

We Save Rivers

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A guarterly publication of the River Alliance of Wisconsin.

The FLOW

In this issue...

The Fox River - From PCB Pool to Kayakers' Playground

By Denny Caneff

I remember well River Alliance board chair and Fox River Valley native Joe Van Berkel's observation when he learned that the River Alliance and other parties were negotiating with a dam owner on the Fox River to manage their dam so that kayakers could get access to the river for whitewater kayaking. It wasn't just the fact that the Fox isn't exactly the Snake River of the Midwest, Joe said. It was the fact that the Fox – Joe's home river with its recent history of abuse, pollution and neglect – could be even considered clean enough to where it was safe to have physical contact with the water. (See Page 7 of this issue for more details on whitewater kayaking on the Fox.)

As kids, Joe and his playmates were warned simply to stay out of the river. All rivers have some lore and legend of danger, but perhaps in the Fox Valley, there were enough fathers working in the paper mills to know what was going down the drain and out the pipes to the river was bad stuff, to be avoided. And everyone knew better than to eat a fish caught in the Fox in the 1960s and 1970s.

(See Page 4 for an update on the most notorious and persistent pollutant.)

In August, I poked around the many dams, locks, paper mills both abandoned and converted, and other river infrastructure at Appleton, Kaukauna, Combined Locks and Kimberly. One sight at a dam in Appleton particularly impressed me: there were 30 or 40 white pelicans, standing in the river just below a dam, waiting for an easy lunch of fish. It was impressive because it vividly told the story of the river's recovery – that the water was healthy enough to sustain a healthy fish population and, ergo, a healthy pelican population.

How did this happen? How did a running sewer of a river recover well enough to attract whitewater kayakers, sustain hungry pelicans, spark economic redevelopment

(see Page 3 for an inspiring story in that regard) and provoke local history aficionados to dust off this river's past and honor it anew?

I would argue regulation. Yes, that dreaded, despised, job-killing, bureaucrat-driven function of government, the gutting of which is on the ascendant again. As we illustrated in an earlier issue of the The FLOW this year about the Wisconsin River, the Fox is a clear beneficiary of the Clean Water Act, a federal law carried out by states to curb pollution such that, as the Act states, waters could be "fishable and swimmable" again. Regulations meant factories and cities could no longer mindlessly dump their wastes in the public's water. Not only did those regulations not "kill jobs," they spurred innovations that made industry more efficient.

There are places on the Fox River you still would not want to wade with your toddler. But the Fox Valley communities that were founded because of the river are aiding its resurgence by committing to the river's aesthetic, historic and cultural recovery. Toddlers and their parents can now appreciate the river in ways the sons and daughters of paper mill workers never could.



Watery Heritage Highway

By Helen Sarakinos

ative Americans found, and European traders and missionaries followed, the liquid pathway cutting diagonally across this piece of North America we now call Wisconsin. Heading upstream from Green Bay, on the Fox River, a river traveler will eventually arrive on the banks of the Wisconsin River. Continuing downstream, the traveler achieves the Mississippi.



There is an ambitious project underway to designate the Fox-Wisconsin corridor, stretching diagonally across the state from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien, as a National Heritage Area. The idea to create this 275-mile long linear parkway has its roots in a study published two decades ago, "Lower Fox River/Winnebago Pool Long Range Plan," and was taken up by some well-placed champions, including then-Assembly Speaker David Prosser. In 1991, the Wisconsin Department of Tourism and the National Trust for Historic Preservation accepted a plan for the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway (FWHP) as a heritage tourism pilot project for the purpose of highlighting and enhancing the state's unique heritage tied to these two rivers. The Parkway lists two main goals: to highlight and promote the historical resources of the Fox and Lower Wisconsin rivers and to increase recreational access to the waterways.

These are goals that just about everyone can get behind, from paddling clubs to real estate developers. It is widely recognized that when natural, cultural and historical assets are protected and promoted, they draw tourism and business. The 275-mile long parkway would encompass every kind of landscape, from the sandbars of the Lower Wisconsin to the wine bars of downtown Appleton, but always in celebration of flowing water and our fascination with it.



