

# Cleanup Review

News and information for participants in the Minnesota Adopt-a-River Program.

## Tubing Stewardship

by Paul E. Nordell

Commercial recreational tubing has been a popular activity on six Minnesota rivers for many years. Despite its popularity, some believe tubing to be neither of much economic nor environmental consequence. When considered carefully, neither claim is true. On the economic front, a study some years ago determined that nine tubing businesses (with inner tubes) in one community, on the Apple River in Wisconsin, netted \$2.3 million dollars annually for the local economy. That was with 250,000 tubers annually and 160 employees. Apple River tubing still thrives with five tubing outfitters. In addition to the economics, tubing has its environmental impacts. Rubbish proliferation, sanitation and erosion control are on the list. Despite the environmental affects, tubing is one of those activities that is near to the hearts of many in the 18-to-25 age group. It also draws mixed-age family groups. It represents carefree times with friends on warm summer days. In Minnesota, commercial tubing outfitters operate on the Root, Zumbro, Cannon, Sunrise, Otter Tail and Red Lake Rivers.



Examining one of four boatloads from a short stretch of Otter Tail River immediately downstream of the tubing district, August 25, 2000.

The first line of defense against rubbish proliferation on tubing rivers is provided by river tubing outfitters. Outfitters place certain requirements upon their tubers. For example, tubing

"Tubing...." continued on page 4

### CONTENTS:

Commissioner's Comments .....	4
Celebrating Water.....	5
On the Water .....	6
Adopt-a-River Up Close .....	7-8
Creature Feature .....	9
News & Calender .....	10-11

companies generally do all they can to either restrict or prohibit Styrofoam and glass on the river. In some instances, this may be reinforced by county or municipal ordinance. Other tubing companies require tubers to pay a deposit on a durable cooler in an inner tube. The typical \$5.00 deposit is returned if the same number of cans come back as go out. A similar method of controlling incoming and outgoing cans is through a system of wrist bands and deposits that document the quantity of cans in possession of the tubing party. Ultimately, outfitters hire cleanup workers on a day-to-day basis to remove what gets away. The bottom line is that the outfitter himself sees it is in his own interests to make sure nothing happens on the river experience that would cause customers to not return. Heavy-traffic tubing rivers are frequently where tubers themselves voice concerns about the rubbish which accumulates, in particular the cans.

The ultimate responsibility for controlling rubbish while tubing is with the tubers themselves. With a typical trip taking two to three hours on a two-and-a-half to five-mile stretch of river, the eco-wise tuber who desires beverages will bring them in containers that will not get lost. The important thing is to have everything tied on. Increasingly, the tuber who loses his can will be the one who will be paying most dearly for this indiscretion. Some outfitters offer, free of charge, a durable floating cooler. If the tuber brings along his own Styrofoam cooler, it is invariably broken to pieces by the end of the ride, spilling it and its contents across the water, much to the disappointment of the tuber, the outfitter, the adjacent landowners, and the next day's tubers. More preferably, a durable floating cooler is used which doubles as a container to receive empty cans and bottles in the tried and true tradition of "tote-it-in, tote-it-out." The consensus by all outfitters is that glass and Styrofoam are either a really bad idea, or is just plain illegal under local ordinance.

Another area of personal responsibility and stewardship for the tuber is the control of alcohol. According to DNR's Boating Safety Specialist, any level of alcohol increases the likelihood of impaired muscle reflexes, clouded judgement and distorted breathing reactions, all of which have been linked in other situations to drownings and related serious injuries. The problem of illegal, or under-aged drinking is tied directly with rubbish proliferation. The under-aged drinker is faced with twin dilemmas. First of all, with smaller body mass, he is more severely impaired by the standard dose of alcohol. Secondly, in an impaired state, he may also be trying to hide evidence of his illegal activity. Put all together, under-aged drinking becomes a strong incentive for leaving beer cans sunk along the bottom of the stream. This in turn becomes hard on repeat business, because studies have shown that recreationists tend to avoid trashy environments.

