

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



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

Spring/Summer, 2022



Rita Thofern

President's Column

Rita Thofern

And then, in merely a blink...

It's here! For a while there it seemed like winter would never end. Then everything happened at once and we have spring. We like to track our phenological events. The first appearance of this or that for the season. But this

spring so many things came along seemingly all at once that keeping track could have been a full-time activity. The leaves began to unfurl. Birds of all sizes and kinds returned to nest. Delicate spring wildflowers burst into bloom one after the other. The wise thing was to settle back and marvel. As it happened, while settling back with

the campground hosts, the scene below unfolded. A teeny fawn struggled to follow its mother on wobbly newborn legs.

The Friends' group is busy and lively as well. It is exciting to be getting back to near normal. Here are some highlights.

Thanks to a grant from the Friends of Wisconsin State Parks, matched by the Friends, an assistant naturalist will be providing services this summer. Volunteers are finding their way back to the parks to assist in a variety of ways. Two Stewardship Grants from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will help fund single track bike trail development at both parks. New directors have joined the Friends' board. All signs point to a return to a lively high season for the parks and the Friends.



Monday, May 23, 2022 at the Willow River Camp Host Site

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

I am sure many of you were wondering if spring would ever arrive. Of course it did and now we are full speed into summer. Park staff have been hustling to get buildings and water systems up and running, campgrounds open, and trails ready. The past few nice weekends have brought many visitors out to the park helping



Aaron Mason

make up for a cold and dreary April. Spring flooding was mild this year and that has allowed us to get an early start on getting Kinni ready. Docks and buoys are out on the St. Croix.

Willow River and Kinnickinnic are open for all uses, and for the most part, back to normal. Offices are open and all facilities are now open. Campgrounds are open and available for reservation. Similar to last year, all campers

are required to make a reservation. No check-in at the park is required. Same-day reservations are available.

We have also been busy with several other projects around the parks. Willow received a grant for a pollinator project that is going in near the gravel lot by the group camp. The plan is to restore about 6 acres of prairie with a mix of heavy forbs and flowers to benefit native pollinators. We are also working on several Eagle Scout projects to add a fire-pit and benches at Kinni and a boat dock and handicap accessible hunting blind at Willow. Several trail and infrastructure projects are in the works for later this year, including repairing the stairway at the falls, redecking the falls bridge, and replacing water and sewer lines at the beach. The boat and dock operation at Kinni will be reconfigured.

Thank you to all of the Friends and volunteers that help make these two parks such great places to visit. All of your help is greatly appreciated. I hope to see you out here soon.

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

Protecting Precious Pollinators

As a naturalist, I am proud to see so many folks resisting the urge to mow this spring in order to help pollinators recuperate after the long, drawn-out winter.

Yet, there are still many setbacks pollinators will face throughout the upcoming seasons and many people still don't quite understand the beneficial impact pollinators have on our planet.

I don't know about you, but for me, it's hard to imagine a world without nutritious fruits, veggies, nuts and seeds. Ninety percent of the world's flowering plants depend on pollinators in order to reproduce. That includes medicinal plants, too! Half the food we eat and medicine we consume ultimately exists because of pollination.



Ashley Goldbeck and Albert

Every year butterflies, bees, bats, and other pollinators face environmental and man-made contaminants, habitat loss, disease, parasites and more. All of these have contributed to a significant decline in many important pollinator species.

How Can You Help Protect Them?

- Provide food, habitat, and shelter for pollinators just like you would for other beloved animals.
- Make a bee house in your backyard.
- Plant native pollinator friendly plants in your yard.
- Plant a seasonal variety of plants to have food sources for pollinators throughout spring, summer and fall.
- Avoid using pesticides on your plants, or use them sparingly. This has a huge impact on pollinators.
- Provide water stations for all sizes of pollinators.
- Leave dead tree trunks and brush piles on your property to provide shelter for bees and beetles.

Make it a Family Adventure!

Visit the park, where we have several pollinator friendly landscapes and witness these amazing pollinators at work! Make it fun and competitive by dropping into the nature center and picking up one of our free Pollinator Scavenger Hunts.

As always, share with us what you see while out exploring. And be sure to share the importance of all these species with friends and family.

Happy Trails!



How Does Pollination work?

