

For Love of a River: The Minnesota
by Darby Nelson
Press Kit

Announcing publication of *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* by Darby Nelson
with John Hickman, editor

The release date of Darby Nelson's second book, *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*, published by Beaver's Pond Press, is October 1, 2019. The invitation-only launch party will be held at the Bell Museum on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota on October 17.

Darby Nelson is an aquatic ecologist and biology professor emeritus at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. In the 1980s, he served three terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Since his retirement from Anoka-Ramsey in 2001, he has been an author and public speaker. His first book, *For Love of Lakes* (2012), was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award in creative nonfiction. Darby has been a tireless advocate for the environment, serving on boards for Conservation Minnesota, the Freshwater Society, and the Nature Conservancy. He was a charter member of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

With an ecologist's lens and a lifelong appreciation for wild and scenic places, Darby wanted to share with as many people as possible his love for the Minnesota River. He and his wife, Geri, decided to paddle the river all the way from its source near the Minnesota–South Dakota border to its confluence with the Mississippi in the Twin Cities. The resulting book, *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*, recounts their paddling adventure and addresses topics as diverse as geological history, early and modern agriculture, citizen advocacy, water-quality challenges and solutions, river-based recreation, dams and dam removal, prairie pothole lakes, the river's rich diversity of plant and animal life, and the Dakota–US War. Never before has a book undertaken such a holistic exploration of the state's namesake river and its basin.

Tim Palmer, author of *America's Great River Journeys* and *Rivers of America*, says, “This great river of the American heartland now has its voice through a seasoned storyteller and scientist who has immersed himself in its currents and backwaters. Darby Nelson has inspired me to see more, learn more, and paddle more on a river that deserves our care in a new era of stewardship that this book tells us is possible, desirable, and essential. *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* is an important contribution to the literature of land and water in the Midwest.”

Kimberly Musser, Associate Director of the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University at Mankato, says, “Weaving together natural and cultural history, Darby Nelson reveals a complex tale of ecological and water quality transformation and highlights stories of inspirational people working together to effect change and build momentum for restoration. *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* makes a heartfelt and compelling plea to experience the river's beauty for ourselves and join in the effort to improve it for future generations.”

For Love of a River: The Minnesota is available for \$24.95 from Amazon, Ingram, and bookstores everywhere. See <http://www.darbynelson.com/> for more information.

END Geri Nelson 763.421.7334 (home); 763.226.5436 (mobile)

Bios

About Darby:

Darby Nelson has a PhD in ecology from the University of Minnesota and is biology professor emeritus at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He began a lifelong love of the Minnesota River at age six when he and his family moved to the river town of Morton. In the 1980s, Darby served three terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives, where one of his most significant accomplishments was legislation creating the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. As an author, he is committed to exploring, preserving, and celebrating Minnesota's rivers and lakes. His first book, *For Love of Lakes* (2012), was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award in creative nonfiction. Darby has been a tireless advocate for the environment, serving on boards for Conservation Minnesota, the Freshwater Society, and the Nature Conservancy, and he was a charter member of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. He has received the Sigurd Olson Award from the Minnesota division of the Izaak Walton League of America, Environmentalist of the Year from the North Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, Willard Munger Award from the Minnesota DFL, Steve Chapman Environment Award from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and several teaching awards. Darby's claim to fame is skiing all 47 Mora Vasaloppet cross country ski races.

About Geri:

Geri Nelson has a BS in biology and secondary education from the University of Minnesota and an MS in gifted and talented education from St Thomas. She taught physical science for 25 years in the Anoka-Hennepin School District, coaching science-fair students and advising National Honor Society and the Girls' Science and Math Retreat. She is active in church and several organizations, including the League of Women Voters for 45 years, leading efforts in candidate forums, voter registration, and projects dealing with household hazardous waste and pollinator protection. She is proud to be Darby's typist, first reader and events coordinator. Geri's claim to fame is being an equal partner with Darby on their many adventures.

About Darby and Geri:

Darby and Geri met at the Itasca Biological Station while examining a round leech with a hundred babies attached to her abdomen. Today, they have two grown children of their own and four grandchildren. One reason Geri married Darby was his creative ideas about fun things to do. They have enjoyed canoe and kayak expeditions throughout their marriage to Alaska, the Yukon, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Greenland, Norway, and Minnesota. They have traveled to the Galapagos Islands, Norway, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, the Maritime Provinces of Canada, and all over the USA. Their adventures also include Darby's six years in the Minnesota House of Representatives and the research, writing, and speaking events for *For Love of Lakes* and *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*. In 2016, Darby and Geri jointly received Bemidji State University's Distinguished Minnesotan Award and the CURE Riverkeeper Award.