A bucolic scene on the Upper Fox River at Omro, the site of the last of nine locks built in the Upper Fox system. (*Photo copyright Craig Eggleston and courtesy Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway*)

Earning designation as a National Heritage Area is no small feat (it takes an act of Congress) and FWHP and its partners have been working hard to make it happen. FWHP has begun to work on an interpretive master plan and on creating an economic impact plan that will examine riverway heritage tourism and riverfront development opportunities. In May of 2009, a study was prepared to provide Congress and the public with information about the resources in the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway and its feasibility as a National Heritage Area. This study was prepared by Friends of the Fox, Inc. and the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (http://heritageparkway.org/planning/feasibility-study/).

The Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway would be Wisconsin's first National Heritage Area. For more information about the program, visit http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAO/

High-resolution images of the Parkway can be downloaded here: http://heritageparkway.org/gallerv/

2009 Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway Feasibility Study: *http://heritageparkway.org/planning/feasibility-study/*

Marquette and Joliet and de Toqueville Would Be Impressed

Many Groups Active to Honor Fox River History, Work to Keep It Clean

Baird Creek Preservation Foundation

Assist the City of Green Bay in acquiring land in the Baird Creek Parkway and help enhance the parkway's value as an ecological, educational, and recreational resource of northeastern Wisconsin. bairdcreek.org

East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

Comprehensive planning agency for the East Central Wisconsin counties of Calumet, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Menominee, Outagamie, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara and Winnebago. eastcentralrpc.org

Fox River Navigational System Authority

The Authority's primary mission is to repair, rehabilitate, operate and maintain the locks system. *foxriverlocks.org*

Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance

An independent nonprofit organization that identifies issues and advocates effective policies and actions that protect, restore and sustain the water resources of the Fox-Wolf River Basin. fwwa.org

Friends of the Fox

A not-for-profit advocacy group established to preserve and develop the environmental, cultural, historic, economic and quality-of-life assets offered by the Fox River.

friendsofthefox.org

Sustainable Green Bay

Catalyst and resource to help citizens, businesses, and government achieve a sustainable future by meeting the needs of people and building a healthy and robust economy and environment. sustainablegreenbay.wordpress.com

Trout Unlimited - Fox Valley Chapter, Green Bay Chapter

Restoring trout habitat to what it once was in northeastern Wisconsin. foxvalleytu.org, greenbaytu.com

Winnebago Lakes Council

Protecting and improving the ecological health and scenic beauty of our lakes through citizen involvement. *winnebagolakes.org*

Clean Water Action Council

Non-profit citizen organization founded in 1985 to protect public health and the environment in northeastern Wisconsin, increase public awareness of threats to water quality, and build support for improved management.

www.cwac.net

Neenah's Front Porch

By Helen Sarakinos

Neenah native Randy Stadtmueller recounts with a laugh how the Fox River in downtown Neenah was a different sort of meeting spot when he was growing up. "It was where boys would meet to rumble after the school dance," he recalls. "Kind of a scary place."

The waterfront today is an entirely different place. With a redesigned public park, new businesses and an ever-expanding riverfront trail, the once-scary place is more suited for a midday stroll than a midnight rumble. It is the shining inspiration for what can happen in the necklace of cities strung along the Fox River, whose history and future are intimately tied to this fascinating waterway. While Neenah has been actively redeveloping and opening up its riverfront for over two decades, other Fox Valley cities like Appleton and Menasha are experiencing growing interest in transforming their waterfronts as well.



