Save The Date!

Our 2016 Gala fundraising benefit, held in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, is scheduled for Thursday, September 22 at the Coronado Ballroom (on Lindell Blvd. in midtown St. Louis.) Please mark your calendars to join us that evening for a very special event!
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance Partners

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance is a 501(c)3 public charity and donations to GRHA are tax deductible as allowed by law.

DONATIONS CAN BE MADE AT: WWW.GRHA.ORG
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance works to preserve the rich heritage and natural beauty of the 100-year Confluence Flood Plain. We have been advancing this cause through educating local decision makers, citizens, and youth. Together, we can save this irreplaceable land for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Great Rivers believes the long-term benefits of a natural Confluence far outweigh any small, short-term monetary gains made by destroying it.

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Great Rivers Habitat Alliance

PRESERVING THE 100-YEAR CONFLUENCE FLOOD PLAIN SINCE 2000

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2016

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance

PO Box 50014,
St. Louis, MO 63105

Phone: 314-918-1007
E-mail: dstokes@grha.org
E-mail: karen@grha.org

Follow us on Twitter: @GRHAmo
Follow us on Facebook: GreatRiversHabitatAlliance

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Conservation Easements Benefit the Confluence

One of the best ways to preserve the heritage of the Confluence, as well as floodplains throughout Missouri, is through conservation easements. Statutory changes that GRHA and many other conservation groups supported in 2013 simplified the process for conservation easements in Missouri. Conservation easements allow private property owners to gain tax benefits for committing to retain their land for agricultural, recreational, forestry, hunting, and other uses in perpetuity. In a conservation easement, the land remains completely private and the easement gives no right for anyone to trespass.

Another development of grave concern is the proposed Port of Lincoln project, which would allegedly shelter the entire Missouri floodplain between Winfield and Foley, Missouri. This massive inland port proposes to link barge, rail, and trucking to transport goods to national and international destinations. It calls for a 500-year levee which would isolate more than 6,000 acres from the floodplain. Untold damage to natural habitats and massive additional flooding could result. The project’s backers have tremendous resources. This one will be a huge challenge to stop. GRHA will use any and all legal means to oppose Port of Lincoln because if we don’t, who will? We cannot stand by and allow it without a fight.

We are pleased to see that while it is a symbolic move, the St. Charles County Council went on the record opposing the development in Maryland Heights. We hope to see more civic leaders follow suit on this and other proposals within flood-prone areas of our region.

There are many other developments that are being planned in which GRHA will stand in opposition. We have become the most vocal opponent of developments in the floodplain and, unfortunately, in many cases, we are the only opponent.

I am proud to welcome David Stokes as Executive Director of GRHA. With David at the helm, we look forward to advancing our mission at Great Rivers Habitat Alliance.

Founded in 2000, our mission at Great Rivers Habitat Alliance is clear: we exist to protect the Confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois Rivers. We do many things to accomplish that goal, but in the end, the preservation of the Confluence, in habitat, floodplains, and wetlands, is why this organization was created in 2000.

At that time, conservationists in St. Louis and St. Charles were becoming concerned about unmitigated development in the region's floodplain. Considering that the reaction to the Great Flood of 1993 was to build an enormous mall in the heart of the Chesterfield floodplain that had been covered in floodwaters, how could one not become concerned? Rick Holton, Sr., Don C. Musick, III, myself, and others formed Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) at the time to take on the Confluence preservation fight.

We hired Wayne Freeman as our first executive director and began to spread our simple message that continuous development within our floodplains is bad for our region. It is bad for our environment, bad for our quality of life, bad for taxpayers, bad in the short run, and even worse in the long run. It is bad for everyone except the developers.

While we lost that battle, we are winning the war, as that particular development has been stalled due to its own fundamental weaknesses. Just as important, we served notice to everyone who wished to develop in the Confluence that we are willing to fight for the preservation of our region’s heritage.