About John:

John Hickman assisted in the writing of *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*. John is a writer and documentary film producer who has been an advocate for the Minnesota River for more than twenty-five years. From 1992–94, he served on Governor Arne Carlson's Minnesota River

Citizens' Advisory Committee and wrote the recommendations for the committee's influential final report, *Working Together: A Plan to Restore the Minnesota River*. In 2011, he was executive producer of the film *River Revival: Working Together to Save the Minnesota River*, which premiered in prime time on the Twin Cities' NBC affiliate. John has served on the boards of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, Friends of the Minnesota Valley, Minnesota Valley Trust, Audubon Center of the North Woods, and Minnesota Valley chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. John's claim to fame is having worked on the final MECC version of the iconic educational software program *Oregon Trail*.

Geri explains how *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* came to be:

In 2011, Darby was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment. *For Love of Lakes* came out that fall, and we embarked on a journey to 150-plus events over seven years promoting lake stewardship and the book. After the first two very busy years, Darby delved into the research for and writing of *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*.

Darby completed the first draft of the manuscript in 2016. By that time, we were attending our Memory Café support group for people with memory loss and their caregivers. We had to acknowledge his condition had become Alzheimer's. His neurologist credited the hard mental work of writing *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* as having slowed the progression of the disease.

For Love of Lakes went through countless revisions before we agreed it was ready to be published. Each refinement made the language more vivid and tightened it up. For the Minnesota River book, reasoning through organizational challenges and wording changes became increasingly difficult. We had known from the beginning that we were in a race against time and memory loss, and eventually we turned to our friend John Hickman to help us through the final stages of the book. His edits were true to Darby's manuscript; he found Darby's voice! Thanks goes to John for rescuing the manuscript from languishing on our computer.

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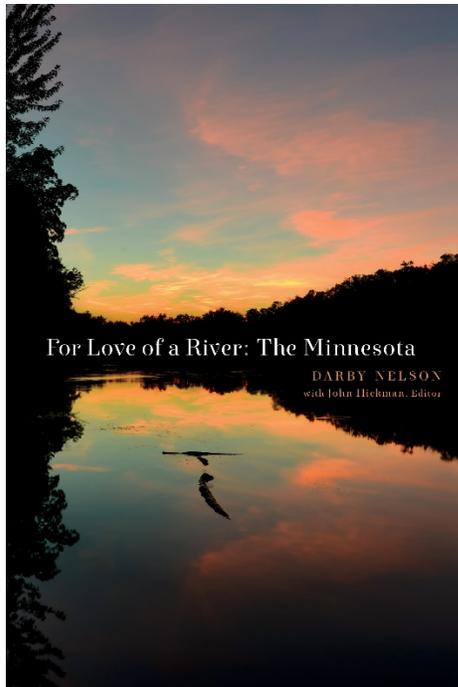
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Summary

The Minnesota River has a long, complex, and sometimes controversial history, and *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* covers it all. The opening chapters describe the unique, 3.6-billion-year geological history of the region, a fascinating story that is still unfolding before our eyes. The book continues with an account of the area's first human inhabitants as well as more recent human activity, including the displacement of the indigenous population by Euro Americans and

the development of commercial agriculture. Nine chapters chronicle the canoeing adventures Darby and Geri took over a five-year period in their successful effort to paddle the river on its 335-mile meandering course from headwaters to confluence. The voyage is punctuated with descriptions of 40 lakes in the Minnesota River Basin and six “Voices for the River” stories of inspirational people who share Darby’s passion for this special place and who have worked tirelessly to protect and improve it.

Cover



Description

The book has 256 pages, maps on the inside front and back covers showing highways, cities, counties, recreational areas and historical sites, and an eight-page insert of photographs.

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Reviews / endorsements

This great river of the American heartland now has its voice through a seasoned storyteller and scientist who has immersed himself in its currents and backwaters. Darby Nelson has inspired me to see more, learn more, and paddle more on a river that deserves our care in a new era of stewardship that this book tells us is possible, desirable, and essential. *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* is an important contribution to the literature of land and water in the Midwest.

Tim Palmer, author of *America's Great River Journeys* and *Rivers of America*.

