



# River Connections

Winter/Spring 2023

fomnrr.org

We are a small, non-profit, volunteer-run organization that brings together a wide range of organizations, communities, and individuals who are interested in the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR). Our goal is to educate people of all ages about how to enjoy the MNRR, and to help people learn about the river's history, wild life, and other aspects of this valuable ecosystem.

## In 2023, we will continue to sponsor these Missouri River Events (MRE):

- **Watershed School Festival.** Riverside Park. Thursday, May 4. 8am to noon.
- **Missouri River Cleanup.** Riverside Park. Saturday, May 6. 8am to noon.
- **Homestead Days.** Pierson Ranch. Saturday, June 10. 10am to noon.

## FOMNRR is also looking forward to:

- A "Get to Know Goat Island and Fun-in-the-Sun" party for volunteers and members!
- Helping to reinitiate the NPS Junior Ranger Program.
- Welcoming new volunteers to help with these projects and other recreational and educational opportunities that create community around the MNRR.
- Developing additional ways to inform and educate people about the MNRR and ways to enjoy it.

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Jarett Bies, from the South Dakota Canoe and Kayak Association, teaches area students the basics of kayaking at the MRE Watershed School Festival at Riverside Park in Yankton, SD, on May 5, 2022.

FOMNRR brings people together as advocates for the river—  
*both for today and tomorrow.*

**We need your support  
—help us grow our organization!**

Go to FOMNRR.ORG to become a member or donate.



## A River's Perspective

About this time a hundred years ago, the grade had been completed on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River Meridian Bridge Project, but the other side still had to be finished. The sand pump that had been used to build the grade was being moved to the Dakota side of the River before ice flows became

significant enough to shut the entire job site down for the winter. The temporary pontoon bridge used for river crossings during the summer was left open to allow for "slush ice" movements downstream. It was said to be too dangerous to make a river crossing at Yankton as winter started to approach, so if a person needed to get to Yankton from the Nebraska side, they had to go all the way to Sioux City to cross the Missouri River!

As I drive to and from Yankton in 2022, I often look towards the Meridian Bridge and see people walking along the pedestrian-bike path of Meridian Bridge Trail. Rarely do I think about what it must have been like here before the old bridge was built. But while kayaking and going under the Meridian Bridge, I slow down and get a whole other perspective—the River's perspective. It's a fascinating point of view. From the Missouri River, one can feel the force of the river and see the why the people in Yankton were motivated to build the crossing in the 1920s.

The MNRR still flows as it has for thousands of years. Its islands, once occupied by Native Americans and camped upon by the 1804 Lewis and Clark Expedition, are still there for all of us to explore. The River still possesses the resources necessary for native plants, fish, and animal populations—it remains a vitally important ecosystem. This is all a part of the River's perspective.

### *The Majestic Meridian*

**"I have kayaked the Missouri River many times and am always in awe of the beauty of the majestic Meridian bridge."**

Quote and photograph by Yankton resident, Lisa Schulz.

The challenge today is getting the word out about why seeing things from the River's perspective is so important. Unfortunately, many people don't know or remember what makes the MNRR so special. In 1978, people pushed Congress to designate the 59-mile section of the Missouri River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and it was in 1991 that Congress added another 39-miles of the Missouri River, 20-miles of the Niobrara River, and 6-miles of Verdigre Creek to the original 1978 designation. Those two sections were designated the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) because they are the only parts of the Missouri River that remain unchannelized.

Today, FOMNRR recognizes the Missouri River's perspective by celebrating what the River means to our quality of life. Every community along the MNRR recognizes the significance of the river as part of their history, and as an important part of their lives now. And it is part of every American's heritage.

As a small non-profit organization, we can't accomplish anything without your support. During this time of year, I would like to encourage everyone who believes in what FOMNRR represents to support our mission, goals and programs. With your help, we can enhance our River's Perspective.

**We fully appreciate your involvement and look forward to your memberships, donations, and support in 2023. Go to [FOMNRR.ORG](https://FOMNRR.ORG) to join, renew, or donate. .**





# Climate Change and the Missouri National Recreational River

by Tom Downs, Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Outreach, and Public Information Officer

We've all seen the headlines: "Extreme Weather Threatens National Parks." Climate change is the greatest threat to our national parks and can negatively affect every acre under the care of the National Park Service. This includes the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR), a national park consisting mostly of Missouri River water passing through its borders between the states of South Dakota and Nebraska.

