

Lower Mississippi River Foundation

Dreams, Goals, Objectives



Strategic Plan 2017-2022

The Lower Mississippi River Foundation promotes stewardship of the Lower and Middle Mississippi River through deep engagement

The Lower Mississippi Valley: our 30-year dream

Thirty years from now the Lower Mississippi floodplain will be the model of a healthy and resilient river ecosystem. The river will thrive as a dynamic environment where recreation, education, agriculture and industry all function in healthy partnership with each other. Quality of life (and local economies) will improve with increasing land values and the added benefit of a booming hunting, fishing, and nature tourism industry. There will be a balanced mixture of public and private landownership to accommodate public use of the river and floodplain recreational and educational opportunities. Sustainable logging and agriculture will be practiced alongside reserves set aside for wildlife and for forests to mature to their fullness.

Thirty years from now Lower Mississippi Valley residents will view themselves and their children as integral inhabitants in a complex ecosystem where every part no matter how small and seemingly insignificant is important as all others. Children will be raised to understand, respect and take responsibility for the wild floodplain through continual engagement and life-long stewardship.



An Unbalance

The river has become an elite environment accessible to a few. We seek to restore the balance. We will diversify and democratize the river by making it accessible to all. We will restore equality and balance to the Lower Mississippi River in thirty years. We will safeguard the health of the river so that the fish and animals can thrive in abundance. Parents will be able to bring their families to the water and let their children swim without fear of contamination. Canoes will be as common as towboats; all ports and towns along the river will provide opportunities for education, recreation and engagement with the river.

Recreation

For too long the people of the south who seek the solace of the great outdoors have been forced to do so far away from their homes -- and in many cases not at all. Residents have been insulated from the wonders of the great outdoors by fear and ignorance. Within three decades we will complete water trails in all the states along the Lower Miss open to all people. We will help residents learn to swim, to paddle, and to enjoy the natural ways that people recreate and interact in the wild places.

Vision

Lower Mississippi Valley

The wild places will become wilder. The levees will be moved further away from the river whenever and wherever possible to accommodate larger flood events, decrease destructive flooding potential, and allow the growth of more wetlands and bottomland forests to process nutrients and maintain a resilient ecosystem. The intricate inner workings of the ecosystem will

be studied and leveraged for optimal functioning. All species will be counted and cataloged, and closely monitored for sustainable life cycles. The Mississippi River floodplain will be a bottomland forest and wetland corridor for wildlife connecting the Piney Woods of the Gulf Coast with the Midwestern woodlands with the North Woods.

Residents

Thirty years from now residents of the Lower Mississippi Valley will commonly recreate on the big river in canoes and kayaks and paddleboards. All children living in the Mississippi Valley will have some first-hand experience of the Mississippi River and its wild beauty. Parents will respect the river, not fear it. It will be popularly understood what the challenges are, and what skills, knowledge and equipment are necessary to safely enjoy it from human-powered vessels. Canoes will be as common as towboats; kayaks as common as fishing boats.

Butterflies will be nurtured and cherished alongside deer, black bear and wild turkeys. Birding and animal watching will be as popular as hunting. The environment will be revered as divine creation where humans serve as students and stewards. Science and art methods will be employed to study, document and share the wildlife. Boat ramps will be as plentiful as grain elevators.



Stewardship

Thirty years from now Lower Mississippi Valley residents will view themselves and their children as integral inhabitants in a complex ecosystem where every part no matter how small and seemingly insignificant is important as all others. Children will be raised to understand, respect and take responsibility for the wild floodplain through continual engagement and life-long stewardship.

Objectives

The Lower Mississippi River Foundation is committed to working toward the following objectives related to its vision, mission and goals:

In 5 years (by January 2022)...

...100 legislators and decision-makers (including funders, CEOs, etc.) will have a Lower Mississippi experience that leads to care and respect of the River, as exemplified by 1) becoming a River Citizen; 2) helping to pass legislation beneficial to public access, recreation and the long-term health of the river; or 3) their partnership with or support of the LMRF.

...25% of Coahoma and Phillips County parents will overcome their fear of the river, as measured by sending their children to field trips on the Mississippi River or its tributaries.

...10 colleges/universities in the Lower Mississippi River Region will engage with the River as a learning laboratory for its students.

