



River Connections

Winter, Spring
2021

Become a Member or Renew Your 2021 Membership to Support the FOMNRR **NOW!**

When you join the Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River (FOMNRR), you become part of a team dedicated to promoting education, conservation, recreation, and public awareness of the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR). Why is this important? Because your stewardship is an integral part of maintaining and celebrating this 100-mile untamed stretch of the Missouri River, which flows between between Pickstown, SD and Ponca, NE. It is a place that is rich in natural history, human stories, diverse fish and wildlife, and educational and recreational opportunities.

**The Missouri National Recreational River is where imagination meets reality.
Your involvement will not only help sustain the past but also build the future.**

Your FOMNRR membership helps us secure the resources necessary to further our mission of sustaining and promoting a national treasure. In addition, you will be able to participate in our activities and have your voice heard in determining future directions of the Missouri National Recreational River.

As an Individual or Family Member, you will receive a subscription to the FOMNRR newsletter, invitations to FOMNRR programs and field trips, an annual FOMNRR outdoor BBQ and day on the river, and other FOMNRR sanctioned opportunities held throughout the year. As a Corporate Sponsor, your company logo will be included on the FOMNRR Website.

There are two ways to join or renew your membership:

- Complete and mail the attached application form on the back of the newsletter
- Go online at www.fomnrr.org and click the "Join Now" button.

Thank you for your support. We are passionate about what we do and would truly appreciate having you as a member supporting our organization and accomplishments.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River is to build awareness, enhance and advocate for the scenic, recreational fish and wildlife, ecological, geological, cultural/historical values and economic and recreational opportunities of the Missouri River, a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

www.fomnrr.org

Superintendent's Corner

Rick Clark, Missouri National Recreational River

Like most of America, and the world for that matter, 2020 has proven to be a tumultuous year given the implications imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. NPS-MNRR adjusted by scaling back operations, including a closure in April of the Park's visitor contact station, and then re-opening in late May according to a response and adaptive recovery management plan tiered to national, state, and local gated reopening criteria. Fortunately, we were able to proceed with summer hiring and successfully on-boarded 6 temporary, seasonal employees who collectively were involved in upgrading the Park's website, coordinating social media postings, developing virtual, on-line interpretive programs, and treating exotic, non-indigenous vegetation at four Park properties (Bow Creek, Green Island, Goat Island, and Mulberry Bend). Additionally, Park staff were able to begin implementation of the Goat Island Management Plan approved in August 2018, including the initial stages of developing the southern most primitive campground and improvements to the interior hiking trail system.



FOMNRR members undoubtedly could detect the hooray echoes emanating from Park HQ when we learned earlier in 2020 that funding support for an operational base increase had been approved as part of the Department of Interior's Fiscal Year 2021 budget. While contingent on formal passage of the budget by Congress and then signed into law by the President, all indications from NPS National and Regional Comptrollers is the funding support is secured. The increased funding support will enable the Park to establish and stand-up for the first time in its history a fully dedicated visitor and resource protection/law enforcement program, which will consist of two permanent full time commissioned rangers augmented by two seasonal commissioned rangers for 6 months out of the year, coinciding with the field season. The Park is elated to be the recipient of this base increase, especially when considering over the last 6 years, the acreage held in fee simple title by the agency has more than tripled (1,315 total acres).

Having commissioned rangers on staff who are duty stationed at Yankton will better enable the Park to fulfill core, mission-critical operations, as well as assist our cooperators from the SD Game, Fish, & Parks, and Nebraska Game and Parks. In light of vacancies occurring in late 2019-2020, the Park will also be hiring 3 additional permanent full-time employees (Program Manager for Interpretation, Education & Outreach, Outdoor Recreational Planner, and Natural Resource Management Specialist) in 2021 as part of a new organizational structure.

Given the new era of expanded park operations to be ushered in 2021, a major renovation of the Park's headquarters building in Yankton was also completed, including new carpeting, repainting, a repurposed conference room, and newly re-configured office supply, storage, and seasonal staffing areas.

