In these days of highly processed food, few activities revitalize a soul and stimulate a palate like an outing to the river to gather vit­ tles off a vine, shrub or tree. Wild greens and fruits often taste better and contain more vitamins than supermarket produce. Besides, there is the fun of the hunt, tracking down clusters of ripe berries and popping them in your mouth on the spot, or savor­ing the wild flavor of a freshly picked leaf or mush­room.

You probably have two edible plants you call weeds growing in your front yard — dandelions and plantains. But the bottomland forests, islands and shorelines of the Upper Mississippi River are lush with tasty wild plants.

Perhaps the first wild food of the year is the sap from maples, birch­ es, boxelders and the occasional sycamore, boiled to make syrup or used for cooking and drinking. The trees should be tapped in early spring when the snow begins to thaw but before their leaves appear — warm, sunny days with cold nights. Bore a half-inch hole two or three inches into the trunk, making sure it slants upwards. Insert a spile, or spigot, into the hole, sharp end first, and hang a pail on it. About 30 to 40 gallons of maple sap boil down to a single gallon of syrup.

Most people who fre­ quent the river and its lands know of at least one fast-running stream where lush beds of watercress grow. Its peppery leaves send fire through the sinuses when eaten raw, but tamed with milk or cream, watercress makes a tangy, savory soup.

Melting winter snow reveals the young shoots of skunk cabbage, Solomon's-seal, cattails and dandelions, all best enjoyed before their flowers appear, lightly steamed or boiled. By the time robins' eggs appear, violets are dancing across the grass and in the woods; their leaves are edible, and their delicate blossoms can be candied in sugar and used to decorate cakes, salads and

(Peregrines continues on page 4)
beverages.

In late April and May, that solitary, secretive species known as the mushroom hunter plies woods and floodplains in search of morels. These cone-shaped fungi with pitted caps are equally furtive in the underbrush, hoping to avoid the eyes of the hungry mycophagist. Once located and ushered into the kitchen, morels are a special treat, sautéed in butter or stuffed with leeks and bacon.

People are often surprised to learn that stinging nettles make delectable and nourishing greens, rivaling spinach. The French make them into a nourishing soup. Nettles are best early in the spring, before their leaves and stems toughen, but you can eat them throughout the year if you blanch them first. Their sting disappears with cooking, and some people pluck them without gloves, believing that the more tentatively you touch them, the more they sting. “Grab them like you mean business,” advises nature expert Ken Salwey.

Nonetheless, if you get stung, relieve the pain by crushing the juice from the watery leaves and stems of the touch-me-not, or jewelweed, onto your skin. They also reputedly combat the itch of poison ivy. Once you’ve completed your first aid, you can boil the jewelweed greens in a couple changes of water and eat them, too. Discard the cooking water, don’t drink it.

Thistles also make delicious greens after a quick peeling to remove their thorns. Their stems and leaves have a delicate flavor reminiscent of artichokes, to which they are often related. Nonetheless, stinging nettles are still the most popular green. Before you harvest them, be sure to wear gloves to avoid the painful sting. Nettles are best early in the spring, when they are tender and rich in nutrients. They are also a great source of protein and vitamin C. So, next spring, get out there and gather your own nettle greens!
are related. The silvery-gray leaves of lamb’s quarters and sturdy, succulent stalks and leaves of green amaranth are also choice potherbs.

Tiny red flowers and kidney-shaped leaves herald wild ginger, whose spicy-smelling roots can be dried and rolled in sugar syrup to make “backwoods candy.” And to add an anise flavor to candy, salads, and baked goods, bruise the roots and green fruit of sweetcicely.

The rampant growth of summer delivers more greens, flowers and fruit. Daylilies escaped from flower gardens brighten roadsides with their riotous orange and yellow blossoms. All parts of the daylily are edible, from its asparagus-like shoots to its crisp tubers, but its blossoms and flowerbuds make the choicest delicacies, especially when swiftly deep-fried, tempura-style.

Early June marks the beginning of wild strawberries, and you are truly lucky if you can find enough of the tiny, exquisitely fragrant fruit to fill a bowl. The trick is finding them before the birds and squirrels, but if the vines are stripped bare of these red jewels, the leaves make a pleasant tea rich in vitamin C.

Clovers are plentiful and a good protein source. The leaves are best cooked rather than raw, and the dried flowers make a healthful tea when mixed with other teas. The dried seeds and flowerheads can be ground into flour.

