



Wisconsin Waters

WISCONSIN'S WATERWAYS HAVE BEEN on CNRA's agenda for most of its 50 years, reflecting a variety of issues critical to preserving the state's rivers, lakes and streams.

In this chapter we tell the story of four rivers, each posing a different problem. The Army Corps of Engineers planned to dam the Kickapoo River as a flood control measure. CNRA fought to protect the beautiful valley from being flooded. The Wisconsin River was polluted. CNRA proposed ways to clean it up. The DNR poisoned the Tomorrow River. CNRA asked a judge to stop the poisoning as part of a larger effort to preserve Wisconsin's fish diversity. The purity of the Wolf River is threatened by a proposed mine in Crandon. CNRA is supporting efforts to ensure all impacts of metallic mining are addressed.

These stories are not yet finished. The Kickapoo is now considered one of the most threatened rivers in Wisconsin, subject to pollution from farmland runoff. The Wisconsin River still harbors toxic substances in its sediments. The DNR continues to poison rivers as a management tool for game fish. And the Wolf River is still threatened by the proposed Crandon Mine.

Finished or not, these stories remain part of CNRA's legacy, along with dozens of other water-related issues spanning the decades. More than any other issue, protecting Wisconsin waterways best exemplifies situations in which CNRA used all of its weaponry: litigation, legislation, education, publication.

The Kickapoo Story

by Louise Rich

MY HUSBAND RON WAS BORN IN Vernon County near Wildcat Mountain State Park, and loved the entire Kickapoo River. He had been a teacher in the one-room school in Jug Creek, which was removed for the dam project. Later, as a professional photographer and devoted naturalist, he knew every nook and cranny of his “crooked river.” Ron and I moved to Baraboo in 1951, but still went back often to hike and canoe along this beautiful river, with its high rocky bluffs and sparkling waters. We got involved in CNRA way back when, in 1953 or '54. I'm still watching what they're doing with the new highway they're proposing here, and hope that CNRA will pick up on this like they did during the seventies.

A bit of background. For years, the citizens of La Farge had complained to the Federal Government about the Kickapoo floods. The Army Corps of Engineers began studying flooding on the Kickapoo in the 1930s, when Congress passed the first national Flood Control Act. By 1950, the Corps had put together three flood control plans. Ron was intrigued by the fact that the Corps was thinking of building a large dam half way down the river rather than doing something to control the amount of water in the numerous tributaries feeding the river, cascading down the steep valleys.

In 1957, Fred G. Wilson, Chief State Forester, proposed establishing a state forest along the river to help hold back the water; the plan was never implemented due to lack of funds. A few years later, the Army Corps presented a plan for an 800-acre reservoir lake that would help control water level fluctuations in the valley. Then, in 1961, the Wisconsin Conservation Department, which became the DNR, was charged with managing the area. The first public meeting, held in La Farge on December 12 that year, indicated that Congressman Vernon Thompson and Senator William Proxmire were both in favor of the project, estimated to cost \$15 million. Boy, was Ron mad!

Governor Gaylord Nelson was chair of the Natural Resources Committee of State Agencies (NRCSA), and was also deeply involved in the review process. The 1962 Federal Flood Control Act authorized the US Army Corps of Engineers to build a flood control dam at La Farge. Money was loosened up, farms along the cliffs were bought up, and buildings were cleared. I remember a CNRA field trip on the Kickapoo River in 1964 that looked at the sites of the two proposed recreation and flood control reservoirs—people were very taken by the beauty of the area and saw the need to take action to protect it.

Several years later, in 1967, we heard that another study supported the idea of making a recreational lake, supposedly to help the local economy. The lake would be much larger and

destroy even more of the river. Land speculators were all around, already visualizing how rich they would become by buying lakefront property. To our chagrin, on March 10, 1967, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission formally approved entering into a long-time lease with the Corps for the La Farge Recreational Area, which would exclude the proposed dam. The Army Corps of Engineers finally got the go-ahead to condemn and purchase farmlands in 1969. Over 140 families were moved off their farms, purchased by eminent domain by the Army Corps of Engineers for almost \$20 million.