...25 colleges/universities will engage with the River through service programs affiliated with alternative spring break.

...2,500 college students will have deeply engaging experiences on the Lower Mississippi River or its tributaries that lead them to become River Citizens.

...25 local, regional or national secondary schools will connect their students to the Lower Mississippi River with deeply engaging activities such as class retreats on the river, educational programs on the river, leadership development on the river or river cleanups, with an average of 20 students per school = 500 kids total.

...250 Mississippi Delta youth will learn canoe design and carving, using hand tools such as the adze, axe, score and plane.



...250 Mississippi Delta youth will learn wilderness survival skills such as navigation, orientation, shelter making, fire making, and cooking over a fire.

...25 Mississippi Delta youth will become youth leaders capable of leading and teaching other groups, and safely leading groups in voyageur style canoes.

...40 Lower Mississippi Valley youth between the ages of 12 and 18 will have gone through the LMRF Mighty Quapaw Apprenticeship Program (or LiNKS), a hands-on, one-on-one, in-depth, multi-year apprenticeship focused on teamwork and challenging outdoor adventures on the Lower Mississippi River. Participation will be approximately half male half female, and approximately reflect regional demographics (80% black, 15% white, 5% other).

...10 youth (from Mississippi or Arkansas) between 18 and 24 will have summer jobs in outdoor recreation along the Lower Mississippi River. Again, the youth will approximately reflect regional demographics (half male, half female, 80% black, 15% white, 5% other).

...5 youth (from Mississippi or Arkansas) between 18 and 24 will have chosen careers in nature tourism or outdoor recreation along the Lower Mississippi River. Youth will approximately reflect regional demographics (half male, half female, 80% black, 15% white, 5% other).

...we will have added at least 1 public use island of over 1,000 acres to the list of 4 protected islands over 1,000 acres along the Lower Mississippi River (Hickman, Loosahatchie, Buck, and Choctaw).

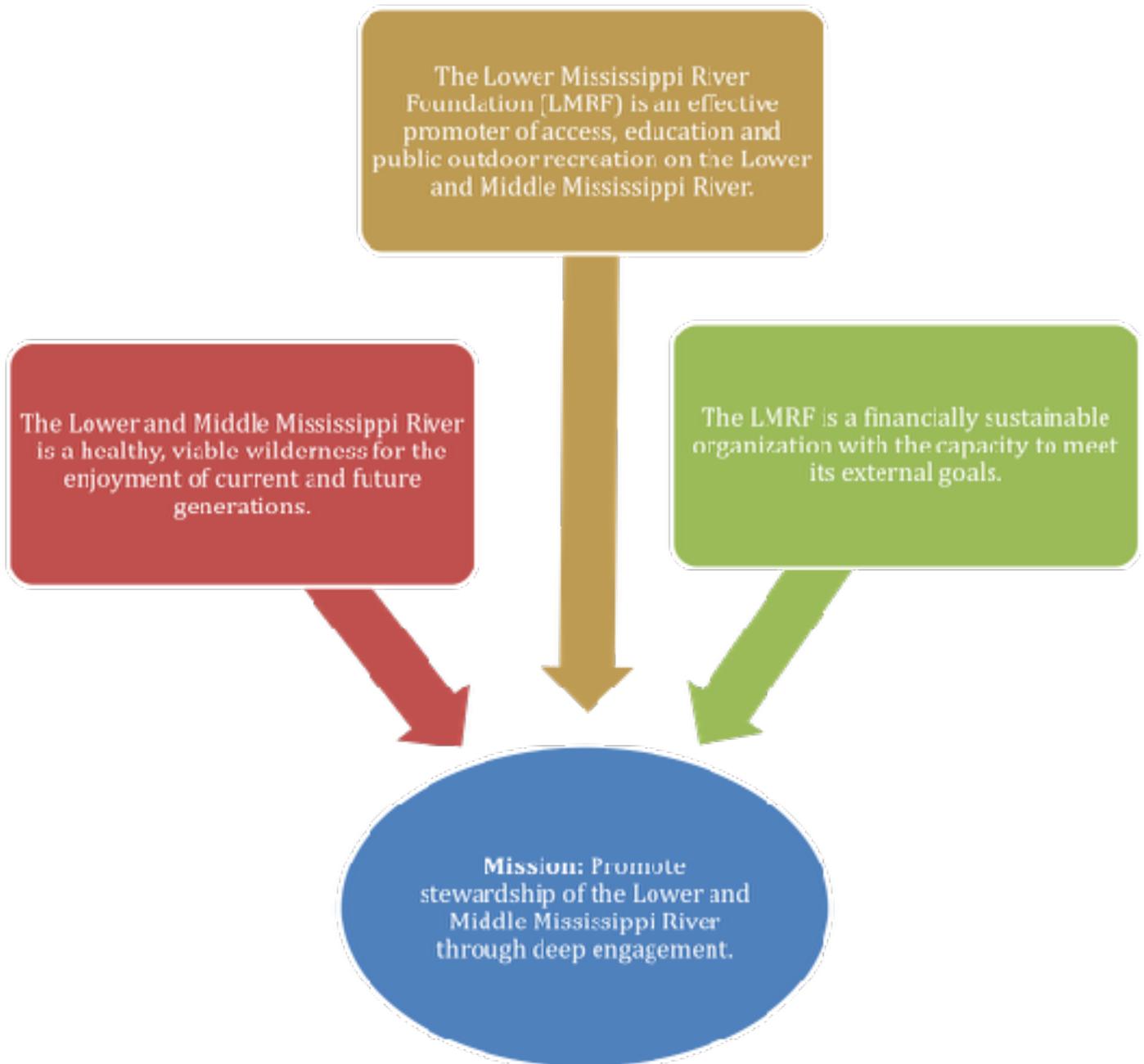
...we will not have lost any endangered species along the Middle or Lower Mississippi Rivers.