Milkweed is another edible plant commonly found along roadsides and in meadows. The young shoots, top leaves and flowerbuds should be cooked in several changes of water to eliminate their bitterness. Bring each change of water to a rapid boil before adding the milkweed, for cold or lukewarm water tends to fix the bitter flavor. The milkweed becomes a mild, pleasant vegetable, and the flower heads can be made into fritters.

The juicy stems and leaves of purslane make an interesting vegetable or potherb that may not be to everyone’s liking, for they become somewhat slimy.

Keep track of where the five-petalled pink blossoms of wild rose ramble, for in the fall they bear cherry-sized orange fruits called hips, which are one of the richest natural sources of vitamin C. Some people like to make tea from the hips, or gather the flowers to make rose-petal jam or to sprinkle raw in salads. When the calls of red-winged blackbirds hang in the heavy, humid summer air and dragonflies seem to wilt in the heat, it’s time to take a cooling dip in the backwaters and look for the delicacies of late summer and fall. We’ll explore them in the next issue. 🌸

Mi Ae Lipe-Butterbrodt is associate editor of Big River.


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**Corps Under Siege**

By Reggie McLeod

The case against the Army Corps of Engineers’ $54 million Navigation Study gained credibility and momentum in May, when a panel of three independent economists and an economist for the Corps claimed the study used flawed data.

In February Corps economist Donald Sweeney filed a whistleblower suit claiming that his bosses replaced him as head of the economic part of the study when he refused to pump up figures to justify expanding the lock-and-dam system on the Mississippi River. In May, Richard Manguno, Sweeney’s successor on the study, told Senate investigators that his boss, Col. James Mudd, commander of the Corps’ Rock Island District, directed him to change the study’s economic data in order to justify expanding the system.

Months before the scandal broke, the Northeast Midwest Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based, nonpartisan, environmental and economic research institute, asked three economists to evaluate the economic section of the Navigation Study. The economists, Steven Berry, Yale University; Geoffrey Hewings, University of Illinois; and Charles Levin, Washington University, have no connections to the Corps, shipping interests or groups opposed to lock-and-dam expansion.

The panel found the economics study to be deeply flawed: “Our findings suggest that there is no compelling reason for this project to move ahead at this time. First, demand projections provided by the USACE [Army Corps of Engineers] seem to be seriously at
The Native Americans who lived along the river in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota must have admired these birds. They carved falcon-shaped petroglyphs into cave walls. They built falcon-shaped mounds on the bluff tops. Several of these mounds remain at Effigy Mounds National Monument, near Marquette, Iowa.

Experts estimate there never were many more than 20 pairs on the upper river. In the 1950s and 60s, peregrines here and across the continent were nearly wiped out by the pesticide DDT. The last wild one was seen on a cliff near Effigy Mounds National Monument in 1964.

After successfully breeding captive peregrines and releasing dozens of birds at nesting boxes on power plant smokestacks for 20 years, Bob Anderson, director of the Raptor Resource Project (RRP), wanted to try getting the birds back on the bluffs where they belong. Not everyone thought it was possible. Adult peregrines are fierce hunters, but the young are prey for great horned owls and raccoons.

In the summer of 1998, Anderson and other RRP volunteers rapelled down a cliff to a nesting box, or "hack box," attached to a cliff at Effigy Mounds National Monument and set young birds into a protective new home. Volunteers returned every day to feed them dead quail and monitor their progress, staying hidden behind a special blind to prevent the young birds from imprinting on humans. This labor of love took about five hours a day: a one-hour drive to the site; a one-hour hike to the cliff; one hour watching the birds; and another two hours to get out and go home. They watched nervously for signs of owls or raccoons near the box.

All nine of young birds survived the early rigors of learning to fly and hunt on the cliff. A year later one young male was found dead at the foot of a cliff in La Crosse, Wis., most likely struck by a car. This year one of the birds released in 1998 built a nest at Queen's Bluff in Blufflands State Park, about 10 miles downstream from Winona, Minn.

In May, Anderson surveyed all the bluffs from the Twin Cities to Marquette, Iowa, at an altitude of 500 feet from a helicopter provided by Dairyland Power Company. He rated each cliff as a potential peregrine nest site. "We discovered that we're not missing any. Twenty years of hiking around and watching has showed us all the likely spots."

Peregrines may now be nesting on many cliffs along the river, including John Latsch State Park (10 miles north of Winona, Minn.); Lansing, Iowa; and Alma, Cassville and Maiden Rock, Wis. "Last year we had no nesting on the cliffs. This year we have five!" Anderson said.

