



2008 RIVER TOWN OF THE YEAR ELKADER, IOWA

Life-long residents of towns that have this kind of interconnection with such a valuable river often take the familiar resource for granted. In Elkader, things are different. The Turkey River serves as a center piece for nearly every aspect of Elkader's residents.

The most important link to future generations, **Central Elkader School** sits directly adjacent to the River. Without even knowing it, generations of students have grown up with a connection to the Turkey River. Over the past eight years every 5th grade student has gone through a comprehensive river and stream ecology class that provides an early discovery of how rivers function as well as the vast aquatic natural world the river supports. That initial discovery is followed up with high school environmental science classes that focus on various aspects of the river. Even the DARE program in Elkader treats its graduates to an annual tube float down the Turkey River. An ongoing adult education program will hopefully culminate in the ultimate sacrifice of the oldest residents: modification of the dam to restore the natural function and connectivity of the river and allow for river travelers to once again pass through town in a canoe or kayak!

A number of **local businesses and cultural attractions** directly reflect the historical connection to the Turkey River. For example, public buildings and attractions such as the public library, restaurants, stores, bed and breakfasts, museums, canoe rentals, and the historic Elkader Opera House have a river thyme and promote direct views and use of the river. Main street state and national awards are proof this river town is alive and well with enthusiastic and motivated residents at the helm. Elkader has also been recognized as a Cultural Entertainment District. A monthly program called "rhythms on the river" also brings free live music to the banks of the river for visitors and residents to enjoy.

Outdoor recreational opportunities that directly connect residents and visitors with the river can be found nearly everywhere you look. These include city and private campgrounds adjacent to the river as well as extensive trails, canoe access, and angler access. These recreational opportunities also tie in with recreational attractions up- and downriver from Elkader such as the historic Motor Mill and Big Spring Trout Hatchery.

In 1991, with the help of Elkader contractor Keith Knospe and many volunteers, the city rebuilt a river walk along the Turkey River from the Stone Arch Bridge to the city park. The concrete and steel structure replaced a board walk that was built about 1900, but fell into disrepair by about 1940. The new river walk is heavily used by walkers, joggers, sight-seers, and tourists. It connects downtown Elkader with the park, swimming pool, and the Pony Hollow Trail. Another segment of the trail on the other side of the river follows a levee downstream from the business district.

The city of Elkader has partnered with the Clayton County Conservation Board to develop the popular Pony Hollow Trail, which follows the Turkey River and Pony Creek for about 5 miles along an abandoned railroad right-of-way. Many Elkader and Clayton County residents, as well as park visitors, use the trail for hiking, biking, running, bird-watching, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding.

On the edge of Elkader, where Iowa Highway 13 crosses the Turkey River, the Clayton County Conservation Board maintains Turkey River Park. It's a highway rest stop, and is popular with anglers, canoeists, and picnickers.

In 2007, the city of Elkader, the Clayton County Conservation Board, the Board of Supervisors, Elkader contractor John Moyna, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources worked together with Eagle Scout candidate Ryan Helgerson to build a new canoe access on the Turkey River in Elkader. The new ramp is farther above the dam and easier to reach from both land and water than an old, makeshift site that was closer to the dam. The facility will make it safer for canoeists and kayakers to pull out of the river above the dam. The city of Elkader recently received a grant from the DNR to install new signs along the river to warn about the dam.

Every year, countless numbers of visitors and tourists venture to Elkader to take advantage of the variety of outdoor recreation associated with the Turkey River. Canoeing, tubing, fishing, camping, and hiking along the river are the main attractions related to the river and are easily accessible to the public. Turkey River Canoe Rentals (otherwise known as "Gene's Place") rents out all their canoes nearly every weekend of the paddling season and the campgrounds in Elkader are usually packed with a festival-like atmosphere of jubilant campers. Elkader is also host to the annual "Red Horse Fisheree", which is in its 18th year and draws hundreds of excited contestants who fish for the less recognized, but vital species of the river. Businesses in Elkader also support active conservation organizations such as Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, White Tails Unlimited, and the Wild Turkey Federation who assist with numerous outdoor recreation and education programs, as well as assist area landowners with numerous conservation practices that ultimately result in improved water quality a healthier river. Over the past two years, Angie Reed of the Clayton County Conservation Board has coordinated a river cleanup that has drawn participants from as far away as California!

