

Cleanup Review

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From Brownfield to Green Space

Creating the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary

Dennis Thompson, DNR Ecological Services

The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, in St. Paul, held its grand opening on May 21, 2005. This was a celebration of a lot of work and effort that went into turning this 27-acre rail yard into a natural park area. Years of abuse from railroads and industry left the soil so polluted that it was designated a “brownfield,” meaning it required extensive cleanup before it was safe for human use. The opening of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary represented the culmination of years of effort to bring back some of this natural area’s historical significance.



One of the 170 volunteers who removed nearly 54 tons of garbage from the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary near downtown St. Paul. (DNR Photo 5-7-03)

This land has many unique resources, including a cave known as Wakan Tipi or “House of the Spirits” located at the base of Mounds Bluff. The cave was an important meeting place for the Dakota and is still considered a sacred site by them. In 1766, the British explorer Jonathan Carver made Wakan Tipi one of the first documented landmarks in Minnesota. Europeans soon began referring to it as Carver’s Cave.

This area was also historically significant because the gradual slope of nearby Trout Brook and Phalen Creek allowed the easiest ascent from the Mississippi River to the upland above the bluff. This made the area the logical place for riverboats to stop, unload and transfer passengers and goods overland, primarily by ox-cart, to Minneapolis and points north. Saint Paul was established in its current location thanks in large part to the creation of this transfer point.

When Minnesota’s first railroad arrived in 1861, the valley was again needed for its

“Sanctuary” continued on page 4

Contents:	
Coordinator’s Comments.....	4
Historical Moment.....	5
On the Water.....	6
End of the Month Garbage.....	7
Creature Feature.....	9
Calendar.....	10
Notes & News.....	11

gradual gradient. Railroads eventually displaced some of the finest mansions in Saint Paul, which were built along the banks of Trout Brook. The brook was put underground to make way for more railroads and their accompanying warehouses. The valley was filled and raised to minimize flooding, ease the track grade, and move the shore of the Mississippi away from the foot of Mounds Park Bluff. The bluff was also cut back, removing part of Carver’s Cave, to widen a crucial rail link with Chicago. While the railroads improved transportation and helped fuel the Twin Cities’ economic growth, the result was the loss of Trout Brook and the partial destruction of Wakan Tipi.

By the 1980s, the railroads had largely abandoned this area, leaving the land vacant and contaminated - until surrounding community members saw the land’s potential as a natural area and connection to the Mississippi River. In 1997, East Side activists joined with the Lowertown community to turn this land into a nature sanctuary that combined the restoration of riverfront habitat with public access to the natural world within the urban core. This group of dedicated citizens joined together and established the Lower Phalen Creek Project. For years they raised funds and developed plans to turn this degraded area into a park that would also connect citizens to a regional trail network.

The project generated a large amount of interest because of its location on the Mississippi River Flyway, and its significant cultural resources. Eventually the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) contributed an \$825,000 Metro Greenways Grant. That money was combined with other grant money from the DNR, the Trust for Public Land, the National Park Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Federal Transportation Enhancement Act, St. Paul STAR, the Burlington Northern Foundation, the Minnesota Environmental Initiative and a variety of other sources. These efforts combined to raise nearly \$6 million for the sanctuary purchase, clean up, restoration and trail installations. Thanks to these efforts, the land was purchased from the railroad and conveyed to the City of Saint Paul in November of 2002.

Following the acquisition, the Lower Phalen Creek Project’s focus turned to cleaning the land and beginning ecological restoration. On May 7, 2003, the DNR Adopt-a-River Program brought in the Minnesota 4 Wheel Drive Association for a major cleanup effort that removed 48 tons of man-made surface debris from the sanctuary. This event, combined with a pair of cleanups organized by the Lower Phalen Creek Project, utilized 170 volunteers who worked over 500 hours to remove almost 54 tons of garbage. In July 2003, the Lower Phalen Creek Project helped the City of St. Paul obtain its first grant from the EPA’s Brownfields Program.