...the least interior tern will be removed from the endangered species list due to its recovery.

...the alligator snapper will no longer be considered a species at risk.

...5 additional boat ramps and/or public access sites will be created on the Lower Mississippi River.

Goals



Strategies and Actions

1st Goal: The Lower and Middle Mississippi River is a healthy, viable wilderness for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

2nd Goal: The Lower Mississippi River Foundation (LMRF) is an effective promoter of access, education and public outdoor recreation on the Lower and Middle Mississippi River.



Strategy A: Increase the amount of protected areas.

To nurture a healthy, viable wilderness, it is critical to increase the amount of protected areas along the Mississippi River. There are already organizations whose mission is land conservation. Despite the fact that LMRF is not a land conservation organization, LMRF can play a valuable role in amplifying this strategy. This strategy complements another strategy around developing relationships and collaborating with partner organizations (government, corporate, nonprofit conservation and land trust organizations, etc.). LMRF seeks to increase its engagement with governmental and corporate partners, engaging them as protectors and users of the River. Increasing the amount of protected lands is one way to engage.

Through its work, LMRF has gained an extensive understanding of the status of properties along the River, including islands that would be especially important to conserve from a river recreation perspective because they may be easier and more manageable to protect. Because of its presence on the River, LMRF often learns about available properties before others.

LMRF is also interested in protecting wildlife species along the Lower and Middle Mississippi River; wildlife protection is closely connected with habitat protection. There is a global concern about the loss of species diversity. The Mississippi River supports over 400 species of wildlife, many of which are endangered. There are 40 animals on the endangered species list, including

the pallid sturgeon and fat pocketbook mussel. The Mississippi River Valley is one of Earth's great migration corridors.



As properties along the River become available, LMRF will disseminate information about the opportunity to potential collaborators/investors, concerning the size, access, and appropriateness for a variety of uses, such as agriculture, vegetation, recreation, commercial use or simply preservation.

Strategy B: More legislators and decision-makers (including funders, CEOs, etc.) have an experience with the River that leads to care and respect.

This strategy of engaging legislators and decision-makers is a great way to advocate for better outcomes along the Lower and Middle Mississippi River, including a wild and scenic water trail or national park, education, conserved lands, and/or river health. This is a long-term strategy; it may take years to engage the right legislators and decision-makers in such a way as to eventually influence policy.

Strategy C: More colleges and college students engage.

LMRF believes that colleges may be an excellent market for experiential education offerings along the River. Engaging colleges and college students can take a variety of forms. One direction may involve creating opportunities for colleges to use the River as a learning laboratory, sending college students to experience an interdisciplinary program that involves weeks or months on the River.

