

A satellite photograph of the Mississippi River delta region. The river is a prominent dark blue-green line winding through a vast, arid, tan-colored landscape. The river's path is highly irregular and meandering, especially in the lower half of the image. The top of the image shows the river's mouth where it meets a larger body of water, likely the Gulf of Mexico, with a dark blue hue. The surrounding land is mostly flat and devoid of significant vegetation, with some lighter-colored patches that could be salt flats or sand dunes.

ISSUE ELEVEN : SUMMER 2018  
OPEN RIVERS :  
RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

# PARADOXES OF WATER

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An interdisciplinary online journal rethinking the Mississippi  
from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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The cover image is of The Nile River, July 19 2004. To the right of the Nile is the Red Sea, with the finger of the Gulf of Suez on the left, and the Gulf of Aqaba on the right. In the upper right corner of the image are Israel and Palestine, left, and Jordan, right. Below Jordan is the northwestern corner of Saudi Arabia. Jacques Descloitres, MODIS Rapid Response Team, NASA/GSFC.

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FEATURE

# WRITING THE RIVER

By Leslie Thomas

**W**hat does the river say to you? This is the core question posed by Write to the River (WTTR), a creative writing project that I launched in partnership with the Twin Cities nonprofit Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) and photographer Tom Reiter, in spring 2017.

Writing is not just for the Robert Frosts of the world or for professional writers who see themselves as artists. We all can be writers capturing the truth of our own lives, with their pain, joys, grittiness and heroism, if we

give ourselves a chance to trust our voice. Expressive writing can serve a wide variety of life-enhancing purposes. Fundamentally, when we put pen to paper, we have the opportunity to celebrate who we are and create a tangible product that surprises us with welcome new meanings and links. (Chavis 2011, 160)

WTTR is an open invitation, a call for all to engage with our river environment through story or poetic verse. No professional or river-related



*WTTR welcomes new river related meanings and links through creative writing.*

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experience is necessary. All ages and writing styles are welcome, including short prose, formal verse or one's own verse. It offers an opportunity to create, and a platform to share a river connection.

It is also substantially different from the rest of FMR's work. Over its 25 years, FMR has grown to be recognized as a hardworking and strong force

for good for the metro Mississippi. Annually, it attracts thousands of people (myself included) to speak up at the capitol in St. Paul, and get our hands dirty (literally) at events where we dig, pull, and plant for the river. So how does a creative project like this fit into such a robust action- and results-oriented organization? Better than we ever thought it would.



*WTTR welcomes new river related meanings and links through creative writing.*

# A Great River Story: Friends of the Mississippi River

In 1992, a roomful of people gathered to lay out the future of a new national park flowing through the heart of the metro Twin Cities, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. (MNRRA).

At one of the first public meetings to create a management plan for the park, a few “river rats” looked around and felt a bit out of place. While people representing business and government interests were in attendance, there weren’t many like them: people who loved the river and were willing to speak on its behalf. That’s when Friends of the Mississippi River was born.

Officially incorporated in 1993, FMR has grown from a handful of founders to engage over 5,000 people annually as river advocates and volunteers—at community meetings, at the capitol, and in hands-on river protection and restoration projects. FMR headquarters has grown from a walk-in closet to a half-floor of a downtown St. Paul building with 19 staff in four departments: water quality, river corridor and land-use, land protection, and stewardship and public engagement.



*Out for a swim: trees along the river improve water quality and wildlife habitat.*

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Over the years the organization has protected and restored thousands of acres of forest and prairie habitat, reduced harmful pollutants, and protected our sense of identity as a river city by preserving beloved views, parks, and natural areas that connect our metro communities to the river. All the while, it continues to cultivate tomorrow's river stewards, engaging over a thousand youth in river protection and education activities annually.

“But none of this work would be possible,” says Whitney Clark, now in his 21st year as executive director of FMR, “if it weren't for our collective affinity for the river.”