The following winter, the construction phase of work on the sanctuary began. Asbestos, mercury and other contaminants were removed and clean soil was added to cover marginal soil areas. Archeologists carefully searched for artifacts of cultural significance from early Europeans and Native Americans. After the discovery of an early brewery foundation and greater-than-expected contamination in the wetland area, the sanctuary plan was revised with a site-planning grant from the Saint Paul Foundation. Working closely with Dakota tribal representatives, the Lower Phalen Creek Project, National Park Service and city staff established revised plans for excavating and re-creating the wetlands in front of Wakan Tipi. Also, they decided that the cave, which was sealed in 1977, would not be opened until an agreement could be reached on how best to provide



Volunteers from the Minnesota 4 Wheel Drive Association winch a pile of garbage from one of the caves in the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. (DNR Photo 5-7-03)

access to this special place.

During the summer of 2004, the restoration of oak savanna and prairie began with a group of volunteers that included the Lower Phalen Creek Project, the East Side Youth Conservation Corps, AmeriCorps, and 3M East Side Lab employees who cleared away the invasive buckthorn shrubs. The Lower Phalen Creek Project was able to obtain additional grants from the DNR and Minnesota Environmental Initiative to plant native

vegetation and stabilize the bluffs with prairie seeds. The East Side Youth Conservation Corps returned to help plant the new vegetation.

By the winter of 2004, the sanctuary land was declared safe for public use. Pedestrian and bicycle paths were installed. A series of three ponds and wetlands were excavated to capture spring water from the base of the bluff. This spring water flows through a creek that meanders along the base of the bluff and drops over a two-foot waterfall into the first pond.

In 2006, the Bruce Vento Trail connection is scheduled for construction. This trail will link downtown Saint Paul with 85 miles of trails from the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, the Mounds Park Trail and other trails in the area.

In the years ahead, the Lower Phalen Creek Project plans to work with the City of St. Paul and other partners to establish an interpretive center, a sanctuary entrance and a trail link to the Mississippi River. Additional funds will be needed to restore the land's floodplain forest, wetland and prairie ecosystems, and implement an interpretive plan.

This wonderful open space is just a few minutes' walk from the city's center and, for the first time in more than 100 years, will provide additional green space for people who live and work in the Lowertown and downtown area. The sanctuary will be a beautiful, lasting legacy for the region, and has generated extensive attention, including selection as one of the McKnight Foundation's top ten treasures in its Embrace Open Space initiative.

The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary embodies the kind of natural stewardship that can occur when a dedicated community rallies behind a single cleanup vision and works hard to carry it out. Hopefully, this project's success will inspire future groups to improve and enhance their natural environment.

More information on the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary can be found at www.mepartnership.org/sites/LOWERPHALENCREEK.

Coordinator's Comments

Keeping Safety Our First Priority

Paul E. Nordell, DNR Adopt-a-River Program Coordinator

The Adopt-a-River program empowers citizens to unite for the benefit of their community. These volunteers sometimes forget that safety should always remain their first priority. When a program, such as Adopt-a-River, continues to have few reported injuries, it suggests people are keeping their safety focus, but a little reminder never hurts.

The safe cleanup begins with good preparation. One of the best ways to avoid mishaps is through careful site selection. Visiting your proposed cleanup site will allow you to assess potential hazards. The site visit also eases the development of an emergency plan and will help you decide on needed supplies, such as a properly stocked first aid kit. While pondering your supplies, consider things as basic as gloves, to be sure they are sufficiently durable for the work you intend to accomplish. Once you have decided on the supplies you need, I would suggest putting your "I must remember" items in a bucket beforehand. This way, those things vital to your cleanup will not be forgotten.

Depending upon your cleanup, the guidance offered in the "how-to" kit may become vital to your success. The how-to kit was developed to assist you in planning your cleanup and includes inserts on safety. One of the basic principles of the kit is the importance for each person to take responsibility for his/her own actions, which will help them avoid the dangers of over-extending themselves. In short, your volunteers should know their limits.

Another way to avoid potential problems is to advise your group in advance as to what to wear. Long pants and sturdy shoes are recommended. If you are using a boat, be sure each person is wearing proper-fitting personal flotation devices and to review other basic water-safety procedures. The *Minnesota Boating Guide* and the *Minnesota Boating and Water Safety Test Packet* can be ordered from the Adopt-a-River order form.