Pollinators buzz, flutter, and fly from flower to flower searching for nectar and pollen to eat. During their adventure from plant to plant they brush against the reproductive parts of the plants and deposit pollen from plants they visited earlier. The plant uses this pollen to produce a seed or fruit, which then grows into the fruit, veggie, nut, or medicine we ingest. Without pollination, they cannot reproduce and cannot survive. What would that mean for us? Think; no more apples, berries, chocolate, almonds, melons, peaches, pumpkins, etc.

Who Are These Important pollinators?

- | | |
|-------|-------------------|
| Bees | Butterflies |
| Moths | Birds |
| Bats | Beetles and more! |

Trouble in Paradise

Although it might not seem like there is a shortage of pollinators while swatting at pesky insects, there is real trouble in pollinator paradise.

Friends Gift Shop

The Friends Gift Shop is well stocked with nature-themed items. Visitors can purchase hats, hoodies and t-shirts to wear. Sizes range from toddler to adult. Other keepsakes include patches, medallions, pins, magnets and stickers, all featuring 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 located within Willow's nature center. It is open daily, noon to 4:00 pm, as well as additional times when staff or volunteers are available.



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

Welcome New Friends Board Members!

Kelly Gillespie and Bob Richardson joined the Friends board this May. We welcome their new ideas and talents.

Kelly Gillespie

Meet Kelly Gillespie. Five years ago Kelly and her husband and son moved to New Richmond from St. Paul.



Shortly after the move, they discovered Willow River State Park. One hike to the falls and they were hooked! They started volunteering at the Nature Center in September, 2021.

Kelly has an Individualized Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Mathematics. Her particular interests

are in sustainable practices and she values and supports environmental education. As a Certified Meditation and Mindfulness Teacher, she is proudly offering classes this summer at the Nature Center. Additionally, she is a freelance grant writer and offers funding strategies to nonprofit organizations.

Kelly is happy to become part of the team that makes the Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks such amazing places to visit!

Canoe and Kayak Rentals Return

Boat rentals are back at Willow River State Park! After several years of being shut down, first by the lake draw-down, then by COVID-19, canoe and kayak rentals are in full swing.

Not only do canoe and kayak rentals provide opportunities for park visitors to explore unique areas of the park, revenue from rental fees support the work of the Friends.

To rent a boat, go directly to the park office. The staff will issue PFDs and paddles and collect payment. Then you can proceed to the boat landing where your canoe or kayak will be waiting. Rental fees for canoes or kayaks are \$25 for up to four hours, or \$40 for an all day rental. Paddles and PFDs are included.

If you wish to arrange for a group rental, we do have 12 additional kayaks and, with advance notice, can accommodate groups. Contact the office or the nature center for more information on individual or group rentals.



Bob Richardson

Bob is recently retired from Ecolab in St. Paul where he worked in the IT Department managing a global team of System Administrators. Prior to his positions with Ecolab, he worked for Mead Paper working in the Technical Services area of the Forestry Department and the IT Department while living in Ohio, Georgia and the Keweenaw Peninsula of Upper Michigan. He and his wife, Cheryl, have one daughter and live just north of Willow River State Park. They



enjoy quick access to the park for hiking, snowshoeing, skiing, and mountain biking.

Bob spends time volunteering at the park grooming ski trails and building the new system of mountain bike trails. Outside of activities at the park, he enjoys canoeing in the Quetico and Boundary Waters canoe areas, kayaking, fishing, woodworking, beekeeping, and training and hunting with his English Setter, Beau.

You Can Make a Difference!

The parks would not be the same without volunteer support. Do you have some time and energy to spare? Consider joining the volunteer effort. To get started, send a message to volunteer@willowkinnifriends.org. Our volunteer wrangler can help match your interests with what needs to be done at the parks.

Here are examples of what volunteering can look like:

- A volunteer session is held each Tuesday morning. Anyone can join in for a single time or on a steady basis. This group focuses on outdoor activities including invasive species management, litter pickup, picnic table repair and repainting, along with other needs that arise.
 - The nature center needs volunteer hosts who help visitors explore the interpretive displays, provide directions and answer questions. You don't need to be an expert and will typically be working while a naturalist is on duty. The nature center is open every day from noon to 4:00 pm.
 - Be the second person accompanying a guided hike making sure no one gets lost or left behind.
 - Help behind the scenes preparing handouts for a program or helping to set up for a coming event.
 - You could take on anything from a long list of things that need to be done around the nature center including weeding native gardens, feeding birds, caring for the ambassador animals, restocking the gift shop, checking on geocaches to keep them ready for explorers, general housekeeping, collecting any litter in the area, etc.
- Maybe you have a new idea. We'd like to hear it. As a bonus, as a volunteer you will meet other like-minded people, learn more about the parks, and have a lot of fun.

