



# Confluence Watershed Festival & River Clean-up

September 12-13, 2008  
Columbia Bottom Conservation Area

## Come down to the Confluence

The Confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers is a special place. Two of the mightiest rivers in the country join together to become one flowing force moving down to the Gulf of Mexico.

If you zoom out from a map of the area, you can see just how much natural wealth is packed in that one region. Going upstream on the Mississippi, you head almost immediately to the west, wrapping St. Charles County in a massive, flowing moat.

The Illinois River, whose wetlands were once the most productive ecosystem in the area, enters just upstream, flowing through a maze of islands. The Piasa Bluffs look southward across the whole area. Large public land tracts, managed by the Corps of Engineers, Illinois and Missouri Depts. Of Natural Resources, Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and Missouri Dept. of Conservation, are at



*A group of Hazelwood students try a "dry run" paddling in Mike Clark's Big Muddy Adventure Clipper Canoe at the Sept. 12 Confluence Watershed Festival.*

*photo by Ruthie Moccia*

work restoring habitat and providing access to nature lovers.

Driving a boat or, especially, paddling a canoe across the Confluence, you feel the swirling tug of two powerful rivers as they merge

into one. On one side of the turbulent line they create is the muddier Missouri River. The other side of that line is clearer, with bubbles of muddy water popping up onto its surface. But from that point on downstream, folks are more likely to refer to the Mississippi River as the "Big Muddy".

**September 12-13, 2008 was our Confluence Watershed Festival and River Clean-up,** headquartered on the banks of the river at Columbia Bottom Conservation Area.

Our clean-ups and learning festivals at the Confluence are special events, with the growing numbers of Missouri River lovers coming together to work

on its last few miles. This time, the weather constantly threatened to jump in, but it held off until Sunday morning. The huge pulse of water brought by the collision of Hurricane Ike and a western cold front didn't run down the river until after the event.

## Hands-on , interactive learning on the Big Muddy

We started the weekend with a Friday **Confluence Water Festival** at the boat ramp in Columbia Bottom Conservation Area. A few schools cancelled because of the threat of storms (which skirted just north of us) but still **206 fifth and sixth graders from the neighboring Hazelwood School District** came down to the river to learn about their watershed, its wildlife, river skills and safety and water issues.

All senses were engaged. Students touched bighead carp, shovelnosed sturgeon, aquatic turtles and even a horse. They competed at "Big Muddy Jeopardy" overlooking the river. They

found their school on a watershed map and saw where their stormwater flows. They gathered around beakers of muddy water, transforming them through chemistry and filtration into clean tap water. They hunted macro-invertebrates in artificial streams, giving each stream a water quality rating. They walked down the beautiful confluence trail, pausing in silence to write down the sounds they could hear. They put on lifejackets and learned the techniques of big river paddling.

A special treat was playing the H2Orchestra, a collection of instruments that use water to create



*Andy Plauk and Chris McLeland of US Fish & Wildlife Service give students a hand-on look at a shovelnose sturgeon.*

*photo by Jen Courtney*

- continued on next page -

different tones, sounds and notes. This amazing interactive exhibit was donated by the River Kids, a self-motivated group of river activists from New City School, who sadly couldn't make it because of scheduling conflicts.

The exhibitors were a mix of biologists, land managers, non-profit experts and engaged citizens. They were tasked with coming up with hands-on learning experiences, and the variety of experiences they shared with the kids was inspiring. No power-points and only the briefest lectures. Engage their bodies, minds and imaginations.

Fifth and sixth graders are the perfect age for this kind of education. They can't hide their



excitement with new experiences. Yet they have enough experience under their belt that they can compare different things and come up with new conclusions.

As the last busses left, exhibitors chatted with themselves, sharing ideas and mixing their energies. Once again, the opportunity to teach children on the river's edge brought about a confluence of active people working for the future of this region in their own ways.

Special thanks to Spanish Lake Fire Dept. for bringing their fire truck onsite before the festival to fill up the H2Orchestra. Thanks to Tom and the staff at Columbia Bottom Conservation Area for their hospitality

as we took over their boat ramp parking lot for a weekend. Thanks to Missouri American Water for bringing water and cups and for sponsoring the event. Thanks to Open Space Council for loaning a couple pop-ups.

Extra special thanks to Susan Raney of Hazelwood School District for pulling in some wonderful teachers and students, and Karla Wilson of Ecoworks Unlimited for arranging the fantastic array of presenters.



Top: Employees from Missouri American Water show students how to turn muddy river water into drinkable tap water; Right: A student explores sounds using water at the H2Orchestra interactive exhibit; Above: Jeff Barrow of Missouri River Relief discusses the problem of trash in our big river systems.

photos by Ruthie Moccia & Melanie Cheney

## Confluence Watershed Festival Exhibitors

Collinsville Area Rec. District  
 St. Louis Audubon Society  
 Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District  
 Missouri American Water  
 Show-Me Missouri Back Country  
 Horsemen  
 US Fish and Wildlife Service  
 (Columbia National Fish and  
 Wildlife Conservation Office)  
 Wild Canid Survival and Research  
 Center  
 Forrest Keeling Nursery  
 Litzinger Road Ecology Center

Columbia Bottom Conservation Area  
 Worldways Children's Museum - the  
 H2Orchestra  
 MO Dept. of Conservation  
 US Forest Service - Mark Twain  
 National Forest  
 East West Gateway Council of  
 Governments  
 Grace Hill Trail Rangers  
 REI (Recreational Equipment Inc.)  
 Washington University  
 Cooperative Weed Management Area  
 Jones-Confluence Point State Park

U.S. Geological Survey  
 Big Muddy National Fish and  
 Wildlife Refuge  
 Missouri Stream Team/Missouri  
 Coalition for the Environment  
 Big Muddy Adventures  
 Gateway Greening, Inc.  
 Soil & Water Conservation District  
 of St. Louis County  
 Missouri River Relief  
 The Confluence Greenway  
 Riverworks Discovery