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# A Birthday Bash 100 Years In The Making



Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) Superintendent Rick Clark looks out over the “Mighty Mo” along Riverside Park at Yankton. The MNRR is sponsoring an open house from 2:30-7 p.m. Monday at Riverside Park’s large picnic shelter to talk about the National Park Service’s centennial celebration and also to roll out the newly-formed “Friends of the MNRR” organization.

## Local Officials For Year-Long Celebration Of National Park Service Centennial

**R**ick Clark and Dugan Smith are helping throw a birthday party 100 years in the making – and covering an area nearly 100 miles long.

Both men work for the National Park Service (NPS) and its Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR), based in Yankton. They are hosting an open house Monday to solicit the public’s input on activities for the NPS’ centennial. The year-long celebration officially kicks off Aug. 25 on the system’s 99<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The MNRR consists of a 98-mile corridor – 39 miles from Pickstown to Running Water and 59 miles from Gavins Point Dam to Ponca State Park. In addition, the MNRR includes the lower 20 miles of the Niobrara River and a portion of Verdigre Creek.

At Monday’s open house, they will also roll out the newly-formed “Friends of the MNRR” organization.

“The Friends is a private, non-profit entity that will provide more avenues for fundraising and advocacy for the river and its events,” said Clark, the MNRR superintendent since December 2013.

The open house will be held



The Missouri River National Recreational River’s headquarters at Yankton provides greater visibility for the nationally-designated wild and scenic river.

from 2:30-7 p.m. Monday with identical presentations at 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. The event will be held at the large picnic shelter in Riverside Park. In case of inclement weather, the open house will be moved to the Dakota Territorial Capitol replica in Riverside Park.

While helping kick off the nationwide NPS centennial, Monday’s open house will focus on ideas for local MNRR celebrations, said Smith, a park ranger and director of the interpretive outreach programs.

“We’re looking at events up and down the rec river. We’re looking at partnerships with communities and local groups,” he said. “We’ll talk to communities we have worked with before, from Vermillion, Yankton, Ponca and Niobrara all the way up to Pickstown and Fort Randall Dam. But we’ll also work with any other community in planning different hometown celebrations.”

As part of its NPS centennial kickoff, the MNRR will host an Aug. 29 event at Mulberry Bend, overlooking the Vermillion-Newcastle bridge on the Missouri River, Smith said.

### Preserving History

The MNRR looks similar to what it did when explorers Lewis and

Clark passed through the area in the early 1800s, Clark said. The two free-flowing stretches have been designated as wild and scenic river, unlike other portions altered by the network of dams.

“People don’t realize how special we have it with the unique stature of the rec river,” he said. “This is one of the few stretches where the river remains intact and fundamentally as it could have been through history.”

Smith noted the MNRR’s unique nature in comparison to the rest of Missouri River’s roughly 2,300 miles.

“Only about half of the Missouri River still runs unchannelized and is a wild and scenic river,” he said. “The Missouri is the longest river in North America, but we have the small piece of the river that’s still pretty much like it was 200 years ago.”

The MNRR offers a rich mixture of recreation, culture, history, wildlife, habitat and overall environment, Smith said. “It’s a natural river, and we’re trying to protect and conserve it,” he said.

The mission is shared through the coordinated effort of federal agencies and several other parties, Clark said.

“With the rec river, we have two states and multiple counties and

other local entities,” he said. “It’s not unprecedented to have two states (cover a park system), and there are challenges because of it. But there are also twice as many opportunities with two state governments and multiple local entities promoting the river.”

### Greater Visibility

The MNRR has gained renewed attention because of its nationally-designated water trail, Smith said. The water trail’s website promotes canoeing and kayaking, among other activities.

“You can take day trips, and (the website) takes you through the amenities, boat ramps, camps, water (for usage) and restrooms,” he said.

The water trail continues the momentum which the MNRR received from the Lewis and Clark Trail’s bicentennial about a decade ago, Smith said.

“The nationally-designated water trail has created more interest in the river,” he said. “People are feeling safer about using the river. It’s nice and peaceful, and they can get out, enjoy it and respect it.”

The NPS centennial will receive prime national exposure when Mount Rushmore is featured on a

float in the Tournament of Roses parade on New Year’s Day, Clark said.

Closer to home, South Dakota Tourism Secretary Jim Hagen told the *Press & Dakotan* that state officials are interested in promoting the NPS centennial, including MNRR activities.

In addition, the MNRR has received heightened visibility through its Mobile Ranger Station. The vehicle allows visitors to learn the culture, history and environment of the river and those who have inhabited or visited it.

Smith has witnessed the positive reaction when he has taken the mobile ranger station on the road.

“We’ve had such great success,” he said. “It brings us better recognition wherever we put it in place.”

Clark has also seen the ways in which the traveling exhibit has benefited the MNRR.

“We have little land mass, and we’re not the traditional park with a visitors’ center. But the mobile ranger station brings the park to the people,” he said. “The mobile ranger station is a gateway to the park. It contributes to the people getting a better sense of the unit as part of the National Park Service.”

The MNRR also offers interpretive programs on the Meridian Bridge at Yankton, Clark said. “We get about 40 people (for each program). It’s very well received,” he said.

The NPS centennial, and the MNRR activities in particular, will allow both residents and visitors to appreciate the rec river as a national treasure, Smith said. The location of the MNRR headquarters in Yankton has helped in that regard, he said.

“We’ve been part of the national park system for some time, but the (presence of a) staff here is pretty young. I’ve been here 14 years, and I was the first park ranger,” he said.

“We’re getting people to recognize us as a unit of the National Park Service. Our vision for the future is for people to enjoy (the rec river) and respect it.”

The NPS centennial provides an opportunity not only to look back on past successes but also to build for the future, Clark said.

“We encourage parents to take their children to the national parks,” he said. “We’re connecting the next generation to the National Park Service and what we’re trying to accomplish.”

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