

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



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

Fall/Winter, 2022



Rita Thofern

President's Column

Rita Thofern

The need was obvious. The source of funding was not all that clear.

For around eight years the park staff and the Friends' volunteers have made good use of a utility vehicle with an enclosed cab and tracks for getting around on snow.

That vehicle has done great work and it's been hard work. It's done the lion's share of grooming the celebrated winter trail system at Willow. Recently, it has become less reliable requiring one repair after another.

After a search for a replacement, a Bobcat UTV was identified as the most promising option with a price tag of \$31,000. There was no room in the park budget for such a purchase at this time. The Friends group dedicated \$15,000 to the purchase. Susie and Jeff Roberts donated \$10,000. An appeal was made to skiers, including the youth-focused Willow River Ski Club, to raise the final \$6,000.

With 30 donors stepping up, the campaign was a success! The new Bobcat UTV has been delivered and is being outfitted to handle ski trail grooming. It should be ready for work very soon, just in time for the upcoming ski season.

This is just one great example of the Friends' community pulling together to make good things happen for everyone at the parks.



Park Rangers Tyler Busko, left, and Arik Feidt, enjoying the first test run of the Friend's new Bobcat UTV.

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

It is hard to believe that deer season is already here and the holidays are just around the corner. Visitation has returned to more normal pre-pandemic levels. A mild October made for an extended color season and a busy fall.

The staff has been working to prepare the parks for winter. Trails are mowed and ready for skiing, fat biking, snowshoeing, and hiking.

The lake returned to normal this summer with no blue-green algae issues. It was a popular destination for kayaking, canoeing, and swimming. Gamefish restocking of the lake has continued. I expect to start seeing more fishing, especially this winter, as bass, panfish, and even a few walleyes reach keeper size.

Staff and volunteers continue to work on various projects around the park. Volunteers have been spending a lot of time and effort this summer on the construction of a new mountain bike system

at both parks. There are about 12 miles open now at each park with varying levels of difficulty. More information is available at wikimountainbike.com The Tuesday crew has also been busy helping with litter pick-up, trail work, and removing buckthorn.

Hunting and trapping season is underway in the parks. Most of the two parks' undeveloped areas are open for trapping and all types of gun and archery hunting from November 15 through December 15. Archery-only hunting remains open through January 8. Trapping is allowed during hunting dates and is restricted to the use of dog-proof traps. Maps and additional hunting information are posted and available at both parks' offices.

Thank you to all of the Friends and volunteers who help make these two parks such a great place to visit. Your help is greatly appreciated. I hope to see you out here soon.



Aaron Mason



Fat bike fun on the new trails!

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

Season's Greetings, Friends!

With the warm sunshine season behind us, I'm here to encourage you to NOT let winter slow you down!

So much can be said about visiting the parks during every season to discover just how much they change. Through rain, sunshine, sleet, or snow, there is always an adventure waiting.



Ashley Goldbeck and Albert

Winter activities you can enjoy ANY time:

- Hit the sledding hill at either park (they rock!)
- Snowshoeing atop fresh powdery snow
- Playing the migratory bird game
- Exploring the natural playground area at either park
- Track-rubbing along Hidden Ponds Nature Trail
- Embarking on a winter scavenger hunt
- Visiting our nature center ambassador animals
- Finding new snowshoe or multi-use trails to explore
- Getting into a snowball fight with a willing partner
- Finding animal tracks
- Ice fishing
- Skiing
- Fat-tire biking
- Geocaching



Happy frost-covered trails to you!

We offer a variety of free educational and recreational activities, classes, and events throughout winter, so we can all avoid feeling cooped up at home!

Here's a sneak-peek at some upcoming winter events:

- Holly-Jolly Scavenger Hunt, 12/17
- Learn to Snowshoe at Kinnickinnic State Park, 1/22
- Learn to Snowshoe at Willow River State Park, 1/28
- 4-mile Frosty Falls Hike, 2/4
- Candlelight Ski and Hike, 2/11
- Potential ice-fishing events throughout the winter



To stay up to date on ALL upcoming programming:

- Follow us on Facebook @WRSPKSP
- Visit: willowkinnifriends.org/programs
- Scan the QR code



Programs



Walking Meditation

Kelly Gillespie—Certified Meditation and Mindfulness Teacher

Sometimes stress and worry take center stage in our minds. One of the most effective ways to clear your mind and realign with your inner peace is to head outside and go for a walk. To make it a more mindful experience with lasting effects, you can practice walking meditation.

