

Newsletter

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From the President:

Canoeing the St. Croix River: Do It!

By Dave Kozlovsky, Friends of Wild River State Park



Last summer Gary Noren asked me if I would be interested in joining him in canoeing the St. Croix River as the St. Croix River Association was celebrating its 100 year anniversary. The plan was to spend 17 days canoeing and camping from the headwaters of the river in Solon Springs to the Muddy Mississippi 186 miles downstream. I had the time, so I said “let’s do it” and a great adventure began.

Besides being with a terrific group of people from across the U.S. and as far away as England, I realized how lucky we are to live so close to this great resource. We had many sightings of eagles, birds of all varieties as well as fish and turtles.

The river appears to be healthy. However, there is an underlying problem--phosphorous. This really shows up as one gets down to Stillwater where the St. Croix deepens and slows. As we made our way toward the Mississippi, the river warmed considerably and algae began to form. As we got to Prescott, green was prevalent along the shore. The St. Croix is supposed to be one of the cleanest rivers in the US and thankfully people are monitoring these levels and getting after farm runoff problems, etc.

What can you do to help? First do not wash your clothes or dishes with soaps containing phosphorus. If you need to fertilize your lawn, do not use fertilizers containing phosphorous.

One of the nicest stretch of the St. Croix river lies in the boundaries of Wild River State Park. This stretch between the Sunrise landing and the main park landing is a great float for families as there are no rapids but plenty of sand bars to stop to swim or lunch. This stretch takes 2-3 hours depending on the river level.

When the weather warms, explore this section of the St. Croix and gain another view of Wild River State Park.



Dave and Gary paddling on the St. Croix

Where is it?



Somewhere in the park, off a trail or near a public spot. Answer on page 4....

State Park Update

By Paul Kurvers, Wild River State Park Manager



One of the many administrative tasks that I get asked to complete this time of year is a report which summarizes volunteer activities that took place at the park this past year. This information is sent to our DNR Central Office and then made available to the Legislature and others who may be interested. Every year when this report is compiled I am amazed by the sheer number of hours and people who have volunteered at the park. Through November, 891 individuals contributed over 4500 hours of service to the park.

To recognize and thank volunteers, the park recently held a recognition luncheon at the park’s Trail Center. Those in attendance were able to meet and socialize with other volunteers, share their experiences, and learn about the different services and projects that each of them has contributed to the park. As I mentioned to those in attendance at this luncheon, the level of volunteerism that I’ve witnessed at Wild River is special. Over the course of my career, I’ve been fortunate to work at a number of different state parks in both Minnesota and Alaska, and although I’ve worked with volunteers at many of these other

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Calling All Volunteers !!

By Gary Noren and Kacie Carlson

We've heard you have been looking for something to do with your spare time! Well we've got a deal for you... Volunteers make our park special. The park staff is special too, but so much of the exceptional programming at Wild River State Park (WRSP) is made possible by volunteers. Prairie Care is a perfect example, where with just that one activity \$37,560 of native prairie seed was collected by dedicated volunteers - who incidentally learned much about prairies in the process. The WRSP prairies keep looking better every year and it is largely because of Prairie Care volunteers (with a little help from Naturalist Kacie Carlson and former naturalist Dave Crawford).

An easy way to support WRSP and move gradually into volunteering is by joining the active Friends of Wild River State Park. A membership application form is included with this newsletter and is always available at <http://www.friendsofwildriver.org/enews.htm> And of course, the Friends Board welcomes new members too. Some of the activities that the Friends sponsor include:

- Candlelight ski & snowshoe event, with over 5 miles of lighted trails
- Annual Meeting and pancake breakfast with WRSP maple syrup
- Seegwan spring celebration event
- Native plant sale each spring (in cooperation with Sunrise Native Plants)
- Summer Guest Presenters program
- Barb Nelson memorial library
- St. Croix River cleanup event, in co-sponsorship with the St. Croix River Association
- Transportation Assistance Grants to area schools unable to afford busing students

You could choose to be involved with any or all of these events.

This year's "Volunteer of the Year" award was given to Dan Carlson. He contributed over 90 hours to Wild River, collecting \$13,132 in prairie seed. Often Kacie would be greeted with buckets of seed when she entered the Visitor Center. Throughout the summer, 68 other individuals and 15 groups donated over 3600 hours: hosting in the Visitor Center, doing daily cleaning, seed collecting, seed sowing, buckthorn removing, yard raking, library inventorying, designing the Prairie Care brochure, archery programming, geocache maintaining, and wildlife surveying. Not enough options? There are many other opportunities available for volunteers. Naturalist Carlson came up with the following short list, but she encourages you to contact her with any other ideas you may have for volunteering.