That affinity is fostered by personal and cultural connections. For Clark, it was fishing with his grandfather that strengthened his connection to nature. “During our shore lunches we listened to the waves lapping against the boat, observed the sunlight reflecting on the trees along the rocky shores. Being there with him, it was easy for me to love the natural world.” Today, Clark is proud to pass this value to the next generation, both via FMR and in his own family.

One of the biggest overarching accomplishments, Clark notes, is of a different nature. “It is the large movement we created, elevating the profile



*Padding tranquil water: one of the many ways to connect with the Mississippi River.*



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and status of the Mississippi River in our area. Now, community members ask the question ‘Will it hurt the river?’ before proceeding.” This is a significant change in the metro-wide conversation, a paradigm shift. And even though it isn’t one that we can put numbers to, that doesn’t mean it isn’t important. In fact, it may be FMR’s most important accomplishment in its 25 years.

“FMR is about protecting the health and integrity of the Mississippi River system that we are each connected to in one way or another,” adds Clark. “Our collective affinity for the river serves as the scaffolding for all of FMR’s work; so providing a forum for people to celebrate the river and connect to one another is our core mission.”



*Seed collecting with FMR at Sand Coulee SNA in Hastings, MN. Image courtesy of FMR Staff Photographer.*

# Start by Planting Seeds

When I moved closer to the Mississippi River in 2013, I wanted to learn how I could help protect and connect to my new landscape. I found FMR online and signed up to receive their biweekly “Mississippi Messages.” Then I responded to a volunteer call for a native prairie seed-collecting event at Sand Coulee Scientific and Natural Area (SNA). “Previous seed collection is not required—all abilities and groups are welcome,” resonated with me.

I learned to identify several native plants and how to sustainably extract seeds for later planting. Renowned for its rare plant and animal species, Sand Coulee SNA offers a glimpse of what Minnesota looked like before 1850. Being there rekindled the memory of a poignant, historic diary entry I’d once read by a farmer in Lakeland, Minnesota.

June 24, 1854: The prairie is now a beautiful green interspersed with beautiful flowers in great abundance and variety. Some of these flowers must be preserved—not that they can ever be made any more beautiful or arranged with any better taste than now. But this great prairie flower garden as arranged by the hand

of the Creator is now exposed to the plow and the lowing herds are already making their paths and selecting their shades and watering places and it is plain that the native beauty must give way to the artificial.

— from the diary of Mitchell Jackson. (Blegen 1939)

After that, I signed up to become a River Guardian with FMR and receive action alerts for the river. What began as an online search for connection led to me becoming part of a large volunteer community doing meaningful environmental work. It may sound hokey to some, but there was and is a certain magic in that transformation, one that continues to inspire me. I began to write about the river in my creative work, which includes poetry, and wished for a sense of community around the more creative and personal aspects of river engagement as well. Surely there were others who felt the same?

FMR was a natural place for me to inquire about partnering on a creative writing project devoted to the river, and I’m certain a seed was planted inside me that day at Sand Coulee SNA.

## A Leap of Faith

At our first meeting, FMR Communication Manager Sue Rich acknowledged that it was my “pleasant persistence” that got the idea through the door. We laughed as we considered that this is how many projects likely begin, with a nudging person peddling their project, insistent on its potential merit. As we talked, my initial offering—a metro-wide poetry contest and anthology—evolved into something ongoing and beneficial to FMR’s mission. Writing judges were

nixed in favor of approachability and inclusion; it would be online and we’d make it as open as we could with the resources at hand.

But would anyone submit creative writing without a prize or the prestige of rising above the competition? Both storylines—the importance of persistence and faith—were familiar and fundamental to FMR. And with that, we knew we had to move forward.



