

RIVER CURRENTS

A PUBLICATION OF MILWAUKEE RIVERKEEPER



Fish Too Shall Pass

Volunteers help clean our waterways at a distance

It's been three months since Milwaukee Riverkeeper unveiled our DIY Spring Cleanup campaign. The pandemic forced us to rethink our programs, and get creative in finding solutions to continue protecting and restoring the waterways we love. Postponing our annual spring cleanup meant safer communities, but it also meant the single day effort that removes thousands of pounds of trash from our rivers did not happen.

In response, we sprung into action, asking volunteers to get outside and restore themselves and our rivers at the same time. We're incredibly proud of the 1,500 pounds of trash collected and

removed by the 300 individuals that participated in the DIY Spring Cleanup!

While we held onto the hope of hosting a large cleanup at some point this year, we made the difficult decision to cancel and instead encourage individuals to continue participating in DIY Cleanups all season long. There is nothing we love more than science at Milwaukee Riverkeeper, and science says we must continue with social distancing, mask-wearing, and hand washing to protect our communities until there is a vaccine available.

During such a solemn time in our nation, and our world we are energized by
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Message from the Executive Director



Dear Friend of the Waters,

Like everyone, our vision for 2020 is unfolding quite different than we planned. Since this year marks our 25th anniversary, we had prepared a year of celebrations. What we are seeing instead is a year filled with unexpected and unaddressed problems affecting every person in our community in different ways.

COVID-19 forced us to turn inward, at a time when our work would traditionally take us outside. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought to the fore the reality that both the environmental and social justice movements are not addressing the problems plaguing our local communities.

For a moment in time, it felt life stopped completely. We were unable to host our Annual Spring Cleanup, and all events, volunteer training and field work stopped indefinitely. During a time of isolation and grief, appointed leaders took advantage of the opportunity to strip critical protections from our waterways (see Riverkeeper Watch on

page 6). Despite the continued attacks on our communities, there seems to be a universal and renewed commitment to the natural spaces in which we all take solace. Water can be a unifier – a bright spot in a difficult time and one that propels the Riverkeeper team forward.

We adjusted our work in record time to provide virtual trainings, meaningful education and limited COVID safe events. We know that impacts to our waterways have not stopped – litter and pollution are still happening, but we're working hard to find new ways to adapt and address these challenges:

- We launched a DIY Spring Cleanup to not only find respite in the outdoors, but to also give back and restore our natural spaces. 300 new friends and families pledge to spend time cleaning up their communities.
- We trained and coordinated 114 Adopt-a-River volunteers, virtually, with curb-side supply pickups. They've conducted over 33 Cleanups removing close to 1,000 pounds of trash.
- We trained over 70 Water Quality Monitors, virtually with curb-side equipment pickups.
- We transitioned our educational programming to a virtual "Jump in with Julius" series with 5 minute videos about issues impacting our waterways.
- We are planning the 4th Milwaukee Riverkeeper Boat Parade on August 30th showcasing local artists and musicians on boats parading down the river. This will be viewable to the public anywhere along the riverwalk with safe social distancing, or watched

virtually at home.

- We are helping Plastic-Free MKE provide sustainable hydration solutions with water refilling stations to support our black and brown community during protests and racial justice events this summer. Over 800 single-use plastic water bottles and counting will not enter the waste stream as a result of our efforts.

And there's so much more – look through this newsletter for information on our Swim Guide, our Urban Water Trail Map, our advocacy efforts, and ways you can help and get involved.

One way to help us work toward swimmable, fishable, drinkable waterways, is to support our work with a donation today. We've come a long way, but it will take more to launch Milwaukee Riverkeeper into the next 25 years of protecting, restoring, connecting and advocating for the waters we love. And we cannot do it alone, or without your financial support.

Please give to the waterways we love, so together, we may work towards a swimmable, fishable, drinkable future for people from ALL walks of life to enjoy.

To healthy communities and free flowing rivers,

Jennifer Bolger Breceda
Executive Director

YOUR NAME COULD BE HERE!
Learn how you can get involved with Milwaukee Riverkeeper visit:
www.milwaukeekeeper.org/board

Get Your Feet Wet Water Quality Monitoring

Water quality monitors mask up and head out into the field. After delays to the start of the season, we're proud to report that 2020 marks the 15th year Milwaukee Riverkeeper has sent trained community scientists into the streams and rivers of the Milwaukee River Basin to collect water quality data.