Winter Fat Biking

John LeRoy

Ride a bicycle on snow? Yes! Biking enthusiasts created a wonderful new winter sport called “Snow Biking” or “Fat Biking.”

Willow River State Park in Hudson, Wisconsin had the opportunity – for its first time ever – to offer winter snow biking on our newly-built mountain bike trails this past winter. Nearly six miles of trails were groomed and ridden by many winter snow bike enthusiasts. As we add more trails this summer (More than 10 additional new miles!) we will be able to add more miles to our winter snow biking portfolio.

Perhaps your next question may be, “How can you ride a bike on snow?” The answer is similar to how someone is able to paddle a canoe across a lake or stream. Flotation is the answer!

How do we achieve flotation with a bike? A wide tire with a width of four inches or more is used and is inflated to a low tire pressure. The tire pressure should match the trail conditions. If the trail is soft, then the pressure should be very low; sometimes as low as 2–4 psi. This lower pressure allows the tire to “balloon out” and spread the weight over a larger area helping the trail support the weight of the bike and rider. This is what we call flotation. If the trail is firmer, then we may increase tire pressure



Winter fun on the fat bike!

up to around 10 psi. The general rule of thumb is, if your tire is breaking through the top layer of the trail then your pressure is too high. Reduce your tire pressure to avoid making trail-damaging ruts. If, after reducing tire

pressure, you are still breaking through the surface of the trail, you should not ride until the trails have a chance to firm up. Hiking with snowshoes will typically not hurt a bike trail and, in fact, can help compact the snow. Hikers are encouraged to avoid hiking on groomed winter bike trails when they are soft as they may leave deep footprints which damage the bike trails.

Winter fat biking allows cycling enthusiasts to maintain their cycling fitness all year long while enjoying the great outdoors. Many winter snow bikers, including myself, describe the sport as therapeutic, stress relieving, healing, and just great fun.

And remember, there is no bad weather, just bad gear! So, next winter, gear up and join us on the fat bike trails to enjoy this wonderful sport.

Human Tow Rope

Rita Thofern



This was a fun sighting. A freelance skier was negotiating her way down the sledding hill. “Look, Mom, no sled!” Her fun didn’t end at the bottom of the hill, though. This sharp kid brought along a human tow rope. Each time she reached the bottom, her dad appeared and provided tow service back to the top. Winter can’t be much more fun than that!



When John LeRoy isn’t out on his fat bike, he can often be found at Willow grooming the winter bike trails. Here he’s seen using a unique trail grooming machine called a “Snowdog.”

Summer Programs at Willow and Kinni

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

Nonstop fun, education, and adventure starts here!

Join us at the parks for a variety of programming every weekend, all summer long. Programs already scheduled include:

- Identification hikes
- Nature meditations
- Fishing programs
- Scavenger hunts
- Nature crafts
- Live animal encounters

You're bound to find something you'll love!

Want educational and adventurous fun without the weekend crowd? Sign up for our Summer Naturalist Programs!

Summer Naturalist Programs are for all ages, for individuals, and for entire families. Enjoying nature has no limitations. Let's ALL learn and explore together! Please note that some classes may not be suitable for younger children. Be sure to check the class description.

Programs are scheduled in June, July, and August. They are offered on Wednesdays from 10:00 am-Noon.

Learn more and register here: www.willowkinnifriends.org/naturalistclass

Stay up to date with our events on Facebook@WRSPKSP or by visiting our website:

www.willowkinnifriends.org. Flyers are posted on kiosks around the park and more program information is available at the nature center.

Summer Assistant Naturalist

Meet Rae! We are pleased to welcome the new summer assistant naturalist, Raelyn (Rae) Skog, to our Friends family!

Rae recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Conservation. She is ready to put her knowledge to the test while gaining additional experience in the field of environmental education.



Outside of learning and teaching others about the importance of sustainability, Rae enjoys kayaking, camping, and all things outdoors. We think she's going to fit in just fine around here!

In the past, Rae has worked in the park office and has volunteered in the nature center. She knows the park well and is eager to get to work.

You'll find Rae at the park most weekends as well as some weekdays.

Welcome aboard Rae!

Thank You, Business Sponsors!



Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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Kinnickinnic Park Ranger: Eric Klumb

Naturalist Educator: Ashley Goldbeck



We Are Willow River

