

Land Conservation Helps Protect the Meramec River

The Challenge

The Meramec River is one of Missouri's longest rivers, flowing 220 miles before emptying into the Mississippi River. It is home to many freshwater mussels and is designated as a "Red Ribbon Trout Stream" by the Missouri Department of Conservation. St. Louis residents receive some of their drinking water from the Meramec.

Springs and the surrounding forest landscape both contribute to the high water quality provided by the Meramec, though this was not always the case. By the end of World War II, the river was no longer swimmable. As a result of the Clean Water Act, though, the river has recovered greatly. Area residents take pride in the river's recovery. Each August they participate in a river cleanup that has been ongoing for 45 years. In 2009 the National Fish Habitat Board named the Meramec as one of its 10 "Waters to Watch" in its effort to highlight improving river systems. However, 20 cities are located in the Meramec River watershed and 2.5 million people live within a half-hour drive of the river, causing ongoing concerns about flooding, urban development, and pollutants.

The Solution

Continuing to improve the water quality of the Meramec River will take a multipronged approach:

- Prioritizing and establishing conservation easements on forest land tracts where long-term protection may support multiple conservation values. Activity: Conservation easements funded through the Forest Legacy Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund.
- Developing innovative marketing strategies to attract forest landowners who have been reluctant to develop and implement a management plan for their land. Activity: Targeted forest stewardship plan writing and implementation.
- Retaining rural landscapes by supporting farmers who are installing livestock watering devices instead of accessing water from the Meramec River and planting riparian forest buffers to restore streambank stability. Activity: Landowner assistance funded by the NFWF Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund and funds from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Fish Habitat Action Plan.



Lower Meramec River. Photo provided by the Open Space Council, Ron Coleman

- Protecting drinking water supplies by recommending ways to address nonpoint source pollution. Activity: Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry watershed project with additional funding provided by the NFWF Upper Mississippi Watershed Fund.

Resulting Benefits

Benefits include protecting 685 acres of forest land through conservation easements as well as improved grazing practices and tree plantings on 16 farms totaling 3,900 acres and 11 miles of stream front. Two landowners planted 57 acres of trees in the riparian area. Long-term protection of forested areas through conservation easements will continue as a result of 2009 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and 2010 U.S. Forest Service ReDesign grants.

Sharing Success

The Trust for Public Land conducted a "strategy exchange" in the Lower Meramec, bringing together experts in land conservation, stormwater runoff, and septic systems. Priority area maps that designate high-value land conservation and stormwater management areas in three subwatersheds of the Lower Meramec are available for local partner use through the Trust for Public Land Web site. The Trust trained local officials on how to access and use these maps. The National Fish Habitat Board also gave the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Lower Bourbeuse Landowner Committee an award to recognize their "extraordinary action in support of fish habitat conservation."



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