

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



Fall/Winter, 2017

President's Column

John Collins



John Collins

October is a wonderful time to visit the park and explore. There are vistas along the Nelson Farm (Silver) trail, especially east of the Nelson Farm Road parking lot, as well as along the Burkhardt (Pink) trail between the falls bridge and the River Road parking lot. If you have not yet explored the north side of the

park, these are good places to start.

A nice afternoon hike crosses both bridges. If you start from the Nature Center, take the Trout Brook (Purple) trail and cross the lower bridge to the Nelson Farm (Silver) trail. Climb the big hill (affectionately known by skiers as "Everest") and wind through the pines to the Nelson Farm Road crossing. Continue east across the road, through a field into a winding, hilly, wooded section to the overlook where you can sit a while. You can survey the field that is our once and future Little Falls Lake bottom and view the woods beyond. Travel down to the upper bridge at Willow Falls, where you turn right (west) along the Willow Falls (Blue) trail, through the campground, past the boat launch area, and back to the Nature Center. The total round-trip distance is about six miles.

If you haven't explored the area north and east of the falls, try parking in the River Road lot just west of the

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Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

This has been another busy summer and fall at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. With about three months left to go, Willow River's attendance is already slightly ahead of last year's total with approximately 844,000 visitors. Kinnickinnic is slightly ahead of last year as well. The fall color season is starting to ramp up and nice weekend weather has made for a busy fall. In preparation for winter, staff has been busy with shutting off the water system, closing up buildings and removing the buoys and dock at Kinnickinnic. Over the next month or so, we will be doing quite a bit of trail work to get ready for ski season.

Staff and volunteers are continuing work on various projects around the park. We are planning to work on some trail and erosion projects yet this fall and hope to complete another part of the natural playground. Volunteers have been spending a lot of time and effort on litter pick-up, trail work, and removing buckthorn. There will also be a few work days set up for groups of volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering contact the park office or nature center and you can be matched with a volunteer opportunity.

Here is an update on the Little Falls Dam project. In September, the governor's budget was signed which included funding for the dam. This brings the project budget up to \$19.1 million. Mead and Hunt was selected as the architect/engineering firm to complete the design. They have been working this summer and fall to prepare the final plans. It is expected the project will be ready to go out for bids this winter, with construction beginning next summer. We are expecting a completion date of sometime in 2020. However, there are lots of factors that could slow or speed up the process and affect the completion date. We are also routinely removing sediments and sand collecting in the pool below the dam to minimize

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Aaron Mason

intersection of River Road and County I. The Burkhardt (Pink) trail runs through a bit of the old Mill Pond lakebed, then up the hill and through the woods to a very nice oak savanna area. There are two beautiful overlooks along the southern loop of that trail, high above the Willow River gorge. From there you can come down a very long stairway to the falls. Take the Burkhardt (Pink) trail away from the falls to return to the River Road parking lot.

For the more adventurous, looking for off-trail experiences, you might try starting along the Trout Brook (Purple) trail at the lower bridge and climbing the hill directly north of there, to a large open field with a pine grove on the west side. Hike along the east edge of the field along the edge of the ravine and check out the views, especially in the southeast corner and about halfway along the east side. There are a couple of small springs along that ravine, but they are not easy to find.

As you explore, you will see that many areas have become choked with buckthorn, as well as autumn olive and honeysuckle, all exotic invasives. We have a crew of volunteers who do battle with them, mostly along the trails and the lakeshore. Our work sessions are generally on Tuesday and Saturday mornings. Contact the park office or the Nature Center if you would like to help out.



Halloween Bash PowerUp!

Our annual Halloween Bash is getting some help from PowerUp in the Parks!

This summer Health Partners started working with local parks in the St. Croix Valley. Working with the National Park Service, State Parks and County Parks, they are creating a PowerUp in the Parks Guide. The purpose is to get people exploring our amazing parks and trails, right here in the St. Croix River Valley. Part of this program is funded by a grant to help fund two large events, one in Minnesota and one in Wisconsin, that bring families outdoors to explore the parks. Willow River was lucky enough to be chosen as the Wisconsin large event host site and will be receiving volunteers and support for our Halloween Bash. This event is held rain or shine in and around the Nature Center. There will be FREE healthy snacks, crafts, storytelling, and more! Wear your Halloween costume if you would like! Free transportation from Westfield Hospital and Clinic in New Richmond will be provided. Those who choose to drive separately, will be greeted at the entrance to receive a complimentary day pass to enter the park at no charge. Please visit www.powerup4kids.org/parks to learn more and to register for the event or to sign up for free transportation!

its transport downstream. You may have seen construction equipment below the dam around Labor Day. We removed approximately 3400 cubic yards of sand and sediment from the pool. This entire 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.