Altered precipitation patterns threaten this area with flooding and drought conditions. Recent reminders of this are the flood of 2011, the bomb cyclone in 2019, and extreme drought this past summer. Shifting weather patterns in our atmosphere can also push extremely cold temperatures into the park, like the dangerous arctic blast that began the 2022/2023 winter season. Extreme weather is occurring with more regularity than previously observed.

MNRR has served as a critical venue for inspiring public thought about everything from Native American history to steamboat history, to endangered species, to extinction. The park shares all these stories boldly. The park's response to climate change is no different. The National Park Service has moved beyond the question of whether the Earth is warming to leading conversations on how to address it. The interpretation of climate change is an evolving topic in all national parks, including MNRR. Awareness about it is a hopeful outcome. Action against it is a desired outcome.

NPS interpreters and educators are established leaders in the field of conservation and have a duty to provide opportunities for understanding that empower individuals to act. While no single act can reverse the effects of climate change, we have an obligation to future generations to address the issue and maintain the integrity of our national parks.

**One of the most precious values of national parks is their ability to teach us about ourselves and how we relate to the natural world. We decided to preserve these places because they are special, and our children, and our children's children deserve to enjoy them just like we do today.**



The Mormon Canal Bridge on Highway 12 near Niobrara, Nebraska, after the bomb cyclone hit on March 13, 2019. This bridge is near the confluence of the Niobrara River and the Missouri River. Niobrara State Park is on the left.

# New Signage at the Niobrara State Park Overlook

If you are driving on Highway 12 across from the Niobrara State Park in Nebraska, you will see the new scenic overlook, with its beautiful view of the Niobrara River as it flows into the Missouri River. If you walk out on the overlook, you'll find four new interpretive signs that teach about the wildlife on the river; how the bridge was rebuilt after the bomb cyclone of 2019; the sacredness of the area to the Ponca People; and how the two important rivers come together. The Friends of the Missouri National Recreational River was instrumental in organizing the collaboration that made this overlook, ramp, and signage possible.

When the bomb cyclone destroyed the Mormon Canal Bridge, it cut off access and services to the Village of Niobrara and forced people in the area to detour at least 70 miles. The storm



also destroyed the only recreational access to the Niobrara River and to this part of the Missouri National Recreational River system. The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) began the immediate construction of a temporary bridge, but public recreational river access was overlooked in the rush to complete the bridge. If NDOT didn't include some form of recreational river access in their long-range planning, there might be not other opportunity.

It was at this point that the FOMNRR organization and its coalition-building skills stepped in. FOMNRR took the lead in reaching out to relevant agencies, organizations and individuals, and by December, 2019, a strategy had been developed in which the 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 canoe/kayak launch, overlook, and parking have been constructed. The four interpretive panels were installed in September, 2022. The design of the overlook and signage was a partnership between Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Nebraska Department of Transportation.

The overlook, interpretive signs, ramp, and parking are part of the Niobrara State Park.

## Hello to Harrison Freund, Outdoor Recreation Planner

My name is Harrison Freund. I began as the new Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Missouri National Recreation River (MNRR) in October 2022. I look forward to getting to know all our partners and stakeholders in the coming weeks and months. The position is new, so you should expect a lot of new things to come out of MNRR.

Following the completion of my master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Iowa, I worked for the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG). ECICOG is a public regional council of governments that provides planning assistance to jurisdictions in the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids corridor. Some of my responsibilities there included plan writing and development as well as grant administration for watershed projects, business assistance programs, and housing assistance efforts. During my time with ECICOG, I became a certified planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners and completed a Sustainable Water Development Certificate from the University of Iowa.

I also served in AmeriCorps twice – once in Cook County, Minnesota along the North Shore, and once at the Holter Reservoir between Helena and Great Falls, Montana. Some of the things I worked on as an AmeriCorps service member included assessing stream health, water quality sampling, outreach and education to school-age children, and studying two Wilderness Study Areas. Being a servicemember in AmeriCorps instilled a profound appreciation that it takes many people to help all of us enjoy our natural and recreational resources.