Much of the safety message is common sense. We sometimes, however, leave our internal "safety first" message at home when we volunteer. When you were growing up, how many times did you hear, "Don't you know it's below zero – where are your hat and mittens?" So much trouble can be avoided with a strategic moment of reflection and a good cleanup plan. By planning for safety, you can have a more successful cleanup. Safe cleanups also allow you to recruit others more easily, so a real difference can be made for our public waters. Everyone's first goal when planning a cleanup should be returning safely and without injury. Be careful out there!

Editor's Note: The Adopt-a-River "how-to" kit can be found online at www.dnr.state.mn.us/adoptriver/howtokit or by contacting the Adopt-a-River Program.

Celebrating the Importance of Water Historical Moment: November 28, 1905 The Mataafa Blow Hits the North Shore

Paul E. Nordell, DNR Adopt-a-River Program Coordinator

"It has been a week that will always be remembered. It has been a week that children of today will tell their children and their children's children about years hence. Fortunately, even grim old Lake Superior is seldom seen in such rage, and nor within the memory of living men has one of her furies resulted in such appalling disasters." (*Duluth Evening Herald*, 12-2-1905)



The Mataafa Blow was one of the worst storms in Great Lakes history. The storm announced its arrival in Duluth with snow around 6:30 p.m. on November 27, 1905. By midnight winds were up to 62 mph and later peaked at 79 mph, devastating navigation on Lake Superior. The resulting thirty-foot waves took the lives of 36 seamen and wrecked or damaged 29 vessels as a Canadian high pressure mass clashed with a low-pressure cell hovering over the lake.

One vessel destroyed in the storm was the *William Edenborn*, a steamer struggling between Duluth and Two Harbors. At 3:30 a.m. on November 28, near Split Rock Creek and under severe storm conditions, the crew found a severed towline to their consort, the *Madiera*, a 436-foot iron ore schooner-barge under tow. It ran aground at Gold Rock, around 5:30 a.m. The *William Edenborn* grounded and broke in two about the same time, at Split Rock Creek, 4 miles away.

The *Madiera* and *William Edenborn* were among a handful of vessels that were totally destroyed in the Mataafa Blow. The losses to shipping in this storm were \$1.75 million, (equivalent to \$35 million dollars today). As a result of these heavy losses, the Pittsburgh Steamship Company (formed by U.S. Steel) launched a national campaign for a government-financed light station; the cheapest available protection for Lake Superior commerce. This was cheaper than redesigning the vessels or paying high-risk insurance rates. The fact that 1/3 of all the damaged vessels on Lake Superior were owned by U.S. Steel gave impetus to press Congress for relief from the storm losses.

In 1907, Congress made an appropriation for a lighthouse at Split Rock. It was constructed in 1910 by the U.S. Lighthouse Service, and was located about 5 miles southwest of Beaver Bay. In 1967, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park was established and by 1969 the U. S. Coast Guard made enough advances in technology to close the lighthouse. Since 1985, the lighthouse has operated one night per year, on November 10, to commemorate the night the *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank in 1975 and took its 29 crewmembers with it.

Sources:

Duluth Evening Herald, 11 and 12/1905; Dr. Julius F. Wolff, Jr. *Lake Superior Shipwrecks*; Thom Holden, "Wicked November Storms", *Lake Superior Magazine*, Oct/Nov. 1990; www.law.berkeley.edu/faculty/sugarmans/; www.mnhs.org/places/; www.terrypepper.org

On the Water

Featuring: "Captain Bob" Schleicher, President and Founder of Minnesota Rivers Revitalization, Inc. (MRRI)
Area Adopted: Mississippi River



Captain Bob surveys the river from the controls of Maggie during the 14th Annual Great Mississippi Riverboat Cleanup. (Photo by Melanie Boyd 7-11-05)

Robert Schleicher, or "Captain Bob", as he is more commonly known, is a longtime "river-rat" who, along with his passenger boat, *Maggie*, is well known to the people along the Mississippi River in the Red Wing area. During his excursions on the river, he noticed all manner of man-made debris marring his "beloved river."

Bob sought anyone who shared his views about cleaning up the Mississippi River. In the summer of 2000, Bob introduced himself to the Adopt-a-River Program by asking what could be done to clean his favorite river. It was explained how the Adopt-a-River Program increases river stewardship by encouraging organizations and individuals to organize cleanups along all of the state's public water bodies.