During that same period, however, Congress had passed the National Historic Preservation Act, which meant that federal agencies had to consider the impact of their projects on archeological and historic resources. Ron's knowledge and love of the entire area brought him in contact with the Wisconsin State Historical Society, which recorded dozens of archeological sites, including rock shelters, burial mounds, petroglyphs, and open-air camps between 1960 and 1974. Today, there are around 450 known prehistoric archeological sites, dating back as far as 12,000 years.

FRED OTT — *The Kickapoo*

All those canoe enthusiasts rallied to save the Kickapoo. CNRA helped give tours of the river. We even had Senator Gaylord Nelson out there to show him what a great place it was. We didn't take him camping because of those crazy whippoorwills. One night, I counted 4736 "whip-poor-will" calls—it went all night long! All I could think of was "Where the heck is that bird? I'm going to kill him!"

We loved going out there for field trips—it was beautiful!

Ron, with the help of lots of CNRA members, began a letter-writing and telephone campaign to Governor Lucey, Senators Nelson and Proxmire, and Representative Baldus, expending tremendous time and energy to get the decision-makers' attention to stop the project. Ron, Jim Zimmerman and I led a Sunday tour of the dam area.

The Federal government seemed to be on our side for once. In 1969, Congress established the National Environmental Protection Act that required federal agencies to evaluate the effects of their actions on the ecology of an area. One of the first Environmental Impact Statements in the United States was drafted by the Corps of Engineers for the Kickapoo River Project.

Ron had been fighting the project since 1962, and was looked to as a leader by the community. The first meeting opposing the dam and lake was held in Valley in 1970 and was attended by about 25 people. Almost 100 showed up at a meeting in Rockton a few days later. The valley was completely divided between dam opponents and proponents, who threatened to break up any additional meetings. For safety's sake, no more public meetings were held at that time.

A group known as "Citizens for Progress," comprised of project supporters fought against the local interests, which in the meantime involved the Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund, Wisconsin's Environmental Decade, as well as our CNRA friends. We were never shot at, but others were. It got so bad that we would hide our car when we parked anywhere, and when we traveled with Bob Smith, the Sierra Club attorney, he'd get out his binoculars before we could canoe under any of the 18 little bridges along the Valley. It was a scary time, but that happens whenever tempers are hot and lots of money is at stake.

There are many ways to skin a cat – or fight a dam. Even before Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, Ron, our son Fred and a friend, Jan Phelps, embarked on a mission by canoe to see if there were any endangered species in the Valley. They were delighted to discover Arctic Primrose (*Primula mistassinica*) on May 18, 1970. Several months later, they found Northern Monkshood (*Acontium noeboracense*) along the rocky banks; 13% of the world’s population of the species lives in this little valley put aside for flooding. One of the promoters of the dam project actually planted some in her garden to prove they could grow anywhere—the primroses died! Samples of these and other endangered plants were sent to the UW-Madison Arboretum, capturing the interest of the Department of Botany and the Botanical Club of Wisconsin. Ron contacted the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club, and the battle was on.

Despite all our efforts, by late December 1970, almost half of the 9,500 acres required for the proposed reservoir had been purchased and cleared, and building of the dam began. That poor river!

We were all devastated when ground-breaking for the new project occurred on August 13, 1971. Building of the dam started a year later; almost 1800 acres of trees had to be cut for the 12-mile-long reservoir. It hurt us to see what was happening to our beautiful valley.

I didn’t see much of Ron in those days. In April, 1971, during Governor Lucey’s Intensive Review of the Kickapoo Dam Project in Madison, Ron represented the people of the Valley and was asked to serve on the Army Corps’ “Partnership Team” to review the study prepared by the Institute of Environmental Studies and look at alternative methods of flood control. The Institute of Environmental Studies led a study of the water quality of the proposed impoundment, whose

VOICES FROM THE PAST
Jim Zimmerman

Help by expressing your concern to Governor Lucey and to your Senators and Congressmen. A delay in funding could allow time for more information and a healthy redirection of this well-meant but, in my opinion, doomed-to-failure project.

—Letter to CNRA members, July 1973

It is recommended that CNRA members devote their energies to guard against the destruction of this natural resource and remain alert to further attempts to complete the dam. Although the project is stopped for the time being, we have learned that we must remain informed about developments and be aware of changes that may occur in the status of the project ...