Tubing outfitters have a great opportunity to shape their own destinies. The consensus among all parties contacted for this article was that alcohol plays a major role in influencing behavior among certain tubers. In areas where alcohol is restricted in only minimal ways, belligerent behavior contributes to many complaints within the community. One of the belligerent behaviors is wanton rubbish proliferation. If alcohol is viewed as one of the ingredients for a successful tubing experience, and this same factor makes it difficult

to deliver a stewardship message to the tubers themselves, then the remaining alternative for better river management is to step up the hired rubbish patrol and tighten regulations imposed upon tubers prior to embarking on the river.

A good example of stepped-up cleaning of the river was the August 24 and 25 cleanup of the Becker County portion of the Otter Tail River last year. The coordinator of this effort was County Deputy Tim Gordon. The cleanup was a very clean sweep of portions of the river that had never been thoroughly cleaned before. The event had the good fortune of happening during a time of low water levels. Jars were found dating back to the 1950's. Beer cans were found with the kind of throw away tabs outlawed in 1971. All told, 78 bags of rubbish were removed, and tires, fence posts, piles of twine used to tie inner tubes, and assorted metal were removed. The purpose of the effort was to bring the river back to a "pristine" level, and then develop strategies to keep it that way during the next tubing season.



**Hired tubing company workers, on the Otter Tail River for the tubing cleanup of August 24-25, 2000**

of the Otter Tail River, and 29 of the volunteers were hired by the three local tubing companies, who had divided up responsibility for the tubing stretch of the river. In addition, the Becker County Explorer's Post and a local Sentencing to Service crew participated. Further cleanup planning was provided by DNR Divisions of Waters and Fisheries. The future plan is to have the tubing companies take primary responsibility for monitoring and cleaning the portion of river impacted by their businesses. This will be under-girded by a new county ordinance.

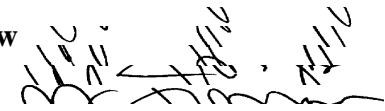
With continued interest in river tubing in Minnesota, the way to keep these waters attractive for all people in the community is the same way as it has always been: responsible stewardship. The Adopt-a-River program continues to be an advocate for the "tote-it-in, tote-it-out" kind of recreation as required on the Cannon Wild and Scenic River. Any variations from this approach will require intensive hired janitorial techniques. A combination of business-led cleanups and litter prevention are hoped to be the way to maintain local quality of life. As commercial outfitters and their clients subscribe to stewardship which includes self-awareness and self-determination, Minnesota's river environments will continue to be the sought-after amenities that build happy communities in those areas of the state allowed to have tubing enterprises.

*Photos courtesy of Frazee Forum August 31, 2000*

## Commissioner's Comments

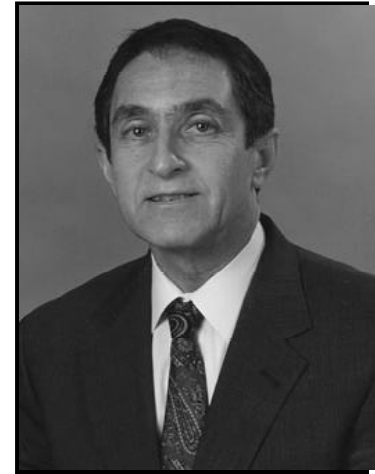
### Stewardship of our Beautiful Ice and Snow

Allen Garber, DNR Commissioner



Nice clean snow seems to be the furthest thing from problems with water quality. In fact, winter is when rivers and lakes are clearer and cleaner than any other time of year. The cloudy sediment load has not yet arrived. This is when we may be in denial about what happens when that bright snow turns to spring meltwater. In a way, the quality of these meltwaters tests the quality of our land stewardship.

