

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks

 FRIENDS
OF
WILLOW RIVER & KINNICKINNIC
EST. STATE PARKS 1990
Spring/Summer, 2016

President's Column John Collins



Some of you may have heard or seen the volunteer Buckthorn Brigade crew cutting and treating buckthorn and feeding it through our new chipper.

This chipper is the latest major acquisition of equipment by the Friends group. It will eat up whole trees up to about eight inches in diameter and

spit them out the chute. It has increased our buckthorn-control productivity tremendously. We have cleared out the overhanging buckthorn from campground roads and campsites, from the Nature Trail, and various areas along the skiing and hiking trails. A crew of eight is about the right size to keep two sawyers busy cutting, while the others treat the stumps and haul and chip the brush. It's good exercise and hearing and eye protection is essential. The park supplies the safety equipment.

How can we afford expensive equipment like this? We depend on the generosity of our friends. The cost of this machine was covered by a grant from the Tolk Fund.

We also receive an annual grant from a fund set up by Dr. Arthur Kaemmer, and recently received a gift of appreciated stock from James Sharer. Our group sponsors a number of fund-raising events throughout the year and has successfully pursued grants from a variety of sources. They pay for trail development and signage, improvements to the nature center and, especially, for educational programming.

For example, a matching grant from the State of Wisconsin Stewardship Fund paid for construction of accessible fishing piers which made the lake much more accessible to visitors with limited mobility.

Great parks and park staff, plus volunteer commitment, plus foundation funding: It's win, win, win for park visitors.

Superintendent's Report Aaron Mason

A mild winter and early spring has 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 as of May 15th. 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, a portion of the dam was removed last fall and Little Falls Lake is currently drawn down. This winter the Department did approve the plan to rebuild the dam. The next step is to select an architect/engineering firm to complete the design and come up with more accurate cost estimates. The Wisconsin Department of Administration is responsible for the selection process and moving this project forward. We are expecting a completion date of sometime in 2020. However, there are lots of factors that could slow or speed up the process. We are also routinely removing sediment and sand collecting in the pool below the dam to minimize its transport downstream. This project 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 remains 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.

The new open-air shelter and restroom facility at the beach picnic area is completed and now open. This facility is not reservable and is open for all to use. It is a great addition to that picnic area, even more so when the beach returns in a few years.

Staff and volunteers continue work on the Natural Playground Trail located where the old disc golf



New wood chipper in action at Willow
Photos by Rita Thofern

Superintendent's report continued on p. 2.

course was located. 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 removing buckthorn. 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 youth hunters, 10–18 years old, participated. The program included a classroom portion, firearms handling and shooting at the range, and a mentored hunt. Three of the hunters were successful in bagging turkeys and it was a great time had by all.

Thank you to the Friends group and all 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.

St. Croix Valley Foundation Grant

Tashina Lahr-Manifold

In April of 2015 the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks received \$4,000 from the St. Croix Valley Foundation Health and Wellness Grant program. This grant was awarded to fund activity-based field trips at Willow River and Kinnickinnic state parks. This project is providing field trip opportunities enabling school groups to experience physical activity while learning about the natural environment in a state park setting. The grant provides buses, naturalist services, and materials at no cost to the schools! This is vital, since limits to school budgets has led to decreased funding for field trips. Once the grant award was made, environmental identification cards, binoculars, pocket microscopes, small backpacks, notepads and additional supplies were purchased and assembled into kits to be used by pairs of students during their field experience. Then the environmental educator reached out to local school groups, giving them an option to sign up for a three-season experience and visit the park in fall, winter, and spring!

On October 16, 2015, the first school to utilize the grant was Hudson Prairie Elementary. Sixty-two second grade students were transported to the park for an environmental lesson lasting one and one-half hours. Each lesson combines classroom and outdoor activities. The next school to visit the state park in the fall was E.P. Rock Elementary with



Second grade students enjoy a sunny day snowshoeing.
Photos by Dave Thoferrn

one hundred fourth grade students on November 6th, 2015. The final fall visit was made by the first grade class of Westside Elementary on November 20th, 2015. They brought sixty-two enthusiastic children. The topics of each school trip varied from geocaching and map reading to living things and how they grow. The environmental educator collaborated with the teachers to ensure the topics met their individual academic objectives.