Wastewater Treatment Compliance

Admittedly, this may be the weakest part of our application simply because Elkader has had some wastewater violations over the years. The bright side is those problems have and are being remedied. The city has committed to spend \$5 million to improve the wastewater treatment system. The possibility of being recognized as an important river town to those outside of town is an opportunity to further instill the far reaching value and importance of what they are doing for the river. It is also an opportunity to recognize those efforts and the fact that Elkader's financial commitment does not go unnoticed.

For several years the City of Elkader has been working with the Department of Natural Resources to become compliant with the NPDES permit. In 2002 major upgrades to our potable water system were mandated which postponed our upgrades to our wastewater treatment facility. In the fall of 2006, an engineering firm was selected to do an analysis of our needs and make a recommendation. After a period of public comment and a second review engineering opinion, the Elkader City Council approved a facility plan for a new wastewater treatment facility in October 2007.

The new facility plan will be a mechanical treatment plant which will allow the City to be compliant with the new ammonia nitrogen discharge limits and fecal coliform bacteria limits. Although the new plant will result in very high user rates for the residents, a mechanical treatment plant was chosen because it can easily be updated or changed to adapt to any future regulations. In addition, the end result, the effluent water, may actually be better, or have less contaminants, than what is allowed by DNR thereby lessening the overall effect on aquatic life. The new plant is scheduled to be operational by January 2010.

TESTIMONIAL

Unlike those river towns perched on the edge of the water, the Turkey River runs through the heart of Elkader. It is parallel to Main Street and serves a similar function within the community. The river draws people to Elkader as well as gives its residents a quality of life that only a beautiful river like the Turkey can provide.

Elkader's relationship with the river runs all the way back to our first settler, Elisha Boardman when he made his homestead along the banks of the Turkey. The history of our town has been intertwined with the river ever since. Perhaps the single most recognizable landmark in Elkader is the 119-year-old Keystone Bridge, which has been on the National Register of Historic Places since January 1979. The bridge, and by extension the Turkey River, have been incorporated into the logo of the city and serves as the initial representation of the town to visitors and businesses alike.

The Turkey River holds special place in our hearts since our restaurant Schera's sits right on its banks. The focal point of our summer season is outdoor dining on our patio overlooking the Turkey, and as such Schera's has become a favorite evening hangout spot for locals and tourists alike. There is no doubt that the views of the river, the bridge, and the dam, all draw people in to sit and relax. Perhaps one of our best memories of last summer was having a live concert on the patio in celebration of the blue moon in June. The reflection of the full moon on the river rounded out the experience that combined art, people, and the beauty of nature and water. And therein lies the power of the Turkey River: it gives a sense of peace and communion with nature in the middle of our small town.

