

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



Spring/Summer, 2015

River Rambles

Ethan Lewis

Happy Spring! My name is Ethan Lewis and I am super excited to be joining the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks as the Environmental Educator. I am looking forward to partnering and working with the Department of Natural Resources staff here at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. I am originally from Burlington, Iowa, which is located in southeast Iowa along the Mississippi River and is the birthplace of Aldo Leopold, one of my heroes. I live across the St. Croix River and look forward to getting to know the Hudson and River Falls area.



Ethan Lewis

My educational background includes a Bachelor of Science in Naturalist Science from Northland College and a Master of Education with a teaching license in secondary education from the University of Minnesota. I have been teaching for 10 years including in Dakota and Ramsey Counties in Minnesota, Antioch University in New England, Central Wisconsin Environmental Station and the International Crane Foundation. Most recently, I was employed by the Bell Museum of Natural History working in the St. Paul Public Schools.

When I am not at work I enjoy being outdoors. Some of my favorite outdoors activities are hiking, canoeing, kayaking, bird watching, cross country skiing and snowshoeing. I also love to play soccer, read and drink tea. Other than the outdoors, my passions are gardening and cooking. My favorite vegetables to grow are Rattlesnake Snap Beans and carrots.

I am looking forward to teaming up with Sara, the DNR Naturalist Assistant, to continue great weekend programs and the Young Naturalist programs while expanding our offerings to reach out to families and older children. We also hope to develop programs for audiences of adults. Some of the ideas we have started to explore include family yoga in the park, nature book club, geocaching and many others. We are open to suggestions for programs, so feel free to stop in to talk with us. See you around the park.

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

A mild winter and early spring have definitely made for busy times here at the park. Park staff have been busy getting buildings and water systems up and running, campgrounds open, trails ready, and some of the prairie fields burned. Water is now on and all campgrounds are open for reservations. The lack of spring flooding also means that Kinnickinnic should see more early-season use on the river and hopefully more boat campers.

As many of you are aware, park staff have also been preparing for the impending drawdown of Little Falls Lake and work on the dam. The drawdown will begin on June 1 and will take about a month. The project and lack of a lake is likely to last for several years. This will certainly have a significant impact on our park and we plan to keep our visitors, friends, and neighbors informed and involved in the process as we proceed.

We are still short-staffed but seasonal employees are coming on board as we move into the busy season. The Visitor Services Associate position is still vacant and will probably remain so for the summer. We will have a little more help this year with the addition of a couple more seasonal rangers.

A lot of changes have been taking place down at the beach. The old bathhouse building has now been demolished and construction of a new restroom facility and open-air shelter is underway. The project is expected to be completed by the end of August. This will be a great addition to that picnic area.

Staff and volunteers are also continuing work on the Natural Playground Trail located where the old disc golf course was. A couple of the larger items will be tackled this summer as Eagle Scout projects but there is still plenty to do. Volunteers have also been spending a lot of time and effort on trail work and buckthorn removal. Contact the park if you wish to volunteer.

Also, as part of the spring hunting opportunities in the parks, staff held a Learn to Hunt Turkeys Program. Six 10-11 year-old boys participated in the program. It included a classroom portion, firearms handling and shooting at the range, and a mentored hunt. Two of the boys were successful in bagging turkeys and it was a great time for everyone involved. Thank you to all of the Friends and volunteers who help make these two parks such a great place to visit. All of your help is greatly appreciated. I hope to see you out here soon.

Grants Support the Parks

Rita Thofern

The Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks have been very successful in obtaining grants to fund a number of exciting projects. So far this year grants have been received to expand naturalist programming, complete a new trail at Kinnickinnic State Park and to begin a geocaching program.

The St. Croix Valley Foundation is providing a Health and Wellness grant that will help us provide field trips to the parks for local schools. We will be able to provide transportation and naturalist services to bring students to the park more than once, provide an active experience learning about nature at the parks, and encourage them to return with their families. Whether it is walking down a trail to go see eagles in their nest or using snowshoes to follow a deer trail, it will provide healthy exercise with a dose of environmental learning.

Thanks to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin's Norma & Stanley DeBoer Quiet Trails Fund, the new trail on the south side of the river at Kinnickinnic State Park will be sporting signs and benches at impressive overlook locations. The grant will provide maps, directional arrows, and interpretive signs. A second contribution, from the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin's David & Joyce Weizenicker Fund for State Parks, will help pay for finishing the trail tread by removing stumps and other obstructions along with benching the trail to eliminate side sloping.