Bob was intrigued with the idea and became one of the program's most ardent supporters. He not only became an active Adopt-a-River Program volunteer, he also became active in the cleanup initiatives of the Audubon Society's Upper Mississippi River Campaign, and Living Lands and Waters, Inc. Around Red Wing, Bob also started a personal bag distribution and education campaign. Almost everyone Bob sees along the river is handed some Adopt-a-River bags, told of the Mississippi River's challenges, and asked to pick up any garbage they find while enjoying the great river.

Bob has always felt that he needed to do more to help the river, however. On January 28, 2005, his dream of forming a non-profit organization came to fruition with MRRI's first Board of Director's meeting. MRRI was formed with the goal of removing garbage along the Mississippi from the Twin Cities to Lock #4 near Wabasha. MRRI plans to achieve this by conducting some of their own cleanup events (see the Calendar of Events on page 10) and by assisting other groups and individuals with their cleanups throughout this area.

MRRI's "Mississippi River Cleanup Project" has already received a good deal of attention, with Bob being interviewed by KSTP Channel 5, the *Washington Post*, and the *Red Wing Republican-Eagle*, among others. Also, the DNR recently awarded MRRI a \$20,000 Environmental Partnership Grant to assist it with its cleanup plans.

Anyone wishing to learn more about MRRI, volunteer their support, or recruit its assistance in organizing a cleanup along the Mississippi (no matter the size) is strongly encouraged to call Bob at 651-592-3494.

Keeping End of the Month Garbage Out of the Waste Stream

Shaun Lettau, MCC – DNR Adopt-a-River Program Assistant

Recently, my wife and I conducted a very common ritual for many families toward the end of the month, we moved. While sorting through our belongings and deciding what was worthy of moving to the new place, we noticed a rather large discard pile forming. Rather than just placing them in the dumpster and into the waste stream with countless tons of other garbage, we decided to find better alternatives for disposing of these unwanted belongings. We thought a good way to solve this problem was to use the three R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle.

While reducing the items already on hand is somewhat impossible, I did find a couple of ways to reduce the discard pile the next time around. According to the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance (MOEA) the average American receives over 500 pieces of advertising mail each year. To combat this influx of "junk mail," the Direct Marketing Association has established the Mail Preference Service (MPS). The MPS has two basic parts. First, the nation's major credit bureaus have joined together to set up a toll free number, 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688), where consumers can call to stop unwanted credit card applications. The second part of MPS is to send a special postcard to the marketing association which will remove you from their mailing list for five years. Anyone interested in signing up for the MPS should call (212) 768-7277 or visit the websites www.the-dma.org and www.reduce.org.

Another way to reduce garbage is to buy things with less packaging. The MOEA estimates that packaging materials make up 30% of all man-made solid waste in landfills. Buying products with less packaging can also save consumers money because over-packaged goods often cost more.

The second "R" is reuse. Many ways exist to reuse old items. Some of the most common items that did not make our move were clothes, furniture and appliances. As families with more than one child know, clothes can be "handed-down" by a number of children until they wear out.

This apartment complex in St. Paul shows a common end of the month scene. (DNR Photo 6-27-05)



Furniture and appliances can also be reused. One way unwanted possessions can be reused is to donate them to charities such as Goodwill and the Salvation Army. Organizations like these agree with the old phrase "one man's trash is another man's treasure." By donating to charities or thrift stores, things that are unwanted in your home have a chance to become

the centerpieces of another home. As an added bonus, these donations could supply you with a tax write-off. The types of items charities will accept are as diverse as the charities themselves. Two excellent resources to help decide which charity is right for you are United Way's First Call for Help (612-335-5000 or 651-224-1133) and MOEA's website (www.moea.state.mn.us).



Another common end of the month problem is illegal dumping, like these reusable pieces of furniture found under I-35E in St. Paul. (DNR Photo 6-27-05)

Yet another option for getting rid of unwanted items is to post them as "give-aways" in high-traffic areas like supermarkets, or using programs such as www.twincitiesfreemarket.org. While programs like Twin Cities Free Market are a wonderful place to both give away your old belongings and get reusable goods from others, they do have a few drawbacks, such as location. Twin Cities Free Market, for example, is only available for residents of the seven-county Twin Cities Metro Area.