1. Buckthorn Free Zone Adopter
2. Citizen Science Surveyor - Topic of person's interest (Rubin Stensing is currently counting and studying owls, frogs and toads.)
3. Trail Steward - Plant ID/ Clean-up/ Maintenance
4. Visitor Center Host/Hostess - prefer a regular schedule (e.g. second Saturday each month).
5. Park photographer
6. Program/ Interpretive Display assistance

Hope to join you volunteering at Wild River soon!

State Park Update

cont. from page 1

locations, the quantity, tenacity, and passion of the volunteers at Wild River is truly unique. Individuals that volunteer at the park are very diverse in terms of their age, experiences and interests. The volunteer corps is comprised of school groups, families, retirees, individuals, community organizations, people with disabilities, Friends Group members and many more. Over the past year volunteers were involved in a variety of different projects and services including seed collection, prairie restoration, invasive specie control, research studies, Visitor Center and Campground hosting, interpretive program assistance, and special events.

Without a doubt, as a result of the efforts and contributions of the hundreds of volunteers who provide service to the park every year, the experience of people who visit the park is significantly enhanced. I applaud all those who have made Wild River a special place. Thank you!

Species Spotlight

Short-tailed Weasel (Ermine)

Latin Name: *Mustela erminea*

Other MN weasels: Long-tailed and Least

Habitat: Anywhere that their main prey, mice, are found. Typical habitats are grasslands, woodlots, and brush piles.

Size: 7-14" long, 2-5 ounces

Color: Brown on top and white-yellow on their undersides in summer, and turn white in winter.

Notes: Weasels are unprotected in Minnesota, but only a few thousand are trapped for their fur in winter



Focus on a Friend

By Tessa Hill, Vice President- Friends of Wild River



Gary Noren lives with his wife Marty in St. Croix Falls but for many years lived adjacent to Wild River State Park. For 30 years he has worked to protect and enhance the park as well as to enjoy its splendor. He is a founding board member of Friends of Wild River State Park and served as chair (with a 2 year break) from its founding until 2008.

Gary comes well qualified to be a member of the "Friends" group having served on the Environmental Education Advisory Board (EEAB) for 9 years, and 13 years on the Minnesota Environmental Education Board (MEEB). In addition, he worked to protect the environment through community recycling and waste reduction programs for Chisago County. Gary is also an educator. He taught mathematics at Taylor's Falls High School and taught math and special education at Pine Technical College for 20 years.

He is a lifelong cross-country skier and co-authored the book "Ski Minnesota." He has also sung in many choirs and now is enjoying singing in the Polk County Barbershop Chorus.

He currently serves on the Board of the St. Croix River Association and belongs to friends groups for the Sunrise River and Interstate Park. Gary has three children and two grandchildren.

We are very lucky to have Gary Noren as a Friends of Wild River board member. His professional background, his volunteer experience, his commitment and his love of Wild River State Park make him an incredibly valuable asset to the park. Thank you Gary!

New Events for early 2012

Jan. 1: 1 - 3 p.m.: National "First Day Hike":

Wild River will be the host park in Minnesota for this new tradition. Join us and representatives from the DNR for hiking, skiing, or snowshoeing.

Jan. 7 & 15 and Feb. 5 & 11: "Snowshoe Along the St. Croix": hikes led by Kacie Carlson (park Naturalist). Snowshoes are provided at no charge – call the park to reserve.

Feb. 14: 7 - 9 p.m.: "Valentine's Candlelight Snowshoe and Bonfire": another opportunity to use the maintained trails in Wild River, then enjoy a big bonfire on the prairie. For this event, one mile of trails will be lined by candle-lit luminaries!

Naturalist Notes

By Kacie Carlson, Park Naturalist



Happy Holidays, Everyone!

While you're out enjoying a trail this winter, I encourage you to keep your eyes and ears open for owls. Minnesota is home to 12 species of owls – seven of which have been heard at Wild River State Park. Can you name these owls? Visit mndnr.gov/birds to check your answers!

Winter Harmony

Like many raptors, owls generally breed January through March. Although they are communicating year-round, the months leading up to this are when they are most vocal in order to attract a mate. With bare trees, these owls can also be spotted easier. This goes for owl sign, too. Keep an eye out for wing prints in the snow where they've recently captured their evening meal.

