

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



Fall/Winter, 2016

President's Column

John Collins



Another busy year! At our Annual Meeting in September, we elected two new Directors to two-year terms. Kathy Lopez is a retired physical therapist who volunteered at Yellowstone National Park for many years. Andy Delong is a former Director and President of our group, who has recently returned to the area to work

with the Keller-Williams agency.

Education is the biggest part of our mission, and the parks provide a wonderful outdoor classroom for folks of all ages to learn about their environment. Probably the biggest change in our education programming this year is that Melissa Dupont is back as our Environmental Educator, having wrapped up her western odyssey and returned with lots of new experiences and good ideas, which she is now putting into practice here. Our pre-school programs continue to be very popular, and a number of school groups choose our parks for field trips, guided by Melissa and volunteers.

Melissa and her volunteers are currently working on a project to install a number of interpretive signs around the parks. The first set will be focused on geology and history. Did you know that Willow River State Park lies across an old fault? The rock formation at the falls is part of this complex, and it exposes several unusually large stromatolites. Also, some of the dams on the Willow River were originally built by Christian Burkhardt, first to mill flour, and later to generate electricity, which supplied Hudson and Burkhardt starting in the late 1800s.

On weekends, we try to staff the Nature Center with volunteers to free our Naturalist for educational programming. Over 5,400 people have visited the Nature Center over the summer. Volunteers have primarily been Friends' members and camp hosts, but we still need volunteers for critical weekend hours through October. If you are willing to put in an afternoon or two, please let us know. If you have a bit of time and energy to contribute, volunteer opportunities are on our website at www.willowkinnifriends.org/volunteer.

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, Willow River's attendance is already slightly ahead of last year's total with approximately 825,000 visitors. Kinnickinnic is slightly ahead of last year as well. The fall color season is starting to ramp up and nice weekend weather makes for a busy fall. Staff have been busy with building and water system shut down and will soon be removing the buoys and dock at Kinni. Over the next month or so, we will be doing quite a bit of trail work to get them ready for ski season.

As many of you are aware, Little Falls Lake is currently drawn down and a portion of the dam was removed last fall. This past winter the Department did approve the plan to rebuild the dam. This summer Mead and Hunt was selected as the architect/engineering firm to complete the design and calculate cost estimates. They are currently gathering geo-technical data for the design. You may have seen the temporary crossing that was constructed to get to the other side of the dam and the drilling rig that is boring samples below the dam. We are still expecting a completion date of sometime in 2020. However there are many factors that could slow or speed up the process. We are also routinely removing sediment and sand collecting in the pool below the dam to minimize its transport downstream. A larger removal of sediment from the pool below the dam is planned for this fall. This project

continues to have a significant impact on our park and we plan to keep our visitors, friends, and neighbors informed and involved as the process proceeds.



Willow Falls Lake
before and after the
dam breach
Photos by Dave Thofern

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Staff and volunteers are also continuing work on various projects around the park. We plan to work on trail and erosion projects this fall including completion of another part of the natural playground. Volunteers have been doing trail work, concentrating on buckthorn removal.

Also, as many of you know, the hunting seasons have changed in both parks. A few years ago Act 168 opened all state parks to hunting. The Natural Resources Board did put some limitations on what parts of parks are open and when. Most of the parks' undeveloped areas are now open for all types of gun and archery hunting (deer, small game, etc.) from November 15 through December 15. The park is also open for archery-only hunting from December 16th through the Sunday nearest January 6. The parks are open for hunting in the spring, too, primarily for turkey hunting from April 1 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 buildings, roads, driveways, parking lots, and picnic areas. Maps and hunting information are posted at trail heads and are also available at the park office. Trapping is allowed during the open hunting dates. Trappers must stay 100 yards from designated trails and use areas and must use dog-proof traps.

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

Family Crafts and Activities

Melissa Dupont

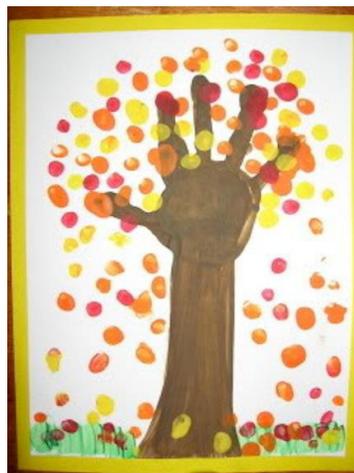
As the seasons change are you looking for things for you and your kids to do? Here are some neat ideas that you can try out.