The final "R" in the triangle is to recycle. Almost everyone is familiar with local recycling programs for paper, metal, plastics, and glass. However, many people are unaware of other recycling programs. One large category of devices that can be recycled is electronic equipment. These efforts will become even more important after the upcoming landfill ban on devices containing cathode ray tubes (television sets and computer monitors).

A variety of ways exist to recycle old electronics equipment. Many communities host annual drop-off events or have other electronics recycling programs. Another program allows anyone wanting to recycle Sony products to bring them to any Waste Management, Inc. site free of charge. For a small fee, many of the manufacturers of computer products will also accept old computer equipment to be recycled. Even out-dated cellular phones can be recycled. For information on how to recycle an old cellular phone, visit the website www.recyclewirelessphones.com.

Of course, there are many other items that you may not wish to move into your new home. The MOEA website is an excellent location to answer many of the questions you may have regarding these items. This website has a database with recycling and solid waste contacts for every Minnesota county, along with a calendar of upcoming electronic-recycling events. This website also has a lot of excellent information on recycling things such as used motor oil, and household chemicals.

Hopefully these tips will help your discarded belongings avoid becoming additions to the waste stream. If enough people keep their discard piles out of the waste streams, the natural streams and other water bodies throughout Minnesota will benefit greatly.

Creature Feature

Flathead Catfish: *Pylodictis olivaris*

Flathead Catfish (DNR File Graphic)

A common species of river fish in the Mississippi River watershed is the flathead catfish. The flathead is so common that the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (of the National Park Service) in the Twin Cities adopted "Freddie the Flathead" as its official mascot.



Like the other members of the catfish family, which also includes channel catfish, and brown, black and yellow bullheads in Minnesota, flathead catfish are readily identified by their telltale "whiskers," called barbels. Many ways exist, however, to distinguish the flathead from its relatives. As its name suggests, flatheads have very flat, broad heads with a protruding lower jaw, while most other catfish species have rounded heads. A slightly notched, square tail is another characteristic that makes the flathead unique among catfish. Flatheads can also be identified by its body color, which ranges from olive-colored or dark brown to light brown or pale yellow, and has patchy or mottled markings. Finally, the flathead is the largest of Minnesota's five types of catfish (and bullheads). The state record flathead was caught on the St. Croix River in 1970 and weighed 70 pounds. This is nearly double the weight of the state's largest channel catfish (Minnesota's second largest catfish type)!

In the catfish world, flatheads also have a unique diet. Unlike other catfish, flatheads prefer eating live fish. Flatheads eat a wide variety of fish and shellfish including sunfish, crayfish, shad, and even other catfish.

The flathead's size, coupled with its taste for live fish, has made it a very harmful fish species when introduced to waters in other areas of the United States where it is not a native species. According to Pam Fuller ("USGS Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database: *Pylodictis olivaris*, Gainesville, FL, 2005, <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.asp?speciesID=750>) the flathead catfish is "one of the most biologically harmful of all fish introductions in the nation." This large predator fish has decimated local fisheries and dramatically altered whole ecosystems when it was introduced to stream systems in California and southeast United States, by out-competing native fish species and consuming large numbers of the smaller fish species.

The flathead serves a vital role as an upper-level predator in its native range, which includes the Minnesota, St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers in this state, serving to help maintain a balanced river ecosystem. However, when flathead catfish find their way to waters where they are not a part of the native fish population, they become a harmfully invasive fish species.

**For more information on flatheads or other fish in Minnesota please visit the DNR's website www.dnr.state.mn.us.*



Fall 2005 Adopt-a-River Calendar of Events.

As of August 1, 2005 * Contact organizers to confirm times and locations.

August 25 - September 5: Minnesota State Fair. Come out and see the Adopt-a-River booth at this year's "Great Minnesota Get Together." We will again have a "found objects" sculpture along with educational material on the problems facing our waterways. Contact Paul Nordell (651-297-5476, paul.nordell@dnr.state.mn.us).

