

Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No. 296

Tuesday, July 7, 2015

Paddling with the Pope



(All photos in this issue by "Driftwood Johnnie" John Ruskey from 4th of July weekend with Alan Huffman and the Creative Writing Group - Putney Student Travel)

Mark River Blog: Paddling with the Pope

Throughout my life I've been confused about the complex structure of our society and our goals for humanity. It started in third grade when I told my class that I wanted to be a humanitarian. Not understanding the goals of a capitalistic society at the time, I was confused on why we did harmful things to each other and our environment for superficial profits and lifestyles. Why we spend so much time creating differences between ourselves, when we are all the same and need the similar natural resources to sustain our culture? Why do we separate our religions, while worshiping the same Creator?

Recently, I was introduced to the Encyclical Writings of the Pope. I've been waiting my whole life for validation of my thoughts and feelings about nature and humanity. Not wanting to totally spill my guts, in fear of being labeled by society and characterized to a certain group. Even though I'm not Catholic, I know the influence of the religion, and always remember watching him on television at a young age with my Mother, Ivera Peoples, with all seriousness. We never heard him speak upon the environment, until now.

Every other Wednesday, our 1Mississippi Outreach Assistants attend a conference call to catch up on River issues and to keep us focus on our goal of 20,000 river citizens by June of 2016. We each take turns discussing our work. I'm usually last, but that day, I was first.

I blurt out, "I'm paddling with the Pope!"

The quiet of confusion rang throughout the call, as I start over to explain myself.

"Have you guys started reading the Pope's Encyclical?"

Finally informed of my outburst, I share my passion for his insight and explain to them that is the breakthrough we need to get the

world on the same page when it comes to freshwater and its importance to all living things. The Pope put a lot on my mind, but his sections about poverty and freshwater really fueled my intestinal fortitude.

It would be impossible to talk about the whole Encyclical, so I'm gonna focus on freshwater because of my stewardship to the Mississippi River. The Pope discusses that it should be our moral duty to protect and preserve freshwater since it's essential to life of all living things. It should be available to all. He warns us off the privatization of freshwater sources and how this is a mistake for humanity. How corporations operate in foreign non-developed countries extracting resources, but leaving environmental hazards behind. Poisoning aquifers by inhuman practices. Clearing rain forest for farmland, that within a few years, become arid. The loss of these forests put stress on the balance of oxygen and carbon, making ocean waters more acidic, affecting marine life.

Think about the floodplain: If we continue to block and disrupt the floodplain, we will slowly kill off thousands of species. The same animals who live in these sacred areas are essential to humanity. As these delicate ecosystems are lost, we get closer and closer to extinction. Without freshwater, there's no plants; without plants, no herbivores; without herbivores, no carnivores. Our culture of entitlement and wasteful practices, continue to move us closer to extinction. Some advances in technology has fooled us to believing we can control our destiny within our fingertips.

Reading the Encyclical has given me the confidence that all walks of life can come together for humanity. The Pope's influence on the world is at the forefront and could be the bond that brings us together on the problems we are creating for ourselves. This goes beyond race, religion, and the superficial reasons we find to separate our lives and well-being. Protecting our environment is a moral issue. We can't deny any walks of life freshwater , nor can we sit back and bleed our ecosystem of commodities and resources for the sake of profit.

At 1mississippi we understand how important the Mississippi River is to humanity. That freshwater fuels life and creates a diversity of habitats needed to sustain a livable environment on this planet. 18 million Americans drink water from the Mississippi River, while thousands species along the River thrive, giving us the quality of life we take advantage of daily. When will we put profit, greed, and wastefulness aside and come together to protect and preserve our natural world for humanity? We are all the Creators protectors of Mother Earth and it's time to redirect our attention to what's real.

So when I say, "I'm paddling with the Pope." I don't mean it literally, but letting everyone know, I'm on his team. And by the way, I'm a Baptist. -Mark River



Mark River

St. Louis born Mark “River” Peoples is a river guide and youth leader with the Quapaw Canoe Company. Mark grew up hunting and fishing along the river with his father. Mark is the Southern Region leader for 1 Mississippi and also serves on the board of the Lower Mississippi River Foundation. When not on the water, Mark mentors Delta youth and educates them on the importance of the protection and preservation of our national treasure for generations to come. Mark works hard on changing the perception of our great River and its tributaries. Through river trips, cleanups, and workshops, Mark’s goal is overall systemic health of the Mississippi River. Please go to <http://1mississippi.org/> for previous Mark River Blogs on the 1 Mississippi website -- with photos, maps, videos, and other depictions of the Big River!

