

Willow Whispers

A publication of
Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic
State Parks



FRIENDS
OF
WILLOW RIVER & KINNICKINNIC
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Fall/Winter, 2021



Rita Thofern

President's Column

Rita Thofern

Scrappy!

The Friends group can take pride in a tremendously scrappy performance over the course of the past year. In spite of being in the throes of a global pandemic, we can claim a number of achievements.

•Programming

During all of the restrictions and precautions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, programming had to change dramatically but was never allowed to just plain stop. The naturalist provided a steady stream of guidance for park visitors suggesting what they could do on their own. Later small groups were permitted and, eventually, restrictions on outdoor activities were loosened considerably.

In four months of nature center operation 5,300 visitors were logged in.

Naturalist-led programs, nearly all outdoors, were attended by 2,700 participants. This does not include visitors who took advantage of do-it-yourself programming ideas.

•Boat Rentals

Finally! The rental canoes and kayaks, in storage since the spring of 2015, when the dam was removed, are back.

•Lee Ann Tolk Endowment Funding

The Friends receive an annual sum from an endowment set up by Lee Ann Tolk. This year that funding was put toward the purchase a mini excavator. It's already being put to good use for some helpful trail work.

•The Capital Campaign

The campaign has gone through some significant retooling with a new consultant. To put the campaign on more solid footing the board of directors recently completed a new strategic plan. We have also begun work with an architect who is very interested in this particular project and has offered to provide his services at no charge. One of the directors mentioned, "This is the fun part."

At this time more than a million dollars have been raised toward the goal of approximately \$4 million.



Outdoor Nature Center Program

Superintendent's Report

Aaron Mason

It has been busy at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks.

Willow River's attendance is very close to last year's with 700,000+ visitors. Kinnickinnic is similar to last year as well, at 225,000+ visitors. Many restrictions related to the current pandemic have eased. This spring, offices reopened to the public. Masks are recommended for visitors in all park buildings regardless of vaccination status. For the most part, parks and activities are open to pre-pandemic levels. Some limits on large groups and events remain. Visitors are welcome to picnic, camp, and hike the trails but encouraged to maintain proper social distancing and avoid crowded areas. Playgrounds and the stairway and overlooks at the Falls have reopened. Campers are required to make reservations on line including same day reservations.

The fall color season was slightly delayed this year, but Mother Nature made up for it with a magnificent second half of October.



Aaron Mason



Staff has been busy shutting down water and removing the buoys and dock at Kinnickinnic. Over the next month or so, we will continue with trail work to prepare for ski season. Staff and volunteers continue to work around the park.

The lake was back this year. It was popular for kayaking and canoeing. However, we did experience a blue-green algae bloom that affected swimming for much of the summer. The likely cause was a combination of hot, dry weather, more nutrients in the watershed, lack of aquatic vegetation in the lake, and very little spring runoff. The mats seem to have disappeared and, hopefully, will not return. The lake has been restocked with perch, bluegills,

crappies, and small and large-mouth bass. Next year, some should be big enough to keep.

Much time and effort by volunteers this summer has gone into the construction of new mountain-bike systems. Each park now has about six miles of trail offering varying levels of difficulty. More information is at: wikimountainbike.com

Thank you to all of the Friends and volunteers who 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.

Hunting in the Parks

Aaron Mason

The hunting season at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks is now underway. Most of the parks' undeveloped areas are open for all types of gun and archery hunting (deer, small game, etc.) from November 15–December 15. The park is open for archery-only hunting from December 16–January 9. The parks are also open for hunting in the spring (primarily for turkey hunting) from April 1–Tuesday, May 3.

At Willow, no hunting is permitted in the area surrounding all of the campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launch, and the majority of the hiking trails south of the lake.

The hunting area at Kinnickinnic excludes a few small closed areas around buildings, roads, driveways, parking lots, and picnic areas. Maps and hunting information are posted at trailheads and are available at the parks' offices.

