

Newsletter

www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org ■ info@FriendsOfWildRiver.org ■ 651-257-4414



From the President:

Winter at the Park

By Tom Dickhudt, Friends of Wild River State Park



I have relatives in Florida who always ask why we do not move south for the winter. They get the wrong idea when I tell them that winter in Minnesota is cool. Wild River State Park is a special place in winter and I would hate to miss it.

In winter, the park maintains 30 miles of groomed cross country ski trails. In addition to the cross country trails, Wild River also has winter hiking and snowshoe trails. The park's Trail Center is heated and a friendly place to meet friends or to just get warm.

The calendar of winter programs in the park includes:

- 1/10/15 Snowshoe along the St Croix
- 1/31/15 Winter wildlife survival challenge
- 2/14/15 Candlelight Ski / Snowshoe / Hike
- 2/21/15 Snowshoe along the St Croix

A search of "wild river state park winter events" on the internet will provide a number of pages that will provide information about these events. Information and registration by phone is available through the park office main line: 651-583-2125.

February 14, 2015, marks the 23rd Candlelight Ski at the park. Illuminating 6 miles of trails, candles will guide you through an amazing once-in-a-winter outdoor opportunity at Wild River. Snowshoers, skiers, and walkers are welcome to take the trails this Valentine's day event. Running from 6:00 to 9:00 in the evening, activities include music, displays, and a large bonfire. A ski and snowshoe rental opportunity is provided. More information can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.

Enjoy winter at Wild River State Park!

State Park Update

By Paul Kurvers,
Wild River State Park Manager

A Vision Realized



Back in 1973, shortly after the park was authorized, DNR managers, planners, and interested citizens began to formulate a vision for what the park and its resources could become. A consensus emerged at

the time calling for the restoration of the park's landscapes to a condition as they were at the time of pre-European settlement. This sentiment was also included in the enabling legislation that authorized the establishment of the park as well as the park's management plan that was developed later. The concept of actively working to restore the park's landscapes was (and still is) a momentous undertaking, as a significant portion of the park's landscapes have been altered due to the impacts of past logging, gravel mining, and farming practices.

It's been over 35 years now since the work of restoring the park's landscapes first began and much progress has been made. A good example of this progress is Amador Prairie. Back then, Amador Prairie was a series of old fields that in prior decades had been used to grow agricultural row crops and as pasture lands for cattle and other grazing animals. From an ecological standpoint this landscape was very sterile, with few native plant or animal species. However, if you look upon Amador Prairie today, you will see a much different landscape. Today Amador Prairie is a rich environment that harbors a wide variety of native plant and animal species. In fact, due to successful restoration efforts, Amador Prairie is now home to some of Minnesota's most endangered, threatened, and special concern species including

WHERE IS IT?



A popular building and area, especially during winter.

Answer on page 6....

Little Free Library at the Park

Your opportunity to contribute

By Bob Walz, Board Member of the Friends of Wild River State Park

Wild River State Park is the first state park to have a "Little Free Library." It is located near the campground and amphitheater. A Little Free Library is a place where you can "take a book" or "give a book," a sort of book exchange at our Park. When you are camping, you are welcome to take a book from the little free library to read or to have. It is modeled after the park's Visitor Center. It has two doors with books on nature on one side and fiction on the other. You are also encouraged to donate or give a book back in return.

Several members of the Friends of Wild River State Park already have donated books. We want to encourage you to look through your personal collections and consider donating field guides, outdoor nature books, and other books that would make an interesting read for park users. We could also use children's books about nature.

You can drop your donations off at the park office, the visitor's office or the home of Bob Walz, the Treasurer of the Friends.

There are labels to put inside your book which identify it as a "donated book." As the Friends are part of a non-profit, the donated books can be a tax donation, as well as a great way to share your love of our parks, the outdoors and nature with park users. For more information, contact Bob Walz at 651-674-2587.



*Designed and built by a
master craftsman:
Brad Bjorklund,
Vice-President of the
Friends of Wild River*

*Little Free Library
program promoted and
coordinated by:
Bob Walz,
Treasurer of the
Friends of Wild River*



- State Park Update -

Continued from Page 1

Henslow's sparrows, jumping spiders, kitten-tails, and bullsnakes. In the particular case of bullsnakes, it appears, as suggested by ongoing research, that Amador Prairie provides a unique habitat which is utilized by a significant population of bullsnakes for breeding, nesting, and over-wintering.

How did the transformation and restoration of Amador Prairie take place? This transformation did not occur by happenstance but was instead the result of committed work by park naturalists, other DNR staff, and hundreds of volunteers (individuals, families, and school children) who contributed thousands of hours of work collecting native seeds, planting seeds, and eliminating non-native plants over multiple decades. Without the dedicated support and work of all the volunteers that have contributed their time through the park's Species Stewards and Prairie Care programs, the restoration of Amador Prairie would not have been a success.

