



THE OTTER

Newsletter of Friends of the Big Sioux River

Formula for Success

There have been many headlines and articles highlighting unsuccessful efforts to promote and develop riparian buffers along the Big Sioux River and other rivers in South Dakota. But here's a report about a program that is making a difference.

The steady successes of the Big Sioux River Project (BSRP) and its promotion of best management practices for lands within the Big Sioux River watershed are worth noting for several reasons. After developing innovative conservation strategies, more than eighty-five miles of rivers and streams in the Big Sioux watershed have been protected, including 3,295.3 acres enrolled into buffers during the last decade. Implementation of improved livestock grazing, feeding management, and manure utilization as natural fertilizer are also valuable practices implemented by the BSRP to prevent water degradation.

Buffer promotion has been underway since 2008 through the Big Sioux River Project's RAM (Riparian Area Management) program and since 2013 through SRAM (Seasonal Riparian Area Management). The BSRP's successes hinge on its multi-pronged approach to stewardship, which includes innovative cropping and conservation strategies along priority riparian areas within the watershed. The BSRP has evolved to develop close relationships with partners while applying sound conservation practices that involve landowner engagement and participation to achieve common goals.

(Continued on page 2)



Photos courtesy of Big Sioux River Project

Sponsored by the Minnehaha Conservation District and staffed by the East Dakota Water Development District, based in Brookings, SD, the BSRP prevents considerable amounts of pollution from entering the Big Sioux River. This includes, annually, 179,776 pounds of nitrogen, 46,662 pounds of phosphorus, and approximately 14,246 tons of sediment. It is also estimated that massive amounts of E. coli (in the quadrillions) are prevented from reaching the river each year. Residents of the Big Sioux River watershed should be excited about the result of the BSRP's continued collaboration between partners and landowners.

Along with the Big Sioux River Project, other organizations and agencies have continued supporting the effort to improve water quality in the Big Sioux River watershed. These groups include the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the cities of Dell Rapids and Sioux Falls, South Dakota's conservation districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and several non-profit conservation organizations, including Friends of the Big Sioux River and Northern Prairies Land Trust.

To learn more about the Big Sioux River Project visit, bigsioouxriver.com.



“BSRP PREVENTS CONSIDERABLE AMOUNTS OF POLLUTION FROM ENTERING THE BIG SIOUX RIVER. THIS INCLUDES, ANNUALLY, 179,776 POUNDS OF NITROGEN, 46,662 POUNDS OF PHOSPHORUS, AND APPROXIMATELY 14,246 TONS OF SEDIMENT.”



RIVER QUIZ

Question



Can you identify this Big Sioux River location?

See page 3 for the answer.

New FBSR Staff Member



Emily Oyos, Outreach and Donor Coordinator

Recent Augustana University graduate Emily Oyos is the new Outreach and Donor Coordinator for FBSR. Emily grew up on a small acreage outside Sioux Falls, and her experiences there shaped her feelings about adventure, nature and the outdoors. Emily is excited about working for an organization that can make a difference in the health of the Big Sioux River. "Through Friends of the Big Sioux River," she explained, "I look forward to working with and educating our community members and lawmakers on water quality and conservation practices to improve our river for all species, both now and for future generations. Together, we can defend, protect, and celebrate this place we call home."

To contact Emily, email her at outreach@friendsofthebigsiouxriver.org.

RIVER QUIZ

Answer

Cranes over the Big Sioux River! Construction of the so-called Steel District in Sioux Falls is underway along the west side of the river south of Falls Park. This photo -taken from Falls Park's southernmost observation overlook on the west side of the river- shows what will soon be a nine-story, 175,000 square foot office and retail building. The Steel District will occupy most of the former site of Sioux Steel, a longtime business that produces and sells steel structures for agriculture. The company moved its manufacturing aspects to a new location, opening the way for the new and welcome development. In addition to the nine-story building featured in the photo, the Steel District will include a hotel/convention center, one hundred apartments, a parking garage, skyway system, pedestrian corridor, and additional retail/restaurant spaces. The Steel District will extend Sioux Falls' riverside promenade on the west side of the river, linking downtown to Falls Park. The scenic vantage for the Steel District includes the southern portion of Falls Park and the Big Sioux River. Local real estate developer, Lloyd Companies, is building and managing the Steel District. The ambitious project carries a price tag approaching \$200 million. Another large, new development -Cherapa buildings II, III and IV- is proceeding on the east side of the river, and upstream of Falls Park. This mix of buildings will blend retail, parking, offices, apartments, and condominiums. The face of Sioux Falls and its relationship to the Big Sioux River is enhanced with these notable projects.

