



River Connections

Summer, Fall 2021

What does **YOUR** Missouri National Recreational River look like?

FIRST ANNUAL FOMNRR PHOTO CONTEST

The Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) flows 98 miles between Nebraska and South Dakota. What is your favorite part of the river? What river activities do you, your family, and your friends enjoy? What birds, mammals, insects, plants, or fish have you seen there? What spectacular sunrises, sunsets, and landscapes have you witnessed?

There will be 4 categories:

River Activities, including boating, rafting, kayaking, hunting, and fishing. If photographs of people are recognizable, they will need to sign a release form.

Wildlife and plants in their natural river habitat, including fish, birds, mammals, invertebrates, wildflowers, and trees.

Scenery, including water, geological formations, bridges, sandbars, and river banks. Note: photographs taken with drones will not be accepted.

Youth (18 and under). Photographs by youth must fit into one of the categories listed above.

Winning photographs will be printed in the FOMNRR newsletter and shown on the FOMNRR website and Facebook page

Deadline is October 1, 2021. See page 3 for further instructions.



*A least tern flying
above the MNRR*

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River (FOMNRR) 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.

A Fond Farewell

In February, I was selected as Deputy Regional Director for Science & Resources Management for Interior Regions 3, 4, & 5 of the National Park Service (NPS). In this new capacity I'll be working with all parks and park superintendents and their respective staffs within the MN/Lake Superior and OH/Lake Michigan Zones (states of IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, & WI). My new duty station will be operating from the NPS Regional Office in Omaha, NE. My family and I expect to relocate later in the summer prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year.



Rick Clark

Some highlights of my time at the MNRR:

1. Developing the charter and launching the inaugural of the FOMNRR in July 2016 coinciding with the NPS centennial anniversary;
2. Developing and rolling out the Park's new visitor and educational film in 2018 coinciding with the MNRR 40th anniversary;
3. Resolving the Goat Island impasse that resulted in the island coming into the Park domain upon completion of the management plan for the island in August 2018;
4. Securing funding support through the Land & Water Conservation Fund for the acquisition from willing sellers the James River Island (59-Mile District) and Sanctuary Island (39-Mile District) parcels;
5. Establishing set-aside areas within the MNRR corridor that will assure representative segments will forever be protected as part of the Missouri River Recovery Management Plan/EIS, which was completed in 2017;
6. Development of a new standardized sign plan culminating in new entrance and highway alert signs along SD highways, and hopefully soon in NE;
7. Establishment of the new lower Niobrara River access and visitor use area in cooperation with NDOT, NEGP, & FOMNRR; and,
8. Securing base funding support in 2021 to stand up the Park's first ever Visitor & Resource Protection/Law Enforcement (V&RP/LE) Program.

My hope is some of these accomplishments will lay the foundation for a new era of Park management. In 2021 the Park will see seven new employees, or 70% of the workforce come on board, including a new superintendent to be appointed, and new program managers within the disciplines of V&RP/LE, Interpretation, Education & Outreach, and Science & Resources Management. Additionally, a Park Ranger Protection and Outdoor Recreational Planner will also be hired. I wish these new incumbents and the friends group the absolute best of continued success in advancing the mission of the Park.

Hello to Drew Podany: MNRR Visitor and Resource Manager

Howdy everyone! First off, thank you for the opportunity to introduce myself. I am the new Visitor and Resource Protection (VRP) Program Manager at Missouri National Recreational River. The VRP Division is responsible for managing Law Enforcement, Wildland Fire, Emergency Medical Services and Search and Rescue (SAR) operations within our jurisdiction.

My family and I have been quite busy since landing here in Yankton in April. My wife, Amanda, son, Harker, and I welcomed baby Colter into this world on May 7th. We made the big move from southern Arizona just a few weeks prior! Before southern Arizona, I worked as a River Ranger in Grand Teton, Canyonlands and Grand Canyon National Parks. I regularly spent 16 days per month patrolling the depths of the Grand Canyon via river and training other Rangers in swift water rescue. Days off typically consisted of more kayaking and whitewater trips to Wyoming, Utah, Montana and Idaho. A true highlight of my career was assisting with the Wild and Scenic designation of the Snake River Headwaters in the Greater Yellowstone Area.



Drew Podany

I've been ecstatic with the amount of support we're receiving for standing up a dedicated VRP program here at MNRR. Our staff will include two permanent, year-round Rangers and two additional "seasonal" Rangers over the summer months. Operationally, we'll be conducting regular and reoccurring river patrols in each district of the Park including sand bars, island areas and backwaters. As I noted above, our VRP Rangers will also be active in wildland fire, SAR and EMS operations. Inter-agency and public cooperation will be pivotal to the success of our program. I thank you all for your stewardship of the Missouri River and I'm looking forward to seeing you on the water. As we say in the boatin' world.....I'll catch you on the flip side!

Photography contest rules (continued from page 1)

Email all entries to fomnrrphoto@icloud.com. You may also email questions.

