

RIVER VOICE



Issue 18

Summer 2016

Legislative Session Yields Success for SLRA

By Judy Erickson

"Wait!", you might say reading this headline. How can a legislative session that failed to pass a bonding bill critical to the clean up of the St. Louis River estuary be deemed a success?

To be sure, the failure of the legislature to act in a timely manner on a bonding bill, further failure at passing it and even more failure at reaching agreement with Governor Mark Dayton for a special session is beyond disappointing and frustrating. The Legislature cannot take pride in their work.

But the St. Louis River Alliance can take pride in theirs. Even though we were let down, the experience of the 2016 Legislative session created opportunities for the Alliance, its director, Kris Eilers and board to move into a strong position of advocacy and leadership in St. Paul and Duluth on the long awaited clean up of the St. Louis River.

The Alliance's work began months before the March 8 start of the Legislative session. In the fall of 2015, the Alliance was a visible participant on the House and Senate Capitol Investment Committee bonding tours. This is a process, well in advance of the legislative session, whereby the key committees tour the state and tour potential bonding projects.

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"The Alliance is to be congratulated on all that has been accomplished this year. The failure and disappointment from the lack of a final bonding bill cannot take away the good work."

- Judy Erickson



Governor Mark Dayton and SLRA Executive Director Kris Eilers

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For the St. Louis River clean up project, this was in September and October of 2015. Legislators toured the Duluth Harbor and estuary looking at and hearing about the plans for the clean up. These tours are important as they leave a visual impact and trigger positive responses during the hectic decision-making days in St. Paul.

Following these tours, the Alliance went about building a strong coalition of local, regional, and state support for the bonding request of \$12.7 million that would trigger access to the federal funds of \$47.2 million. Kris met with countless groups, we drafted and edited fact sheets and created an impressive array of 75 organizations to support this work. In January, Governor Mark Dayton announced his proposed bonding package. The Governor's package is an important starting point in the legislative dance that produces (or not) a final bonding package in May. The Governor put the full \$12.7 million in his proposal and the Alliance was active in local media stories about this important accomplishment.

As we entered the legislative arena in March, the Alliance drafted and sought sponsors for bills that would fund the \$12.7 million in bonds. Our legislative authors and co-authors represented a broad spectrum of support from the House and Senate. It was great to have strong leaders to help shepherd the project through. In the Senate, our lead author was Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope) who serves on the Great Lakes Commission and is passionate about Lake Superior and this project. Our House author, Rep. Erik Simonson (DFL-Duluth), brought equal support and passion to the effort, as he knows first hand the economic benefits the clean up will bring to West Duluth.



Judy and Kris at the State Capitol

The Alliance also played a key role in a lesser-known piece of the bonding story. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency needed to add four staff to manage the project once the state and federal funds became available. This required \$432,000 in new General Fund spending. These funds would complement the bonding request and are critical to successfully completing the project in the timelines of the partnership agreement with EPA. The Alliance led the effort within the supplemental budget process to ensure the \$432,000 was made available to fulfill this function. Once the need was brought to the attention of key legislators, it was agreed to and fully supported. These funds were included in the Supplemental Budget bill that Governor Dayton did sign into law.



SLRA Executive Director Kris Eilers (left), Representative Jennifer Schultz (center), Senator Ann Rest (right)

During the short, ten weeks of the legislative session, the Alliance was engaged every step of the way. From generating letters of support to legislators, issuing press releases, posting on social media, attending community forums, events such as Duluth Days and having a presence at the Legislature in St. Paul, the Alliance was front and center. Through the Alliance's efforts, we knew the House and Senate would support the \$12.7 million in state funds. As the session wore on, and eventually as we see now, the largest concern was if there would be a bonding bill. The bill that was assembled on the last day of the session, the bill that failed to pass on that last day, did include the \$12.7 million. The Alliance was front and center again, when calls for a special session began by contacting legislators and participating in a press event with Governor Mark Dayton at UMD on June 10th.

The Alliance is to be congratulated on all that has been accomplished this year. The failure and disappointment from the lack of a final bonding bill cannot take away the good work. The partnership and support of 75 organizations is a testament to the value of this work. This solid foundation will serve the community well in 2017 as we re-group and make another run at securing the state funds to trigger the federal match.