As one snowfall covers another, we tend to give little thought about the contents of an ever deepening pile of snow. Think about it. We have 130,000 fishing houses on frozen lakes creating virtual fishing villages, and 18,000 miles of snowmobile trails going virtually everywhere. Don't forget the 2,000 miles of ski trails. We certainly enjoy our ice and snow, but we seasonally are challenged to keep our winter activities from damaging public waters during the big spring melt. Proper, non-trashing stewardship on and around lakes and streams in winter makes for happier, healthier enjoyment of these waters in the spring, summer and fall.



We also need to manage the ice and snow that is not part of winter recreation. Every year we have mountains of melting snow draining across streets and parking lots. Are these piles placed properly? Does the melting water have enough time for minimal settlement or filtration of debris before it rushes down ditches and storm drains or across the land and into our public waters? Do we act quickly enough to remove the rubbish from melting snow before it washes away or blows into our public waters?

Every spring our Adopt-a-River volunteers see the results of less-than-wonderful snow and ice management. It's almost as if we use each blanket of clean snow as some sort of sweeping compound, like a substance used to soak up messes. Our Adopt-a-River volunteers find the results of the sudden flush of spring meltwater: lots of floating water rubbish. It's not a pretty picture, but it's all too common. Much of the trash bears the telltale marks of a street battle: ground-in grit and tire-tread marks. It even includes scuffed-up pieces of household hazardous waste, such as motor oil bottles, pesticide and spray-paint cans and lighters. It's no question where this stuff is coming from.

Knowing what we know about the rubbish floating in our rivers and lakes, we should become more vigilant about preventing its escape from ice and snow each winter. Rubbish should be secured at the curb, within the truck bed or within each automobile. It is a year-around commitment. In such a way, the great springtime meltdown that is about to occur will be less of a water-quality shock. Of course land stewardship involves ice and snow, and the sober yearly reminder of this is the meltdown just a few days away.

# Celebrating the Importance of Water:

**Historical Moment: August 22, 1884**

**The Appeal for Harnessing Water Power in Breckenridge**  
*Wilkin County Gazette, Breckenridge, Minnesota*

As Breckenridge was organized on January 30, 1857, the proposed town plat included 673 city blocks, and a canal connecting two bends of the river for milling purposes. The town had a water-powered saw mill before the Civil War, but in 1862 a fire burned the town. At that time, the sawmill, which was the only building left standing, was apparently abandoned.



By early 1871, Breckenridge had shrunk to a hamlet of 25 people, and had virtually no remaining industrial base. Then, on October 25, 1871, the town became connected by the Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad. By 1872, wheat was produced locally, and in 1880 the crossed the river. In 1882 the Northern Pacific, Fergus and Black Hills Railroad arrived from the east and also crossed the river that same year. Now Breckenridge had transcontinental rail service from competing railroads, but the pre-Civil War water power site remained abandoned.

Saint Paul and Pacific finally

A strong local wheat market, driven by water-powered grist milling, was reportedly able to raise the value of local wheat by five cents per bushel. It was thus water power that led the editorial page of the *Wilkin County Gazette* of Breckenridge for **August 22, 1884**. The plan was to capture 16 feet of water behind a mill dam. Five years earlier this milling proposal included twelve and one half acres of land and free water privileges to anyone willing to rebuild water power in Breckenridge.

Eventually a mill was built, but it was not water-powered, as was anticipated. By 1898, the Schmitt, Eckes and Fricke Roller Mill of Breckenridge was in operation, with a capacity of 135 barrels of flour per day. It was operated by a 6.5 horsepower steam engine. The **August 22, 1884** edition of the *Wilkin County Gazette* had done its part to lure investment to town. This time, however, the expected waterpower solution had been eclipsed by a newer, more predictable technology: a steam engine driven by coal or wood delivered by rail.

