

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



Spring/Summer, 2017

President's Column

John Collins



John Collins

Spring is a wonderful time to visit the park, at least when it's not raining. The anemone flowers have been prolific, the eagles are nesting, lots of migratory birds are passing through.

Also, the buckthorn is leafing out and the garlic mustard is sprouting. These are invasive plants. Ruwal Freese

and his Tuesday morning Buckthorn Brigade, as well as a Saturday morning group led by Jeff Bolte, have been hard at work clearing trails, cleaning up the campground, tackling the buckthorn infestation where it's closing in on trails and picnic areas, and cleaning up garlic mustard, mostly in the lower campground. If you would like to help out, we would love to have you—call the Nature Center or email naturalist@willowkinnifriends.org. More info at www.willowkinnifriends.org/volunteer.

As always, our primary focus is education. The park includes a wide range of ecosystems including river, bottomland, marsh, upland prairie, and oak savanna. Melissa, our naturalist, is doing a wonderful job with programming. This includes pre-school and summer Young Naturalist programs, school field trips and weekend programs for campers and the general public. Starting this fall, we hope to have an AmeriCorps volunteer on our staff for a year. If you know someone who might be interested, information is available on our website.

We are outgrowing the Nature Center. It's not big enough for most school groups, and the display area is dark and cramped. The existing building is an old house that was moved to the site. It has structural problems that make it infeasible to enlarge and upgrade. Major work will probably be needed in another 10-15 years. As a result, we are working toward a new Nature Center that would include a larger classroom/lab space, an open space with year-around restrooms for warming up in the winter and cooling off in the summer, and an upgraded display space. If you are interested in helping out with this project, please contact Melissa at naturalist@willowkinnifriends.org. We hope to have a preliminary design ready by mid-late summer this year.

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

A mild winter and early spring have definitely made for busy times here at the park. Park staff have been busy getting buildings and water systems up and running, campgrounds open, trails ready, and some of the prairie fields burned. Water is now on and all campgrounds were open for reservations as of May 12th. Beautiful April weekends brought many visitors out to the park and gave us record spring attendance, a great start to the summer season.



Aaron Mason

As many of you are aware, Little Falls Lake is currently drawn down and a portion of the dam was removed in October of 2015. The Department of Natural Resources is moving forward in the process to replace the dam. Mead and Hunt was selected to design and engineer the new structure. Over the past 6 months they have been surveying the site, taking geo-technical data, and developing architectural plans. The project also received a huge boost this spring as additional funding was included in Governor Walker's proposed biennial budget. This additional funding brought the project up to \$19 million and is set to include removal of the existing structure, construction of the new dam, some sediment removal at the dam, lake habitat improvements including cribs, tree drops, and boulder piles, site restoration, and road replacement. There are still more hurdles to pass but the project is expected to be approved in the final budget in June. It would then go to the Building Commission for approval in August and, hopefully, be sent out for bids later this fall or early winter. Construction would take place over the 2018-2019 seasons with an expected completion in 2020. Currently, we routinely remove sediments and sand that collect in the pool below the dam to minimize its transport downstream. This 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.

Also, some of you are aware that Park Manager, Brian Markowski, has taken a promotional opportunity and is now the Park Superintendent at Peninsula State Park in Door County. This is a great opportunity for him and we wish him the best. This does however leave us with a big

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hole in our staffing with two full time staff positions now vacant.

Staff and volunteers continue to work on various projects around the park—trail and erosion projects and additions to the natural playground. An Eagle Scout is now working on a new element in the natural playground. Volunteers have been investing a lot of time and effort on trail work, removing buckthorn, and spraying garlic mustard. Contact the park if you wish to volunteer.

As part of the spring hunting opportunities in the park, staff held a Learn to Hunt Turkeys program. Seven youth hunters, 10-18 years old, participated in the program. The program included a classroom portion, firearms handling and shooting at a range and, finally, a mentored hunt. Two of the hunters were successful in bagging turkeys and a great time was had by all. Thank you to all of the Friends and volunteers who 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.

Welcome Ashley!