Tom Gujer, lead trail builder, works on the new Hidden Falls Trail.
Photo by Dave Thofern

Another very helpful grant will allow the Friends to provide a new opportunity to park visitors. Thanks to a Friends of Wisconsin State Parks Affinity Card Naturalist Grant we will be able to acquire a set of gps units and provide naturalist support to develop and support a program for their use. Likely activities include scout troop use of the gps units to learn and earn badges, and group sessions to teach gps use and geocaching. The gps units will also be available for sign-out to allow individuals and families to find geocaches in the park.

Look for more information on these grant-supported activities on the web page and on Facebook.

Same Mission, New Name

Julie Gujer

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc. is the new name for the long-time Organization for Wildlife Learning, Inc. (The OWLs). The reasons for the name change are two-fold. First, it was time to include Kinnickinnic State Park and offer naturalist programming and volunteer support to users of both parks. Second, the OWLs name was confusing. "People would often think we were a birding group and didn't really understand what the "OWLs" stood for," said Ruwal Freese, the Willow River Volunteer Coordinator.

Watch for the new name and logo at the parks and at events.



Coveted DNR Award

Rita Thofern

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Secretary's Award for 2015 has been given to our own Buck Malick. This award honors his steadfast commitment and leadership in all things environmental.

Here is a brief version of his accomplishments. He assisted in the development of the River Walk curriculum, at Hudson's Willow River Elementary, that leads students to understand the importance of protecting the St. Croix River. He helped to establish the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area (See a related article in this newsletter.) and played a role in forming the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District. Further, as a member of The Prairie Enthusiasts, Buck coordinates the chapter's annual Prairie Days celebration.

To park users and Friends members, Buck may be best recognized as the DNR-certified



Buck Malick



angler instructor who organizes and operates kids' fishing events, including summertime and ice-fishing contests, held at Willow River State Park.

Congratulations, Buck!

Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area

Julie Gujer

The Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area (WPHRA) was established in 1999 and encompasses 350,000 acres within 15 townships in Polk and St. Croix counties. The goal is to permanently protect 20,000 acres, approximately 10 percent of the historic grassland acreage within the restoration area.



At the time of European settlement—prior to 1840—prairies dominated areas of southern Wisconsin and were abundant south and west into Illinois and Iowa. These extensive, rich, and diverse grasslands encompassed thousands of acres. The plant and animal diversity of the prairie was incredible. Often, remnant prairies are found to have upwards of 300 species per acre. Thousands of species of birds, animals, and insects evolved to live and thrive in the prairie ecosystem. Sadly, few healthy remnants of the original prairie exist today. Town names such as Star Prairie, Sun Prairie, and Prairie du Sac are reminders of what the area was like when European settlers arrived.

The process of restoring a prairie can be complex. The biggest hindrance to success is weed seeds in the soil. Weeds germinate quickly and can greatly hinder the growth of native prairie seedlings. Rich, weedy soils are the hardest to deal with. Sandy, poor soils are often the easiest. A prairie restoration begins with site preparation to minimize these threats.



Prescribed prairie burn at Kinnickinnic State Park
Photo by Julie Gujer

You may see prescribed prairie burning at Kinnickinnic and Willow River State Parks. Burning every year for the first several years helps prairie plants compete against the weeds. Once well established, a site should be broken into three to five areas, one of which should be burned each year. This keeps habitat in place for prairie birds and allows beneficial insects to complete their life cycles. After five years a prairie should be well established. But don't lose interest! It will keep changing year after year as new plants emerge and new creatures recolonize the land.

For more information on the Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area, visit their website at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/other/wphra.html>

Future of Little Falls Lake

By Aaron Mason

Little Falls Lake is one of the main features of Willow River State Park. It is a flowage on the Willow River created by Little Falls Dam. The lake is popular for fishing, swimming, canoeing, kayaking, and sightseeing. It is also one of the few non-motorized lakes in the state.

The lake was first created in the mid 1800s when the first dam was constructed out of wooden timbers. The early dams were used as grist mills and the flowage aided the movement of logs downstream to the St. Croix River. The existing dam was constructed in 1920 by the Willow River Power Company and was used for hydroelectric power until the 1960s when the property was sold to the State of Wisconsin and the park was created. The flowage has been maintained for recreational use since the park's inception.