—*The CNRA Report*, April 1976

waters would become eutrophic and overly fertile due to runoff from the fields above. The Sierra Club requested a hearing in early 1973, but no decisions were made. Throughout 1976, CNRA members sent letters supporting alternative proposals to the dam. Grassroots opposition grew as the project’s scope expanded from mere flood control to a recreational lake.

By late 1974, President Ford’s White House Council called for a moratorium on the La Farge Dam Project, with the support of Senator Nelson, who had, in the meantime been introduced to the river by canoe enthusiasts. Senator Proxmire, however, under severe pressure from constituents who had purchased land around the proposed lake and hoped for economic booms through development, continued to support the project. The Corps’ own Council on Environmental Quality recommended a halt to construction. When the project was stopped in 1975, CNRA and others were told to write Governor Lucey and get his concurrence.

I remember Governor Lucey going out a limb to make approval of the project contingent upon maintaining good water quality! Toward the end of 1975, Governor Lucey withdrew his support of the dam and ordered trees be planted to replace those that had been cut during the clearing process. In 1979, a federal report entitled “Alternatives for the Kickapoo Dam” written by a state task force was issued. Then finally, in 1985, deauthorization was recommended. All that letter writing, canoe trips with legislators and phone calls by CNRA and other friends of the river worked!

The Wisconsin legislature finally approved the proposal for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, which called for the federal government to return the land to the state for “educational, recreational and low-impact tourism.” Ron was still vigilant, though, as were we all. During the late eighties, he was very worried about five proposed alternatives to upgrade roads in the Kickapoo Valley near the unfinished dam, and asked CNRA to help contact the Wisconsin Department of Transportation calling for improving existing roads and bridges.



CNRA, Sierra Club, conservationists, and canoe enthusiasts fought to protect the scenic Kickapoo River from damming and development—and won. The river above Rockton. (Photo by Orie Loucks, 1971)

Soldiers Grove Film

Interest in the Kickapoo River led CNRA to donate \$1500 toward producing the documentary film, “Come Rain or Shine,” in 1982. The film tells the story of the Village of Soldiers Grove’s innovative way of dealing with periodic flooding of the river. The entire downtown was abandoned and a new commercial center built up the hill. All the new buildings demonstrate various techniques for using solar energy. CNRA visited the village at its annual meeting in 1982. CNRA’s donation was a match for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

— CNRA Report, February 1983

This would be far less detrimental to the natural beauty of the valley, and also discourage thoughts of starting dam construction again.

We all breathed a sigh of relief when the dam project was officially declared dead in 1991, and the almost 9,500 acres were turned over to the state. The project was finally stopped for good in 1995, one year after Ron died. In 1996, Congress passed the Water Resources Development Act, which included a provision to return the project area to the State of Wisconsin and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for the Ho-Chunk Nation. The land is to remain in public ownership and largely undeveloped.

The Rockton Bridge still spans the lake that never was and the purchased lands were turned into the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Today, prairie flowers are being planted around that old, ugly tower. I just hope Ron knows that his river is safe.

Long-time CNRA member Louise Rich is the widow of Ronald Rich, a professional photographer who fought tirelessly to save his beloved Kickapoo River Valley. Ron died in 1994, just before the project was deauthorized.

Restoring the Wisconsin River

by George Becker

THE 1960s WERE FRUSTRATING times for those of us who cared about the lakes and rivers in Wisconsin. Even though Wisconsin had a long history of good environmental regulations, we could see how ineffective these regulations were in preventing pollution arising from rapid population and industrial growth during those years.

I spent a good part of my life as a fish biologist and professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The Wisconsin River was at our doorstep. We could see the decline in water quality during the fifties and sixties. The river was brown and lacked its former clarity. It had a terrible odor. Massive fish kills were occurring, including a remnant sturgeon population. We saw a dramatic reduction in the number of species and individual species. Contamination of fish was so bad that by 1968 fish from the river were no longer edible. We were turning the river into a sewer and I knew something had to be done.

At that time CNRA was one of the few citizens groups making their voices heard about water pollution. One spokesperson for the group was a new CNRA member, Reginald Richie. Richie, a resident of West Allis, wanted it known that he was not a biologist, just a citizen concerned about pollution. He owned a cottage on Lake Wisconsin. For years he, too, watched the water quality of the lake gradually worsen. Fishing fell off, odors increased, the water lacked clarity, and a greasy scum covered the surface. Richie considered

moving to another lake, but most of the lakes he knew were experiencing the same problems.