Although this year started off later than normal due to precautions around COVID19, 75+ monitors are now out in the field collecting data monthly from 100 sites throughout the Milwaukee River Basin.

This data is critical, because it helps us compile a solid baseline of the water quality of our rivers. Improvements in water quality take time to see and without a picture of where we've been it's nearly impossible to craft and implement a successful path forward.

Want to learn more? You're in luck. Our 2019 Milwaukee River Basin Report Card will hit mailboxes this fall. This report is a comprehensive analysis of water quality in the Milwaukee River Basin based on data from 2019. Check out the 2018 Report Card while you wait: bit.ly/18MRKReport

Winter road salt workshops go virtual. Milwaukee Riverkeeper invites winter maintenance professionals to participate in two FREE Snow and Ice Removal Workshops led by Minnesota's Fortin Consulting, with the support of Fund for Lake Michigan.



Due to COVID19, these workshops will be held virtually for the first time, so tune in from the device and location of your choosing and learn with us.

Participants can choose to attend one or both of our winter maintenance workshops. All attendees will learn state of the art winter maintenance practices, including how to transition to liquid deicers and reduce overall salt application.

Workshop Dates:

- September 9th -**
Snow & Ice Control Workshop: Roads
- September 10th -**
Snow & Ice Control Workshop: Parking Lots & Sidewalks

Register:
bit.ly/MRKwinterprofessionals

Questions? For more information on volunteering or upcoming workshops contact Katie Rademacher at katie@milwaukeekeeper.org

continued from cover -- the dedication of our friends and community members to our waterways. We must again, ask for your help. The rivers belong to our community, so as a community we must work together to remove the litter and debris that leaves our waters dirty, unsightly, and unhealthy.

This September, in honor of National Cleanup Day, Milwaukee Riverkeeper will be celebrating all month long! We're providing cleanup supplies and an exclusive 2020 DIY cleanup t-shirt (sure to be a collector's item!) to families interested



in holding a household DIY Cleanup. With a new winner announced every week, you could win BIG just for participating.

So mask up, spread out, wash those hands, and cleanup our rivers!

See our website for details and areas in most need: bit.ly/MRKdiycleanup

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EXPLORING THE MILWAUKEE URBAN WATER TRAIL

A difficult start to the season has left many looking for relaxation that only our natural areas can provide. Fortunately, the Milwaukee Urban Water Trail offers some of the most gorgeous views in the city. Stretching from Newburg to Bay View and from Lake Michigan to the Menomonee Valley, the trail offers not only the beauty of our parks and waterways, but easy access to Milwaukee's most iconic landmarks. Better yet, there's more than enough room for everyone on the rivers -- even with six feet of space!



If a day long paddle with sweeping city views is what you're after, we recommend paddlers put-in at **Lincoln Park** and head downstream, making sure to portage at **Estabrook Falls** and consider portaging around the North Avenue Rapids if flows are high.

Estabrook Dam was removed two years ago, just downstream from **Hampton Avenue Bridge**. Can you find the new tree plantings where it used to be?

Hubbard Park is just a few miles -- or roughly an hour ride -- down from Lincoln Park. With scenic riverside views, plenty of picnic space, and a beer garden, Hubbard Park makes a great rest stop before continuing downstream.

The Schlitz Brewery Ice Dam is another half mile downstream. Once used to supply nearly 300,000 tons of ice harvested each year in the late 1800s, the dam has long since been removed but remnants still remain. Be careful to pass on the right and mindful of the Locust Street Bridge rapids. When the water is low, there may be a one-to two-foot drop. If you haven't stopped yet, **Riverside Park/ Urban Ecology Center** is a great resting point. Over 15 acres of wooded area and riparian habitat open for hiking, makes this "urban wilderness" worth exploring.

The **Milwaukee Rowing Club** is a great place to take out after exploring the downtown rivers, and the take-out is on river

right just downstream from the Humboldt Avenue Bridge.

Looking to fuel up? **Lakefront Brewery** is accessible from the river and has both outdoor dining and takeout options. Order in advance and grab your food as soon as you hop off the pier! As with Hubbard Park, drink in moderation.