The winter visits began on February 26th, 2016 with Hudson Prairie. Snowshoeing and animal track hunting was a day of fun for the first graders! The second winter visit was from Westside Elementary on March 17th. One of the schools was unable to come for their winter visit. Since there was extra funding due to the missed visit,



Geocaching is a favorite with the students.
Photos by Dave Thoferrn and E.P. Rock staff



Westside Elementary will be able to bring both their first and third grades out to the park this spring!

The spring visits for all three schools are lined up for May 2, May 12, May 20 and June 2. After the spring visits to the park each student will receive a packet of suggested activities to be completed at the park during future visits. Additionally, participating students will be given a certificate that they can bring back to the nature center to be exchanged for an outdoor education prize! These incentives are intended to encourage students to revisit the park with their family this summer

The goals of this project were three-fold; Enhance relationships between the Friends group, and the schools. Engage students in field trip experiences that introduce them to an active outdoor lifestyle while meeting academic objectives tailored to each group as determined by the teacher in cooperation with the Friends' naturalist. Focus on providing opportunities to low-income students who are not likely to have these experiences without the support of this grant. When the spring visits are completed Willow River Nature Center will have provided nearly 700 student visits from three different elementary schools who otherwise would not have been fortunate enough to attend a field trip at the state park.

The Tolk Foundation

Jeff Roberts

LeAnn Tolk lived for almost 30 years in a hide-away tucked back into the state park at the end of Nelson Farm Road. Upon her early passing in 2010, at age 62, her generous bequest established the Tolk Foundation. The foundation was directed to provide an annual grant to the Friends group at Willow River State Park to be used to enhance visitor experiences.

Who was LeAnn Tolk? One major thing was that she was an individual guardian of the northwest corner of Willow River. There was hardly a morning when LeAnn could not be found scouting the roadsides, woods and fields, keeping things in order. LeAnn found time for this passion despite a demanding career of thirty-four years with 3M in international logistics. Between numerous trips to foreign 3M locations, LeAnn loved being part of nature in her lovely setting at the edge of the park.

LeAnn was born in Hendricks, Minnesota and was raised on a farm in Elkton, South Dakota. She attended Southwestern Minnesota State College. In her bequest, she also established a scholarship fund supporting students from rural communities who attend her alma mater.

Due to unfortunate circumstances in her life, LeAnn mostly lived alone. At age forty-five, her first partner died. She married later in life to Jim Miezwa who had a serious battle with cancer, taking much of LeAnn's energy in caring for him.

Over the years, the annual grants from the Tolk Fund have accomplished many things. First the woodshed was built near the park office and it continues to generate income used to fund the Friends' naturalist position. Tolk funding was paired with DNR funding to provide a playground in the upper campground. Ski-trail grooming equipment was purchased making Willow's ski trails some of the finest in the area. A Bobcat skid-steer tractor, a "Swiss army knife" of power equipment, was acquired in 2014. Just last fall, the new wood chipper was brought on board. Without Tolk Foundation funding, none of these would have been purchased.

The legacy that LeAnn left will continue to contribute to the enjoyment of many visitors to Willow River State Park.



Playground equipment purchased with Tolk Fund grant money
Photos by Dave Thofern

Volunteer at Your Park

Ruwal Freese

Spring flowers are blooming bountifully
Spring warblers are warbling
beautifully. Many, many flowers and
many, many little birds are matched
by many, many opportunities for
meaningful volunteering at Willow
River and Kinnickinnic State Parks.
Like to be outdoors and work with
others? Show up at the Willow River
maintenance building at 8:45 a.m. on any Tuesday to join
the Buckthorn Brigade, Mustard Musketeers and Tuesday
Trails & Trash Troop. Together we attack the invasive
buckthorn and garlic mustard, work on trails, paint and
stain, and pick up trash and litter. Not all at once, of course!



Uncle Ruwal Wants You!