Trapping is also allowed during hunting season. Trappers must stay 100 yards away from designated trails and use areas. Dog-proof traps are required.



Canoes and Kayaks Are Back

Late this summer the lake was back, COVID-19 restrictions were greatly reduced, all the kinks were worked out, and canoe and kayak rentals became available again for the first time since the spring of 2015.

It's simple. Go to the park office at the entrance station. The office staff will take it from there.

River Rambles

Ashley Goldbeck, Naturalist Educator

The Great Migration!

Ahhh, fall has arrived!

Here in Wisconsin that means it's time to pull out our long underwear, coats, hats and mittens, and get outside to enjoy the crisp, refreshing air!

It also means that many of the birds that spend their summers here are preparing for the long haul back to their wintering



Ashley Goldbeck and Albert

grounds. Many birds must make the over 600-mile, non-stop trip across the Gulf of Mexico. Each species of bird has a unique migration plan. Our part of Wisconsin, and especially Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks are great places to view migrating birds. Our close proximity to the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers places us right alongside a major bird migration highway!

Turn Migratory Bird Season Into a Family Adventure!

•Grab a pair of binoculars, hit your favorite outdoor location or hiking trail and see how many traveling birds you can spot.

•Visit the Willow River State Park natural playground and play the Migratory Bird Game.!

•Make bird feeders or bird houses out of recycled plastic bottles, milk containers, or toilet paper rolls. Use fallen leaves, branches, and bark to decorate your bird house.



DIY feeder!

Slather bird feeders with peanut butter and sunflower seeds to help keep birds fueled as they travel!

•Participate in Cornell Lab's Project FeederWatch, a winter survey of birds visiting feeders throughout the United States. Learn more at:

feederwatch.org.

•Participate in The Big Sit!

Track as many bird species as possible during a 24-hour period from within a single 17-foot circle. Learn more at: birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/about.php.



Circumpolar birds, like this Rough-legged Hawk, breed in the northern arctic and then migrate to southern Canada and northern US for the winter.



Volunteer Opportunities

Do you want to help? Opportunities abound indoors and out. Some indoor examples are caring for the ambassador animals, assisting with programs by preparing materials, helping during an event or cleaning up, housekeeping at the nature center, greeting visitors to the nature center, or increasing the social media activity of the Friends. Outdoor activities include working in the native plant gardens at the nature center, maintaining the bird feeders, gathering litter throughout the park and assisting with trail work and invasive plant management.

Contact: Ashley Goldbeck naturecenter@willowkinnifriends.org or Katrina Larsen volunteer@willowkinnifriends.org

Tuesday Volunteers

Katrina Larsen

Have you walked through the picnic area near the boat launch and seen the lake clearly or noticed that the small woods between the dam and beach are pretty open? Those are two of the areas the Buckthorn Brigade worked on this summer. The Brigade has continued the efforts begun by Ruwal Freese to improve the visitor experience by the control of invasive plants, trash removal, and other trail work.

New volunteers are always welcome. The Brigade provides an opportunity to make a difference while being outdoors working with other interested and committed people. While most of the work is done during the spring, summer, and fall, there are occasional work activities in the winter. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Katrina Larsen at volunteer@willowkinnifriends.org. A big thank you to the crew of volunteers that helped this year!



Volunteer Bob Richardson uses the Friends' new mini excavator to construct ski trail at Willow River State Park.

