

The Big Muddy



"The Missouri River is a little too thick to swim in and not quite thick enough to walk on." Thomas Hart Benton, American painter and U.S. Senator from Missouri

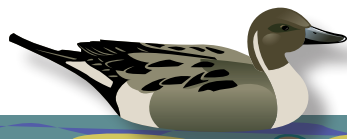
A Big Muddy History

The name "Missouri," in Missouri River, comes from a Native American tribe that lived along the river. The name means "People of the Big Canoes" because the tribe used massive "dugout" canoes made from cottonwood logs. The state was named after the river. The river's nickname is "The Big Muddy," because of all the dirt and sand that the river brings along with it, which gives it a chocolate color. The Missouri ends in the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers near St. Louis.

The first white American explorers to travel the length of the Missouri River were Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, along with their crew called the Corps of Discovery. It took them 14 months to get up the river to Three Forks, Montana, where the Missouri River starts.

A boat can't float from the beginning of the Missouri River to the end anymore because there are 15 dams along the river. Six of those dams create huge "reservoirs" or lakes that help control floods on the river and store water for dry years.

The river also has been straightened, or "channelized," to keep it from moving around and to make it easier for barges to use the river. Today the river is 72 miles shorter than it was when Lewis and Clark traveled it.



What is a Watershed?

A watershed includes all of the land that drains into the same river. It acts like a giant bowl. We all live in a watershed. If it rains in your backyard, that water will eventually drain into a stream, and then a river. Your watershed is named after the biggest river that rain will drain into.

The Missouri River watershed is 1/6 of the area of the continental United States.

The Missouri River watershed includes parts of 10 states and two Canadian provinces. The river itself touches seven states: Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri. The Missouri River is 2,341 miles long, making it the longest river in North America.

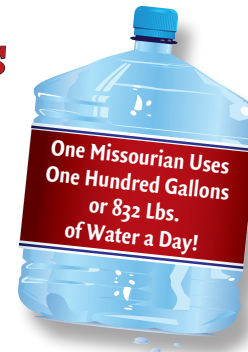
All of the Missouri River Watershed is also part of the Mississippi River watershed because the Missouri River flows into the "Mighty Miss." All of the streams



and rivers in this watershed eventually flow through the state of Louisiana into the Gulf of Mexico.

Missouri River Facts

- > 40% of Missouri residents get their drinking water from the Missouri River.
- > In Missouri, 80 percent of concrete is made from Missouri River sand.
- > The "Big Muddy" is less muddy than it used to be. The river carries 1/4 of the sediment (sand and mud) that it did naturally. That sediment is now trapped behind dams.
- > The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is required to manage the Missouri River for 8 purposes: Navigation, Flood Control, Water Supply, Water Quality, Fish and Wildlife, Recreation, Irrigation and Hydropower.
- > The Missouri River is about 1/3 as wide as it was. Channelization created new farm land but destroyed many thousands of acres of habitat for birds, fish and wildlife. The USACE is now working to restore some of the islands and wetlands that fish and wildlife need.



Trashing our River

Fishermen or other people hanging out along the river leave some of the trash in the Missouri River. Some gets dumped in the river by people too lazy to dispose of it properly. But most of it washes in from other rivers and streams that drain into the Missouri River.

Any piece of trash from any street or yard in your town can get blown or washed into a storm drain or stream. All of that ends up draining into the big river.

There are no government agencies that regularly clean trash from the Missouri River. It is up to local communities to clean their rivers.

Since 2001, Missouri River Relief has hosted 104 river cleanups in 22 communities, working with 17,000 volunteers to remove 718 tons of trash from the banks of the Missouri River. That's almost 1-1/2 million pounds of junk that doesn't belong there!



Just a few things Missouri River Relief volunteers removed from the river just last year!

364 Tires	1 Hula Hoop	1 5 gal. Jug of Insecticide
10 Refrigerators	2 Hockey Sticks	1 Oil Drum
19 Propane Tanks	100+ Balls (Soccer, Football, Basketball, Tennis)	1 Computer Hard Drive Tower
30 55 gal. Plastic Barrels	1 Basketball Goal	1 Hot Tub
21 55 gal. Metal Drums	1 Lawn Mower	25 Lottery "scratcher" Tickets – scratched
34 5 gal. Plastic Buckets	2 Shopping Carts	Thousands of Styrofoam cups, straws, bottles & plastic bags
1 500 gallon Metal Diesel Tank	1 plastic Step Ladder	An "Official" Message in a Bottle from Fort Morgan, Colo.
36 Chairs	2 inflatable Swimming Pools	
13 TVs	1 5 gal. Plastic Bucket with Poison	

You Can Help!

You can help the Missouri River by cleaning up your neighborhood or your favorite stream. You can even adopt your favorite stream by starting a Missouri Stream Team. (www.mostreamteam.org)

To learn more about Missouri River Relief, visit www.riverrelief.org