What a difference a park makes: Neenah's Shattuck Park, along the Fox River, was undeveloped and undesirable. With its revival came efforts to make the riverfront the focal point of the city. (*Photo courtesy City of Neenah Community Development Dept.*)

Neenah: "The riverfront is our front porch"

In some respects, the revitalizing of the Neenah waterfront is a case study in effectively using public-private partnerships to get big things done. One of the critical ingredients for success for the city was its close relationship with Future Neenah, Inc. (FNI), a non-profit that promotes economic redevelopment in the city. In 1998, FNI gathered citizens for a community visioning session; a focus on their water resources quickly emerged as a priority for the public. FNI and the city government then partnered to commission a waterfront design and development master plan which identified the redesign of Shattuck Park as a priority project.

The \$3.2 million redesign was an ambitious project that involved over 25 public meetings in 12 months and a heroic fundraising effort. While the city supported the project, they challenged FNI to raise 30% of the project cost to match the city's investment. As former executive director Karen Harkness proudly states, "FNI met our fundraising goal and then surpassed it." The city got a new public park and FNI pledged to program it, moving the farmers' market to the park and developing a series of music and outreach programs that attracted thousands to the new public space.

Repurposing the riverfront park was a catalyst for several major private redevelopment projects. Concurrent with park redevelopment, Alta Resources consolidated all its offices to downtown Neenah near the river. Not long after, the hotel nearby the park announced a major renovation. Within five years of Shattuck Park's dedication, Plexus Corporation chose the site of the former Glatfelter Mill on the river for the location of its world headquarters.

Fox River still creates jobs - through restoration

As redevelopment projects came in, the public amenities increased as well: a total of six new parks and open spaces along the Riverwalk will provide more than 25 acres and 1.5 miles of shoreline along the Fox River for the enjoyment of the public. The City of Neenah has invested approximately \$22 million in public/private projects in the Riverwalk over the past 15 years which has, in turn, leveraged over \$65 million in private investment and brought over 2,000 jobs to the riverfront. The city has accomplished as much in part because they were not the only entity championing these projects: FNI raised private money and lots of public support for these projects, which ultimately was the key to getting them funded.

For Chris Haese, director of community development for City of Neenah, these numbers are exciting but he is quick to add, "The really wonderful part about this is that the riverfront has become the heart of our city. It's our front porch and we are proud of it." And that is a real measure of success.



Boats of all sizes and colors enjoy the Fox River, whose appeal increased considerably thanks to focused effort and investment by local government, a nonprofit group, and private developers. (*Photo courtesy City of Neenah Community Development Dept.*)

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On The Cover: The Fox River: its many guises, its diverse denizens. (Photo of the band in the park courtesy City of Neenah Community Development Dept. Photo of lockmaster George Allanson Sr. at the Menasha Lock courtesy Christine Williams and the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway. Photo of the Lower Fox at sunrise courtesy J. Pinkham. The factory at Menasha – River Alliance photo.)

If They Had Only Known About Email.....

The magic of carbonless paper still fouls the Fox River

By Chris Clayton

Remember completing a form on carbonless copy paper by pen or typewriter and seeing the letters magically transferred to the duplicate pages underneath? During the heyday of carbonless copy paper, a chemical – polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs - made possible the transfer of the dye to the copies.

From 1957 to 1971, Appleton Coated Paper Co.* made billions of sheets of carbonless copy paper. During these years, many other paper mills on the Lower Fox River routinely purchased Appleton Coated's waste paper and trimmings to recycle in the manufacturing of their own paper products. This situation resulted in a stream of PCB-laden wastewater from the highest concentration of paper mills in the world. To this day, a massive amount of those PCBs sits amidst the muddy sediments of the Lower Fox River and Green Bay.

PCBs are very stable chemicals. They don't break down easily and they bind strongly to river sediments, making them persistent in the environment. It has been 40 to 50 years since PCBs were dumped in the Lower Fox River, so what we now have are highly contaminated sediments stretching more than 60 miles, from Little Lake Butte des Morts (immediately below Lake Winnebago) to at least 21 miles out into Green Bay.