Darby Nelson returns to his childhood home where he developed a love for the land and people of the Minnesota River Valley. Weaving together natural and cultural history, he reveals a complex tale of ecological and water quality transformation and highlights stories of inspirational people working together to effect change and build momentum for restoration. *For Love of a River: The Minnesota* makes a heartfelt and compelling plea to experience the river's beauty for ourselves and join in the effort to improve it for future generations.

Kimberly Musser, Associate Director of the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University at Mankato

If you are proud of your state, but not well-acquainted with its namesake river, in *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*, Darby Nelson will take you on a paddle pictured in words, all delightful, illuminating and reminiscent of Sigurd Olson's prose about Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Forrest Peterson, Communication & Outreach, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Darby Nelson flits effortlessly back and forth through time in this accessible biography of the Minnesota River. True, the river has suffered a host of cumulative transgressions — its flow has doubled over his lifespan, for example — but Darby shows where the beauty is and can be again. The geology, botany, history, and agronomy he describes so clearly make the basin come alive.

Steve Woods, Executive Director (retired), Freshwater Society

An informative mix of some of the oldest geological formations on earth, long-lost tallgrass prairie, the basin's original inhabitants, profiles of modern-day advocates who worked, and still work, to reclaim the river, all framed by one couple's tale of paddling the length of the Minnesota River. If you love rivers, if you love nature and the outdoors, if you are concerned about the environment, you will love this book.

Ted Suss, Minnesota River advocate

Events calendar

Southern Minnesota Book and Art Festival, Saturday, October 5, 2019, 10 AM to 6 PM,
Henderson MN

Book Launch Party, Thursday, October 17, 2019, 7 PM, Bell Museum, Larpenteur and
Cleveland, St. Paul

DKG Alpha Rho Chapter, Saturday, January 11, 2020, 9:30 AM

Links



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Itasca Book Distribution <https://itascabooks.com/for-love-of-a-river-the-minnesota/>

Amazon <https://www.amazon.com>

Interview questions and answers

Why did you write this book?

Morton has been the home of my heart since spending first through seventh grade there. I spent my days wandering the valley, bluffs, streams and the Minnesota River, fueling my lifelong love of adventure in the natural world. The old quarry behind the school was our recess playground. Ancient Morton gneiss sparked my interest in geology. When the Dakota kids came from the Lower Sioux reservation to Morton Public School in 7th grade, I cherished my new friends and gained an appreciation for Native Americans.

My interest in public policy and advocacy for environmental issues started in my 30's, flourished while in the Minnesota House of Representatives, and continues today with the writing of *For Love of Lakes* and *For Love of a River: The Minnesota*. My desire to make a difference to help restore the Minnesota River and prevent sediment and pollutants from traveling into the Mississippi and to the Gulf is the ultimate goal of writing the book.

Why paddle the entire river?

Geri and I have always had a purpose when we planned expeditions. Paddling the Minnesota fulfilled a lifelong dream and gave us the experiential basis for the book. It was important for us to meet the people of the basin, steep ourselves in the river's currents, and see the valley from the water. We love seeing what's around the next bend, checking out the vegetation and wildlife, and sleeping in the fresh air.

Who were some of the inspirational people you met along the way?

The many people who organized and attended meetings of the Minnesota River Congress
Beth Dale—photographer, kindred spirit
Woman with her young daughter who came to the river for solace
Fisherfolk all along the river and the man who gave us a northern pike in Ortonville
Deer hunter in the river bottoms
People enjoying Catfish Days in Franklin
Helpful librarians in towns throughout the basin
CURE staff
People who helped us shuttle our vehicle between launching and destination points.

What surprised you on your paddles and other activities in the basin?

How farmers are adopting best practices of no till, cover crops, pasturing animals, etc.
How good the fishing is, especially for walleye and catfish.
Places along the river that are as beautiful as any we've seen in the Boundary Waters.
The number of committed, organized people throughout the basin who are working to clean up the river and promote recreational opportunities.

What do you hope the book will accomplish?

We hope it will raise awareness of the challenges facing the river and motivate people to do what they can to solve them.

Who should read this book?

Anyone who lives in Minnesota—it's our namesake river!
Everyone who lives or works in the Minnesota River watershed
River recreationists—fishers, boaters, kayakers, canoeists, hikers, birders, hunters, photographers
Policy makers at the federal, state, watershed, county and municipal levels
Farmers in the basin
Activists who are already working to improve conditions on the river and in the basin, and those who would like to become involved
Anyone who has read and enjoyed Darby's first book, *For Love of Lakes*