Pere Marquette Park, with a pavilion, and plenty of picnic tables, is flanked on all sides by gorgeous architecture. Better yet -- it's just a few blocks from the Bronze Fonz and close to Old World Third Street! Be sure to use the south pier to take out, as the north pier is reserved for tourist boats. If water levels are too high take out at the pavilion steps.

Rockbottom Brewery/Plankinton Alley on river right and Mason Street on river left offer convenient places to stop or drop off/load your canoe or kayak in a pinch. Or it's just one more mile until to Milwaukee Riverkeeper HQ!

After passing through the Historic Third Ward, follow the river left. South and right of the harbor gap / Hoan Bridge, you can take out at the **Bruce Street Boat Ramp**, or further south is the **UW-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences**, where Milwaukee Riverkeeper is located, and home of the **Harborview Plaza** canoe and kayak launch. This makes an easy place to end your journey, and parking is available along Greenfield Avenue. Celebrate with a ride down the slide, or hang out at a picnic table and watch the big ships as they pass.



MILWAUKEE URBAN WATER TRAIL

Full map available at



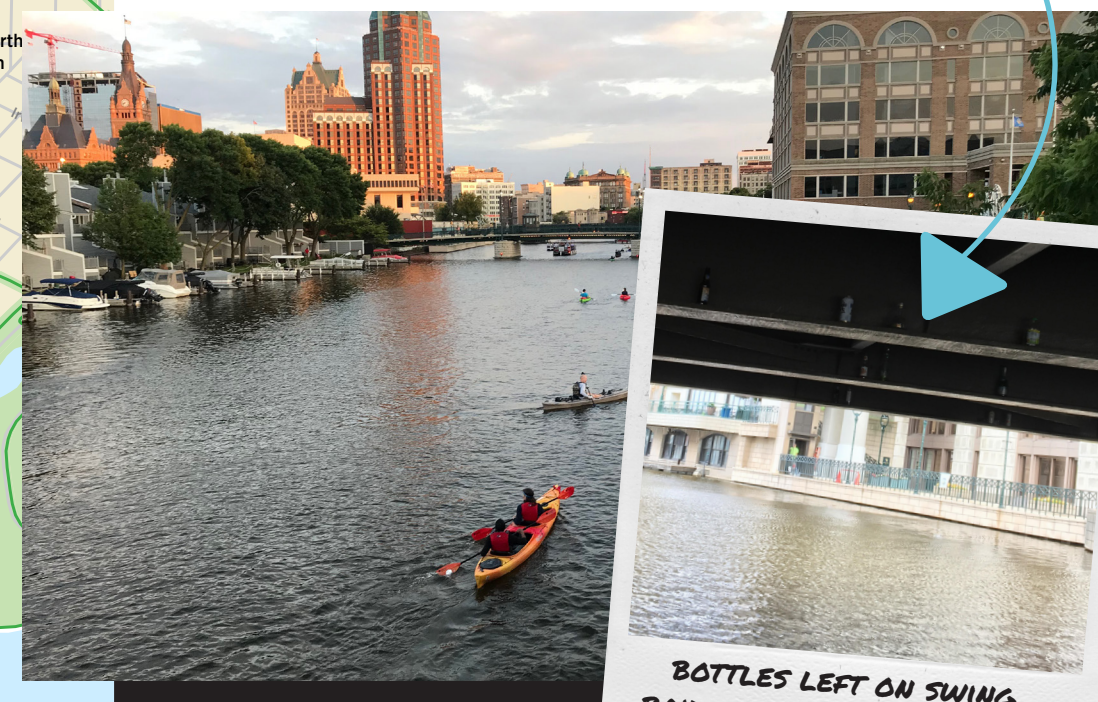
www.milwaukeeriverkeeper.org



Feeling the need for speed? Our rivers are busy with many heading out for "socially distant" boat rides. If you choose to take a cruise, be mindful of paddlers, other boats, and obey boating safety regulations!

Record-breaking water levels in Lake Michigan, mean the downtown rivers are also high. This makes boating under bridges, like the Menomonee River Swing Bridge, difficult if not impossible and leaves bridge supports easily accessible. While the occasional beer bottle left by boaters on these supports used to be a mild local nuisance, it's become a real problem. Bottles fall into the river when these bridges are opened and Milwaukee has 21 moveable bridges. That's a lot of bottles.

