From the Director

At the heart of Missouri River Relief is the river, but this organization was built for people. Our mission is connecting people to the Missouri River. For our river to have a healthy future, it needs a community of people who love it. People who want to care for the river. For 20 years, we’ve been building that community with our river cleanups, education programs and races.

This year we celebrated our 20th Anniversary with you. We’re proud of the transformation in our river and our community that this effort has accomplished. We know you are proud too.

We know that the river is so much cleaner than when we started 20 years ago. We can measure that. What is tough to measure, but clear to anyone involved in these programs, is the change that occurs in the people that participate.

This impact is reflected in the 44% of our income driven by individual donors. We are grateful for your trust that we will do great work with your dollars.

We cannot wait to see you on the river in 2022.

THANK YOU.

Steve Schnarr
Director, Missouri River Relief

See You on the River in 2022!

Our Mission

To engage individuals and communities along the Missouri River in the exploration, enjoyment, restoration and care of the river through hands-on river cleanups, education programs and recreation.

Our Staff

Melanie Cheney
Office Manager

Kristen Schulte
Education Director

Kevin Tosie
Operations Manager

Lisa Cole
Development Manager

Katy Miller
Bookkeeper

Anna Miller
AmeriCorps

Alyssa Marie Thomas
AmeriCorps

John Brady
Fleet Manager
RETURN TO OMAHA & COUNCIL BLUFFS

For the first time in 4 years, we were able to get back to Omaha/Council Bluffs for a cleanup event on the Missouri River. 116 local volunteers and 29 crew from all over the watershed helped clean up 12 miles of river. Over 3 days, we removed 8.2 tons of trash and a staggering 257 pieces of Styrofoam left from the flood of 2011!

REACHING DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

In 2021, Missouri River Relief expanded its programs to new audiences. We began by inviting those residing in assisted living facilities to a virtual tour & panel discussion of the Missouri River. We were fortunate to be able to shepherd a group from Military Wild down the river in kayaks. Our most popular program to date, Mornings at the River, drew families with young children ages 0-5 to explore and make memories together alongside the majestic Missouri River.

FRONT PAGE NEWS

Our Programs made the front page 6 Times! Visit our “In the News” webpage to read all about it! bit.ly/mrr-media

NEW TEAM MEMBERS

River Relief was blessed with two new amazing team members this year. Alyssa Thomas joined as an AmeriCorps Stewardship & Outreach Assistant, and helped coordinate our signature event of the year, the Big Muddy Clean Sweep. Lisa Cole climbed aboard into the role of Development Manager, after spending much of her career working in higher education as well as Big Brothers Big Sisters. Welcome!
Since October 6, 2001

In September, Missouri River Relief hosted our 20th Anniversary party at Cooper’s Landing, a funky riverside venue just upstream from the site of our first Missouri River cleanup in 2001. Amidst the familiar smiling faces and the sublime sunset melting into the river was a slideshow of photos from the past 20 years.

Photos of special river places flowed by like water. The sand dunes of Goat Island in South Dakota. The trash-strewn rocky riprap of downtown Kansas City. The deep forest of the Big Muddy Refuge. Limestone bluffs reflected in the muddy water near Rocheport. The river wrapping around the Washington River Festival. The swirling waters of the Missouri & Mississippi River Confluence.

And amongst the river scenery – a community of people gathered around the river. So many faces of people working hard cleaning the river, sharing river joy with students and introducing new people to this river and this community. Nobody knew at that time what Missouri River Relief would become back in 2001, but they already knew it would be more than one cleanup effort. Thanks to everyone that has helped make it possible!