Lastly, with funding support secured through the 2020 Land and Water Conservation Fund arrangements continue in cooperation with the NPS Regional Lands Office in Omaha, NE for the acquisition of



Remodelled MNRR Park Headquarters Conference Room in Yankton

Roscoe in the Virtual Classroom

By Teresa Mentzer, MNRR Education Technician

Everyone is back to school including ROSCOE! River Odyssey for School and Community Outreach and Education is starting its sixth year of visiting 4th grade classrooms along and near the MNRR corridor. The program introduces the Missouri National Recreational River to the students as the “national park in their backyard.” In September, 2020, Roscoe and Ranger Teresa visited the students through a virtual portal and connecting online to their classrooms in communities like Springfield, Wynot, Butte, Wagner, Elk Point, Ponca, Verdigre, Vermillion, Hartington and Niobrara. The program, ‘Roscoe presents, the National Park in Your Backyard,’ gives an overview of the MNRR and how students can receive their free Every Kid Outdoors pass. As future stewards of the national parks, they are encouraged to learn about our national treasures and the places preserved and protected by the National Park Service. Each of the schools visited has its own Roscoe to remind them of their national park. Several teachers use him as an incentive to do well in school and students may be rewarded with some personal Roscoe time. At Niobrara, 4th grade teacher, Jenny Bauer, states, “As a reward for good behavior, my students get Roscoe on their desk and they just love working hard to get him for the day!” Thanks to all of the schools and teachers for your support of the ROSCOE program and our national parks.



Dorion Tourism Award Goes To Dugan Smith



Dugan Smith receiving the 2019 Dorion Tourism Award at the MNRR Headquarters.

Yankton's Convention and Visitors Bureau presented its 5th Dorion Tourism Award to Dugan Smith, Lead Park Ranger with the Missouri National Recreational River, at this year's virtual Chamber Social .

“We had some really great nominations,” says Kasi Haberman, director of the Yankton CVB. “But Dugan’s leadership, dedication and loyalty really stood out.”

Since 2001 Dugan has been tirelessly promoting and educating the public on the 98-mile stretch of the Missouri River, in both Southeast South Dakota and Northeast Nebraska. As one nominator wrote, “This guy is amazing, he promotes Yankton and the National Park through numerous events, partnerships and educational efforts.”

During his time with the National Park Service, Dugan’s has developed a unique ability to identify and nurture partnerships up and down the river with federal, state, local agencies, tribal governments, and other community organizations. These valuable partnerships have led to further development and promotion of the park and the Yankton tourism industry. For those that know Dugan, you fully understand why he is so successful at facilitating these partnerships, his cheerful personality and sense of humor allow him to identify common ground and keep people engaged.

“I think Pierre Dorion would be extremely proud of Dugan,” says Haberman. “Both are uniquely talented in facilitating partnerships which have greatly impacted the success of Yankton’s tourism industry.”

Smith was presented a hand-carved granite sculpture of a buffalo created by Yankton artist, Scott Luken.

Reflections From the Chair: A Different Time

By Rich Burns, Chair of the Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River

It has been said that “this year can’t end soon enough” and 2020 will probably be remembered for all of the things we couldn’t do. Most of us weren’t able to go out to a restaurant, see shows beyond the comfort of our own space, travel very far, attend special events, go into an office or school, or participate in any type of social gathering. However, this past year could also be remembered for having time to accomplish the tasks we had been putting off, learning new things, and enjoying those places we may have taken for granted in the past. Such a place for many of us is the Missouri River.

We are fortunate having the Missouri National Recreational River as a part of our landscape. Whether we are kayaking, hunting, fishing, or simply contemplating the river, we are improving our quality of life. However, quality of life for ourselves and for the river cannot be taken for granted. Sustaining something as big as a river is best done when we work cooperatively, which is what being a part of an advocacy group is all about. The Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River is a local leader in connecting people and communities with the river. It’s about sharing experiences and knowledge, which in turn makes for a better place.

Unfortunately, a number of 2020 activities and programs were either cancelled completely or scaled back to where FOMNRR didn’t have much of a role to play. Our momentum going into 2021 is to sustain our leadership capacity and stay positively engaged with all the activities we’ve traditionally participated in, including:

- **Missouri River Watershed School Festival**
- **Lake Yankton Outdoor Festival,**
- **Missouri River Cleanup**
- **Third Thursday Social Events**
- **ROSCOE School Curriculum**
- **ROSCOE Junior Ranger Academy**
- **Missouri River Institute.**



Rich Burns, FOMNRR Chair

FOMNRR will continue working on the Niobrara River public access development project, look into additional recreational river access and improvement opportunities, continue with Frost and North Alabama Trails development projects, and explore new opportunities that connect people to the river. FOMNRR will also continue offering support to habitat improvement projects; and through its new website design and Strategic Plan, become the “go-to” organization supporting public awareness and MNRR outreach initiatives.