Anderson hopes to visit the Queen's Bluff nest one day to find newly hatched young. Then, in his words, "The peregrine will be back on the Mississippi, for sure, forever!"

But is it the same Mississippi? The river has changed in countless ways since the early 1960s. The water is less polluted, but islands and forests have diminished. Many migratory songbirds, a seasonal food source for peregrines, are in decline, but pigeons, an easy prey, are more plentiful. Raccoons, a predator of eggs and nestlings, are also more plentiful; they're not trapped as heavily as they were in the 50s and 60s, when pelts were worth $50.

Researchers are testing for increased levels of heavy metals in peregrine habitat, especially near power plants. One very important thing has not changed a bit: the craggy, steep dolomite and sandstone cliffs that peregrines nest on.

Humans who live in the valley, too, are glad to see the return of this amazing bird to the bluffslands.

Watch for peregrines along the river and call in your sightings to the toll-free number 1-877-575-2860 or email them to the Raptor Resource Project rrp@salamander.com.

Pamela Eyden lives in Winona, Minn.

Photo by Allan Zarling, courtesy Effigy Mounds National Monument.

odds with recent evidence and projections provided by other specialists. Thus, the presumption of future congestion seems not to be substantiated. Further, there seem to be growing possibilities for diverting grain to other uses (potentially creating more value-added for the region) or diverting grain for export to other ports using alternative transportation systems.

In another development, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), put the Corps on notice that the lock-and-dam system and shipping jeopardizes two endangered species, the Higgins' eye pearl-mussel and the pallid sturgeon. The Corps must work with the FWS to relocate Higgins' eyes to environments where they can survive and restore habitat for pallid sturgeons. The Corps will also have to reduce damage to several other threatened and endangered species, including the bald eagle, winged mapleleaf mussel, least tern and Indiana bat.

The Army Corps of Engineers is a branch of the Army, which is part of the Department of Defense and thus part of the executive branch of the government. When Sweeney's whistle-blower suit brought to light problems in the Corps, the Pentagon and Army began reorganizing the Corps to increase its accountability. Three Republican senators, Armed Services Committee Chairman John W. Warner (R-Va.), Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Robert C. Smith (R-N.H.) and Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) told the Army not to reorganize the Corps. Then Stevens and Energy and Water Subcommittee Chairman Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.) introduced a rider to a farm budget bill to prevent the Corps from reorganizing in the future, according to the Washington Post (5-13-00).

The rider says: "None of the funds made available in this or any other Act may be used to restructure, reorganize, abolish, transfer, consolidate or otherwise alter or modify the organizational or management oversight structure; existing delegations; or functions or activities applicable to the Army Corps of Engineers."

Corps critics claim it is a major conduit for pork-barrel projects that Congress wants to protect. An Associated Press story from mid May reports that Corps and Army officials told a Senate subcommittee that Congress has given the go-ahead, but not the funding, for $38 billion of navigation, flood control and other water construction projects. The Corps gets about $1.6 billion a year for these projects.  

Reggie McLeod is editor of Big River.

Letter to the Editor


Before leaving the slip, brief guests on how to use the head and what can and cannot be flushed.

All recreational boaters should know how to navigate the rivers. Courses from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary or the U.S. Sail and Power Squadrons (USSPS) are an excellent way to develop your boating skills.

A safety warning to houseboats with davits bolted through the stern deck or the transom: If thunder storms are likely, drop your dinghy and secure it to the shore or beside your houseboat. Otherwise, strong winds and waves may fill the dinghy until the weight tears off the davits and sinks your boat. (A 36-foot houseboat did sink with me and my wife aboard due to the dinghy filling.)

Writer Holecek stated he preferred to tie a line from his boat cleat to a tree on shore rather than using anchors. In my opinion this is safe in a calm anchorage, without towboat and recreational boat wakes. Otherwise, I recommend three anchors, not lines tied to trees: two anchor lines in the wet sand from either the stern, mid—cleat or bow cleats (the later with the boat floating in two to three feet of water off the shore).

An anchor line tied to a tree may burn and break, but a proper anchor in the wet sand will dig deeper as tows pass. The popular stainless steel stick anchors are fine for day beaching in calm weather. They are useless in heavy winds and high waves and should not be used overnight.

If a storm is coming, set a stern anchor 50 to 100 feet on the upstream side of the boat and tie the bitter end to the downriver stern cleat, to avoid being blown into the shore.