*Hidden Falls showcases the varied river landscape.*

# WTTR: How it Works

The Mississippi River as it flows through the Twin Cities is not one but three rivers. It enters the metro as a prairie river with banks instead of bluffs. Then, as it roars over St. Anthony Falls in downtown Minneapolis, it becomes a gorge river wending its way through the steep-sided bluffs in south Minneapolis and western St. Paul. Finally, as it joins the Minnesota River near Fort Snelling, it relaxes and widens to become a floodplain river.

Which river would people focus on for Write to the River? Its changing nature as well as the number of visiting spots could make it a challenge

to face the dreaded blank page. We needed to give people a common starting point.

You could call it a form of Ekphrastic creative writing, a fancy word for writing inspired by other works of art, including paintings, photographs, or statues. Writers “interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects.” No two perceptions will be the same; every writer will see something unique from their own experiences.

WTTR contributors are not limited to writing to the image provided; it is offered as a starting point to inspire writing and showcase scenes along the river.



*WTTR summer 2017 submission “Lonesome whistle” over the Mississippi River at Hastings, MN, near several FMR habitat restoration and Vermillion Stewards volunteer sites.*

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For each season, one image is chosen by a volunteer team of writers and river enthusiasts. The image is selected from 10 photos provided by FMR volunteer photographer Tom Reiter, based on its broad inspirational and emotive qualities to serve as a writing prompt. Reiter's stunning photographs capture different scenes, elements, and activities along the Upper Mississippi River basin throughout the year.

It is often the feeling of being in a place that prompts a photographer to capture an image. Reiter explains, "When I click the camera's shutter, it's often because something I'm seeing invokes certain feelings within me. If a picture could have that effect on me, I wondered if it would produce a similar reaction in others?"

A brief caption is provided with each image, along with the location for anyone who would like to visit—we aim for just enough information to prompt participation, without overly influencing the writing direction. To get creative juices flowing, we ask readers and potential contributors a few leading questions: What feelings does the photo evoke? Does it remind you of a past experience? Can you imagine walking here? What sounds, smells and tastes might you experience?

In addition to appearing in each "Mississippi Messages," the image and invitation to submit a writing piece are shared on FMR's web and social media sites and with local libraries, bookstores,

and with colleagues, friends, and family. Participants are given approximately 6 weeks to reflect on the image, write their piece and send it to the project email. After the submission period closes, writing pieces are in turn featured on the FMR website, and the link to the online issue is distributed through the same channels for their readership to enjoy.

Tom, Whitney, Sue, and I have all been pleasantly surprised by the number of people who responded, sharing their personal river stories. And in keeping with the spirit of Ekphrastic writing, everyone has seen something different in the featured photo.

The writing reflects diversity of voice and ways the river is appreciated—as a meaningful constant, an important connection to the past and natural world, and source of healing, inspiration, and work. It includes the gripping tales of a retired towboat captain's experiences on the Lois E, a heartfelt story of a busy Minneapolis nurse who finds reprieve living on a houseboat, poignant poems of Native American ancestral river links, and inspiring memoir.

Below are the photographic image and caption prompts offered during WTTR's first year, some of the writing we received in response, and thoughts from the writers on their involvement with the project. To see all of the writing, please [visit the site](#).

# Year One: WTTR Creative Writing Sampler

## Winter 2017-18 Submission Prompt



*The sun sets upon St. Paul, MN from the beloved Indian Mounds Park bluff top view.*

## TAKING TIME

*By Jim Larson*

The sun has done its best all day  
to turn the ice back to water  
but the River won't have it.

The River knows to rest this time of year;  
no tugs, no barges, no kayaks.  
The empty trees all have the same idea.

Even the buildings  
have their eyes closed.  
Time to put this day back with all the others.

Time to gather up a few friends  
at a quiet table. Get some talk flowing about  
what keeps you warm below the surface.

## Interview with Jim Larson

**LT:** I learned you write poetry often. Is there something about WTTR that inspired you in a different way?

**Jim:** The thing that caught my fancy was the title of the whole project, "Write to the River." It did not say, "Write about the River." So it seemed appropriate to write about a photo, but to write to the river.

