



Currently

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY



Re-centering the River
in the COVID-19 Era

Dear Great River Passage Supporters,

In an age when everything has gone virtual (even before the pandemic), visiting Saint Paul's Mississippi River in person feels even more significant.

Just as we appreciate being close to the river, seeing and hearing it right in front of us rather than on a screen, we value the idea of reading something you can hold in your hands. For all the convenience of email and social media, reading a physical piece can be refreshing.

We hope this quarterly newsletter can play that role for you. Maybe you'll even read it by the river, taking in a quick update on the Great River Passage Conservancy's work of bringing the river back to the center of public life, a goal that seems even more urgent during these homebound days.

Thank you for reading.

With the river,



Eric J. Jolly, Ph.D.

Great River Passage Conservancy Board Chair
President and CEO,
Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation



Mary E. deLaittre

Founding Executive Director
Great River Passage Conservancy



Images: Mississippi Parks Connection (above),
Chris Juhn (opposite).

About the Great River Passage Conservancy

The **Great River Passage Conservancy** was founded in late 2018 to rally philanthropic support for the Great River Passage Initiative's river-focused projects designed to build economic vitality along Saint Paul's stretch of the Mississippi River. These three projects—the River Balcony, East Side River District, and River Learning Center and National Park Service Headquarters—respond to the enduring qualities of the Mississippi River that link it to Saint Paul and the wider region's health, well-being, and financial sustainability.

With Saint Paul's 17 miles of river, 26 miles of river edge, and 3,500 acres of publicly owned land, we have a unique opportunity to become the River Capital and unite our region's two greatest assets: its people and one of the three great rivers of the world, the Mississippi. While this has always been a worthy goal, it feels even more essential in the COVID-19 era, when Saint Paul needs new forward-thinking projects to accelerate our city's economic recovery, build community connection, and help our river environment thrive.

Great River Passage Conservancy
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Board Members

Eric J. Jolly, Ph.D. (Chair)
President and CEO, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

Shelley Buck
President, Prairie Island Indian Community

John I. Marshall
Director of Community Relations, Xcel Energy

Peter Myers
Owner, Myers Communications Group

Joe Nayquonabe Jr.
CEO, Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures

Jake Reint
Managing Director, Public Affairs, Koch Companies Public Sector/Flint Hills Resources

Mike Hahm (Ex Officio)
Director, City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation

Russ Stark (Ex Officio)
Chief Resilience Officer, City of Saint Paul



Image by Erin D. Carter



Re-centering the River in the COVID-19 Era

A recent survey found that **70% of Americans living in cities feel that parks are essential** to their physical and mental health in this time of isolation.

But we also know that **access to parks and natural spaces is not equitable**. A recent National Parks survey found that just 21% of park visitors were people of color, despite making up 37% of the population. We are determined to upend this national trend locally by ensuring that the river and nearby parks are accessible to people of color and other communities that have historically not felt safe or welcome in those areas.

Amidst the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the social justice movement rising from the death of George Floyd, we are restructuring our work to include pandemic-conscious design and equitable community outreach, making sure to prioritize diverse voices as we move forward with Great River Passage projects. In this way, the Conservancy can be a **key part of the blueprint for a more inclusive Saint Paul**.

While that vision excites us in an expansive way, we are also mindful of the centering and grounding experience of simply connecting with nature. As a recent Scientific American piece puts it, “During times of acute stress like we’re in now, a walk outdoors feels more important than ever.” A walk outdoors, especially along our great river, is a restorative experience we aim to make accessible and safe for all. Through the Conservancy’s work, we can bring the river from the edge to the center of public life, where we live not just by the river—but with it.





Mayor Carter Champions River Learning Center

In August, **Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter** spoke with our partner, Mississippi Park Connection, about the River Learning Center, one of the three main projects of the Great River Passage.

“The river is why we’re a city in the first place,” shared Mayor Carter. “It has been a center of our lore, storytelling, and recreation.”

He also shared insights that echoed the Conservancy’s focus on the river’s social, environmental, and economic impact. “The power of a waterfront to be social connector, an economic engine, a cultural hub is established across the planet,” said Mayor Carter. “Anywhere you go, where there is water, there are people, engagement, and livelihood. We have access to all of that right here in Saint Paul. Returning our city to the livelihood of the river to engage all of our different communities is our opportunity.”



Conservancy Board Grows

We are thrilled to welcome **Peter B. Myers** to the Great River Passage Conservancy board of directors. Peter brings significant experience and connection to the Twin Cities arts and nonprofit community through his philanthropic work and his business, Myers Communications Group. He is best known for his work in the nonprofit arena serving clients such as Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, Breakthrough Twin Cities, and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts. Please join us in welcoming Peter to the team!



Coming Soon: Give to the River

November 19 is GiveMN’s **Give to the Max Day**, an opportunity to support the Conservancy as we build momentum heading into the new year. Stay tuned for the launch of our campaign!

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Great River Passage Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent of the law.



PERSPECTIVES: DESIGNING WITH THE RIVER

A Virtual Speaker Series

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE VIRTUAL SPEAKER SERIES

Perspectives: Designing with the River

When we host events, we see our vision for Saint Paul as The River Capital take clearer shape. Each time we come together (physically or virtually), we move closer to bringing the Mississippi River back to the center of public life, where we live not just by—but with—the river.

Forward-thinking design is central to that vision—but what does that look like in practice?

Find out when our monthly speaker series launches on September 24. Join us as we hear from world-renowned designers whose inspiring perspectives, approaches, and experiences can help us move our Great River Passage project goals forward.

Visit **GreatRiverPassage.org/SpeakerSeries** for more information and to register.