Richie felt the same way I did: too much talk and not enough action by regulatory agencies, politicians and industries. He thought it imperative to get citizens involved in water pollution issues. In numerous letters to newspapers and state politicians, he spelled out the seriousness of water pollution problems and cited the backing of a statewide environmental group of well-known citizens—CNRA.

To support Richie's efforts, CNRA established a Water Pollution Fund at its 1969 annual meeting, authorizing acceptance of \$1.00 trial memberships and additional contributions toward a pilot study of the Wisconsin River. This study, conducted by a private consultant, would collect data on pollution in the river, pinpoint sources and recommend solutions. The intent of the study was to supplement and augment work already being done or planned by the DNR.

As word of the potential study spread, it was gratifying to see how much support Richie, Fred Ott, Roy Gromme, and other CNRA members were able to generate for the Water Pollution Fund. Hundreds of new members joined CNRA, some contributing \$1 for trial memberships, others making larger donations. Meanwhile, the DNR continued to conduct water quality studies of its own, collecting extensive data on the river. Richie, other CNRA members, and I attended public hearings on these studies. The advice given to us by agency people and local politicians was not to

waste money on another study; rather, they suggested that CNRA publish the results of existing studies in an easily understood format so that the general public would become better informed about pollution issues.

Around this time, I heard Richard M. Billings, an executive of Kimberly Clark Paper Company, tell representatives of the paper industry they would have to spend a larger share of their profits on pollution control if environmental contamination is going to be reduced. Billings said, "If all the known available practical technology were to be installed in the realm, the pollution problem would be very much reduced. . . . In other words, we'll have to admit that we are not doing everything that can be done."

What I seemed to be hearing from almost everyone was a need to get reliable, substantive information to the general public about the seriousness of the pollution problem; then develop a plan and find sufficient resources to do something about it. Therefore, in 1970, under the auspices of CNRA, I formed the Wisconsin River Restoration Committee dedicated to "spread the word up and down the Wisconsin River Valley, from Lac Vieux Desert to Prairie du Chien, that this great valley must become a model of cleanliness." I wanted to encourage the active help and leadership of businessmen, educators, industrialists, law enforcement officers, politicians and citizens.

I chaired the group; Richie was vice-chair. Eight others served on the Steering Committee. Members of the committee testified at public hearings and submitted numerous resolutions and petitions to various branches of government to clean up the river. We backed these actions with extensive

scientific data and thorough analyses of existing standards and regulations. In 1972, with funds from CNRA, we compiled these actions and other pertinent material into a special report: *Stream of a Thousand Isles: The Wisconsin River: Its History and a Plan for Restoration*. We distributed this report widely.

As an introduction to the report, Sylvia, my wife, wrote a poetic piece telling the story of an earlier Wisconsin River that was the hub of life for Indian tribes and immigrants who settled near its banks; a river loved by many throughout

the years, a haven and refuge for fish and wildlife, now polluted beyond belief.

The first petition in the report, dated January 23, 1971, was a copy of one we sent to the U. S. Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin under the 1899 Refuse Act. We asked for immediate action against nine major industries to force them to desist from dumping harmful wastes into the Wisconsin River. We also asked that any portion of fines to which CNRA was entitled be remitted to CNRA to

From Lac Vieux Desert to Prairie du Chien ... this great Wisconsin River valley must become a model of cleanliness. (1970)

- The Wisconsin River Restoration Committee:**
 Chairman: George Becker, Stevens Point
 Vice-Chairman: Reginald Richie, West Allis
 Secretary: Arthur Meeks, Wausau
 Steering Committee:
 Koby Crabtree, Wausau
 William Howe, Prairie du Chien
 Carla Kruse, Loganville
 Al Krzykowski, Wisconsin Rapids
 Sherman Stock, Milwaukee
 Tom Tompach, Wausau
 Florence Tuttle, Nekoosa
 Douglas Witt, Stevens Point

“promote environmental quality wherever needed.” As a result of this petition, Consolidated Papers of Rhinelander was fined \$1,000. CNRA received \$250 as its share.