Unfortunately, the courts deferred to legislative intent and decided—no matter how absurd the laws were and no matter how much the Army Corp of Engineers and other government agencies ignored their own rules—to allow the City of St. Peters to move forward with its enormous, floodplain-destroying plan.

While we lost that battle, we are winning the war, as that particular development has been stalled due to its own fundamental weaknesses. Just as important, we served notice to everyone who wished to develop in the Confluence that we are willing to fight for the preservation of our region’s heritage.

When the court fight ended in 2012, GRHA focused on building partnerships with like-minded organizations. You can see the full list of those partners in this newsletter, which includes such organizations as Ducks Unlimited and Great Rivers Environmental Network.

We value the relationship we built with all of those groups under the direction of GRHA’s then executive director Dan Burkholder.

Furthermore, we have developed excellent working relationships with a number of elected officials, including U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, St. Charles County Executive Steve Ehlmann, Missouri Sen. Bob Onder, St. Charles County Councilman Joey Brady, and many others.

We are excited to be entering a new phase with the recent hiring of David Stokes as our executive director. Our current board, under the direction of Chairman, Jim Blatt, and President, Andy Spann, is rejuvenated and ready to further grow GRHA. Unfortunately, the quest to turn every green space into a new shopping mall never stops, nor does the attempt to have taxpayers subsidize these future disasters-in-waiting.

We are going to actively oppose the newest floodplain proposal in Maryland Heights. We will oppose unnecessary new ports and levees along our great rivers. We will fight to protect the rich heritage that the Confluence provides for our region. We will fight to preserve the natural beauty and culture that have made our area great, and we will fight to ensure that the people of our region can enjoy the same benefits that have made our area great. We will fight to protect the water quality and wildlife habitat.

Adolphus A. Busch, IV
Board Member
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance
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Another development of grave concern is the proposed Port of Lincoln project, which would destroy the entire Missouri floodplain between Winfield and Foley, Missouri. This massive inland port proposes to link barge, rail, and trucking to transport goods to national and international destinations. It calls for a 500-year levee which would isolate more than 6,000 acres from the floodplain. Untold damage to natural habitats and massive additional flooding could result. The project’s backers have tremendous resources. This one will be a huge challenge to stop. GRHA will use any and all legal means to oppose Port of Lincoln because if we don’t, who will? We cannot stand by and allow it without a fight.

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There are many other developments that are being planned in which GRHA will stand in opposition. We have become the most vocal opponent of developments in the floodplain and, unfortunately, in many cases, we are the only opponent.

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The flooding in late December brought focus to two things:

1. Natural causes seem to be resulting in greater and more frequent rainfall.
2. The addition of man-made structures in and around the floodplains have drastically increased flooding outside of it.

Within a few weeks of the flooding subsiding in our region, there was another announcement of a proposed major floodplain development. This one is championed by Stan Kroenke from the Walton family with plans to build a commercial – residential development on the banks of the Missouri River in Maryland Heights. This is the same developer who developed Chesterfield Commons after the Great Flood of 1993 that devastated Chesterfield Valley. Mr. Kroenke seems to care more about his pocketbook than about St. Louis and its natural resources. GRHA will stand in opposition to this development and any others like it.

With the recent lawsuit being waged by the Army Corp of Engineers and other government agencies, including the EPA, it seems as if the individual plans for the Port of Lincoln and the Chesterfield development will be halted. Unfortunately, as the courts have determined, the laws were and no matter how much the Army Corp of Engineers and other government agencies ignored their own rules — to allow the City of St. Peters to move ahead with its enormous, floodplain-destroying plan.

We are proud of our legal and PR wins so far. In 2011, we successfully persuaded the Grain Belt to abandon its plans to build a huge, floodplain-destroying plan. We are proud to have convinced the U.S. Army Engineers to declare farmland “blighted”? Officials for St. Charles County intervened in the case ON OUR SIDE, as they clearly saw the harm this project was doing to the larger region.