The question of FOMNRR members is: “Considering our size, how do we get all of this done?” Looking ahead, 2021 is going to be a very busy, exciting, and rewarding year for the FOMNRR organization.

To sum it all up, we have a National Recreational River that is needing our attention, so let’s get started!

Kayaking from Fort Randall to Springfield

By Roger Foote, President of the South Dakota Canoe and Kayak Association (SDCKA)



39 Mile Section MNRR 2016 Photo by C. Pruett

Friday afternoon found me scrambling around trying to find all of my paddling gear and tossing it all in the truck. I needed to be at Fort Randall dam by 6 pm, and I was already running late. However, this condition is normal for me, and I was hoping to make up a little time on the three hour drive from my home base in Watertown. This was to be my first overnight paddle trip with a bunch of folks I hardly knew and wanted to make a good impression. I was desperate to not forget something important or worse, looking like a rookie.

I had paddled the Fort to Field 50 paddle battle a couple of times and was sort of familiar with the 39 mile stretch of the MNRR -- but like life, the river changes. I was looking forward to taking a slower pace, exploring some of the sand bars and really enjoying the views and the life of the river itself.

Meeting up with the other paddlers, shuttling our vehicles to Springfield and a stop for burgers at Running Water went as you would expect, right down to an unplanned detour on dark back-country river roads. We arrived back at the put-in well after dark and well ready to catch some zz's before daybreak. Without a tent and rolled up in a sleeping bag on an old army cot, I tried to ignore the buzz and lights from the hydroelectric plant.

So excited to begin this journey, I don't remember breakfast Saturday morning, but a vague hint of oatmeal and blueberries tickles the back of my mind. Soon we were launching from the boat ramp, armed with a big knife, a can of spam, a loaf of French bread and some trail mix to face the day.

The first half mile or so always seems to be a new introduction to an old friend. Hello river, what personality are you going to show me today? Stroke, slip, stroke, slip, the muscles stretch, the shoulders bunch and then release as the paddle blade transfers tension to the water. Take a deep breath, let it out slow... you are now on river time.

The river winds a bit in places and runs deep in others as it carves its own way though the floodplain with total disregard to the whims of man. I watch the surface for hints of what lies below, searching for the current or peeling off in a backwater. Drowned trees slowly make their way downstream as the sands shift and banks erode, a dance of a thousand years and more set to nature's tempo.

We camped at Montfort, a private family campsite set up with showers and picnic shelter -- a welcome stop to a day on the water. Campfire, toasted spam on a stick and a night sleeping under the stars has a way of resetting the soul, cleansing the daily hubris away and making room for growth. With many thanks to our hosts and the NPS for the evening's program we launched Sunday morning, eager to see more.

The day rose clear and bright with the smell of promise after a heavy dew. Hello river, how are we today? The day was punctuated with sunshine, little wind, and the cry of the killdeer defending its territory along the water's edge. The sounds and smells of deep summer mixed with low conversations among the paddlers. Sometimes two or three together, sometimes paddling alone, but always as a group of shared experience.

We reached the takeout with mixed feelings, glad to rest but sad to see the day end. We hurried back to our busy lives to take up the responsibilities we all face, but now with a little more river tucked away in our hearts.



Annual FOMNRR Report

by Rich Burns, Chair of the Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River

Saying that things didn't come easy this year would be a gross understatement. As with many non-profit organizations, the COVID pandemic impacted the FOMNRR organization. For the year, membership activity topped at only 8 corporate and 24 individual memberships. Dues and donations were down almost 64% from our 2019 totals.

However, to every downside there is an upside. Though all Missouri River Events (MRE) were cancelled, donations to this category went up by 11% from 2019. All donors who contributed to MRE this year declined to be refunded, so their contributions are going to be rolled over to support future MRE activities. Prior to the COVID outbreak, FOMNRR ordered materials and supplies to be used in future public gatherings, and these items can all be used when programs resume. Unlike many non-profit organizations FOMNRR was not financially stressed by the COVID pandemic. In fact, the Organization has on hand its largest amount of cash assets ever, going into the new fiscal year with almost \$16,000 to the good.