Help the birds survive the winter by making pine cone bird feeders. Have the kids pick out different pine cones, tie a string to them to hang from trees, spread them with peanut butter and roll them in bird seeds. To enjoy watching the birds eat, hang the cones outside a window or in a tree that you can view.

Celebrate Fall by making a fall tree picture. Paint your child's hand and lower arm brown for the tree. Then have them decorate the tree using their fingers to make fall leaves.

Make nature people: Take a TP roll and glue a leaf on the top for their head, use sticks for arms and legs, and rocks for buttons. You can also use pipe cleaners, buttons, and googly eyes.



River Rambles

Melissa Dupont

Hello Again! It feels great to be back after my year and a half Odyssey (as some have called it) out west. I am



very fortunate to have been able to return to the Friends group as your Environmental Educator/Nature Center Coordinator and look forward to continuing on what has grown since my departure while adding new things as well.

For those who are new to the Friend's group I will give you a little background on myself. I am originally from Dubuque, IA and received my Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and Secondary

Education with a minor in Environmental Science.

Upon graduation I worked as a Recruiter/Advisor for the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Distance Learning Center. After that two year position concluded, I became the Educator at Willow in the spring of 2013 and worked until the fall of 2014. I had an "explorer bug" to live off the land in a tiny teardrop camper and explore out west, which led me to work in the Education department at Lake Mead National Recreation Area near Las Vegas, Nevada I then traveled and lived in Spearfish, South Dakota and made a full circle back when University of Wisconsin-Platteville asked me to come fill in as an advisor for their Master's Degree and undergraduate students in the Spring of 2016. I am especially thankful for being able to return to Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks in the summer of 2016.

We had a great summer with our Young Naturalist Classes. We even added another preschool class over the summer to accommodate interest from the community. Our park programs went over well and we tried out a few new locations; like over by the falls and in the 300 campground. Programming included bringing in speakers to talk about outdoor skills, monarch caterpillars, astronomy, mushrooms, and more. We will continue to do programming throughout the fall, winter, and spring so check out our events page and keep up-to-date through our website or Facebook page.

The Nature Center received a lot of traffic over the summer and will remain open as much as my schedule allows and with volunteer help. If you would like to volunteer, please contact me at the Nature Center. Keep up-to-date on our schedule posted at the park office, the Nature Center door, and the beach pavilion.

The Wonderful World Beneath Us!

Melissa Dupont

This wet fall has made for a wonderful environment for mushrooms to flourish throughout the parks. Precipitation and temperature help determine when mushrooms will appear. Mushrooms are the fruit of fungi that are usually sticking above ground on their food source. They provide numerous benefits to the forest ecosystem including nutrient recycling, symbiotic relationships with trees and other plants (mushrooms receive nutrients while the trees or plants receive protection from other fungi or nematodes). Mushrooms can also cause diseases in plants and animals,



Chicken of the Woods

and can provide us with a wonderful food source. They help decompose dead matter by sucking the nutrients out of the decaying structure and turning it into the soil.

We classify mushrooms based on their fruiting structures (the part we

typically see above ground). Most commonly, mushrooms produce spores on gills, Boletes produce spores on elongated tubes, and hedgehog mushrooms produce spores on elongated spines.

Mushrooms are actually quite large, with the majority of their structure being a mass of interwoven threadlike hyphae growing in plant tissues and in the soil.

You probably see the wood-decaying bracket and conk fungi most frequently in the forest. They are the mushrooms that you see on live and dead tree stems. They produce a new layer of mushroom every year.

Common mushrooms found in our area include: Morels, Chicken of the Woods, Oyster, Chanterelle, and Hen of the Woods

Source: *USDA Field Guide to Common Macrofungi in Eastern Forests and Their Ecosystem Functions* by Michale Ostry, Neil Anderson and Joseph O'Brien, April, 2011

Volunteer at Your Park

Ruwal Freese

Want a million Dollars?

At the annual Friends of the Parks meeting, five Tuesday morning volunteers each received million dollar bills in appreciation of their work/play on Tuesdays. You, too, can be rich! Just meet up with our group at 8:45 a.m. on a Tuesday and join in the fun. We're done before noon in time for lunch together (if desired) and an afternoon nap (recommended).