Board Member Profile

Ryan Donovan, Board Chair



Ask Ryan Donovan why he volunteers his time and energy to Friends of the Big Sioux River, and he'll respond without hesitation. "In 2018, I had an epiphany," he explained. "I realized how ridiculous it is that the Big Sioux River remains unacceptably polluted and that too many people in our community seem to tolerate that condition."

Donovan sought a meeting with FBSR founder, Dana Loseke, to learn more. And in 2019 Donovan joined FBSR's board of directors.

Donovan, a Sioux Falls native, is vice-president of business development at a local health care institution, managing and promoting the health system's business products. He views pollution issues from the perspective of running a responsible business. "If you operate a small or large business or a family farm," said Donovan, "and you can't produce a product or provide a service without leaving the environment in at least as good a condition as it was before your business, then you have a flawed and failing business model."

“

“OUR FUNDRAISING AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS HAVE BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL, AND WE HAVE EXCELLENT VISIBILITY IN THE COMMUNITY.”

Donovan's love of the outdoors started young, when his father and grandfather took him on camping, fishing, and hunting trips. His passion for those activities and for preserving wildlife habitat continues. "I have applied for just about every large-game hunting license offered in our state," Donovan explained.

Last year, Donovan became chair of the FBSR board, and he noted several highlights of his tenure. "We have a full board now, and it is a very talented, enthusiastic and diverse collection of people," he said. "Our fundraising and development efforts have been very successful, and we have excellent visibility in the community."

New Board Members

Tyler Wasberg

Tyler Wasberg, Sioux Falls, graduated from Augustana University and works in Sioux Falls as a brewer at Remedy Brewing Company. Tyler, a Minnesota native, has been passionate about the outdoors and conservation from a young age.

Tim Meagher

Tim Meagher, Sioux Falls, serves as chief operating officer of Vanguard Hospitality, overseeing operational management for its restaurant properties, including Grille 26, Minervas in downtown Sioux Falls and Morrie's Steakhouse. Under his direction, Vanguard is purchasing food sources from local farmers who use healthy growing practices.

Jason Unger

Jason Unger, Flandreau, is an attorney whose diverse legal practice includes serving businesses as corporate counsel. Jason volunteers considerable time to his community, serving on a variety of local boards, and he also is a member Flandreau's city council.

Public Can Contribute to New Falls Park Master Plan

The future of Falls Park, near downtown Sioux Falls, will be determined -in part- by interested citizens. Today's sparkling iteration of the park began in the late 1970s, when farsighted citizens envisioned an urban sanctuary and a fitting homage to the city's namesake. Neglected for many years, the land around the falls was overgrown, inaccessible, and covered with litter. Few visited the place. It was a squandered resource. Today's park is a stunning, 125-acre gem, a centerpiece of a proud community. And the park's master plan is being updated. Your ideas are welcome. Not only will there be public meetings, but there are online opportunities for input.

According to the City of Sioux Falls: "The Falls Park Master Plan will consider opportunities, challenges, needs, desires and preferences for the future of Falls Park. Leveraging public and stakeholder input will be the main influence in the creation of this plan. These conversations will provide guidance on growth and development, amenities and services, safety, transportation, mobility, connectivity, public improvements, and funding."

Visit confluence.mysocialpinpoint.com/falls-park-master-plan to learn more.





Heartland River

A Book Review

By Pete Carrels

It's not uncommon for locals to bemoan the disrespect or inadequate understanding about their home territory demonstrated by people living elsewhere. That seems especially true for our slice of heaven, the upper Midwest. A new book about the Big Sioux River, titled *Heartland River*, specifically expresses this circumstance. According to *Heartland River* editor Jon Lauck, the rest of the country does not comprehend or care about the ecological and cultural richness of the Big Sioux River and its region. And while there is some truth to that sentiment, a bigger concern related to the Big Sioux River is not that those who live far from the river don't recognize the waterway's substance and consequence, it's that too few who live *near* the Big Sioux feel a meaningful connection to the river. This is one reason the river and its watershed have been dramatically altered and degraded. Correcting that deficiency by cultivating a collective of informed river enthusiasts is one of the challenges Friends of the Big Sioux River works to overcome. Can *Heartland River* propel a rising level of interest and sensitivity among those who live near the river? I hope so.