**I am excited to be a part of preserving the ecological, historical, and cultural heritage of the MNRR for future generations. The river brings all kinds of people together, meaning it belongs to all of us. The Mighty Mo' is an important part of the identity of the regional community, so when people connect with and understand one another through it, amazing things can happen.**



# Looking back on 2022: MRE activities

## Watershed School Festival

Despite the drizzly weather on May 5th, 349 students from six invited Nebraska and South Dakota schools attended presentations offered by twenty organizations in stations that were set up around Yankton's Riverside Park. It was an inspiring setting for students to learn about the MNRR. Much of their experience was hands-on, as students from grades 7-11 touched living animals, tried nature writing, or saw how far they could throw rescue ropes. They also learned about a variety of river-related subjects, including water safety. Students gained a new respect for the river.

The 2023 Watershed School Festival will be held on Thursday, May 4 from 8 am to noon.



## Missouri River Cleanup

On Saturday, May 7th, about 60 volunteers from the Yankton area picked up their Personal Flotation Devices and received safety instructions before going out on seven boats to gather trash from Gavins Point Dam to Riverside Park. A total of 1330 pounds, or .665 of a ton, was brought back to Riverside Park and collected by a ground crew. The trash was then recycled or disposed of. These volunteers helped make the river a cleaner place!

The 2023 Cleanup will be held Saturday, May 6 from 8 am to noon.



## Homestead Days

On June 11, families who visited the picnic shelter at the Pierson Ranch Recreation Area of Lewis and Clark State Park had fun engaging in a number of hands-on activities. For example, they learned how settlers dressed, cooked, played games, and made crafts. There was also a guitar-playing folk singer and a cowboy in chaps who taught kids how to lasso a cow. Kids and adults could try



butter-making, candle-dipping, and panning for gold. Visitors sampled the delicious homemade bread, cherry-rhubarb cobbler, and other old-time foods that were being prepared for them on site. Activities were sponsored by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks, the Meade Center, and Friends of the Missouri

National Recreational River.

The 2023 Homestead Days will be held Saturday, June 10 from 10 am to noon.

## Lake Yankton Outdoor Festival

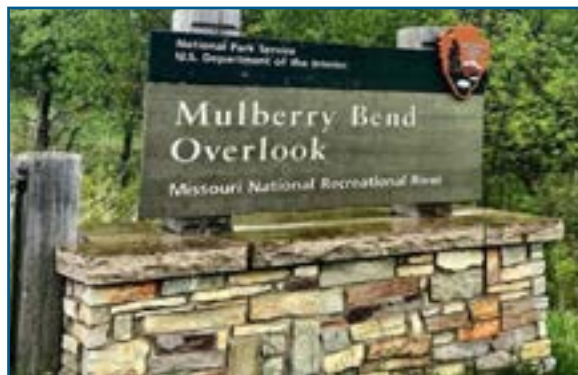
Families who came to the Lake Yankton training dike on June 11 were treated to many fun, hands-on learning experiences. Children played mini golf, disc golf, and hover ball archery. A fishing clinic gave kids a chance to cast a line. Adults and kids went on the lake in kayaks or waterboards, and others learned about birds of prey, and search and rescue services. In 2023, the US Army Corps of Engineers will conduct the Lake Yankton Outdoor Festival at a date to be announced.



## Reopening of the Mulberry Bend Overlook

On June 10, The National Park Service staff invited held a celebration for the reopening of the Mulberry Bend Overlook in Dixon County, Nebraska. The redesign of the Mulberry Bend Overlook improves visitor experience and accomodates all levels of mobility. At the reopening, NPS-MNRR park staff provided information, and the park's mobile ranger station was on site for people to learn more about the river, the park, and MNRR programs.

New construction includes an accessible walkway and parking spot, a slightly lowered overlook, and a new mulched wood trail that follows the flowing contours of the river and the hill. The overlook also gives visitors an expansive view of the Missouri River, the surrounding countryside, and the Newcastle-Vermillion Bridge.



## Frost Trail Signage

The Frost Trail is a FOMNRR project trail that begins near the intersection of SD Highway 19 and Dakota Street, south of Vermillion, SD. The trail travels through riparian woodlands and along the grassy bank of the MNRR. The Gundersen Backwater comes into view along a portion of the trail. Frost Trail is designated for hiking and other foot traffic, such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

To add to the hiking experience, FOMNRR installed an informational trailhead sign at the trail parking lot. The sign includes a map of the trail as well as information about cultural history and ecologic features in the vicinity of the trail. FOMNRR volunteers designed the sign, and it was funded with help from the Vermillion Area Community Foundation, the Howard Coker Memorial Fund, and FOMNRR general



## MRI Symposium

On November 10, 2022, scientists, students, and the public came together to discuss research that is being conducted along the Missouri River. The event was organized by the Missouri River Institute at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. Topics included: What are future research and management plans for the MNRR? How does the red cedar invasion affect birds along the river? How does sandbar management affect piping plovers and least terns? These and many more scientific studies were presented at the MRI Symposium. The event was free and open to the public.