Some mornings we move stuff and paint. Check out the renovated office and reading room in the Nature Center or the now-free-of-graffiti railing at the lookout above the falls. Tuesdays after three-day holidays we pick up litter.



Uncle Ruwal Wants You!

Prizes are given for the most interesting items found.

Sometimes we attack thistles or garlic mustard. We've taken truckloads to the burn pile. And BUCKTHORN! We are not nick-named the Buckthorn Brigade for nothing. Walk the Nature trail behind the Nature Center. You can actually walk without bumping into buckthorn. And you can see into the woods. Nature looks like nature again.

There is more to do. Your million dollar bill is waiting for you. Questions? Contact Brigade leader and super-supervisor, Ruwal Freese at ruwalfreese@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.

FYI: The \$1,000,000 bill is printed on a mint wrapper, but it does show how much you are worth to the parks.



Jeff Bolte, Buckthorn Buster

The 2016 Willow River Trail Challenge

Rita Thofern

The Trail Challenge was, once again, a success as a trail run event and as a fundraiser. More than 200 runners participated in the long and short courses. Better than 100 kids enjoyed the Kids Fun Run Obstacle Course. The weather was fine, trail conditions were good, and everyone, runners, volunteers, and spectators had a great time at a great park. This event raised more than \$6,000 to support activities at the parks.

As the event grows, more helpers will be needed, not just



Some participants who were new to the park found themselves distracted as they passed in front of spectacular Willow Falls.



Some of the littlest runners show serious competitive instincts.

on the day of the event but on the days before and after the event. You can expect to hear from the organizing committee with more information on becoming involved.

Buckthorn Project at Willow River State Park

Jill Jordahl, Watershed Steward

If you have been out walking the trails in the park this fall, you may have noticed some activity along the Trout Brook (Purple) Trail.

You may also have noticed how much buckthorn there is in Willow River State Park. Buckthorn, both the Common and Glossy varieties, is a very invasive tree brought from Europe to North America in the 1880s.

Why is Buckthorn a threat?

Buckthorn leafs out earlier and retains leaves longer than most plants, thereby shading out native understory plants including seedlings of native trees. Over time, this results in a severe depletion of native species.

Buckthorn has prolific seed production and dispersal, aided by the birds who enjoy their berries.

Buckthorn germinates and grows both in full sun or deep shade.

Buckthorn lives in a variety of habitats including woodlands, savannahs, prairies, and road sides. Glossy buckthorn aggressively invades wetlands but also survives in dry sites such as sand forests.

What you see along the trail is the start of a joint research project between the Friends of Willow and Kinnickinnic State Parks and the St. Croix Master Watershed Steward (SCMWS) program. The SCMWS is a pilot program funded by an EPA grant devoted to protecting the waters of the St Croix Watershed Basin. The project began with questions regarding how to best control buckthorn along the Willow River considering cost, labor, method used, herbicide used, erosion, and threats to water and the environment. A team of volunteers is currently establishing test plots to research and compare a variety of ways to control this very invasive plant.

Watch for an interpretative sign with more information that will be placed by the test plots and updated later with our findings.

More volunteers are always welcome.

Let us know if you are interested in helping out with this project by contacting project coordinators Jill Jordahl or John Collins thru the Friends group.



Dense Buckthorn in one of the test plots. Notice the lack of other vegetation!



Volunteers work on buckthorn test plots.

Possible Nature Center Upgrades

Nick Schmit

A committee of the board, along with our naturalist educator, Melissa Dupont, has begun an assessment of how well the nature center supports our educational mission and attracts park visitors. This effort was prompted by a generous donation from former board member Jim Sharer to provide for surveys of visitors and site visits to other facilities with similar environmental education missions.

Many of you may recall seeing, and perhaps responding to, a survey in early September asking for your impressions of the Nature Center at Willow River State Park. The survey results will be reviewed carefully. While the survey information was being gathered members of the committee got busy visiting a multitude of area nature centers and making contact by other means with some sites across the country.

The initial assessment and proposals should be completed yet this year. Ideas from this exercise will most likely include programming, displays, activities and, quite possibly, upgrades to our building, perhaps even complete replacement. More detailed plans, costs estimates and fund raising will follow in 2017 and beyond.



Willow's Nature Center could be in store for some big improvements.



