



Missouri
River
Futures

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Quarterly Activities Report for Jan. - March 2009

Submitted by Theresa M. Smydra - Coordinator

Events/trainings organized/attended:

WREP organizational meeting – January 7, Lewis & Clark NRD
WREP Landowner meetings – January 20 & 21, Niobrara & Newcastle
SD NRCS Landowner Wildlife Habitat Workshop – February 2, Tyndall
2nd Annual Missouri River Landowners Conservation Workshop - March 18, Yankton
Missouri River Institute Symposium – March 5, Vermillion

Events/trainings planned:

Cottonwood Community Habitat Model Workshop – March 30 thru April 2, Vermillion
NE NRCS Employee Mtg. – April 8, Hartington
Missouri River Bank Stabilization Assoc. – April 14, Newcastle
Missouri River Festival – May 8, Yankton
Wetland Workshop – June 10-11, Hastings
Conservation Buffers – July 21-23, Nebraska City

2009 2nd Annual Missouri River Landowners Conservation Workshop

The 2nd Annual Missouri River Landowner Conservation Workshop was held at the 4-H building Wednesday, March 18, 2009 in Yankton, South Dakota. With the increased interest and activities on the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR), several stakeholders along the river took time out of their busy schedules to get the latest information. Attendance for the landowner workshop was just over 50, up from 2008. The workshop was well supported by 25 interest groups/agencies from South Dakota and Nebraska. With many of the groups involved with the Rec. River on hand at the workshop; key conservation topics, projects, and events were well covered and participants were able to learn about them at one location. It was a beautiful March day which was great to view outdoors the popular water infiltration/runoff and pallid sturgeon gear demonstrations. Presentations from two landowners that lived across the river from each other were also well attended. They shared their life along the river and what they are experiencing now.

Heavy WREP/WRP workload continues in Nebraska

What a whirlwind these past three months have been! A teleconference, one organizational meeting (rescheduled twice), two public meetings, another mailing to the same 400 landowners the intro letter went to, numerous field visits and rankings, and, of course, the obligatory mountain of government paperwork. I went through a basic application and counted 34 pages. Many applications need much more documentation.

Several of the WREP applications are also eligible for WRP and vice versa ,so applications are being submitted for one or the other or both. There is enormous interest in the WRP program along the Niobrara and Verdigris Creek which also have the Wild & Scenic designation and are critical tributaries of the Missouri River. The partners have been troopers through all of this since this required a lot of their time as well. This effort really shows how folks can work together when given an opportunity to protect & enhance our great natural resources with these programs.

Landowners

The best part of being able to offer these wetland programs is being able to provide real, viable incentives to landowners to help them with something they really want to accomplish. I have made several new acquaintances and friends with the release of WREP to the Rec. River reach and additional WRP applications and we are well on our way to reaching a common goal. The renewed interest in both programs is partially due to the change in easement offers which have improved dramatically since 2008 and as land is enrolled, word is spreading. We have been on several privately owned sites that are pristine which reminds many of us that work for the public just how special and important these lands are and how important developing great working relationships with these landowners is. WREP and WRP provide a win-win situation for all involved and I (and others) felt this was a great opportunity for Missouri River Futures to step in and head up the effort.

Also worked with local county commissioners and engineering firm on a pending development on the Missouri River riverfront and data that had been assembled from readily available sources two years ago to provide information addressing the suitability and long term sustainability of building and road structures on that landscape. Care was taken not to infringe on the personal rights of the landowners and information was provided with their approval. All involved found the data collection useful and plan to take it into account when future decisions are made.

A staging area was needed for the construction of two of the emergent sandbar habitat projects for the 2009 fall season. I was able to find a potentially willing landowner, and after answering a few questions, connected him with the US Army Corps of Engineers for final deliberations which is proceeding smoothly.

Via our website, I received a clean-up request on the 39-mile from an absentee owner. I hope to be able to assist in this effort this summer, perhaps expanding efforts over a larger area. I also received a request to be added to our mailing list which I was happy to oblige.

MNRR Promotional Activities

The Missouri River Festival Planning efforts continued as the date for the event neared (May 8). Since this was a first-time attempt at an event in the area focused on young adults of school age, many challenges were yet to be addressed. Mary Robb, with the City of Yankton, picked up the torch and kept everything moving forward. 10 presentations are being planned, each with a different focus of the Missouri River. A summary of the event will be posted on the MRF website.

A water trail kickoff is being planned, and had been working on trail head signs, but I was unable to attend the design meeting due to wetland program workload. Kayaking and canoeing are popular recreational activities on the Rec. River and are well suited to the wide, meandering river that is uniquely beautiful with the lack of channelization and impoundment seen on the majority of the Missouri River.

Missouri River Futures Recognition

Two mailings, news releases, web site updates, and radio interviews for the workshop certainly adds to the MRF name recognition as does using the dual letterhead (NRCS & MRF) for WREP/WRP correspondence. There have also been articles written in the local papers listing MRF's participation in the planning efforts of the Missouri River Festival.

I was honored to be asked by Randy Thoreson, president of the Midwest Chapter of the River Management Society (RMS), to submit an article on Missouri River Futures for the Spring 2009 RMS Journal, Midwest Focus. I had worked with Randy, who is employed by the National Park Service based in Minnesota, on a collaborative effort 2 years ago (it's been that long already?) of which he was a great resource. That article can be seen at <http://www.river-management.org/newsletter.asp>.

Changing Farm Bill & Agency Programs

NRCS in both states are being bombarded with pending deadlines with new and newly revised programs with newly allocated funding that needs to be applied else lose similar funding for the following year. I was told once by an 'old timer': "if you don't like change, this isn't the agency for you". Significant changes are also being made throughout the partnerships across the landscape with the new administration and the ever-changing political climate surrounding the Missouri River and global warming.

South Dakota forestry currently has a grant to cost-share tree plantings along riparian areas but lost the technical component match they needed to assist landowners with planning and help implement the project. There have been two teleconferences to address this and plans are underway to get the project in full swing by the 2010 tree planting season.