

Volume 2, Edition 2 | Summer 2021

Currently

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY



Dear Great River Passage Supporters,

As both the summer days and the Great River Passage Conservancy's work move forward at a quickening pace, it can be easy to just look ahead, especially in this time of greater freedom as COVID restrictions loosen.

But with the Conservancy's three major projects all building momentum, we think it's important to recognize that connecting people to the Mississippi River has a long history. From the Dakota who made their home along the river before Saint Paul was even a city, to the construction of the state capitol in the 19th century, to the last 40 years of work to re-orient ourselves to the river, the Mississippi has always flowed through us.

As highlighted in Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) Executive Director Katie Nyberg's piece in this newsletter, **environmental stewardship has been, and must remain, at the heart of our reconnection to the river.**

Conservancy partners like MPC and other nonprofits are essential in that effort, as are river ambassadors like Jack Driscoll, a lifelong outdoor educator featured in our profile on page 6.

Thinking back on his childhood, Jack told us he roamed and ranged far in the outdoors, but the river itself was off limits. "The whole time, we were not allowed to put a toe in the river—it was that badly polluted. **But today, it's such a joy to see people actually get out in the river.**" His grand stewardship vision is for Saint Paul "to send every drop of water that goes down the Mississippi cleaner than when we got it."

From city departments to nonprofit organizations to individual champions, we all have a role to play in making Saint Paul the River Capital, and doing so as responsible stewards of the land, water, and culture. Thank you for being on this journey with us, and we hope this summer finds you putting a toe in the river.



Eric J. Jolly, Ph.D.