Bundle Up and Stay Out Late

Owls are predominantly nocturnal, meaning they're hunting and courting at night. WRSP volunteer owl surveyor, Rubin Stenseng, suggests hitting the trail just before dawn or after dusk for the best listening. Always remember safety first, though. Bundle up and let someone know where you're headed and when you'll be back.

Migrating to Minnesota

Snowy owls are the one species of owl not resident to Minnesota. They nest in the treeless tundra far north. There, they feast on lemmings – a small arctic rodent. When the lemming population is down, Snowy owls will migrate south to where voles, moles, and other small mammals are more abundant.

Occasional Irruptions

As rodent populations fluctuate, we see occasional irruptions of Snowy and Great Gray owls farther south. You might remember when over 5,000 Great Gray owls flew into northern Minnesota from Canada in 2005. While minor irruptions occur every five-ten years, experts doubt we'll see anything of that magnitude anytime soon. However, if it's any indicator, the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union has already reported several Snowy Owl sightings in northern Minnesota and mid-Wisconsin as of November this year!

As you're keeping your eyes and ears peeled, I hope you're all having a great winter. As always, we look forward to seeing you out at the park.

New Program Announcement: Kids to the Prairie!



A new initiative of the Friends this year targets area children. With limited resources for field trips for hands-on learning experiences, the Friends Board has dedicated a portion of our financial resources toward grants to assist with transportation costs for schools and community organizations (up to \$900 per year).

Not only will these grants assist in getting children to the park, but they will help kids get to know the great outdoors and the beauty of the park. These groups also serve as volunteers in the restoration of 450 acres of native prairie within the park by collecting or sowing seeds on the prairie land within the park.

The goal is to provide 600 kids/new users to the park per year, providing a minimum of 300 volunteer hours to the park.

A grant application form has been prepared. The grant is a matching grant, offering half of the total cost of transportation to the park. The priority will be to bring new users to the park. For more information, request a copy of the application.

The application deadline will be February 1 for spring trips and May 1 for fall trips. A committee appointed by the Board will review the applications.

Recent Unusual Bird Sightings

Carolina Wren: Rubin Stenseng took the photo at the right in early Dec. while volunteering at the Wild River Visitor Center. It continues to come to our feeders quite regularly: once an hour in the morning then later in the day, but stays only 60-90 seconds. Its normal range is the south-eastern US. Visits by this species to WRSP aren't common. Congratulations Rubin!



Snowy Owl: Normally residents of the tundra, they are showing up in Minnesota and across the northern US this winter. Such an influx of birds is called an "irruption". Most experts agree that this occurs because of insufficient food, in this case lemmings, in their usual range. It is unknown how long they will be around, so enjoy them while you can!



Answer to **Where Is It?** ... from page 1: see ★ on map

The peninsula at the mouth of Spring Creek.

GPS coordinates: N45°31.527' W92°43.744'

It's about a quarter mile north of the main boat landing. Start at Erik's Canoe Rental building, go north to the big green water pump and continue north on a narrow, unmaintained but easy trail between Spring Creek to the west and the St. Croix River right next to you to the east. Go through a small open prairie section filled with little bluestem, some thimbleweed, and on the nearby riverbanks you may occasionally see swamp milkweed.

This little peninsula gets narrower and narrower as Spring Creek bends northeast toward the St. Croix – be careful when approaching the end since you will be on a small hill about 3-4 feet above the water (see photo). This section of the St. Croix can be especially exciting in the winter and early spring because you may be lucky enough to see two of Wild River's more elusive animals:

- River Otters – may be seen riding ice flows and then sliding off for fish.
- Trumpeter Swans – as many as 32 have been reported in winter and early spring when there are openings in the ice.



Upcoming Events

Jan. 1: 1 - 3 p.m.: **NEW!** "First Day Hike" – see page 3 for more info.

Jan. 7 & 15 and Feb. 5 & 11: **NEW!** "Snowshoe Along the St. Croix" hikes led by Kacie Carlson (park Naturalist).

Jan. 14: Candlelight Ski-Snowshoe-Hike – see page 5 for more information.

Feb. 14: 7 - 9 p.m.: **NEW!** Valentine's Candlelight snowshoe and bonfire.

March 17: 9 - 11 a.m.: Pancake Breakfast/Annual Mtg. of the Friends. More information in the Spring Newsletter.

March 24 & 30: Maple syruping programs. More info later.

May 5: Native Plant Sale. More information in the Spring Newsletter.

May–Aug: Summer Speaker Series sponsored by the Friends.

