

# LWV Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO

## 2024 Report to our local and state league members

**LWV Upper Mississippi River Region**, or UMRR (pronounced “Ummer”), is an interleague organization (ILO) focused on water quality. UMRR is made up of 60 local Leagues in the states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin representing over 10,000 local League members in this region. Our geographic area is the Upper Mississippi River basin – that part of the Upper Mississippi basin upstream of the river’s confluence with the Ohio at the south edge of Illinois to its headwaters in Itasca County, MN. Here’s a link <https://www.lwvumrr.org/blog/lwv-upper-mississippi-river-region-who-we-are-what-we-do> to learn more about what an ILO is and how it fits into the LWV national structure, and to learn more about how our structure strengthens our work, allowing the amplification of the voice of League throughout this watershed.

**Established in 2015**, UMRR’s ILO Board has strong representation from each of our now five member states. **Our 2024-25 Board includes:**

### Board Officers

**Chair** Mary Ellen Miller (IA-Metro Des Moines)

**Co-Vice Chair** Nancy-Porter (IA-Johnson County)

**Co-Vice Chair Vacancy**

**Secretary** Susan Adams (WI-Beloit)

**Treasurer** Catherine Franczyk (IL-Wheaton)

**Past Co-Chairs** Mary & Steve Ploeser (WI-Dane County)

**Communications Director** Gretchen Sabel (MN-ABC)

**Committee Chairs**

**Action:** Kay Slama

**Nominating:** John Howard (MN-Winona)

**By-Laws:** E.J. Gallagher

**Audit/Budget:** Catherine Franczyk

### State Appointed Board Members

**Iowa:** Tamara Prenosil (Dubuque)  
E.J. Gallagher (Blackhawk-Bremer)  
Steve Paulsrud (Muscatine)

**Illinois:** Lee Ekstrom (McHenry County)

Paula Ekstrom (McHenry County)  
**Vacancy**

**Minnesota:** Kay Slama (Willmar)  
Megan Benage, (New Ulm)  
Colleen Werdien, (ABC)

**Missouri:** Michelle Croyle (St. Louis)  
Sheryl Eufinger (Kansas City/JCP)  
Pending (Columbia)

**Wisconsin:** Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins (La Crosse)

**Vacancy**

**Vacancy**

**BOARD/ACTION COMMITTEE RECRUITMENT:** As we approach our 9<sup>th</sup> year advocating for clean water and promoting the health of the Mississippi River, we recognize that the scope of our work needs more “hands on deck.” To that end, the proposed expansion of the UMRR board to three voting members appointed by each state was approved by a By-Laws amendment during our May 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. As highlighted in our Board Roster above, we have openings in both Illinois and Wisconsin.

Reach out if you are interested. If policy and advocacy are more your thing, then consider joining our Action Committee! This is where we focus on state and federal legislation impacting the river. You need not be an UMRR board member to serve on our Action Committee, but be forewarned, they meet monthly and are a hard working group, these are the people that truly carry our water! Our 2023-24 UMRR Action Committee report is available on our website; I hope you will read it as they have done yeoman's work this year, especially on federal and state legislative issues. Find more information about serving on the Action Committee on our website!

**UMRR BOARD MEETINGS & ACTIVITIES:** The Board meets six times a year, usually on the first Monday of even numbered months via ZOOM. Agenda and Zoom link are posted on our website. Minutes of our UMRR May 29, 2024, annual meeting and the video recording of the meeting are available on our website. [Consider joining the UMRR Board... \(lwvumrr.org\)](#)

**UMRR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:** Our programs are aimed at educating league members on the issues within the UMRR watershed to learn what we can do on an individual, community, regional and national level to protect and improve water quality in the Mississippi River. These educational sessions **are free and open to the public** and recorded videos are shared and posted on our website. We encourage local Leagues to utilize these session recordings as part of your educational programming.

**Educational sessions during 2023-24:**

- August 7, "Federal Farm Bill Update,"  
Duane Hovorka, National Wildlife Federation
- November 6, "Clean Water Act Implementation after Sackett Decision"  
Rob Lee, Midwest Environmental Advocates
- December 4, "CO2 Pipelines: Activism, Coalitions, Legislative Action"  
Peg Furshong (CURE MN), Pam Richert (Eco-Justice Collaborative IL), and Jan Norris, (Pipeline Opponent, IA)
- February 3, "The Swine Republic"  
Chris Jones, Author
- February 7, "St. Cloud Minnesota's Circular Energy Economy,"  
Tracy Hodel, City Public Works Director
- March 2, "The River Knows"  
Neil Hamilton, Author
- April 4, "Clean Water Forever Campaign"  
Robert Hirschfeld, Illinois Prairie River Network
- May 29, "A Visit from Will Dilg" film at our Annual Meeting  
Riverlorian Steven Marking

**UMRR WEBSITE & NEWSLETTER:** our [website www.lwvummr.org](http://www.lwvummr.org) has lots of information! Our Blog features 2-3 posts per month on current UMRR topics of interest. A lot of focus this year has been on the reauthorization of the federal Farm Bill as it supports the many agricultural conservation programs that protect our

lands and waters. We also send out an email newsletter that includes links to our Blog posts and other items of interest. Sign up here <https://www.lwvumrr.org/contact-us.html>



Our most exciting activity this past year was our traveling **Pure Sparkling Stream Water** exhibit that features an Andy Warhol-inspired Pop Art project with an environmental message. The artist Christine Curry uses oversized advertising graphics and addresses the poor water quality problems that plague the Upper Mississippi watershed by promoting a fictitious PURE IOWA sparkling stream water company that bottles pure water directly from the river. The exhibit features an oversized inflatable aluminum can with the message “**SAVE MISSISSIPPI RIVER**” alongside four large graphic advertising panels. The fictitious company appears to be a respectable beverage company, but the fine print on the can suggests otherwise. The back can label includes a description of the river, a reflection, and a list of “natural” ingredients telling a very different story of the numerous harmful contaminants commonly found in many of our waterways throughout the upper Midwest. A red warning label further compounds conflicting advertising messages. A large image of a farmer champion landowner with a brief description is included on one of the large panels, illustrating healthy land management practices as a positive solution to improving water quality through their conservation practices.

This traveling educational exhibit was made possible by a \$10,000 grant awarded to the LWV UMR by the Mississippi River Network (MRN). This exhibit also acknowledges the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife & Fish Refuge. A collaborating sponsor is the Isaak Walton League.

At each exhibit location the local host League held an opening reception with the artist discussing her motivation for the project (which also features five other rivers and streams within Iowa). The opening exhibit was held Earth Day, April 22, and hosted by the Muscatine LWV. Additional locations (all hosted by local Leagues) included Galena, Dubuque, La Crosse, Des Moines, Coralville, Winona, St. Paul and Washington, D.C. (LWV US annual meeting). Flood waters cancelled our date in the Quad Cities but we plan to continue to travel this exhibit in 2025 as we could not fit all requests into the 2024 summer schedule. Let us know if you want to host the exhibit next year.

**The Mississippi River is an enduring and defining feature of North America. We invite all who are interested in the restoration and revitalization of this valuable natural resource to join us in this important work! All are welcome to attend our board meetings and our educational programs, just register when you see the invitation. As always, we very much appreciate the continued support of the local Leagues in our Upper Mississippi River Region. Our work is made possible by your dues and donations.**

*In League, Mary Ellen Miller, UMMR Chair, 2023-25*

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