A good model is a 3-month, 18-credit river semester organized by professors at Augsburg College in Minnesota's Twin Cities, in partnership with a geology professor at Louisiana State University (LSU). Quapaw Canoe Company (QCC) guided the group on a 10-day portion of their trip. Other colleges, like the University of Puget Sound and the University of Mississippi, are creating interdisciplinary academic programs that use the Mississippi River as a learning laboratory; as part of these programs they have engaged LMRF/QCC as river experts.

Another possible direction is to appeal to colleges' continuing education programs. This could take many forms, from a 1-day class to a semester-long class. For example, in partnership with Louisiana Delta Adventures and LSU in Monroe, LMRF offered Guiding and Outfitting 101, a 2-day class for those hoping to start their own guiding/outfitting businesses. Community colleges, technical colleges and larger colleges' continuing education programs may be the most effective partners for these types of offerings.

LMRF is also interested in advising colleges and universities on alternative spring break opportunities in the Lower and Middle Mississippi River region. Alternative spring break programs offer opportunities for college students to travel to impoverished regions to perform community work while also enjoying outdoor experiences. LMRF has already been offering a day on the River and a clean-up for existing alternative spring break programs. LMRF can be a consultant to design these types of programs for other educational institutions.

Strategy D: Early exposure to the River in nurturing educational experiences dissolves “fear culture” and opens the imagination of youth involved.

LMRF is considering the development of an experiential 1-2 week summer camp program focused on the River. Helena is the logical starting point for this camp, due to its location directly on the River. The LMRF works with after-school youth programs in Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee, mostly 5th graders through 12th graders, reflecting the demographics of the region. In 2014, LMRF provided river experiences (day-trips or overnights in canoes on the big river) for 870 youth. There is great potential for expansion in this direction. Lack of funding often proves to be a stumbling block. The LiNKS = Leave No Kids On Shore is a project to fill this gap, by creating a perpetual fund for providing river experiences for any school or youth program that demonstrates need.

LiNKS = Leave No Kids On Shore!
Lower Mississippi River Foundation LiNKS Project: a permanent fund created for LiNK-ing kids to the big river and mother nature –with the passion of a Lynx. Every LiNK in the chain is as important as the others. Real-time experiences for the betterment of personal health and environmental conservation along the Lower Mississippi River.

History

The Lower Mississippi River Foundation (LMRF) evolved out of volunteer efforts provided by the Quapaw Canoe Company (QCC) of Clarksdale during the new millennium. The Mighty Quapaw Apprenticeship Program for instance was born in 1998 under the direction of the QCC. This award-winning youth program, like most of our projects, is a public service, offered free-of-charge. The *Lower Mississippi River Dispatch* was initiated by John Ruskey at the same time as a way to share river stories and illustrations with a growing audience. Friends of the Sunflower River began in 2002. The campaign to “Save Buck Island” was initiated in 2005, and successfully protected Buck Island for perpetuity three years later. Buck Island is now one of only five public islands on the entire Lower Mississippi River, almost 1,000 miles of river.

The LMRF was created in 2011 to oversee the Rivergator project. At the same time, it became the umbrella organization for the newsletter *Lower Mississippi River Dispatch*, and simultaneously the Mighty Quapaw Apprenticeship Program, the Dugout Canoe Carving Project, GRIOT River Arts, the Friends of the Sunflower River, the Wild Miles, Between the Levees Project, Helena Canoe Club, LiNKs=Leave No Child On Shore, and most of our other community and environment-based projects and activities.

Now the Rivergator is almost complete with one million words describing the Middle and Lower Mississippi River and thousands of photos, videos and maps. The *Rivergator: Paddler's Guide to the Lower Mississippi* is an incredible resource, available to everyone online free-of-charge at www.rivergator.org! Now we need your help to keep this project alive (as well as everything else we do). We have decided the best way to do this is the introduction of a Charter Membership Program in 2017.

Announcing the 2017 LMRF Charter Membership Program!

\$25 - jump in the big canoe as a **Paddler** and join the crew in the excitement of starting a new journey down the river.

\$50 - become a **Voyageur** and connect with the river that connects us all.



