

Friends of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway 2015 Annual Summary



Who we are

Friends of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway, Inc., also known as FLOW, is an organization that works to protect and preserve the wilderness-type experience of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway.

What we do

Our Strategic Plan includes three primary goals:

- 1) Information and education
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) A well-informed membership

Information and Education

“Kids Don’t Float” Water Safety Program

The Kids Don’t Float Life Jacket Loaner Board program is a cooperative program of the U.S. Coast Guard, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and other partners. The purpose of the program is to install life jacket loaner stations at boat landings around Wisconsin. The stations provide an opportunity for recreational users to borrow a life jacket or Personal Flotation Devices. The life jacket is then returned to a loaner station. This year, FLOW worked with the WDNR, the Riverway Board and area businesses to install six Kids Don’t Float kiosks on the Lower Wisconsin River.



Kids Don't Float kiosk along the Riverway

Long-term Study of Surface, Groundwater, and Aquatic Communities in Backwater Sloughs of the Riverway

Dave Marshall, a FLOW board member and retired aquatic biologist with the WDNR, has been studying the habitat and water quality in the backwater sloughs. Through his work, Dave has documented a decline in water quality that has impacted rare fish species. He attributed the impacts to contaminated groundwater from intensive agriculture in the sand plain adjacent to

the Riverway. Dave and FLOW have continued this work by securing WDNR grants and working in cooperation with The River Alliance of Wisconsin and Sauk County. As more data is collected, it is now clear that groundwater high in nitrates is the major factor in the overall water quality and habitat decline in these unique water bodies. Currently a study is underway to establish standards for vegetated buffers adjacent to sloughs to prevent and mitigate water quality decline. The list of partners for the project now includes UW-Madison and UW-Stevens Point.

Wisconsin River Float Trip by Ruth Oppedahl of the WI Natural Resources Foundation

This fall, Ruth Oppedahl, the executive director of the Natural Resources Foundation, paddled the Wisconsin River from its headwaters to the Mississippi River. The purpose of her trip was to bring attention to the beauty, the importance, the threats and the need for collective action to protect and manage the river and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. FLOW assisted Ruth on her trip, coordinated special events and publicized her journey.



Ruth and FLOW President Timm Zumm

Paddling Events and River Outings

FLOW President Timm Zumm and other board members organized several paddling and other events along the Riverway:

- An outing for a local Girl Scout Troop
- A paddling event for the staff of Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA), a partner organization
- The Wisconsin River Alliance paddling event(s)
- River Safety programs for school groups
- An outing for UW-Platteville students organized by our intern Katya Frank

Advocacy

Legal Challenge to Wastewater Permit

FLOW worked with its partner, the Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA), in implementing a legal challenge to a wastewater permit issued by the WDNR to a consortium of dairy processors. The permit conditions did not comply with the law and a settlement was reached after extensive negotiations between the MEA, WDNR and permittee. Funds from the settlement were used to help purchase a conservation easement adjacent to a slough to mitigate the impacts from groundwater high in nitrates. The Driftless Area Land Conservancy worked on the project and they hold the easement (see long term study above). The effort began more than two years ago culminating with securing the easement at the end of 2014 and early 2015.

RAMSAR Designation to Riverway Wetlands

FLOW worked with the WDNR field staff and the Wisconsin Wetlands Association to submit a Ramsar Convention application to designate the Lower Wisconsin River as a "Wetland of International Significance." Other large wetland systems in Wisconsin that have qualified and received this designation include the Horicon Marsh, Kakagon Slough and the Door County wetlands. Unfortunately the WDNR administrators have withdrawn support for the application at this time.

WDNR Master Plan Revision

FLOW has been extensively involved in the process to revise the WDNR Master Plan for the Riverway. One issue we are focusing on is water quality and habitat decline in backwater sloughs. In May of 2015, FLOW board members organized a tour of the slough study sites for WDNR planners and land managers.



Groundwater sampling demonstration

The tour involved a demonstration of groundwater sampling procedures at the study areas. After the tour, WDNR made a verbal commitment to mention water quality and habitat degradation in the sloughs and offer recommendations in the Master Plan revision.

FLOW is a strong supporter of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board mission to administer Riverway law. Members work closely with Mark Cupp, executive director of the Riverway, on education, emerging issues, and special events.

Petition for Corrective Action

Although not a board-approved action, three FLOW board members and one former board member joined a first-of-its-kind action in Wisconsin led by the MEA to draw federal attention to the lack of environmental oversight in Wisconsin. Through this effort, MEA filed an 85-page petition to the U.S. EPA (Region 5) requesting the EPA rescind its delegated authority to the WDNR to administer the Federal Clean Water Act. This is important because the EPA provides funds to the states to administer regulatory programs such as issuing permits to municipalities and industry to discharge wastewater to "waters of the U.S." The request to remove the authority from the WDNR is based on at least 75 deficiencies in the WDNR's regulatory programs. This is a long-term problem that is only getting worse. The bold move by MEA and a total of 16 petitioners will hopefully initiate changes that will improve Wisconsin's water resources. As a follow-up to the

petition, more than 50 retired WDNR staff have signed letters to the EPA in support of the petition. FLOW board members were involved in the outreach effort with WDNR retirees.

Informed Membership

FLOW devoted a considerable amount of time and effort developing and maintaining partnerships with other groups and organizations that share our mission. We believe that we can pass along valuable information and insight to our members as we engage with our partners. Our hope is that our information will translate into action to protect and enjoy the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. We have worked with the following organizations on activities, issues and special events:

*The River Alliance of Wisconsin
Midwest Environmental Advocates
Crawford County Stewardship
Driftless Area Land Conservancy
Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance
Wisconsin Wetlands Association
The Lower Wisconsin Riverway Board
UW Madison and UW Stevens Point*

Financial Report

INCOME/ASSETS	Amount (\$)
Balance from year 2014	3,383
Membership dues\contributions	9,250
Research Grant	2,500
T-shirt sales	70
Total Income	11,820
EXPENSES	
Charitable contributions	200
Dues and subscriptions	54
Bank service charge	22
Annual meeting costs (2014)	557
Postage and delivery	250
Printing and reproduction	293
Professional fees (accounting)	55
Utilities	3,166
Liability insurance	450
Office supplies	313
Outside services	1,663
Wild edibles fiduciary pay-out	1,159
Miscellaneous	363
Total Expenses	8,545
NET INCOME 2015	3,275
Carryover to 2016	6,658