The report also contained a copy of the committee’s petition to the Secretary of the DNR to review and revise water quality standards and zones as they apply to the Wisconsin River. In addition, we included an analysis I wrote on the dangers of environmental contamination by mercury. This paper was written to support the Wisconsin River Restoration Committee’s decision to go on record in June 1970 requesting the state of Wisconsin to establish a standard requiring total elimination of mercury and its components from all effluents discharged into state waters.

The centerpiece of the report was a plan I developed to restore the Wisconsin River. My friends called it “George’s Pipe Dream.” Proposed was a Wisconsin River Sanitary Authority, which would implement a plan to place all man-derived wastes into a closed system. This system would

eliminate, by stages, all discharge of municipal and industrial wastes into the Wisconsin River and its tributaries. The plan called for the most up to date treatment systems. The clear, reusable water coming from centralized plants along the main stem of the river would be piped back for reuse to industries and municipalities. With this system, the river would be returned to a near-pristine state; the value of fishing and recreation on the river would rise; and property values would increase substantially.

This plan was also published by CNRA in another format called *The Wisconsin River: A Plan for Its Restoration*. The first section contained my plan. The second section, by John Holland, an engineer from J.R.L. Industries, included working plans for the Wisconsin River Basin sewage disposal system and implementation costs. I have a 1972 letter from Al Berkman, CNRA’s president at that time, confirming CNRA’s willingness to publish this report. In the letter Al says, “George’s Pipe Dream may not come true, per se, but something akin to it will.”



The smiling faces of members of the CNRA Council in 1971 belie the seriousness of the issue that was before them: clean-up of the polluted Wisconsin River.

From left: Jeffrey Rill, George Becker, Russell Rill, Katherine Rill, Trudi Scott, Marguerite Baumgartner, Carla Kruse, Fred Baumgartner, Fred Ott, Ethel Princel, Reginald Richie, and Orie Loucks.

I guess Al Berkman was right, because everyone I talk to now says the Wisconsin River is in its best shape in memory. Shortly after the report was published, the national 1972 Clean Water Act set the goal that all waters were to be swimmable and fishable by 1983. The DNR divided the Wisconsin River into three segments: Upper, Middle and Lower, and developed comprehensive water quality management plans for each section. Preparation of the plans included extensive participation by local citizens, communities and industries, similar to Reginald Richie's earlier planning concept. And just as I recommended new state-of-the-art treatment plants, so too most municipalities eventually had new plants, and all industries updated their treatment methods to meet the requirements of their legally assigned discharge permits.

I recently obtained a copy of a 1987 speech given by Bob Martini from the DNR Rhinelander District Office. He says that after 1980, when waste discharge permits were implemented under the Clean Water Act, less than 30,000 pounds of BOD a day were being discharged into the river. This compared to over 500,000 pounds of BOD discharged daily in 1972 when I wrote my plan. He goes on to say: "Several stretches of the river showed dramatic improvement. Oxygen levels increased, flavor and odor problems decreased, foam and aesthetic problems disappeared and biological diversity returned to the river. Game fish became a dominant segment of the fishery.... Fishing increased, boating, kayaking, swimming, water skiing and other water sports became commonplace on a river that had been avoided by most residents for decades."

We know toxic waste continues to be a problem in the river. Substantial quantities of mercury, PCBs, dioxins, furans and other toxic material still can be found in sediments and fish. These will be there for a

long time. But in a recent telephone conversation with Martini, he says he is optimistic about efforts by the state to be the first state in the nation to regulate air-borne mercury emissions from coal-burning plants. The DNR has scheduled hearings on these regulations this summer—30 years after CNRA's Wisconsin River Restoration Committee requested that the state of Wisconsin set standards for the total elimination of mercury from its waters.

Not too long ago, George Rogers, a sports writer for the *Stevens Point Gazette*, sent me a note about the status of fish in

the Wisconsin River near Stevens Point. He said the river now has a thriving population of channel catfish; muskies planted a few years earlier are doing quite well; and there's an excellent small mouth bass population. Sturgeon were reintroduced in 1991 but the jury is still out on their success. He concluded by saying, "To sum up, the river is in better shape than it has been in decades, so your efforts weren't wasted."

