

# Operation Pollination

**T**ake away mosquitoes and you could very well take away Grizzlies. Those little pests are *that* important. Mosquitoes are pollinators. In its simplest terms, pollinators are those that carry pollen from the stamen (male) part of a flower to the stigma (female) part of a flower. Without pollination, supermarket produce departments and farmers markets don't exist. And, neither do many animals.

To learn more about pollination, paddle down the Mississippi River. When you see Lock and Dam 7, veer left making your way to French Island, Wisconsin. Say hello to Roz Schnick.

Days before my launch, while with John and Ellen in St. Paul, my hosts made it perfectly clear: "When in La Crosse, visit Roz."

The two had known this conservation activist for years. In fact, they would stay at her home during their upcoming drive to Rhode Island. Having them mention to Roz about 'Paddler Paul' she would welcome me as well.

It's one thing planning a trip when you're driving, it's another when you're kayaking. Waves, wind, and unexpected mayhem can ruin the best of plans. As it was, I didn't know what day or time I'd be arriving in La Crosse. The only thing I knew was that La Crosse was on the path to the Gulf of Mexico, as well as mosquitoes, butterflies, and bees.

Closing in on La Crosse, I phoned Roz letting her know my arrival schedule. Approaching the town the water was calm, but once veering to the left the calmness turned chaotic. I no longer had the current on my side. It was windy, choppy, and one of the toughest two miles I'd paddle in the entire summer. Add to that, the pain in my left foot intensified.

I experienced this discomfort during long bike rides. After several minutes of my foot pressing against a hard surface, I get extreme pain. On the bike it was from the pedal, on the boat it was from the foothold.

To alleviate the discomfort, I raise my foot. Throughout the 2300-mile trip, my foot came off the foothold too many times to count. The pain lasts for 90 seconds.

The side trip to French Island felt like it lasted for 90 minutes. I arrived at Roz' dock at 1:54pm.

Entering her beautiful and spacious home, I was glad she pointed me to the bathroom and shower. I was wet, muddy, and exhausted. Ten minutes later I was refreshed and sat with her at the dining room table. The night earlier she had hosted over 70 people for a political fundraiser. Leftovers from the catered event were between us.

As she spoke, I listened and nibbled on the crackers, cheese, olives, strawberries, and grapes. I was an equal opportunity consumer. I didn't discriminate with any of the various items that were in my reach. I ate them all.

Remembering that former Wisconsin Congressman Ron Kind's wife, Tawni, was a court reporter, and on the Board that hired me to speak at their state conference decades ago, I asked if she knew the couple. "They were here last night," said Roz. Most likely they didn't drive. They lived a few doors down.

For someone in her eighties, she had more vigor than many half her age. If she believed in you and your cause, she had more punch than a Joe Louis right hook. Roz Schnick was a fighter.

Walking into her office passing framed photos of her standing with presidents and other elected officials, she showed me her 714-page book on the *Mitigation and Enhancement Techniques for the Upper Mississippi River and other Large River Systems*.

The river was in her backyard, and she wanted to protect it, including ways to eradicate the invasive Asian carp. What she didn't want was to eradicate pollinators.

Through her efforts, Roz began the initiative to help protect the pollinator biodiversity along the Mississippi River.

Across the street from her home was her cottage, dubbed, *The Monarchy*. The guest house is a pollinator sanctuary. Surrounding the house were pollinator gardens.



In an interview with local television station WXOW, Roz says, “It’s all about having producers of food and flowers, ...The monarch is at risk and that’s the queen of all pollinators, so it’s very simple to me, if we want to eat, we have to have pollinators.”

In September 2024, Roz Schnick received the Stewardship Award from the Mississippi River Parkway Commission for her efforts related to Operation Pollination.

Her award proved how much of a Mississippi River ally she is in protecting our natural habitat.

I’m sure my visitor felt the same.