2001
- First Cleanup in Easley, MO with Chad’s Living Lands & Waters barge

2002
- First boat donated by Bass Pro Shops – “The Karp” • 2 Cleanups • 2 Learning Festivals with 450 students

2004
- “Voyage of Recovery” - series of 9 cleanups ahead of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Reenactment • River Relief acquired our first Box Truck • Hosted our first Intern

2006
- “The MegaScout” a 754-mile trash mapping project with 2 boats from Ponca State Park, NE to St. Louis • First cleanup in Omaha, NE • 300 tons of trash removed, cumulatively

2008-2010
- Began participating as “safety boats” in the 3rd annual MR340 paddle race • Started the monthly Big Muddy Speaker Series • Surpassed 10,000 volunteers

2011
- MRR’s 10th Anniversary! First Big Muddy Clean Sweep by barge - Jefferson City to St. Louis

2014
- Second Big Muddy Clean Sweep - Brunswick to Hermann, MO • Hired our First Education Director • 800 tons of trash removed • 20,000 volunteers surpassed

2017
- Total Solar Eclipse on California Island • First “Trash Mob” at Cooper’s Landing

2018
- Moved out of our original office at 812 E. Broadway in downtown Columbia to our current location at 916 N. College • Helped shepherd over 1,000 paddlers on the river • Awarded “Conservation Organization of the Year”

2020
- The Coronavirus Pandemic canceled 40 programs, new ones were designed or modified for “virtual” online events • 105 individual “Trash Mobs” removed 15 tons of trash • MRR acquired the MR340 Race • Launched new website

2021
- Missouri River Milestones

Check out our interactive 20-Year Timeline to see our milestones by year, and read stories from the past.
Virtual Field Trips
The Missouri River Comes to the Classroom

In the Spring of 2021, Virtual Missouri River Days was our response to field trip restrictions during the pandemic. Instead of our annual Missouri River Days field trip for hundreds of Columbia Public Schools fourth graders, we created an all-new educational experience for students that brought the Missouri River to the classroom.

Education Director Kristen Schulte was joined by guest presenters Kory Kaufman, Melanie Knocke, and Anna Miller, who led a total of sixty fourth-grade classes in lessons based on actual student questions about the Missouri River. During these lessons, students were able to explore whether or not there are sharks in the Missouri River and were able to learn all about the invasive flying carp!

These lessons are now available as a part of our Missouri River Detectives series. Missouri River Detectives consists of four video-based lessons enabling students to uncover the mysteries of the Missouri’s muddy waters and learn critical thinking skills.

To learn more about Missouri River Detectives, visit bit.ly/missouri-river-detectives

“Ocean sharks can’t live in the river, but could a fish from the Missouri River survive in the ocean? My students were fascinated! Thank you for doing this program.”

-- excited 4th grade teacher
Bringing Kids Down to the River
New Nature-Based Early Childhood Programs Grow in Popularity

In June we debuted a new program to embrace a new audience. **Mornings at the River** was designed for kiddos 0-5 and their families. We set up an interactive river camp with lots of hands-on activities for two days a week for three weeks. **633 parents and children** attended the play sessions, with many repeat participants as they kept coming back! Each week had a different river theme, including Awesome River Art, Magical River Music and Beautiful River Birds. Spending time at the river is transformational for these little ones.

When families have meaningful experiences outdoors their quality of life, health and social wellbeing improve. This is why we have partnered with First Chance for Children, a non-profit that provides early childhood programs and family resources to foster healthy outcomes for children and families to offer five **child carriers** for hiking. Whether you’re new to hiking or an experienced hiker, consider making the next time you hit the trail for a few miles into the woods a family affair by checking out one of our child carriers.

To learn more about these programs, visit: [bit.ly/mornings-at-the-river](bit.ly/mornings-at-the-river) or [bit.ly/child-carriers](bit.ly/child-carriers)

“Thank you for providing this awesome opportunity. I am terrified of rivers, so taking my kids to the river is something I wouldn’t likely do on my own. Thank you for encouraging this experience!”

-- grateful parent
Our massive endeavor this fall was the Big Muddy Clean Sweep, a 200-mile cleanup of the Missouri River from Kansas City to Columbia. Five core crew members camped their way down the river, working with an ever-rotating cast of volunteers, filling their boats and dumpsters along the way with trash and leaving a real impact on the river and the river communities we worked in.

