



Missouri River Relief

Creating A Better, Cleaner Missouri River

BY ANITA NEAL HARRISON

Missouri River Relief connects people to the Missouri River through hands-on river clean-ups and education events and activities.

“Our ultimate goal is to bring people together on the Missouri River to make a visible and lasting difference in their community, creating a better, cleaner river for everyone,” says Melanie Cheney, the nonprofit organization’s assistant program manager. “Specifically, we organize large-scale clean-ups up and down the Missouri River, as far up as Yankton, S.D., all the way down to the confluence with the Mississippi in St. Louis, so we travel a lot. ... Anyone, of any age, with any skill sets can join the effort.”

The Missouri River Relief’s website, www.riverrelief.org, has a schedule of

upcoming clean-up events, as well as an online sign-up. Three large clean-ups are scheduled for this fall: St. Charles on Sept. 11; Kansas City on Oct. 2; and St. Joseph on Oct. 16.

The rewards of volunteering are amazing, Cheney says.

“First of all, there’s the instant gratification you get from cleaning up the river in one day,” she says. “Making a visible and lasting impact gives people a great sense of empowerment that comes from interacting with and improving such a powerful natural resource such as the Missouri River. For many volunteers, it’s their first time being on the Missouri River — but it’s usually not their last.”

Another benefit volunteers receive is access to the organization’s resources and expertise.

“We are not just cleaning the river, but we are teaching others about it and learning new things all the time,” Cheney says. For example, volunteers learn how to use different tools and how to drive boats. “There’s definitely a different set of skills you learn from being on the river, and it’s a fun and rewarding way for people of varying backgrounds to share a unique experience and give back to and build community.”

And that brings Cheney to her favorite reward, the sense of community volunteers share.

“We have such a good time camping together and making new friends,” she says. “We are always building new and lasting relationships that we will enjoy for years to come.”

Volunteers with Missouri River Relief also get chances to work with like-minded organizations, including the Missouri River Communities

Network (www.moriver.org), Friends of Big Muddy (www.friendsofbigmuddy.org) and Missouri stream teams (www.mostreamteam.org).

Besides volunteering, people can support Missouri River Relief through financial donations and sponsorships. A “donate” button on the website makes giving easy, and the organization is also a member of EarthShare of Missouri, www.EarthShareMo.org, which allows for payroll donations. Equipment donations, from shovels to motors, are also a big help.

In its nine years of existence, Missouri River Relief has brought together more than 12,000 Missouri River Relief volunteers to haul more than 1,000,000 pounds (or 537 tons!) of trash in nearly 60 river clean-ups. Cheney invites anyone interested in learning more about Missouri River Relief to check out www.riverrelief.org. People can also email riverrelief@riverrelief.org or call 573-443-0292. ♦

 For more information about Missouri River Relief, log on to www.riverrelief.org.