Recent dam inspections have brought up concerns about its structural integrity and the ability of the existing structure to pass projected 100 and 1,000-year flood flows.

The current structure does not have the ability to pass these required flows.

The Little Falls dam is nearly 100 years old and is showing its age. Amid these concerns the Department of Natural



Historic photo of Little Falls Dam before the power-house building was removed.
Photo courtesy of Hudson Star Observer

Resources (DNR) has decided to draw down Little Falls Lake. Removing the stored water in the lake will reduce the risk of flooding to downstream residents. The drawdown is set to begin on June 1, 2015. This drawdown will certainly have an impact on park visitors, affecting the fishing, swimming, boating, and sightseeing in the park. The lake will remain drawn down until the dam is replaced or repaired and meets current regulations. A third option is permanent removal of the dam.

A construction project of this size will likely be a long and expensive process, and project funding is still in question. The drawdown is expected to last for several years, during which time park visitors are likely to see many changes taking place as this project unfolds, including sediment stabilization and removal, dredging, stream bank repair, and work on the dam itself. The future of Little Falls Lake is yet to be determined. However, the DNR realizes the importance of the lake to the park visitors, area residents, local businesses, and the rest of the state park system. Please bear with us as we move ahead with this project and ultimately improve the park and the resource for future generations. Additional information on the Little Falls Dam project is available on our website at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/willowriver/littlefallsdam.html>

The Nature Center Needs Your Help

Rita Thofern

A very popular display in the nature center allows visitors to match a bird specimen with its name. Even though the birds are displayed in a glass case they have become tattered and are in need of replacement. Of course, we are not about to go out to collect live birds for this purpose. However, from time to time a bird will fly into a window or be struck by a vehicle. We are asking everyone to be alert to such events and contact the park when they find a dead bird in otherwise good condition.



Catbird

The birds currently on display and in need of replacement are listed below. Substitutions are possible. So, if you find a fine specimen of a dead bird that is otherwise in good condition, whether the bird is on the list or a common bird that is not on the list, place it in a plastic bag, seal it tightly and place it in the freezer. Then call the park office 715-386-5931 or the naturalist 715-386-9340 to let them know it is available.

Here are the birds we hope to replace:

American Woodcock
Blackburnian Warbler
Bobolink
Catbird
Common Grackle
Common Nighthawk
Indigo Bunting
Kingfisher
Northern Cardinal
Northern Flicker (formerly Yellow Shafted Flicker)
Northern Shrike
Prairie Horned Lark
Red-winged Blackbird
Scarlet Tanager
Screech Owl
White-breasted Nuthatch
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Yellowthroat



Northern Cardinal



Yellow-headed Blackbird

Upcoming Events

Art Along the Willow

Sunday, June 7, 10 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Free park admission all weekend!

Free Kids Fishing Derbies

Saturday, June 6, 9:00–11:00 a.m.
Homestead Park on Perch Lake
Saturday, July 25, 9:00–11:00 a.m.
Lake Mallalieu, southwest corner

2015 Willow River Trail Challenge

Saturday, Oct. 3
Free park admission all day!

Don't Get Ticked-Off!

Julie Gujer

Tick season is the time of year when you're likely to be hiking and camping. Ticks are tiny and flat. They are the largest of all mites and have eight legs compared to the six legs of an insect.

There are two kinds of ticks in Wisconsin, the deer tick, also known as a black legged tick, and the wood tick. The deer tick sometimes carries Lyme disease and these ticks can infect you with their bite. Lyme disease may cause a rash, fever, flu-like symptoms and fatigue. Symptoms usually occur within a month of being bitten by an infected tick. If you think you've been bitten and infected with Lyme disease, see a doctor.

Here are some tips to help prevent tick bites:

- Wear long sleeves and pants. Tuck your pants inside your socks. Light colored clothing will make it easier to spot ticks.
 - Use insect repellents containing 20–30 percent DEET. You can also treat clothing with a product containing permethrin. Be sure to follow the instructions on the labels.
 - Walk down the center of mowed trails to avoid brushing against grass and shrubs.
 - At the end of each day, carefully inspect yourself, children and pets and promptly remove any ticks. Ticks need to be attached for 24–48 hours to transmit bacteria. Remove attached ticks with a tweezers. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull straight up. Clean the site with rubbing alcohol or skin disinfectant. Other attempts at tick removal such as coating the tick with oil or applying a heated object are ineffective and may increase the chances of infection.
 - Wash and dry all clothing. Ticks can survive a wash cycle but can't withstand an hour in a hot dryer.
- With a little preparation and care, you won't get ticked off this summer, or, let's say you'll keep the ticks off.

