

Ripple Effect # 57

Shall We Gather at the River?

Celebrate on the banks of a river? This idea seems foreign to many of us, even though we may live close to a river or stream. For, here in the Red River Basin, we may fight a river in times of flooding or we may complain about water-use restrictions when river levels are low. But we haven't often celebrated our rivers with festivals on their banks—or by even including them in our definition of recreation.

Such attitudes are changing about the “mighty” Red River, as evidenced in the downtowns of several cities situated on its banks. Downtown Winnipeg's Forks area, where the Assiniboine meets the Red, has long been a meeting place. Indeed, it has a 6,000 year-old history as a trading place for aboriginal bison hunters, then European fur traders, riverboat and railroad workers, and tens of thousands of immigrants.

Today, the Forks continues to be a gathering place, with its dining, shopping and Festival Park attracting 4 million visitors each year. A pathway through Festival Park celebrates the historic themes of the Forks, and its outdoor stage, the Scotiabank, hosts numerous concerts and festivals each year.

Upstream, the idea of the river as a place to gather, play and celebrate is also taking hold. The Grand Cities Art Festival in Grand Forks/East Grand Forks, with local, regional and national artists, literally spans the Red River each June.

A greenway of 2,200 acres, established after the 1997 flood, lines both sides of the Red all the way through the two cities. It hosts parks, a campground, two golf courses, bike trails, shore bank fishing sites and rock dams. Events coming up include 4th of July fireworks on the river in downtown Grand Forks/East Grand Forks and East Grand Forks' Catfish Days in August.

Further upstream in Fargo-Moorhead, a new Main Avenue bridge invites strolling and viewing, while the renewal projects on both sides of the bridge are painting a new face and upscale tone for the whole area. On the Moorhead side, the Hjemkomst Heritage Interpretative Center and Museum sits adjacent to the Red River, allowing the numerous events and people it hosts to spill out onto Viking Ship Park on the banks of the Red.

And coming up soon is Moorhead's River Arts Celebration. Tuesday evenings from July 10 through August 14, visitors can enjoy art, music, culture and family fun starting at 5:00 p.m. This year, River Arts will be held in Moorhead's Davy Memorial Park at 8th Street and 1st Avenue North.

If water levels permit, the S.S Ruby Boat Tours and Canoe and Kayak Rentals will also be open during River Arts. Call 793-RUBY for reservations.

Wherever we live in the Red River Basin, we have opportunities to gather at the river!

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org.