# Paddling and Canoe Traditions along the MNRR

Many adventurous, hearty people have found their way along the Missouri River over the years. From the Native Americans who have traveled the river over many centuries, to the explorers of the 1804–1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition, and to the many contemporary paddlers who have made their way down long stretches of the river, men and women have overcome high winds, swift currents, and tired bodies to experience the beauty and challenge of the Mighty Mo. Two events on the MNRR challenged paddlers in the summer of 2022.



## Fort to Field 50 Paddle Battle

The Fort to Field 50 Paddle Battle took place last summer on July 8, 2022. Paddlers were challenged with 90+ degree temperatures, high winds, and low river levels. Ninety paddlers launched at Fort Randall Creek but less than thirty people were able to make it to the finish line at Springfield, South Dakota. Heroic volunteers supported the paddlers along the way with safety boats, check-points, and water. The event was organized by Jarett Bies, from the South Dakota Canoe and kayak Association.

## Missouri River Paddler's 2022 Rendezvous

Last summer, nearly 100 “through paddler” alumni and associates, from 15 US states and Europe, attended the 2022 MoRP Rendezvous. In 2015 Norm Miller and other river-alums organized a “through paddler” reunion—the MoRP Rendezvous, which was named after the historic fur trader marketplaces. It was a successful event, and they decided to repeat it in 2022. Starting south of the Fort Randall Dam on July 30, the paddlers camped at selected sites until they reached Scenic Park in South Sioux City on August 7. Here are a few of the accomplished through paddlers you might have seen on the MNRR that week:

- **Norm Miller**, founder of the Missouri River Paddlers and organizer of the 2022 MoRP Rendezvous. In 2004, he completed an up-river journey from St Louis to the Pacific Coast to honor the Bicentennial of the 1804 Lewis and Clark Expedition.
- **Neil Moore**, author and adventurer. He departed Astoria, Oregon on Feb 9, 2020, on a 22-month multi-river journey that ended in New York City on Dec. 14, 2021.
- **Dirk Rohrbach**, German physician and photo-journalist. In 2018 he became the 13th person to descend from the Brower's Springs, Montana, to the Gulf. Dirk filmed his journey.
- **Ellen 'Magellan' Falterman**, in 2017, she was the youngest woman to descend from Three Forks, Montana, to the Gulf. Ellen plans to circumnavigate the globe in a rowboat.
- **Churchill Clark**, noted 'dugout canoe' builder, In 2015 he retraced the Corps of Discovery Expedition. He's the 4th Great Grandson of William Clark.
- **David L Miller**, retired Chair of Geology at SUNY/Cortland. In 2002 he began a three-summer solo kayak descent. Afterwards, he wrote “The Complete Paddler,” aka ‘the bible,’ used by virtually every paddler on the Missouri River.
- **Tina Brooke**, a legend on the Missouri River. In 2017 she paddled solo in a canoe from Bear Trap Canyon on the Madison River, MT, to Vicksburg, MS.

List and profiles by Bob Foley, FOMNRR Board Member.

Missouri River Paddlers gathering at the MoRP 2022 Rendezvous



# About FOMNRR Membership



**FOMNRR website: [www.fomnrr.org](http://www.fomnrr.org)**

**NPS-MNRR website: [www.nps.gov/mnrr](http://www.nps.gov/mnrr)**

**“Like” FOMNRR on our Facebook page!**



*“Mid-winter morning from Sanctuary Island looking East onto the Missouri River.”*

*Banner photo, page 1: “Late afternoon winter looking toward Sanctuary Island from South Dakota.”*

Both photos are by Barbara Yelverton, FOMNRR Board member.

## Annual Membership

### FOMNRR Membership

- \_\_\_ \$25 Individual
- \_\_\_ \$50 Family
- \_\_\_ \$10 Student (under 25)

### Corporate Sponsorship

- \_\_\_ \$1000 Platinum
- \_\_\_ \$500 Gold
- \_\_\_ \$250 Silver
- \_\_\_ \$125 Bronze

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

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Click the “Become a Member” button**

Or send a check to  
**Friends of the MNRR  
P.O. Box 7029  
Yankton, SD 57078**

**Memberships and donations are tax-deductible.**