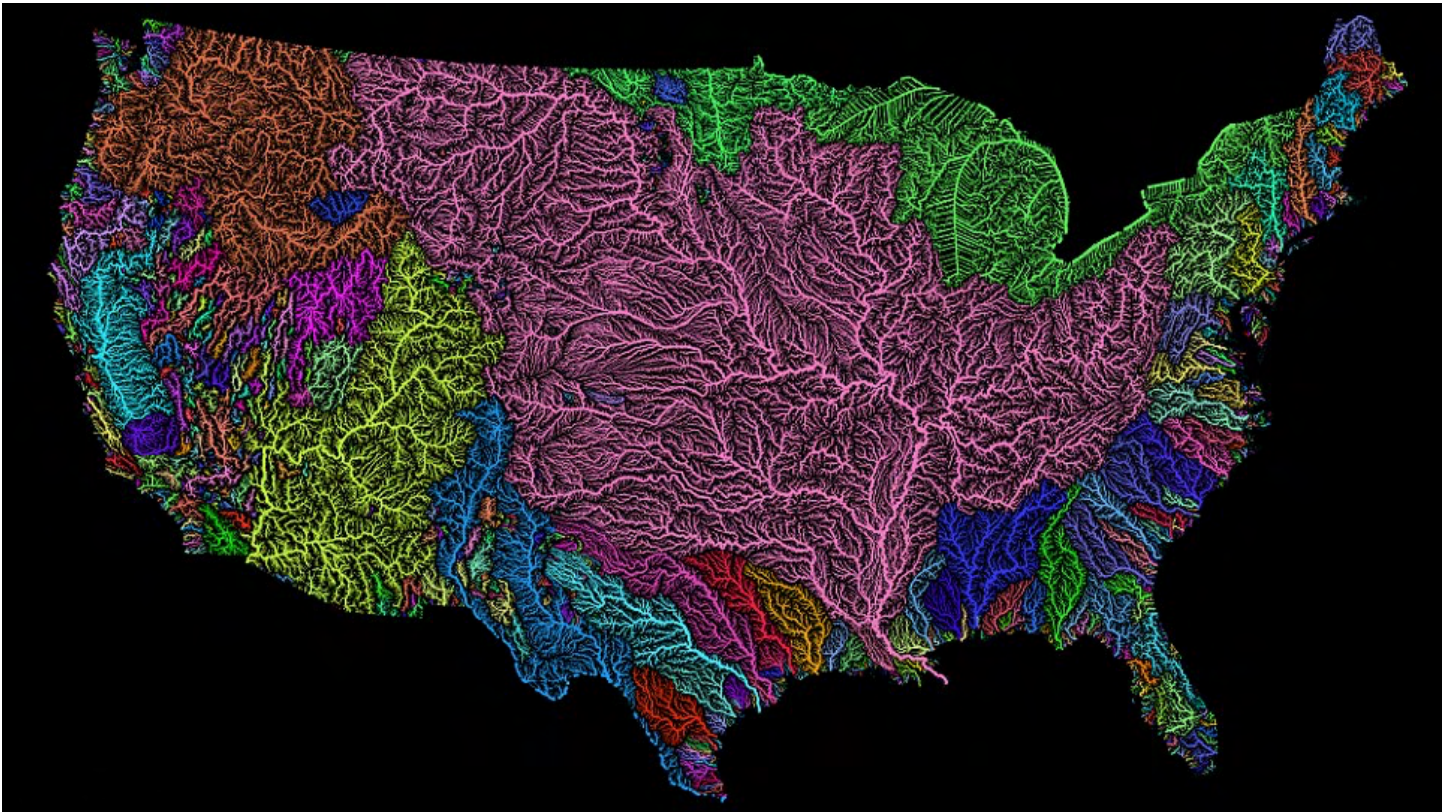
The Mississippi River Delta is the seventh largest deltaic region in the world, created as the river periodically flooded over 6,000 years. The delta’s lifeline was in deposits derived from a drainage

basin comprising 41 percent of what is now the continental United States.[i]

From the Mississippi’s waters, an amazingly complex ecosystem of freshwater swamp, salt-water marshes, and forests grew into 3 million acres, or approximately 6,000 square miles of wetlands, an area twice the size of the Everglades that represents 40 percent of the nation’s coastal wetlands in the lower 48 states.[ii]



Louisiana wetlands. By JamesDeMers [CCo], via Wikimedia Commons.



This map highlights (in pink) the massive expanse of river basins across the country that feeds the Mississippi River. Image Courtesy Robert Szucs, <https://www.etsy.com/shop/GrasshopperGeography>



A dramatization of a flooded Tiger Stadium at Louisiana State University. Courtesy America's WETLAND Foundation.

Through the centuries, this fragile wetland has been subsiding under its own weight, only to be rebuilt annually by new sediments and nutrients, the natural process for sustainability.

Today, the equivalent of a football field of land is being lost every hour.[iii] During the past 80

years, almost 2,000 square miles of Louisiana's coast has turned to open water, posing a lethal threat to an important ecosystem and an energy and shipping corridor vital to the nation's economy.

The Problem

After the Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers responded to public demand for flood protection by building a vast levee system along the banks of the Mississippi River Valley. Historic documents show that at that time engineers and scientists raised concerns that the future of the Mississippi delta and its prolific wetlands would hang in the balance, but the outcry for action and the resulting political response created the massive public works project for levee construction.

View a silent film of the [1927 flood damage](#) by the U.S. Signal Corps and published in 1936, via USGS.

The ensuing years would see a complex system of locks and dams built by the federal government, trapping sediment, and starving the delta of the

natural processes that built it over the last 6,000 years. To compound the problem, the federal government also built jetties that jettison 150 million tons of sediment each year off the outer continental shelf, only to be lost to the depths of the Gulf of Mexico.[iv] Thus, federally sponsored programs, advancing subsidence, trapping of sediments, as well as oil and gas exploration canals and sea level rise have all been contributing factors threatening to seal a fate of economic and environmental destruction of this rare and valuable region.

View an animation showing the [proliferation of dams](#) based on data from the [National Inventory of Dams](#). Courtesy Irina Overeem, Ph.D., Research Scientist, University of Colorado, Boulder.

National Implications of Louisiana's Land Loss

Coastal Louisiana is of world ecological significance. The potential collapse of this intricate ecosystem where 95 percent of Gulf marine life spends all or part of their lifecycle and more than 10 million waterfowl winter each year will have catastrophic environmental consequences for wildlife habitat and marine species.[v]

It is also a working wetland; Louisiana is the third largest producer of petroleum, and the second largest producer of natural gas, supplying slightly more than one-quarter of the total U.S. production. It is from this area that distribution of energy for the entire eastern U.S. begins.



Tri-colored Heron, via National Park Service.

As the wetlands disappear, energy, shipping, and maritime infrastructure along the coast become exposed to open Gulf conditions. Wells, pipelines, ports, roads, and levees that are key to energy and commodity delivery become more vulnerable, the potential for damaging oil spills increases, and the probability of interruption of oil and gas production and distribution to the nation increases.

The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway runs through these coastal wetlands. This shallow-draft canal, an integral part of the inland transportation system of the United States, makes it possible to supply domestic and foreign markets with chemicals, agriculture products, and other essential

goods from America's heartland. Wetland loss along Louisiana's shore poses an immediate threat to this vital water transportation route once sheltered by wetlands and now experiencing open water conditions and channel widening as land is lost.

Louisiana's coastal wetlands also act as a natural buffer for coastal communities as the first line of defense against hurricanes and major storms. The rapidly eroding wetlands are integral to the safety and security of more than two million people and a truly unique culture inextricably tied to the land.

Creation of a National Movement

In response to this threat, the America's WETLAND Foundation (AWF) was established in Louisiana in 2002, in response to a comprehensive coastal study calling for the need to alert the state, nation, and world to the devastating loss of Louisiana's coastal wetlands and how that loss affects the rest of the nation. When AWF noted that Louisiana was losing the equivalent of



Media Interview of Commissioner Jay Dardenne, Louisiana's Director of Administration. Courtesy America's WETLAND Foundation.

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“a football field of land each hour,” the metaphor stuck and the reference became ubiquitous in media depictions of the impending tragedy.

Since then, AWF has developed a comprehensive strategic communications plan, which has been followed and updated annually to achieve substantial earned media results and position the dialogue in ways that keep a focus on the urgency of action to restore disappearing wetlands. AWF has effectively used public opinion, earned media, triggering events, conferences, and workshops to swing political and public support for wetland restoration.

The Foundation is perhaps best known for continuously demonstrating the link between a strong environment and a secure economy. It serves successfully as a neutral convener,

bringing diverse interests to the table to seek and establish solutions for ensuring the sustainability of the Gulf coast.

The Foundation is led by a diverse and accomplished board of directors, chaired by civic leader and former Whitney Bank chair, R. King Milling of New Orleans, LA, who also chairs the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Coastal Protection, Restoration, and Conservation in Louisiana. CEOs of national corporations and NGOs sit on the board along with civic and educational leaders.



America’s WETLAND Meeting in Chicago. Courtesy America’s WETLAND Foundation.

Solutions are at Hand

This board, together with partner organizations, scientists, and policy makers, has been working to find solutions for the loss of coastal wetlands. While there has been rigorous debate about how to save coastal Louisiana, the best science and engineering have led the way for restoring the coast. The depth of research and planning engaged in by the state of Louisiana is impressive and has led to reorganizing its government and creating the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. Recognizing that a comprehensive process was required, a master plan of solutions has been developed, including both integrated ecosystem restoration and hurricane protection. In its third iteration, Louisiana’s Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast addresses the notion of “multiple lines of offense”—the urgent need for aggressive, large-scale diversions and land creation measures designed to address the calamitous loss of land.[vi]

While there has been a rush toward more politically popular protection measures, restoration advocates, including AWF, have held firm that restoration cannot be left behind or we will pay



Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana

the price of wholesale ecosystem collapse, where other short-term and expensive measures may be sacrificed or compromised without the natural system of wetlands and barrier islands.

AWF continues to be a strong advocate for Louisiana’s Coastal Master Plan, and the 2017 plan now moves into implementation phases. (The plan is mandated by law to be updated and adapted every five years.) Earlier, the state modeled 109 high performing projects that could



*Louisiana Governor
John Bel Edwards.
Courtesy America’s
WETLAND Foundation.*

deliver measurable benefits to our communities and coastal ecosystem over the coming decades. The plan shows that if these projects are fully funded, the state could substantially increase flood protection for communities and create a sustainable coast.

The price tag for achieving success is upwards of \$50 billion and more is now on the table as protection measures for economic and community assets are part of the options.[vii] Many significant obstacles to comprehensive coastal restoration remain, including dedicated

funding, a lack of Federal commitment and an overabundance of red tape, and the potential for diverting funds held in a trust fund. Despite this, Louisiana's new Governor John Bel Edwards has stood firm in the face of shrinking state revenues.