Editor Lauck assembled a group of writers, historians, and scientists from across the country to present a variety of subjects, including topics that are informative and unexpected. As a book-shelf resource, this volume is useful. We learn about famous authors, scientists,

and artists born in the watershed. The relationship of the region's original settlers -Native Americans- to the river and its tributaries is detailed. We learn about the origins of the term "Siouxland," and about early explorers sent by the United States government to map and document the terrain. Practical background about topics such as natural history and water quality is reported.

River rats discover the rivers they love flow a rich current of stories. I wish the book told more stories about those who had or have a personal connection to the river. A handful of local champions have invested passion and energy improving and promoting the river. They are largely missing from the book's four hundred pages. Not mentioned, for example, is Dana Loseke, founder of Friends of the Big Sioux River.

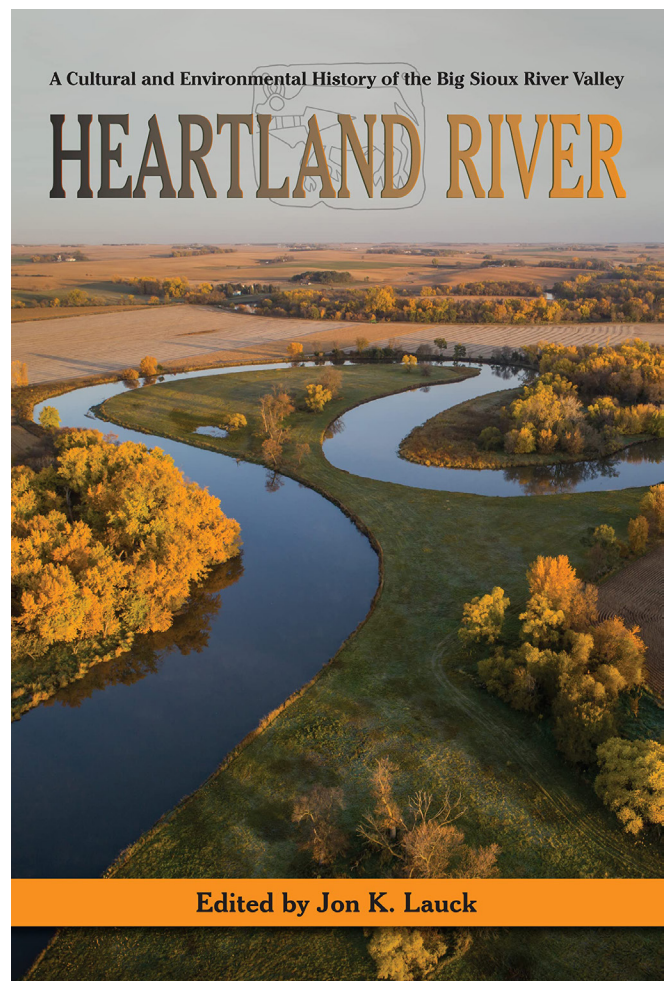
There have been important and recent projects uplifting public sentiment about the river. The development of shoreline parks, canoe/kayak access, and biking/hiking/strolling trails in a variety of locations exposes more of the river to the public. The beautification of Falls Park, a sparkling triumph by the City of Sioux Falls, has attracted countless visitors to the river. The city's downtown riverside promenade is an appealing community amenity. Discussion of those subjects will have to happen in subsequent books.

(Continued on page 7)

Providing an emotive and informative look at a river and its watershed is, no doubt, a challenging undertaking. There is a lot to choose from, and lots of water to cover. Heartland River is described by Jon Lauck as the first book about the river, and it's a good start, as it sets the bar at a reasonable level for books yet to be created; books written, perhaps, because the writer was inspired by *Heartland River*. The Center for Western Studies at Augustana University -the book's publisher- aspires to contribute to the knowledge and appreciation of our part of the world, and this is another example of that admirable institution pursuing an ambitious mission.

**“We do not inherit
the Earth from our
ancestors. We borrow it
from our children.”**

— Native American Proverb



Unnatural Data

1

Debate over Plastics Continues

Plastic refuse, long a scourge of waterways, including the Big Sioux River, continues to be a major problem. Not only is plastics litter and garbage unsightly and unsafe for wildlife, but the process of producing plastics also contributes mightily to pollution issues. In the U.S., per capita plastic waste rose from sixty pounds per year in 1980 to 218 pounds per year in 2018 - a 263% total increase. Meanwhile, the rate of recycling plastics has dropped from 8.7% in 2018 to less than 6% in 2021. Experts indicate that to protect the environment it is more important to reduce plastics use and production than to recycle plastics.

