

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



Fall/Winter, 2024



President's Column

Rita Thofern

Here we go. The seasons are changing again. The canoes and kayaks are stored and snow could come at any time. A major source of enjoyment at our parks is their ever-changing nature. The Friends group works hard to encourage people to get outdoors at all times of the year. It's different every time.

As we move closer to having a new larger nature center building, we look forward to doing even more to help visitors connect with nature and get the most out of their next outdoor adventure. Be sure to check out the fresh conceptual drawings and other information about our goals for the new building. Some images are included in this newsletter, many more are available on our web page. Go to WillowKinniFriends.org and click the button for New Nature Center!

Little Falls Lake



Does it really look that great from a boat? Yes. Yes it does.

Special Fundraising Notice: Attention Senior Members and Supporters

For those of you who have reached the age at which you are required to withdraw funds from your IRA account, please keep the Friends in mind. The Required Minimum Distribution, RMD, can be sent directly from an IRA account to a qualified non-profit, such as the Friends, without incurring any tax obligations.

The Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc. is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our federal EIN is 39-1667467.

The Friends can also accept gifts of stock. Contact us at 715-255-0434—voice or text—for details.

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

As we near the end of the 2024 season, park staff remain busy getting ready for the transition to winter. Water is shut off and some buildings have been closed for the season. At Kinnickinnic the new dock has been stored and winter prep is under way. We also are wrapping up some renovations to the Willow maintenance building. In the next few weeks, ski trails will be mowed, campgrounds gated for the winter, and seasonal equipment moved to storage.



Despite fall road construction on County Highway A, Willow's visitor numbers have remained strong. This is mostly due to the warmer-than-normal weather and an extended camping season. The roundabout south of the park has now been completed and is open to traffic.

Superintendent's report continued on p. 2.

Snowshoe Rental



Winter and snow are on the way! Snowshoeing is a great way to enjoy the outdoors and allows you to explore areas you wouldn't normally reach during the winter.

Do you know you can rent snowshoes at both Willow and Kinni? If you've never tried snowshoeing, renting is a great option.

Snowshoe rental at the parks begins online where you reserve and pay for your rental followed by email instructions on how to pick up your snowshoes from one of the self-service boxes. This means you can rent and return snowshoes even when the park office is closed. For more information or to begin the rental process, scan the QR code or go to: tinyurl.com/rentss.



Snowshoe rental

With this summer's completion of repairs to the extremely popular falls overlook, we were happy to reopen access to the stairs. The lower half of the stairway was completely replaced by a crew of primarily Amish workers. We hope to get the upper portion of the stairs replaced in the next few years.

The lake had its ups and downs this summer but remained a popular destination for kayaking and canoeing. The dry weather later in the summer seemed to trigger several months of blue-green algae blooms. In the future we hope to have a better balance of nutrients and temperature to avoid these blooms. The Fisheries Department has continued to re-stock the lake with bass, panfish, and walleyes. Fishing has improved, and, as fish are starting to reach "keeper" size, I expect to start seeing more anglers, especially this winter.

For those of you who frequent the park, you may have noticed that we are still quite lean on staff. We appreciate your patience. This summer we had one full-time vacancy, and due to budget constraints, several fewer seasonal employees. We do hope that we will be able to fill our Ranger vacancy after January 1. However, seasonal staffing will likely remain reduced until park operating budgets are adjusted.

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

Eagle Scout Projects



Cottonwood Tree Platform-Completed by Caleb Blaukamp of Hudson Troop 9168

No, those are not teensy people. They are Sarah and Ron, visiting from Woodbury. It's the tree that is out of scale. It is really large.

Willow Whispers

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

Thank You to Our Amazing Volunteers!

As the vibrant hues of fall settle into the cool, crisp days of winter, we want to take a moment to recognize the engine that drives our mission—our volunteers. Our organization simply couldn't achieve all we do without the incredible dedication of these community members who give their time, energy, and passion.