After years of grassroots and stakeholder interaction, the America's WETLAND Foundation has outlined specific issues and identified 12 solutions articulated below. These solutions are grouped into three main categories of solution that overlap and intersect ecological actions, financial support, and policy.

Ecological Actions: Transition Projects

AWF has designed projects to promote innovation in project design and financing. Many coastal leaders understand that turning dirt immediately for large-scale projects will still mean years before achieving positive effects from building wetlands

or protection mechanisms. For that reason, the Foundation has focused its work on what it terms "transition projects" that will provide the ability to hold current wetland assets in place while waiting for larger projects to come on line.



*Newly created berm, ready for the installation of Vegetated EcoShield™.
Courtesy America's WETLAND Foundation.*

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One key example of these transition projects in action is work with the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW). For decades, navigable waterways designed to support transportation and commerce, such as the GIWW, have felt the effects of coastal erosion and the dramatic loss of coastal wetlands. The waterway, second in tonnage to the Mississippi River, experiences ongoing neglect as both the state of Louisiana and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers disagree about which entity is responsible for maintaining the channel built by the federal government.

In south Louisiana, the GIWW has become a virtual line of demarcation for erosion and wetland loss. In Lafourche Parish on the north side of the channel, the loss of shoreline has

resulted in widening of the channel, which has taken private land and resulted in the loss of vital fish and waterfowl habitat. In past years, private landowners at the project site have had to rebuild the embankment numerous times due to continual erosion caused by tidal surge and other forces. This AWF project was designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative green shoreline strategies in stabilizing wetland boundaries and fortifying embankments to prevent further land loss, while also highlighting that these strategies have potential for replication throughout the region and nation.

Both traditional and innovative technologies were used in the form of low-cost bucket dredges and the vegetated, recycled plastic matrix material



Lifting up of one layer of EcoShield to unveil roots of plants below. Courtesy America's WETLAND Foundation.

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called Vegetated EcoShield™, produced from recycled, post-consumer plastic that protects shorelines and stabilizes banks while promoting vegetative growth. By providing a protective medium for vegetation to establish, grow, and spread, it enhances the natural processes of the system by creating vegetated shorelines and important coastal habitats.

Phase One of the America's WETLAND Foundation Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) Shoreline Stabilization and Restoration Project

is complete; one mile of Vegetated EcoShield™ has been installed and planted to create habitat and provide protection from storm surge for the community of Larose and for critical energy infrastructure. The project provides a clear path for private investment to protect environmental, community, and economic assets at an affordable cost, about a sixth of the cost of similar projects using rocks.



EcoShield in the midst of installation. Courtesy America's WETLAND Foundation.

Multiple Lines of Offense

Louisiana’s coastal sustainability requires building “multiple lines of offense” that include reconnecting the Mississippi River with the wetlands through reintroduction of fresh water and sediments from the lower river into the upper basins and also possibly re-engineering the mouth of the river to achieve beneficial land building.[viii] Multiple lines of offense include: the immediate beneficial use of dredged material, fortification of ridges and barrier

islands, and the critical, long-term efforts such as Mississippi fresh water and sediment diversions. AWF believes Louisiana’s coastal program must proceed with transparency about realistic timelines and financing so that both commerce and communities can adapt to change. Incentives to provide greater community and private sector participation are needed immediately to stem the rising tide and coastal land loss.

Building with Nature

The Foundation supports restoring the natural processes of the Mississippi River, the Atchafalaya River and Bayou Lafourche both through the re-introduction of sediment and fresh water to the wetlands and through hydrological efforts needed to prevent accelerated land loss along the coast in the western part of the

state. These efforts are in keeping with measures in the Netherlands where more than 800 years of engineering has led to conclusions that long-term restoration requires utilizing nature’s natural processes in tandem with compatible measures for restoration and protection.[ix]



Six months after installation of EcoShield. Courtesy America’s WETLAND Foundation.

Beneficial Use of Dredged Materials

The Foundation promotes the beneficial use of dredged material to aid in restoration. To that end, the Foundation supports the U.S Army Corps of Engineers' Principles and Guidelines for Water Resources and calls for funding that would allow dredged materials from maintenance of

shipping channels to be used to restore coastal wetlands. A cost benefit analysis demonstrates that the cost to the U.S. of coastal land loss is much greater than the cost of beneficially utilizing dredged materials from our nation's largest river and other federally controlled waterways.

Beneficial Use of Carbon

The restoration and avoided loss of coastal wetlands and habitats offer significant potential for the sequestration of carbon, which could simultaneously restore ecosystem health while reducing greenhouse gases. In addition, coastal habitat restoration is a key strategy in adapting to changing climate conditions and helps to mitigate impacts. A tremendous potential exists

for public/private partnerships to simultaneously restore our coasts while mitigating for greenhouse gas emissions. The Foundation supports the development of science protocols for the use of wetlands for carbon sequestration, and endorses policy considerations for the beneficial use of carbon by the private and public sectors for recycling and reuse of carbon dioxide.

Financial Support: Innovation in Financing Ecosystem Restoration

Globally, in response to increased concerns about climate change and sea level rise, corporate shareholders and boards are seeking investments in ecosystem sustainability programs that yield competitive returns. New mechanisms can enable land-based offsets and the financial value of natural systems to effectively approach the scale of restoration needed if certain policies are adjusted is one possible approach. Wetland carbon sequestration is an added value that can induce

more financing to mitigation banking and Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) credits; if allowed for large-scale mitigation, wetland carbon sequestration in Louisiana can facilitate large venture capital plays. In October, AWF organized a convening of public and private sector leaders and outlined the case for restoration using private financing by establishing greater certainty for investment financing of large-scale restoration and ecosystem valuing parameters.

Dedicated Funding for Coastal Restoration

The America's WETLAND Foundation supports the creation of dedicated funding streams for coastal restoration along America's coasts. One

funding stream should come from increasing the sharing of offshore revenues for coastal restoration as called for in the Gulf of Mexico Energy

Security Act (GOMESA). In addition, RESTORE grants from BP oil spill fines should be carefully monitored to ensure the funding aligns with high probability restoration solutions. Finally, establishing specific national funding mechanisms to address the need for adaptation and resiliency

strategies would be an enduring funding solution for a majority of the U.S. population residing in coastal communities who face climate change impacts of increased sea level rise and storm related events.

Use of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund as Intended

America's WETLAND Foundation contends that funds from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund be made available at the outset of each annual Congressional Budget Cycle for the US Army Corps of Engineers.[x] AWF also urges Congress and the Administration to mandate this funding be used for its intended original purpose—the

operation and maintenance of America's ports and harbors and navigable waterways. AWF also suggests that the Corps be authorized and funded to beneficially use dredged materials from these efforts.



*AWF's October Coastal Restoration Leadership Roundtable.
Courtesy America's WETLAND Foundation.*

Policy:

Resolution of Conflicting Federal Policies

The federal processes in place to address the restoration and protection of this vulnerable coastline are fraught with conflicting agency missions and policies. Existing policies and regulations are expensive, cumbersome, slow, and without regard to the unique nature of coastal landscapes and functions of this region that directly benefit and have an impact on the rest of the nation. Understanding unprecedented urgency and the scale of restoration and protection in America's coastal regions, immediate action and a national resolve are critical to restore environmental, economic, and energy assets at risk. With the emergence of the RESTORE Council to distribute

BP fine monies, a coordinated effort by federal agencies is promising.

AWF will continue to seek the commitment of Congress and the new Administration to resolve conflicting federal policies and to change federal procedures that slow and often prevent the ability to restore, rehabilitate, protect, and sustain coastal regions. The Foundation has issued detailed reports and met with federal agencies to help identify federal impediments, to act effectively, to design mechanisms for streamlining the process to sustain the region, and to focus on innovation in rule-making to speed restoration work.[xi]

Emergency Permitting for Restoration

The Foundation endorses the development of an emergency rule that would expedite restoration projects meeting the priorities of approved coastal plans. This permitting would prevent environmental degradation caused by lengthy delays

and cost overruns associated with the current regulatory delays and impasses. Mitigation for environmentally beneficial projects also burdens the process and inhibits costly restoration in a timely manner.

Establishment of a Federal Coastal Restoration Agency

The lack of a focused mission in any funded federal agency that drives coastal priorities is leading to irrevocable degradation of the Gulf Coast with enormous economic, environmental, and social consequences. The Foundation favors the formation of a consolidated federal coastal

restoration agency based on the principles of the RESTORE Council to "restore the coastline of the United States of America" through a comprehensive approach that fast tracks restoration efforts and coordinates priorities across agencies.

Revised Mitigation Policies

Mitigation for environmentally beneficial projects can be a major barrier to funding coastal restoration projects. The Foundation recommends a review of mitigation policies and the elimination

of mitigation for projects that increase coastal sustainability and restoration. In addition, AWF contends that preserving healthy wetlands should earn private landowners mitigation credits rather

than penalizing the act of private restoration. Private land owners need incentives to proceed immediately to restore their land consistent with federal and state plans. As such, AWF believes that incentive programs should be created for landowners and industry willing to fund and build restoration projects. Development of an environmental exchange with an inventory of projects for private support should be utilized.

This will continue to bring the complexities of coastal restoration and its financial, environmental, and social consequences to the public's attention. The history of Foundation approaches shows encouraging results and continues to move the needle of political will necessary to address the menacing challenges that could sink a state and nation's economy.

Footnotes

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About the Author

Valsin A. Marmillion is managing director of America’s WETLAND Foundation (AWF). Marmillion has managed the work of AWF since 2002. AWF serves as a respected Gulf Coast voice for preserving the environmental, economic and community assets of the region. With more than a decade of Congressional service and drafting legislation impacting coastal zones, Marmillion combines his 30 years of public outreach experience with deep knowledge of coastal policy.

PERSPECTIVES

THE NATIONAL RIVER ORGANIZATIONS

By John Helland

Citizens who appreciate the importance and preservation of our country's natural resources know that governmental agencies need assistance to do their jobs. That's why in the conservation arena so many not-for-profit or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are acting to augment and monitor the work of the government agencies.

When it comes to rivers—recreation, management, governance, protection, restoration—national nonprofit river groups make a significant contribution. What follows is a description of the five major NGOs active on rivers in the United States.



*The Mississippi River in Minnesota, by Ken Ratclif (Flickr)
[CC BY 2.0], via Wikimedia Commons.*

American Rivers

American Rivers is a Washington, D. C.-based nonprofit with the largest board and staff of the five NGOs, 26 board members and 80 full-time staff. Some of the staff are situated in nine regional offices around the country.