Judy Erickson has worked with the St. Louis River Alliance as a Government Relations Consultant since October 2015

Clean Water Coalition Supporters

Advocates for the Knife River Watershed
AMI Consulting Engineers P.A.
Armory Arts and Music Center
Arrowhead Fly Fishers
Bent Paddle Brewing Co.
City of Duluth
City of Superior
Conservation Minnesota
Deer Tail Press
Denton Law Office
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Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce
Duluth Charter Fishing Guides
Duluth Seaway Port Authority
Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council
Ely Outfitting Co. & Boundary Waters Guide Service
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Fond du Lac Community Club
The Food Farm
Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness
Hartel's/DBJ Disposal Companies
Heck of the North Productions
Intectural Inc
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John Doberstein LLC
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LISC Duluth
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Marine Tech LLC
Midwest Energy Resources Co.
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Minnesota Land Trust
MN North Shore Commercial Fisherman
MSA Professional Services
Mont du Lac
Morgan Park Community Club
Northern Engineering Co.
Northland Films
Park Point Community Club
Park State Bank
Pheasants Forever
Pilgrim Congregational Church
River Corridor Coalition
River Point Resort
Sappi Cloquet LLC
Save Lake Superior Association
Scalzo Architects
Ski Hut
Spirit Lake Marina & RV Park
Surge Communications
Tate & Lyle
Trout Unlimited
Twin Ports Walleye
United Northern Sportsmen
Upper Lakes Foods
Vikre Distillery
Visit Duluth
Western Lake Superior Trolling Association
Western Lake Superior Sanitary District
White Cedar Studio
Whole Foods Co-op-Duluth

UPDATE ON SPECIAL SESSION: News out of the capitol last week suggests that legislators are nearing an agreement on a bonding bill and the governor may call a special session in August.

Please consider donating now to help support the extended government relations work at www.stlouisriver.org. Your donation will enable us to keep a presence at the capitol, monitor progress, and ensure that the clean up of the St. Louis River Estuary project stays on schedule to receive a 65% federal funding match.

We would like to thank the following River Partners for supporting our work in the Estuary:

River Protector \$2,500 Supporter



Great Blue Heron \$1,000 Supporter



Clear Answers for Clean Water™



Lake Sturgeon \$500 Supporter



Living up to our name.





**Dumpster
donated by**



**Garbage
Removal
Services
donated by
WLSSD**

**40
Volunteers**

**2016 Annual St.
Louis River Clean Up:
49th Ave. W. Creek**



**3,700 lbs.
of Garbage**

**Gloves, Bags, and
Equipment donated by
City of Duluth Parks
and Rec Department**



Thank you to all the volunteers and supporters of this project! River and Creek Clean-ups are an annual event for the SLRA. If you or your business would like to participate in a clean-up or team building exercise organized by SLRA, visit: www.StLouisRiver.org/river-partner-benefits/ and become a River Partner today!

SLRA Volunteers during the 2016 River Clean Up

LITTLE BIRD, BIG WORLD

Team Plover Grows in 2016!

SLRA would like to thank all the returning and new volunteers that participated in our training sessions and helped monitor the beaches during the 2016 season!

Thank you to...

Darryl A.

Ella C.

Pat C.

Shelby C.

Kristy D.

Laura E.

Anmarie G.

Brien & Shelley G.

Eliza G.

Mary G.

Ramsey H.

Suzanne H.

Bonnie P.

Kelly P.

Randy S.

Rubin S.

We would also like to thank Seasonal Monitors: Alex, Cedar, Dan, Mack, and Mariah for a great season!

GO TEAM PLOVER!



Female Piping Plover on Park Point (above photo by Cedar Lechner-Riehle), Monitor Mack (bottom right) on Park Point, Monitor Cedar (right) on Wisconsin Point.



The St. Louis River Alliance has completed its sixth season monitoring the beaches of Park Point and Wisconsin Point for the presence of the elusive and endangered Great Lakes Piping Plover. Many members of the Twin Ports community have become familiar with our monitors out on the beach in their gold jackets, taking notes and answering questions about this sensitive shorebird. Morning and evening, the piping plover monitors, both staff and volunteers, venture out onto the beach to record data about the shoreline habitat and the birds that utilize it.

