

# History of



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 1<sup>st</sup> Executive Director.
- Constructed MB Johnson Boat Ramp.
- Installed floating bike/pedestrian bridge.
- Coordinated first Riverfront Days festival.



## 1992

- Published *Red River Explorers Guides*.



## 1993

- Hired Christine Holland as Project Coordinator.

## 1994

- Held first River Caring Workshop.
- Coordinated Duck Derby on the Red as a fundraiser with FM Sertoma Club.



## 1995

- Started Adopt-the-Red clean-up program.
- Published *The Red River: A Use and Protection Guide*.
- Installed interpretive markers in the river corridor.



## 1996

- Started coordinating Paint the Drain.
- Organized first Fun For All Fishing Clinic.
- Established river access sites in Lindenwood.
- 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Executive Director, Bob Backman.
- Formed Red River of the North Trail Group.



## 1999

- Completed Midtown Dam retrofit.
- Began Lions Conservancy Park developments.
- Coordinated first Red River Water Festival.
- Implemented Cavity Replacement program.
- Worked with Fargo Park District on Convent Landing.
- Built outdoor learning classroom at Johnson Park.
- Received grant for Project RUN (River University Naturalists).



## 2000

- Received funding from Minnesota Department of Natural Resource for lighted buoys and signs providing



- Worked with partners to get two new boat ramps on both sides of the Midtown Dam at Fargo's Dike East.



- Became coordinating partners for the Red River of the North Historic International Canoe Trail.

- 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.



- 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.

## 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.
- Obtained appropriation to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources from Minnesota legislature for inventory and mapping.
- Participated in Moorhead Parks and Recreation's first Polar Party.



## 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 two trips to visit St. Paul, and Sioux Falls/Sioux City, these cities that have successfully incorporated the riverfront into their urban redevelopment.
- Worked with an advisory committee and many volunteers on the Living Lab, an urban restoration demonstration site.
- Published a Red River Basin Water Quality Monitoring Volunteer Manual.
- Participated in the St. Patrick's Day Parade.
- Added canoe and kayak rental services at the S.S. Ruby landing.
- Completed, with City of Fargo and Fargo Park District officials, a Downtown Fargo Riverfront Development Plan for Dike East to Oak Grove.



## 2004

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



## 2005

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



## 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.



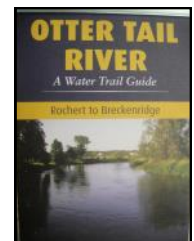
## 2007

- 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 North Dakota 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.
- Coordinated the first two 'sold out' *Make Your Own Rain Barrel Workshops* with Cass County Soil Conservation District.
- Collaborated with the Northern Plains Botanic Garden Society on 2 green roof workshops.
- Wrote, designed and installed about 30 interpretive signs. Planted 900 trees and shrubs in plots. In coordination with Cass County Soil Conservation District, 12 experimental plots were designed and planted.
- Initiated T-shirt to Tote Project with Moorhead Community Education.



- Explored the development of a “sister river” relationship with Eco-TIRAS, a non-profit working with the Dniester River. Made presentation at Dniester River Conference on role of non-profits in river management.

## 2009

- Approved a “Flood Awareness in the Red River Valley: A call to action-again” statement that contained 5 recommendations.
- Assisted Wahpeton Breckenridge coordinate their first Red River Water Festival.
- Produced a backpack program for hands-on activity stations at the Living Lab that tie into elementary curriculum standards.
- Analyzed River Keepers water quality monitoring data from the last 10 years.



## 2010

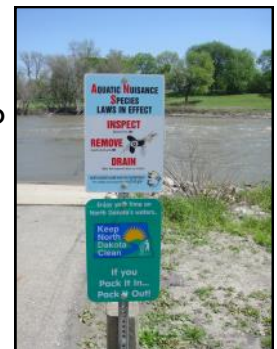
- Developed a “sister rivers” relationship with the Dniester River in Moldova.
- Added a rain garden demonstration site to the Living Lab.
- Taught the first 2 ‘Make Your Own Compost Tumbler Workshops’ with Cass Soil Conservation District and Moorhead Community Education.

- 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.
- Installed aquatic invasive species signs to combat the increasing threat.
- Received the Governors 2010 Best Package Award for Canoeing, Cooking, and Campfire: A Women’s Weekend on the Red River.
- Completed a rain garden at the Living Lab.
- 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.
- Coordinated the first annual board member led River Keepers Golf Tournament and cookie sale at Atomic Coffee.