The old "cost vs. risk" thing

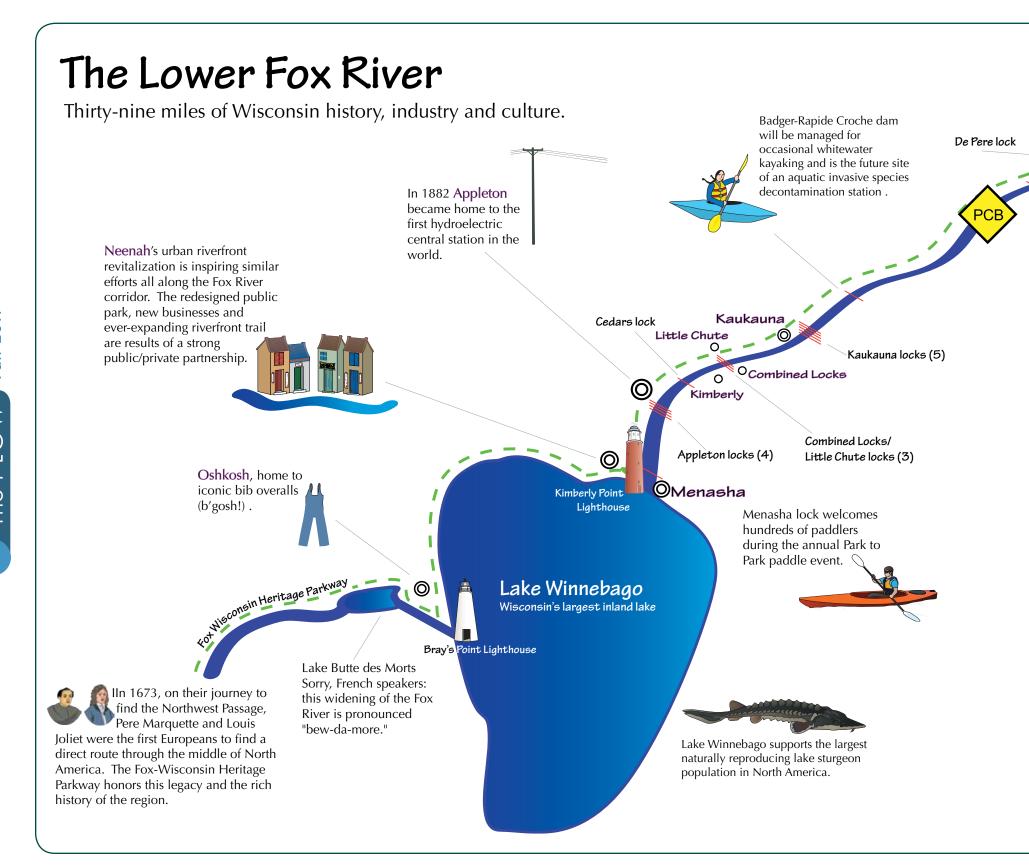
The health effects to humans and wildlife from PCB-contaminated sediments in the Lower Fox River have been a constant source of debate, pitting estimates by paper companies against estimates by federal and state agencies. PCBs are toxic, and depending on the nature of one's contact with PCBs, they can cause a wide range of symptoms such as skin rashes and asthma on the tamer side of the spectrum. PCBs are also carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. The dangers of PCBs were first known and documented as early as the 1930s, and further knowledge of their effects on life led Congress to ban their production in 1979.

Because PCBs persist in the environment and because their health effects are complex, it is virtually impossible to prove all of their negative impacts. The magic of carbonless copy paper has come with a cost no accountant can tally.

So instead, we turn to discussing PCBs in terms of risk: In this case, everyone agrees that people who eat fish caught in the Lower Fox River and Green Bay risk ingesting high levels of PCBs. Since the 1970s, a fish consumption advisory has been in place to warn people of this danger. The Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources estimates that following the completion of a clean-up effort, it could be two decades before the advisory for PCBs could be lifted.

A messy clean-up and the vagaries of responsibility

About 700,000 pounds of PCBs were discharged to the Fox River over nearly two decades, contaminating 11 million tons of sediment. Each year, roughly 300 to 500 pounds of PCBs are flushed into Green Bay and Lake Michigan. Estimates suggest that 160,000 pounds of PCBs have already reached the bay and lake where it becomes many times more difficult, in some cases impossible, to remove them.





