

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



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

Spring/Summer, 2024



President's Column

Rita Thofern

We are happy to introduce you to the newest addition to the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Noelle Murphy, Development Coordinator

Noelle grew up in the small town of Houlton, Wisconsin. Her

Rita Thofern

deep-seated love for the picturesque Willow River State Park was cultivated beginning in her childhood. Fond memories of countless family outings to the park include leisurely strolls along the winding paths leading to the majestic dam and cascading waterfall, and joyous hours spent playing in the water with her siblings and cousins. The park became a cherished sanctuary for family gatherings, where the tantalizing aroma of sizzling barbecues filled the air, creating a warm and unforgettable atmosphere.

Noelle's extensive skill set includes proficiency in public speaking, adeptness in building and nurturing relationships, skill in harnessing support for various initiatives, and a history of effectively engaging and rallying community members to surpass annual giving goals. Her dedication to education and nature amplifies her ability to inspire and make a positive impact.



Noelle Murphy,
Development Coordinator

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

Here we are, already at the start of summer and what a busy spring it has been. With a winter that really wasn't much of a winter, spring started early along with an increase in visitation. Over the winter, park staff was able to work on repairing fire rings in campsites and cut many of the ash trees that were killed by emerald ash borer. Many dead trees will need to be removed over the next year.

As many of you may have seen, a contractor replaced the aging bridge deck at Willow Falls. Repairs to the lower half of the falls' overlook stairway are underway. Volunteers are continuing work on the mountain bike trails, invasive species removal, tree planting, and litter cleanup.

Park staff has prepared both parks for the busy summer season. The Kinni beach area is open and all Willow campgrounds are open. Campers are required to make an online or telephone reservation. Check-in at the park office is no longer required. Same day reservations are often available.

We have a recent change to Willow's staffing. Arik Feidt, Park Ranger at Willow for the past 10 years, has received a promotion within the Department. He is now the Park Manager for Straight Lake State Park. We wish Arik the best and hope that he may return to Willow. That leaves just two full-time staff positions at Willow, Ranger Tyler Busko and me. Keeping up with everything that needs to be done this summer will be challenging. I hope that the ranger position will be filled quickly, but that time frame is unknown.

Thank you to all of the Friends and volunteers who help make these two parks such a great places to visit. Their help is greatly appreciated. See you at the parks!

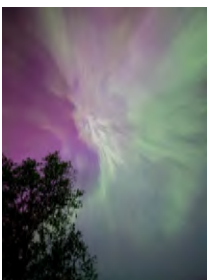


Northern Lights Extravaganza

Did you hunt for northern light sightings on May 10? Phenomenally, your phone camera may have seen more than you did. The photos here

were taken on a phone by campers who were not seeing much with their own eyes.

Really, what could be better than kicking back at your campground fire ring and enjoying a rare spectacular display?



Please Save the Date!

A Friends membership social is being planned for **Saturday, September 14, 2024.**

This will be a time when members can meet and visit. Of course, guests will be welcome. Watch for details.

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

Why Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Park?

When you visit Willow or Kinni, you may have witnessed some shockingly busy days, especially at Willow, and especially on weekends.

Wisconsin is home to 50 state parks, 44 state trails, 15 state forests, 84,000 miles of rivers and streams, and 15,000 lakes.

Just across the St. Croix River, Minnesota has 65 of their own beautiful state parks covering over 235,000 acres of land. Clearly, the area we live in is blessed with endless opportunities to get outside and explore, recreate, and revive.

So, why Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Park?

From a Naturalist's Standpoint

Why not?! If you truly are a lover of the great outdoors, our two parks have everything you could need and more.

It's amazing that you can find such vast diversity of ecosystems, plants, and animals thriving in both parks, ranging from prairies to wetlands, and forests to rivers. I encourage you to dive into the landforms of both parks and explore their rich natural history.

That same rich variety can be found in the wildlife inhabiting the parks, from the tiniest macroinvertebrates



Ashley Goldbeck and Albert

swimming in the ponds, lakes, wetlands and rivers, to the large black bear munching on raspberries and seeds along the forest edge.

