The Mississippi: A River Trapped by History?

John O. Anfinson
Chief of Resource Management for the
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area,
a unit of the National Park System
in the Twin Cities, Minnesota

Abstract:
Since the early settlers raised the first feeble levees, since the Corps of Engineers first placed the navigation structures in the Mississippi River and since biologists first seeded the river’s floodplains with species more amenable to human needs, the natural river has become increasingly an artifact. Each action has required reactions that define each subsequent move. Regardless of its purpose, has each action raised a bar that now forms a hydraulic trap from which the river cannot escape? Are all our efforts at ecosystem restoration so constrained by what has been handed down that they have little chance of truly making a meaningful difference? In his presentation, Dr. John O. Anfinson will try answer these questions and hint at where the Great River may be headed.

Biographical Sketch

John O. Anfinson is the Chief of Resource Management for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park System in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. John has been researching, writing and speaking about the Mississippi River for over 25 years. He is the author of The River We Have Wrought: A History of the Upper Mississippi (2003) and many articles about the Mississippi. In 2005 John was one of ten U.S. delegates to the joint U.S./Dutch symposium on water resources at The Hague, Netherlands, sponsored by the Institute for Water Resources and the Rijkswaterstaat. John has articles forthcoming in Engineering Earth: the Impacts of Megaengineering (University of Kentucky Press, 2011) and The City, the River, the Bridge: Before and After the Bridge Collapse (University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

John is a founding board member of Friends of the Mississippi River, an organization that focuses on the environmental health of the Mississippi in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. He is also on the Minnesota Marine Art Museum board. John holds a PhD in American History from the University of Minnesota.