Created in 1973 by river advocates, it can be called “the Granddaddy” of national river organizations in size. American Rivers was formed initially to fight unnecessary dams on the nation’s free-flowing rivers and to add new rivers to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, which was created by Congress in 1968. American Rivers’ goal is to help maintain for the nation clean, healthy rivers that sustain and connect U. S. citizens. The members and staff serve as advocates to protect wild and scenic rivers, restore damaged rivers, and conserve clean waterways.

Working with Congress and federal agencies, such as the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service, American Rivers advocacy also utilizes field work on particular threatened

ivers. They have an annual program that identifies the ten rivers in the country most under threat to be impaired or endangered. This garners a lot of media attention in April each year.

The increasing concern about the effects of climate change on natural resource systems has caused American Rivers to identify the potential impacts on river systems. They also have studied and explained the benefits of restoring flood plains, the toxic legacy of fracking and mining, and the damage caused by pipeline failures on rivers.

Lately, American Rivers has been promoting integrated water management, which is a system to manage water as a single resource, along with adopting proven technology and policies to promote the natural water cycle. Their work in this area is mostly with cities and water utilities to embrace and utilize the integrated water management approach locally.

River Network

River Network is a group created in 1988 in Portland, Oregon, but now based in Boulder, Colorado. It works on the local level with river advocates more than American Rivers does, and has a board of 15 members and a staff of 11.

River Network believes in three key ingredients for healthy rivers: clean water, ample water, and strong champions. The organization primarily serves as a helping network to empower and unite citizens and communities to protect and restore rivers.

River Network helps move the local effort on river issues with a bottom-up approach through different levels of government—local, regional, state, and federal. They work to encourage local friends’ groups of river advocates by providing a wide variety of services to advance the cause of healthy rivers. These services include mentoring, consulting, training, technical assistance, scientific support, and hands-on facilitation to strengthen the local effort. They also sponsor events and conferences.

River Network offers small grants and training in the use of best practices on rivers. Each year they sponsor a large River Rally to bring local groups and river advocates together, and to provide educational presentations and individual

awards for success in their effort. The rally always takes place in a part of the country that is near an iconic river, so the participants can enjoy paddling fun.

The River Management Society

The River Management Society (RMS) is a group of river professionals and supporters who study, protect, and manage North American rivers. Created in 1996 from two groups formed in the 1980s, RMS has a board of 13 and a staff of 2, with offices in Washington, D. C.

The goals of RMS are to provide professional development, scientific information and education, communication on policy development and decision-making at all levels, and capacity building through collaboration.

There are eight regional chapters of RMS, including one in Canada, that hold meetings and regional field trips to discuss river management issues. RMS prides itself on using a wide variety of forums to share information and connect river professionals regarding the appropriate use and management of river resources.

RMS works on hydropower reform and relicensing that emphasizes recreation and carrying capacity for river allocation. They conduct

several online workshops and webinars annually. They also keep tabs on which rivers require governmental permits for access, or which have bathroom waste disposal requirements.

One of the new projects for RMS is a national river recreation database with information for the general public on river access points, paddling difficulty rating, and available campgrounds. Another recent program is the River Studies and Leadership Certificate, which partners with several colleges to offer undergraduates select courses to enable them to join the next generation of river professionals working in the field.

Each year RMS has an annual River Ranger Rendezvous, sponsored by one of the regional chapters, that brings professionals together to combine a river trip and discuss common river management issues. Biennially, RMS conducts a river management symposium on international training related to planning and management topics for its members.

American Whitewater

American Whitewater (AW) formed in 1954 to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy the rivers safely. It is a membership organization

of individuals and more than 100 local paddling clubs. Twelve board members and ten full-time staff make up the organization's governance. Their current office is in the town of Cullowhee,

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North Carolina, which offers ample whitewater nearby.

AW seeks to connect the interests of human-powered river recreationists with ecological and science-based data resources. They maintain a national inventory of whitewater rivers, monitor potential threats to the rivers, promote public advocacy for whitewater management and for legislation, and provide technical support for local whitewater clubs. They also pursue and protect access and navigability on whitewater rivers.

In the Midwest, AW proposed concepts of Wisconsin law to protect rivers that U. S. Senator

Gaylord Nelson used in creating the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers law. Also in Wisconsin, AW pushed a dam removal program and dam relicensing for recreational paddlers.

AW helped create the international scale of whitewater difficulty, Class I–Class VI, for whitewater enthusiasts to know the gradient of various rivers. They regularly sponsor several whitewater festivals and paddling events around the country.



*Arcola Bridge on the St. Croix River, north of Stillwater, Minnesota.
Image from the Metropolitan Design Center Image Bank, Copyright the Regents of the
University of Minnesota. All rights Reserved. Used with permission.*

American Canoe Association

American Canoe Association (ACA), now 100 years old, is located in Fredericksburg, Virginia. It has 15 board members and 18 staff people. The ACA's mission is to provide people with paddling instruction and education in all its aspects. While this includes paddling any form of water resources—rivers, lakes, oceans, and estuaries—ACA promotes stewardship to protect these environments, and sanctions various events and programs for paddlesport exploration, competition, and recreation. They desire to make paddlesport opportunities both fun and safe for the public.

ACA attempts to make paddling education and instruction accessible to everyone interested,

including underserved communities. They regularly communicate paddlesport benefits as healthy lifetime activities, and create strategic alliances with other groups to expand awareness and knowledge.

A Safety and Education Council and certification program for paddlers is a major part of ACA work. They also provide a regular insurance program for local paddling clubs and events. ACA promotes a system of state directors to establish local programs to increase membership and to facilitate communication with the national office.

Collaboration

The five major national river NGOs play a prominent role in their primary focus areas and common collaboration efforts to assure that Americans know about their river resources and the need to help protect them.

American Rivers serves in a traditional advocate role for river issues, especially on a national level. There is collaboration and communication between American Rivers, American Whitewater, and the River Management Society on hydro-power relicensing and dam removal on certain rivers, but not always on a regular basis. RMS also has used AW's inventory and information on whitewater streams in order to develop their own national river recreation database.

River Network also does advocacy work, but more on the local level in terms of capacity building and education on how to promote river issues for desired results.

Because RMS is mainly composed of river professionals, both government and private, their meetings and symposia provide a wealth of cross-pollination between the major river NGOs and the public agencies active in the field. In the same vein, River Network's annual river rallies attract a lot of participants who may be members of two or three of the other NGOs, and whose networking and communication at the rallies leads to more collaboration possibilities among the NGOs.

Risa Shimoda, the Executive Director of RMS, has said that not only do rivers play a central role in shaping landscapes and creating biologically diverse and unique ecosystems, they also form the foundation of cultures, economies, and communities. Rivers connect us to nature, to our past, and to each other.

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About the Author

John Helland served as the nonpartisan research analyst for two environmental committees in the Minnesota House of Representatives for 36 years. Now retired, John serves on a variety of nongovernmental environment boards. As a longtime river lover, he greatly enjoys paddling on midwestern and western streams.

IN REVIEW

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET'S *WATER/WAYS*

By Joanne Richardson

In November 2016, I visited *Water/Ways*, hosted from October 1 to November 13 at the Goodhue County Historical Society in Red Wing, Minnesota. This traveling exhibition and community engagement initiative— which then moved on to Sandstone, Minnesota—is part of the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street and is

available at a series of venues nationwide through April 2017. *Water/Ways* is touring Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wyoming; visit the Tour Schedule for more details.

Partners involved in Minnesota's exhibitions include the Minnesota Humanities Center,



Water/Ways exhibition in the atrium of the Goodhue County Historical Society.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Section of the American Water Works Association, and six community hosts in greater Minnesota: Spicer, St. Peter, Red Wing, Sandstone, Lanesboro, and Detroit Lakes.

The *Water/Works* exhibition comes straight from the Smithsonian and forms the base of the experience, supplemented with exhibits specific to the state and hosting institution's region. Each host, therefore, offers a unique and specialized experience to its visitors. As an added benefit for visitors to Red Wing, this exhibit also provided an opportunity to visit the Historical Society and its thoughtful permanent exhibits.

From the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street [web site](#):

The Smithsonian's *Water/Ways* exhibition dives into water—essential component of life on our planet, environmentally, culturally, and historically.

In societies across the globe, water serves as a source of peace and contemplation. Many faiths revere water as a sacred symbol. Authors and artists are inspired by the

duality of water – a substance that is seemingly soft and graceful that is yet a powerful and nearly unstoppable force.

Water also plays a practical role in American society. The availability of water affected settlement and migration patterns. Access to water and control of water resources have long been a central part of political and economic planning. Human creativity and resourcefulness provide new ways of protecting water resources and renewing respect for the natural environment.

The exhibit I visited was being hosted at the Goodhue County Historical Society in Red Wing, an attractive river town on the banks of the Mississippi River, north of Lake Pepin in Minnesota. Nestled snugly among bluffs, hills, farms, and forests, the town and surrounding area are appealingly picturesque.

The main part of the exhibit, from the Smithsonian, was formed of dramatically curving panels in the atrium of the historical society. Methodically, not wanting to miss anything, I started at one end and tried to fully experience each panel before I moved on to the next. The richness, variety, and layers of information



View of Red Wing and the Mississippi River from the Goodhue County Historical Society.



The curved panels of the exhibition create spaces for exploration.



Not merely blurbs of text, the rich imagery and interactive displays keep the information fresh and varied.

proved to make this challenging. The exhibit lends itself, appropriately, to exploration and discovery, rather than methodical review.

The content of the displays included themes that explored the behavior and material physicality of water and interventions upon it, functional aspects of water from agriculture to drinking water, meaning and placemaking, and culture and heritage. The displays included interesting facts, discussions, and sources, as well as a few well-chosen interactive elements, to the delight of the pokers, prodders, and children visiting.

They were illustrated throughout with excellent photographs and diagrams.

