



Fall news '10

OUR
MISSION
Great River
Greening
leads and
inspires
community-
based
restoration
of our
prairies,
forests,
and
waters

A Vision Which You Helped Fulfill

For resident Loran Kaardal, the dream dates back to the early 1970s when he and others in the largely farming community of Renville and Redwood County began to imagine the possibilities for recreation and conservation along the Minnesota River Valley. "We have a closing window of opportunity to ask this generation of ownership to help us leave a legacy of public access to this pristine land," he says, "This is perhaps the last generation of ownership with local connections that has a heart for the Minnesota River Valley."



Today, decades later, you have helped give shape to the dream, by supporting our assistance to the local citizens group called the Minnesota River Valley Green Corridor. Great River Greening is not in the business of acquisition, but used its ecological expertise to spearhead the conservation action plan, Middle Minnesota Valley Conservation Plan, which will guide those purchases in the future, as well as important work in land management, historic preservation, and land use practices. Already the group has two major milestones: over \$6 million of State of Minnesota grants awarded (through the Outdoor Heritage Fund and the Minnesota Environmental Trust Fund), another \$6 million in proposals.

According to Brad Cobb, hired as Minnesota Valley Green Corridor project manager, "The Green Corridor Initiative is indebted to Great River Greening for getting us off the ground. Since then there has been an explosion of activity and accomplishments, and it's not hard to imagine that in ten years we will have large blocks of river habitat, well marketed recreational sites that attract visitors, and new businesses created by a recreational economy."



In addition to habitat acquisition for natural areas and state parks, the Green Corridor is also proposing the state's first residential history center in conjunction with the Renville County Historical Center and Museum in Morton. Its work has made possible the newly-designated 182-acre Whispering Ridge aquatic management area along the Minnesota River and the addition of 45 acres to the Fort Ridgely State Park horse camp and trail area.

"I will share one of my most favorite quotes," Loran Kaardal offered as a summary: "A bamboo seed must be watered every day for four years before it sprouts. After that patient tending, it shoots to 60 feet in 90 days."

Top Right: Minnesota River Valley © Brad Cobb. Left: Canoeing the Minnesota River © Loran Kaardal. Right: Wildlife in the Minnesota River Valley © Ron Bouldan



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Thank You... You Make It Happen

In spring and fall, often in early hours when the sky is just beginning to show color, you, our Greening volunteers, defy rain, wind, scorching sun, and freezing rain to dig holes and plant trees; collect and spread seed; or haul brush and drag into piles the invasive species that can alter an entire forest habitat. You are part of the vision of a healthier, more sustainable world.

But so too are you, our supporters, who every spring and fall dig deep into your pockets and contribute to our annual appeals. You help us reach those volunteers, leverage funds for our partners, and support our ecologists as they implement the highest scientific standards.

Three aspects—volunteers, partners, and expertise—are the unique strengths that you help to build within Greening.

- To date, you have helped us engage more than 25,000 volunteers to restore disturbed and degraded land to a semblance of its original graceful existence.
- This year you helped us to match nearly \$200,000 in government grants.
- You supported over 100 projects by our ecologists, including some that demonstrated the most aggressive best management practices for water quality.

Supporters like you are the growth medium for Great River Greening's work, and we couldn't accomplish what we do without you. So thank you for helping to make the world a shade better.



You Can See the Difference You Make

Uncus Dunes Scientific & Natural Area (SNA) may be a site of statewide significance, but for Missy Hajovy, it was an opportunity to act locally. "I heard that Great River Greening needed help clearing brush, and I was happy to get the Big Lake-area cub scouts involved in something close to home. Because it is local, the kids get to affect their own community." With your support, they are now able to see their impact on the region over time.

The Uncas Dunes SNA is home to a variety of creatures that would not be able to live in the deciduous and coniferous forests that blanket much of our state. A great example is the Blanding's turtle, which often uses sandy grass plains like those at Uncas Dunes as a safe place to lay eggs. The site is named for the rare Uncas Skipper, an endangered butterfly, and is one of only two sites in the state where this species is found. The area's degradation threatens these species and others.

Volunteers like Missy's cub scouts have been key to restoring the area to natural sandy grassland, a process that could take up to three years including woody encroachment and brush removal, prescribed burns, seed collection and seeding. "The first time the kids volunteered, they felt good about themselves. It was hard work, but they had a blast and couldn't wait to return. We have volunteered two times so far and want to see it through. Great River Greening staff really worked hard to create a good relationship with the volunteers."

"I am hopeful about our environmental future," Missy reflected, "but only if we can teach the next generation that if you put in the effort, you can see the results. Uncus Dunes is not going to change the world, but we can make a difference locally if we keep at it. The scout motto is "fun with purpose," and this project is perfect. Each time we come, we see more accomplishment."

Uncus Dune's restoration began in February 2010 with a Woody Biomass Harvest involving the Department of Natural Resource's SNA, Forestry, and Woody Biomass Project groups. With your support and that of volunteers like the cub scouts, the restoration is continuing with additional funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as well as the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources through the Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation District.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteers at Uncus Dunes 2010.
Left: Mother and son cutting buckthorn © Cynthia Fleury.



You Are a Part of Historic Mission Restoration



In 1843, Gideon and Samuel Pond, brother-missionaries from Washington, Connecticut, built a log cabin-style Oak Grove Mission House and later a brick home for their families in what is now Bloomington, Minnesota. They had followed a Dakota chief named Cloud Man who, weary of battling the Ojibwe and seeking better trade access to the Europeans, relocated his band from Lake Calhoun to the Minnesota River bluffs.