## 2012

- Managed (along with the City of Fargo Forestry, Fargo Park District and City of Fargo Planning and Development) ten AmeriCorps members who removed 80,000 pounds of woody debris and 1400 pounds of trash from the downtown riparian area during an 8 week project.
- Worked with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other partners to coordinate a ribbon "tying" ceremony for the Christine and Hickson Dams Retrofit Modifications. All five local dams are now modified!
- Started River Rambles series with guest narrators on the S.S. Ruby tour boat.



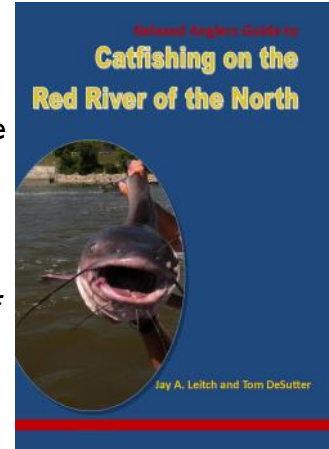
## 2013

- First stand up paddle board entry in the Race the Red canoe and kayak races.
- Managed the Red River Clean Team in partnership with the City of Fargo Forestry, Fargo Park District, and City of Moorhead.
- With grant support from the Minnesota Department of Health, River Keepers convened an advisory group and researched community outreach messages and protocols for pharmaceutical disposal.

- River Keepers, the International Water Institute (IWI), and the Red River Basin Commission established common office space at the Red River Watershed Center, 1120 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue North in Fargo.

## 2014

- Increased Red River Water Festival to 5 days to accommodate more 4th grade students.
- Published *The Relaxed Anglers Guide to Catfishing on the Red River of the North* with authors Jay Leitch and Tom DeSutter. All proceeds go to River Keepers.
- Created first river education geocache.
- Hired Christine Holland as 3<sup>rd</sup> Executive Director.



## 2015

- Produced River Keepers 25th Anniversary Video.
- Planted 3500 trees and shrubs during Reforest the Red events.
- Produced two How To videos for rain barrels and compost tumblers.
- Held River Paddling Excursions and started renting canoes and kayaks again with Moorhead Parks and Recreation.



## 2016

- Produced an exhibit that was displayed at the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County May-June
- New opportunities for youth education included leading a River Detective Camp through West Fargo Parks, participating in Ellen Hopkins Nature Play Steering Committee, and mini water festival at the World Garden Commons.
- Kicked off a strategic planning process to set priorities to strengthen operations so that we can climb towards our vision.
- Hired Kim Morris as Project Coordinator.



## 2018

- Received Clay County Soil & Water Conservation District's Outstanding Conservationist Award.
- Held first Best Decorated Contest during Race the Red.



## 2017

- Along with City of Fargo and Fargo Park District, created a 10-year Reforest the Red Plan. Increased the number of trees and shrubs planted in Fargo to 9,000!
- Over 1700 (up 600 over last year) volunteers contributed over 4800 hours to River Keepers projects, events and committees.
- Coordinated an "Advanced Catfishing Seminar" with Brad Durick.
- Changed to a flag format for Race the Red canoe and kayak races with 52 vessels participating.



Annie Wodarek

- Integrated the City of West Fargo as a partner in the Storm Drain Marking Program.
- Received a refreshed logo, new slogan, and brand etiquette guide from Absolute Marketing.
- Partnered with Red River Zoo and Giacaches to create Watchable Wildlife geocache.
- A volunteer created a photo booth prop with people enjoying and helping sustain the Red River to use at events.
- Coordinated first Pollinator Habitat Workshop with Clay Soil & Water Conservation District and Cass County Soil Conservation District.



## 2019

- Created an online educational activity tote check out system.
- Coordinated two winter hikes along the Red River.
- Received North Dakota Trees Volunteer Organization Award from the North Dakota Forest Service.
- Produced multiple impact videos about our projects and our new slogan Learn, Sustain, Enjoy.



## 2020

- Created, with volunteer Gia Rassier, the Red River Geocaching Adventure Lab utilizing the interpretive signs and new trail at M.B. Johnson Park.
- Hosted our first interpretive snow shoe hike along the Red River during Frostival.
- Produced multiple project volunteer training videos and offered contactless pick up of project supplies so that the community could volunteer for the Storm Drain Marking Program, T-shirt to Tote Project and trash clean ups on and along the Red River during the pandemic.



## 2021

- Created, with the Moorhead Public Library, our first Story Stroll at Viking Ship Park featuring the book *Hey! Water*.
- Created our first Red River Ornament Challenge to promote one of our projects/ programs and exploration of riverfront parks. This year's theme was Reforest the Red.
- Coordinated our first ever Winter Solstice Walk which brought out over 220 participants!
- Partnered with the Fargo Park District, Moorhead Parks and Recreation and Southeast Cass Water Resource District to work with 225 volunteers to pick up over 16,000 pounds of trash along and in the Red River, along drains and in Snakey Creek.



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