

Willow Whispers

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Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks

 FRIENDS
OF
WILLOW RIVER & KINNICKINNIC
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Fall/Winter, 2015

River Rambles

Tashina Lahr-Manifold

Hello everyone! My name is Tashina Lahr-Manifold and I am the new Environmental Educator joining the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. I moved to River Falls, Wisconsin, a little over a year ago and have found Willow River State Park to be one of my favorite places. In fact, I got married on the property in September of 2015.



Originally, I am from Tashina Lahr-Manifold & Sophie Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I was raised on a Clydesdale horse farm with an average of twenty horses at any given time.

Later, I attended college at Manchester University where I earned a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies, with a minor in Biology. While completing my degree I worked as park ranger for the Army Corps of Engineers. After graduation I was hired as a naturalist with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources where I gained a large amount of experience conducting public programs. Once I moved to this area, I became a recreational instructor for the Three Rivers Park District where I instructed stand-up paddle boarding, kayaking, fire building, and canoeing.

When I am not working I love spending time hiking with my husband and our dog, Sophie. We also enjoy being on the water kayaking and fishing. I am truly excited to be hired on as the environmental educator. I am continuing the Young Naturalist classes through the winter and also plan on increasing the number of events. I am hoping to implement a new maple syrup program, natural art classes, and geocaching events. I am also looking forward to working with all of our volunteers to make the special events, field trips and programs amazing. Let me know if you are interested in helping!

I love getting to know new people, so stop in and say "hello!"

Little Falls Lake Drawdown

Once studies revealed significant safety issues in the Little Falls Dam structure, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) made the decision to drain the lake. The drawdown began in June of this year by gradually allowing water to flow through the dam. This fall, a large excavator was brought in to breach the structure bringing the water flow down to the rock levels on which the dam had been built. The drawdown is now complete and, while the Willow River continues to flow through the area, there is no lake. For the time being there will be no swimming beach, boat landing, or canoe and kayak rentals. The waterfalls, picnicking, camping, and hiking trails in the park will be unaffected by this project.

Removing and, very likely, replacing the dam is a major project and is expected to last for several years. Studies are ongoing regarding the reconstruction of the dam. The DNR has hosted several meetings to keep the public informed of the project's progress. More information on this project can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/o57dhsb>



Excavator works to breach Willow Falls Dam



View of the lake bed and Willow River channel from the Nelson Farm Trail overlook following the drawdown
Photos by Dave Thofern

Enjoy Winter In the Parks. Life Is Too Short to Stay Home!

Julie Gujer

It's hard to believe, but snow is just around the corner. With an average annual snowfall of 45 inches, Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks are perfect places to embrace the winter weather.

Snowshoeing is a growing winter sport that is a great workout not requiring a lot of technical skill, physical strength, or expensive equipment. It is an easy way to explore spaces and places touched only by Old Man Winter's snowy wand. Casual trekkers, families, fitness buffs, and nature photographers are just a few of the groups who enjoy snowshoe outings.

Some people believe that the winter trails at Willow and Kinni are reserved only for skiers. Not true! Although designated ski trails are off limits to hikers, snowshoers and pets, other trails are open to all. Also, exploring off-trail is permitted and can take you to amazing sites.

Willow River Winter Snowshoe/Hiking Trails

Falls Green Snowshoe Trail (1.2 mi./1.9 km round trip) goes to Willow Falls and includes a nice overlook plus a steep, short hill. Begin at the 200 campground parking lot.

Pines Brown Snowshoe Trail (1.3 mi./2 km round trip) rambles gently through pines, brush, and open prairie. Start at either the 200 campground parking lot or the group camp parking lot.



Winter beauty along Willow's Green snowshoe trail.
Photos by Dave Thofern

Lakeview Black Snowshoe Trail (1.6 mi./1 km round trip) is a scenic wooded trail that travels through the Natural Playground loop. Access the trail from the Nature Center Hidden Ponds trail or from the west end of the boat landing parking lot.

Kinnickinnic Winter Snowshoe/Hiking Trails

Hidden Falls Trail (1.9 mi./3 km loop), a narrow, scenic trail with moderate elevation changes is easy for most users. You will meander through fields, and pine and hardwood forests, and enjoy glimpses into various coulees and the Kinnickinnic River gorge before returning to the parking lot. The trailhead is located on the south side of the park on 770th Avenue, about 3/4 mile from County Road F.

Blue Trail (.8 mi./1.3 km round trip) is a mostly wooded intermediate park trail with some hills.

Red Trail (1.5 mi./2.5 km) is an easy park trail wandering through pines, brush, and open prairie.



