

Willow Whispers

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Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks

**FRIENDS**
OF
WILLOW RIVER & KINNICKINNIC
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President's Column

John Collins



John Collins

Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks are amazing natural resources. The mission of the Friends is to maximize their value for our local communities. We do this by developing and delivering a range of educational programs for children and adults, and by a variety of activities aimed at enhancing the parks and the visitor experience.

Much of what happens in the parks is due to the continuing involvement of volunteers. Our paid staff consists of naturalists who develop and run programs through the Nature Center. Much of our income to support them comes from firewood and ice sales, and from events like the Willow River Trail Challenge. Volunteers staff the nature center, help with classes, field trips, and other programs, tackle the worst infestations of buckthorn and garlic mustard, groom the ski trails when we are blessed with snow, and work with park staff to develop and improve trails and pick up litter after major holidays. Boy Scout groups are helping to develop the Natural Playground west of the boat launch area and up the hill from the playground east of the beach shelter.

Volunteers also serve on our Board of Directors and on committees, and help out with events such as the Trail Challenge, the Halloween Bash, Fall Festival, and others. Ongoing committees include Membership, Grants, Volunteers, Trail Challenge, Facilities. All of these areas welcome additional help. The Facilities committee, working with our architect, is nearing completion of the conceptual design of a new Nature Center. We are now working to form several committees to help run a Capital Campaign to raise the \$4 million we'll need to build it.

If you have time, and if you love the parks, we would love to put you to work for an hour, an hour a week, or whatever suits your life and interests. Please contact the Nature Center, and we'll get you hooked up with a group that could use your help.



Buckthorn busting volunteer,
Jeff Bolte

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Lead Naturalist

Well, well, well, the the seasons certainly have changed! It's about time after a scorcher of a summer! Through the endless sunshine and high, humid temperatures we managed to stay as busy as a band of bees at the Nature Center this summer. We offered several Young Naturalist classes each week, including classes at Kinnickinnic State Park for children ages



Ashley Goldbeck and Albert

3-12. We hosted field trips throughout the summer, spoke at local libraries and events, and offered 2-4 free weekend programs to campers and park visitors each week! Our newest Women in the Parks program, funded by a 2018 Allina Neighborhood Health Connection grant, was also a blast! We went geocaching and kayaking, did some outdoor cooking, tested out our archery skills, and found out how limber we are while practicing yoga. We don't plan on kicking back or winding down anytime soon.

Fun and exciting events are coming up. We will continue to offer preschool Young Naturalist classes that will keep us from getting too cooped up indoors. There will also be non-school day Young Naturalist classes and a new Saturday morning class that will meet once a month. Both are offered to children ages 3-12.

New family programs this year: Turkey Bingo Bonanza on November 17, Christmas Nature Crafts on December 15, and Winter Wonderland Animal Homes on December 22. All of these events are at 1:00 pm at the nature center.

After the excitement of the holidays we offer free weekend indoor and outdoor programming all winter long.

Be sure to check out the program schedule on our website at www.willowkinnifriends.org or find us on Facebook to stay up to date on all the fun and educational programs that we are offering! When looking for something fun to do this winter, come out to the parks and snowshoe, ski, sled, play on the natural playgrounds, try out our new rubbing booklets on the Hidden Ponds Trail, or stop in at the nature center to explore. Don't let winter get you down! Get outdoors 365 days of the year at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. We'll be waiting for you!

See you out there,

Nature Center Display Gardens

Carol Hardin

Our beautiful park has many wonderful features, not the least of which is its colorful abundance of wild flowers.

Ever changing with the seasons, there are hundreds of species. Many years ago Friends of the Park volunteers, Ruby and Roger Fairbanks, identified 250 species and published a DNR pamphlet with seasonal lists and color, habitat, and abundance keys. They also noted



Wild quinine

which plants were threatened or endangered in Wisconsin.

The two display gardens in front of the Nature Center were initially planted with native plants from the Park. Then in 1998, a professional landscape plan was designed which included about 50 native grasses and forbs. Funds for the plantings, labels, and educational materials were donated by the Hudson Home and Garden Club.

This summer, a half dozen or so native wild flower species were given to the Park from US Fish and Wildlife Services. These plugs were grown from seed by people at the St. Croix Correctional Facility in New Richmond.

Currently, about 35 species in the plots are identified and labeled. More plants that are seen throughout the park—such as asters, compass, and cup plants, pussy toes, and wild quinine—will be added to the gardens.