Through Great River Greening you are now helping to bring that Minnesota River Valley site alive.

Today the Oak Grove Mission House and the 1856 Gideon and Agnes Pond House are feature attractions at the Pond-Dakota Mission Park, which receives well over 10,000 visitors a year. According to Mark Morrison, Recreation Supervisor and manager of the park, the City in 2009 partnered with Great River Greening to restore a five-acre area within the Pond-Dakota Mission Park to the state in which Chief Cloud Man may have found it in the early 1840s.

Great River Greening brought to the table your support, its experience with prairie restoration, project and volunteer management, and grant funding, securing a grant from the Minnesota Environmental Trust Fund that paid for approximately 40% of the site restoration. The City contracted with Greening for the rest of the funds, and also provided vehicles, large equipment, and debris removal.

"Great River Greening had the experience we were looking for, and they were able to keep the project's expenses down because they inspire an amazing group of volunteers and have a lot of experience with grant-writing," he says. By the end of this fall, Great River Greening volunteers will have cleared three of five acres of noxious weeds and unwanted trees and planted them with acorns and native oak saplings.

As for the future, Morrison says that the City hopes to eventually build an interpretive trail with signs describing the native plants, flowers and animals, and historical events. An archeological survey before the restoration found ceramics, glass pieces and metal objects, many of which are believed to have belonged to the Pond family. Additional signage is planned that will have significant input from members of the Dakota community.

"It would be great to provide information about how the Native Americans used the resources to survive," he adds. "We might even do a brochure for walkers including information about invasive species that threatened the area after it was cleared for agriculture."

"We are excited to think that some day the site will look the way it did to the Dakota Indians. Even now, the clearing of unwanted trees and weeds has opened up the view of the valley and the Minnesota River as it was long ago," Morrison says with satisfaction.

Brigitt Martin is a freelance writer from Burnsville, MN.



Top Right: Taking a break from raking © Laura Kaczmarek
Above Left to Right: Stacking brush Pond Dakota Mission 2010
Cutting Buckthorn at Pond Dakota Mission © Laura Kaczmarek

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You Can Be Twice the Hero

During difficult times when all foundations are scrutinizing their funding, The McKnight Foundation, in June, awarded Greening a challenge grant through which every new and increased individual and corporate gift will be matched dollar-for-dollar. That means if you donate for the first time, or increase your gift, your new or increased dollars will be doubled by the McKnight Foundation.

Information about giving can be found on our website www.greatrivergreening.org

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You Helped Create a Stewardship Model

In 2009 Bob Elliott answered an initial call for volunteers at Pilot Knob by Great River Greening, but when he came back in 2010, he brought his troops. Elliott, who acts as unit commissioner for the Boy Scout Troop 292, Chief Black Dog District, Northern Star Council, saw Pilot Knob as an opportunity to help the boys fulfill their environmental stewardship pledge, have fun and learn a bit of local history. Now, because of your ongoing support, Pilot Knob became not just a restoration, but a model of stewardship.

The boys, who are between 11 and 18 years old, cut thistle seed heads and cleared burdock for more than two hours – and loved it! Since then the troop has returned to Pilot Knob seven more times, working in groups of up to 13 and giving more than 107 hours of their time.

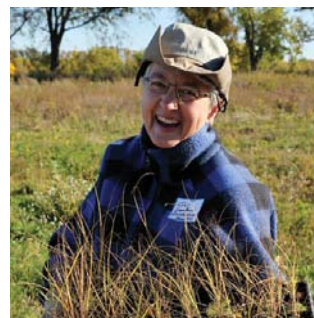
Elliott says he has also enjoyed teaching the Scouts about the historical and spiritual significance of the site. “The boys understand now that it’s more than just a farm field they’re cleaning up. And they ‘get it’: many have internalized the importance of what we’re doing at Pilot Knob.” Elliott refers to the fact that Pilot Knob is a spiritual site, in part because of the burial mounds located on the promontory. The Dakota chose the site for signing a treaty in 1851 in which they ceded to the United States 35 million acres of their tribal lands west of the Mississippi.

Today, with your support, Great River Greening and the City of Mendota Heights, together with more than ten other partners, including the Minnesota Environmental Trust Fund, are three years into a ten-year plan to restore the native prairie and oak savanna that once blanketed Pilot Knob. A series of mowing, seeding, prescribed burning, invasive species treatment and removal activities are in process on 25 acres of land.

Two interpretive signs tell the story, in Dakota and English, of the unique history and sacred significance of Pilot Knob/Oheyawahi. An overlook recognizes the seven council fires of Dakota people and a medicine wheel constructed with colored stones represents the four cardinal directions.

Meanwhile, the test partnership between Great River Greening and Boy Scout Troop 292 has been so positive, Elliott says, that the troop recently signed an Adopt-a-Site agreement, pledging to work at Pilot Knob on a regular basis under Great River Greening’s supervision. “By returning to the same restoration site we are giving the Scouts an opportunity to see the difference that they are making. Even now they see less burdock than they did earlier this summer and they can say to themselves, ‘I am a part of this place,’” Elliott says. “It becomes personal. And it’s that personal connection that makes me and the boys want to continue doing this work.”

Brigitt Martin is a freelance writer from Burnsville, MN.



Clockwise from top left: Pilot Knob wildflowers in an urban setting; Pilot Knob volunteer with city in background © Mark Karney; Volunteers planting at Pilot Knob 2010 © Debra Gagner; Pilot Knob preservationist and volunteer Gail Lewellan © Mark Karney.

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