Another upcoming issue that all of you should be aware of is the Department's Recreation Opportunities Analysis study to identify future recreational needs on DNR properties. This statewide process began a few months ago in the north and is rotating around the state. There are public meetings as well as an online survey to collect data to determine future recreational needs. This will be used to develop future master plans for Department properties. Our area will have a public meeting at the River Prairie Center in Altoona, WI on October 23rd from 4:00–7:00 PM. For more information and to complete the survey online go to: <http://tinyurl.com/WIrecreation>

We are also gearing up for the park's upcoming hunting season. The season structure is similar to the past couple of years. Most of the parks' undeveloped areas are now open for all types of gun and archery hunting (deer, small game, etc.) from November 15th through December 15th. The park is also open for archery-only hunting from December 16th through the Sunday nearest January 6th. The spring hunting season, primarily turkey hunting, runs from April 1st through the Tuesday nearest May 3. The area surrounding all of the campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launch, and the majority of the hiking trails south of the lake are still closed to hunting year-round. The hunting area at Kinnickinnic has mostly stayed the same with only a few small closed areas around building, roads, driveways, parking lots, and picnic areas. Maps and hunting information are posted at trailheads and are also available at the park office. Trapping is now allowed during the open hunting dates. However, trappers must stay 100 yards away from designated trails and use areas and are required to use dog-proof traps.

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

River Rambles

Melissa Dupont



Melissa Dupont

This summer was exciting at the park! The Nature Center was able to be open almost every day in June, July, and August due to a wonderful group of volunteers and also due to the hiring of an Assistant Naturalist. More programs and more classes were offered. People enjoyed attending live animal programs, scavenger hunts, fishing programs, hikes, and more! Attendance was up across the board.

Ashley, our Assistant Naturalist, has the following story to share from her Patterns in Nature hike.

“When I did the patterns in nature hike there was a family that showed up with a little boy, age 5, who didn’t want to have to hike to find patterns so he was dragging his feet as we walked along the trail. Then his twin sister found her first pattern, a big beautiful spider web which made him scream (super high pitched) and clap his hands together. He was so excited! He started competing with his sister to see who could find more patterns and between the two of them they found over 40 different patterns to draw and share with the rest of us. “

We hope to continue making differences in people’s lives as we take our programming into the fall and winter. We don’t plan to bring programming to a screeching halt. There will be a Winter GO! (Get Outdoors) day where we can go sledding, make a craft, play winter Kubb and more. Look for fall color hikes, art programs, trivia nights, and other fall and winter activities. Stay up-to-date on our Facebook page and the WillowKinniFriends website for these programs.

In our Nature Center we saw a daily increase in attendance and helped an average of 150 visitors every weekend day and 50 every week day. They enjoyed the live animals (snake, turtles, frog, crickets, and caterpillars) the best. Visitors were also able to learn about the history of the park and the names of animals and birds found in the park. Exploring the exhibits is popular, too. Our new exhibits include a matching board and “touch and feel” boxes. Both of these displays can be changed regularly to introduce visitors to more topics. The matching board is currently displaying photos and names of invasive species in the park. Each “touch and feel” box provides a clue to read so the visitor can guess what they will touch inside the box.

We now have a predator display for learning about the benefits of certain predators in our area. There is also a new mussel display to help individuals identify mussels in the area. This winter we plan to put more items out

for exploration, re-do our bulletin board, create a pelt matching wall, change/move our phenology board and add a rock display. We hope that you enjoy being able to visit the Nature Center time and time again. We try to change things up so that it is different almost every time. If you haven’t visited us in a while please stop in. We will be open Friday–Tuesdays through October and then open \ Mondays and Tuesdays for the rest of the year. Our schedule is posted on Facebook, inside and outside the park office and outside the nature center.

I would like to take a moment to thank all of the volunteers at the park and those that I worked with over the year! Without your help I wouldn’t be able to do what I do. We truly are able to help the community and our visitors through our work. I know that they enjoy and appreciate all that we are able to accomplish! Thank You!

Snowed In? Make Snow Ice Cream!

This winter enjoy making a sweet treat with your little ones by making some snow ice cream! If you find yourself hungry while you are out sledding, skiing, or building that snowman, this makes for a wonderful treat to enjoy inside as you warm up. What you will need to do is combine the following ingredients in a large bowl:

- 1 cup milk
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 pinch of salt
- 8 cups of clean snow

Mix together and serve. You can also add food coloring, toppings, or fruit to make it colorful as well as tasty. Here are some variations:

Chocolate Peanut Butter Snow Ice Cream

- 1/2 cup of Hershey’s Chocolate Syrup
- 1/4 cup Peanut Butter
- 1/4 Cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 8 cups of clean snow

Chocolate Peppermint Snow Ice Cream

- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
 - 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
 - 1/2 teaspoon peppermint extract
 - 8 cups clean snow
- Enjoy!