I'm Ashley Goldbeck, the new Assistant Naturalist at the Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. I'm excited to be apart of the Friends Group because I absolutely love both parks and all they have to offer. Last spring I graduated from the University of Wisconsin River Falls with a Bachelor of Conservation Science. I live for the outdoors, whether it's fishing, hiking, kayaking, camping, backpacking, or simply taking the boat out to catch some sun. Since I've graduated, I still spend a lot of time with my nose in a book, watching documentaries or going out in the field, always learning something new and fascinating about nature.

It has always been a dream of mine to find a job that enables me to share my knowledge of our Wisconsin wildlife and it's natural environment. I hope to do that this summer by assisting the Naturalist, Melissa, with programs, classes, hikes, and service projects. I feel it's important to educate the general public, especially children, about the natural environment of our parks so they learn to respect and appreciate them.

Whether it's teaching visitors about the diverse plants and animals or simply helping them navigate hiking trails for their own adventures, I'm ready to help make their trip fun and educational. It's bound to be a blast and a new learning experience for me as well. I'm happy to be on board and look forward to a great summer here.

See you out there!



New assistant naturalist, Ashley Goldbeck and friend, Albert, the fox snake



Melissa Dupont

River Rambles

Melissa Dupont

Spring is here and the weather is finally warming. We have already been busy here at the Nature Center and will only get busier as the summer continues to come upon us. To help us with this busy season, we are excited that we have a new assistant naturalist for the summer.

Having grown up in the area and spent her childhood days exploring the park, Ashley Goldbeck is very knowledgeable. You may recognize her from last summer when she worked greeting visitors in the office and filling in at the Nature Center. Ashley will be able to help us increase our programming at both parks and will help us keep the nature center open more hours. Please help me welcome Ashley to our team!

A special request. Please share with us your stories of the park. We hope to collect them into a new book!

We are continually refreshing the displays in the nature center and working to have more interactive displays. Come by to see what's new and let us know if you have a suggestion. Our goal is to have the nature center open every day of the week from at least noon to four. To make sure this happens, though, we ask for your help in volunteering for a few hours this summer. You can sign-up here: www.tinyurl.com/naturecenterhost

Remember, if weekdays work better for you, we can still use your help. Contact me at naturalist@willowkinnifriends.org to sign up.

We hope that you and your friends and family will come join us during our programming this year. Our Art in the Park program continues to be a success for children and the adults have a good time, too. We have started a free summer yoga program for mixed ages. Weekend programs on various topics will be offered at both Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. Special events will be offered at both parks. Check our current events listed in this newsletter and stay up-to-date on Facebook, our website, and the DNR events page.

Young Naturalist classes for kids ages 3–12 are being offered this summer at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. If at least 5 kids are registered for a class date, the class will be held.

•Kids ages 3–5 have three options:

Mondays, 10:00–11:00 a.m. or 1:00–2:00 p.m.

Tuesdays, 10:00–11:00 a.m. Sign up here:

<http://tinyurl.com/SYN325>

•Kids ages 6-8 can join us on Tuesdays, 1:00–2:00 p.m. Sign up here: <http://tinyurl.com/SYN628>

•Back by popular demand: children ages 9–12 can join us on Wednesdays, 10:00–11:00 a.m.

Sign up here: <http://tinyurl.com/SYN9-12>.

•We will also host a program at Kinnickinnic State Park once a month on Thursdays from 10:00–11:00 a.m.

Sign up here: <http://tinyurl.com/SYNKSP>.

Walking Tour of Buckthorn Test Plots

Jeff Bolte

Join one or more members of the volunteer Buckthorn Brigade group On Sunday, June 4, 1:00 p.m. to view various works in progress to control buckthorn. I will lead a 90 minute to two hour walking tour. The tour may include various tool demonstrations as a plot is finished. We will view an infested plot for reference and proceed to the nearly-finished restoration plot. The tour includes sections of the Hidden Ponds nature trail and the Trout Brook trail. There are some gentle hills on the Trout Brook Trail. We will see about a dozen plots in all. Meet at the picnic shelter near the dam at end of the entrance road at 1:00 p.m.

This is amateur research at its best. Nothing we have found has not been done and published somewhere previously. Some of the results discovered were confirmed by reading published research papers afterward. I was just a frustrated Nordic skier watching Willow's trail width shrinking as invasive buckthorn continued to encroach. That got me started on buckthorn removal and led to the original 2015 test plots on the Whitetail Trail which are still there. Buckthorn is well established throughout the park. The best we can hope for is control in selected areas.