- Photos may be taken with either a camera or a smartphone. If using a smartphone, please choose the actual (4 mb) or large size (1.25 mb).
- You may submit up to 5 photos, but their combined size in an email should be no larger than 25 MB.
- Include your name, address, and telephone number.
- If you are entering your photos under the youth category, include your age.
- Label each digital file with your last name and the title of the image.
- Include a one-two sentence caption for each photograph that lets viewers know where the photograph was taken and what is important to you about it.



Rich Burns, FOMNRR Chair

A Seat at the Table

With every opportunity comes a challenge and visa versa. Mother nature has provided us the opportunity of the Missouri River, and with it comes the challenge of sedimentation. Historically, the Missouri River is a sediment producer. Over the years, dams—especially Gavins Point—have impounded most of that sediment, thereby creating issues not only here where we have collected too much and are choking ourselves out, but also down along the Mississippi River and Delta where they don't get enough sedimentation, so their coastline has been eroding away.

Though many scientific studies have been done related to sedimentation, solutions to resolve issues here and further south have not yet been found. It's one thing to sit back and let nature take its course, but it's quite another to be involved. Those of us in the FOMNRR organization have chosen to be involved. We don't have any more of an answer as to what to do than any other entity or organization, but we are at the table, and that's what is important.

In January, 2021, we were asked by the Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) to provide scoping comments for their Master Plan, which was proposed to come out later this year. Addressing the challenge of sedimentation is one of the Master Plan's major topics. In addition to USACE, the Missouri Sedimentation Action Coalition (MSAC) has recently reached out to FOMNRR to be a partner in the development of a comprehensive Sediment Management Plan for Lewis and Clark Lake. Being asked to participate in this planning shows that FOMNRR can work with agencies and advocacy groups to help resolve issues as big as the Missouri River itself.

FOMNRR appreciates being actively engaged in the challenges we are facing today. For our quality of life, it's not only having what's important—we have to maintain it, too. Keeping the Missouri River as a viable ecosystem is critical to our organization, and chances are that it's important to you as well. Thank you for your support, involvement, trust in us, and for helping us earn "That Seat at the Table." The Missouri National Recreational River is something to be passionate about and worth keeping healthy and viable for future generations to come.

How Partnerships Helped Save an Opportunity

It was March, 2019. The Bomb Cyclone event effectively washed away the Highway 12 Bridge crossing the Niobrara River and Mormon Canal, cutting off access and services to the Village of Niobrara. As an emergency measure, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) received the "go ahead" to begin the construction of a temporary river crossing so east-west travelers wouldn't have to detour about 70 miles. In the rush to get traffic moving again, however, considerations about the importance of public recreational river access were overlooked. If NDOT didn't include some form of recreational river access in their overall plan, the State was going to lose its only public opportunity to reach the Niobrara River and part of the Missouri National Recreational River system.



Highway 12 Bridge break after the 2019 Bomb Cyclone.



New Highway 12 Bridge under construction.



New public overlook, parking, and canoe/kayak launch and takeout under construction in 2021.

It was at this point when the FOMNRR organization and its coalition building skills stepped in. FOMNRR discovered that NDOT had not included public recreational access off of State Highway 12. Prior to the Bomb Cyclone, access to the Niobrara River and Mormon Canal had always been available on State lands overseen by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC). Public access provided opportunities not only for recreational interests such as fishing, waterfowl hunting and kayaking, it also aided tourism business, provided a local cultural identity, and helped provide an overall better quality of life for people of Niobrara and Knox County. During the second half of 2019, FOMNRR took the lead in identifying stakeholders who were willing to use their resources, combine their talents, and contribute solutions to the problem of public access. Agency and stakeholder meetings, workshops, field visits, and outreach efforts were held.

By December, solutions were reached and a strategy was found where excess material used in the temporary bridge crossing could be repurposed and placed as road material to build a new public access to the Mormon Canal from Niobrara State Park. The proposal not only worked for recreational needs, it also created a cost savings to NDOT. To move forward, the agencies involved needed to collaboratively agree to the final development plan. When agency agreements were achieved, dreams became reality! Work on the new public river access, including overlook, parking, interpretive display, canoe/kayak launch and takeout, is almost done and should be opened later 2021. The final product exceeded all expectations. When traveling on Highway 12, just look to the southwest of the new bridge and see for yourself.

FOMNRR would like to thank NGPC, NDOT, State Senator Tim Gragert, the Village of Niobrara, the Ponca Tribe, Santee Sioux Nation, US Army Corp of Engineers, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, Nebraska and South Dakota Canoe and Kayak Associations, local businesses, numerous sporting and fishing groups, and countless others for their involvement. Organizations such as FOMNRR do have important roles they can play. It would be hard to image all of these agencies and interests getting together if it wasn't for one advocacy group taking the lead.

Collaborative partnerships *do* work and can create solutions far greater than any one of us thought possible.