This is just a partial list of what was collected on the Big Muddy Clean Sweep:

- 847 bags of trash
- 382 tires
- 20 refrigerators
- 574 plastic straws
- 4 mini-fridges
- 27 large pieces of Styrofoam
- 1 washing machine
- 4 mini-fridges
- 27 large pieces of Styrofoam
- 1 2 coolers
- 25 plastic barrels
- 3 metal drums
- 1 fiberglass boat
- 1500-gallon cistern tank
- 500-gallon septic tank
- 38 mineral tubs
- 1 port-a-potty
- 4 orange road barriers
- 4 milk crates
- 6 propane tanks
- 1 set dentures w/ gold teeth
- 1 couch
- 1 inflatable kayak
- 4 TVs
- 25 plastic buckets
- 1 unused urine test sample
- 1 suitcase
- 1 hot water heater
- 1 transistor radio
- 1 long handled axe
- 1 garden hose
- 1 Mizzou beach towel
- 3 folding chairs
- 2 motorcycle helmets
- 1 duck decoy
- 4 traffic cones
- 1 plastic horse head
- 1 bowling ball
- 2 wheel barrows
- 2 toilet seats

While doing a river cleanup at Miami, MO, a couple of volunteers dug a massive tractor tire out of the riverbank. Later, after doing the math, we realized that tire included the 2 millionth pound of trash that River Relief volunteers have removed from the river since 2001! It’s a mind-blowing statistic made up of thousands of river stories created by thousands of people.

343 volunteers • 23.6 tons of trash • 45 river sunsets

At a Big Muddy Clean Sweep cleanup near Boonville, MO, 10-year-old volunteer, Colby Williams, stopped us to explain his passion for cleaning up the river. Colby said, “We need to protect the wildlife. They were here first, then we came in and polluted it, so we need to help clean it up.” He nailed it.

Sweeping downstream of KC

We spent 2 days with 42 community volunteers in the Rocheport area and they removed more than 3 tons of junk from the river, including 67 tires. Here’s the Odell Brewing midwest marketing team & their tires!
This was the first year of Missouri River Relief taking the helm of the 16 year-old MR340 paddling race from Kansas City to St. Charles. We are proud to be stepping into a bigger role in this world-class adventure event and continue to work with the founders to build on this solid foundation. This year’s race was perfect – with 639 paddlers from 39 states in 419 boats.

In 2021, River Relief assisted in 5 river races and paddling excursions that involved a total of 1,046 paddlers.

Learn more by visiting the MR340 Race Library at: bit.ly/mr340-links

The longest non-stop river race in the world!

“I learned about the MR340 from a Missouri Conservationist magazine article years ago and always wanted to do the race; I finally did it in 2018 and 2020 (2019 was flooded out). This past year I was the ground crew for my son Jack. I had as much fun chasing Jack down the river as I did actually doing the race! I learned about the work River Relief does through the MR340. I support River Relief because I’m thankful for all they do and what they create in communities all along the river.”

-- Racer, Michael Basler
The 11th Annual Race to the Dome was held on Saturday, October 2, 2021 on the Missouri River. There were two race courses: Providence Landing (long) or Hartsburg Access (short) to Wilson’s Serenity Point at Noren Access in Jefferson City, MO. 193 Paddlers competed in 130 Boats - the largest Race to the Dome to date! Winners in each division took home a beautiful medal and bottle of wine from St. James Winery.
Engaging New Audiences

Exploring an Island

We offered a new engaging program called Big Muddy Boat Rides that gave families the opportunity to experience the Missouri River each month. In total, the boat ride series took 250 people out on the river in our passenger hauling boat, “Lucia,” and included a stop to explore a special sandy place we call “California Island”.

More Than a Workshop

In October, fifteen Shawnee Mission School teachers in Kansas City loaded into our motorboat for a 3-hour Integrating Water Quality Education into Your Classroom Workshop. Kristen Zuck, the school coordinator, said, “this was exactly what our teachers needed”.

New Merit Badge Program

Merit badges are an excellent way to explore your interests, learn new skills, and show others what you have accomplished. That is why we launched the Missouri River Explorer Badge for all ages.

The badge is gained upon the completion of a Missouri River Explorer Activity Card, which includes participation in activities and events that fall under the three tenets of the river. Explore, Learn and Protect. This badge is earned by those willing to go the extra mile to explore the Missouri River.