Tuesday Morning Volunteers Pose With the new Chipper
From left to right: Joe Sommerfeld, John Collins, Jeff Bolte, Ruwal
Freese, John Heck, Sierra Oxbow, Gary Briske, Theresa Gibson

From January through April of this year, ten different
Tuesday morning workers volunteered 227 total hours.
The park is 227 times better because of their work.

Consider joining us and making
it 250 times better. Join us every
Tuesday or whenever you have a
chance.

Can't make it on Tuesdays?
Stop in the office at either park to
explore various volunteer needs
and opportunities at other times.
Or, you may contact the Nature
Center at 715-386-9340 or email,
willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.
com. You are just the person for
some needed state park task.

Upcoming Programs

Keep an eye out for these upcoming events!

Saturday Morning Yoga

Saturday mornings, 9:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m.

Even if you have no experience, now is the time to enjoy a Vinyasa Flow Yoga class and the beauty of the park at the same time. Meet at the Nature Center.

Sign up at: tinyurl.com/gmu3w5y

Saturday, May 14	Saturday, May 28
Saturday, June 11	Saturday, June 25
Saturday, July 9	Saturday, July 23

State Park Open House and Free Fishing Weekend

Saturday, June 4 and Sunday, June 5

Enjoy free admission to Wisconsin state parks! Anyone may fish free of any license fees in all Wisconsin inland waters. Other fishing rules and limits apply.

Speaker Cliff Jacobson

Saturday, June 4, 1:00 p.m.–2:00 p.m. **Free Park Entry!**

Come listen to one of North America's most respected outdoor writer, wilderness guide, national and foreign consultant, and the most published canoeing and camping writer of this century. Meet at the Nature Center.

15th Annual Art Along the Willow

Sunday, June 5 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. **Free Park Entry!**

Enjoy free entertainment as you stroll through many fine art and craft exhibits. A special craft table for kids will be provided. Held near the beach picnic pavilion.

Prairie Day at Willow River State Park

Saturday, August 20, 8:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Willow River will have everything prairie related on August 20th! There will be a prairie walk for adults and families, exhibits, film showings, and a talk by University of Wisconsin's Dr. Stanley Temple! Meet at the Nature Center.

Fall Fest at Kinnickinnic State Park

Saturday, Oct. 15, 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. **Free Park Entry!**

This will be your first chance to wear your halloween costume. There will be fall games, a giant leaf pile, stories, crafts, and prizes.

Willow River Trail Challenge

Saturday, October 1, 9:00 a.m. **Free Park Entry!**

Run along a beautiful and challenging course. The run starts at the beach and goes through the woods and prairies on park trails. There will be a 10.6K and, a 6.6K course along with a great Kids Fun-Run Obstacle course. For information go to: WillowKinniFriends.org

Annual Halloween Bash

Saturday, October 29, 5:30 p.m.–7:30 p.m.

Wear your best costume and enjoy fall crafts, games, snacks and storytelling. Be sure to visit the Nature Center exhibits and browse in the gift shop. The event is FREE but donations are appreciated



Julie Gjuer represented the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks at this year's Cabela's Ladies Day event.



Four Seasons of Friends' Activities



Friends of Willow River & Kinnickinnic State Parks Membership Application

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Payment Method:

___ Join the Friends of Willow & Kinni online at our secure website:
www.squareup.com/market/friendswrk

___ Credit Card
Credit Card Number _____

Exp. Date _____ CVV _____
Month & Year 3 or 4 digit security code

___ Check payable to "Friends of Willow & Kinni"

Membership Level

___ \$15 Friend ___ \$25 Good Friend

___ \$50 Great Friend ___ \$100 Best Friend

___ \$500 Best Friend for Life

Additional Contribution \$ _____

Your contribution supports the Friends Group programs. All contributions are tax deductible.

___ The newsletter is sent to your email address.
Check here for newsletter delivery by US mail.

Thank You!

Mail to:
Friends of Willow & Kinni
1034 County Road A
Hudson, WI 54016

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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Office: 715-386-5931

Nature Center: 715-386-9340

willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.com

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. Or, renew online at squareup.com/market/friendswrk

Thank you!

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Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason
Kinnickinnic Park Ranger: Eric Klumb
Environmental Educator: Tashina Lahr-Manifold



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