**LT:** Your poem gives meaningful voice to different elements within the photo. Can you share more about that?

**Jim:** This was an invitation to invest the river with a certain agency, maybe even a sense of character. And while we're at it, why not do the

same with the other elements in the photo—the sun, the trees, the buildings? The hope was to animate each thing and set them into some sort of relationship without getting all Walt Disney about it.

**LT:** How can creative writing expand awareness and appreciation of the river?

**Jim:** Any audience enjoys hearing stories about characters and their relationships. The poem, however briefly, attempts to provide that. The true completion of the piece is accomplished in the minds of the audience as they follow along and add personal associations from their own imaginations.

## Step Outside *By Christine Yaeger*

Don't lament.

The tomb of concrete spreadsheets will rake your soul,  
but the barren tracks will be uprooted into flourishing.

Step outside.

The light will cascade off of ice crystals as the flame subsides its quest,  
vanquished yet unconquered.

Listen.

Whispering grass underneath the shadowed limbs  
sunken roots, deep and abiding.

Rejoice.

The thaw will awaken the unseen miracles  
carrying messages of hope into another day.

## Interview with Christine Yaeger

**LT:** I learned you work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Can you tell me how you became involved in this field?

**Christine:** I knew I wanted to pursue a career in natural resources after taking a college course in environmental studies. I had interest in our collective dependence on natural resources, and how it brings our values into focus. Through my studies I gained a different appreciation, learning Latin names and how resources like timber are used in industry. I worked at several entities on water quality sampling, agriculture grants, and data coordination, before landing at the DNR.

**LT:** What can you tell me about your experience with WTTR?

**Christine:** I heard about WTTR through the FMR newsletter. I appreciate the important

work FMR does for water and people, and the invitation to submit a creative writing piece. I like the mission-driven nature of my work at the DNR, which involves strategic planning. WTTR offers a different opportunity, applying an artistic response to a river photograph. I was inspired by the evocative light within the image.

**LT:** Can projects like WTTR offer something meaningful for those doing environmental work?

**Christine:** WTTR is an opportunity for creative ideas to simmer and become a story or poem, and to read other river writing. Sitting alone to reflect can help to recharge from the layers and fast pace of life, as well any discouraging news, and be inspired afresh.



## Fall 2017 Submission Prompt



*A paddleboat passenger enjoying the Big River and St. Paul's iconic High Bridge.*

## Empress *by Linda Moua*

At any given moment  
I feel as though I am guest on her flowing body  
At this very moment  
She provides passage to spy on carefully hidden neighbors

At any given moment  
I could fall through her chilly surface and suffer an abrupt shock  
At this very moment  
She can only feel the towing of my paddles left to right

At any given moment  
I look up to her thicket of verdant friends to find inner peace  
At this very moment  
She has craftily coaxed me to silence as I slip into awe

At any given moment  
I see that I am only a small explorer in her noble domain  
Because at this very moment  
She has painted me a self- portrait of who she is and why she is mighty

## Interview with Linda Moua

**LT:** I learned you work with FMR. What do you do for them?

**Linda:** I work part-time as FMR's development and advocacy assistant, working in our database, doing administrative work, and occasionally assisting at off-site public events.

**LT:** Do you recall what inspired you to get involved in river work?

**Linda:** I've always tried to be environmentally conscious but my relationship with FMR transpired because I was attracted to the people who worked there, and the dedication they were known for having toward their mission.

**LT:** Is there one particular challenge pertaining to your work?

**Linda:** As someone whose childhood time outside meant pulling weeds and watering endless rows of seeds more so than hiking and swimming, I have learned that "spending time outdoors" means different things to different people, and that experiencing fun and engaging activities outdoors should happen early on. Growing up in a large, low-income and recently immigrated household, there wasn't a lot of environmentally related outings my family took, other than going to the farm. Eventually my neighborhood community started collaborating with outreach programs to take us kids on hiking trails, beaches, and other activities. I'm grateful for those experiences, but know it hasn't always been easy to establish or launch cross-cultural connections. That said, I'm proud of FMR's efforts to be mindful and inclusive in youth engagement programs, because I know how memories like those can shape one's outlook about experiencing nature.

