Get Connected!

We completed our recent fiscal year by selecting a new name and visual identity for the Mississippi River Fund. As of October, we have officially changed our name to Mississippi Park Connection. Our new name is a better reflection of our mission to strengthen the connection between people and the Mississippi River's national park.

We are particularly pleased with the new connections we have made this year. Thanks to new partners like Ultra Creative and Studio Mpls, our programs like Ranger on Call have benefitted from great graphic design. Our Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures fellows connected thousands of students to the Mississippi River and our community volunteers continue to bring more and more of their friends and colleagues to the park for habitat restoration and education programs.

New board members Dianne Hickok, Kristin Rasmussen, Chris Mortenson, and Stephanie Zawistowski bring new connections to the organization and bolster our expertise in finance, science, education, and public policy. We are also proud to welcome new staff members Alora K. Jones, Mary Hammes and Connie Xiong. Our staff members are creating new relationships with members of the community every day—opening eyes to the national treasure we have in our backyard.

As we look forward to celebrating the National Park Service Centennial next year, we will have the opportunity to expand our impact—from scholarships for school field trips, to community-wide days of play in our park, to a new visitor center at the Science Museum—more and more people will be able to discover their river. We look forward to connecting with you in 2016. Thank you for your support!
Mississippi Park Connection and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area work closely in many arenas. From habitat restoration programs, to signature events, like National Public Lands Day, to the popular River City Revue, our staff and volunteers work toward a common cause of engaging the public with the river. This year, however, was marked by close collaboration on the planning for two things that will not come to fruition until 2016.

Next year, we will celebrate the National Park Service Centennial and we have spent a lot of time this year planning for it. Thanks to our terrific partnership, we have formed a steering committee and have developed a robust calendar of events and programs. To commemorate the centennial, the Connection has set its most ambitious fundraising goal ever, a large portion of which includes revamping our visitor center in the Science Museum of Minnesota.

Both projects demonstrate that the park could not be as successful as it is without Mississippi Park Connection. The Connection brings together private philanthropy and boots on the ground assistance to help us deliver programs and events to engage our broad community.

Thank you for supporting Mississippi Park Connection!

John Anfinson
Superintendent, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area
Volunteers

1,758 Hours served at Coldwater Spring—and 20,431 hours across all programs including education, habitat restoration, and special events.

172 Groups, including 1,052 corporate volunteers and 2,422 community members and youth, gave 9,171 hours to the habitat restoration program.

9 Years of service Lee Larson, Volunteer of the Year, has given to our national park.

Public Programs and Events

3,000 Community members experienced their park through public programs.

Volunteers paddled and restored the river at 5 River Action Volunteer Events.

Artists and musicians gathered at 4 River City Revues.

Families found fossils and banded birds at 5 Second Saturday events.

Visitors walked or biked 6 Ranger on Call audio tours.
YOUTH EDUCATION

18,128 Students served from Minneapolis–St. Paul and the surrounding metro area.

1/2 Of all students on Big River Journey and Journey to the Falls received a full scholarship to attend their national park field trip—92 classrooms in all.

5 Interns hired: Connie Xiong supported the volunteer program, Lucy Kayee, Shalesa Johnson, and Aaron McCalip worked on Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures. Our marketing and communications intern, Alora K. Jones, officially joined Mississippi Park Connection’s staff this fall at the end of her internship.

93 Youth from YMCA intervention services experienced canoe trips and volunteer service on the river.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

2,140 Trees were planted in the park, including 4 plots of cottonwoods.

3 Weekly volunteer crews cared for Coldwater Spring and Mill Ruins Park, pulling invasive species and planting native plants in the prairies.

1 Lock closed at St. Anthony Falls to prevent Invasive Carp from traveling upstream.
“Having the opportunity to experience nature is something we have always wanted to share with others. Nature and the outdoors are great educational tools for young people to help them develop important social skills, discover new talents and enhance their health and well-being. As such, Judy and I have been committed to providing this experience to urban youth in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. We have heard from many of these students, after completing a wilderness experience, about how much this time has impacted their lives.

Judy and I feel very strongly about getting young adults involved in the outdoors. Local parks and rivers are areas that everyone can enjoy regardless of their background. These areas need people to help preserve them so future generations can benefit from the same experiences and learn to appreciate the wonders of nature in our own backyard. The summer internship program is a great place to start fostering this passion for the outdoors.

We are thrilled that we have been able to achieve our goal of providing summer internships and employment opportunities to urban youth. We look forward to the future of this program!”

“I love being able to connect with students, and seeing that light in their eyes when they finally step into a canoe, or learn about the different ecological elements of the river. I have a passion for the river and to see youth also get that passion is something I want them to continuously pass on. I want to see more youth learning in National Parks, and more job opportunities and volunteer opportunities extended to students who come from low-income urban areas.”