And visit us anytime on the web for the most current news and events:

- www.friendsofwildriver.org
- www.mndnr.gov/wildriver

Wild River State Park CANDLELIGHT

❄️ *Ski • Snowshoe • Hike*



Join the Friends of Wild River State Park for a fun moonlit evening of cross-country skiing, hiking or snowshoeing

Featuring the following fun activities throughout the night:

- ◆ Multiple Raffle Prizes to choose from: A New Set of Skis
A collection of Native Plants for Spring Planting
A personal "Naturalist Dave" led hike in the Park
- ◆ Minnesota's largest prairie bonfire near the Trail Center -- lighting to start at 6:00.
- ◆ Live music at both the Visitor Center and Trail Center,
with cookies, cider and coffee (donations appreciated).
- ◆ Large Telescope for viewing the remarkable night sky -- led by Kenny Bahmer.
- ◆ Ski & Snowshoe rental available -- call the park for more info: 651-583-2125.
- ◆ Opportunities to get involved: set-up luminaries, parking assistant, Trail Center Info table, Visitor Center info table, cookie contributor, etc.
Call Dave Kozlovsky at 651-674-1526 to confirm your spot!

IT'S WINTERTIME FUN FOR ALL AGES!

Remember to Renew!

Membership dues are the Friends' main source of funding for programs that we sponsor at the park. Please send in the form at the right or sign-up online and help support the great programs Friends of Wild River State Park bring to Wild River!

Still getting the paper newsletter?

To save paper, mailing costs, and time we encourage you to have your name added to the Friends' secure email list. You can request to be taken off at any time.

To be added to the email list, please visit our website at:

www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org

or contact us at info@friendsofwildriver.org

If you prefer to receive a paper copy of the quarterly newsletter, we would be happy to do that also. Just let us know.

Thank you!

Find us on the Web >>>

www.friendsofwildriver.org

And you can scan this QR matrix barcode using a smartphone and any free QR code-reader app.



WILD RIVER State Park Friends Membership Dues

- Individual **Friend** -- \$20 / year
- Family **Friend** – \$35 / year
- Silver **Friend** – \$50 / year
- Gold **Friend** – \$100 / year
- Platinum **Friend** – \$250+ / year
- Add an additional \$10 and be a member of MN Parks and Trails Council

Name:			
Address:			
City:			
State:		Zip:	
Email:			

We will never sell or trade your email address

Favorite activities at the park include:

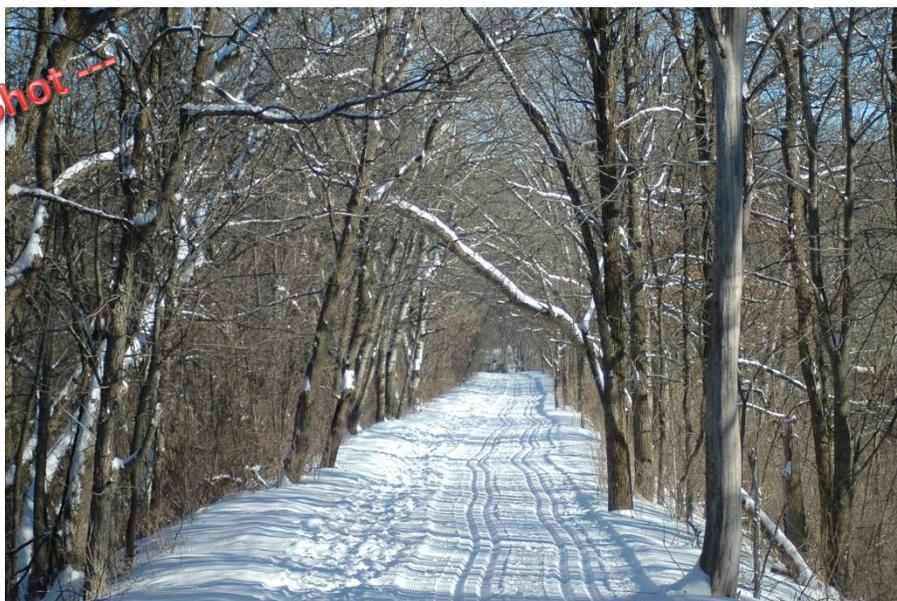
Option 1: Mail above with check to Friends of Wild River State Park c/o Treasurer Maurice Whalen 3663 164th Ave NE Ham Lake, MN 55304



Option 2: Sign-up OnLine and use your credit card www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org

Thank you for your support!

Parting Shot --



Nevers Dam extension and trail

Enjoy Wild River in Winter!



Park Entrance on Candlelight Ski/Hike evening