

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



 **FRIENDS**
OF
WILLOW RIVER & KINNICKINNIC
EST. STATE PARKS 1990

Spring/Summer, 2023



Rita Thofern

President's Column

Rita Thofern

There is so much joy to be had in seeing the remarkable level of support that makes our parks especially good. First, park staff members, rangers, wardens and office staff go beyond the basics in supporting park users and the Friends' organization. Then the Friends' group provides highly-trained naturalists to create and present a remarkable array of programs for visitors, including day users, campers, and community groups. Next, volunteers step up to fill multiple roles. These include hosting at the nature center, removing litter, grooming winter trails, building the new bike trails-both by hand and with the use of heavy equipment, working to manage invasive species-especially European buckthorn, assisting during events throughout the year, and many other unseen activities that truly make a difference when people come to the parks.

In addition to this amazing people-power support, individuals, organizations and foundations step up to lend financial support. Thanks to a significant contribution from Ciranda, we have been able to hire, Michele DeLong, our new development coordinator, and we were just informed that we will be receiving another significant contribution, from the Fred C. and Katherine B. Andersen Foundation.

The support we witness all around us is gratifying and encouraging.



The trout lily, an early spring wildflower, thrives in woodland environments. Look for them near the falls at Willow River State Park.

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

Here we are, already at the start of summer, and what a busy spring it has been. After a long snowy winter, we were beginning to wonder if spring was ever going to come. Of course it did, but not before one last blast of snow and ice on April 1 that we definitely could have done without. Both parks received significant damage to trees along our roads and trails. With thousands of trees down at both parks, park staff began the daunting task of getting the roads open and the trails passable.

With camping season approaching, staff and volunteers worked for several weeks on cutting and cleanup, primarily in the 300 campground to make it passable and safe for campers. The schedule was already busy with getting buildings and water systems up and running, picnic areas cleaned up, campgrounds open, and trails ready.

All trails are open and passable, but we still have lots of trees down along the trails and roads. We will continue to work on storm cleanup for much of the summer.

We also had a pretty active flood season this

year with significant high water at both parks. The dam at Willow had no issues passing the high flows, but at Kinni, we did have some damage at the beach area from the near historic high-water levels.

The past few nice weekends have brought many visitors out to the parks helping make up for the late spring.

There is more to watch for as summer unfolds. Thanks to an Eagle Scout project, Willow now has a dock at the boat landing. The six-acre pollinator project, in the open area across from the group camp, will soon have interpretive signs. The boat and dock operation at Kinnickinnic State Park is being reconfigured. Also this summer, the stairs at the falls will be repaired, the falls bridge deck rebuilt, and plumbing lines at the beach replaced.



April 1st storm damage at Kinnickinnic State Park. Can you find the trail?

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

We're heading into the busy season, so get ready for tons of fun and education all summer long! Throughout the summer we will have two naturalists on duty full time to provide new and additional programming.

Watch for:

- Painting on The Prairie
- Beginner Mountain Biking
- Sunday Strolls
- Weekend Kayaking Classes



Ashley Goldbeck and Albert

Summer Naturalist Classes

Weekly on Wednesdays from 10:00 am–noon in June, July and August. Classes are open to individuals, and families with children of nearly all ages. (Some classes may not be suitable for children under 8) Each month we will focus on a major theme with something new each week.

- June: Plant & Animal ID Hikes
- July: Kayaking
- August: Nature Crafts

Cost: \$5.00/person for each individual class or you can purchase a pass for a full month for \$20.00/person. Vehicle admission into the park is also required.

Learn more and register here: tinyurl.com/JuneNatClass

The BEST Guest Speakers

We're "over-the-moon" excited to share that we have a variety of influential guest speakers lined up to present at Willow River State Park this summer. They include:

- Kris Polson, Recycling 101: Monday, June 12, 6:00–7:30 pm
- River Valley Raptors: Raptors 101 -Saturday, June 24, at 11:00 am
- Backyard Bees and the Mysteries of Honey Bees : Local Beekeeper Dave Klumb, Saturday, August 26, at 1:00 pm.
- Kelly Gillespie will be providing Mindful Meditation classes throughout the summer
- Meet our very own park rangers and Conservation Wardens at Willow on Friday, July 7, at 5:00 pm. They'll be roasting hot dogs and marshmallows, and answering any and all questions you have about this vital and impactful field of work!

Stay up to date with our programs and never miss out on the fun!

Follow us on Facebook: @WRSPKSP

Visit our website: willowkinnifriends.org/upcomingevent

Welcome Michele DeLong!

The Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks is excited to announce the hiring of Michele DeLong as our first development coordinator, a new role for our organization.

As development coordinator, Michele's job is to make connections to sustain and expand the Friends' mission to enhance the parks' natural environment and engage visitors through recreation, education, and conservation. In her first few weeks on the job, she's been



Michele DeLong, Development Coordinator

getting to know the parks, the nature center and, of course, the Friends organization, its members and volunteers.

She hit the ground running by representing the Friends at the Hudson Community Expo, the first of many community events the Friends will participate in during the coming months. As she strives to increase the Friends' visibility in the community, she will also be coordinating significant fundraising and grant writing efforts.

Michele has lived most of her adult life in Hammond, "The Heart of St. Croix County," and comes with decades of experience making community connections through both her professional and volunteer work. Most recently she served as secretary and part of the marketing team with Hudson Hot Air Affair. A year ago she and her husband, John, purchased a historic home in Hammond. They have three adult children.