And finally, the USSPS Port Captain program publishes the names and contact information of port captains for each area, for its members. These volunteers can answer questions about launching areas, where to cruise, beaching areas, rules on overnighting, restaurants, marinas and safe anchorages.

I also recommend that every boater purchase the Army Corps of Engineers' Upper Mississippi River Navigation Charts, available from Big River and most boating supply stores.

Sincerely,
Donald B. Anderson
Golden Valley, Minnesota
Past Commander St. Paul Sail And Power Squadron
Port Captain USSPS
Lowdown on Drawdown

St. Paul – “Maybe not” is the consensus of the River Resources Forum on whether to conduct a drawdown on Pool 8 this summer. Dry weather conditions prompted the Corps of Engineers (Corps) to revisit the plan to reduce the water levels in Pool 8, between La Crosse and Genoa, Wisconsin, by 1.5 feet in order to encourage the growth of aquatic plants important to wildlife. Drawdowns simulate the natural low water levels seen on the river before the installation of the lock-and-dam system. Recent rains have improved river levels, but the long-range forecast still predicts a dry summer.

According to Gary Palesh, of the Corps, a meeting was held on May 5 to consider the drawdown, but no decision was made. During a subsequent meeting on May 10, a recommendation was made to postpone the drawdown for one year; a final decision will be made on June 1. This decision must be reviewed and accepted by the River Resources Forum members: the Corps, the departments of natural resources of Minnesota and Wisconsin, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Park Service. Palesh noted that the drawdown should be conducted when conditions favor its success, even if that requires a one-year wait.

Passport to Fun

Twin Cities – Parents looking for fun and educational summer activities for kids should check out the Mighty Mississippi Passport. The passport is a 33-page booklet that lists 62 activities for families and kids who want to enjoy the river this summer.

Activities include birding hikes, fishing, canoeing, visiting historic sites and environmental activities. All activities are free, and groups are welcome to pre-register for most events. Kids who attend collect stamps in their passports to send in for a free pin or entry in a grand prize drawing in the fall. The program is a joint project of Wilderness Inquiry, Target Stores and the McKnight Foundation. Passports are available by calling (612) 676-9444, or check the links on the Big River website.

Park Developments

Koch Petroleum Group, which was fined $7 million in civil penalties last year for pollution and contaminants found at their Rosemont, Minn. refinery near the Mississippi River, has donated 43 acres of riverfront land to the City of Hastings for a park. According to the St. Paul Pioneer Press (4-21-00), the area is the site of a former petroleum tank farm and will cost $3 million to renovate. Plans for the park would restore native vegetation and build a trail system and a picnic area. Last year Koch gave a total of $1 million to eight environmental projects in the area as part of the settlement agreement, (see “Fine for the Environment,” Big River, September 1999).

Across the river from Hastings, in Prescott, Wis., plans are underway to remodel Freedom Park. The park sits on a bluff overlooking the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. The plan includes two new overlooks, new picnic shelters and a playground, and eventually the construction of a Learning Center. The plan aims to balance the needs of the community with attracting visitors.

In Winona, Minn., anonymous donors have offered the city $1 million to help refurbish the 83-year-old Wagon Bridge (Winona Daily News, 5-5-00) to provide access to Aghaming Park, a tract of 1,800 acres of wild bottomland forest. An additional $1 million will be needed for the bridge project, plus additional funds for trails, observation docks and a floating visitors center.

Downriver, in St. Donatus, Iowa, Pat Kennedy has an ambitious plan to convert 325 acres of bluffland into a major park attraction, according to the Dubuque Telegraph Herald (4-28-00). Kennedy is not planning to create an ordinary park, but a “non-consumptive recreation complex” to include cabins, eight miles of trails, a bird sanctuary and an operating replica of a 19th century river ferry, among other ideas. Kennedy will need cash to put his plans into motion: $1 million to buy the property and about $10 million for development.

Shared Values

Washington, DC – The Environmental Defense Fund polled 1,000 people on their environmental attitudes, and found many similarities between members of the Baby Boom generation (45 to 55) and the Internet generation (18 to 25). Members of both age groups believe that environmental problems are worse than they were 30 years ago, and that individual action and public education are “powerful methods of tackling environmental problems.”

Both groups agreed that environmental organizations are the most likely to do the right thing for the environment, and that Republicans are the least likely to do the right thing. In addition, a majority of the people polled from each group have participated in Earth Day Activities.