From a Visitor's Standpoint:

Maybe it's the unlimited recreational activities. Visitors can enjoy hiking, biking, skiing, snowshoeing, camping, kayaking, swimming, fishing, hunting, birding, foraging (fungi, nuts and seeds only), meditating, nature photography and more!

From a Community Standpoint

Maybe it's the wide range of activities we offer for all ages and abilities. ALL. YEAR. LONG.

These include nature-based programs—pollinators, landforms, nature journaling, park beautification events, school field trips, weekend events, workshops, training for St. Croix Valley Wisconsin Master Naturalist Volunteers and more!

From a Collective Standpoint

Maybe it's all of the above!

I encourage you to get out to the parks and reflect on what exactly it is that draws you back to them, time-after-time. Then, please share those positive reflections with the park staff and volunteers who work harder than you'll ever know to protect, maintain and educate.

Happy Trails!



Morel Mushroom

Mountain Bike Trails Update

Trail construction at Willow is focused mainly on the new trails east of Nelson Farm Road. Several of these are currently open with others scheduled to be completed by the end of the construction season.

Trail work at Kinni is focused on improving and maintaining existing trails. The Friends have applied for a \$250,000 federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP). This grant, if approved, will be used to hire a professional trail builder to complete mountain bike trail system at Kinni.



A question often asked is, "Can I hike or trail run on the parks' mountain bike trails?" The answer is, "Yes, but..." While hiking and running on these trails are allowed, be aware that they were designed for mountain biking. Expect to encounter high-speed bike traffic, steep hills and limited sight lines.

Always hike or run against the direction of bike travel and be extra alert for oncoming bikes.



In the early summer, be on the lookout for remnants of egg shells. As birds hatch, or nests are raided, the shells can turn up right on the trail. The turkey shell pictured here was found along one of the new trails in the northwest area of Willow River State Park.

Remembering Art Kaemmer

In 1990 the Friends organization, then named Organization for Wildlife Learning (OWLs), was created by a small group of dedicated individuals. Four people signed the original documents and Art Kaemmer was one of them. Over the years he served as a member of the Friend's Board of Directors and later made annual donations to the group through the HRK Foundation.

Art was a beloved St. Paul pediatrician. He was well known for donning his Alice the Gorilla Halloween costume and entertaining neighborhood children while collecting countless bananas and canned goods for the local food shelf. After retirement, Art turned his attention to another passion—fly fishing. This interest saw him fish in all corners of the world.



Arthur West Kaemmer
July 9, 1943–January 31, 2024

Native Plant Garden Renewal



The Hudson Home and Garden Club provided a grant to the Friends this spring. The purpose of the grant is to redevelop one of the flower beds at the nature center entrance.



This is a multi-step process. First, both beds were burned, mimicking a prairie fire, nature's natural method of refreshing prairie plants.

Next, volunteers got busy raking through and digging up everything in the small bed to be sure no bits of plants remained, native or non-native. Finally, new plants—199 new plants to be exact—were purchased from a local nursery and tenderly placed in the ground.



Gloria Bonse, Joe Grinstead, and Karen Swisher work on prepping the soil prior to planting.

Watch for developments over the summer growing season, and notice the differences between the larger bed that was burned and the smaller bed that received a complete re-start.

Local Podcast Features the Friends

The Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks was recently featured on Tyler Mason's podcast, *St. Croix Stories*. Tyler highlights the people and places that make the Hudson, Wisconsin area unique.



Friends' president, Rita Thofern, was interviewed on the podcast that aired March 19. You can listen to that episode, and link to others in the series, here: <https://tinyurl.com/WRKPRK>



Hey everybody! I found some turtles!



It's Good to be Appreciated!

At our state parks, budgets are tight and staffing is limited. The Friends group has steadily supported the parks by providing "extras." In coordination with park staff, items of heavy equipment became part of this support. This certificate officially acknowledges the transfer of several items to park ownership. We can all give ourselves a little pat on the back.

Accessibility at Willow

The trail behind the nature center building is designated as an accessible trail. It is paved and one-half mile long. The trail includes three delightful ponds, has benches in three locations, and has very little change in elevation. It is a particularly calm area that is embraced by wildlife.