PS: You can download the *Laudato Si* in English here:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf

You can read, print or download the *Laudato Si* in Arabic, Danish, Italian, French, Portuguese, Polish, or English here:

<http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html>



Spring Showers Call for Flood Protection, not Another Bad Project

If there's one thing this spring and early summer have taught us, it's that severe storms and heavy rainfall have become frequent occurrences in Illinois. Risks to flood-prone communities are at an all time high, and flood protection measures are needed now more than ever. One method of flood relief that dozens of communities rely on for protection is the New Madrid Floodway, which connects the Mississippi River to its floodplain. The town of Cairo, Illinois learned just how important this Floodway is during a major flood in 2011 when the Army Corps blasted a hole in the Birds Points Levee to flood the floodplain and save the town from devastating damage. The use of the Floodway allowed water levels in Cairo to drop 2.7 feet in just 48 hours. The need for timely use of the Floodway was proven again during another flood in 2011 when a delay in its activation led to the destruction of 50 homes in Olive Branch, Illinois.

Despite overwhelming evidence of its importance, the Army Corps has proposed a project that would make it more difficult to use the Floodway for flood relief. This project—called the St. John's Bayou-New Madrid Floodway project—would waste tax dollars, put communities at risk and cause irreparable damage to the environment. Many of our members and partners have fought the project since soon after it was first added to the Corp's project list in 1954, and continue to make efforts to stop the project for good. The project proposal includes the construction of a 60-foot high, quarter mile long levee and two large pumping plants along the Mississippi River in southeast Missouri. It would close the last 1,500 feet of floodplain connection at the south end of the New Madrid Floodway, destroying critical wetland habitat and interfering with emergency flood protection measures.

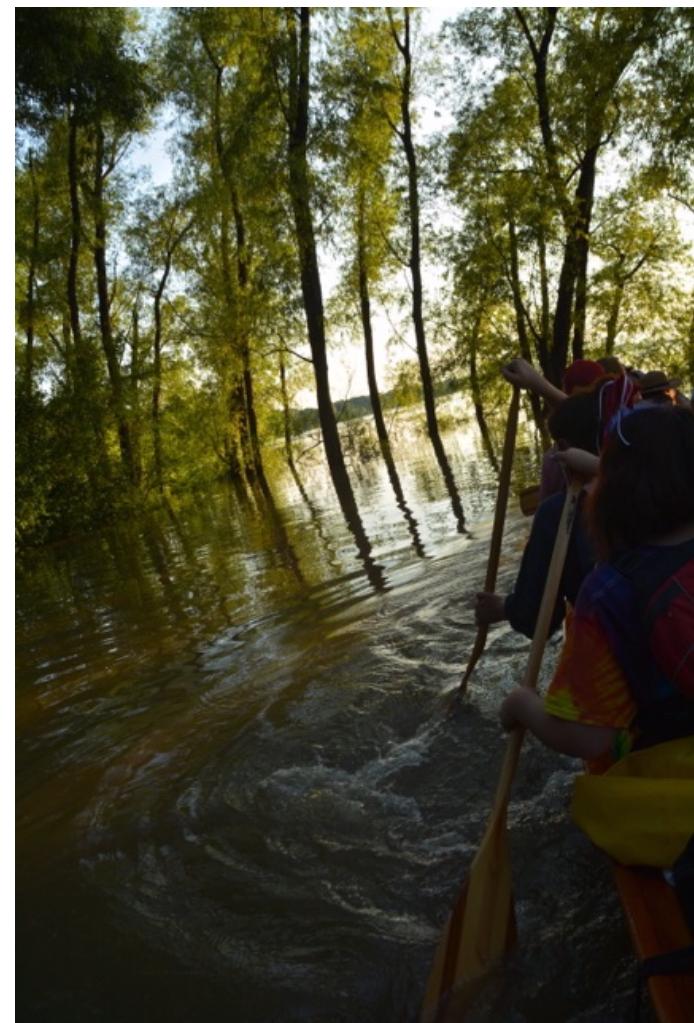
The New Madrid Project intends to allow increased development and agriculture in the Floodway, where a group of southeast Missouri farmers own land. The project would cost taxpayers \$165 million while only benefitting this small set of landowners and putting Illinois communities at a greater risk of catastrophic flooding, especially in minority and low income communities. Intensifying crop production and other land usage would make it even harder to use the Floodway for needed flood relief in time to prevent disastrous effects. As Cairo Mayor Tyrone Coleman says, "This project risks the lives and livelihoods of thousands to secure financial gains for a few."