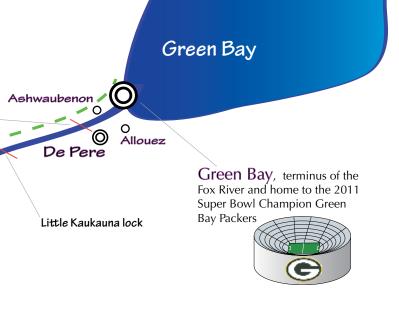
There are two PCB removal practices at work in the Lower Fox River. Either the PCBs are sucked off the river bottom by a dredge, then taken to a toxic waste landfill (*right*), or sand and gravel is dumped on them, essentially burying them (*above*). The sand and gravel operation took place on Little Lake Butte des Morts, at Menasha. The dredging operation happened just downstream of the dam at De Pere. (*Photos courtesy Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources*)

And as if physical removal is not challenging enough, there is the crucial issue of getting the responsible parties to pay for the clean-up, which was last estimated at \$875 million and rising. Government agencies used data on the discharge of PCBs to argue that those who dumped it should clean it up. Appleton Papers and National Cash Register Corporation (NCR) were held responsible, and as such, they formed a limited partnership to pay for cleaning up the PCBs between Little Rapids and (the water body of) Green Bay. The two companies have spent \$300 million over the last three years to fund this work. However, who pays for the remaining clean-up is contentious and unsettled. A federal court case is set to begin in February to determine the validity of Appleton Papers and NCR's claim that other paper companies should help pay.

U.S. District Court Judge Griesbach put the past into perspective by stating that Appleton Coated Paper applied a "risk management strategy to accept the risk of potential environmental harm in exchange for the financial benefits of continued (and increasing) sales of carbonless copy paper containing [PCBs]." And the risk management strategies continue: the companies assumed responsible for PCB contamination take on the risk of costly legal battles and delays in the clean-up effort with the hope they will reduce their costs in the end.

Clean-up work is on again, off again

In 2008, U.S. Paper Mills Corporation and NCR paid to remove PCB-contaminated sediments in an area immediately below the De Pere dam. Although this site



The Fox River lock system includes 17 locks over 39 miles. The locks were needed in order to make the nearly 170 foot drop from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay passable for boat traffic.

Dutch immigrants who settled in the Fox Valley account for the surname "Van ____" so common in the region. It is said that these experienced water-movers were encouraged to move to the valley to help create the Fox lock system.

The Fox River PCB clean up project employs dredging and capping to remove toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from the riverbed. PCBs are a byproduct of papermaking so it is no surprise that the Fox River, home to the highest concentration of paper mills in the world, suffered intense pollution from the toxin.

The most famous of the Fox Valley mills, Kimberly Clark, introduced America to two iconic paper products: "Kotex," the first disposable feminine hygiene product (1920), and "Kleenex" brand tissue (1924).



had 10% of the total mass of PCBs in the Lower Fox River, it had only two percent of the contaminated sediments that need to be removed. In 2009, the former Wisconsin Tissue Mills, Inc. and P.H. Glatfelter Company paid to complete the dredging of contaminated sediments in Little Lake Butte des Morts.

Three years ago, the Fox River Cleanup Project began to dredge contaminated sediments in a stretch between Little Rapids and De Pere and pump them to a processing facility along the Lower Fox River in Green Bay. Over 800,000 tons of "cakes" of PCB-laden sediment have been trucked from the processing facility to a landfill in Calumet County. Where the contaminated sediments cannot be removed by dredging from the river bottom, sediments are capped by a combination of sand and stone.

The stretch between De Pere and Green Bay is the next area of focus and contains most of the PCB contamination in the Fox River. If the issue of who pays is resolved by the court, and Appleton Papers and NCR continue the project early in 2012, the clean-up should finish up in 2017. Those are two very big ifs.