Because we are curious creatures, our minds will inevitably wander away from the present moment during this practice. Remember: You are not your thoughts. The trick to regaining control of your mind is to choose a focus. Each time you become aware that your mind has wandered away from the present moment, simply return to your focal point. While practicing walking meditation, it is best to choose an *internal* focus since your immediate environment will continue to change along your journey.

Here are a few suggestions for your focus:

- Bring your full awareness to your breath. Silently say to yourself, "I am breathing in. I am breathing out."
- Drop your awareness all the way down to the soles of your feet. Notice the way in which they make contact with



the ground. You can take it a step further (pun intended) and begin to focus on the rhythm of your feet as you walk.

- Place your hands over your heart and silently say to yourself, "I am only now."

Applying these suggestions to a hike at Willow River or Kinni will allow you to truly immerse yourself in the beauty of these places and experience the woods and rivers in a whole new way. After all, 'tis the season of quiet stillness in the woods, so get out there and soak in the calm. Happy trails!

Eagle Scout Projects

Aaron Mason

Four Eagle Scout projects were completed at the parks this year. Eagle Scout is the highest rank attainable in Boy Scouts of America. One of the requirements to become an Eagle Scout is to complete a service project. Park users are the beneficiaries of this year's great projects.

Early this summer, Travis Hastreiter from Troop 148 constructed a new bike trailhead with a picnic table and bike racks at the Nelson Farm parking lot.

Jarrett Mason of Troop 168 constructed a handicap accessible hunting blind in the northeast part of the park. Located just off the Mound Trail, overlooking a small food plot, the blind is an 8x10-foot enclosed and insulated structure designed for wheelchair access. Disabled, elderly, and youth hunters may reserve the blind.



Accessible hunting blind, Jarrett Mason, Troop 168

Be Prepared, Be Happy, Be Safe

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

Every time I head out on a winter excursion, I always, at a minimum, carry these items with me:

- Waterproof outerwear (hat, coat, mittens, pants, boots)
- Plenty of water and 1-2 energy bars
- Small first-aid kit
- Multi-tool or knife
- Ice cleats (Yaktrax)
- Waterproof fire-starter
- Emergency blanket
- Balaclava or scarf

As long as you're prepared, any winter day can be just as enjoyable as a hot summer day. Get out there and embrace this beautiful, winter-wonderland we call our home!



Near the St. Croix overlook at Kinnickinnic State Park Isaac Anderson, from Troop 168, constructed a concrete patio. It features a built-in fire-ring and three benches. One side has been left open for accessibility.

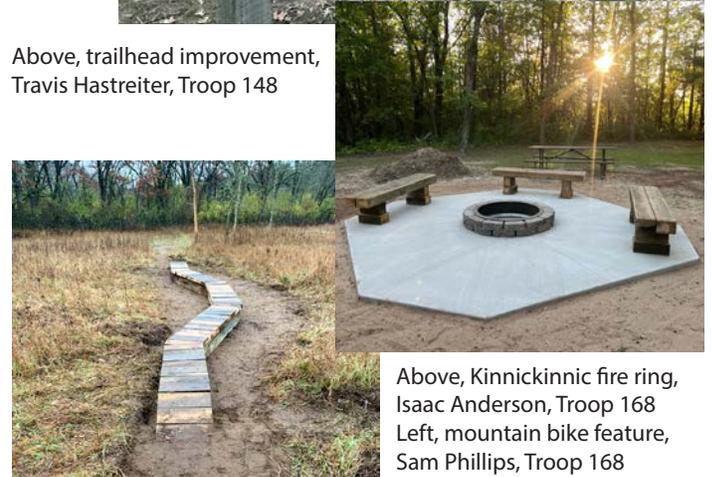
This fall, Sam Phillips, also from Troop 168, built a "feature" on one of the new mountain bike trails. Mountain bike features are constructed to add fun and challenge to the riders' experiences. Now bicyclists can stay on the main trail or challenge themselves by riding the narrow and curvy boardwalk.

Each of these projects is a uniquely-designed, well-constructed addition to the parks that will be utilized by park users for many years.

Thank you, Scouts!



Above, trailhead improvement, Travis Hastreiter, Troop 148



Above, Kinnickinnic fire ring, Isaac Anderson, Troop 168
Left, mountain bike feature, Sam Phillips, Troop 168

Snowshoe Rentals Are Back at Willow and Kinni!