Here is a fine example of why volunteers get involved. On a recent early evening, two volunteers had just finished clearing the trail of debris and were loading their tools into the UTV when these folks came along. That's why so many of us volunteer.



A great option for those wishing to travel on the park's unpaved trails is the availability of the Trackchair, an electric powered, all-terrain wheelchair. A Trackchair is available at no cost from the Hudson Rod, Gun & Archery club. For details, visit their website: tinyurl.com/trkchr.

Boat Rentals

Looking for a great way to get out and enjoy Willow's Little Falls Lake? How about renting a canoe or kayak from the Friends? You can explore areas of the park



The Friends' boat rental fleet includes both canoes and kayaks.

that are only accessible by boat and enjoy the lake's quiet, non-motorized environment. Rentals are available at the park office.

Enjoy a Picnic With Your Pet

Wisconsin DNR *OutWiGo* Newsletter

What more could you ask for than to spend time with your four-legged friend, fantastic food and the great outdoors. Below are some tips and ideas to ensure a "pawsitive" picnic experience with your pet.

- Plan a creative menu for you and your pet.
- Pack the essentials, like water, a collapsible bowl, leash, waste bags and a blanket or mat for relaxing.
- Check park guidelines to ensure pets are allowed and familiarize yourself with locations that feature specific pet picnic areas.
- Choose a suitable spot. Look for a quiet shaded area, away from other picnickers where your pet can relax comfortably.
- Always keep your pet on a leash no longer than 8 feet.
- Supervise your pet to ensure they do not disturb wildlife or other park visitors.
- Dispose of any pet waste properly into dumpsters or trash receptacles or carry out.

Wisconsin state parks are more fun with friends, especially furry, four-legged ones. Find a pet swimming or picnic area for your next outdoor adventure and enjoy some exploration with your canine companion(s)!

Are you wondering where you can enjoy a picnic with your pet at Willow or Kinni? Willow has a great pet-friendly picnic area near the boat launch. Buckthorn Brigade volunteers have worked hard in this area to clear out brush and open up lake views. Kinni has several parking areas near the park office where you and your pet can enjoy a quiet picnic.



Getting outside is more fun with friends, especially furry, four-legged ones.

Photo: Travel Wisconsin

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.

Willow River State Park
1034 County Road A
Hudson, WI 54016

Park Office: 715-386-5931

Nature Center: 715-386-9340

naturecenter@willowkinnifriends.org

volunteer@willowkinnifriends.org

www.willowkinnifriends.org

Board Officers

President: Rita Thofern

Vice-President: Walt Zuliani

Treasurer: Dave Thofern

Secretary: Bob Richardson

Directors

Joey Filipiak, John Gallagher, Dan Marchand,
Mark Meydam, Colleen O'Brien, Mike Wilcox

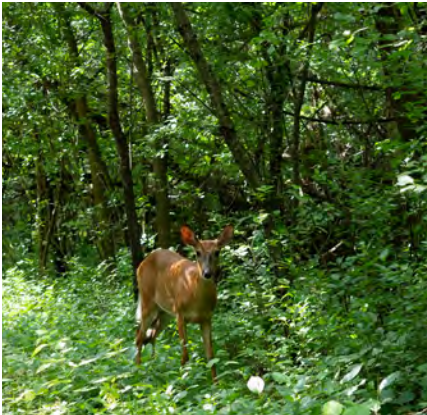
Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason

Kinnickinnic Park Manager: Eric Klumb

Naturalist Educator: Ashley Goldbeck

Follow us on Facebook: @WRSPKSP

Seen at the Parks





Thank You Business & Foundation Supporters



Fred C. & Katherine B. Andersen
FOUNDATION
Bayport, MN



Friends of Wisconsin
State Parks

Preserving, Promoting, Protecting, and Enhancing Wisconsin state parks, forests, trails, and recreation areas.



RIVER FALLS
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Natural Resources
FOUNDATION
of Wisconsin



Power of 100 – Hammond/Roberts
Remington Law – New Richmond
Hudson Daybreak Rotary
James E. Dutton Foundation
Hudson Home and Garden Club