Photo by Melissa Dupont

Preschool and Young Naturalist Classes

Melissa Dupont and Ashley Goldbeck

This summer we really enjoyed teaching our Young Naturalist Classes for children ages 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12 years old. This summer, we started monthly classes at Kinnickinnic State Park. We hope to continue these next year.

Young learners were able to earn Wisconsin Explorer badges, learn about fish, snakes, turtles, mystical creatures, aquifers, animals, rivers, and more!

We are currently offering preschool classes on Monday's from 10:00 am–1:00 pm and 1:00–2:00 pm, and Tuesdays from 10:00 am–1:00 pm. Please spread the word and share with anyone who might be interested. All classes are free to attend; vehicle admission into the park is required.



Photo by Melissa Dupont

Two families who have been attending our program for some years now have graciously allowed me to share their thoughts regarding the programs:

“When I asked my two kids what their favorite things were about nature class, they both said fishing. My son also remembered that he needs special pants for when he sees a jackalope. (Hee hee.) Our family enjoys spending time outdoors and it seemed natural for our children to attend the preschool nature classes and young naturalist classes at Willow River State Park when we moved to the area four years ago. Our kids have had an abundance of learning opportunities through this program: from coloring and painting to hiking and snowshoeing. They listen to storybooks. They eat snow ice cream and edible aquifers. They touch turtles, snakes, and animal pelts. They practice casting and fishing. They learn the differences between certain insects, birds or mammals. They pretend to be flying squirrels. They sound like owls for a few days after a class. Simply, they explore with thoughtful guidance from the environmental educator, Miss Melissa. Additionally, our children know where several things are located in the park since we are there weekly for class.

They also pick up any trash they spot when near the picnic and playground area or when hiking on a trail. They have learned to be responsible users of the park.”

“I have been attending the WRSP preschool program for two years now. I recommend it to every parent with a

toddler I meet. I have watched the program unfold with Miss Melissa and she has made it truly enjoyable. My children beg to attend, even on rainy days. She integrates valuable education, sensory activities, nature hikes, stories and fun crafts. Her sincere love for nature is expressed through her hard work and reflected in her positivity to all the children and parents who attend. I love her encouragement and take pride knowing my four year old can identify so many things in the wild! My family is so thankful that the Friends group offers this program at the park.”

Volunteer at Your Park

Are you looking for a way to help out your state park and have fun doing it? Join the Tuesday morning Buckthorn Brigade group. The group meets most Tuesday at 8:45 a.m. at Willow's maintenance shed and wraps up by noon followed by lunch at a local restaurant. Saturday morning sessions are also available.



Uncle Ruwal Wants You!

The Brigade's work at the parks is much more than just buckthorn control. The group spends time on whatever projects need doing ranging from painting the nature center, litter pickup, brush clearing, and more.

There is no long-term commitment. Your time is valued whether it's every week or only occasionally.

Questions? Contact Brigade leader and super-supervisor, Ruwal Freeze at ruwalfreeze@yahoo.com or 715-441-0736. Or just show up at 8:45 next Tuesday, or the Tuesday after that, or the one after that.



Gabbi Gujer and Ashley Goldbeck, above, register participants. Steve Doll and Peter Rayne, right, direct traffic at the 2017 Willow River Trail Challenge.



Willow River Trail Challenge— More Than Just a Race

Rita Thofern

This year's trail challenge included four events. In addition to the long and short versions of the timed trail run, the activities included the Kids Fun Run Obstacle Course and a Family Fun Walk.

The kids' obstacle course changes and is enhanced each year. It has gotten to be so popular that the number of kid participants for that event is closing in on the total number of runners in the timed races.

This year a Family Fun Walk was introduced as one more way to enjoy the day with healthy outdoor activity.

A trail run, a fundraiser for the park's friends group, has taken place at the park every fall for many years. Of course, like most things, it has changed over time. The current version, now in its fourth year, is known as the Willow River Trail Challenge and focuses on presenting runners with some of the park's most challenging hills while promoting fun, healthy outdoor activity.

It should come as no surprise that this event provides another opportunity for park supporters to step forward to volunteer. This year nearly 50 people volunteered on the day of the event. What a vibrant group!

Trail Challenge photos here and on page 4 by Terry Butler, Sue Oberstar, Laurie Sabata, Fred Sobottka



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Payment Method:

____ Join the Friends of Willow & Kinni online at our secure website:
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