I can easily say the same for the efforts of Richie and numerous other CNRA members who worked to achieve the goal of a cleaner Wisconsin River. I think we would all agree with the way Bob Martini ended his speech, quoting Aldo Leopold in *Round River*: "There is as yet no social stigma in the possession of a gullied farm, a wrecked forest, or a polluted stream." Bob Martini then responded: "This may have been true in 1945 but the Wisconsin River story illustrates that the public, the state and even private industry are no longer willing to accept the social stigma of a polluted stream in Wisconsin." 🐾

The river is in better shape than it has been in decades, so your efforts weren't wasted.

— George Rogers, 2000

Dr. George Becker, professor emeritus of the UW—Stevens Point, is the author of Fishes of Wisconsin, and served as CNRA president from 1972 to 1974. George and Sylvia retired to Arkansas.

Poisoning the Tomorrow / Waupaca River

by George Becker

EARLY IN 1971, I learned that the DNR was planning to “treat” the Tomorrow-Waupaca River with the fish poison Antimycin along with a green dye so as to trace the movement of the toxin. As soon as the public meetings were published, I planned to attend all three, which were held in the early months of the year.

Several DNR managers said they planned first to remove all the trout along with minnows, which they would hold at state fish hatcheries; the carp would be destroyed. When the water in the river was safe, the trout would be returned along with the bass. Over 50 miles of stream would be treated and end at the Weyauwega Dam. On September 17, I was in Madison meeting with the Lawton and Cates law firm to seek an order to restrain the DNR from poisoning the Tomorrow-Waupaca River system. The order would include the Citizens Natural Resources Association of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Trout Fisherman’s Association, and Trout Unlimited.

Lawton and Cates attorneys immediately sought a restraining order from Circuit Judge Maloney, who promptly denied our request. On October 5 Antimycin, mixed with green dye, spurted from barrels as the DNR began chemically treating the river. But the project was halted later in the afternoon when a short restraining order was granted by Chief Justice E. Harold Hallaway of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. In a few hours, the Supreme Court reversed the order and poisoning was resumed.

Several students and I seined the waters below the Nelsonville dam and extracted dead northern pike, suckers, carp, pan fish and 25 dead trout, ranging up to two and a half pounds. Earlier in the summer the DNR recovered nearly 5,000 trout, which they were holding at hatcheries until the water was safe for restocking.

I went home rather dejectedly. Even an unexpected visit from Paul Hayes, sports and environmental writer for the *Milwaukee Journal*, didn’t cheer me up. Paul, Sylvia and I were a sad bunch. I remember telling Paul “They (the DNR) don’t know what they are doing.”

Early the following morning, my son Dale and I trudged through a disaster of hundreds of dead trout. There was a lunker brown about

four and a half pounds. Dale held it for a moment while I snapped a picture and we put it back in its watery grave. We filled a large museum bottle with beautiful 12”-14” trout, which I took along to the State Supreme Court. One judge saw the jar and all he had to say was “What’s that?” and turned away without waiting for an answer.

We lost the “Tomorrow” and we saw the devastation once again on the Horicon Marsh this past winter. We will continue to lose until the DNR realizes its poisoning efforts jeopardize the diversity of our fish fauna.

Thanks to CNRA that stood behind us. And kudos to Fred Ott who found money to pay the huge legal bills without blinking. 

We will continue to lose until the DNR realizes its poisoning efforts jeopardize the diversity of our fish fauna.

Mining Threatens the Wolf River

by Kira Henschel

EVEN THOUGH I HAD STUDIED geology in the late seventies, my first real introduction to the devastation mining could wreak was in Austria, where hard-rock mining for silver, lead and iron has been going on for over 600 years. On a geological tour of that country during graduate studies in waste management in the early nineties, we passed through the one-industry towns so typical of mining districts. The people were visibly unhealthy, the trees were dying, and the rivers were devoid of fish. In Hungary, former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, as well as in the new German states, mining of coal and metals had created wastelands that boggled my mind. How people continued to live where the air was so thick and waters so poisonous was beyond comprehension.

When I returned to Wisconsin in 1992 after living abroad for 13 years, I was dismayed to hear that Exxon, Noranda and other multinational mining companies were going after gold, copper and zinc in our beautiful Northwoods.