There were also plenty of things accomplished that didn't require social gathering:

- **Public Boat Access.** Ground work orchestrated by FOMNRR to establish public access to the Niobrara River near the Village of Niobrara came to fruition, with the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), in cooperation with other State and Federal agencies, to build a public access site at Niobrara State Park.
- **Standardized Signage.** In South Dakota, new standardized signs with recognizable logos have been installed along the major highways to better direct the public to Missouri National Recreational River access locations.
- **Hiking Trail Signs.** Efforts continued on FOMNRR's two hiking trail projects in South Dakota. Work on the Frost Trail involved designing a draft trailhead sign. After the design is approved, FOMNRR will move forward in having the sign made to then be installed later as a volunteer project.
- **New Trails.** Members of the group were also actively involved in discussions with the Army Corp of Engineers regarding a process for creating either a trail or series of trails at North Alabama Bend.
- **Redesigned Website.** Team members began layout and content improvement work for the FOMNRR website. The hope is to better connect with members, have a "go to" place where people can get information of various topics, and have something more inviting to the public to potentially enhance membership.
- **Strategic Planning.** As FOMNRR organizationally grows, the need for a strategic plan became very apparent. To begin the process, a subcommittee was developed and, over a series of socially distanced meetings, a draft template of a strategic planning document has taken shape.

FOMNRR Strategic Planning Goals include:

- **Education,** especially focusing on kids and on tribal networking;
- **Conservation,** including river clean up and natural resource preservation/protection
- **Public Access and Awareness,** including promoting the river's recreational opportunities and public informational resources.

The FOMNRR strategic planning effort will dovetail with the development of a six year MNRR Strategic Plan beginning in 2021. As the official non-profit partner of the MNRR, FOMNRR remains committed to continuing collaborative efforts that promote and build upon mutual accomplishments to date. The partnership between the National Park Service and FOMNRR continues to grow, with NPS staff and FOMNRR members collaborating on many programs designed to strengthen public awareness, support educational values, and safeguard the treasures of such a great national recreational river resource.

FOMNRR Retreat

Barbara Yelverton, board member

Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River held a retreat on February 15, 2020 at the Ponca Tribal Community and Education building west of Niobrara, NE. Nick Mauro, cultural director for Ponca Tribe and a former FOMNRR board member, and the Ponca Tribe graciously allowed use of the community building for the board retreat. The retreat was initiated by Daniel Peterson (former NPS MNRR Chief of Interpretation, Education and Outreach, Dan has since taken a new position with St. Croix National Scenic Riverway) and board member Barbara Yelverton after their attendance at a Friends Alliance Meeting at Grand Teton National Park in Jackson, WY in September, 2019.

Objectives for the retreat were multi-faceted:

- Relevancy of our organization to FOMNRR members and to local and regional communities—how do we stay relevant?
- Where does FOMNRR see the organization in 5 years, 10 Years?
- What are FOMNRR's short and long term priorities/goals?
- To accomplish this does FOMNRR need to develop a strategic plan?

After robust discussion there was a consensus by the board that indeed a strategic plan would be a helpful tool. The board decided to form a strategic planning committee to begin the task of developing a strategic plan by identifying, prioritizing and setting goals for FOMNRR and evaluating present events and activities sponsored by FOMNRR. Strategic plan committee members are Rich Burns, chair, Pat James, Bob Foley, Dave Swanson and Barbara Yelverton.

Little did we know that less than a month after the retreat our world would be dealing with a pandemic. Unprecedented and challenging as these times are, the committee has met three times since the retreat in February. We have diligently tasked ourselves with identifying FOMNRR core functions, goals and strategies to accomplish. The committee is also developing a vision statement for FOMNRR. The committee's goal is to bring a document to the full board for consideration and adoption in 2021. Everyone stay safe.



Members of FOMNRR Board at the Winter Retreat

Superintendent's Corner (continued from page 2)

group of 6 primary landowners, willing sellers. Once acquired, the Park will initiate developing a management plan for the Island comparable to the process followed in 2017-18 for developing the Goat Island Management Plan. And, with the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act by Congress in September, the Land and Water Conservation Fund is now permanently funded. Consequently, NPS-MNRR is optimistic that this will provide opportunity in the future for the acquisition of key lands identified within the Park's authorized boundary from willing sellers. A high agency priority for future land acquisition is our targeting the 300+-acre Sanctuary Island for purchase from the willing landowner, which if secured would be the first parcel held by NPS in fee simple title within the Park's 39-Mile District. So, despite the disproportional share of inherent challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 will also be remembered for its share of successes as staff continue to be engaged in further advancing the mission of the Park.

Friends of the MNRR
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