

Fishers & Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin

Fact Sheet

What is Fishers & Farmers Partnership?

Fishers & Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin is a self-directed group of non-governmental agricultural and conservation organizations, tribal organizations and state and federal agencies united to add value to farms while protecting, restoring, and enhancing the 30,700 miles of streams and rivers of the Upper Mississippi River Basin. It is a partnership of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

What is the National Fish Habitat Action Plan?

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan's purpose is to protect, restore and enhance fish and aquatic life while improving quality of life for people. Fishers & Farmers Partnership has answered the Plan's national call to improve United States waters and fisheries. To learn more see www.fishhabitat.org.

What does Fishers & Farmers Partnership do?

Fishers & Farmers Partnership works with landowners throughout the Upper Mississippi River Basin to add value to farms while restoring aquatic habitat both on site and downstream.

The Partnership's aim is to keep profitability high and soil and nutrients on the land. Local watershed projects are selected and implemented by landowners, with technical assistance from state and federal agency and non-governmental staff. Organizational support and flexible cost-share funding are provided, and creative use of local resources is encouraged.

Projects selected by landowners often include: stabilization of eroding stream banks, reconnection to floodplain, construction of in-stream habitat, installation of prairie and forest buffers, exploration of alternative land uses, optimization of fertilizer application rates, enhanced grazing rotations, fenced creeks, or better watering systems. Rivers and fisheries respond quickly and well to these straightforward techniques.

When projects are complete, the Partnership:

- Helps landowners showcase successful practices;
- Shares lessons learned with Partnership organizations and other landowners;
- Monitors fish populations and habitat at project site and downstream.

Throughout the Basin, the Partnership works to build flexible, collaborative relationships between landowners, agriculture, and conservation organizations and to empower landowners to act for themselves and the greater good.

Why the emphasis on landowner leadership?

Fishers & Farmers Partnership recognizes the desire of landowners to leave a legacy of good conservation on the land they farm and the streams that flow through it. Farmers know their own land, know how to manage their landscape, and understand which practices will most improve it.

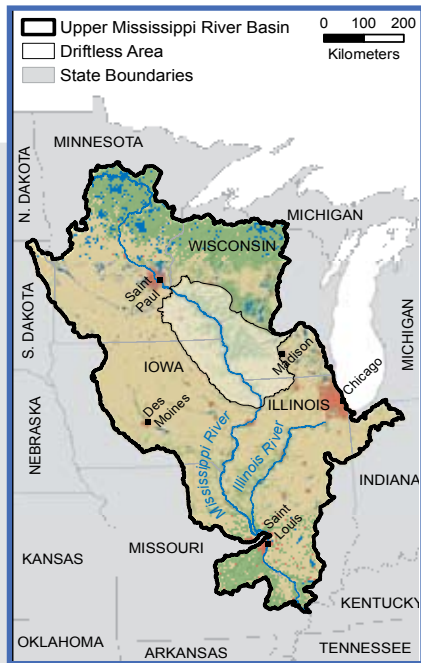
Partnership projects show that when local watershed work is led by landowners—with organizational and technical assistance from conservation partners—more work gets done, community resources are leveraged, costs are reduced through cooperative planning and purchasing, community is strengthened through shared experience, and projects “sell themselves” to spread throughout the neighborhood.

Significantly, when landowners take the lead, funders and others listen. This brings more resources to bear on improving streams, farm life, and farm profitability. In a region where



Healthy Streams Are Within Reach

mississippi facts



The Mississippi River:

- sustains more fish species than any other temperate river in the world;
- supports more than 25% of freshwater fish in the United States;
- is a migratory flyway for 40% of all North American waterfowl;
- with tributaries, is used to move more than 126 million tons of commodities annually;
- sources 23 public water supplies north of St. Louis, Missouri.

The Upper Mississippi River Basin:

- covers 189,000 square miles;
- is drained by 12 major tributaries and 30,700 miles of streams;
- is inhabited by 30 million people (80% in urban areas);
- supports more than 11 million recreational trips annually;
- has a landscape that is more than 60% cropland and pasture.

two-thirds of the land is privately owned agricultural acreage, the ultimate success of fish and farm conservation depends upon landowners' actions and their willingness to speak.

Why is a neighborhood, watershed approach important?

A watershed is one system. When farmers and landowners work together within a drainage, recognizing that one person's actions affect the conditions of everyone's river and the lives of many others, a measurable difference can be made for both farmers and fish.

How do landowners benefit?

Conservation actions that improve the quality of fish habitat and streams also improve farms and life on farms. Benefits of these projects include: soil retention, more organic matter and nutrients in the soil, sustainable all-season grazing, easier livestock management, more wildlife, better fishing and recreation, and peace of mind. Farmers say that these benefits can also reduce input costs and lead to a farming system that is highly profitable.

How do fish, aquatic life, and fishers benefit?

The Upper Mississippi River Basin's 30,700 miles of streams support more than 200 fish species. Altered landscapes have reduced the range of these species and the size of native fish populations overall. When habitat is restored, native species can thrive, aquatic diversity improves, and better stream conditions and aquatic landscapes increase the appeal and rewards of fishing.

Why is this Partnership needed right now?

The world's richest topsoil is being lost from the Midwest at rates greater than previously understood. Thousands of miles of streams in the Upper Mississippi River Basin carry soil from fields into the Mississippi River, where it moves downstream through ten states to the Gulf Coast. In the basin's streams and the Mississippi, soil from tilled land clouds water, reduces depth, covers streambeds, alters native systems, and destroys the habitat of fish and other aquatic life. Excess nutrients move with soil, entering water that is the primary drinking source for more than 30 million people. In the Gulf, nutrients promote growth of algae and zooplankton, which consume oxygen as they decompose, choking out life in a "dead zone" area that covered 7,720 square miles in August 2010).

No one knows the answers to all the questions that surround this reality, but it is clear we're all connected by the Mississippi River. Actions throughout the Basin affect water quality, human and aquatic health, quality of life, cost of living, and long-term production and profitability on farms.

Fish habitats in the Upper Mississippi River Basin include cold-, cool- and warm-water streams, riffles, pools, backwaters, side channels and oxbow lakes. These and 25 percent of the freshwater fish in the nation are threatened and diminished when soil and excess nutrients enter streams.

Two-thirds of the basin's 189,000 square miles is privately owned agricultural land. Conservation on private lands is successful when landowners and farm operators see need, get support to act, and complete projects that improve fields and streams, profitability, and quality of life on their farms. Fishers & Farmers helps landowners take a leadership role, fosters collaboration, and champions the efforts of landowners to conserve the lands they value.

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