Looking at Birds along the MNRR

Bird of the Day Story

By Dennis Menke, FOMNRR Board Member

We are paddling our kayaks on the MNRR. When Ann and I approach a quarter mile of cut sand bank, I see what looks like a large raptor fussing about the ledge, half way along the cut bank. We pass a young man fishing and I give him a yell and ask him about the bird, "I don't want anything to do with it," he yells back. Curious, I paddle toward the bird. I get closer and find it is a two year old bald eagle. I paddle toward him and he starts flapping his wings and moving across the water to meet me! I extend my kayak paddle towards him and he climbs right on to it, then just looks at me like, "What took you so long!" I've got paddling gloves on and a terry towel across my legs to prevent sunburn. I very slowly bring the large raptor toward me. Man, does he have big talons! Wrapped around one of his talons is some monofilament fishing line. (Never throw a used fishing line into the river.) I can tell that he is tired from his struggles to get airborne. Surprisingly, he just lets me take hold of him, and I stick his head under the cowl of my kayak. I can feel his talons gripping the towel that covers my legs.



Photo by D. Menke

"Now what?" Ann asks. "We paddle to Clay County Park and call a GFP warden," I answer. So off we go -- me, the eagle and Ann. The bird rustles around, but having his head under the cowl keeps him from struggling too much -- those talons are sharp. We arrive at the boat landing and a dog trainer training his dogs greets us. He's amazed to see the eagle in my lap! Calling the warden, we request a cage. When the warden shows up, he immediately tells me that it is against the law to possess a bald eagle. I chuckle and tell him, "I don't have an eagle, and you do." Then I handed him the eagle, and he put it in the transport cage to take to the Raptor Rehabilitation center in Sioux Falls. As the warden is driving off, Ann says, "Too bad you didn't take a picture of you and the eagle -- nobody is going to believe that you caught a bald eagle bare handed." I thought to myself, "I guess I'm just going to have to keep my paddling partner around all my life so she can collaborate my bare-handed eagle catching story." I am a very lucky guy to live on the river.



Piping plover on a sandbar in the MNRR

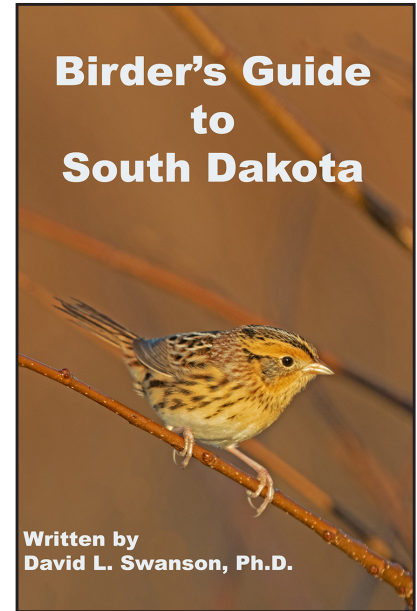


Least tern in flight

A Birder's Guide to South Dakota

by Dave Swanson, FOMNRR board member and Professor of Biology at the University of South Dakota.

South Dakota straddles the 100th Meridian – the unofficial boundary between east and west in North America. The state offers a variety of habitats ranging from pine and spruce forests of the Black Hills and open mixed-grass prairies in the west to large reservoirs on the Missouri River to eastern deciduous forest outposts and remnant tallgrass prairies in far eastern regions. Because of this geographic position and habitat variety, over 420 species of birds have been documented in South Dakota. This book aims to introduce birders to the rich habitats that South Dakota has to offer and their associated birds. Over 100 of the best birding sites in the state are mapped and described in the book, along with specifics on the habitats and birds that occur at each of these sites.



To order, go to: <https://sdou.org/SDOU/Merchandise.aspx>

Swanson, D. L. 2019. *A Birder's Guide to South Dakota*. South Dakota Ornithologists' Union, Sioux Falls, SD, and Sentinel Press, St. Cloud, MN, 358 pp.

You may wonder.....why do we have to stay off some of the sandbars?



Sign on a restricted sandbar

The Interior Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum athalassos*), along with the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), nests on unvegetated sandbars in the Missouri River. Completion of the mainstem dams on the Missouri River in the 1950s and 1960s reduced flooding and changed the flow regime on the river, including free-flowing sections such as those of the MNRR. The reduced flooding has dramatically limited the creation of new sandbar habitat, with detrimental effects to both terns and plovers. The Interior Least Tern was listed as an endangered species in 1985, with fewer than 2,000 birds remaining across the Great Plains and lower Mississippi Valley.

Management efforts to maintain and create sandbar habitat have had a positive effect on Interior Least Terns across their range, including the MNRR, such that they were delisted as an endangered species in January of 2021, with a population now numbering more than 18,000 across 48 nesting regions in 18 states. Interior Least Terns feed primarily on small fish near breeding sandbars, but may range more broadly for foraging, with birds along the MNRR being recorded up to 13 miles from the river foraging over ponds and flooded fields. (By Dave Swanson)

Friends of the MNRR
P.O. Box 7029
Yankton, SD 57078



The Missouri National Recreational River is where imagination meets reality.

Your involvement will not only help sustain the past but also build the future.

We need YOU!

**Friends of the
Missouri National Recreational River**

***Please join, renew,
or donate now***

**Online: www.fomnrr.org
Click the "Join Now" button**

Or mail this form and a check payable to:
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P.O. Box 7029

Membership includes a subscription to the newsletter and invitations to Friends programs and field trips. Memberships and donations are tax-deductible.

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