Do I have the answer on how to effectively control buckthorn economically with easy labor? No! It is a long-term process regardless of the control method. I will show you what has worked through planning, by just dumb luck, or both, and those with incomplete results. I can demonstrate hand tools that work efficiently and those "tools" that are useless for sustained work. The safe and effective use of herbicides will also be discussed.

This is a free admission day at the park. Bring along water and snacks. Rain will cancel this event.



Jeff Bolte, Buckthorn Buster

Natural Play

Melissa Dupont

Remember when you were growing up and were able to play in the rain, mud, and dirt? Maybe you built forts. I had a fort in the middle of some spruce trees between my parents' yard and the neighbors'. It was my own little place that I would sneak into during the days and into the evenings. It was a place to play and pretend. Our 21st century kids are not getting that same kind of childhood experience. Many activities are structured for them and they are becoming less and less likely to be given the opportunity to just play outside and explore the natural environment. Research shows that there are numerous benefits for child development when they are given this opportunity.

Children learn to appreciate nature and work on gross and fine motor skills, exercise creativity and practice problem solving.

One of our goals at the parks is to provide these types of experiences for kids. With the hard work of volunteers, staff, and Boy Scouts, we have been able to build natural playgrounds at both Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. These are special places built from natural materials meant to be explored by kids. Little instruction is needed. Just let kids be kids who explore and do whatever it is that they see fit. There are eagle's nests, forts, tree cookies to build with or step on, logs to balance on, and so much more.

At Kinnickinnic State Park the natural playground is located by the main picnic area, at the end of the entrance road. At Willow River State Park it is up the hill from the beach pavilion. You can access it by going up the sledding hill across from the beach playground or from the Hidden Ponds trail. Both natural playgrounds are being continuously developed. Currently, a fort is being built at Willow River. Come enjoy exploring outside with your children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews. Let them use their imagination, get dirty and have fun. Hint: Grownups can play, too!



Stop by the park office and see the stunning new trumpeter swan mount. The swan died as a result of lead poisoning.

Upcoming Programs

Keep an eye out for these upcoming events!

Unless otherwise noted, all events are free to attend but require park vehicle admission.

This is not a complete schedule of events. Please remember to check our monthly events email, the Friends' website, www.willowkinnifriends.org, and our Facebook page to stay up-to-date on events.

These free programs are sponsored by the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc, the parks' friends group. For more information, please call 715-386-9340 or email naturalist@willowkinnifriends.org.

Yoga in the Park

Saturdays, June 10, July 8, Aug. 12, Sept. 9,
8:30–9:30 a.m.

Willow River Nature Center

Come experience the beauty of Willow River State Park while learning how to incorporate yoga into your life. No experience is necessary as our experienced instructor will help you through a basic set of warmups, poses, breathing exercises, and deep relaxation. Join anytime, come to one of the classes or to all. Bring your own Yoga mat if you have one. We have a limited number of mats, so if you need to reserve one, please let us know. Register at: tinyurl.com/mr3tkse.

Art in the Park

Saturday May 20, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Willow River Nature Center

Join UW-River Falls Art Education majors in creating a wonderful take-home art project. We will be doing cyanotype printing—make your own nature blueprints. Best for ages 6 and up. Space is limited so please register in advance at: tinyurl.com/zzgop6g. A limited number of walk-in places may be available.



Willow River State Park Presents Hiking Thru History

Saturday, May 27, 2017, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at the group camp, overflow gravel parking area. Come walk the yellow Pioneer trail to the beautiful falls. The hike is approximately 3 miles, round trip. The Friends' naturalist will share with you the interesting history of the park and surrounding area. Bring water and a snack.

Fungi Beneath Our Feet

Saturday, May 27, 2017, 7:00–8:00 p.m.

Willow River Nature Center Classroom.

Local resident, Joni Garbe, will be giving a presentation on general mushrooming, morels, and fall mushrooms.



Long Skinny Snakes

Sunday, May 28, 1:00–3:00 p.m.

Willow River Nature Center

Stop in the nature center anytime to learn about our slithering snake friends. Make your very own snake or meet our live snake at 1:00, 2:00, or 3:00 p.m.

Totally Turtles

Saturday, June 3, 1:00–3:00 p.m.

Willow River beach/picnic area.