**The Minnesota Adopt-a-River Program seeks to make you a steward Minnesota's rivers by encouraging you to actively "adopt" a portion of stream, river, ravine, lake or pond. We provide free cleanup bags, gloves, promotional artwork and materials, "How to" literature, a loaner video and recognition. You may choose your own site.**

# On the Water:

By Paul E. Nordell

**Featuring:** Headwaters Canoe Club  
**Area Adopted:** Mississippi River

The Headwaters Canoe Club, founded in 1990, has been cleaning the first (or the top) 82 miles of the Mississippi River, from Lake Itasca to Cass Lake, since 1994. **They have adopted a longer stretch (26 miles longer) than any other adopt group in the state.** The club cleans this stretch in three to twelve-mile segments. Some members return to their same favorite segment every year. Other cleanups take place as scheduled outings involving the entire club. The results of all the cleanups are compiled by the club coordinator, Tony McKeown, who informs DNR of the annual progress being made. According to Jack Gustafson, the previous cleanup coordinator, 300 to 500 pounds of rubbish have been removed annually from this 82-mile stretch of Mississippi River. The typical cleanup is done by two people, each in his/her own canoe, each covering one bank of the river.



**Visitors crossing the Mississippi River as it leaves the lake Itasca headwaters**

Tony reports that the amount of removed rubbish has been relatively constant over the years, with most of it being of recent origin. The most remote sections of river have virtually no rubbish, but messes occur downstream from bridges and at canoe campsites, especially those which have vehicle access. Another source of trash is the careless winter trail user, who leaves cans and bottles buried in the snow. Bridge crossings and boat access parking lots are also potential (and inappropriate) places for dropping off rubbish prior to ending one's vacation and heading for home.

What is found on cleanups can sometimes be bizarre. For Tony, the strangest thing he has ever found was a fully wrapped once-frozen turkey. Sometimes the finds can be near tragic. For example, several years ago Jack Gustafson talked to some campers who had just released a loon that they had freed from being hopelessly tangled in fishing line. The loon offered no resistance, and even stayed around for a while, a move the campers interpreted as being out of the loon's sense of gratitude for saving its life.

One of the most disturbing stories Tony had to relate was a time recently when he and a friend had just hauled an entire canoe load of junk out of the Fish Hook River in northern Wadena County. As they were unloading their day's catch of river rubbish, another person was also taking out his boat, only this person was pitching his garbage onto the ground, including a snarl of fishing line. Life has its moments. One's resolve to do the proper thing will always be challenged by careless indifference on the part of others. Tony wonders what would happen if a trash can were sitting under the nose of this indifferent angler. Would it have made any difference? Could such an angler be persuaded to visit an appropriate rubbish disposal site near by?



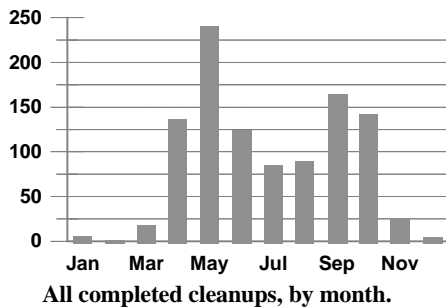
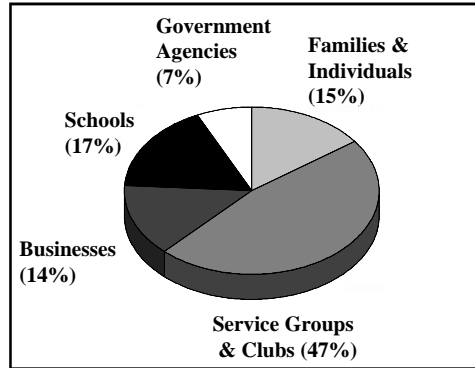
# Adopt-a-River Up Close

By *Melanie Burns*  
MCC Americorps Member

*Editors note: The following article was written with the assistance of our new Access data files. The conversion of these files has been completed by the author over the past several months. Now we are able to analyze our files more easily than ever before and to offer new insights into what Adopt-a-River volunteers have achieved for the program between 1989-2000.*