September 10: 12th Annual MCNC Mississippi River Cleanup. The Mississippi Corridor Neighborhood Coalition (MCNC) invites you to help them clean the banks of the Mississippi River as it flows through Minneapolis. Call Randy Kouri at 612-331-4738 for more information.

September 10: 5th Annual Eagle Cliff Campground and Lodging Cleanup. Help clean the Root River from Torkelson Creek to Eagle Cliff Campground. Volunteers will be cleaning from canoes provided by the campground and dinner will be provided Saturday evening. For more information contact Ivan Naber at (507) 467-2598.

September 17: MRRI Hok-Si-La Cleanup: Join Minnesota Rivers Revitalization, Inc. (MRRI) for one of their cleanups as part of their mission of cleaning the Mississippi River from the Twin Cities to Lake Pepin. This fun event will be held at Hok-Si-La Park in Lake City. Contact Bob Schleicher at 651-592-3494.

September 17: Crow River Watershed Cleanup. The Crow River Organization of Water (C.R.O.W) is organizing a large cleanup involving many of the cities within the Crow River watershed. For information Contact Diane Sander, Crow River Watershed Coordinator, at 763-682-1933 Ext.3 or email at diane.sander@mn.nacdnet.net.

September 17: International Coastal Cleanup/ Great Lakes Beach Sweep. The Great Lakes Aquarium is again sponsoring the Great Lakes Beach Sweep in conjunction with the International Coastal Cleanup. Cleanups will take place throughout the Duluth area with supplies and refreshments being provided. Contact Erin Zoellick at 218-740-3474 (ext.1027) or email ezoellick@glaquarium.org.

September 17: 14th Annual Xcel Energy Mississippi River Cleanup. Xcel Energy will be partnering with others in the Monticello - Becker area to clean the Mississippi River. Prizes and refreshments will be available. For information, contact Dan Orr at 763-261-3155 or email daniel.j.orr@xcelenergy.com.

Cleanups can also be found on the DNR's Internet Calendar of Events at www.dnr.state.mn.us or by contacting the Adopt-a-River Program.

Adopt-a-River Notes & News

Purple Cards: Thank you to all the groups who have sent their purple cleanup report cards. 2005 is shaping up to be another great cleanup year! Since 1989, Adopt-a-River volunteers have spent over 212,000 hours removing nearly 4.7 million pounds of trash from Minnesota's public waters. Excellent work! Also, please remember that if you have completed a cleanup and not reported it, **SEND IN YOUR PURPLE CARD**. Results can also be emailed to paul.nordell@dnr.state.mn.us or faxed to 651-297-5475.

Going after "Ghost" Boats: The Adopt-a-River Program recently received a \$10,000 grant from the Mississippi River Fund, part of the National Park Foundation, to remove abandoned houseboats and other large objects from the 72-mile Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) corridor. MNRRA extends from the mouth of the Crow River near Ramsey downstream to the border of Dakota and Goodhue counties south of Hastings. We sincerely thank the Mississippi River Fund and others who assisted us in receiving this grant that will help us further the Adopt-a-River mission of cleaning Minnesota's public waters.

Correction: In the "Creature Feature" section of the previous issue, we may have inadvertently misled our readers. It was brought to our attention that the loon population in Minnesota is more stable than we made it seem. While lead sinkers in fishing tackle can harm loons and other aquatic birds, at this time there is no evidence to suggest lead sinkers are causing declines in bird populations. Please accept our apologies.

14th Annual Great Mississippi Riverboat Cleanup: The Adopt-a-River Program and Padelford Packet Boat Company hosted another riverboat cleanup on July 11, 2005. 74 volunteers braved the 90-degree heat to remove 2,850 pounds of garbage from the banks of the Mississippi River near the Pig's Eye Waste Treatment Plant in St. Paul. Thank you to everyone who helped make the day such a success.



Six volunteers, including 4 members of the Minnesota Conservation Corps and the artist for this year's State Fair Sculpture, show great teamwork at the 14th Annual Great Mississippi Riverboat Cleanup by removing a 250 - gallon fuel oil tank.
(Photo by Melanie Boyd 7-11-05)

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

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*Don't forget to visit our web site at:

www.dnr.state.mn.us/adoptriver.

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