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



Mary E. deLaittre

Founding Executive Director
Great River Passage Conservancy

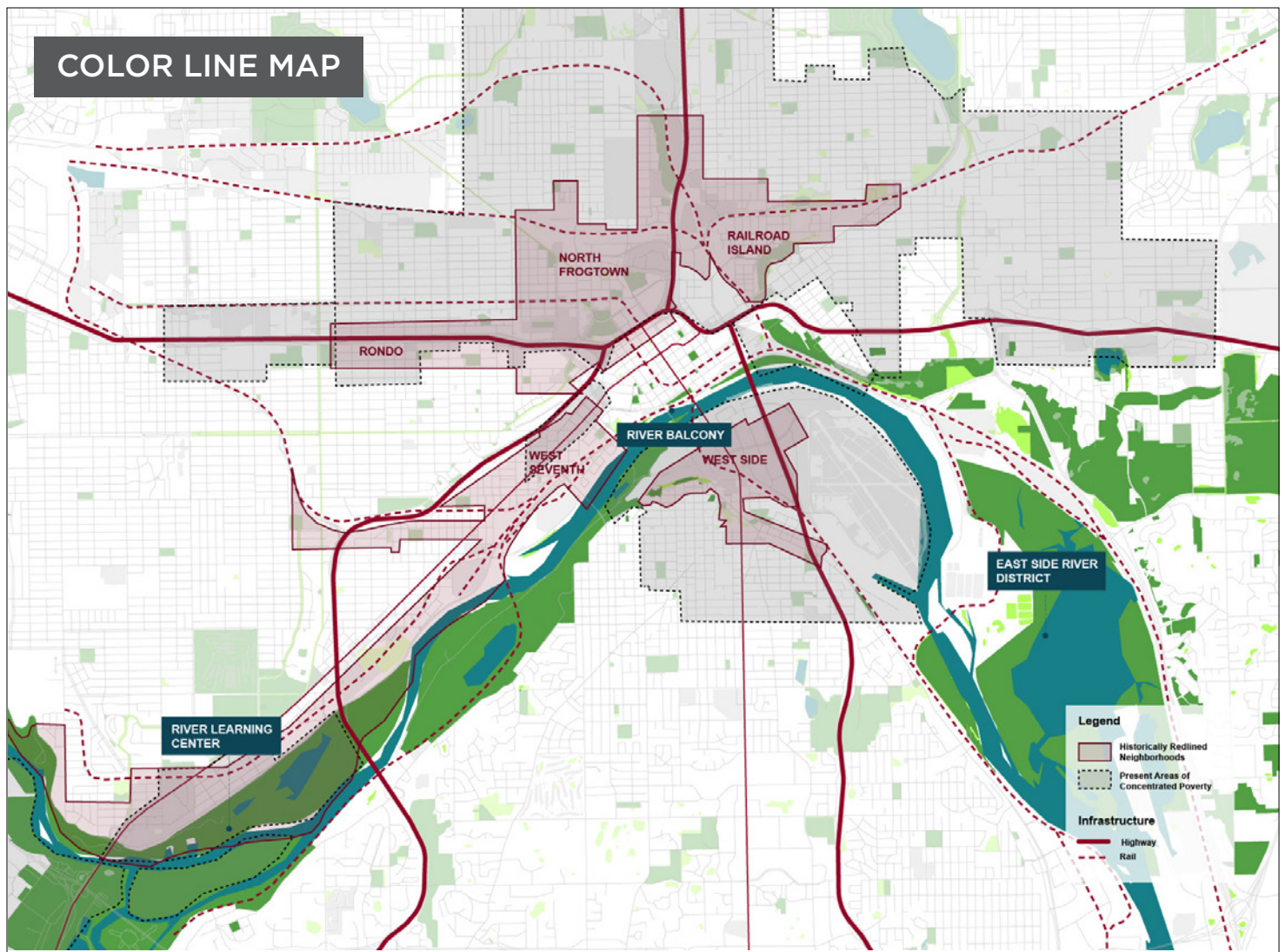


Image credit: Dylan Culp and Gena Morgis

Designing for Equity: Equitable Impacts Framework Moves Forward

As we shared in a recent *Currently* edition, in 2020 the Great River Passage was selected to **join the High Line Network** along with 35 other initiatives across North and Central America. As part of that partnership, we were thrilled to be chosen as one of six initiatives across the country to take part in the High Line Network's **2021 Equitable Impacts Framework (EIF)**.

Now underway, the Equitable Impacts Framework collaboration is supporting GRPC to define our organizational approach to equitable development and set specific, meaningful, and measurable goals that maximize community benefit (economic, social, cultural and environmental) for our projects and programs.

Thus far, the EIF partnership with Harvard Graduate School of Design students has been illuminating, helping us understand how to:

- Cultivate long-term relationships with communities that have historically been disconnected from the river and excluded from city building planning and design
- Adjust planning, design and engagement systems and process to make sure community voices are heard and help shape projects
- Develop community ownership of projects and programs
- Better understand the roles and responsibilities of both the GRPC and the city in advancing equity

We are now moving into Phase 2, working with the Urban Institute to develop an equity strategy and implementation plan over the next six months. As the work continues, we are eager to see how we can weave the EIF team's recommendations into our projects in a way that gives our mission an even stronger equity focus.





PARTNERS IN STEWARDSHIP: MISSISSIPPI PARK CONNECTION

The Great River Passage Conservancy is proud to call Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) an essential partner, especially in the fundraising, design, and future development of our River Learning Center, where MPC will host youth education, community engagement, and environmental stewardship programs in partnership with the National Park Service. As the nonprofit partner of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, MPC plays a particularly important role in protecting the natural spaces of our River Capital. MPC Executive Director Katie Nyberg shares more in this guest article.



The Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) and Great River Passage Conservancy partnership is a natural fit for many reasons, including our shared belief that everything along the river is interconnected. Just as the Conservancy is working to connect people to place to project by bringing the river from the edge to the center of public life, **environmental stewardship is linked to every aspect of our work in parks along the river.**

Among other challenges, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area's urban forests face increasing pressure from invasive pests, a changing climate, and challenges with regeneration. To keep the land and river resilient against these threats, **Mississippi Park Connection partners with many land managers and nonprofits to revitalize river habitat and protect natural spaces** within the national park. Volunteers, land managers, and our Mississippi River Crew play a vital role in our joint efforts.



The River Learning Center will give our community a new opportunity to deepen this spirit of stewardship. The Center will be a place to connect with the river: to stand in it, float on it, touch it, and hear it. By hosting host year-round environmental, cultural, and historical education and recreation opportunities that are integrated into the region's routines, traditions, and collective identity, the River Learning Center will lead the way in developing Saint Paul's next generation of river stewards.