Thanks to our volunteers, the nature center remains a thriving hub for recreation, education, and conservation. From welcoming guests at the nature center to ensuring our events run smoothly through setup, takedown, and behind-the-scenes support, their contributions are endless. Whether they're collecting trash along trails, tending to gardens, or tackling invasive buckthorn to protect local habitats, their work enhances the beauty and accessibility of our parks for everyone to enjoy.

To all of our volunteers—thank you for making our parks, our events, and our mission possible. We can't wait to share more fun and memorable moments with you this winter!

As we look forward to the exciting fall and winter programming ahead, we know that this season will be even more meaningful because of our volunteers. We can't wait for all the incredible activities and projects still to come, and we thank each and every volunteer who helps bring the Friends' vision to life.



Natural Playground Bridge, Stepping Logs, Drum Set-Completed by Bridger Graf of River Falls Troop 9054



Natural Playground Fort—Completed by Corbin Wild of River Falls Troop 9054
You can spot this structure at the top of the sledding hill.

Winter Fun Soon to Come!

As we prepare for snow and ice, we're happy to remind everyone that we do not shut down, slow down, or succumb to cabin fever blues around here!

The parks provide a wealth of outdoor entertainment no matter the season. With countless miles of hiking, biking, skiing and snowshoeing trails, you're bound to warm yourself up. Better yet, test your luck and fill your daily bag limit with crappies and bluegills from Little Falls Lake. We offer a variety of educational and recreational programs all winter long. Most events are free to members.

Keep an eye on the calendar and join us for these upcoming events:



DECEMBER

Holiday Nature Crafts -Saturday, December 7 or Holiday Nature Crafts -Saturday, December 7 or Sunday, December 8 at 10am. Willow River Nature Center

Holly-Jolly Scavenger Hunt -Saturday, December 14 anytime from 1-3pm. Willow River Nature Center.

Holiday Story Exploratory -Saturday, December 21 anytime from 12-3pm. Willow River Nature Center.

Hibernators of WI Trivia Hike -Saturday, December 28 anytime from 1-3pm. Willow River Nature Center.



JANUARY



First Day of the Year Hike -Wednesday, January 1 Watch for details.

Snowshoe Demo at Willow River State Park -Saturday, January 4 anytime from 1-3pm. Willow River Nature Center.

Frosty Falls Hike -Saturday, January 11. Hike Leaves at 10:00 am sharp. Willow River Nature Center.

Snowshoe Demo at Kinnickinnic State Park -Sunday, January 12 anytime from 1-3pm. Meet at the parking lot down the hill from the entrance station at Kinnickinnic State Park.

Let's Go Ice Fishing -Saturday, January 18 from 1:00-3:00pm. Park at the beach and meet us out on the lake.

Skulls, Pelts, Tracks & Scat -Sunday, January 26 anytime from 1-3pm. Willow River Nature Center.



FEBRUARY

Winter Wonderland Painting -Sunday, February 2nd at 10am. Willow River Nature Center.

Winter Wonderland Quest -Saturday, February 22nd anytime from 1-3 pm. Willow River Nature Center.

Stay up to date on all of our programs and never miss out on the fun!

Follow us on Facebook: [@WRSPKSP](#)

Visit our website: willowkinnifriends.org/upcomingevent

Candlelight Hike and Ski at Willow River SP

In addition to the Friends-sponsored events listed here, the Friends group coordinates with the DNR for the annual candlelight event.

The event is set for Saturday, February 15, from 6:00 to 8:30 pm.

This is a very popular event, and it comes with cookies!



The candlelight hike and ski also comes with hundreds of candles to be placed along the trail and gathered afterward. If you would like to help, please leave a message with the nature center at 715-386-9340 or send a message to volunteer@willowkinnifriends.org

Amber Rappl-Naturalist

Meet Amber Rappl who joined us in August with a background in Biotechnology, Biology, Chemistry, and a passion for community education. She was drawn to the Naturalist role by her commitment to fostering a deeper appreciation for the natural world. When she's not facilitating seed collections, waste-free walks, and other fun outdoor educational programs you can find her hiking. One of her favorite adventures was exploring the Porcupine Mountains in Northern Michigan during the vibrant fall color shift.