Plover Project Primer

- The piping plover monitoring project is funded by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- The goals of the project are to determine and monitor locations that would be suitable nesting habitat for the Great Lakes Piping Plover.
- Piping Plovers last nested in the Twin Ports in 1986 but the success of the last clutch of eggs is unknown, most likely predated due to a dramatic increase in the Ring-billed Gull population over the previous decades.
- Habitat changes over time including growth of vegetation, loss of beach depth, increased human/canine activity, increased industry/development, and a boom in the predator populations have all contributed to the struggle of the GL Piping Plover.
- As of July 2016, 72 pairs of Piping Plover have been documented in the Great Lakes region. This marks the 3rd consecutive year of more than 70 pairs! However, the benchmark for population recovery is 150 pairs, 100 in Michigan and 50 in other states. (continued on next page)



LITTLE BIRD, BIG WORLD

2016 SLRA Season: We started our season on May 1st, 2016, monitoring both Park Point and Wisconsin Point. Our daily monitoring yielded results when the first Piping Plover of the season was spotted on the morning of Saturday May 21st near the Sky Harbor Airport on Park Point. Through the use of spotting scopes and with help from the University of Minnesota, we identified the bird as a female from North Manitou Island. The appearance of a female bird in our area is big news! Unfortunately, there are more males than females in the GL Piping Plover population. Our monitors settled in to keep an eye on this beautiful bird for the next three days. We had amazing conversations with people recreating on the beach that gave the plover plenty of space. Community members can support our efforts to help plovers by paying attention to signs, removing any garbage from the beach, and making sure dogs are safely on a leash while visiting the beach. Sadly, on the morning of our fourth day of monitoring, the plover flew far up the point and through a spotting scope, our monitor watched as she was chased by a dog off leash and vanished out over the lake. Despite hours of searching, the female plover was never relocated.

We have seen Piping Plovers land on our area beaches annually and in several cases, the birds have stayed for extended periods of time, giving us hope that they will choose this area as a nesting habitat. However, Piping Plover are a very sensitive species that require specific conditions and if the area does not meet those criteria, the plovers are forced to move on in search of more favorable nesting grounds.

Path Forward: After completing another plover season, SLRA is developing a new path forward with new partnerships to re-

evaluate our goals and efforts to create a safe nesting habitat for the piping plover. As the population of plovers continues to grow in Michigan, more suitable habitat may be needed to support birds that travel greater distances to nest. We have established very supportive relationships in Wisconsin and work closely with Douglas County, the University of Wisconsin-Superior, the City of Superior, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the Superior Police Department. The police worked hard to increase patrols along all of Wisconsin Point to help reduce all illegal activities and prevent vandalism and destruction of designated plover habitat! We are hoping to forge similar partnerships in Minnesota and begin the process of searching for an appropriate location to continue habitat restoration to provide the birds with their best chance of survival in our area.



For more information about the Piping Plover Project or to find out how you can help, contact Sarah@StLouisRiver.org

Upcoming SLRA Events

Annual Canoe & Kayak Tour and Picnic

Saturday August 6th 9:00am to 1:00pm

Perch Lake Landing 121st Ave. W. off Hwy 23, Duluth, MN

Members: \$5/person or \$20 for a family

Non-Members: \$10/person or \$30 for a family

Canoe or (Limited) Kayak Provided, Lunch Provided

RSVP is REQUIRED by August 4th at 4:00pm, if you need to cancel, you must cancel by August 4th at 4:00 pm in order to receive a refund.

This year's event will feature points of interest on the lower St. Louis River Corridor featuring the Wisconsin side of the river where there has been extensive wild rice planting by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. The tour will begin at Perch Lake Landing on 121st Ave W off Highway 23. Look for the volunteers assisting with parking and boat drop off. This event is for all experience levels. Canoes, paddles, and PFD's will be available for those that have registered for the event if they are unable to provide their own equipment. Equipment and space is limited. A picnic lunch will be served at Perch landing at the end of the tour. Children under 12 are free but must be accompanied by an adult.

To Register visit our website

<http://stlouisriver.org/slra-annual-canoe-tour-and-picnic/>

What to watch for in the Fall issue of River Voice...

Sentry Program: Community Members get the tools to monitor aquatic invasive species through courses provided by SLRA

Phragmites Management: Protecting the estuary from colonization of this resilient non-native plant

Design Duluth: Updates on this collaborative, student-driven project addressing connectivity and design challenges in St. Louis River Corridor neighborhoods

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information about our organization and events

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Visit us on the web at
www.stlouisriver.org