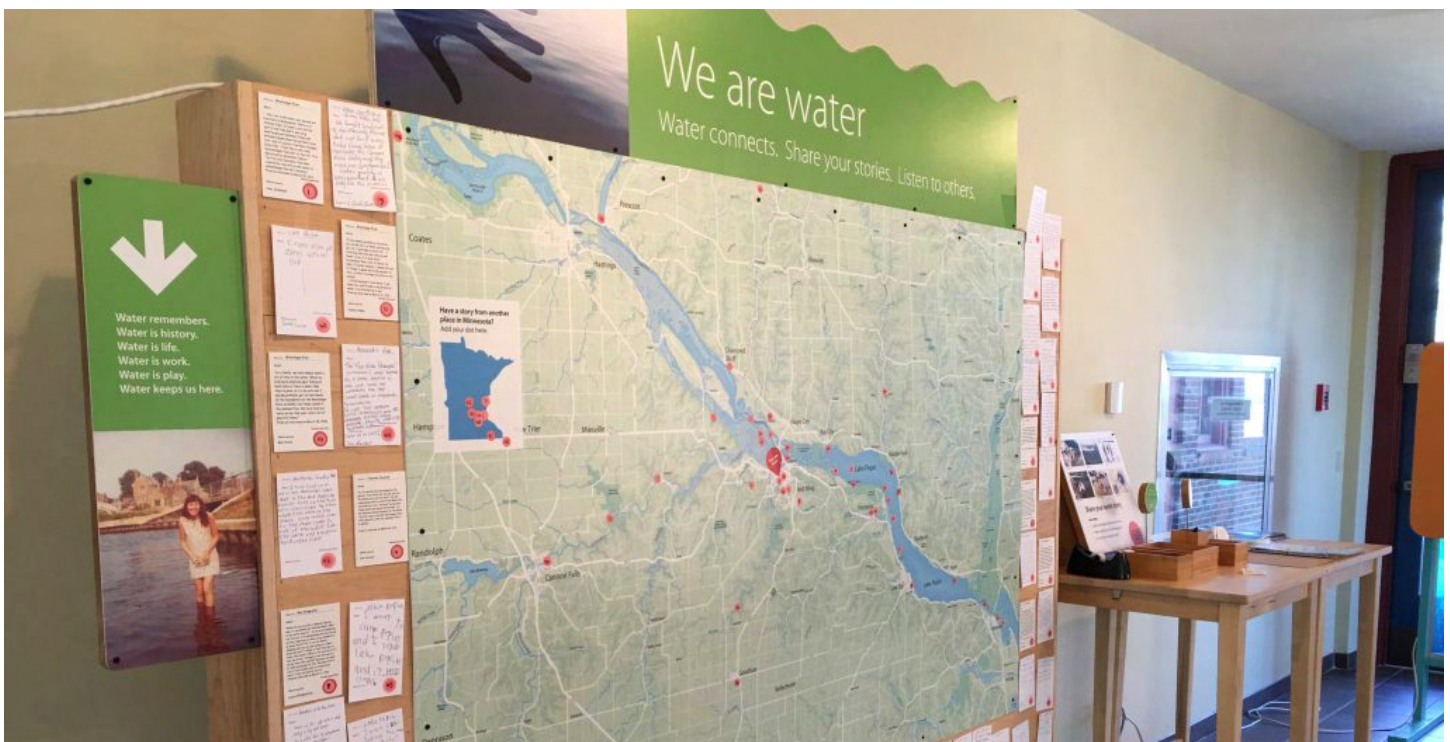
The statewide partners provided a mapping exhibit called *We are Water*, which allows the visitor to read personal stories about the water landscape adjacent to Red Wing, and to contribute his or her own stories directly on the map. I contributed one, but it was unclear from the exhibit whether this would be preserved in perpetuity, or if the stories would be ephemerally wiped away with each successive generation of visitor.



The exhibit's interactive displays read well at a distance, as well as up close.



Tactile displays illustrating the Elwha River watershed are appealing to adults and children alike.



The We are Water display encourages examination of the stories of nearby water landscapes, as well as inspires the visitor to contribute his or her own story.

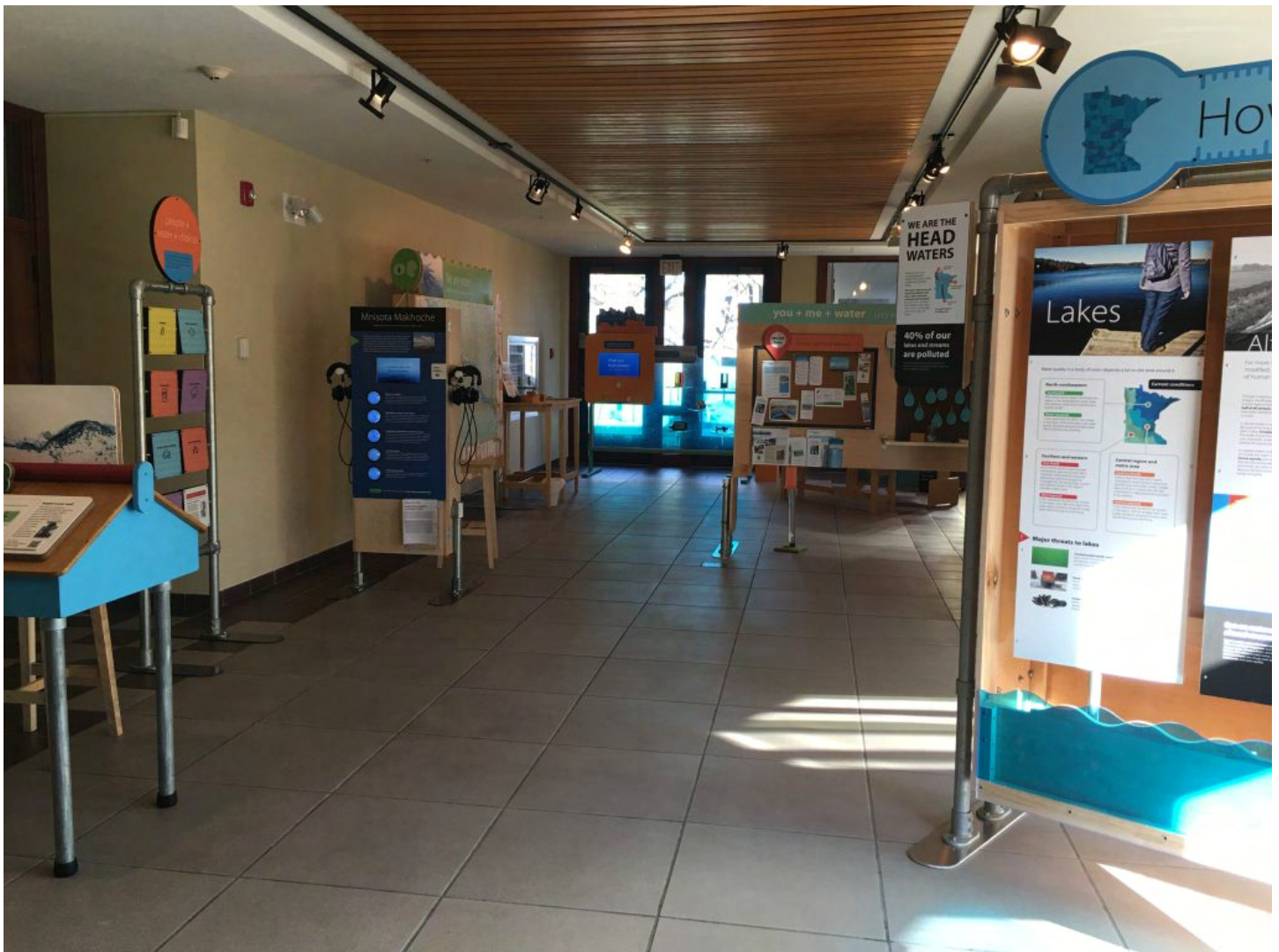
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The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency provided an excellent interactive exhibit titled *How's the Water?* which took a more focused look at water quality and quantity, and issues of stewardship. With hands-on components and clear messaging, this exhibit is particularly well suited to hands-on visitors, especially children.

The exhibit also included two interactive kiosks that allow the visitor to choose from a large array of multimedia stories about rivers and water. Initially thinking they were gimmicks, I found myself immersed and lost track of time. At the time, they felt as though they were the real-world manifestations of the lessons and questions

presented and posed in the rest of the exhibition. Unable to review all of the content without dramatically adjusting my travel arrangements, I was curious to discover if the content of the kiosks (and the panels) would be made available online at some point.

After finishing the crisp, modern exhibition in the main atrium, I went deeper into the museum to explore a new Historical Society exhibit that made its debut during *Water/Ways*, and will remain at the museum. This exhibit has four main themes; Cloudy Waters, Sacred Water, Consuming Water, Protecting Water.



How's the Water? encourages play and exploration, and strongly connects the exhibits to water issues specific to Minnesota.

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All the exhibits were very interesting, but in particular, I was drawn to *Cloudy Waters*, an installation by Mona Smith, a Sisseton–Wahpeton Dakota Oyate artist born and raised in Red Wing, Boulders and a nestlike wreath of twigs surround a small blue pool, lightly illuminated in a calm and shadowy room. Projected into the pool from above are images that fade in and out: clouds, fish, waterfalls, landscapes. All this was overlaid by sounds of water, loons, and Dakota voices talking about water, place, meaning, and indigeneity. Reminding us to start with the indigenous, *Cloudy Waters* illustrated clearly that people

have lived here for thousands of years, and are still living here today. We would do well to listen to their knowledge and experiences.

Water/Ways is thoughtful, detailed, complicated, and accessible, and the opportunity it has provided for partner institutions to develop additional exhibitions is extraordinary. The addition of the Goodhue County Historical Society's new permanent exhibit is an enduring reminder that water issues are not fleeting, but are ongoing, and is well worth a visit long after *Water/Ways* has moved on.



Cloudy Waters is also on permanent display at Mill City Museum and The Science Museum of Minnesota.

Other *Water/Ways* venues include:

- [Audubon Center of the North Woods](#) (Sandstone, Minnesota), Nov. 19, 2016 – Jan. 1, 2017
- [Lanesboro Arts](#) (Lanesboro, Minnesota), Jan. 7 – Feb. 19, 2017
- [Becker County Historical Society](#) (Detroit Lakes, Minnesota), Feb. 25 – Apr. 9, 2017

For more information

- [Water/Ways](#)
- [Museum on Main Street](#)
- [Smithsonian](#)
- [Goodhue County Historical Society](#)

All images in this article courtesy of River Life, University of Minnesota.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

TREATIES & TERRITORY: RESOURCE STRUGGLES AND THE LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE U.S./AMERICAN INDIAN RELATIONSHIP