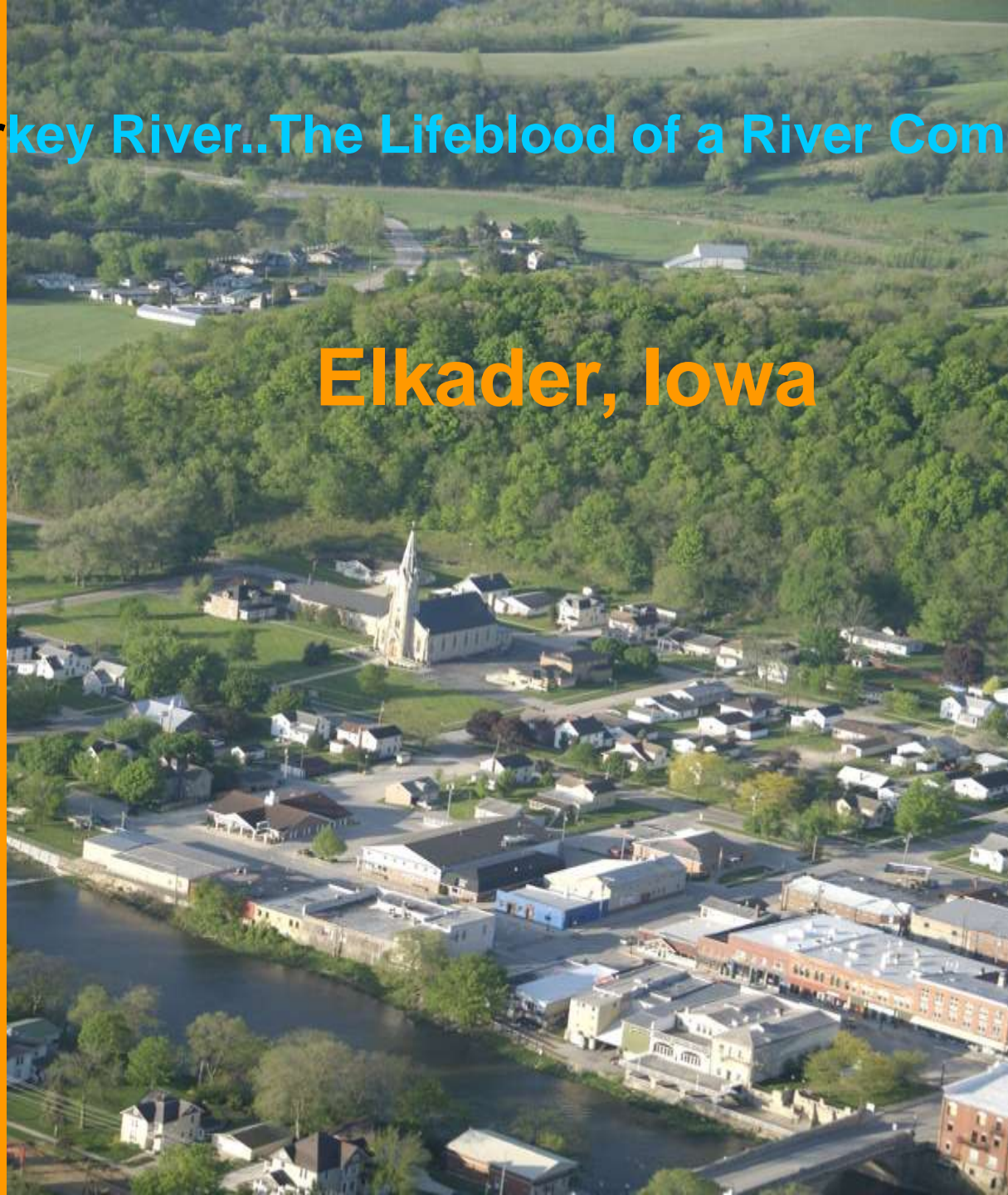
Therefore, we are strongly committed to maintaining the quality of the river and support the conscientious protection and maintenance of the river in and out of our community. As a superb canoeing and tubing river, the Turkey draws people from all over the Midwest. Already, we have received messages from people coming to Elkader to canoe the Turkey who would like to end their day at Schera's enjoying dinner on the patio. A river like the Turkey is an asset that cannot be obtained by force of will or money, yet is fragile and therefore must be cherished and protected.

Before moving to Elkader about a year and a half ago, we lived in Boston. We had grown tired of the traffic and congestion of big city life and sought something better. We found that in Elkader. Perhaps the most decisive reason why we moved to Elkader is that there is a high quality of life here created by people who care about their town and their natural resources. The Turkey River is an acknowledged asset of our community and a major factor in making Elkader a truly wonderful place to live. The river is the heart of our community: we protect it, interact with it, live with it, share it, and love it.