My first forays against metallic mining were with the Mining Task Force of the Milwaukee Area Greens, which I joined after becoming somewhat involved with that eco-political movement in Europe. There was a great need to coordinate efforts on a statewide basis and to educate the public about mining. Current Sierra Club state mining chair, David Blouin, his wife Claire Gervais, and I formed the Mining Impact Coalition of Wisconsin in 1994 to serve as a clearinghouse for the growing numbers of small, grassroots organizations emerging throughout the

state to battle this new threat. I was first introduced to CNRA in 1995, when I was offered the opportunity to speak before the Council at a wintry meeting in Oshkosh.

The battle to keep the wild Wolf River in northern Wisconsin pristine had been one of CNRA's issues since its earliest days. When Congressman Henry Reuss introduced a bill to establish a Wolf River National Scenic Riverway in 1966, it permitted local people to establish a comprehensive plan for the protection and management of the riverway. The bill gained the support of CNRA, who was involved in the fight to preserve the forest lands along the river in Menominee County. Additionally, federal and state pollution control agencies were to cooperate for "the purpose of eliminating any present or future pollution." That was then.

In 1975, Exxon Coal and Minerals discovered a massive zinc and copper deposit in the headwaters of the Wolf River near Crandon, just upstream from the Mole Lake Sokaogan Chippewa Reservation. Like the lead and zinc of southwestern Wisconsin that led to the first U.S. Geological Survey in the mid-1800s, these minerals are found in sulfide ore bodies that also contain gold, silver and numerous heavy metals. When mined and exposed to air and water, they produce sulfuric acid, devastating to fish, wild rice and drinking water supplies.

For the next decade, mining proponents tinkered with Wisconsin's mining laws to exempt

mine waste from other legislation, and establishing “local agreements,” essentially contracts between the mining company and the local township that override local and other zoning. The Flambeau Mine near Ladysmith eventually went in because town officials buckled to pressure from Noranda to permit the mine.

Exxon pulled out in 1986, saying that mineral prices did not warrant the expense of mining at that time. They showed up again in 1996. Conservationists, tribal members of five tribes, hunters and anglers, religious groups, sports enthusiasts, union members, and politicians put aside erstwhile animosities, joining forces to protect the Wolf from the new threat, very much in keeping with CNRA’s philosophy of collaboration to protect the environment.

Mining proponents, developers and even the DNR at that time thought that there was the potential of a new mining district, with up to ten sites identified for metallic sulfide mining, all in the headwaters of our rivers. Wisconsin is unique among the states in that almost all of its waters flow outward from the northern Highlands, toward the Mississippi and into the Great Lakes.

Hundreds of miles of rivers have already been poisoned by mining and mine waste throughout the United States and the world.

Any contamination or disruption would have far-reaching consequences on water quality—and quality of life. Hundreds of miles of rivers have already been poisoned by mining and mine waste throughout the United States and the world

The Wolf River has twice been on American Rivers endangered and threatened rivers list because of the hazards posed by mining: once in 1995, when it ranked 20th among all national rivers, and again in 1997, where it was listed as the 5th most endangered river in the nation. These listings were due to a joint effort between the Menominee Nation, River Alliance of Wisconsin and Mining Impact Coalition that emphasized the threats to ground and surface water posed by mining.

Because of these listings, the mining company changed its plans to dispose of mine waste water within the Wolf River watershed, instead opting to transport it to the Wisconsin River through a 38-mile pipeline. This decision would have meant transferring water from the Great Lakes watershed to the Mississippi River watershed, and become an international concern known as interbasin transfer. The pipeline also got citizens up and down the Wisconsin River, now swimmable thanks to efforts by CNRA and others, involved to stop the proposed mine.

One key to raising awareness about an issue the public has little or no knowledge is education. CNRA has helped by providing the Mining Impact Coalition and Kids for Clean Water with funding and moral support in conjunction with the Wolf Watershed Education Project, a collaboration of speaking tours up and down the Wolf and Wisconsin rivers. Some of

those who listened and added their voices and bodies to the fray were once-homeless veterans in Milwaukee; many served as volunteers for fundraising and outreach activities. We wrote articles, traveled throughout the state to schools, conservation organizations, Rotary meetings, the 1995 NAACP national convention, and even put together a Mining Awareness Caravan around the Great Lakes.