The restoration of Amador Prairie is a testament to what is possible when people work collectively to achieve a common vision and goal. It is also an example of a positive lasting legacy that can be realized when citizens take on the role of becoming stewards of the land.

Hope to see you at the park this winter.



*A Prairie Care volunteer collecting
seed from Amador Prairie*

Naturalist Notes

By Mike Dunker, Park Naturalist

As I look outside on a dreary, wintery day, I continue to be amazed at all that is going on in the park around me. The chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers dine on the bird feeders outside the Visitor Center as red and gray squirrels collect the seeds that gather on the ground. More often than not, the squirrels change their mind on the ground location and prefer to climb onto the feeders and get the first choice of seed. The seed isn't the only option for food for our feathered friends, however. Although we may not see them, there are still quite a few insects around if you know where to look.

Recently I attended a workshop on plant galls. Galls are abnormal growths in plant tissue usually caused by parasites such as insects, mites, and fungi. You probably have seen them while walking through the woods or prairies as a round ball located on a plant stem or leaf. The most familiar one to most people is that of the goldenrod. Here, an insect known as the gallfly deposits an egg into the plant by finding a desirable spot by taste and inserting the egg inside the plant.



What's amazing is not the fact that inside these plant growths is an insect, overwintering to emerge in the spring. Rather, it's the fact that the gallflies that deposit their eggs into the stalk of the plant genetically trigger the plant to change the material of the plant. After the egg is in place, the plant begins to grow new material around the egg made of special nutritional tissue that is different from the rest of the plant tissue. After the egg hatches into a larva, this is its only food as they do not eat as adults. Surrounding this tissue is also a cork-like plant tissue that protects the larva. The curiosity for scientists is where this genetic code to create this new plant tissue comes from and what triggers it.

The size of the gall also plays an important role. A number of creatures in the animal kingdom know what lies inside these little lunchboxes. Parasitic wasps will find small galls which they will insert their eggs into the larva for its young to eat as it grows. When the gall is larger in size, meaning it has more cork-like tissue around the larva, the egg isn't able to penetrate inside. On the other hand, the larger galls are more desired by birds such as chickadees and downy woodpeckers. At least they don't have to share these with the squirrels.

Some goldenrod galls skip the gallfly and wasps completely and are home to a certain species of moth. These are not round but more tubular in shape with a chrysalis inside. You can find all of these just a short walk from the Visitor Center. Plus they are there all winter to check out.

Although I'm sure it sounds more comfortable curling up in a warm ball surrounded by good food for the winter like a gallfly larva, I encourage you to check out the goldenrod in the prairie and savanna areas of the park this winter. There is more to them than meets the eye.

2014 Prairie Care Report

Starting back in 2000, Naturalist Dave Crawford began creating the Prairie Care program within Wild River State Park. Since then, numerous volunteers and groups have participated in an amazing park restoration process. Schools look forward to bringing students out to not only get to see a restored prairie, but take part in the process and create young conservation stewards along the way.

The majority of seeding this year took place on two main parcels that had been burned by park staff in May. The first was the prairie area just south along the entrance road of the main park entrance and the other was east and north of the Quonset near the park shop. Students, scouts, park guests and friends volunteered their time to hand sow these areas to add to the seed base already stored within the ground.

Seed collection started as early as the end of June and continued until our first snow in November. Dan Carlson was again the leader in volunteer hours and seed collected for Prairie Care, often leaving behind a few buckets to greet the Naturalist every weekend at the Visitor Center. Discussion was also held this year with Dave Crawford and Virginia Blakesley, our Area Resource Specialist, about priority species for collection and seed still stored from previous years. It did change a little the collection process followed by larger school groups.

The 2014 seed has been collected, processed, weighed and stored for next year. Here are some numbers:

- Over 50 species were collected in the fall of 2014. This is made up of about 10 species of grasses and over 40 species of forbs or flowering plants.
- Approximately 340 individuals collected seed this past fall.
- About 40 pounds of clean seed was collected, processed and stored.
- There still remains around 50 pounds of unprocessed seed in storage from previous years.

With the absence of a naturalist late last fall through the winter, the processing of seed was unable to be done and amounts were not recorded for 2013. This winter, the 2013 seed is currently being hand processed and cleaned to be used for next year's prairie restoration.

The Prairie Care program started years ago is truly successful because of committed volunteers and staff dedicating time and effort to the restoration on Wild River State Park. Thank you all for helping to create not only the beautiful landscapes, but also improve the ecological health of the park and protect many of the plant and animal species that live here.

If you want to learn more about the Prairie Care program or wish to become a volunteer or species steward, call the park naturalist at 651-583-2925 ext. 227. As you can see, every volunteer is important!

Get Ready for CANDLELIGHT SKI 2015!