Brian Bruening & Frederique Boudouani
Owners
Schera's Restaurant & Bar

The Turkey River..The Lifeblood of a River Community

Elkader, Iowa



Historic River Attractions

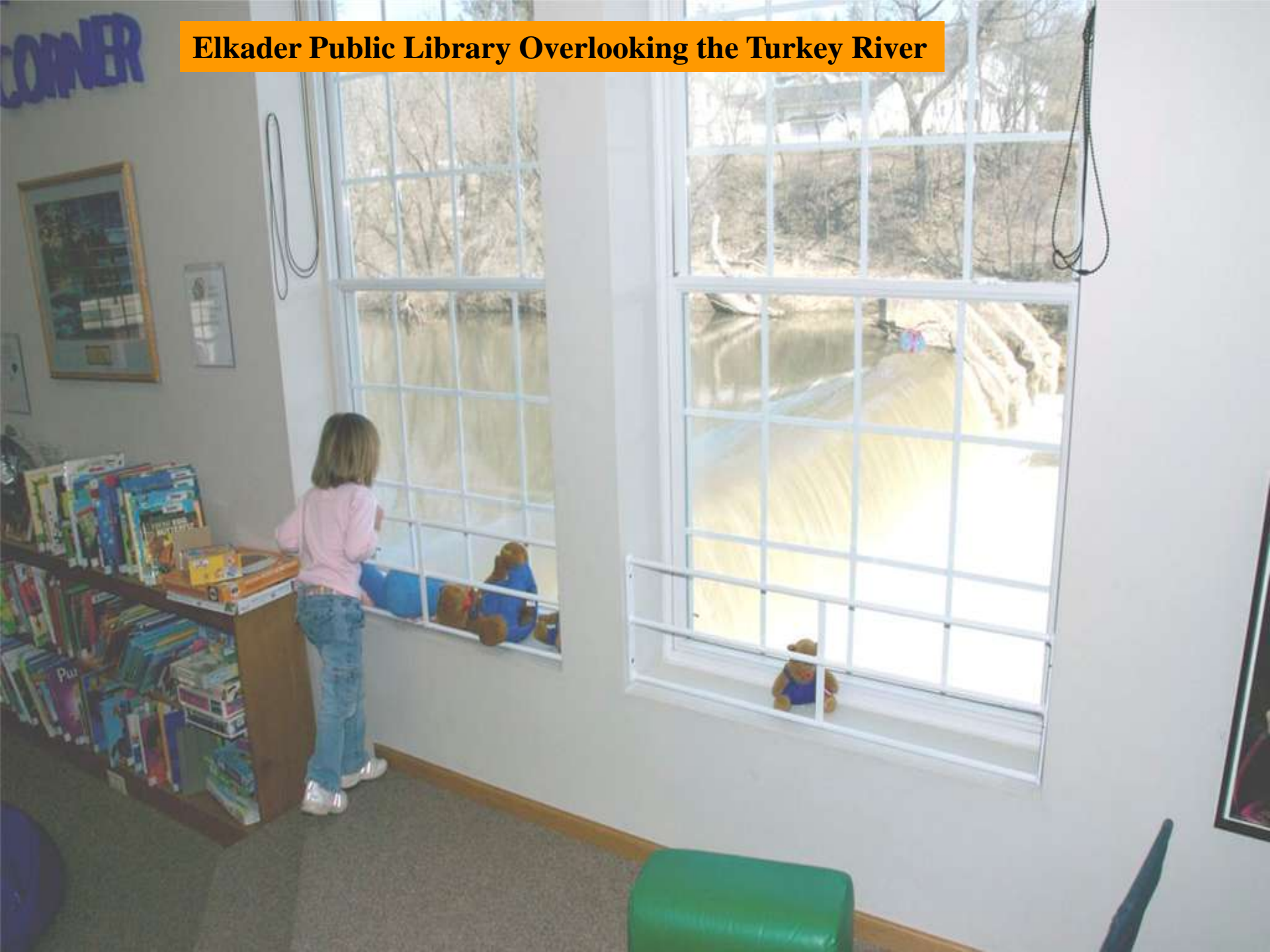
Motor Mill



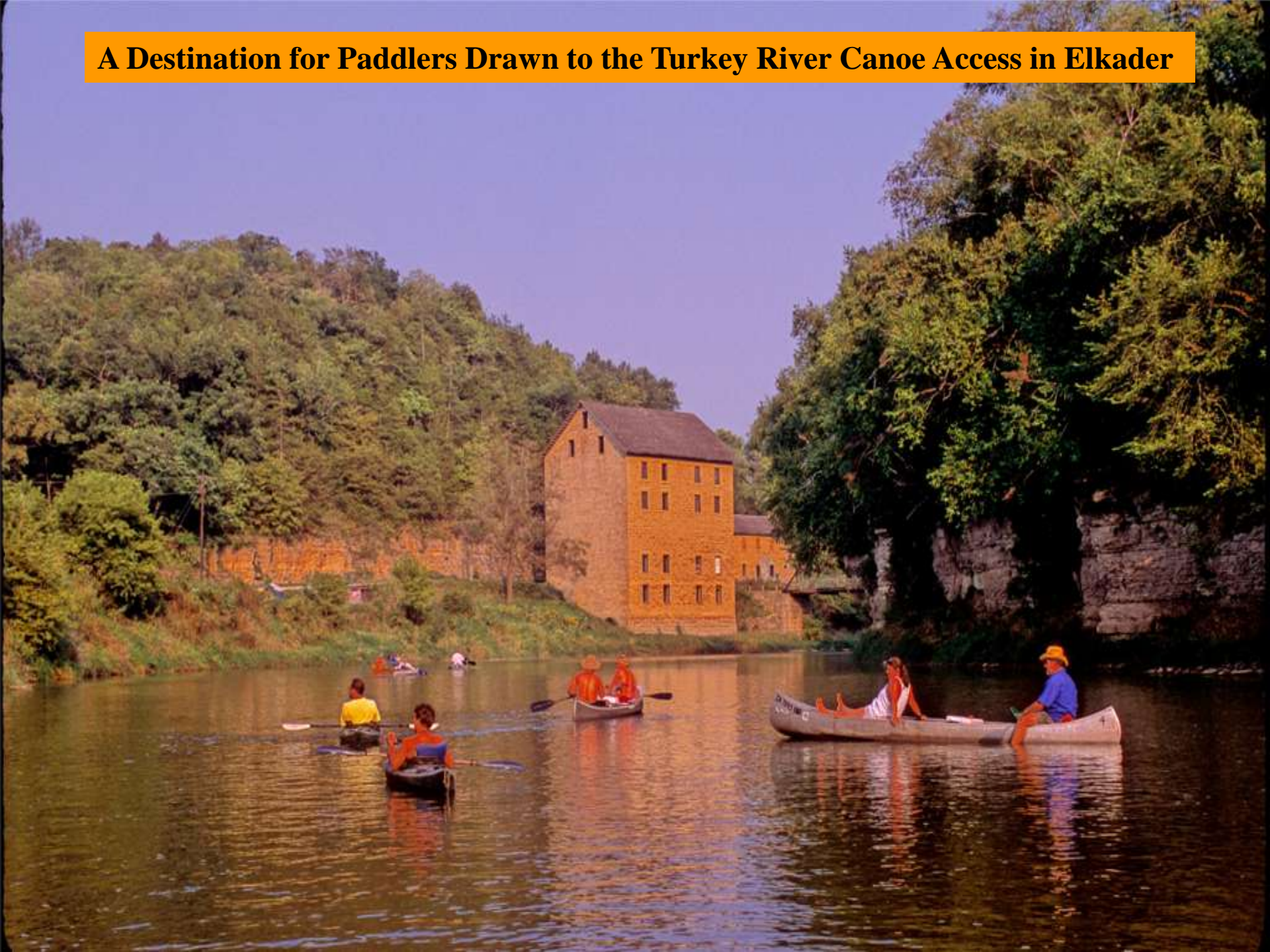
Annual Stream and River Education Program with Elkader 5th Graders



Elkader Public Library Overlooking the Turkey River



A Destination for Paddlers Drawn to the Turkey River Canoe Access in Elkader



Elkader 5th Graders Learning About the Diversity of Life Dependent on the Health of the Turkey River for Survival



An Opportunity for Youth to Connect Through Recreation on the River



Ample Angler Access and Canoe Access Provide Easy Opportunities For Residents and Visitors to Directly Connect to the River