Older respondents worried more
about toxic waste than did the younger group, (79%, 63%). The only area where the younger group exhibited more concern was about endangered species, (56%, 49%). Check the Big River web site for a link to the entire survey, including questions and results.

No Luck, No Vice
Davenport, Iowa – The President riverboat casino is awash in over $70 million in debt, and may be for sale. Its parent company, President Casinos Inc., posted $10.6 million in losses last year, according to the Quad City Times (3-5-00). The company has met with potential buyers. Still it seems likely that the boat, even if sold, would remain in Davenport since it is the company’s most profitable location.

In addition to financial troubles, the President’s dockmate, the Vice President, is headed for St. Louis. The boat’s presence at the foot of the Government Bridge proved unwelcome according to the Quad City Times (4-15-00) because it sat unused and covered up, blocking the view of the river for nearby hotel patrons and riverfront visitors. Ironically, the boat may need to return in a few months to act as a stand-in for the President, which will return to Louisiana for a hull inspection in the fall.

Safe Passage
Rock Island/Davenport – A cantilevered bike and pedestrian pathway addition to the Government Bridge-Arsenal Island crossing is planned, pending funding from an Illinois Department of Transportation (DOT) grant. Cyclists and pedestrians can cross the bridge now, but face dangerous traffic conditions according to the Quad City Times (4-13-00). The $1.22 million plan includes ramp approaches on both the Illinois and Iowa sides, and a cantilevered, 10-foot-wide pathway attached to the causeway bridge over Sylvan Slough. A decision on the $801,440 grant request is expected this month.

Swan Song Indeed
Alma, Wisconsin – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may introduce a tundra swan hunting season in Wisconsin. In a letter in the Spring 2000 issue of the Alma Tundra Swan Watch newsletter, Swan Song, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Complex Manager, James Fisher, asks Jon Bergquist of the Wisconsin DNR to discuss the matter with the FWS.

The letter, dated March 21, raises several concerns about a possible hunt. If conducted, the hunt would likely occur on FWS lands, since those are the areas where the birds concentrate during migration. Fisher’s primary concern is balancing the benefits of only a few hunters with those of thousands of people who enjoy observing the swans. According to Fisher, the number of swan watch visitors to Alma numbered over 20,000 in 1999.

Pressure to open new bird species to hunting appears to be increasing. Wisconsin residents attending statewide spring fish and wildlife rules hearings in 1999 approved the concept of a limited sandhill crane hunt. Just two months ago at the same hearings, a hunt of mourning doves, the Wisconsin state bird, was approved. The results of Wisconsin fish and wildlife hearings are taken under consideration by the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, which advises the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board.

Sewer Tax
Moline, Ill. – Home owners will soon see a modest rise in their property taxes to finance a renovation of Moline’s storm sewer system, according to the Quad City Times (4-26-00). The improvement will bring it into compliance with new federal laws regulating pollution in storm sewer runoff.

While the city’s sanitary and storm sewers are separate, the aging storm sewers are causing some damage to city streets. Taxes for the new sewers are not based on property value, but on property size. Quarter-acre lots, which make up about 70 percent of residential properties in the city would pay an increase of $16 per year.

Sky-Tinted Waters
St. Paul – Although the word “Minnesota” means “sky-tinted waters,” the Minnesota River is more than sky-tinted these days; its a major source of pollution for the Upper Mississippi. The Minnesota River drains 10 million acres of land mostly dotted with farms and small towns, not smoke-belching factories. The pollution from these areas add up to a heavy load of phosphorus, sediment, fecal coliform bacteria, nitrogen and other harmful substances.

A new plan to reduce pollution in the Minnesota has been released by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The draft Minnesota River Basin Water Quality Plan sets forth a simple yet challenging goal: “To protect, restore, and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the water in the Minnesota River Basin.” To attain this goal, the plan outlines seven subgoals with objectives and some measurable outcomes to achieve lower levels of a number of specific pollutants.

The plan is in its draft form, and the specifics of how it will be put into action and many details remain incomplete. The plan is currently being reviewed at a series of public hearings.

The Big River website (www.big-river.com) lists links for more information about many of the stories in this issue.
**Special Events & Festivals**

**June**

3 Bay City Daze, Bay City, Wis.

3 St. Anthony Park Arts Festival, St. Paul, Minn.

3-10 National River Cleanup Week, free information and trash bags for groups, register, (651) 558-3593.