Earlier this year, the DNR reported that PCB levels in walleye tested in Little Lake Butte des Morts were down by 73% from levels seen from 1990 to 2003. This is encouraging, given that clean-up in that section of the river was only completed two years prior, and is evidence that removing the PCBs actually works in reducing contamination.

If the courts soon rule that responsible parties are indeed responsible, mending probably the most egregious wound to this storied river is within reach.

*Purchased by the National Cash Register Corporation (NCR) in 1970 and merged with another company in 1971 to make Appleton Papers, Inc



Stairway to Green Bay

Wisconsin history, culture and geology captured in the Lore of the Lower Fox Locks

By Matt Krueger

he Fox River is defined by two very different sections of river. The Upper Fox begins in east-central Wisconsin and flows generally eastward through flat marshy land, picking up dozens of tributary streams before flowing into Lake Butte des Morts, and then into Lake Winnebago at Oshkosh. The Lower Fox flows out of the north end of Winnebago, and runs 39 miles to the northeast, bisecting Neenah, Menasha, Appleton, and other cities prior to its terminus in Lake Michigan at Green Bay. Along its course, the Lower Fox drops considerably—nearly 170 feet (roughly equal to Niagara Falls).

Two physical traits of the Fox River system play dominant roles in the river's historical and present-day context—the proximity of the Upper Fox to the Wisconsin River, and the steep grade of the Lower Fox from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay. The headwaters of the Upper Fox are only a few hundred yards east of the Wisconsin River in present-day Columbia County, and it was this connection between the two river systems (via a short portage, hence the name of the city located there today) that provided a critical transportation link from Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River (see graphic on Page 7).

Nearly two centuries later, as cities and commerce established along the river, the steep grade and waterfalls of the Lower Fox proved a hindrance to commercial traffic. The solution was a system of locks, dams, and canals, constructed between 1849 and the 1870s, that allowed boats to navigate up and down the lower river. In place of the raging torrent of rapids and waterfalls previously there, the locks created a slack-water system maintained at different water levels, "stair-stepping" from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay.

Taming a Fox

Taming the Fox River – today placid and tightly controlled – challenged the creative minds of the state's founding explorers and entrepreneurs. Fortunes were lost and grand schemes dashed, including the attempt to connect the Fox with the Wisconsin River (thereby connecting two subcontinental basins, the Mississippi and the Great Lakes). That effort was stymied due in part to the difficulty of linking up with an unstable, shifting Wisconsin River, and in larger part due to the rise of the railroads.

Building the Fox locks that one can see, and actually use today, commenced in the 1850s. Ownership and operational responsibility bounced back and forth between governments and private parties for decades. The lock system was shut down in 1984.

Today, the Lower Fox locks are owned and managed by the Fox River Navigational System Authority (FRNSA), which took over ownership of the system from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2004. The system was nearly dismantled and filled by the Corps, but at the urging of local citizens, the historical and cultural significance of the locks was evaluated and deemed worthy of listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and

the system was preserved. FRNSA is tasked with managing, operating, and restoring the 17 locks of the Lower Fox, as well as 135 acres of waterfront property.

Locking in history

The Fox locks are notable for exhibiting the evolution of lock technology: from the timber-crib construction of the 1850s (featuring wooden gates and chamber walls supporting large chunks of limestone) up to modern-day lock chambers with steel gates and concrete walls. Kaukauna Lock #5 still exhibits the original timber crib design, which will be preserved during renovation efforts in the coming years.

"Technologically, it's fascinating," says Jim Draeger, deputy state historic preservation officer and FRNSA board member. "It's a very simple operating system, but you'd be impressed by the elegance of the design—wooden gates, opened by hand-turning a gear."

Intertwined with the lore of the Fox is the rich history of lock tenders, whose responsibility it was (and continues to be) to safely pass boats through the locks. Until 1983, lock tenders and their families actually lived in the lock tender's house, located right at the lock—or in some cases, on an island in the middle of the river, accessed only by cat-walking across the closed lock gates. Though lock tenders no longer live in the houses, they still work the locks seasonally from May 7 to October 2.

