

# One in a *Ver* Million

## Meet Chris Wilkinson

By David Lias

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Chris Wilkinson has a long title and a lot of love for the Missouri River in the Vermillion River.

Chris, an employee of the National Park Service, is chief of interpretation and education for the Missouri National Recreational River, which is made up of two districts – the 39-mile stretch of the river from the Fort Randall Dam near Pickstown that ends just a few miles west of Springfield, and the 58-mile length of the Missouri that meanders from the Gavins Point Dam near Yankton to the bend in the channel that flows near Ponca, NE.

These two districts, which include such familiar landmarks as Myron Grove, Goat Island, the Clay County Park and Mulberry Bend, are two of the remaining areas of the Missouri that are still free flowing.

Chris has worked for the National Park Service

for the last 10 years, and began his job as chief of interpretation last October.

Before moving to South Dakota and becoming familiar with the unique characteristics of the Missouri River in the Vermillion area, he was at Big Horn Canyon National Recreation Area, located in Montana in the vicinity where the Big Horn River flows into the Yellowstone River, which flows into the Missouri.

Chris, who resides in Gayville, is stationed in Yankton, and is often in Vermillion and other communities in the two districts of the Missouri recreational river, working with such local agencies as the Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce and Development Company, and the Missouri River Institute at the University of South Dakota.

“What I find so significant, and why this is a national park, is that if you start at the mouth of the Missouri, in St. Louis,

you have to go all the way to Ponca State Park where our boundary is before you hit natural river,” he said. “The 752 river miles below that have all been channelized, so this is the first place in the United States where people coming from the south, the east, or even the north must go before they reach a portion of the natural Missouri River.”

Thanks to man’s intervention, only about one third of the Missouri actually fits the definition of a natural river. The lower one third, which ends at St. Louis, has been channelized.

“Another one-third is impounded behind dams and is contained in large reservoirs, such as Gavins Point Dam, Lewis and Clark Lake, Fort Randall Dam, Lake Francis Case, and so forth,” Chris said. “This is in an incredible place ... because the first place where people see the river the way Lewis and Clark relatively saw it is at Mulberry Bend.”

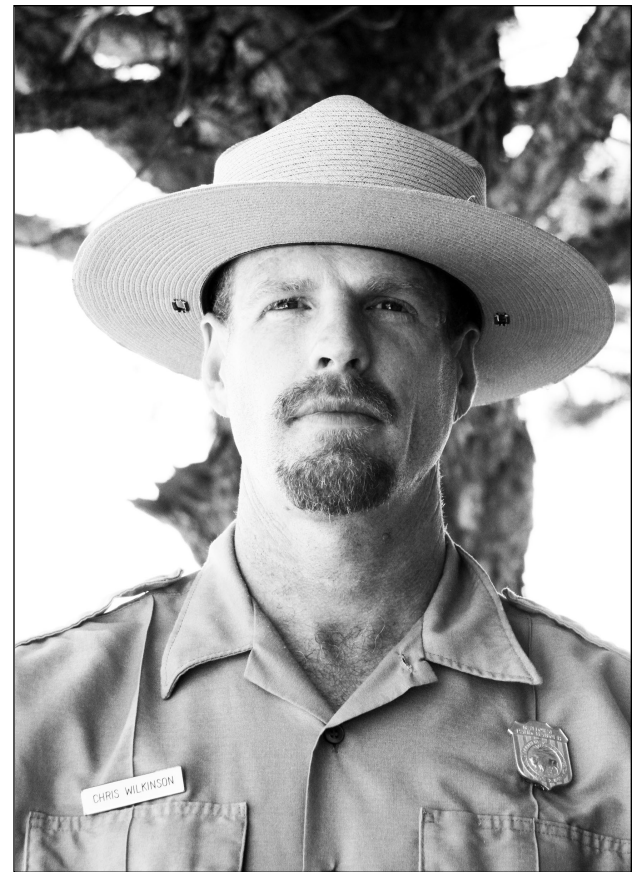
Chris grew up in western North Carolina, and has lived seven of the last nine years in South Dakota. “I was at Jewel Cave near Custer for two years with the National Park Service, then I was at a small national historic site managed by the park service near the Badlands called Minuteman Missile National Historic Site,” he said, “so I lived in Wall for five years.

“I was in Bighorn Canyon for two years, but I actually took a transfer to come back to South Dakota. I like South Dakota better than any place I’ve lived,” Chris said.

His job includes outreach, creating awareness, and developing partnerships with individuals and agencies in communities along the recreational river.

“And I get to tell the story of the national parks and how special they are,” Chris said, “especially, the non-traditional national parks.

“Here in Vermillion or



Yankton, to some people, the Missouri River is just ‘there,’ but it’s really a significant, significant, river. This is a fabulous natural resource, and it has such history – Lewis and Clark, the fur trade, and the various Native American tribes,” he said. “Many of the homesteaders didn’t arrive here by railroad – that came later. They arrived by steamboats. The river was

the number one highway into the west.”

He notes that South Dakota’s second biggest industry is tourism, and people easily think of Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills as visitor destinations in the state.

“I think the Missouri River is the most untapped resource regarding tourism potential in the state,” Chris said. “I really love the river and enjoy it here.”

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## Scholarship Program Benefits from 4-H Auction Sept. 2

This year the 4-H Teens as Teachers Scholarship Fund will benefit from the 4-H Auction held at the South Dakota State Fair on Sunday, Sept. 2, at 2 p.m. at the DakotaLand Stage. The 4-H Auction is held in conjunction with the South Dakota Auctioneers Bid Calling Contest.

The South Dakota 4-H Teens as Teachers Scholarship program is the only one of its kind in the nation. It provides opportunities for older youth to be leaders and teachers to younger youth while earning a scholarship for post secondary education. In addition, 151 scholarships totaling more than \$58,000 have been awarded through the 4-H Teens as Teachers Scholarship Fund. Your participation in the auction

provides funds for these scholarships.

Sarah Tow, 4-H scholarship recipient, said, “The 4-H Teens as Teachers Scholarship Program gave me the first stepping stone towards becoming a better public speaker. Each group (that I worked with) operated under very different dynamics, which taught me to think quickly on the spot and gave me the experience needed to speak in front of a wide variety of people, both kids and adults.”

More than 30 different items have been donated by various individuals who are interested in supporting 4-H in a unique way. We have an exciting line-up for the 4-H Auction – including something for

everyone – special items include a Mission CRAZ junior archery bow & arrows, an iPad, four units of Legend seed corn, beef bundle, model John Deere tractors and much more.

See complete listing at <http://www.sd4hfoundation.org>.

The South Dakota Auctioneers Association will be auctioning off these items during their annual Bid Calling Contest. If you are unable to attend, bid on-line at <http://www.sdaa.net>.

For more information on the Auction contact the SD 4-H Foundation office at (605) 688-4943.

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