I have been honored to work with such greats as Roscoe and Evelyn Churchill, who struggled to prevent the Flambeau Gold Mine near Ladysmith, and Hilary “Sparky” Waukau, a Menominee elder whose life was dedicated to protecting the Wolf, and the first Native American to be inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

Another key is political action. CNRA members stood with hundreds of others to support the election of the new anti-mining town board of Nashville (99% voter turnout) to rescind the original local agreement with Exxon. CNRA has contributed funds to the town’s legal defense fund to overturn previous agreements with the mining company.

CNRA was active in supporting the Mining Moratorium Law, which passed in 1998, and most recently, voicing their support of efforts to prohibit the use of cyanide in Wisconsin mines. This highly

toxic substance would be used at the Crandon mine to dissolve the zinc, copper, gold, and silver from the ore.

Cyanide used in mining has caused recent environmental disasters in the United States and abroad, resulting in massive fish kills, bird deaths and contaminated drinking water. Cyanide is a powerful solvent that breaks down heavy metals, such as mercury, cadmium and lead, all found in the bedrock at Crandon. Cyanide poses serious environmental risks—from transportation on our roadways, from storage and use at the mine site, and from wastes disposed in tailings ponds long after the ore has been removed.

The Wolf River has twice been on American Rivers’ endangered and threatened rivers list because of the hazards posed by mining: once in 1995, when it ranked 20th . . . and again in 1997, when it was listed 5th.

Wisconsin’s statutes still maintain that metallic mines are exempt from the State Groundwater Protection Law. Metallic mining waste, like that which would be produced at Crandon, is not subject to the state’s stringent Hazardous Waste Management Law, even if it contains cyanide (mine waste is regulated as solid, rather than hazardous, waste). This issue is still very much alive and the need to remain politically aware continues.

Kira Henschel, current CNRA president, is a business consultant in Madison.

CNRA and Waterways

THE RIVER STORIES WE HAVE just told recount both our successes and failures. But they are not our only stories. Looking back, we see from early on, protecting Wisconsin's rivers, lakes and streams have always taken high priority. Every decade has seen its share of water issues.

In the early 50s, as part of its efforts to preserve the Flambeau State Forest as a wilderness area, CNRA fought to keep a strip of inviolate wilderness not less than a mile in width on either side of the Flambeau River. At the same time we joined with numerous other groups in successfully stopping a dam on the Namekagon River for hydroelectric power, a landmark case that spelled out the rights of the public on Wisconsin's navigable waters.

In the 60s we supported designating the White River Marsh in Marquette County as a wildlife area. We urged the federal government to provide additional funding and the right of eminent domain for acquisition of remaining private property in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. In the 60s, too, CNRA protested building a generating plant on the St. Croix, promoting the river's designation as a National Scenic Riverway. We supported other Wild and Scenic River designations, including one for the Wolf River. The DDT hearings also were a water quality issue. DDT was declared a water pollutant; thus banned.

In the late 60s and early 70s we testified at numerous public hearings to stop developers from building dams on high quality rivers to form artificial lakes for resorts and private

residences. The 70s also saw protests against fish kills in other rivers besides the Tomorrow River: CNRA lost a court case to stop the poisoning of the Rock River Basin near Horicon. We also objected to construction of a bridge across the Wisconsin River at Merrimac.

In the late 70s and early 80s wetlands were a pressing issue. We reacted intensely: monitored all proposed legislation, testified at public hearings, contributed \$2,500 toward a state wetland coordinator, held a wetland workshop, and published a controversial wetland handbook. The 80s also saw a rash of river plans for comment: CNRA reviewed the Upper Mississippi River Basin Commission plan and took positions on proposed changes to locks, dams and barge traffic; we also supported designation of the Lower Wisconsin Waterway.

In the 90s we continued to protest poisoning fish in the Rock River at Horicon Marsh. Again we lost. At the same time, through HMAC, CNRA partially funded a pollution-monitoring project for the marsh and helped develop sub-watershed plans. Recently we opposed lessening restrictions in cranberry marshes. Now, in 2001, we maintain our watch over Wisconsin's waterways through affiliation with the River Alliance of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Wetlands Association, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Stewardship Network, and the Mining Impact Coalition of Wisconsin.