4 Wis. State Parks Open House Day

9-11 Jesse James Wild West Days, Marquette, Iowa, 1-800-896-0910.

9-11 Felix Adler Days, Clinton, Iowa,

9-12 Illinois' Free Fishing Days, (217) 785-8955.

10-11 Take A Kid Fishing Weekend, Minn. State Parks, 1-800-657-3929.

10-11 Art & River Festival, Winona, Minn., (507) 452-2272.

10-11 Tour of Historic Homes, Galena, Ill., 1-800-747-9377.

12-17 Spass Tag Festival, St. Cloud, Minn., (320) 252-6822.

14 Mermaid Festival/Ice Cream Social, Bellevue, Iowa, (319) 872-5830.

15-18 Rendezvous, Prairie du Chien, Wis., 1-800-732-1673.

17 Mississippi River Carp Festival, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, Brooklyn Park, Minn. , (763) 476-4663.

17 Summerfest, Maiden Rock, Wis., 1-800-474-3723.

17 Art in the Park, Clinton, Iowa, (319) 243-4054.

17 Steamboat Saga 2000, noon to dusk, Pepin, Wis., (715) 442-2248.

17-18 Stone Arch Festival of the Arts, Minneapolis, Minn.

19 Take a Dad Fishing, free launching, Camp LaCupolis, Minn., (651) 565-4318.

20-21 Solstice River, 8:30 p.m., performance at the Stone Arch Bridge, Minneapolis, Minn.

22-25 Catfish Festival, Dubuque, Iowa, (319)583-8535.

22-25 Wheels, Wings, & Water Festival, St. Cloud, Minn., (320) 252-6822.

23-24 Riverfest, Moine, Ill.

23-25 Water Ski Days, Lake City, Minn.

24 Bird Walk, 8 a.m., Effigy Mounds National Monument, Harpers Ferry, Iowa, (319) 873-3491.

30-July 2 Mississippi Valley Blues Festival, Davenport, Iowa. (319) 32-BLUES.

30-July 4 Riverboat Days, Clinton, Iowa, 1-800-895-7277.

**Mississippi Tours**

Friends of the Mississippi River Pre-registration required, (651) 222-2193.

**June**

10 Prairie Wildflowers and Birds, 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m., Grey Cloud Dunes Scientific and Natural Area, Cottage Grove, Minn.

**July**

8 Swede Hollow Walk and Talk, 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m., St. Paul, Minn.

22 Mississippi River Canoe Adventure, 8 a.m.-2 p.m., Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn.

**Meetings & Hearings**

**June**

8 Lower Wis. Riverway Board, 5 p.m., Rhinelander Cabin, Mazomanie, Wis., 1-800-221-3792 or (608) 739-3188.

15-17 River of Dreams, Mississippi River Partnering Conference, Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis.

**Workshops & Conferences**

**June**

3 Boating safety course, Arsenal Island, Rock Island, Ill., (309) 794-5338.

6 Profiting from Wildlife Tourism, 8:30 a.m., Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Bloomington, Minn., register, (651) 296-6157.

**July**

31-Aug. 4 Rivers Project of Southern Illinois University, teacher training, Edwardsville, Ill., (618) 650-3788.

Check the Big River website (www.big-river.com) for additional calendar information.

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**Almanac by Kenny Salwey**

River kids migrate from schoolhouse classrooms to those of the outdoor variety. Pencils, textbooks, calculators and book bags are exchanged for fishing poles, canoe paddles, outboard motors and new swimming hole ropes.

The Main Channel is busy with towboats, pleasure craft, fishing and excursion boats. Wing dams are the summer haunts for catfish, walleyes, sauger, sheepshead and smallmouth bass.

The backwater plants stand lush and dark — pickerelweed, cattails, softstem bulrush, waterlily, arrowhead and lotus, homes for schools of minnows, largemouth bass, sunfish and dogfish. Painted turtles, softshells, rare Blanding's turtle and the old mossback snapper all live here. This month they sometimes travel quite a ways to their sandy, high-ground nesting areas. Egrets, great blue, night and green herons stroll leisurely about their secret fishing holes until a flock of cormorants converge to compete with their wading kin for the finny bounty.

Critter youngsters are growing fast. The exuberance of youth is evident in skunk, possum and raccoon as they search these placid places for frogs, fish and turtle eggs.

June brings feelings of adventure and freedom to all — young or old, human or critter. It brings a freshness to the air. The sun seems brighter, the sky bluer. More things to do and more time to do them.