By Laura Matson

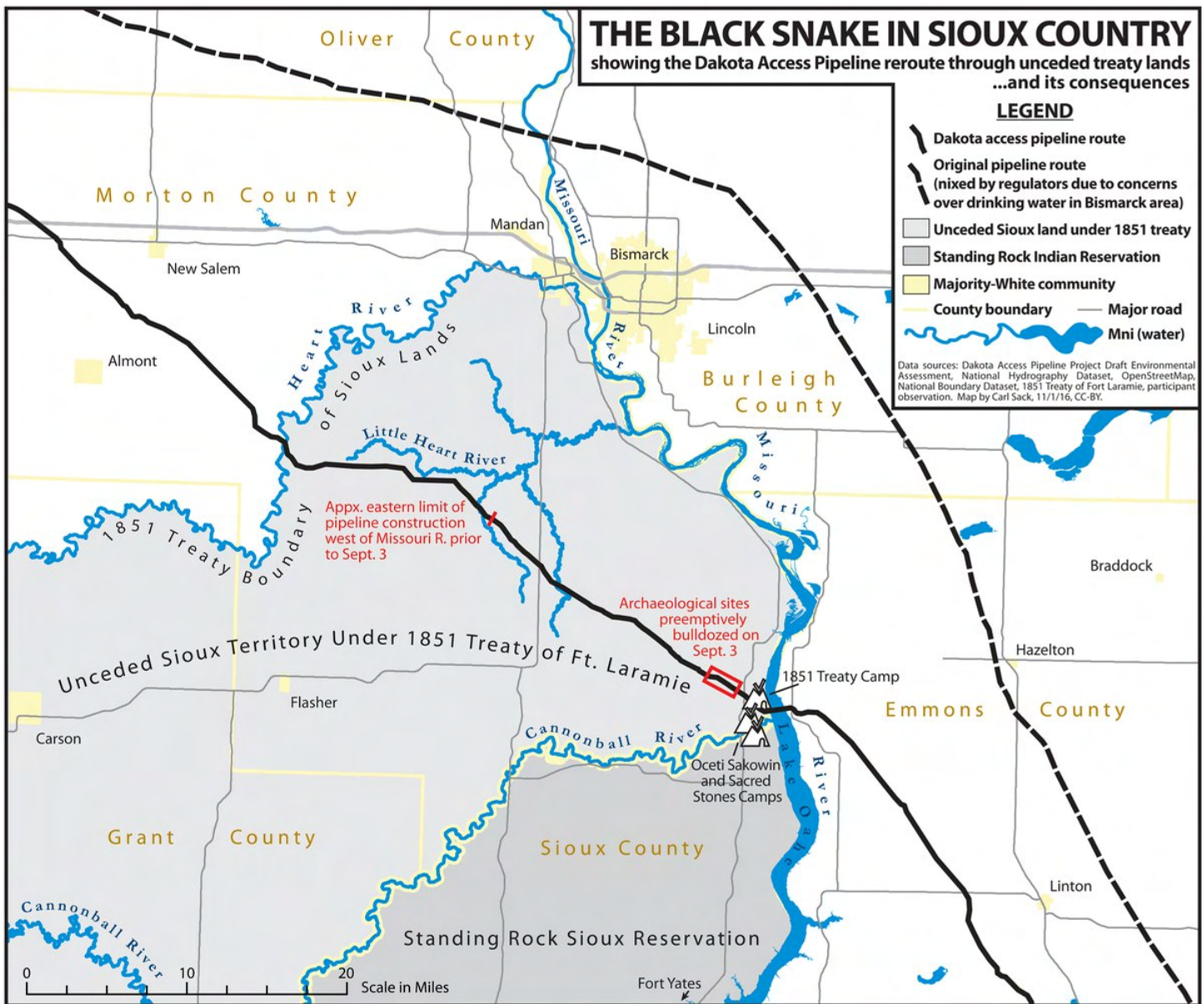


Small bay on Lake Oahe on the Missouri River. By Argylis, via Flickr, CC-BY-2.0.

In April 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe began organizing a campaign to challenge the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline through territories just north of their reservation and across the Missouri River and Lake Oahe, the tribe’s primary water source. The tribe, and its supporters, contest that the pipeline’s route threatens their fundamental water supply and that insufficient environmental review and consultation with tribes threatens tribal sovereignty. Since that time, a movement has grown at Standing Rock, inspiring the largest gathering

of American Indian tribes in over a century. In attempting to understand this historical contestation over water resources and tribal sovereignty, the question of treaty rights has been on the lips of Standing Rock water protectors[1], as well as scholars, community leaders, politicians, and commentators.

Treaties signed by American Indian tribes and the colonial, and later, federal governments between the 1600s and 1871 gave rise to physical and legal landscapes that remain vitally important



The Black Snake in Sioux Country, showing the Dakota Access Pipeline reroute through unceded treaty lands and its consequences. Map by Carl Sack, November 1, 2016, CC-BY.

to American Indian sovereignty, Constitutional law, and questions of resource protection in the United States. Treaty history is complex, and treaty documents themselves are charged with unequal power dynamics, problems of interpretation, and unforeseen consequences. Many treaties were signed under specious circumstances, or with inconsistent understandings by participants as to what the treaty ultimately signified. Indeed, the histories of treaty making—and breaking—are foundational to tribal/federal relationships, American law, and the violent westward expansion of the United States in the 1800s.

Members of the Sioux Nation—a group comprising several distinct tribes—signed over 30 treaties with the U.S. government between 1805 and 1868. Two of these—the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie and the 1868 Treaty with the Sioux and Arapaho—are essential to understanding the contemporary relationship between Sioux tribes and the U.S. government. Though Congress passed a statute that ceased treaty-making with

American Indian tribes in 1871, treaties remain important legal documents that recognize tribal nations as sovereign entities. Further, treaties establish American Indian tribes' unique political status as groups set apart by their sovereignty, rather than ethnicity.

Treaties, and the circumstances surrounding their negotiation, also provide some of our clearest insights into the fraught and dynamic encounter between American Indians and settlers in the burgeoning United States. Legal scholar Robert Williams, Jr. argues that treaties must be understood as an engagement between colonial law and American Indian visions of law, marked by cycles of confrontation and accommodation over time (Williams 1997, 7). The Fort Laramie treaties of 1851 and 1868 document this confrontation and accommodation, mediated through two very different legal traditions, and provide important insights into negotiations over the legal, social, and political interactions between tribes and the government.

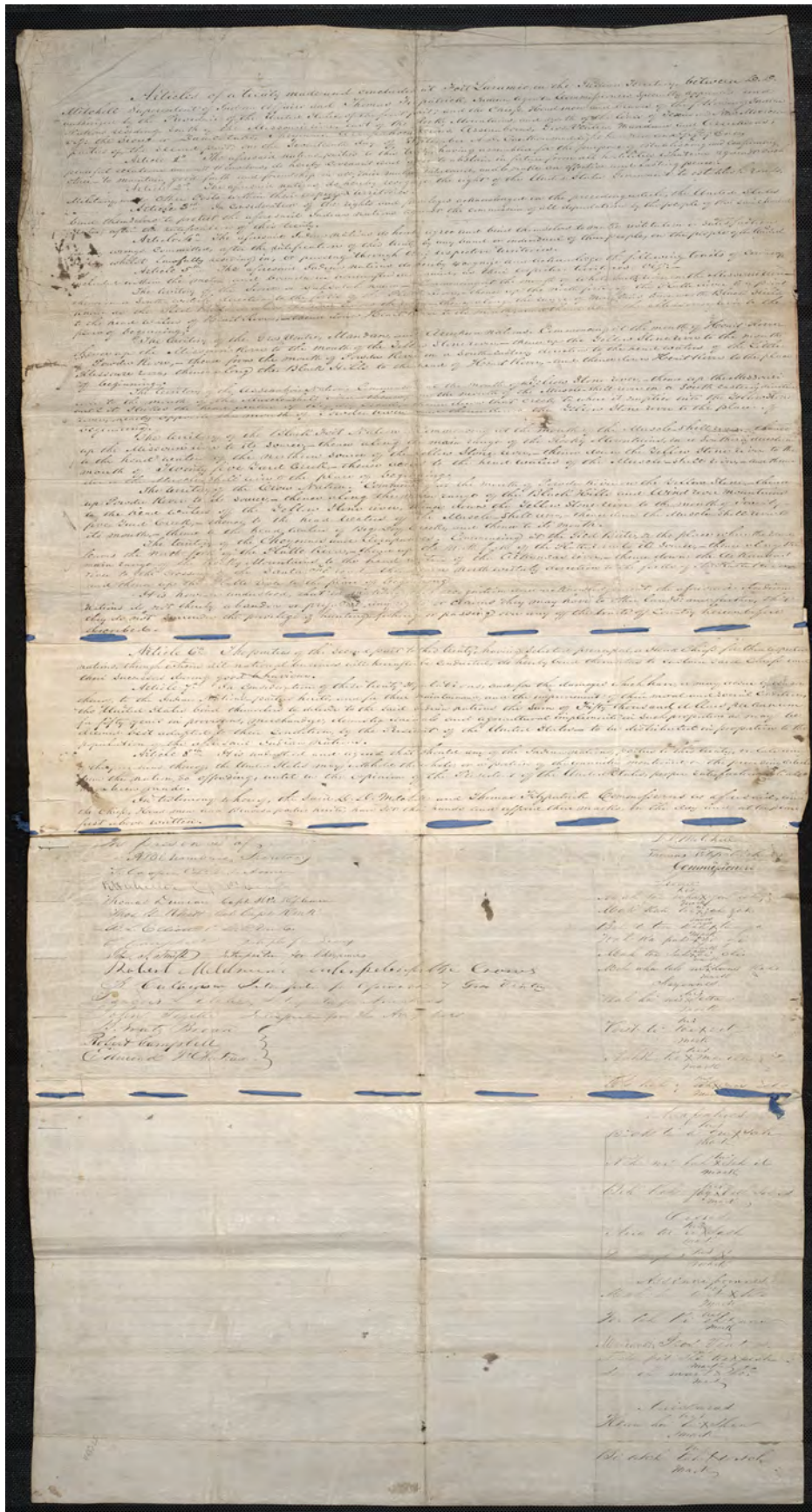
Treaty of Horse Creek (Fort Laramie), 1851

By late August 1851, tens of thousands of Cheyenne, Sioux, Arapaho, Crow, Assiniboine, Hidatsa, Mandan, Gros Ventre, and Arikara peoples gathered approximately thirty miles south of Fort Laramie—which was unable to accommodate the large number of attendees—at the mouth of Horse Creek in present day Western Nebraska. They, along with nearly 300 U.S. federal representatives and soldiers, convened a treaty council to address increasing migration of settlers and gold prospectors into Western territories and ongoing territorial conflicts between tribes.

The ensuing negotiations, and the treaty document that emerged, dealt with conflicts between American Indian nations and with the U.S., addressed increased westward expansion by settlers and prospectors, and reflected both Indigenous

and American legal traditions. According to anthropologist Loretta Fowler, the treaty council was conducted in accordance with Native custom—treaty participants and government officials distributed food and gifts, superintendent of Indian Affairs D.D. Mitchell conducted individual meetings with each tribe, and proceedings were founded upon ceremony and an expectation of mutual trust (Fowler 2015, 365). The U.S. government agreed to respect tribal lands, and bind its military to protect tribal interests in these lands, took responsibility for compensating any depredations to tribes by Americans, and agreed to a limited term of annuity payments.