Amber is dedicated to providing exceptional environmental education to the public and groups of all ages and backgrounds. Some of her main focuses are fostering pollinator-friendly habitats, promoting evidence-based practices, and protecting natural resources for future generations to enjoy. She is excited to bring her knowledge and enthusiasm to our team! We are glad to have her here.

Membership Meeting

Look who showed up for the October membership meeting! The group included new members, old hands, and everyone in between. Trail workers were there who support bike trails, hiking trails, and ski trails. Nature center hosts and program assistants dropped in. Our naturalists were part of the party. Regular Buckthorn Brigade participants—the Tuesday volunteer group—were represented, along with kids' coaches for mountain biking and skiing. And, best of all, wonderful folks who enjoy the parks and are eager to get more involved with the Friends were on hand. It seemed like everyone had a story to share.



Ed Heyes, Ashley Goldbeck,
Janet Bliven



Katrina Larsen, Joe Folsom

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.

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Willow Whispers



Steve Campbell, Mark Meydam



Amber Rappi, Joey Filipiak

Lake Mallalieu

A short distance downstream from Willow River State Park's boundary, Lake Mallalieu is impounded by a dam near Willow River's entrance to the St. Croix River. When Little Falls Dam was removed, and when the new construction was washed away in heavy summer flooding, quite a bit of silt flowed into the Lake Mallalieu area and made alterations to its character. The Lake Mallalieu Association (LMA) is considering dredging.

More information about the LMA's proposed dredging project in northeast Lake Mallalieu and the adjacent Willow River channels is available from Lake Mallalieu Dredging Info at <https://lakemallalieu dredging.info> and SOS Lake Mallalieu - Save Our Swans at <https://soslakemallalieu.org>.

Anyone who lives or owns property within one-mile of Lake Mallalieu may join the LMA by paying the annual dues, at the LMA website: <https://www.lakemallalieu.org/services-1>

Board Officers

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Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason
Kinnickinnic Park Manager: Eric Klumb
Lead Naturalist/Educator: Ashley Goldbeck

Follow us on Facebook: @WRSPKSP



Our Nature Center Vision

The new Willow River Nature Center will serve as one of Wisconsin's leading nature centers, a gateway to experiencing Wisconsin's natural environment.

Our Mission

Enhance the Parks' natural environment and engage visitors through recreation, education and conservation.

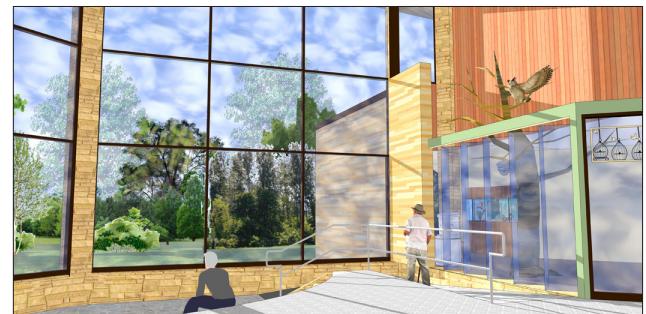
Paths to Discovery the Campaign For the New Willow River Nature Center

It is time for a new nature center. The current nature center was a modest mid-century home that existed on property acquired to form Willow River State Park. Our programming has outgrown this beloved structure, and we have worn it out.

The New Nature Center Will Deliver:

- A welcoming design that will entice visitors to enter, explore, learn, and become well informed as they begin their park visit
- A public area that can serve large groups year-round
- Full accessibility including family restrooms
- Animal care/workroom
- Flexible space that can easily be arranged for multiple classrooms, meeting space, or large group needs
- A larger and updated museum area
- Educational space to serve groups of up to 200
- New rentable space to offset operating costs
- Increased office space to accommodate more staffing for program and activity growth
- Enlarged retail space supporting sales of park memorabilia, clothing, guidebooks and children's items
- Outdoor learning space
- Demonstration plots of native plantings to attract native fauna
- Opportunities for nature observation
- Energy Efficiency
- Utilization of natural light

Conceptual Drawings





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