Snowshoes are available at both parks and are rented online. They can be picked up and

returned at anytime with no need to track down a staff person or stick to business hours. The cost is \$7 per day for each pair. To rent snowshoes, go to our secure store. Enter "friendswrk.square.site" or scan the QR code. For information contact: wrsnowshoe@willowkinnifriends.org or 715-869-3695 (cell).



Rent Snowshoes

Kinni Turns 50!

Wisconsin DNR

As part of its 50th anniversary celebration, Kinnickinnic State Park was featured in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) online OutWiGo newsletter. Here is a very shortened version:

With the help of key citizen groups, including the Save Our St. Croix Association and the Minnesota Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission, a new state park was proposed for the land where the Kinnickinnic and St. Croix rivers met. Carl and Alice Pemble, Homer and Mildred Creswell, and George and Wilma Richter donated a total of 45 acres to the DNR to create a new state park.

These gifts, combined with the overwhelming support of the remainder of the affected landowners, so impressed the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board that they established Kinnickinnic State Park in 1972. Currently, Kinni encompasses 1,242 acres of forest, prairie, and riverfront habitat. Activities at Kinni include hiking, swimming, boating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and mountain biking.

To read the full article and subscribe to the OutWiGo newsletter, go to the DNR State Parks website, dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Parks. Scroll down to the OutWiGo newsletter and subscribe.



St. Croix Overlook at Kinnickinnic State Park

It's Easy to Join or Support the Friends!

Making a donation or joining the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks has never been easier!

We are pleased to introduce a new platform for joining the Friends or making a donation. Designed for nonprofits, it is secure, cost effective for the Friends, and convenient for members and donors.

Join: tinyurl.com/wkjoin. Donate: tinyurl.com/wkfdonate
Or, scan the QR codes below.



DONATE



JOIN

Welcome New Friends Board Member!

Walt Zuliani joined the board in October. He and his family have lived on the edge of Willow River State Park since 1994. They've watched the park grow in popularity, developing its facilities over the years. Recently they've become enthusiastic users of the new mountain bike trails.



Walt Zuliani

Walt has worked for the past 30+ years in various sales and sales management positions within the information technology industry. He is skilled at finding solutions to complicated problems, and plans to have an especially positive impact on efforts to fund and build a new nature center.

His interests include running, hiking, skiing, fishing, foraging, backpacking, music, and motorcycling. He's also an avid reader of mostly fiction.

Walt joined the Friends' board because of the many years of enjoyment he has received from the park and because he is interested in helping to shape its development for future generations.

Friends Gift Shop

The Friends Gift Shop is well stocked with nature-themed items. Visitors can purchase hats, hoodies and t-shirts in sizes ranging from toddler to adult. Other keepsakes include patches, medallions, pins, magnets and stickers, which feature Willow Falls. For kids there are plush critters –live versions of all can be found living in the parks. We also have coloring books and an array of small toys. Guidebooks are available to help visitors identify what they spot while exploring the parks.

The gift shop is in the Willow River Nature Center and is open Tuesday–Sunday, noon to 4:00 pm.



These and other fun and educational items can be found at the Friends Gift Shop at Willow River State Park.

Business Memberships

Theresa Gibson

Our annual community fundraising efforts are kicking into high gear in December and January. Newer offerings for local businesses are Business Memberships. These provide various benefits at a range of donation levels. Most exciting are our naturalist-led, team-building activities. These are offered at the park for businesses who support the Friends at \$500 or above.

All member businesses receive recognition for their support. And, of course, employees benefit from having such magnificent parks and interpretive programs available for recreation, group activities and exploring nature.

To become a business member go to tinyurl.com/bizmbr. Or scan this QR code:

Please share this with business owners who may be interested in supporting the Friends, or send their contact information to:

sponsorships@willowkinnifriends.org.

Thank you, and please let us know if you are interested in volunteering to help us approach local businesses.



BUSINESS
MEMBERSHIP

Thank You, Business Members and Sponsors!



Natural Resources
FOUNDATION

of Wisconsin



Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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Board Officers

President: Rita Thofern

Vice-President: Walt Zuliani

Treasurer: Dave Thofern

Secretary: Colleen O'Brien

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

Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason

Kinnickinnic Park Manager: Eric Klumb

Naturalist Educator: Ashley Goldbeck



We Are Willow River