The treaties made claims on the physical landscape, and the landscape formed the boundaries of the treaty. Horse Creek provided water and



Horse Creek Treaty, 1851, via National Archives, Washington, D.C.

sustenance for the unprecedented gathering of treaty parties, their families, and their horses; area rivers—the Missouri, Heart, Platte, Yellowstone, Powder, White Earth, Big Dry Creek, and Musselshell (referred to as Muscleshell in the treaty)—established vital reference points and shaped the contours of the treaty maps. While the U.S. government had an interest in clearly demarcating tracts of land and jurisdictional boundaries, tribes reserved off-reservation hunting and subsistence rights, preserving broader territorial claims for gathering foodstuffs. In exchange, the treaty guaranteed Americans safe passage across tribal lands, and allowed the U.S. to build forts and roads in tribal territories.

In the years following the 1851 treaty, settler migration onto tribal lands increased significantly, decimating buffalo and other game. Meanwhile, U.S. troops violated provisions ensuring the peace

and protection of Indian nations. Tribal members retaliated by disrupting railroad construction, fighting back against military incursion, and in some cases, kidnapping settlers in their territory. Neither party effectively adhered to the treaty's restitution mechanisms. In many cases, U.S. agents withheld annuities provided under treaty obligations, or sold them to the tribes at inflated cost. Tensions mounted across the plains as the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1858 further increased migration across the 1851 treaty territories. A U.S. military expedition pushed into the Dakota Territories in 1863 and 1864, and the military's decimation of a Cheyenne village at Sand Creek in 1864 sparked even deeper distrust of the federal government (U.S. War Department 1883, at 131–151, 948–958). The treaty council of 1868 reconvened at Fort Laramie under circumstances of heightened animosity and suspicion.

Treaty with the Sioux, 1868

Formally known as the *Treaty with the Sioux—Brulé, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonai, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, and Santee—and Arapaho, 1868*, this document was much more detailed than the 1851 treaty. The 1868 treaty functioned as a peace treaty, extended the obligations of the U.S. to tribal parties, promised educational resources and civil services, and renegotiated territorial boundaries. In exchange for territorial cessions, the U.S. promised that the land retained by the Sioux and Arapaho should be “set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians herein named” (Treaty with the Sioux, 1868, Art. 2).

The Missouri, North Platte, and Smoky Hill Rivers again featured as significant resources and boundaries. References to the construction of the railroad through Sioux territories highlight its proximity to the North Platte River, gesturing to

the railroad's disruption for migrating animals and communities that relied on the water source. The 1868 treaty also reflected the U.S.'s expanding policy efforts to disrupt Native communities' traditional customs and subsistence practices in favor of assimilation to American cultural structures. The treaty text instituted preferences for private property parcels, encouraged laws for land inheritance, and provided incentives for any head of household that shifted from hunting and fishing to agricultural subsistence. While tribes continued to retain off-reservation hunting and subsistence rights, the treaty offered higher annuity payments to tribal members who transitioned to a farming economy. Restitution provisions that reflected tribal legal traditions were replaced by a mandate that any American Indians who committed harm to any person or property (white, Indian, or otherwise) should be delivered to the U.S. government for punishment.

4

Articles of a Treaty made and concluded by and between Lieutenant General William T. Sherman, General William S. Harney, General Alfred H. Terry, General C. C. Augur, J. B. Henderson, Nathaniel G. Taylor, John B. Sanborn and Samuel F. Tappan, duly appointed Commissioners on the part of the United States and the different Bands of the Sioux Nation of Indians by their Chiefs and Head men whose names are hereto subscribed, they being duly authorized to act in the premises.

Article I. From this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall forever cease. The Government of the United States desires peace and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it. The Indians desire peace and they now pledge their honor to maintain it.

If bad men among the whites or among other people, subject to the authority of the United States, shall commit any wrong upon the person or property of the Indians, the United States will, upon proof, made to the Agent, and forwarded to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Washington City, proceed at once to cause the offender to be arrested and punished according to the laws of the United States and also reimburse the injured person for the loss sustained.

If bad men among the Indians shall commit a wrong or depredation upon the person or property of any one, white, black or Indian, subject to the authority of the United States and as provided hereunder, the Indians herein named, solemnly agree that they

Fort Laramie Treaty, page one, 1868, via National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The circumstances surrounding the 1868 treaty negotiations, and the tenor of the treaty document differ markedly from the 1851 treaty. Reading the two documents in tandem illuminates the changing face of U.S./tribal relations in the mid-nineteenth century. Whereas the 1851 treaty was negotiated with attention to Indigenous customs and reflected dispute resolution mechanisms favored by Indigenous treaty parties (Fowler 2015, 365), the 1868 treaty demonstrates the U.S.'s more heavy-handed

position with regard to tribal nations, and establishes the U.S.'s desire to assimilate the Sioux into American property arrangements and social customs. Those political shifts culminated three years later in an 1871 Congressional Act barring future treaty making. In 1877, after a failed attempt to create a new treaty to annex additional Sioux territory, Congress violated the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty when they voted to unilaterally seize the Black Hills.

Treaties as Primary Texts: History, Law, and Contemporary Interpretations

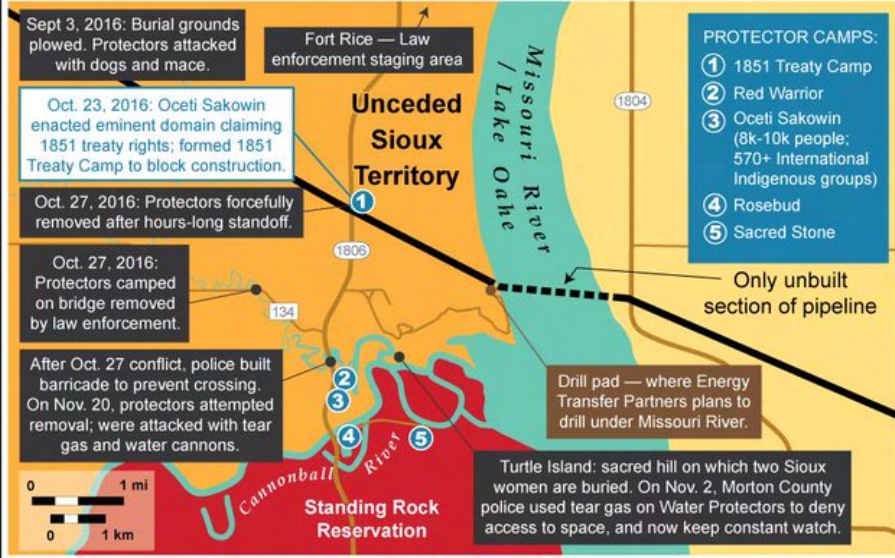
As the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie councils suggest, treaties must be understood as complex and historically contingent documents. As Williams argues, treaties are rich resources for understanding the political prerogatives, fears, and interests of tribes and U.S. government representatives at key moments in American history. The treaties continue to impact legal and physical landscapes in the present by animating critical questions about how tribal sovereignty and U.S. federalism can continue to coexist, and to what ends. These questions are often litigated through courts, and in court documents, treaty texts take on an additional layer of complexity. Treaties' original text or agreed-upon terms may be differently interpreted by judges, or may stand in as justification for legal holdings beyond the scope of the treaty. In this way, treaties can take on new life in legal jurisprudence.

Federal Indian law scholars Wilkinson and Volkman summarize three primary rules of American Indian treaty interpretation that have developed through the court decisions: 1) "ambiguous expressions must be resolved in favor of the Indian parties concerned;" 2) "Indian treaties must be interpreted as the Indians themselves

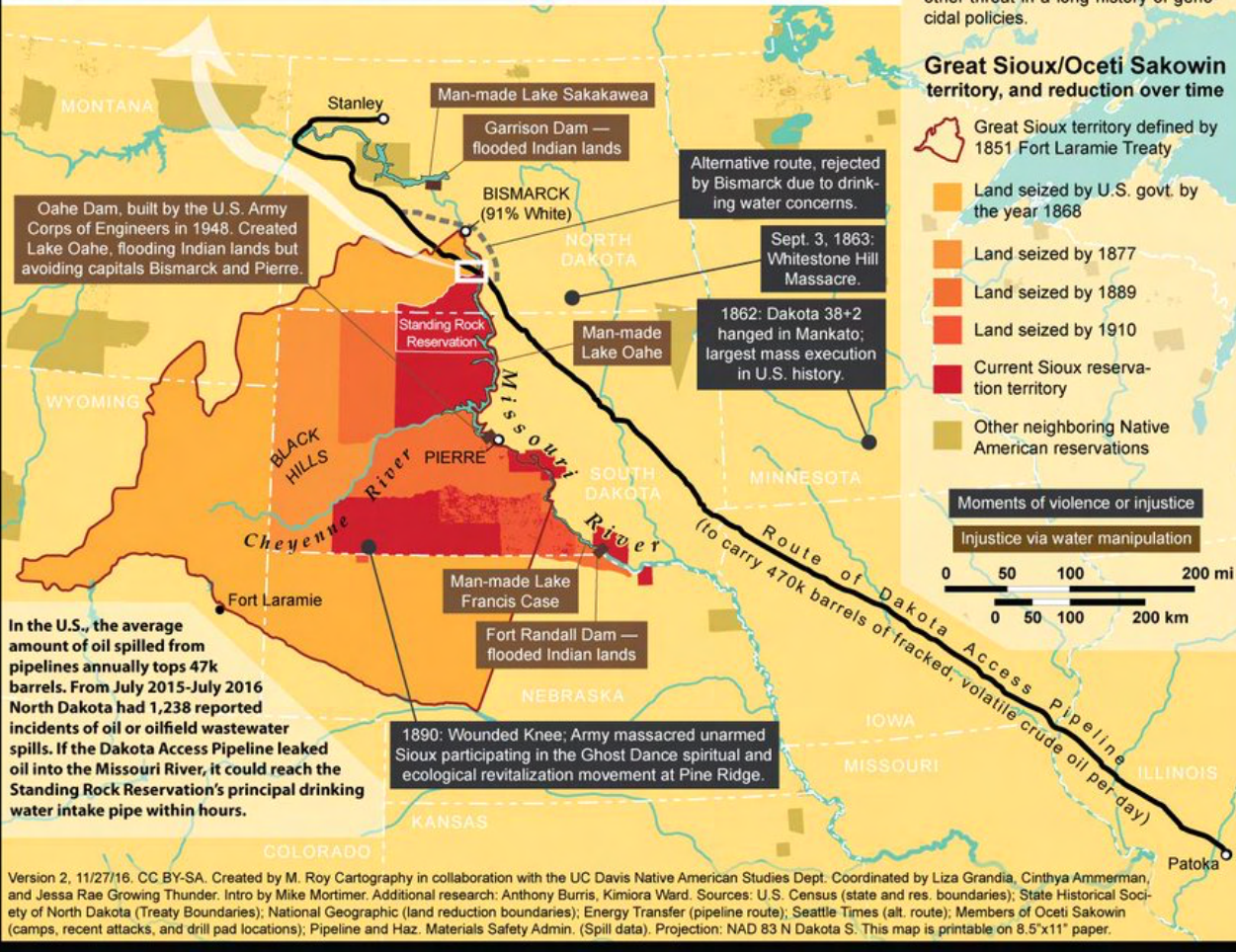
would have understood them;" and 3) "Indian treaties must be liberally construed in favor of the Indians" (Wilkinson and Volkman 1975, 617). Despite the promises of these interpretive rules, Federal Indian Law—or the body of U.S. law and jurisprudence that relates to tribes—is rife with contradictions, oversights, and abuses. While courts have routinely relied upon treaty language and provisions in developing legal opinions, the judiciary has struggled to develop a consistent canon of treaty interpretation. As legal scholar Frank Pommersheim argues, treaty doctrine "is extremely pliable—at times so pliable that it is better described not as doctrine, but as chimera totally at the service of national objectives" (Pommersheim 2009, 69). Utilizing treaty texts as primary sources requires deeper investigation into the context and consequence of the treaty process and negotiations. Many courts have failed to do this work, and have further relied on interpretive canons that impinge tribal sovereignty and autonomy in grave and destructive ways.