"They're doing the exact same job someone did 130 years ago," says Christine Williams, director of cultural and historic resources at the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway, who is gathering oral histories of Fox lock tenders.

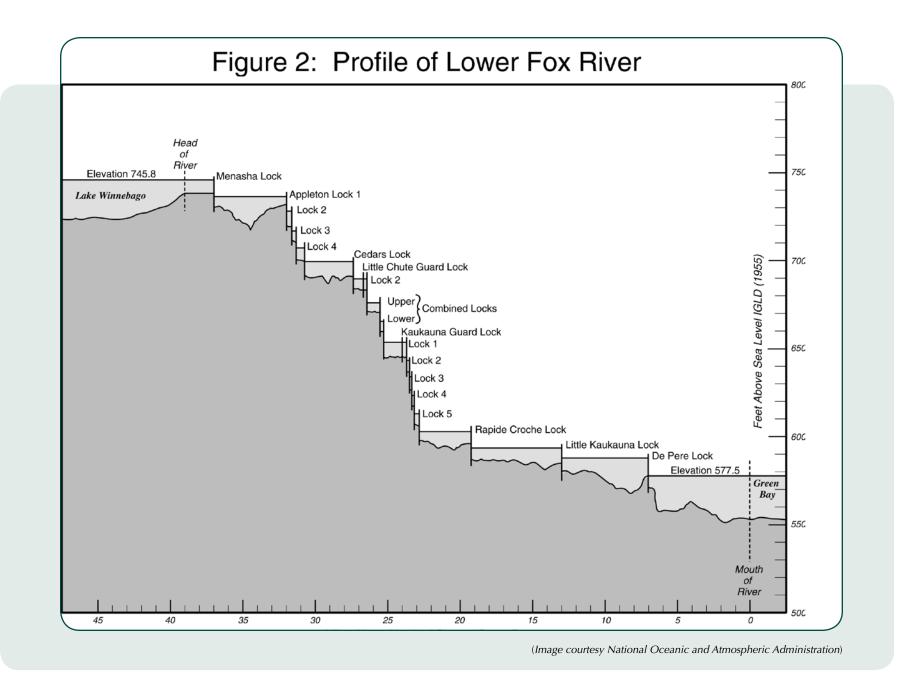
Though the primary responsibility of the lock tender is boater safety, De Pere lock tender Scott Thompson relishes the tradition inherent in his job, and the ability to talk about it with boaters.

"To do it this way, it just honors those who designed and built this system. It's really cool to be a part of such a back-in-time kind of thing."

The cultural and historic gem that is the Fox beckons paddlers and boaters today, as both the river's water quality and the locks are improving. FRNSA has been restoring and maintaining the Lower Fox locks since 2004, with work slated to finish by 2015. For a lock fee, watercraft may pass through the locks at Menasha, Little Rapids at Kaukauna, and De Pere, from May to October, and through the Cedars and four Appleton locks on weekends during this time. Portages are required around the 12 dams on the Lower Fox, including the permanently-closed lock at Rapide Croche, now an aquatic invasive species barrier. Few other places in Wisconsin—or the country—can paddlers and boaters experience historic locks, lock tenders, abundant wildlife, dams, commercial barges and cruise ships, and even whitewater, all on the same river trip. The Fox, and its locks, have it all.



Locking through: Fox Valley inhabitants have enjoyed the river by boat for decades. Here, about a half century apart and in the exact same place – the lock at Menasha – you can see how many more boats you can fit in a lock if the boats are kayaks. Suggested "Where's Waldo?" exercise: find the canoes in the picture on the right. (*Photo on left courtesy Lakeland Yachting magazine. Photo on right courtesy Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway*)



Shooting the Rapids at Kaukauna Federal license negotiations lead to better river access for boaters

ost hydroelectric dams are governed by a federal license issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Most aspects of a hydro dam's operation – how much water passes through the turbines, how the land around the dam is managed, how and whether a dam's structure is altered – come under the dam's federal license, which is reviewed every four decades or so. This process, with its elements of public input and comment, is the bane of many a hydro dam owner.