In the past couple of years Friends of the Park, Master Gardeners and other volunteers have been working to “weed” and maintain these plots of prairie plant. Labels are made with a vintage Scott pantograph model 100 engraver. These labels, the same as those seen in professional botanical gardens, are affixed to stakes placed near each specimen.

Only the common names are engraved, due to the size of the labels. Each plant is given a number on its label which



Pink pussy toes

will correspond to a large sign with color photographs and the genus and species names. This sign, will be displayed outside the Nature Center.

Much thought has been given to deciding which plants to include in the gardens. Originally, only native, mostly prairie plants were chosen. However,

non-native flowers were included in the pamphlet made by the Fairbanks and indeed there are many introduced non-native, or alien species in the Park. Visitors want to know what a plant is called be it native or non-native. Therefore,

the labels will be marked to designate which plants are non-native.

Non-natives “introduce” themselves in the gardens. Some are quite lovely, such as Deptford Pinks and oxeye daisies. Others are so invasive and common that they are removed (repeatedly), i.e., dandelions and spotted knapweed.

The two gardens were planted to educate visitors and display some of the beauty found in Willow River State Park. As the seasons change so does the look of the gardens. The blooms during the growing season are attractive to us as well as to pollinators.



Halloween Bash

We welcomed 230 visitors at this year’s Halloween Bash. Activities for kids and their families included face painting, a scavenger hunt by flashlight, a guided night hike, tables of fur pelts, and skulls and bones to explore. Chomp the Carrot, from Healthier Together, was on hand and games and snacks were popular.



Give a Gift Membership!

Do you know someone who enjoys the park but hasn’t become a Friends member? You can get them started with a gift membership for as little as \$15. Go online to purchase a membership. Provide your friend’s name, address and email address in the “Write a note to the seller” box on the checkout page.

squareup.com/market/friendswrk

2018 Willow River Trail Challenge

Dave Thofern

The annual Willow River Trail Challenge keeps getting bigger and better. From its start many years ago as a “Walk Along the Willow” the Trail Challenge has become one of the area’s premier trail running events. Not only were hundreds of runners attracted to the challenging and beautiful terrain of Willow River State Park, but over 200 children signed up for the amazing free Kids Obstacle Course.

This year, the addition of a half-marathon, 13 mile, distance proved to be very popular with runners looking for more miles, more hills, and more of Willow’s great scenery. With three race distances—6.6 km, 10.6 km, half-marathon—plus the Family Fun Walk, and the Kids Obstacle Course, the Trail Challenge has become a true family event.

The Trail Challenge is a major fundraising event for the Friends group. This year, the Trail Challenge brought in over \$15,000 through our generous community sponsors and runner entry fees. Of course, none of this would be possible without the over 50 dedicated volunteers who donate their time, efforts and enthusiasm to ensure a successful event.

Next Year’s Willow River Trail Challenge will be on Saturday, October 12. We’d love to see you there as a participant or volunteer.



2018 Willow River Trail Challenge
Photos by Fred Sobottka

Progress Continues on Little Falls Dam

Dave Thofern

If you have been to the lower part of Willow River State Park lately you’ve probably noticed the construction traffic and the large piles of dirt in the beach parking lot. All of this is related to the complicated project to remove the old Willow Falls Dam and construct a new dam.

The old dam was found to be structurally unstable and



Late July view of dam construction
Photo by Nick Schmit

was deliberately breached in the summer of 2015. The lake was drawn down and the process of securing funding and designing a new dam began. Full-scale work on removal of the old dam started this summer. Most of the old structure has now been demolished and a diversion is in place. Construction of the new dam is taking place alongside removal of the old dam. Work will continue through the winter with hopes that the new dam will be in place for the 2020 summer season.

Due to safety reasons, the public is not permitted in the work area. However, you can pay a virtual visit to the construction site via the webcam overlooking the project. Just point your browser to <https://tinyurl.com/WRSPDAM>. Not only can you see a live view of the site, but you can also watch a fascinating time-lapse video of the project from early August up to the present. At the same website, you can find more information about the project and its history, an architectural drawing of the new dam, and other still pictures.

At the September annual meeting of the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc., Park Manager, Aaron Mason, arranged a tour for Friends’ members and guests inside the fence of the construction project. He hopes to be able to lead a similar tour in the spring. Stay tuned!



Park Superintendent, Aaron Mason, points out construction highlights.
Photo by Dave Thofern

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