As we look at the relevance of treaties in the present moment, it is important to understand that treaty rights form a basis for the relationship between tribal nations and the United States.

THE DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE IN CONTEXT



For more than 150 years, the US government has waged a sustained environmental war against the Sioux. Unable to defeat mounted warriors on the battlefield, the US army massacred buffalo herds in the 1860s-70s in order to starve the Sioux into submission. In violation of treaties, army officers led gold prospecting missions into the Black Hills in 1874. During the ensuing gold rush, miners murdered Sioux without penalty and contaminated streams with mercury. After seizing the Black Hills in 1877, the federal government dismembered the Great Sioux reservation into four smaller reservations in 1879, coerced native families into accepting 160 acre parcels, and then allotted "extra" agricultural lands to white settlers. During the mid twentieth century, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a series of dams on the Missouri river, flooding 200,000 acres of Standing Rock Reservation and destroying 90% of the remaining trees. Today, Energy Transfer Partners and the Dakota Access Pipeline threaten the drinkable water at Standing Rock with petrochemical contamination, and have bulldozed sacred cultural sites in the building process. For the Sioux, the Dakota Pipeline represents yet another threat in a long history of genocidal policies.



The Dakota Access Pipeline in context. Created by M. Roy Cartography. CC-BY-SA.

Treaty negotiations, while challenging and problematic in their own right, reveal some of the pressing concerns of these multiple sovereigns attempting to reconcile contradictory interests and disparate legal traditions. They are also a legal record of the U.S. government's territorial expansion, and shed light on how the dispossession of tribal lands over time fuels contemporary disenfranchisement and discontent.

In the essential and ongoing struggle over water at Standing Rock, and beyond, treaties remain tremendously relevant. But, treaty rights are often only one component of broader legal claims, which can be addressed through different mechanisms at the tribal, state, and federal level. While the rights and obligations established by the 1851 and 1868 treaties were central to the decision in *U.S. v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, and were highlighted in the Standing Rock tribe's complaint in the Dakota Access pipeline case,

treaties were no more than a passing reference in the District of Columbia Circuit Court's order dismissing the tribe's request for an injunction against pipeline completion (*Standing Rock Sioux v. USACE*, 1). As such, the Standing Rock challenge to the Dakota Access Pipeline builds upon the treaty relationship, but utilizes a host of other legal tools, such as the National Historic Preservation Act and various environmental protection statutes. And yet, even these diverse mechanisms emerged from a legal and political system indelibly shaped by the treaties signed with Indigenous nations.

Treaties—texts, histories, and consequences—illuminate the contestations and accommodations upon which claims to sovereignty, territory, and resources are built. While the Missouri River was essential to the Fort Laramie treaty maps, only time will reveal the treaties' impact on the river.

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Footnotes

[1] This is the preferred term used by tribal leaders and their supporters who are working to protect water quality and supplies at Standing Rock and elsewhere.

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GEOGRAPHIES

BRIDAL VEIL FALLS

By Hilary Holmes

Many Minneapolis residents don't know about Bridal Veil Falls, yet there was a time when it was one of the area's most memorable and sought after tourist attractions. An excerpt from Dr. Otto Schussler's 1928 book, *Riverside Reveries*, describes with eloquence the historical importance of the falls.

"In those simple but (I believe) better days, before the advent of trolley cars and automobiles, this romantic 'Falls' was well out in the country, and the iron bridge... was by no means an overcrowded thoroughfare...No other natural beauty spot, with the exception, of course, of the

world-famous Minnehaha, was more frequently mentioned by the people of the city. Photographs of [Bridal Veil Falls] were commonly seen in the shop windows and picnic parties often made it their place of meeting."

With words that seem ahead of their time, Schussler also expresses the effect humans have had on the natural environment surrounding Bridal Veil Falls and on the Mississippi River:

Those were happy, care-free times for the little waterfall, but dark days were in store for it. The vigorous, enterprising



*Bridal Veil Falls on the East Bank of the Mississippi River, 1860.
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*



*Bridal Veil Falls on the East Bank of the Mississippi River, 1860.
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

city which had grown up about the great Falls of St. Anthony two miles farther up the stream, began a rapid march down both sides of the river and in a few short years the territory drained by the little creek underwent incredible change. Broad meadows and quiet woodlands that had lain undisturbed for ages were torn and perplexed by numberless freshly-graded streets; ditches and tunnels ran here and there; hundreds of cellars and basements were dug; wells were sunk, water mains and sewers were laid and soon the great watershed to which the little stream had always looked confidently for an unfailing supply of pure sparkling water was so altered that the rains which fell upon it

found themselves directed into a thousand unfamiliar channels. The once sizable creek became a modest brook, then dwindled to the dimensions of a tiny rill and finally disappeared from sight altogether save at the very rim of the ledge at the head of the glen where a pitiful trickle (barely enough for comforting tears but none at all for song) may now and then be seen by those whose hearts are touched by the little stream's sad fate.

Urbanization of Southeast Minneapolis since the 1860s buried the creek that fed the falls. The history of Bridal Veil Falls is one of both human admiration and change.

The Watershed

What is now known as the Bridal Veil Watershed was once a 300-acre wetland that drained into Bridal Veil Creek, which wound its way to the East Bank of the Mississippi River, spilling over the edge at the site known as Bridal Veil Falls. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the wetland was drained and the creek was put into a culvert; yet the falls survived, albeit in a lessened state. Lots were platted, a street grid was laid down, and railroads began to crisscross at the northern edge of the Bridal Veil Watershed, establishing an industrial area of Southeast Minneapolis that remains today. Along with the industrial landscape, the residential neighborhoods of St. Anthony Park in St. Paul and Southeast Como and Prospect Park in Minneapolis were also developed.

Over the years, the area continued to be altered by industrial development, the construction of Highway 280, the filling of ponds, flooding, and the reconstruction of sewer lines and drainage systems. In the 1960s, as I-94 was being constructed, Bridal Veil Creek was almost entirely

eliminated. Some of the spirit of the old Bridal Veil Creek endured, however, thanks to residents of the area who talked roadway engineers into saving the creek.

Unfortunately, decades of industrial use have polluted the watershed, including the natural and artificial ponds near Kasota Avenue and Highway 280 at the creek's northern edge, as well as the creek itself. As a result, remediation efforts on Bridal Veil Pond began in 2008.

It is remarkable that Bridal Veil Creek and its once famous falls have survived, avoiding the fate of two other nearby East Bank falls—Fawn's Leap and Silver Cascade, both once found on what is now the University of Minnesota campus. Bridal Veil Falls can still be seen today from the Franklin Avenue Bridge or from a pedestrian path near the bank of the river.

People have altered and continue to alter the landscape of the Bridal Veil Watershed. Many parties have been involved in discussing the



Postcard of Bridal Veil Falls circa 1908. Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

redevelopment of the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area and the environmental rehabilitation of Bridal Veil Creek Watershed. Many agencies, including the St. Anthony Park Community Council, the Southeast Como Improvement Association, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minneapolis Public Works, and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, collaborated to remediate contamination of Bridal Veil Pond and Open Space. It was converted back to a wetland area, allowing the creek to meander to promote natural bioremediation (MWMO et al. 2016).

The story of Bridal Veil Creek is an interesting one: humans spent a century continually

degrading a natural feature that we are now working to restore. The residents of Minneapolis have shifted from admiring the natural environment of Bridal Veil Creek and its falls to desecrating it, back to embracing it once again. While the story of Bridal Veil Falls may not necessarily be unique, as one of only eight waterfalls that flow directly into the river, it nonetheless illustrates an important part of the history and ecology of the Mississippi (Arey 1999).

This article first appeared in River Life's River Atlas in 2009. Content has been updated and edited for Open Rivers.

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TEACHING AND PRACTICE

NAVIGATING THE ETHICS OF PARTNERSHIP

By Monica McKay

Higher education has increasingly embraced what is variously called public, civic, or community engagement over the past two decades, and more and more students arrive on campus having participated in community service or service-learning as part of their K-12 education. This might seem like an ideal recipe for success for a Center for Community-Engaged Learning that facilitates curricular and co-curricular

engagement opportunities for University of Minnesota students. Recent years have indeed seen a steady increase in the numbers of students participating in our programs, but like most blessings, this one is somewhat mixed as we strive to maintain high quality in our work. Engagement means partnering with the off-campus community, but while this work is rooted in values of reciprocity and mutual benefit, there



University of Minnesota students worked with Corporate Accountability International in 2008 to secure a ban on the sale of bottled water in Minneapolis City Hall. With the students in the photo are then-mayor R.T. Rybak (center) and current mayor Betsy Hodges (left), who was then on the Minneapolis City Council. Photo courtesy of Amber Collett.

are – to use a river metaphor – strong currents in academic and American culture that can make our efforts to truly and authentically engage with communities as equal partners and collaborators feel like swimming upstream. These currents require our constant and thoughtful attention as we pursue our own engagement work and, more importantly, as we prepare and coach students to engage as well.

One thing we have to do is get past what can be called, for lack of a more elegant phrase, the academic superiority complex. Because universities are sites of knowledge production, it can be all too easy to think they are *the* sites

of knowledge in our society. It's fairly easy to find examples of how this causes us to trip over ourselves in our own language; to cite just one, part of the University of Minnesota's current branding proudly proclaims that we are "solving the world's grand challenges." Granted, this statement doesn't specify that we're doing it alone or preclude the notion of partnership, but it has more than a small note of hubris, and it reinforces a "deficit model" of community engagement – the world has challenges, while we (the university) have solutions, and engagement consists mostly of a one-way sharing of university resources with the community.