In the case of a recent relicensing of the Badger-Rapide Croche dam at Kaukauna, the National Park Service, Wisconsin DNR, the River Alliance and American Whitewater successfully convinced FERC to compel Kaukauna Utilities (KU) to manage flows through the dam to enhance fish spawning and recreational paddling, monitor for invasive species, construct and maintain boat access to the Fox River in the vicinity of the dams, and meet other requirements that make this hydroelectric project much friendlier to fish and people.

Kaukauna Utilities tried to back out of the boat access provisions of the license earlier this year when a kayaker dumped in the river at high water. KU claimed the river was too dangerous for paddling and they didn't want to be liable. The feds denied KU's request to revisit the matter, saying, "The fact that there may be risk involved with whitewater boating or other recreational activities does not obviate a licensee's responsibility to provide recreational opportunities in accordance with area needs." Well said, FERC!

This month, the Park Service, American Whitewater and River Alliance will sit down with KU to work out lingering issues so that, by next spring's (very brief) whitewater season, paddlers will be able to take advantage of this emerging recreational amenity of the Fox River.





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The River Rats of the River Alliance of Wisconsin

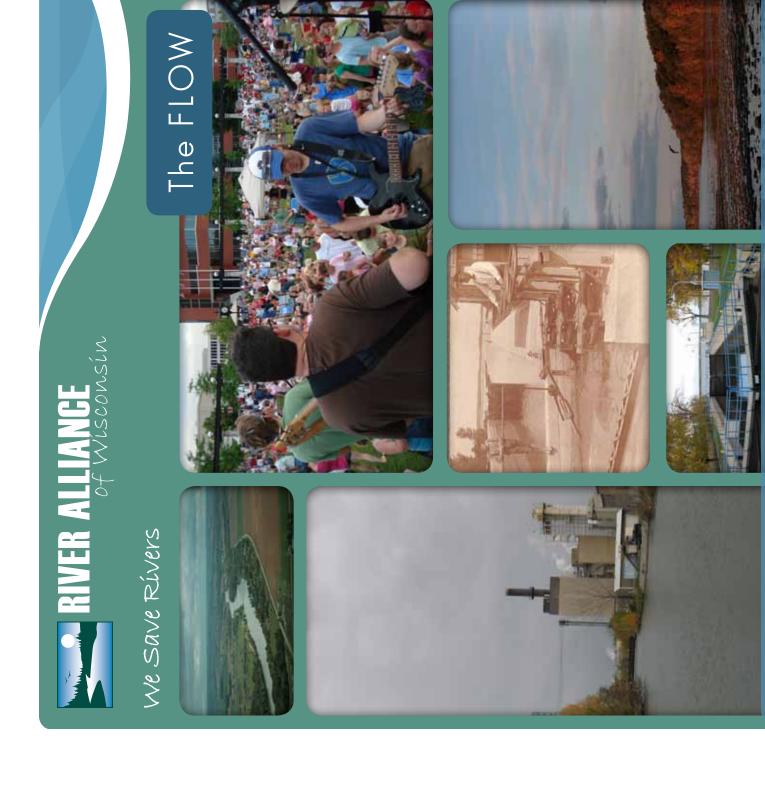
Whew!

What a year it's been for Wisconsin's rivers. They've been threatened, championed, debated and enjoyed. And all year, as we have since 1993, the River Alliance has been there to defend, champion and help you speak for and enjoy your rivers and streams. We could not continue to do this without the support of our members. Thank you.

As we reach the holiday season, won't you consider including the River Alliance in your end of the year giving plans? If you're a member, consider an additional gift. If you're not, become one...or give a membership as a gift to a friend or loved one, and help us continue working to save Wisconsin's rivers.

Happy Holidays!





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