Photo by Julie Gujer

Snowshoe Event Days

Bring your family to the park and learn to snowshoe this winter. Choose between a guided hike or just heading out on your own. After the first few steps, you will be on your way with this fun, outdoor activity. Bring your own snowshoes or borrow a pair from our limited supply. We will have complimentary hot cider and cocoa available, along with a warming bonfire. Please call 715-386-9340 or email willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.com to reserve a spot, and reserve snowshoes, if needed. These events are free. Park entrance fees apply. See details on page three.

Additional snowshoe event dates may be added. Check back at willowkinnifriends.org.

Willow River State Park Candlelight Ski and Hike

Saturday, Feb. 13, 6:00–8:00 p.m.

Looking for something fun to do with your sweetheart or family on Valentine’s weekend? Join us to ski or hike the candle-lit trails at Willow River State Park. Enjoy a bonfire along the way and come into the Nature Center to warm up with hot beverages and snacks.

The Friend’s group needs many volunteers for the candlelight ski and hike. If you would like to help with set-up or take-down of the hundreds of candles that light the trails, please contact Tashina Lahr-Manifold, Environmental Educator at 715-386-9340, or email willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.com.



Trail Groomers Wanted

All Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Park cross-country ski trails are groomed and maintained by volunteers. Many volunteer hours are put into making these the best nordic ski trails in the area. If you are interested in becoming a ski trail groomer at Willow or Kinni, please email Dave Thofern at dthofern@gmail.com.



Upcoming Events

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks
Directors Meeting
Thursday, January 14, 7:00 p.m.
Willow River Nature Center

Learn to Snowshoe–Willow
Saturday, January 9, 1:00–3:00 p.m.
Meet at the Nature Center

Learn to Snowshoe–Kinni
Saturday, February 6, 1:00–3:00 p.m.
Meet at the Kinni Maintenance Shed

Candlelight Ski and Hike
Saturday, February 13, 6:00–8:00 p.m.



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

SNOWSHOE RENTALS

Snowshoes are now available for rental at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. Adult and children’s snowshoes are available for one-day rental.

Cost: \$6.00/pair or \$20 for up to 6 pairs.

Snowshoes must be reserved and prepaid at least 2-days in advance.

STEP 1 MAKE SECURE PAYMENT

Go to the secure website and prepay rental by credit card:
squareup.com/market/friendswrk
Before you place your order, you can check for availability on the snowshoe calendar at:
tinyurl.com/wrsnowshoe

BE SURE TO TELL US THE DAY AND DATE YOU WISH TO USE SNOWSHOES IN THE “WRITE A NOTE TO THE SELLER” BOX ON THE CHECKOUT PAGE.

An email will be sent telling you that your order was received.

STEP 2 RECEIVE UNLOCKING COMBO

You will receive a response with instructions and the combination for the lock on the snowshoe trunk. The combination will be valid for the day of your rental.

Willow River Trunks are located near the Nature Center door.

Kinni’s Trunk is located at the park office.

If snowshoes are not available you will be notified of that and your credit card will not be charged. Questions? Send an email to:
wrsnowshoe@gmail.com or call
(715) 869-3695.

White-Tailed Deer—Winter Survivalists

Dave Thofern

The white-tailed deer has developed a remarkable set of adaptations allowing it to survive winter's snow and cold. They grow warm coats, put on extra fat, and stick together.

Deer shed their hair coat each spring and fall. The rusty-red summer hair has solid shafts with no undercoat. The gray-brown winter coat has hollow hair shafts and a dense, soft under-fur, providing insulation. Deer can also adjust the angle of their hair shafts to "fluff up" their fur for extra warmth.

Deer go into each winter not knowing how long or severe that winter will be. During the summer and fall, deer accumulate body fat. This serves both as insulation and an energy reserve for the winter ahead. Fat reserves can be up to 30 percent of a doe's weight in the fall.

Winter food sources are restricted, so deer are limited to a diet lower in protein and calories. They reduce activity to conserve energy. Deep snow, bitter cold, and a late spring can combine to be especially challenging.

Deer change their behavior in the fall and into winter, as family groups of deer congregate into larger groups made up mostly of adult does and their fawns. These groups seek protection from wind and deep snow depths by moving to sheltered areas such as pine plantations or areas of heavy brush. Snow on the ground is often shallower under tree canopies. Gathering together allows many deer to share the energy cost of maintaining a trail network to access cover and food as well as to escape predators. Finding suitable habitat, maintaining a warm winter coat, and beginning the winter season with a good layer of fat are all important to winter deer survival.

Some deer do not survive the winter. Fawns are at greatest risk of winter mortality, followed by adult bucks and then does. But nothing is wasted in nature. When a deer doesn't make it through the winter, it becomes food for other animals striving to survive nature's deep freeze.