2

Rescue Training at Falls Park

On a warm summer afternoon, members of Sioux Falls Fire Rescue practiced water-based rescue techniques at Falls Park, in Sioux Falls. According to Sioux Falls fire chief Matt McAreavey, there has been only one rescue event in the water at the park during 2022. During 2021, there was not a single rescue event. Nine people have drowned at the park, in the Big Sioux River, since 1982. The most recent drowning occurred in 2018. Increased public awareness, including warning signs in the park and near the river informing park visitors about the dangers of surging flows and slippery rocks, are paying dividends, it seems.

(Continued on page 9)





3

Worrisome Nitrate Levels in Rock River

The Rock River is the Big Sioux River's largest tributary. Source of the Rock is near its namesake, a prominent outcrop of quartzite in Blue Mounds State Park, close to Luverne, Minnesota, and the river flows 144 miles through southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa before emptying into the Big Sioux 15 miles east of Beresford, South Dakota. Draining an intensively farmed watershed, the Rock is scrutinized by scientists studying nitrates levels. It is, according to Iowa researchers, one of the most nitrates-polluted rivers in Iowa. The primary sources of nitrates in the river are farm fertilizers and livestock manure. The federally recommended standard for safe drinking water is below 10 milligrams of nitrates per liter (mg/L), a standard established in 1962. On the Rock River, during WY (Water Year) 2019 (Oct 1, 2019, to Sept 30, 2020), the federal nitrates standard was exceeded during 252 days. According to the Environmental Working Group, it would be prudent to modernize the safe nitrates standard to 5 mg/L. If this more stringent standard were applied to the Rock River, nitrate levels would exceed that standard on every day of WY 2020 but three. Extensive use of drain tiles beneath grain fields has worsened nitrate levels in the river. Nitrates are serious, problematic pollutants. In addition to nitrates accumulating and creating biological "dead zones" at the mouths of rivers carrying elevated levels of farm runoff, nitrate consumption by humans has been linked to colorectal cancer, thyroid diseases, birth defects, and methemoglobinemia (blue baby syndrome). Drinking water supplies and water users downstream on the lower Big Sioux, Missouri and Mississippi rivers are impacted by unregulated nitrates pollution flowing from the Rock River and countless other streams and rivers.

4

Grassland Conservation Act Introduced in US Senate

Federal legislation to restore and conserve grasslands has been recently introduced by Oregon Senator Ron Wyden. This important proposal can help protect water quality in the Big Sioux River by helping balance and improve land use in the Big Sioux watershed. Prior to European settlement, nearly all the watershed was grassy prairie, and the river flowed deep with clean water. Today, more than half the watershed is intensively farmed for grains and the river channel is clogged with sediment caused by soil erosion and water quality is compromised by agricultural chemicals, waste and runoff, reflecting the direct connection regarding how land is used and its impacts to rivers and streams. Nearly 75 percent of grasslands in the US have been lost, with roughly 1.5 million acres being developed or converted to grain-growing cropland every year. According to the World Wildlife Federation's Plowprint Report, approximately 2.6 million acres of grasslands on the U.S. and Canadian Great Plains were plowed to accommodate row-crop production in 2019 alone. Tall grass prairie ecosystems have been especially impacted, with about 99 percent of the nation's native tall grass prairie destroyed by farming and urban development. Senator Wyden's proposal is modeled after efforts to protect wetlands and would complement the existing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).



400 N Main Ave, Suite 205
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

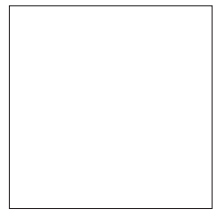


Photo by Christian Begeman

Thousands gather on the city's Big Sioux River shoreline promenade. Riverfest, celebrated annually, attracts Sioux Falls residents and visitors to the river in downtown Sioux Falls to celebrate the marriage of city and waterway. Music, food and drink and numerous activities and vendors make this a memorable community event. This photo was taken during Riverfest, 2021.

CHAMPION SPONSORS

Thank you to our Champion sponsors:
ISG
Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation

FBSR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ryan Donovan	Ross Wright
Reece Almond	Lindsey Krause
Rachel Kloos	Amber Lively
Rebecca Christman	Jason Unger
Jose Vizcarrondo	Tyler Wasberg
Iona J. Branscum	Tim Meagher

MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR RIVER

Join us at
friendsofthebigsiouxriver.org/join
to become a member.

STAFF

Travis Entenman
Emily Oyos