



History of River Keepers

River Keepers mission is to advocate sustainable use of the Red River of the North, primarily within the Fargo-Moorhead area. River Keepers:

- Advocates awareness, appreciation and stewardship of the Red River.
- Advocates riverfront development projects.
- Encourages and promotes River usage.
- Helps develop economic opportunities in the River corridor.
- Encourages development of recreation amenities in the River corridor.
- Educates residents on the River environment.
- Addresses safety concerns regarding the River corridor.
- Assists in providing cultural opportunities at the River's edge.

River Keepers grew from a desire to rediscover the Red River's heritage, and to teach people to again appreciate the Red as a living River. In earlier decades of Fargo-Moorhead history, people used and appreciated the Red River for a variety of activities. In later years, people lost that appreciation for the river which is the dominant geographical feature in the community, and began to consider it a liability to be avoided.

In 1989, believing that it was time to promote a "new attitude about the River," and explore ways to develop the River as a recreational site, a team of architects called the Red River Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT), produced an intensive review and analysis of the resources along the Red River that flows through the cities of Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota.

R/UDAT proposed the creation of an organization to act in the position of River Keeper. They also proposed plans to educate people about

maintaining the ecological health of the river, ideas for expanding the river's recreational use, and plans to build a "rediscovered" riverfront area in the downtown Fargo-Moorhead area. These visions could be accomplished through the actions of a River Keepers organization, the Fargo and Moorhead governmental offices, and by educating the public to be stewards of the river.

A few of River Keepers milestones include:

1989

- Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team studies Red River in Fargo-Moorhead

1990

- Formed River Keepers
- Hired Steve Zaiser as Executive Director
- Constructed MB Johnson Boat Ramp
- Installed floating bike/pedestrian bridge

1991

- Held first annual "Race the Red" canoe/kayak race
- Produced first annual photo contest

1992

- Published "Red River Explorers Guides"

1993

- Hired Christine Holland as Project Coordinator

1994

- Held first "River Caring Workshop"

1995

- Started “Adopt-the-Red” clean-up program
- Installed interpretive markers
- Published “The Red River: A Use and Protection Guide”

1996

- Organized first “Fun For All Fishing Clinic”
- Established river access sites in Lindenwood.
- Started coordinating “Paint the Drain”
- Coordinated an Archeological Dig for “Fargo in the Timber”

1997

- Published “Common Water: A Story of Life Along the Red River of the North”

1998

- Hired Executive Director, Bob Backman
- Formed Red River of the North Trail Group

1999

- Completed Midtown Dam retrofit
- Implemented “Cavity Replacement” program
- Organized first canoe/kayak demonstration on the Red.
- Coordinated first “Red River Water Festival”
- Began Lions Conservancy Park developments
- Built outdoor learning classroom at Johnson Park
- Worked with Fargo Park District on Convent Landing

2000

- Received funding from Minnesota Department of Natural Resource for lighted buoys and signs providing warning of dam locations.
- Became coordinating partners for the Red River of the North Historic International Canoe Trail.
- Received funding from Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation grant for an outdoor classroom at Lions Conservancy Park, which was designed by an NDSU Landscape Architecture class.
- Constructed two new boat ramps on both sides of the Midtown Dam at Fargo’s Dike East.
- Coordinated The Millennium Tour, a 34 day, 550 mile, international canoe trip from the Headwaters of the Red River at Breckenridge, Minnesota to the Mouth at Selkirk, Manitoba, Canada.

2001

- Passed inspection and began operation of S.S. Ruby, a pontoon tour boat.
- Received FM River grant from EPA to communicate the health of the river to citizens.
- Progress on canoe trail included appropriation to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources from Minnesota legislature for inventory and mapping.

2002

- Obtained funding for safety lighting under downtown bike paths.
- Developed master plan for Red River Boating & Canoe Trail under contract to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- Installed over 400 wood duck nesting boxes in the river corridor.
- Installed interpretive signs at MB Johnson Park nature trail.

2003

- Led business and government leaders on a trip to visit Sioux Falls and Sioux City, two cities that have successfully incorporated the riverfront into their urban redevelopment.
- Published a Red River Basin Water Quality Monitoring Volunteer Manual.
- Completed, with City of Fargo and Fargo Park District officials, a Downtown Fargo Riverfront Development Plan for the area between Dike East and Oak Grove.
- Working with an advisory committee and many volunteers on the Living Lab, an urban restoration demonstration site.
- Added canoe and kayak rental services at the S.S. Ruby landing.

2004

- Developed map, directional signage and kiosks for the Red River of the North Canoe and Boating route between Breckenridge and Georgetown.
- Coordinated South Dam Retrofit ribbon cutting.
- Expanded Red River Water Festival to include an optional outside component focusing on water quality monitoring

2005

- Produced three issues of *River Connections*, a citizens guide to river stewardship.
- Worked with Fargo Park District on a dock at Convent Landing.
- Coordinated South Dam Retrofit Ribbon “Connecting” and lake sturgeon release.
- Coordinated organizational meeting of FM River Riders, a human powered water craft group.

2006

- Completed Map 2 & 3 of the Red River Canoe & Boating Route map series.
- Designed and planted native plant wild bird garden at Living Lab.
- Coordinated *Canoeing, Cooking, and Camping*, River Keeper’s first women’s weekend on the Red River.

2007

- Partnered with Fargo Park District, Cass County Soil Conservation District and Sierra Club to coordinate the first annual Reforest the Red event where 1000 trees were planted. Received award from the ND Forest Service.
- Worked with City of Fargo on the development of the Grand Meadow and Wildflower Grove.

2008

- Contracted with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to develop a master plan and water trail map for the Otter Tail River.
- Made presentation at Dniester River Conference on role of non-profits in river management. Exploring the development of a “sister river” relationship with Eco-TIARS, a non profit working with the Dniester River.
- Coordinated the first two ‘sold out’ *Make Your Own Rain Barrel Workshops* with Cass Soil Conservation District and Moorhead Community Education.
- Collaborated with the Northern Plains Botanical Garden Society on 2 green roof workshops.
- Wrote, designed and installed about 30 interpretive signs. Planted 900 trees and shrubs in plots. 12 experimental plots were designed and laid out by staff and Cass Co Soil Conservation District.

2009

- Approved a “Flood Awareness in the Red River Valley: A call to action-again” statement that contained 5 recommendations.
- Produced a backpack program for hands-on activity stations at the Living Lab that tie into elementary curriculum standards.
- Added a graduate credit component to the Women’s Weekend.
- Analyzed River Keepers water quality monitoring data from the last 10 years.

2010

- Developed a “sister rivers” relationship with the Dniester River in Moldova.
- Taught the first two ‘*Make Your Own Compost Tumbler Workshops* with Cass Soil Conservation District and Moorhead Community Education.
- Added a rain garden demonstration site to the Living Lab.
- Worked with an NDSU student on a low water use garden.
- Produced the first board run fundraising event - Celebrate Our Red at the HoDo.

2011

- Partnered with Cass County Soil Conservation District on two “Living with the River” bus tours for city and county leaders.
- Received the Governors 2010 Best Package Award for *Canoeing, Cooking, and Campfire: A women’s weekend soft adventure*.
- Completed a rain garden at the Living Lab.
- Installed aquatic invasive species signs to combat the increasing threat.
- Developed and distributed a F-M Red River Map with support from Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Fargo Moorhead Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- Board coordinated the first annual River Keepers Golf Tournament and Atomic Coffee cookie sale.

For more information:

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