\$100 - become a **Steward** for deep engagement in the next generation of river residents, our kids.

\$250 - become a **Pathfinder** and help us find our way around the next bend looking for greater understanding and appreciation of the biggest river in North America.

\$500 - become a **Pilot** to locate the Mississippi Valley youth that need the most attention and the lands that need the most protection.

\$1,000 - become a **Navigator** and help steer us toward a balanced river with equal access for all.

\$2,500 (or more) - become our **Partner** in bringing health and happiness to the biggest river in North America.

Details: Annual membership, dated from the day your donation is received. Our goal is to raise \$20,000 in 2017. Checks make a better pathway for us; we don't lose 3% to the bank! Please send a check or if necessary, make your gift via Paypal on one of our websites. We will continue taking charter members throughout 2017. The LMRF is a 501(c)3 in good standing. All donations are considered tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Send your check to:

**Lower Mississippi River
Foundation
291 Sunflower Avenue
Clarksdale, MS 38614**

**Online Credit Card Donations
(via Paypal)**

Please send an email to john@island63.com for a personalized Paypal Request, or go to one of our websites and use the "donation" button.

LMRF: lowermississippiriverfoundation.org. Rivergator: www.rivergator.org. Wild Miles: www.wildmiles.org.



...and welcome aboard as a charter member!

How else can you support the Lower Mississippi River Foundation? Six Ways:

1) Get on the River! You can support the LMRF by going on a big river adventure with Quapaw Canoe Company. QCC donates 10% of its annual income to the LMRF in cash or in-kind services.

2) Sign up for the Rivergator Celebratory Expedition March-May 2017: we are now filling seats on the 6-week expedition from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico celebrating the completion of the Rivergator - one million words describing the Lower Mississippi. Your participation in this celebration will help make it a success!

3) Watercolor Map Posters: You can purchase original watercolor map posters of the Lower Mississippi River, hand-painted by river rat artist John Ruskey. Custom signed at your request. Great present! Go to the Rivergator Map Shop at <http://www.rivergator.org/map-shop/map-shop.cfm>. Proceeds go to LMRF.

4) Volunteer: Contact John Ruskey (john@island63.com), Mark River (markriver@island63.com) or Lena Von Machui (lena@island63.com) for how to volunteer on behalf of the big river.

5) Newsletter: Subscribe to the *Lower Mississippi River Dispatch*: stories, photos and news from the Lower Mississippi River. Published weekly and delivered via email.

6) Become a River Citizen: Contact Southern leader Mark “River” Peoples about the 1 Mississippi Program to connect people who care about our nation’s greatest waterway with the leaders who make decisions about them.



Acknowledgements

The Lower Mississippi River Foundation thanks its Board of Directors, as well as the Quapaw Canoe Company and staff, for their support and encouragement.

LMRF Board of Directors

Scott Shirey, LMRF Founding Treasurer
Curtis Boschert, LMRF Founding Secretary (ex-officio)
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Shonda Warner, LMRF Founding At-Large
John Ruskey, LMRF Founding President (ex-officio)

Quapaw Canoe Company Staff:

Mark "River" Peoples, Guide/Youth Leader
Lena Von Machui, Guide/Secretary
John Ruskey, Guide/Owner

Special thanks to our long-term partners GRIOT Youth Program, Spring Initiative, Big Muddy Adventures, Visit Clarksdale!, Mississippi Development Authority, Arkansas Parks & Tourism, Louisiana Delta Adventures, Lower Delta Partnership, the Atchafalaya Basinkeeper and the Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper.

Our paddles are up to **Melissa Levy - Community Roots** of Hinesburg, Vermont, for leading the LMRF in our strategic planning 2017-2022.

This report is made possible with a grant from the **Walton Family Foundation**, which believes in "conservationomics:" lasting solutions that make sense for the economy and the environment.





For more information about the Lower Mississippi River Foundation and its projects, go to the following websites: 1) LMRF Home Base lowermississippiriverfoundation.org foundation website, 2) Rivergator: Paddler's Guide to the Lower Mississippi River www.rivergator.org one million words describing the Lower Mississippi River, with thousands of photos, maps and videos, and 3) The Wild Miles www.wildmiles.org 71% of the Lower Miss is wild according to river rats. Will it stay that way?