Watch for Michele at the parks and events around the community, and offer her a warm welcome.



Friends' board member, Theresa Gibson, and new Development Coordinator, Michele DeLong, represent the Friends at the Hudson Community Expo.



Member Highlight

Wendy Peterson

My husband Dan and I live in Hudson and enjoy spending time in the park several times each week, hiking the many beautiful trails and viewing the current state of the thundering falls. My husband likes the challenge of running the entire circle route around the lake. My favorite hikes are the snow shoe trails and the smaller trails through the camp-sites. This spring we have especially enjoyed spotting many beautiful migrating birds as they make their way back to their northern homes.

Since my retirement at the end of March I've begun a series of paintings inside the park to capture the variety of the landscape and the seasonal color changes. I'm joyfully spending my days developing my skills, especially painting outdoors "en plein air." This is more challenging than painting in my studio, so my goal is to create a study rather than a finished piece. I limit my time to less than three hours and I focus on capturing the essence of the place, the lighting, and the colors. I may finish the piece at home, or I may use the study, notes and photos as a reference to start a new piece.

I love it when other park guests stop to peek at my work and share their mutual love of the beautiful surroundings. If you happen upon me painting in the park please, stop to say hello!

I took up painting in 2019. My primary medium is soft pastels but I also enjoy painting in oils. I am the current president of the Lake Country Pastel Society in Minnesota.

You can find me on Instagram at [#wendypetersonpaints](https://www.instagram.com/wendypetersonpaints) or check out my website at wendypeterson.com.



Five Minutes of Calm

Kelly Gillespie, Certified Meditation & Mindfulness Teacher

How would your life be different if you took one or more five-minute breaks every day to recharge and experience calm? When we make the time to practice feeling calm, we are able to experience the act of simply being. This is the mental and physical state of feeling whole as well as at ease in any place at any time.

Resting and trusting in your unique state of calm dissolves stress, aids clear thinking, enhances your awareness, and allows you to heal. Finding calm gives you back yourself. Ironically, it's often what most of us spend so much time looking for outside of ourselves.



Struggling with our busy minds on a daily basis can be exhausting and actually slow us down. To feel like yourself again and ultimately be more productive, set aside five minutes a day to practice the following exercise:

1. Start by finding a comfortable seated or lying position. Allow your muscles to relax as you slow your breathing.
2. Bring your awareness to each part of your body and allow it to relax. Start with your feet and work all the way up to the top of your head. A helpful trick is to imagine your awareness lighting up each part of your body as you move through this part of the practice.
3. After the body scan, begin to deepen your breath. Count ten deep breaths.
4. Next, intentionally allow your body and mind to receive the benefits of the state of calm you've achieved.
5. Last, but certainly not least, feel gratitude for the awareness you just gained.



John LeRoy leads a group of mountain bikers on an early spring ride. The new mountain bike trails at both Willow and Kinni offer fun and healthy activity for riders of all experience levels.

Mystery on the Silver Trail

Nick Schmit



Hikers, runners and skiers on the Nelson Farm (Silver) Trail may have glanced across the open prairie over the years and seen this protrusion in the midst of the grasses and flowers and wondered what it is. Could it be a leftover relic from life here before the park was established? Can it tell us about the history of this section of the park?

Chances are good there are at least a few readers of this newsletter who can enlighten us. What do you think? Does the springtime closeup help?

Share your knowledge, or your inspired guesses.

Canoe and Kayak Rentals Are Open For the Season at Willow

Looking for a fun time on the water this summer? Canoe and kayak rentals are up and running at Willow River State Park. Stop in at the park office to arrange your rental. Both four-hour and full day rentals are available. Rentals include life jackets and paddles.

Proceeds from boat rentals go to the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. Have fun and help support the work of the Friends!



Did You Know? A Trackchair is Available



The electric powered Trackchair, an all-terrain wheelchair.

If you, or a member of your group, find it difficult to negotiate the park trails, the Trackchair can be borrowed at no charge for up to four days. This could allow your entire group to more fully enjoy the park, especially when attempting to travel the hilly trails to the falls.

The Trackchair is electric powered. It is kept in an enclosed trailer for the user to tow to the location where it will be used.

For more information visit the Hudson Rod, Gun & Archery web site: tinyurl.com/trkchr

The Hudson Rod, Gun & Archery Club could make a big difference in your outing to one of the parks. The club has a Trackchair and would like to see it being put to use. What is a Trackchair? Think of it as an all-terrain, powered wheelchair, designed to easily navigate steep hills and rough



The Trackchair and its trailer are available at no charge to anyone needing a bit of assistance accessing Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks' trails.



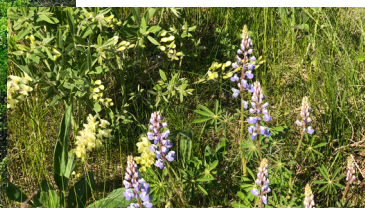
Goodbye Winter!



Hello Summer!



A walk in the park this season will bring a mix of sightings. You may see wildflowers and remaining storm damage as seen here, while encountering wildlife and greeting your fellow park users.



Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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Vice-President: Walt Zuliani
Treasurer: Dave Thofern
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Directors

John Collins, Theresa Gibson, Dan Marchand, Bob Richardson, Nick Schmit

Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason
Kinnickinnic Park Ranger: Eric Klumb
Naturalist Educator: Ashley Goldbeck



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