A clean river is a fun river. Be a good river steward, safely dispose of all waste after your trip, and help us cleanup along the way when you can.



BOTTLES LEFT ON SWING BRIDGES POLLUTE THE RIVER

Ready for a day at the beach?

Download the Swim Guide, for the most updated information available on swimming safety conditions. Often beaches are closed due to heavy rainfall, sewage overflows, or other water quality conditions. Red flags mean "closed," yellow flags mean "warning" or swim at your own risk, and green flags mean, healthy beaches. Check the Swim Guide app to when choosing where to swim, and note any posted safety warnings. Not every beach is tested daily and all should be avoided after heavy rain.

We know pool "floaties" (looking at you inflatable unicorn!) seem fun, but they can actually be dangerous on the lake, especially for those that can't swim—as they are easily blown "out to sea." Swimmers should also beware of "rip currents", especially near the rocky areas next to McKinley Beach, which are dangerous and have led to loss of life.

With a little common sense, and planning, a day at the beach can be the perfect way to cool down. Remember to mask up, spread out, wash your hands and be kind out there!

To see the full expanded map visit milwaukeeriverkeeper.org or request a copy at info@milwaukeeriverkeeper.org

Riverkeeper Watch



Rollbacks to Federal Laws Threaten Water Quality and Wildlife

The Trump Administration officially released long-awaited rollbacks to the Clean Water Act, dramatically reducing which waters are federally protected. Waters that will lose critical protections, include “isolated” wetlands not directly connected to navigable waters and “ephemeral” streams that do not always run, but still affect downstream waters that are used for drinking, swimming, and fishing. These rules are being challenged around the country and we are assessing a formal challenge, as well. On a positive note, The Clean Water for All Act (H.R. 6745), was introduced to stop implementation of this “Dirty Water Rule” and requires EPA to use appropriate science and public outreach to craft a strong, protective replacement rule. The bill is currently up to 41 sponsors in the House.

The Trump Administration also finalized rollbacks to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), one of the landmark environmental laws that requires federal agencies to report on the environmental impacts of their actions that significantly affect “the quality of the human environment.” These rollbacks—sought largely by pipeline, transportation, and construction interests—would make it easier for federal agencies to approve infrastructure projects by creating giant loopholes, removing consideration of climate impacts and other indirect or cumulative impacts

of their actions. We submitted comments on these rollbacks with other national and regional partners.

House Passes Strong Funding Appropriations for Clean Water

The House Appropriations Committee and Subcommittees passed many funding bills, and thankfully, rejected most of the proposed devastating budget cuts put forth by the Trump Administration. Funding for every office and program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) be funded at or above the current level, with Coastal Zone Management Program funds increased by \$1 million (funds Wisconsin Coastal Management). Likewise, the EPA will receive \$9.38 billion and regional programs like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative will receive a 5% increase to \$335 million. The budget also includes a focus on funding “scientific and regulatory work on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), needed to establish drinking water and cleanup standards,” as well as strong funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Programs. The most notable inclusion is \$15 billion in emergency infrastructure spending, \$13 billion of which to be used as a water infrastructure stimulus of sorts. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) passed the US House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and includes funding for the US Army Corps to design and engineer retrofits to the Brandon Road Lock and Dam to control Asian carp in the Chicago Area Waterway System.

Wisconsin Climate Change Task Force and the Role of Carbon

We appreciate State efforts to invest resources into a comprehensive Climate Action Plan. We submitted comments to the Wisconsin Climate Change Task Force in July. Wisconsin must quickly and equitably reduce our carbon emissions in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Most of the carbon pollution in our state comes from power plants and transportation we must address these issues to better mitigate

and adapt to climate change. Those most directly impacted by the worst effects of our warming climate are communities of color and economically disadvantaged communities—these communities already experience other structural injustices. We need to do better.

From mining to transportation, storage, burning, and disposal, coal for energy production is toxic at every step, and is a major source of greenhouse gases. To ensure Wisconsin electricity is carbon-free by 2050, we need to transition generation away from fossil fuels and towards renewable resources. Energy generated by solar and wind now costs the same as or less than coal and without extra costs to human and environmental health. We support recommendations made by the Clean Power Coalition to eliminate the use of coal and mandate retirement of all coal-burning power plants by 2030. Shutting down the Sheboygan coal burning power plant is a good first step.