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

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Upcoming Programs

Keep an eye out for these upcoming events!

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all events require park vehicle admission.

Willow River State Park Preschool Nature Classes

Tuesdays 10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. OR 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.

Wednesdays 10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Come to the Nature Center this Fall with your child(ren) who are 3–5 years old. We will provide fun nature-based classes. Come to one or come to all, sign up: tinyurl.com/gvuwelr.

Kinnickinnic State Park Fall Fest

Saturday, October 15, 2:00–4:00 p.m. at the Kinni overlook picnic area

This could be your first chance to wear your Halloween costume. There will be fall games, stories, crafts, and prizes. The event is **FREE** to attend and admission into the park is **FREE**.

Willow River State Park Halloween Bash

Saturday, October 29, 5:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m. at the Nature Center

Wear your best costume to enjoy fall crafts, games, snacks, and storytelling. Be sure to visit the Nature Center exhibits and browse in the gift shop. The event is **FREE**, donations are appreciated.

Bear Proofing Your Camp—Cliff Jacobson

Sunday, November 6, 2:00 p.m. at the Nature Center

Meet local outdoor writer Cliff Jacobson as he gives his presentation on bearproofing your camp. Learn how to protect yourself and your food from bothersome bears—“treeing food packs” doesn’t always work! Know how to properly use pepper spray to discourage a bear. Understand the behavioral differences between black bears, grizzlies, wild, and man-wise habituated bears. What should you do when you meet a bear on the trail? If you’ve read Cliff’s views on bears in his books, you know he challenges accepted beliefs. Now, research by Stephen Herrero and James Gary Shelton suggest he’s right on track!

Willow River State Park with Cheers Pablo Presents Petite Picasso’s Paint “Joyful Tree” at Willow River Nature Center

Saturday, December 3, 1:30 p.m. in the Nature Center

Cheers Pablo will be teaching us how to paint a Willow River Winter Scene. We will provide hot drinks and treats. Gift certificates to Cheers Pablo will be given away. Please pre-register for this event here www.cheerspablo.com under the Hudson location. Event cost: \$25.00. Call 715-386-9340 or email willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.com for more information. This program is sponsored by the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc. and Cheers Pablo.

Learn to Snowshoe at Willow River State Park

Saturday, January 14, 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. at the Nature Center

Get active this winter and try snowshoeing! After the first few steps along the guided trail, you will be on your way to this fun outdoor activity. Bring your own snowshoes or borrow one of our limited number of pairs. We will have complimentary hot cider and cocoa available. Please register and reserve any needed snowshoes at tinyurl.com/nbpgxec. Contact us at wrsnowshoe@gmail.com or (715) 869-3695 with questions. This event is **FREE** to attend.

Learn to Snowshoe at Kinnickinnic State Park

Sunday, January 29, 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. at the Kinni maintenance shed

Get active this winter and try snowshoeing! After the first few steps along the guided trail, you will be on your way to this fun outdoor activity. Bring your own snowshoes or borrow one of our limited number of pairs. We will have complimentary hot cider and cocoa available. Please register and reserve any needed snowshoes at tinyurl.com/nbpgxec. Contact us at wrsnowshoe@gmail.com or (715) 869-3695 with questions. This event is **FREE** to attend.

Members Only Snowshoe Outing at Willow River State Park

Saturday, February 11, 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. at the Nature Center

Join your fellow Friends members for a fun afternoon of snowshoeing in Willow River State Park. We will provide snowshoes if you need them, including children’s sizes, and refreshments will be available. Children and guests of members are welcome. If you’ve never snowshoed before, instruction will be available as well as guided snowshoe hikes. This event is **FREE**! Please pre-register so we know how many people are coming and how many snowshoes to have available. Register and, if needed, reserve snowshoes at tinyurl.com/willowkinni. Contact us at wrsnowshoe@gmail.com or (715) 869-3695.



Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



Willow River State Park
1034 County Road A
Hudson, WI 54016

Office: 715-386-5931

Nature Center: 715-386-9340

willowrivernaturecenter@gmail.com

www.willowkinnifriends.org

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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!

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Park Superintendent: Aaron Mason

Kinnickinnic Park Ranger: Eric Klumb

Environmental Educator: Melissa Dupont



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Willow River State Park
1034 County Road A
Hudson, WI 54016