## Who are we?

Since Adopt-a-River began in 1989, an average of 37 new adopt groups have joined the program each year. These groups are immensely varied, bringing people from all walks of life. Almost half are service groups or clubs, including Boy and Girl Scouts, Kiwanis Clubs, 4-H Clubs, neighborhood groups and a wide variety of special-interest groups. School groups make up the next largest portion of adopts. They range from elementary through college, with students as well as teachers organizing annual cleanups. Adopt groups are sometimes small, consisting of only a few family members. Some "groups" are even solo adopts who do daily cleanups while walking their dogs. Government agencies of all kinds are also adopting shorelines across Minnesota. It is not uncommon to see them working in conjunction with other groups, towards the common goal of all the groups: to improve the quality of our waterways.



## When are the cleanups?

While spring, summer and fall remain the most popular months to do cleanups, some extremely motivated adopt groups have also done cleanups in the middle of winter. Despite the threat of high water, the month of May remains the most popular time for cleanups. When the snow melts, and trash becomes visible, adopt groups spring into action to clean their chosen locations.

## Where are we?

42% of adopt groups are located in the Twin Cities metro region. The remaining 58% are scattered all across Minnesota. Since the start of the program, over 135 different waterways have been adopted from as far north as the Warroad River to as far south as the DesMoines River. Every year, dedicated groups clean up hundreds of miles of shoreline. The cleanups are only interrupted in flood years, such as in 1993 and 1997. When conditions improve, adopters return in full force. We have had over 1,000 cleanups reported over the years,

totaling more than 4,000 miles of shorelines cleaned.

The length of shorelines cleaned varies greatly, from the smallest section, (a public access), to the longest area adopted, an 82 mile stretch of the Mississippi River. In descending order, the top five most popular waterways for adopt groups are the Mississippi, Minnesota, Otter Tail, and Cannon Rivers, and Minnehaha Creek.

## What do we do?

After receiving the How-to Kit, half of all our adopt groups registered and planned their cleanups within one month. Many of them registered after only one week. Other adopt groups took more time to reflect upon the implications and commitment involved in becoming an adopt member, waiting years to decide it was just the right time to commit.

As active members, adopt groups send purple report cards with their cleanup results. From a national perspective, plastic is reportedly the most common type of trash found in our waterways. Adopt groups in Minnesota are finding similar results. Those who have itemized their rubbish report finding 60% of their trash being plastic or metal. The plastic they find is usually in the form of plastic bottles, items which are easily and economically recycled. The next most common type of trash, metal (55% being aluminum), is even more easily recycled. Watching aluminum and plastic containers bobbing down the river symbolizes a pathetic waste of our resources.

The variety of trash items found by volunteers during their cleanups ranges from the disgusting to the unique, and from the unrecognizable to the valuable. A disturbing item that pops up over and over again on report cards is fishing equipment. This includes plastic lines, bait containers, tackle boxes and lures. Fishing equipment is not only one of the more common items found during cleanups, but can also be one of the most deadly to wildlife, leading to entanglement and suffocation. Diapers and household hazardous waste are two more troubling items commonly found by adopt groups. These eyesores pollute our waterways as well as take away from their natural beauty.

Our new data base tells us much about the habits of our adopt groups and the habits of the people living in our watershed. In effect, adopt groups function as hypothetical members of a volunteer materials-management-oversight committee. The next step is to brain storm and implement methods of keeping useful, recyclable materials out of our public waters and in the hands of those who can properly utilize these materials.