“I’m from the University, and I’m Here to Help”

This persistent mindset dovetails nicely, but to negative effect, with a prevailing view in our society that community service means “helping” others who are “less fortunate” than ourselves. This is a common motivation and starting point for students, and in the absence of critical reflection, their K-12 experiences often reinforce this view. In our Community Engagement Scholars Program (CESP), which we describe as an honors-like program that supports and recognizes students who are deeply committed to and involved in community engagement throughout their undergraduate careers, the first of six reflections required of all participants asks them to articulate their “ethic of service” – their philosophy of, motivations for, and expected outcomes from community work. All CESP participants submit a draft Ethic of Service and then meet with a program advisor to discuss it. One of our advisors recently reflected that a majority of the students she meets with talk a lot about “helping” in their first drafts. In one sense these students are acknowledging their own privilege by talking

about advantages and benefits they have received that others have not, but as one scholar of engagement stated, “If I ‘do for’ you, ‘serve’ you, ‘give to’ you – that creates a connection in which I have the resources, the abilities, the power, and you are on the receiving end. It can be – while benign in intent – ironically disempowering to the receiver, granting further power to the giver.”[1]

Challenging students’ heartfelt and noble sentiments requires delicacy, but it’s crucial to making sure that our and our students’ engagement with the community doesn’t play on and thus reinforce existing power differentials. Introducing students to the concept of asset-based community-development and coaching them to identify the knowledge and resources already present in the community are fairly simple ways we can begin to shift the helping frame. Curricular community-engaged learning, when done well, can also help to re-orient students to the community as learners rather than benefactors, but here again

we sometimes get in our own way. Faculty members structuring community-engaged learning components for their courses sometimes note that they want to ensure their students do “meaningful” work in the community. Of course, if a community organization brings in students but consigns them to making copies, filing papers, or doing data entry alone in a room, we wouldn’t have high expectations for the students’ learning. But we need to be careful not to suggest or ask that our students be given the same type of work typically done by professional staff members with significantly more education and experience, thus devaluing our community partners’ expertise. Faculty and community partners need to work

together to structure student experiences that both can achieve course learning objectives and are appropriate to students’ levels of skill and experience. Faculty play a critical role here in creating reflection assignments and activities in their classes that will help students draw learning out of their work in the community, regardless of what that work specifically entails. We can work to recast the idea that our students are “helping” the community from a dynamic where they bring the community things that it lacks to one where our students step into a supportive role that frees up time for the community’s “experts” to focus on advancing solutions to the challenges at hand.

We’re in This Together

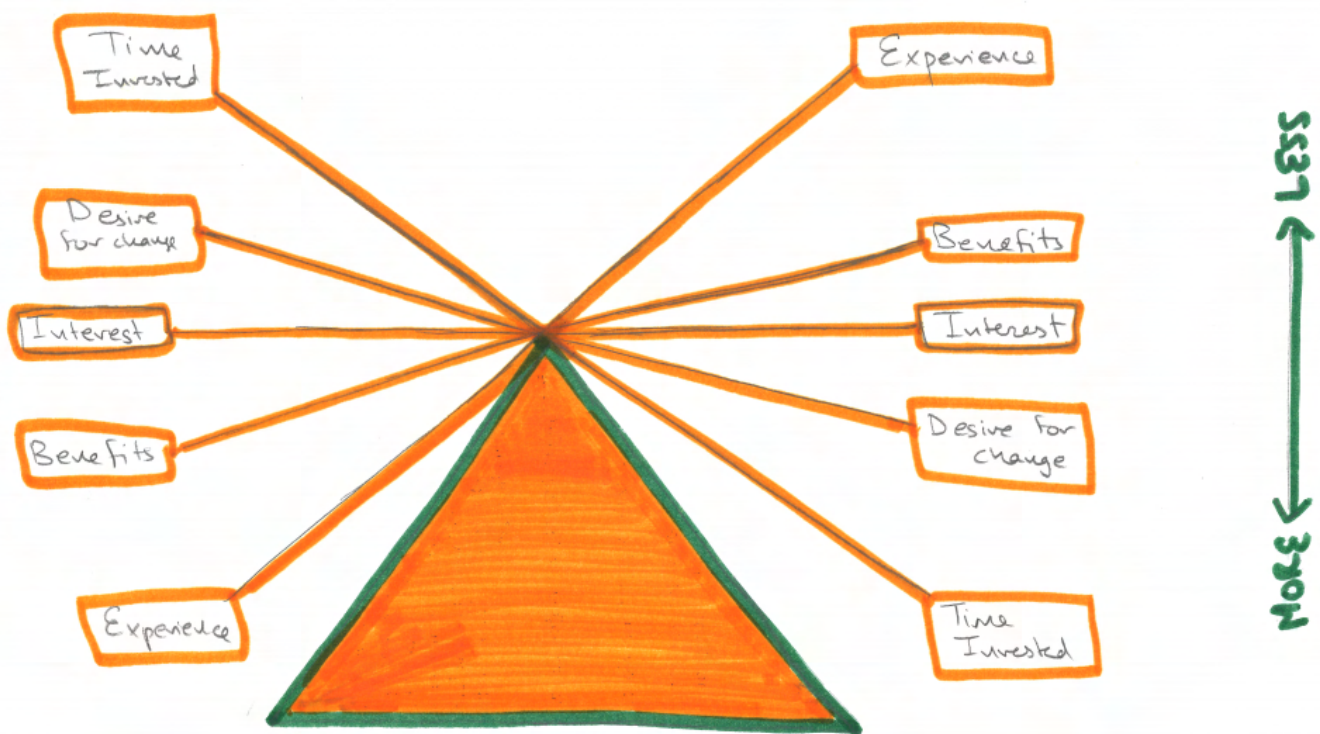
This reframing can have the additional salutary effect of encouraging our students to think of themselves as members of a team, tempering the strong current of individualism that runs through our culture and both informs and is often exacerbated by academic institutions (consider, for instance, the near-universal revulsion with which students tend to react to group project assignments). In our Community Engagement Scholars Program, one of the final requirements is for each student to complete an Integrative Community Engagement Project with and for a community organization they’ve previously worked with, and these projects are almost always solo endeavors. In the capstone seminar students take while working on their projects, however, we draw on community organizing techniques to push the students to think about all the stakeholders who need to be “involved” in their projects in some way for the work to be successful and have a lasting impact. All students have to create a power map for their projects, a process that involves three steps: identifying as many individual, group, and institutional

stakeholders as they can; placing all those stakeholders on a grid illustrating each stakeholder’s level of influence/authority over the project and their interest in/enthusiasm for it; and finally, linking different stakeholders in a “web” that illustrates relationships and lines of influence between them. After completing and reflecting on their power maps, students must select one individual stakeholder from the map and do a one-to-one with them, ascertain their self-interest or potential self-interest in the project, and reflect on how they can leverage that self-interest to enhance the likelihood of their project’s success. Even if this process results just in a student making sure that more people in their partner organization are aware of their project, this can help add context to what might otherwise feel like a solitary pursuit and accomplishment.

Striking a Balance

The community organizing conception of self-interest depicts it as a middle ground between selfishness and selflessness. If we approach others focused either on what we can get from them or on how we can give of ourselves to help them, our collaborations will be unsustainable over the long term – think exploitation on the one extreme, and burnout on the other. If, however, we identify how our goals and aspirations overlap with others’, we can harness our shared interests to work together toward a common purpose. Interestingly, the same CESP advisor who noted that a majority of the students she meets with initially frame their work in terms of helping – thus appearing to be driven primarily by selflessness – also shared that many students,

sometimes even the same ones, also talk a lot in their first drafts about what they “get out” of their volunteer experiences, or how those experiences benefit them, which sounds more like the other side of the coin. When we market our office’s programs and services to students, we often invoke these benefits: community engagement can help you build your résumé, your professional network, and a host of skills that will make you not only a more well-rounded individual but also a more competitive candidate for jobs. These are, of course, all legitimate reasons for students to engage with the community, but we need to make sure they are not the only reasons – that we, or they, are not putting a thumb on the scale in the direction of selfishness.



Example of a partnership scale created by a student in the Community Engagement Scholars Program. Image courtesy of the University of Minnesota Center for Community-Engaged Learning.

Speaking of scales, one of the in-class activities in the CESP capstone seminar uses this exact image to encourage students to reflect on what they and their community partners are both giving and receiving from working together. We instruct students to draw a scale that depicts their partnership with their community organization, with possible “weights” on each side including things such as time and energy invested in the work and benefits received from it. Students can thus visualize and think about partnership dynamics; for instance, some students will draw multiple lines to show that on different measures there are “imbalances” between them and their partners that, on the whole, tend to even out. In discussion we also bring in the element of time, noting that an apparent imbalance in a partnership at any given moment is not necessarily a bad thing; again, it’s only when it remains one-sided over time that it becomes unsustainable. In fact, we often point out that the scales students draw in this exercise look like seesaws, which, if they are perfectly balanced – or if one person is always up while the other is always down – are not much fun at all.

Activities such as these can be quick and useful ways for all of us who do engagement work to remind ourselves that we are always working in networks of committed individuals, each of whom brings resources, knowledge, and skills to the shared collective task of creating change on issues we all care about. In an ideal world, these networks are characterized by the constant exchange of these assets. The longtime coordinator of the CESP has noted that when she has met with students to discuss their Ethic of Service reflections, it has been rare to have a student who, in their first draft, talks about their community work in collaborative terms, as something they do with others in the community, as partnership

work. In fairness, for this reflection students are asked to write a personal narrative, and among the prompts we offer to stimulate their thinking is one about what outcomes they expect from their work, so when they discuss what they get out of community engagement, they are answering a question we asked. This is why the advisor meetings are so important, so we have a chance to nudge these students to think about if and how their work benefits their community partners as well, and if and how their work situates them on a team of individuals and organizations working toward a shared goal.

These are some small ways that, here in our small corner of our campus, we swim against the currents of academic superiority, deficit-based approaches to community work, and individualism that can inhibit our and our students’ abilities to work in true partnership and collaboration with community members. Or perhaps I should say we paddle against those currents – as I reflect on these ideas myself, my own academic training in Minnesota history calls to mind the fur trade period and the complex networks of exchange at work all along the highways of the time, rivers. Of course, over time, the structural inequities that underlay relationships between European/ Euro-American traders and Indigenous peoples ultimately caused them to break down, often with devastating consequences, and naming and facing up to the dynamics of identity, power, and privilege in our own engaged work are crucial to achieving better outcomes (and a topic for another day). For now, we focus on the fact that none of us is an island, and we need to cultivate humility, openness to learning what (and how much) we don’t know, and awareness of our own and others’ self-interests in order to be good partners.

Footnotes

[1] Pompa, L. (2002). Service-learning as crucible: Reflections on immersion, context, power, and transformation. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 9(1), 67-76.

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About the Author

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