Geocaching at Willow River State Park

Rita Thofern

Here is one more way for families to get outdoors at Willow River State Park. You can try hunting for geocaches by using a GPS unit borrowed from the park. Thanks to a grant from Friends of Wisconsin State Parks the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc. has a collection of GPS units available for use at no cost to park users.

It's simple to do. Stop in at the Nature Center or at the park office, complete a user's form and go try it out. You will be given an instruction sheet and a list of some of the caches registered in the park.

Geocaching guidelines state that there will be no digging. Caches are never buried. And there is a fun custom, too. When you find a geocache there will be something inside that you can collect, but you are expected to replace it with something of your own. So bring items along that you can use for trading. Keep in mind that these caches sit outside so anything that won't hold up until the next person finds it is a bad idea. Be sure that your trade item can't melt, dissolve, get moldy, or create any sort of a mess. Some examples of good choices are small toys or picture cards. Be sure to place each cache back just the way you found it. We don't have deep snow yet. Let's get out and explore some more geocaches.



Photo by Dave Thofern

2015 Willow River Trail Challenge

Dave Thofern

Early October weather can be very fickle indeed. Over the years, the annual trail run at Willow has seen rain, snow record cold and, finally this year, perfect weather. This year's race found runners greeted with cool, clear skies and gorgeous fall leaves.

Over 150 runners signed up to tackle either the 10.5 km or the 6.6 km course. Additionally, more than 50 children participated in the free Kids Dash



Photo by Fred Sobottka, Western Wisconsin Photo Club

obstacle course. Using the race's start/finish line and adding fun obstacles were very popular with participants and spectators alike.

This year's men's 10.6 km winner was Jason Finch, (38:23). Melissa Zajec, (50:28) took first place in the women's 10.6 km race. The men's 6.6 km winner was Reid Roebbecke, (31:11) with Jen Vos Benkowski, (33:03) winning the women's event. Congratulations to all of our racers!

Volunteers are the key to this successful event. Julie and Tom Gujer literally saved the race from the brink of extinction last year by stepping in as race directors. They put in countless volunteer hours managing and coordinating the event. Our more than 50 volunteers ensured a safe, fun and exciting race.

Thanks to Julie Gujer and Katie Jones, we had a record number of race sponsors and contributors. After paying expenses and purchasing permanent equipment, the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks made a profit of over \$4,000. This makes the Trail Challenge our top fund raising event.



Photo by Fred Sobottka, Western Wisconsin Photo Club

Tuesday Mornings and You

Ruwal Freese
You are invited to experience joy, well-being, and satisfaction at our Tuesday morning work/play time. Volunteers meet at 8:45 at the maintenance building for an exciting morning of service to the park.



Uncle Ruwal Wants You!

We are known as the Buckthorn Brigade, but could also be called the Mustard Massacre Squad, the Happy Painters, or the Trash Team depending on the season and the immediate needs.

We have recorded 360 volunteer hours so far in 2015. With your regular or occasional help we can surpass 500 by year's end. For more information contact Ruwal Freese, Tuesday Morning Coordinator, 715-441-0736 or email ruwalfreese@yahoo.com.

Can't make it on Tuesday? There are many needs and many opportunities for volunteers. I can help you find the right place and time for your service.



Cleaning and storing materials in the Nature Center basement

Volunteer Project Saves Big

Rita Thofern

Once again hardy volunteers have turned a problem into an opportunity here at Willow. The problem was a mouse invasion in the nature center basement. Access to the basement was much too convenient for our local field mice and they created a mess. The board sought bids for professionally cleaning and sanitizing the basement and for sealing and insulating the top of the foundation. The bids came in at close to \$6,000.

Enter the volunteers. A group of intrepid volunteers descended on the basement, cleaned and removed the contents and then, after the professional cleaning and insulating was complete, put most of it away again. In addition to cleaning and organizing, the group was able to remove quite a bit of no longer useful material, much like the kind of cleanup that people do when they move from one home to another. This project has left the basement tidy and organized. The new foam insulation should help with the heating bill. And it's no small thing that the final cost was reduced by nearly \$4,000.

One more thing—A fun time was had by all. Really. That's part of the magic of volunteering.

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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Office: 715-386-5931

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Prefer to receive *Willow Whispers* electronically?

Email your request to:
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!

Board Officers

President: John Collins
Vice-President: Linda Malick
Treasurer: Dave Thofern
Secretary: Julie Gujer

Directors

Alicia Acken, Jerry Bauer, Ruwal Freese, Carol Hardin,
Buck Malick, Colleen O'Brien, Jeff Roberts, Nick Schmit,
Beth Soltis, Rita Thofern

Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason
Kinnickinnic Park Ranger: Eric Klumb
Environmental Educator: Tashina Lahr-Manifold



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