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Missouri River Relief is a community- and equipment-based 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to connect people to the Missouri River through hands-on river clean-ups, education events & stewardship activities. Going strong **since 2001**, the organization has conducted **133 River Clean-ups** making a visible & lasting difference in more than **30 river communities**, bringing together **21,005 volunteers** to haul **801 tons of trash** from **1,031 miles of river** and **16,545 students and teachers** to river education events.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – November 11, 2015

EPA grant for \$91,000 will boost organization capacity to teach and connect people to the Missouri River

Columbia, Mo. – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced yesterday the recipients of the Environmental Education grants in 2015 and Missouri River Relief (MRR) has been awarded \$91,000 to complete a work plan over the next two years for stewardship and education.

The grant is called “Building Capacity for Missouri River Environmental Education” and will provide communities along the lower Missouri River with ways to become actively involved in stewardship activities while increasing educational opportunities for students, teachers and the general public. MRR also will provide skills, training and resources to communities, including distributing \$22,750 in sub-grants to other organizations for increasing and sustaining river stewardship.

“This support from EPA will provide a dependable source of revenue for our project to grow into an interconnected network of people taking action along the Missouri River,” said Jeff Barrow, director of Missouri River Relief. “We are excited to expand our educational programs for people of all ages and especially place-based, service learning for students and teachers.”

EPA funded 35 grants from more than 400 applicants around the country in 24 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. The grants ranged from \$40,000 to \$192,200 for a total of \$3.3 million and they are intended to support projects to increase public awareness about environmental issues and provide participants with the skills to take responsible actions to protect the environment.

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The “Building Capacity” grant work plan consists of three components:

- (1) Building a network of River Action Teams along the lower Missouri River;
- (2) Conducting a river educator workshop entitled “The River Is A Classroom;”
- (3) Hosting an on-the-river summer camp for youth called “Big River Experience.”

MRR expanded its educational programs last year with the addition of a full-time staff member and Education Coordinator Kristen Schulte will be planning, organizing and conducting the teacher workshop and youth summer camp. Her background with outdoor education in natural settings provides the foundation for a successful program. MRR intends to build momentum on these projects to provide similar programs into the future for students and teachers along the Missouri River.

MRR Program Manager Steve Schnarr has been working for years to create a network of people, organizations, businesses and government agencies along the Missouri River. The “Building Capacity” grant will offer a thrust to those efforts by providing resources to develop a directory of partners and a communication forum to foster connections between groups.

In addition, the EPA grant will help support an annual “River Rendezvous” gathering of the Missouri River Action Teams, including race directors, clean-up coordinators, wildlife habitat managers, scientists and others interested and involved with river issues.

“Building Capacity” also provides MRR with \$22,750 out of the total \$91,000 EPA grant to offer min-grants to organizations for stewardship, education and outreach activities. This “ripple” effect will expand the capacity of MRR to support action all along the lower Missouri River in the four states within EPA Region 7 (Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri).

MRR will partner with the Missouri Environmental Education Association to help administer the grant, develop curriculum and distribute sub-grants.

“River Relief provides unique opportunities for people to experience the Missouri River up close with the overall goal of restoring this tremendous resource for future generations,” Barrow said. “The EPA grant will be used to further the goals of making a better river environment for everyone.”

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