

River Quest

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River Quest; an adventure on the Vista Star and in Pioneer Hall at the DECC. River Quest taught me how people like you and me affect the St. Louis River. For example, we could accidentally set loose an invasive species into the river. Thankfully, *Western Lake Superior Sanitary District*, WLSSD cleans the water from our drains and sends it back into the St. Louis River. Imagine if the water wasn't cleaned, the river would be polluted! The following paragraphs will show and describe what I learned at River Quest.

My group and I started our quest on the Vista Star. The boat rocked as we started down the St. Louis River. What fascinating things would we learn about?

The St. Louis River is the largest river in the U.S. that dumps into Lake Superior. Being 179 miles long, you can kind of understand that. We learned this at the tippy-top of the Vista Star. We used binoculars to see points of interest that the instructors pointed out.

My group and I were eager to find out what this big container of ice water was for at this next station. We should have known that we'd be learning about hypothermia. Moderate hypothermia makes you sluggish and if severe hypothermia sets in, your body will start to shut down! So if you're out on the ice, or anywhere that's cold, be prepared. I'm sure going to be prepared after sticking my hand into that container of insanely freezing water!

"An estuary is a place where two waters meet and mix!" My group and I learned this fun little jingle at the *Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve* station. The St. Louis River meets Lake Superior and forms an estuary. Estuaries are sheltered from the weather, which makes a great place for creatures to live. With the unpredictable weather here in Duluth, that's a bonus!

Maybe you've seen these big cage-like things down at the beach; they're protecting the nesting areas of the Piping Plover. The Piping Plover is a migratory shore bird. But it's endangered. Litter prevents the Plovers from nesting in an area, and as you know, dogs like to chase things like birds. We can help save the population of the Piping Plover by keeping our dogs on leashes, (when there is a Plover nesting area near) and not littering!

Did you know that 10 people drown every day in the U.S.? 88% of those people are NOT wearing life jackets. This terrifying fact surprised me at the life jacket station. Life jackets are literally life savers. That is why it is so important to wear them.

You would think that your average goldfish would cause no harm, but it is an invasive species! Invasive species are animals and plants, like sea lamprey, zebra mussel, and buckthorn, that come and take over everything! In the past, sea lamprey invaded and almost wiped out the trout population in Duluth! So instead of releasing your aquatic pets or other plants back into ponds or lakes, bring them to a school or aquarium. Think before you do!

That ends our journey on the Vista Star. But there are still things to learn in the DECC. In Pioneer Hall, there were six more stations. What would my group and I learn here?

To be honest, I thought rip currents were only in oceans but they're in lakes, too! Rip currents can be faster than Olympic swimmers and are very, very strong. So if you're caught in one, let it pull you until you can swim away to the side. At Parkpointbeach.org, you can find the rip current danger level of the water. Be sure to check that website before you swim at Park Point!

Everyone uses water, but do you know where it goes? Water from drains goes to the WLSSD. There, workers clean the water in 8-10 hours, and then send it back to the St. Louis River. If we didn't have WLSSD, the St. Louis River would look totally different...

What's the difference between sanitary sewers and storm sewers? Storm sewers go straight into lakes and rivers. Sanitary sewers collect drainage from homes and goes to WLSSD. The people who work with storm and sanitary sewers have an important job. If the sanitary sewer water got mixed up with the storm sewer water, streams and lakes would be in trouble.

At the next station there was a big machine. With this machine, my group and I made electricity with water! On a screen of the machine, we had to yell out numbers that flew by. We also got flashlights to work by pushing repeatedly on a lever/switch thing. Thank you, Minnesota Power for keeping things bright!

The manufacturing company, Sappi, makes paper, wood pulp, and other products as well. The wood pulp is used for making the paper. They bleach it white and then refine it. Now it can be made into paper!

At the last station we learned about oil in the environment. Gasoline is a product of oil and doesn't mix with water, so if it spills in some, you can still see it. If there is a spill of gasoline, at a gas station maybe, let it evaporate because it is very explosive. The U.S. Coast Guard and the USCG Auxiliary taught us about this.

Well that was River Quest. A very fun, educational experience. I definitely learned lots of new things, despite the seasickness!