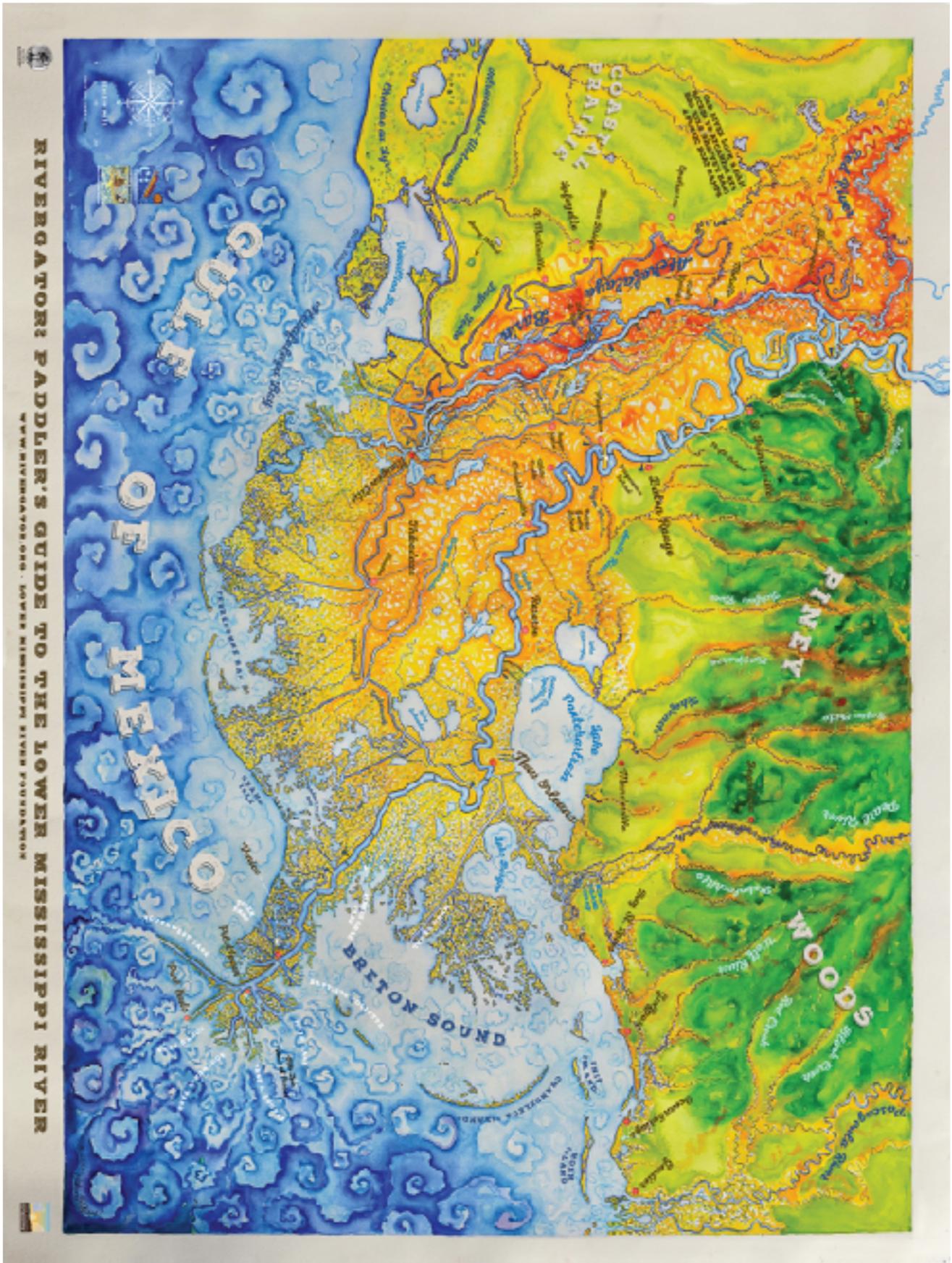
Contact info: director John Ruskey (john@island63.com) 662-902-7841, youth leader Mark River (markriver@island63.com) 662-902-1885 or volunteer coordinator Lena Von Mac 662-313-6220.

Lower Mississippi River Foundation Inc
291 Sunflower Avenue | Clarksdale | Mississippi | 38614



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