



TRIB-bing

If you have missed past issues of The TRIB, our new e-newsletter for local river advocates, you can access the archives in the newsletter section of our website, www.wisconsinrivers.org. The TRIB provides

Let Them Paddle Canoes

by Allison Werner

Every kid in our watershed should have the opportunity to have at least one paddling experience before they graduate high school."

This is the vision the Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters (FOTSCH) have set after learning that a local student didn't get a scholarship to a conservation camp because she had never been in a canoe.

How did a kid surrounded by the St. Croix River and the numerous lakes of northwestern Wisconsin never paddle one of them in 18 years? FOTSCH concluded that the major barriers between children and water were a

lack of access to boats and willing adults to lead outings. Their solution is Canoes on Wheels (COW), a program that trains teachers and other educators to integrate paddling experiences into

lakes, rivers, and wetlands," says FOTSCH's executive director, Scott Peterson. As individuals, young and old, participate in the COW program, they will come to better understand FOTSCH's goals and the group will better understand the community, in turn fostering new partnerships. This program has already helped FOTSCH better communicate what conservation means to them.



Young customers of the Friends of St. Croix Headwaters' COW program (Photo courtesy Scott Peterson)

Their new tag line is, "Conservation is about people taking care of the places they love."

Some of the other outcomes of this project so far are full board participation in planning,

*organizational tips and
tools from river groups
around the state and
information about funding
opportunities, trainings,
and events.*

*To sign-up for
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their curriculum. The COW program includes eight canoes and equipment for educators to use free of charge.

Stream-huggers go to school

The COW program also helped strengthen FOTSCH as an organization. During an organizational assessment exercise that the River Alliance conducted, the board of directors determined they needed to change the perception of their group in the community. FOTSCH

fundraising and implementing the program, and the addition of two new board members. FOTSCH leveraged a \$5,000 organizational development grant from River Alliance of Wisconsin and raised an additional \$7,500 from local businesses, civic groups and municipalities. To recognize the donations, decals of the sponsors' names were placed on the canoes and boat trailer. Did we mention that all of this work was completed in about six months?

River Alliance is proud of and impressed with

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board members knew their efforts to test the water quality and create watershed plans would not only improve the health of their rivers and lakes, but would also result in better water for recreation for all. However, like many other river groups, they felt they were perceived as “stream-huggers.” Connecting with community values is one of the best ways for groups to gain support for their issues.

“The Canoes on Wheels program has been a great opportunity to better understand and work on what is really important to the community and to more effectively communicate the need for improved public stewardship of our streams,

the work FOTSCH has accomplished. The COW program is a great example of what a small river group can accomplish when they take the time to stop and evaluate their organization and set simple plans to address immediate priorities.

Oh yeah, FOTSCH wants you to know that the student did get to go to the conservation camp. She learned to canoe and had a great time!

Learn more about Canoes on Wheels at www.fotsch.org. ♦