The New Madrid Floodway not only protects communities from flooding, but it also provides vital fish and wildlife habitat and is an essential connection between the Mississippi River and its backwater floodplain. This critical part of the Mississippi River ecosystem allows the regular exchange of water, nutrients, and energy that support the plant and animal life in this unique area. The New Madrid Levee would drain more than 53,000 acres of wetlands, causing the greatest loss of wetlands function in EPA Region

7's history. It would also destroy some of the most important fisheries habitat in the Mississippi and cause irretrievable losses of nationally significant fish and wildlife resources.

Despite a 2007 ruling by a federal judge to stop the project and tear down parts of it that had already been constructed, recent funding availability has put this project back on the table. The Environmental Protection Agency has the power to stop the project once and for all through a veto under section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act due to its unacceptable adverse impacts. The EPA must veto this project to save taxpayer dollars, protect Mississippi River communities and preserve vital habitat and resources. Congress would have to appropriate construction funds for the project, giving our legislators the chance to stop this expensive project from moving forward if approved. To ensure this happens, we need leaders like Governor Rauner and Senator Durbin to take a stand for Illinois and against the St. John's Bayou—New Madrid Levee Project.

This originally appeared in the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club blog as [Spring Showers Call for Flood Protection, not Another Bad Project](#) on [July 2, 2015](#) by [katrina4cleanwater](#)



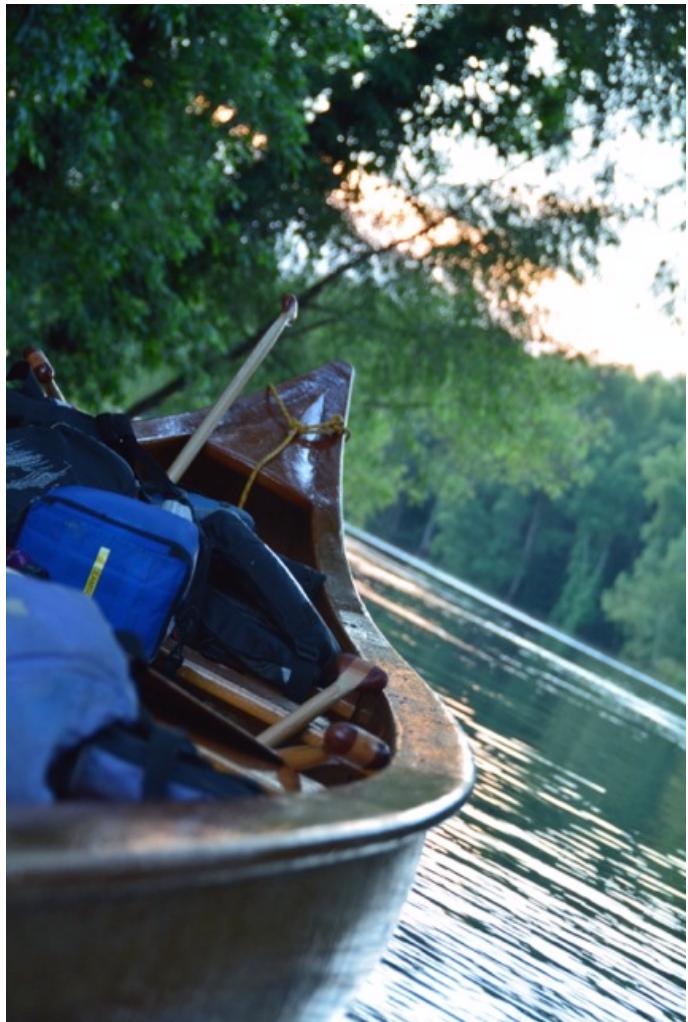
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