**LT:** Is there anything you would like to share about writing to the river?

**Linda:** I loved that I was able to combine my appreciation for the river while exercising my poetry skills! I don't consider myself an avid partaker of water-related activities but have always enjoyed time spent leisurely walking alongside the river or learning about its different eco-systems. Also, reading the work from other contributors showed me that spending time with nature can unexpectedly inspire, humor, or heal us.

**LT:** Your poem is so poignant, expressing appreciation for the river. Are there any ways the writing of it spilled over into your work?

**Linda:** For me, writing this poem further attested to the river's beauty and resilience and

why people connect with FMR to help protect and restore it. It also strengthens my appreciation for the projects we do and the staff I get to work with.

**LT:** Are there any ways your work informs your creative writing?

**Linda:** While writing this poem I tapped into a memory of our FMR staff canoeing trip last fall. After much time spent worrying about capsizing, I finally started feeling those moments of unclouded reflection as I paddled down the river. My poem speaks to the river's daunting yet inspiring presence because that's what I felt that day. The emotions were easy to evoke but it took time to think through how I wanted to portray those feelings. Using techniques I'd learned in my writing courses, I decided to describe them via a poetic homage.

## Spring 2017 Submission Prompt



*“Morning Color” at Pine Bend Bluffs SNA in Inver Grove Heights, MN one of FMR’s most popular protection and restoration sites.*

## Untitled

*by Michael Daugherty*

A place where my ancestors speak,  
but there is no one left to listen.  
Hush waters whisper to our souls  
to remind us of what we're missing.

I want to stop and breathe in deeply  
and try to smell the smoke of their fires.  
I want to hear their songs in the creaking  
branches, hoping that it will inspire  
me to remember my blood.

O whisper to me the inspiriting beauty  
of life that captivated my ancestors so  
that they prayed and gave thanks!

Oh why can't I see the smoke  
rising  
above the trees.

## Interview with Michael Daugherty

**LT:** Your moving poem speaks to ancestral ties to the river. Can you share a little about yourself?

**Michael:** I grew up in Quapaw, Oklahoma, where I graduated high school in 2004. Today I live in Neosho, Missouri, with my wife Amy and my son Eli. I am an enrolled member of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma.

**LT:** Is there anything you'd like to share about your WTTR experience?

**Michael:** I like writing poetry, but don't share it too often. I'm an introvert and with no formal education in creative writing, very self-conscious when it comes to my writing. When I first saw the photo of the sunrise over the Mississippi, I was in awe of how beautiful it was. The first image that came to mind was seeing smoke rising above the trees. I wondered if Indigenous people, especially my ancestors, had ever camped or lived in that

area, or somewhere along the Mississippi River. I could see it. I wanted to smell that smoke. Unfortunately, there was no smoke and any sign of Indigenous people living there would most likely be gone. The poem came to me pretty easy, though it took me a day and a half of reading the poem over and over again before I finally submitted it. I'm glad I did. I was very excited to see it on the website. I'm very proud of it and extremely thankful for the opportunity.

**LT:** Is there a river photographic image you can suggest for our project?

**Michael:** I can't think of an image, but hope this project continues. The stories people share about those places have their own vision, knowledge, and love for the water and land that can open our eyes to a different way of how we look at the earth. I think it's good to share with each other our love for the earth. There is a deeper

understanding to be gained from each other. The poetry and prose I've read on the website are amazing and touching.