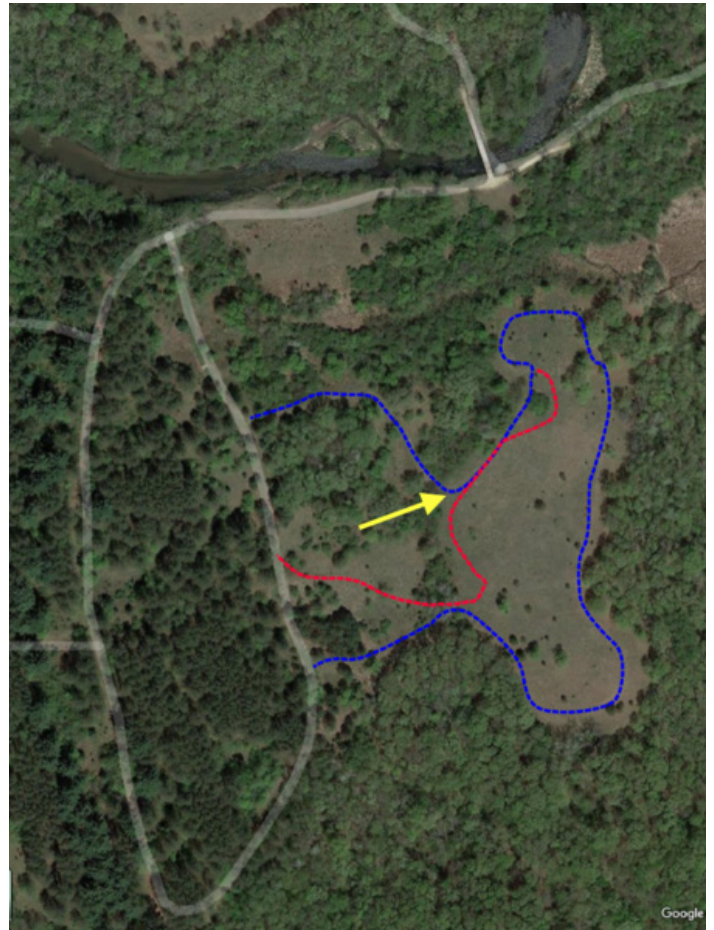
Purple Lowland Ski Trail is Revised

Does this too-wet spot look familiar? It was on the winter portion of the Purple Lowland Loop that has gradually gotten wetter over the years. During the construction of the mountain bike loop, it became necessary to move the bike trail onto the exit portion of the Purple Lowland Loop ski trail. This presented an opportunity to finally reroute a section of the ski trail away from the always-troublesome wet area.

Park staff mowed a revised route. Volunteers followed up with the Friends' new mini-excavator and some raking.



The ski trail has been rerouted away from this troublesome wet area.



This map shows the old Lowland Loop in blue with the reroute in red. The yellow arrow indicates the wet area that has now been abandoned.

Mountain Biking Families

Families have embraced the new mountain bike trails at Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. The Hutton family was enjoying the new bike trails at Willow on a brisk fall day. Why? It was Adler's birthday and his birthday wish was to go mountain biking. He's a seven-year old who knows how he likes to have fun!



Pictured left to right are the Huttons; dad Matt, Everett, Ellen, Adler, and, mom Ember.

Winter Foot Trails

Snow will be along any time now. That means that many trails will be for skiing only. But you can still hike or snowshoe to the falls from the nature center area and other trailhead spots on the winter foot trails. Keep in mind that these trails can be heavily used and crusted with ice. Good traction is important. We recommend traction devices for your boots. Outdoor stores provide many options for winter hikers.



Snowshoes!

Snowshoes will be available to rent as soon as we have good snow cover. Our snowshoes were refurbished last spring to assure that they grip well. Some now perform better than when they were brand new. To learn about renting, go to: willowkinnifriends.org/about-1



Willow Whispers

Year End Donation

Yes! It's that time of year. As you work out your plans for giving, please remember the Friends.

The Mission of the Friends is to enhance the Parks' natural environment and engage visitors through discovery, education, recreation, and conservation. Your donation can provide critical support to the mission.

Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc. is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) organization. Your donation is deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law.

Donations can be sent to The Friends at 1034 County Road A, Hudson, WI 54016. Online contributions can be made at our secure donation site: friendswrk.square.site.

For donations of stock or fund transfers, call or text (715) 255-0434.



Thank You, Business Sponsors!



Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, Inc.



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We Are Willow River