Learn more at:

bit.ly/mo-river-explorers

Photo: Luke Mattern, our first badge earner of the program! by Steve Schnarr
Meet the Board

Officers

Lynne Hooper, President
Urban Hydrologist, Boone County Resource Management

Drew Lemberger, Vice President
Owner; Mt. Nebo Inn B&B & Missouri Boatworks; retired VP Les Bourgeois Vineyards

Cathy Gunther, PhD, Co-Treasurer
Biology Instructor
University of Missouri

Michael Crist, Co-Treasurer
Executive Director,
Managing member of Tatanka Resources

Diana Papoulias PhD, Secretary
Retired Fisheries Biologist - US Geological Survey; Ascension Mission Leader of Exxpedition

Members

Bill Fessler
Resource Management
Kansas City Parks & Recreation

Dana Kee
Social Worker
Ellis Fischel Cancer Center

Tom Lemley
Attorney
Bridgepoint Law Firm, LLC

Sandy Neal
Regional Director
Central States Water Resources

Kent Robinson
Branch Manager
Plumb Supply/DKB

Nic Rogers
Stewardship Specialist
Ozark Land Trust

Heidi Sharp
Loan Officer
Veteran’s United

Kris Mattern
Freelance Graphic Artist
Owner, Kristyle Marketing

Kory Kaufman
Retired Science Teacher,
Columbia Public Schools

Lynne Hooper
Board President
Lynne Hooper has served on the River Relief Board of Directors since 2016. Lynne has been a crew member and helped organize River Relief Education Events back in the early days of the organization. She currently works as the Urban Hydrologist for Boone County.

Thank you for your service, Lynne!
Our projects would be impossible without the generous donations of our many sponsors. Our gratitude is heartfelt.

**SPONSOR OF THE YEAR**

Roo Yawitz

**$25,000 - $75,000**

- Cabela's Outdoor Fund
- Hulston Family Foundation
- Rio Vista Foundation
- Anonymous

**$10,000 - $24,999**

- AmeriCorps
- Community Foundation of Central Missouri
- John P. & Maida S. Hulston Family Fund
- William G. Little

**$5,000 - $9,999**

- Alpine Shop
- Alta’D State
- Bass Pro Shops
- Boone Electric
- Community Trust
- Big Muddy Adventures
- City of Columbia
- Columbia Rotary South
- Evergy
- Frances R. Dewing Foundation
- GFL Environmental
- Mid-Mo. Solid Waste
- Michael & Elizabeth Basler

**$2,000 - $4,999**

- Athletic Brewing
- Barney & Eileen Combs
- Brooke Vaughn
- Columbia Public Schools
- Dave & Fran Stous
- Eric Turcotte
- Gearlab
- Jan & Clayton Schnarr
- Kansas City Water Services
- Kristyle Marketing
- Midwest Paddle Adventures
- Mid-America Regional Council
- Missouri Birding Society
- Shawnee Mission School District
- St. James Winery
- Odell Brewing Company
- Peter Dyke
- Ruthie Moccia
- Some Beach Outfitters
- Schlafly Brewing
- Stephen & Linda Jackson
- Steve Schnarr
- Trevor Tilton
- Van Trust Real Estate
Since River Relief’s inception, these river heroes have guided the organization having served on the MRR Board of Directors, led countless lessons during our education programs, participated in many, many cleanups, hosted our staff and crew in their home and continue to be one of our most dedicated and long-term recurring donors to the organization. We are forever grateful to this power couple for their continued support throughout the years, we are inspired by them and we are super proud to recognize their lifetime worth of dedication on behalf of the Missouri River.
Back then, when I looked more than saw
Heard more than felt the river’s call
Now, I know some of the riches there
Of the perils deep I am more aware
Many fears the years have slain
While searing more within my brain
So how, now, does the man explain
Why a mother’s caution was in vain
The river’s become a vast tableau
Of now, of soon and of long ago
It tells in water swift and brown
The tale of mountains broken down
Of ages spent in relentless toil
Grinding granite to silt and soil
Neolithic shards discovered there
Tell tales of bison, buck and bear
And sing their maker’s prowess still

Excerpt from “Song Unsung”
by crew volunteer, John J. Brady