## Most Interesting Cleanup Finds

*shoes, hotdogs, ski pole, money, toilet, tent, sink, radio, hog feeder, underwear, rabbit cage, grave marker, mattress, vending machine, pickles, vandalized newspaper dispenser, silverware, TV, baby buggy, pumpkins, suitcase, fish tank, hair net, Nordic Track, manhole cover, coin change machine, deep fat fryer, fire extinguisher.*

## Program Statistics for 1989-2000

Number of Cleanups: **1,090**  
 Number of Volunteers: **33,470**  
 Numbers of Hours Worked: **109,364**  
 Shoreline Miles Cleaned: **4,065**  
 Pounds of Trash Removed: **1,761,395**

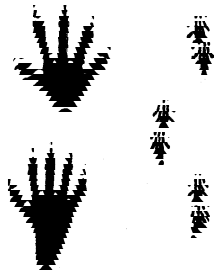
# Creature Feature:

## The Raccoon: *Procyon lotor*

The raccoon is found commonly in every one of the lower 48 states. They were rare in Minnesota before the 1930's, but favorable conditions have allowed them to flourish statewide. Populations are now over 800,000 (or one raccoon for every six people in Minnesota). While raccoons may be abundant in Minnesota, the chances of running into one on the river are slight. They are nocturnal and tend not to venture far from their dens during the day. If you do spot one, you'll have no trouble distinguishing it from other creatures. Their furry black coats, black masks and ringed tails are unmistakable. Raccoons have a bear-like body and thin, mobile fingers that allow them to open jars and latches, and even to turn on faucets. The amazing dexterity of the raccoon and its unique facial features have helped to solidify its reputation as a trouble maker, and has given it the nick name of "masked bandit".



Raccoons and humans share common characteristics that may help to explain their success in Minnesota. Like us, raccoons are omnivorous. They will eat just about anything they can get their paws on. A typical meal might consist of fruits and veggies, eggs, insects, crayfish, frogs, fish, small mammals or a few leftovers from their human neighbor's garbage can. After sifting around in the mud in search for a tasty aquatic treat, raccoons have been observed washing their food before sitting down to eat. So as unlikely as it may seem, raccoons appear to be obsessed with cleanliness. Also like humans, raccoons tend to thrive in many different kinds of habitats, from desert to tropical forest, and from hardwoods and marshes to city centers. While they seem to prefer dens near water, raccoons will make a home for themselves anywhere they can find a quiet, comfortable place, including a garage or attic. They like hollowed-out tree limbs and will den anywhere from ground floor to 60 feet up. Raccoons tend to be territorial and live alone, but are often brought together by a large food source or a warm shelter. One Minnesota hunter discovered 23 raccoons taking shelter from a cold winter night in an abandoned house in the forest.



Raccoon Tracks

If you have a keen eye, signs of raccoon activities can be seen all over a shoreline or forest. They leave their tracks on muddy shores, and if you look carefully, claw marks can even be seen on the bark of trees. Raccoons have been known to carry a wide variety of diseases, so keep a safe distance and watch out for your dogs when a raccoon is near. Pound for pound, raccoons will usually win in a brawl with a dog.

*Drawings courtesy of DNR Graphics*

# Adopt-a-River Notes & News

## Cleanup Review on the Web

Beginning with this issue, the *Cleanup Review* will be posted on our Web site [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trails\\_and\\_waterways/adoptriver/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trails_and_waterways/adoptriver/index.html). If you visit the next issue on the web, it will save us both paper and postage. Write, call, or e-mail us to be removed from our mailing list. While you are browsing our site, check out the other improvements we have made. Our new photo gallery contains up-to-date photos of cleanup activities and some amazing trash pictures.

## Now Available: Adopt-a-River Pencils for Cleanup Volunteers

Available upon request, our new Adopt-a-River pencils were designed to be both practical and environmentally friendly. Our pencils are made from incense cedar (*Libocedrus decurrens*), a hardy, decay-resistant tree growing abundantly in dense managed stands throughout Oregon and California. Increased use of this plantation tree to supply the pencil market's needs would make it possible to put an end to the destruction of ancient and tropical forests. So, as you order your other cleanup supplies, ask for this small token of appreciation for your volunteer's hard work and dedication. Our telephone number and website are listed on the pencil, so you can use it as a quick reference if you need to contact us.