—Shalesa Johnson, UWCA Fellow
Karen and Eric Kaler

“My husband, Eric, and I have the great fortune of living along the Mississippi River. We live in a house built by the Brooks family in 1922 on the eastern bluff of the river. They named the home Eastcliff for the location. The family donated the home to the University of Minnesota in 1958.

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area was established as a national park in 1988. Now students at the University of Minnesota have the benefit of being on an urban campus and, by crossing the Washington Avenue Bridge, walking across a national park while going to class.

Last December we gave trees to the president’s office staff and senior leaders at the university. We reassured people that they didn't have to find a place for the trees—they were all planted by Mississippi Park Connection in the oak savanna at Coldwater Spring. Some of us enjoyed joining in the planting, as shown in the photo. It’s rewarding to know that these trees should outlast us all.

We enjoy taking our dogs for walks along the river and appreciate the great beauty of the changing seasons. I am in awe whenever I see an eagle flying over the river. Remembering a time when eagles were in decline, I’ll never take that sight for granted. Mississippi Park Connection is a leader in giving people the opportunity to experience the river and learn firsthand why we need to protect our natural resources. We are grateful for that work.”

“Volunteers continue to dedicate their time by working with park staff to expand and enhance Coldwater Spring. These events would not be possible without coordination from Mississippi Park Connection and generous donors.”

–Neil Smarjesse, National Park Service Biologist

Karen (purple turtleneck) and Eric Kaler (white jacket) stand with staff from the University of Minnesota’s president’s office just before a tree planting event this spring.

Photo courtesy of Karen Kaler
Second Saturdays

One of Coldwater Spring’s advantages is that it is right in the heart of our park. Just south of Minnehaha Falls, and north of the airport and Fort Snelling—it’s a great location for city people to get out of the house and explore nature close to home. This year marked the second year of our popular Second Saturdays program. With support from the National Environmental Education Foundation, Mississippi Park Connection supported programs like “Splash, what’s in Coldwater’s water?” a program about aquatic invertebrates, “Bees and Bugs” about native pollinators, and “Fossils” that featured a paleontologist leading scavenger hunts for Ordovician Period fossils in the park. Hundreds of kids and their families enjoyed national park programming at Coldwater Spring each month this summer.

“The biggest benefit that I see to Second Saturdays are the number of people who discover our site and realize that they can not only get quality ranger programs once a month but can also visit it on their own whether their passion is birding, fossils, frogs or just getting a bit of exercise.”

—Ranger Sharon Stiteler
Corporate volunteers, like Boston Scientific, make all the difference when it comes to restoring native habitat on the Mississippi River. This year, 144 Boston Scientific employees gave more than 800 hours of service to the National Park and Mississippi Park Connection’s co–managed volunteer program. The majority of the work went into removing invasive plants and planting prairie forbs at Coldwater Spring and Coon Rapids Dam. The Green Team at the Arden Hills corporate office went beyond volunteering, and nominated Mississippi Park Connection for a $5,000 impact grant, driven by votes from Boston Scientific employees. Organizing their fellow co–workers, the Green Team campaigned this spring within their office for votes, and 641 Boston Scientific employees voted for Mississippi Park Connection to receive the grant, which was awarded at the beginning of our 2016 fiscal year that began in July.

“For the past two years Boston Scientific employees from Minnesota have volunteered with Mississippi Park Connection to help maintain and improve the environment in our great river’s national park. Our volunteers have loved the events organized for them and as organizers we have loved the professional and safe way that these events are managed. Our staff arrive at volunteer events “corporate clean” and have left muddy, tired and very happy. There has been a great sense of accomplishing something meaningful. Thank you Mississippi Park Connection—let’s see what’s next!”

—Sonia James, Boston Scientific, Green Team President
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July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015

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The National Park Foundation

Financials

Expenses

- Fundraising $36,331
- Administration $51,763
- Program Services $520,323
- New Brand Initiative $34,973

TOTAL $643,390
Special thanks to The Bachelor Farmer for donating proceeds from their annual Kraftskiva event to Mississippi Park Connection.

And to the 4,061 volunteers who provided 20,031 hours of service: our park simply would not be the same without your contributions. Thank you.

**Revenue**

- **Foundation Grants** $310,499
- **Corporate Grants** $45,099
- **Government Grants** $133,424
- **Individuals** $55,204
- **Program Revenue** $13,060
- **Endowment Distribution** $140,224
- **Other** $10,013

**TOTAL** $707,523

*Some contributions will be used for projects in the 2015-2016 fiscal year.*
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Mississippi Park Connection is led by a group of local community leaders from Minneapolis and Saint Paul. They guide the operations of the fund and its programs. We are proud to list this distinguished group that includes:

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