Come meet the turtles of Willow River State Park and learn why these animals are important. We will have painted turtles and a false map turtle for you to meet.

Annual Art Along the Willow Arts and Crafts Fair

Sunday, June 4, 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Willow River beach/picnic area.

Free Park Admission Day!

Stroll through the park and see over 30 booths offering many fine arts and crafts for purchase. We will have a free kids' art tent and free kiddie train rides. The Friends group will be selling brats, hot dogs and soft drinks so you can enjoy a picnic lunch at the park.

Buckthorn Control Work and Study Area Tour

Sunday, June 4 at 1:00 p.m.

Meet at the dam picnic shelter.

Complete the work on a lawn restoration plot followed by a walking tour of active treatment sites in the area. Estimated duration of the tour is 90 minutes to two hours. Most of this will be the walking tour. Rain will cancel this program.

Skulls & Pelts

Saturday, June 10, 7:00–8:00 p.m.

Willow River Nature Center

Come join locals, Mike and Sue Reiter, as they help us get up-close and personal with animals in and around the park. They will share with us their extensive skull and pelt collection giving us a unique introduction to some local and exotic animals.

Get Outdoors (GO!) Drop-In Programs

Saturday, June 10, 1:00–3:00 p.m.

Willow River beach/picnic area.

Come stop by anytime during the event. We will have a variety of fun nature-based activities for you and your family to enjoy.

Totally Turtles

Saturday, June 24, 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.

Kinnickinnic State Park beach area

Come meet the turtles of Kinnickinnic State Park and learn why these animals are important. We will have painted turtles and a false map turtle for you to meet.



Snakes Slithering in the Grass

Sunday, June 25, 1:30–2:30 p.m.

Willow River Nature Center

Prairies need to be protected for snakes to survive. During this program meet and learn about fox snakes while also discovering the importance of snakes and prairies in our lives and how we can protect them.

Citizen Scientists

Melissa Dupont

Phenology, the science of seasonal changes, tracks when animals arrive and depart, when plants change, etc., is a great way to get a larger picture of what is occurring in your natural environment. About one-and-a-half years ago we began keeping a phenology board at Willow River. We now have one full year of data, but we need your help to keep it going. Please think about becoming a “citizen scientist” as you visit Willow River. When you notice seasonal changes such as the arrival of a migrating bird, or blooming wildflower, please report it at the nature center or park office. Both have forms available so you can write down the date and what you observed. You can also email or call the nature center. This data is becoming increasingly important in tracking the affects of our changing climate.

Interpretive Signs

Rita Thofern



Interpretive sign installation near the historic fishing clubhouse

Look for new signs appearing around the park this summer. Some are already in place and more are on the way. Once the signs are all in place, an interpretive guide map will be available at the office and at the nature center. This signage is possible thanks to support from park staff, Friends volunteers and a grant from the David & Joyce Weizenicker Endowment Fund for State Parks through the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.

Topics for this collection of interpretive signs include the geology that gives us spectacular Willow Falls, the history of several dams along the Willow River, information about European pioneers in the area, prairie restoration, and European Buckthorn management.

As you work your way to the various interpretive panels you may find yourself in parts of the park you haven't explored before, spot some remarkable sites, encounter wildlife, and get some healthy exercise along the way.

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.



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.



Friends of Willow River & Kinnickinnic State Parks Membership Application

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Payment Method:

____ Join the Friends of Willow & Kinni online at our secure website:
www.squareup.com/market/friendswrk

____ Credit Card

Credit Card Number _____

Exp. Date _____ CVV _____
Month & Year 3 or 4 digit security code

____ Check payable to "Friends of Willow & Kinni"

Membership Level

____ \$15 Friend ____ \$25 Good Friend

____ \$50 Great Friend ____ \$100 Best Friend

____ \$500 Best Friend for Life

Additional Contribution \$ _____

Your contribution supports the Friends Group programs. All contributions are tax deductible.

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1034 County Road A
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Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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Office: 715-386-5931

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www.willowkinnifriends.org

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dthofern@gmail.com

Your membership expiration date is printed on your address label. If your Friends' membership has expired, or is about to expire, the date is highlighted and a membership form is enclosed. Please take a moment to fill it out and mail it back today. Or, renew online at squareup.com/market/friendswrk

Thank you!

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