**LT:** Can you share anything that speaks to the power of story?

**Michael:** I believe storytelling is an important part of any culture. Stories can open minds, inspire, and heal. A single story can plant love inside the hearts of children for a world that can seem scary. A story can teach and inspire people

to care for the earth and for each other. Stories tell us who we are, who we were, where we come from, and where we can go. When it comes to our future, our children, nothing is more important than an inspiring story to help open their minds to alternate paths in life, rather than a single path that society demands they take. Our lands, our air, our water—they don't survive unless we can tell a child a story that teaches them the importance of those sacred elements. Stories have to live on in our children to pass on to our grandchildren. That's how we change the world.

# The River Story Map

In Spring 2017, I was profoundly moved by one Write to the River submission in particular, a letter to the river from Michael Bischoff. In it,

Michael thanks the river for the healing role it continues to play in his life with terminal brain cancer.



*Michael Bischoff reflects near the river's edge.*

## Dear Mississippi River,

You are family to me, so you probably know my story already, but I'm writing to express my love and gratitude for you and all those who have cared for you, and loved you, as I do.

I found out a year and a half ago that I have an aggressive kind of brain cancer. We tried chemo, but it didn't work. The cancer grew while I was taking the chemo. We tried a new experimental treatment, but yesterday my doctor told me that treatment was ending because it hadn't produced enough results. So, I've turned to you, dear river, as my primary healer. A year ago, I made a commitment to myself and you, that I would come slowly walk and sit by your banks every day. I committed to receiving the healing, wisdom, and grace you wanted to offer. You've been my most faithful and generous healer. I trust you, and I will be faithful to you. This week you guided the great blue herons to an island in the middle of your waters, close to my house. I sit at your edge and watch the herons flirt and fight in their nests, above your patient waters. My wingspan is the same as the herons. As they stretch their wings, I hold out my arms, gliding with them over your waters. I want to share their intimacy with you, flying so close to you, getting to know your length.

You've been so generous with me, nourishing me, washing away cancer and anxiety. If I believed medical statistics guided my body, my life would be over tomorrow. But I know that your water fills and guides my body more

than medical statistics. I know that I am a small part of your watershed, and that after my body stops breathing, I will still be a part of your wholeness.

Today, and every day, I will sit at your side, watching the ice melt into your wholeness, hearing the woodpeckers knock pieces of the trees down closer to you. As my body declines, may I also fall into your wholeness, resting in the grace you carry across this continent that we call home.

— Michael Bischoff

Not long after, Michael and I were sitting at a table discussing his idea for another new project: The River Story Map. While it can occasionally overlap with WTTR, the River Story Map aims to capture and share personal river stories tied to the specific place along the river connected to their experience.

The [River Story Map](#) launched in January 2018, featuring 25-plus stories of connection to the river in honor of FMR's silver year. These honest and personal reflections portray the river as a source of intrigue and adventure, a beloved date night venue, and even an unlikely partner in tales of loss and healing.

As the map continues to grow, we expect word about it to circulate more as well. Michael asked me to be sure to let Open Rivers readers know that we welcome everyone to add an image and story about a place along the river that is meaningful to them.



# The Power of Sharing Creative Writing

I often think of WTTR unfolding as dendritic branches from Tom Reiter's lens, to the writer's creation, to the reader's mind. Like seed collecting in a prairie, a sense of community develops around contributing to something meaningful while sharing river interpretations.

"The Mississippi River is an incredibly valuable natural asset," says photographer Reiter. "Those who take the time to explore its wonder are richly rewarded with its beauty, history and power."

It's those feelings that people enjoy sharing with others and WTTR provides the forum."

While the River Story Map has afforded greater opportunity to connect to the river locally, WTTR has found itself expanding across state and even international lines. Writer Barbara DeCoursey Roy lives in St. Louis, but assists with WTTR photo selection. She also contributed a thought-provoking submission to the winter 2017 prompt about the river's power as a connective force during divisive times:



*WTTR Spring 2018 image. Our Twin Cities river corridor is part of an internationally significant flyway that provides vital resting places and food for both resident and migrating birds.*

## Great River

*By Barbara DeCoursey Roy*

The river doesn't see color or division.  
Red or blue states merely states  
of being—sundown trending garnet,

but turning midnight blue just before dawn  
cleanses muddy water, washing away  
the sins of the fathers.