Transportation emissions are the largest category of greenhouse gas emissions in America, and the second largest in Wisconsin after coal. Governor Evers and WISDOT Secretary-designee Craig Thompson recently announced that the state would seek to resume plans to rebuild and expand 3.5 miles of I-94 in Milwaukee—between the Zoo and Marquette Interchanges—at over a billion dollars. Governor Walker cancelled the expansion due to the high cost and community opposition to the project led by communities of color that are disproportionately impacted.

After 10 years, Milwaukee Riverkeeper, as part of the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation (CMRT Coalition) remains opposed to expansion of I-94 as it would increase impervious surfaces and polluted runoff.

To read all letters and comments issued by Milwaukee Riverkeeper visit:
bit.ly/MRKletters



Artwork by Sara P. Mendes (ig: @sara.p.mendes) for Intersectional Environmentalist

Advocacy in Action

Environmental Justice is critical for a sustainable future.

We’re dedicated to protecting our waterways for future generations to enjoy. The civil unrest as a result of the brutal murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis has forced us to cast our gaze inward in an effort to ensure that we are being intentional in our work to achieve clean and healthy waterways for all to enjoy.

We know water is life. It is not only the lifeblood of our bodies, it’s the liquid pathway connecting our communities. Milwaukee’s waterways have historically been used as a tool to divide us, and while we’re proud of the progress and projects happening to restore our rivers it’s critical we double down on efforts to ensure spaces are not only accessible, but inclusive.

The looming threat of the climate crisis means it is essential that we include all voices, especially black and brown communities which are disproportionately affected by pollution and other environmental hazards, in the conversation to develop equitable, sustainable solutions to these issues.

While we certainly don’t have all the answers, we will continue the critical work of interrogating our mission and focus, educating ourselves, advocating for change, and listening to our colleagues and neighbors. It will take action to enjoy a cleaner, greener future for everyone.

One action we are taking now, is the work to further diversify our advisory committees and board membership to reflect the communities we serve. If you’re interested in being in available opportunities visit:

www.milwaukeekeeper.org/board

From Creek to Classroom

MRK takes outdoor education virtual

The past few months have changed the ways we teach students about our rivers. While the pandemic altered our ability to do in-person lessons and activities, we were able to quickly adjust to ensure we never stop educating and inspiring future generations of river stewards. To assist students in remote learning and teachers looking for online resources to support science curriculums, we decided to launch a new educational video series, “Jump in with Julius,” starring our Education Coordinator, Julius Gayo.

Let’s Jump In! Each month, Julius explores a new topic related to water quality and our rivers. Every lesson includes a scientific explanation of the topic as well as a walkthrough of an engaging activity with common items that can easily be replicated at home. Thus far, we’ve explored flooding, watersheds, the shapes of rivers, bank erosion, and plastic pollution. Our most popular lesson on bioplastics, showed students how to create their own DIY alternative to plastic, from sustainable materials keeping this harmful pollutant out of our rivers. **Find the full series on Youtube here: youtube.com/mkeriverkeeper**



Ready for MRK to come to your classroom? We’ll bring the river to you! From scout meetings to science classrooms we are scheduling full length lessons for groups this fall. We worked hard over the summer to adapt our lessons to fit virtual, hybrid, and in-person classes so that we can safely meet the needs of students and educators in these uncertain times. Our goal is not only to connect students to their local waterways but also to help foster an understanding of how our choices and actions impact our local river system. These lessons are targeted to students between grades 4 and 12 and pair with Wisconsin Department of Public Instructions state standards for science.

Interested educators, schools or programs should contact our Education Coordinator Julius via email at julius@milwaukeekeeper.org or via phone at 414-367-6743 to learn more and start planning!

Special thanks to the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District for making this programming possible.



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DONATE TODAY!

With grateful hearts we are still working hard to protect and restore our precious waterways. These are challenging times for everyone with lessons to learn, including that the health of the environment will improve if we give it space and time.

We've come a long way, but it will take more to launch Milwaukee Riverkeeper into the next 25 years of protecting, restoring, connecting and advocating for the waters we love. And we cannot do it alone, or without your financial support.

Please give to the waterways we love, so we together, we may work towards a swimmable, fishable, drinkable future for people from ALL walks of life to enjoy.

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