## Adopt-a-River was in *Time Magazine* for Earth Week 2000

Minnesota's Adopt-a-River program was featured in the spring 2000 issue of *Time Magazine* as one of nine innovative groups working year-round to improve the quality of our environment. This special Earth Day edition focused on the state of our planet, and the people, programs and activities that are making a difference in our communities. Adopt-a-River was named as one of those programs, encouraging people to get personally involved in preserving and maintaining the health of our waterways.

## Purple Card Alert!

The postage-paid purple cleanup reporting card has been enlarged for your convenience. If you haven't done so, now is the time to report your results even if it is for an earlier season you forgot to report. The purple card is our sole method of tallying progress on all the cleanup you do. Our tally for 1999 reports 1,961 volunteers collecting 109,433 pounds of trash. We are still waiting to hear about some cleanups from 2000. The purple card's new look this year provides more room for you to report your cleanups results, and more space for you to write your address. It will help us keep our files up to date, and allow us to provide you with recognition materials and news of current program activities.

You have cleaned everything from ravines to public accesses to storm-water detention ponds. As these areas are cleaned, adopters have often removed such household hazards as motor oil, chemical containers, aerosol cans, batteries, and discarded paint. Bravo to our courageous force of volunteers!



## The 2001 Adopt-a-River Calender of Events.

This calender includes events that will help you better appreciate rivers, lakes and wetlands, or will provide community service, learning and discussion opportunities relating to watersheds. Call to verify times and locations.

**April 21: City of St. Paul Parks and Recreation City wide Spring Parks Cleanup.**

For more information call Patricia Freeman at (651) 292-7311.

**April 21: Annual Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation Mississippi River Cleanup.**

Call Marcie Padgett for details. (651) 450-2588. **Check locally for other cleanups this day.**

**April 22: 31st Annual Earth Day.** The first Earth Day was April 22, 1970, a grass-roots effort conceived by Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin to show concern for the environment.

**April 24: 12th Annual Greater Lafayette Park Cleanup and Celebration.** A joint cleanup effort for state agencies and local businesses in the Lafayette Park area on the East edge of downtown St. Paul. For more information, call Paul E. Nordell at (651) 297-5476.

**May 5: Annual River Environmental Project (REAP) Mississippi River Cleanup in South St. Paul.** Call Lois Swanson for details. (651) 451-1038.

**May 12: River Valley Cleanup in Mankato.** Help clean up the Minnesota Valley. Food and entertainment provided. Call Jim Peterson For details. (507) 389-2127.

**May 12th-19th: National River Cleanup Week.** Each year, National River Cleanup Week encourages cleanups of local waterways and promotes the importance of keeping rivers and streams clean. Free bags and information are provided. Contact their office at (865) 558-3595, or by email at [rivercleanup@aol.com](mailto:rivercleanup@aol.com)

**May 12 & 13: Take a Mom Fishing Weekend.** No MN license is required if you are fishing with a MN resident "mom". A child can extend this privilege to only one "mom". For more information, call Minn Aqua at (651) 297-4919.

**May 19th: Mississippi River Cleanup and Education Festival.** Sponsored by the Mississippi Corridor Neighborhood Coalition of Minneapolis. Call Randy Kouri at (612) 788-0249.

**June 21: 10th Annual Mississippi Riverboat Cleanup.** Registered volunteer crews will clean up riverbanks between downtown St. Paul and Ft. Snelling. Hosted by the DNR and Padelford Packet Boat Company. Call Paul E. Nordell, DNR (651) 297-5476 for details.

**New Adopt-a-River Assistant:**

Melanie Burns is a recent graduate of the University of Alaska Anchorage with a degree in Natural Science. She is the new Adopt-a-River Assistant; a Minnesota Conservation Corps position. Former assistant Jenny Meyer, is the Wild and Scenic Rivers Specialist for the DNR Trails and Waterways division.

*Cleanup Review* is published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for the Adopt-a-River Program in the Trails & Waterways Division.

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