One indivisible. Holy water, the Black Robe  
rode; bloody water, Grant's ironclads trolled.  
Hosting both beaver and trapper.

Oasis for Red on their trail of tears;  
a Red Sea for Blacks hankering for  
the warmth of other suns.

Strife-roiled, yet rolling. On. Unconstrained  
by armies of the dead. Breaking boundaries  
imposed by paltry dreams, feeding underground

streams, breaching the banks of imagination.  
A mighty chorus of voices singing "Mni Wiconi."  
Water is Life. Colorless, fluid, never tame.

DeCoursey Roy shared the edition in which her poem was featured on Facebook and a dozen of her international poet friends posted congratulations or shared the link. "Great poems, like the river, serve as containers to hold the tension

of opposites. I believe in the power of writing to forge connections among diverse groups of people. I believe the love of our country's great natural resources has the same power, if we harness it," says DeCoursey Roy.

## Impact: Our Collective Affinity

So far, roughly 3,300 people have visited Write to the River online, most spend a long time on the page, with roughly two-thirds of them returning. And while we don't request demographic information, we can say there has been a diverse mix of backgrounds, including some identifying as Native American and some as Hmong. Experience levels on the river vary from people

frightened of being on the water to seasoned river pilots.

But how do you quantify the impact of a poem or a creative writing project? Numbers can be illusory or, when they are available, misleading. Webpage hits can't capture poems shared on social media or printed and hung in an office

cubicle. And while we can point to a rise in the number of WTTR readers, as well as River Guardians and members, this is little more than correlation. We know that some WTTR participants (even ones who submit works that could be considered politically charged) prefer to remain solely connected to the creative writing side of things. But we also know that many advocates and environmentalists delight in the opportunity to reconnect to the passion that underlies their work.

“WTTR is a reminder of the heart connection many of us have as river advocates, but don’t always get the chance to express while working in policy or natural resource science,” says FMR director Clark. “It’s all important; the work of volunteers, organizations, elected officials, scientists, etc., and based on a shared underlying foundation. WTTR is an opportunity to tap into that deeper foundation of place and create a confluence of ideas.”

As we see both WTTR and the River Story Map circulated among not only traditional writing circles but fellow water organizations, watershed districts, and other agencies, and as the writing continues to flow in, we are honored to provide a forum to strengthen our connection to the river, to refuel, and recharge. We also can’t help but wonder if we created a niche no one knew needed to be filled.

As part of the celebration of FMR’s 25th anniversary, a special exhibit of Write to the River took place July 3-29 at the Wabasha Brewing Company near the river in St. Paul. Visitors stopped by for a pint, a photo, and a poem or story to honor FMR’s 25 years of protecting, restoring and enhancing the river.

For questions about Write to the River project, contact Leslie Thomas at [writetotheriver@fmr.org](mailto:writetotheriver@fmr.org). To learn more about FMR, Write to the River, and the River Story Map, link to: <https://fmr.org>, <https://fmr.org/write-to-the-river>, and <https://fmr.org/river-stories-map>.

*All images courtesy of Tom Reiter, unless otherwise stated. Special thanks to FMR Communications Manager Sue Rich, who contributed to this article.*



*River ‘concrete’ poem by Christine Bronk from Fall 2017 Write to the River.*

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## About the Author

Leslie Thomas is a writer, historian, aviation professional, and river guardian. She holds a master's degree in landscape, environment and history from the University of Edinburgh. She is a Minnesota certified wetland delineator in-training and member of Poets Abroad, an international poetry group. She lives along the Big River in Wisconsin, and enjoys kayaking, hiking, and gardening.