



# 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 Park
- 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 MB Johnson Park
- Constructed 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 the north and south 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

- Published a Red River Basin Water Quality Monitoring Volunteer Manual.
- Completed, with City of Fargo and Fargo Park District officials, a Downtown Fargo River-front 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

For more information:

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