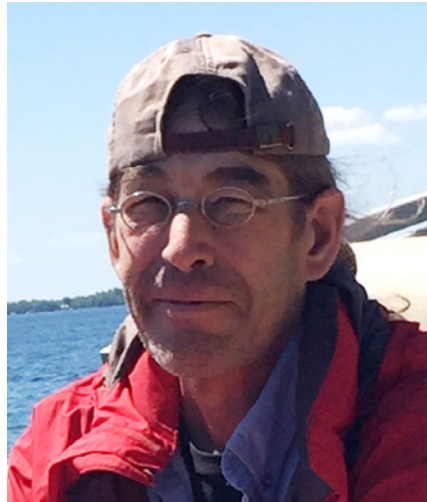
DONOR PROFILE

Mississippi River ambassador and educator **Jack Driscoll** reflects on his lifelong passion for getting people out on our great river.

Within a few minutes of talking with Jack Driscoll, even over Zoom, you quickly come to meet Jack the Teacher—or, as he’s known on Wilderness Inquiry Canoemobile excursions, “Jacques the Voyageur.”

For Jack, the Mississippi River, and all our outdoor spaces, are here to be experienced, immersed in, and brought up close. During our conversation for this story, he did this with words, from descriptions of “beavers wreaking havoc (in a good way)” along the river to the visceral wonder of holding an eaglet. Ever the teacher, he shared, “There are 49 nesting pairs of eagles in the gorge right now. Have you ever held an eaglet? It’s this amazing ball of feathers and talons. I’ve been lucky enough to experience that stuff.”

His passion for the natural world has led him to make those experiences accessible to as many people as possible through 30-plus years as an outdoor educator, as a board member for Mississippi Park Connection and Wilderness Inquiry, and as a supporter of the River Learning Center, whose potential he sees as huge. “[The future Center] is literally this close to an international airport,” said Jack. “Virtually everybody in the world recognizes the Mississippi River, and to give people from different countries the opportunity to be on a layover, come paddle the river, and take that experience home with them—that’s remarkable.”



As he ticks off the many interweaving features of the River Learning Center—Pike Island, Fort Snelling, National Park Service headquarters, Crosby Farm, and more—Jack calls the site a “cosmic convergence. That’s what all these pieces and partners are doing, coming together to create a destination that’s a park, a greenway, a civic center, all to benefit not just the people of Minneapolis and Saint Paul but the world—because we want the world to come.”

“It’s time,” he says. “We have MPC, Wilderness Inquiry, and the Conservancy putting in the work and energy to make this a reality. Every person we can get to the river becomes an ambassador, and momentum builds. It takes a river to bring a community together, and what better river than this one?”

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—JACK DRISCOLL

PARTNER PROJECT

City of Saint Paul Commits to Keeping Mississippi River Clean

By “tracking the plastic,” Saint Paul and other cities along the Mississippi are fighting river pollution. As part of a new multi-state **Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative**, Mayor Melvin Carter and our partners at the City of Saint Paul are rallying the community to help clean up the river.

In April, Mayor Carter released a geo-tagged bottle from Harriett Island to show in real time how plastic makes it way down the river. You can even track the bottle (it's Bottle 3) online at <https://debristracker.org/mississippi>.

To date, 78,406 items were tagged and removed in 35,827 tracking sessions from Saint Paul to Baton Rouge. For the record, the top three items collected have been cigarette butts, food wrappers, and plastics. If you'd like to get involved in the community science and stewardship of the river, visit Debris Tracker: <https://debristracker.org/> (Click “Data,” then choose “MRCTI” in the Organizations pulldown.)



August 2021: Introducing Our River Balcony Designer

The GRP designer selection committee is in the final stages of choosing a design team for our River Balcony project. Want to be among the first to know? Sign up for our e-newsletter at greatriverpassage.org, where we'll be announcing the project designer in the August edition.

The logo features a stylized, light blue outline of a river meandering through a landscape. To the right of the river graphic, the words "GREAT RIVER PASSAGE" are stacked above "CONSERVANCY" in a bold, sans-serif font.

GREAT RIVER PASSAGE CONSERVANCY

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*Great River Passage Conservancy is a
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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 Learning Center and National Park Service Headquarters, East Side River District, and River Balcony—respond to the enduring qualities of the Mississippi River that link it to Saint Paul and the wider region's historical, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being.

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. By advancing major projects along the Mississippi River that allow all people to experience the river in new and equitable ways, the Great River Passage Conservancy fosters environmental stewardship, community health, and economic development.

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