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At that time, conservationists in St. Louis and St. Charles were becoming concerned about unsightly development in the region’s floodplain. Considering that the reaction to the Great Flood of 1993 was to build an enormous mall in the heart of the Chesterfield floodplain that had been covered in floodwaters, how could one not become concerned? Rich Holton, Sr., Don C. Musick, III, myself, and others formed Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) at the time to take on the Confluence preservation fight.

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Just as our organization got up and running, the City of St. Peters in St. Charles County announced a plan to develop 1,600 acres of irreplaceable floodplain into a business park, indoor recreational complex, homes, and more. The project progressed with the city continually ignoring the laws were and no matter how much the laws were and no matter how the Army Corp of Engineers and other government agencies ignored their own rules — to allow the City of St. Peters to move ahead with its enormous, floodplain-destroying plan.

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We are excited to enter a new phase with the recent hiring of David Stokes as our executive director. Our current board, under the direction of Chairman, Jim Blaitz, and President, Andy Spann, is invigorated and ready to further grow GRHA. Unfortunately, the quest to turn every green space into a new shopping mall never stops, nor does the attempt to have taxpayers subsidize these future disasters-in-waiting.

We are going to actively oppose the newest floodplain proposal in Maryland Heights. We will oppose unnecessary new ports and levees along our great rivers. We will fight to protect the rich heritage that the Confluence provides. We do not wish to see everyone in our region living in our future disasters-in-waiting.
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance works to preserve the rich heritage and natural beauty of the 100-year Confluence Flood Plain. We have been advancing this cause through educating local decision makers, citizens, and youth. Together, we can save this irreplaceable land for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Great Rivers believes the long-term benefits of a natural Confluence far outweigh any small, short-term monetary gains made by destroying it.

Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) dedicated to preserving and restoring the floodplain of the Mississippi River at St. Louis, Missouri. Our mission is to protect the natural resources, cultural heritage, and public health of the Confluence Flood Plain through conservation, education, and advocacy.

The board and staff of GRHA promise you that we will relentlessly oppose this proposal. Mary Heights has asked developers to submit their proposals by April 15. During the entire process, GRHA will be leading the fight against both the subsidies and the entire development plan. This plan is wrong for our region. How much worse will flooding get, how much more land will we take out of the ecosystem, and how many more people will be harmed before we learn that floodplain development has terrible consequences?

The news of the proposal came early in February when the Post-Dispatch reported on the afternoon of Feb. 4 that the Maryland Heights City Council would be issuing a Request-for-Proposal (RFP) to redevelop the floodplain at its meeting that night. Due in large part to the short notice, the Post later reported that "only three people" showed up to oppose the RFP. Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) is proud to tell you that our new executive director, David Stokes, was one of those three.

He spoke to the City Council during the public comment segment and asked city officials to reconsider the move. Two residents of Maryland Heights also spoke against it. Judging from online comments, radio callers, and water cooler conversations throughout St. Louis, far more than "only three people" oppose this outrageous proposal.

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We are excited to announce that Great Rivers Habitat Alliance has hired a new executive director. David Stokes began working for GRHA on February 15, although prior to his official start date, he stepped up to testify on behalf of GRHA on two occasions in early February.

Stokes comes to GRHA after nine years with the Show-Me Institute (SMI), a Missouri-focused free-market think tank. He did policy work for seven years at SMI before taking over fundraising and development in 2014. One of his major policy focus-areas was reforming Tax Increment Financing and other tax subsidies. Stokes was a regular guest on radio and television programs throughout Missouri discussing a wide-variety of policy issues. Prior to working at SMI, Stokes worked as an aide to former St. Louis County Councilman, Kurt Odenwald, for five years.

In his short time with GRHA, Stokes has already appeared before three legislative bodies seeking the reforms for which this organization was originally founded to fight. He intends to regularly appear before government decision-makers, work with citizen groups, represent GRHA to the media, publish online commentary about floodplain issues, and do whatever it takes to achieve real change for Missouri. Changing policy to preserve our region's Confluence and our state's floodplain is still what GRHA is all about. Stokes said he is thrilled to be a part of this movement.