Visit the EEK website for other great outdoor tips:
<http://dnr.wi.gov/EEK/>



Volunteers Wanted!

There are many opportunities to volunteer at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. Whether hosting at the nature center, helping out with special events, or joining the Tuesday morning volunteer group, there's something for everyone.

Contact Ruwal Freese, volunteer coordinator, ruwalfreese@yahoo.com, for more information.



Uncle Ruwal Wants You!



Learn to Kayak

Julie Gujer

Are you looking for something fun to do with your family this summer? The Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks will be offering a beginner kayak class. Participants will learn the basics of proper equipment care, kayak safety and rescue, maneuvering strokes, and how to work with wind, waves, and current, all while having fun with new friends.

This class is perfect for families with children 12 and up, or anyone eager to meet new friends who also enjoy the outdoors and the St. Croix River. Lessons will be held at the Kinnickinnic State Park beach. Kayaks, paddles and PFDs (life jackets) are provided. The class will meet weekly for six weeks. Each session is one-and-one half hours long.

Class size is limited to twelve participants, so act quickly. For scheduling information and to register, contact Ethan Lewis, environmental educator, at 715-386-9340 or willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.com.

Kayaks and related equipment were purchased through a grant from Allina Health.

Kinnickinnic State Park Hidden Falls Trail

Julie Gujer

Some of you may have ventured out this past winter to hike or snowshoe on the new three-mile foot trail located on the south side of Kinnickinnic State Park. People have reported that this is one of the best new trails they have been on and we have learned that more than 12 geocaches have been placed along the new trail!

A group of dedicated volunteers with the Friends group, along with Kinnickinnic State Park Ranger, Eric Klumb, met last year and began development of the new, sustainable trail. The corridor was roughed in for winter use but much finishing work needs to be done. Stumps will be removed, and bench cutting is required in some areas to reduce side-sloping along the trail. Overlook benches will be installed and some trail reroutes will help ensure good flow. Once completed, this will be one of the finest, most scenic trails in the area. There are plans for a phase two development to add to the trail in the future.

We are looking for people to help with the trail. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Eric Klumb at Kinnickinnic State Park. Email: eric.klumb@wisconsin.gov

Make Your Own Butterfly Feeder

Linda Malick

According to the North American Butterfly Association, about 725 species of butterflies are found in the United States and Canada. In most parts of the United States, you can find roughly 100 species of butterflies near



Viceroy

your home. Not only are these insects beautiful, they are important pollinators and vital to the health of their natural habitats. An eHow contributor, Bonnie Singleton, shares how we can encourage these gentle creatures to visit our gardens by using easy-to-make butterfly food and feeders.

Here is one of Bonnie's homemade butterfly feeder ideas:

Take a ceramic or glass pie plate, plastic or terra cotta plant saucer, or any dish with a sloping rim. Suspend the plate with flower pot hangers or a macrame-style holder made from household twine.

Decorate around the twine with silk flowers, including their stems, to make it visually appealing to butterflies. Hang the feeder from the bough of a shady tree. Place brightly

colored yellow and orange kitchen scouring pads in the dish with a liquid butterfly food solution. (See recipe below).

You will attract butterflies and give them a resting place while they drink.

Easy recipe for food: Save any overripe fruit. Add a squirt of honey. Blend it coarsely in a blender. The extra mixture can be stored in your freezer.



Red Admiral



Swallowtail

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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www.willowkinnifriends.org

Prefer to receive *Willow Whispers* electronically?
Email your request to:
dthofern@gmail.com

Your membership expiration date is printed on your address label. If your Friends' membership has expired, or is about to expire, the date is highlighted and a membership form is enclosed. Please take a moment to fill it out and mail it back today.

Thank you!

Board Officers

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Kinnickinnic Assistant Park Manager: Eric Klumb
Environmental Educator: Ethan Lewis
Summer Naturalist: Sarah Lysne



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