By Dave Kozlovsky, Candlelight Ski Committee chairperson

It is time to put the Friends of Wild River State Park "Candlelight Ski" on your calendar for "must attend" events for 2015. The date for one of the Friends of WRSP's most popular events is **Saturday, February 14, 2015**, from 6-9 PM. Last year with near perfect weather and snow conditions, attendance was impressive! Based on the vehicle count for the evening, it was estimated that attendance was close to 1600 people, just shy of the record which was set in 2008 (1700).

Depending on conditions, there will be up to six miles of cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking trails lit with luminaries.

Besides the trail activities, there will be the state's largest bonfire (big as a house), star gazing, hot cider, cookies, and musical entertainment as well as a chance to win a complete cross-country ski package donated by Wade Vitalis of Wild River Ski Rental. Also, if you don't have your own skis or snowshoes, you can rent them through Wade at WRSP. Call Wade at 651-257-0685 for more info on rentals; you may want to reserve ahead of time as it is a busy night.

What happens if there is little or no snow? Well, this is Minnesota so we are prepared for everything! If we are lacking in snow, we will have a Candlelight Walk with lighted trails and all the other aforementioned activities.

Would you like to get involved and help set up the luminaries, etc.? Give me a call at 651-583-2123 as we could use your help.

Come join in the fun!!

October 5K Run/Walk is a Big Success

The 3rd Annual Wild River 5K Run/Walk, also known as the "Snake Slither 2014", was a big success! We had 49 participants this year over a wide range of ages. There were also many volunteers from our Friends group and staff from the DNR that quickly and effectively ran the event, plus provided free refreshments including bottled water, cookies, and fruit. See our website for more information and photos: www.friendsofwildriver.org.

Join us and spread the word in 2015!



And: 2 more Events in Feb. 2015

The weekend of the Candlelight Ski will also see 2 other ongoing activities sponsored by the Friends:

1) The Friends are planning to provide information at the Visitor Center and perhaps sponsor a bird hike as part of the GBBC: **Great Backyard Bird Count**. This is a national 4-day event (Feb. 13th – 16th) jointly sponsored by the Cornell Univ. Ornithology Lab and the Audubon Society. For more information and to get an official bird checklist, visit www.birdsource.org/gbbc/whycount.html.

2) In honor of **President's Day** on Monday, we will have a display in the Visitor Center on Presidents that have played a significant role in the creation of parks and preserves. Many, especially Theodore Roosevelt, used a loophole in the Antiquities Act of 1906 that allowed them to set aside thousands of acres of land by simple Presidential decree without the need for approval from the US Congress or State Assemblies.

And, of course, there's that other significance to Saturday the 14th: **Valentine's Day!** Although there will be no specific activities, the Park is a beautiful romantic place to spend some special time with your loved one.

*See you at the Park Feb. 13, 14, 15, or 16,
or all 4 days!*

Calendar of Events

JANUARY:

10: *Park Program:* Snowshoe along the St. Croix River.

31: *Park Program:* Winter Wildlife Survival Challenge.

FEBRUARY:

14: **Candlelight Ski** – see page 5 for more information.

13-16: **Great Backyard Bird Count** – see page 4 for more information.

13-16: **President's Day display** – see page 4 for more information.

21: *Park Program:* Snowshoe along the St. Croix River.

MARCH:

14: **Pancake Breakfast** at 9:00 in the Visitor Center, followed by our **Friends Annual Meeting** – more info in the Spring Newsletter coming out March 1.

For more information on park programs:
http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/wil_river/calendar.html

Wild River State Park CANDLELIGHT



Ski • Snowshoe • Hike



February 14, 2015

Ongoing 6-9 pm

Wild River State Park

FREE!

With a Minnesota State Park
Vehicle Permit.
Skiers: see **NOTE** below.

Featuring the following fun activities throughout the night:

- Raffle Prizes including a new set of skis and boots!
- Minnesota's largest prairie bonfire - lit at 5:45pm
- 6 miles of candle-lit ski, snowshoe, and walking trails
- Live music at both the Visitor Center and Trail Center
- Home-made cookies, cider and coffee (donations appreciated)
- Large Telescope for viewing the remarkable night sky.
- Ski & Snowshoe rental available -- call Wade of Wild River Ski Rental at 651-257-0685 for more info.
- Call Dave at 651-583-2923 to volunteer to help out.

NOTE: A Minnesota Ski Pass is required for ski trails in State Parks or Forests, or on State or Grant-in-Aid Trails, for those who are age 16 and above. The cost is \$6 daily or \$20 for the season, and are available at the Park Office or online.

A big **Thanks** again goes to the 50+ members of this year's North Branch High School National Honor Society for doing all the following work, and more:

- Bagging, lighting and planting the hundreds of luminaries on a cold February afternoon.
- Greeting visitors at the entrance.
- Providing directions for parking.
- Selling raffle tickets.
- Serving cookies and cider.
- Re-lighting and maintaining the luminaries throughout the night.
- Answering questions.

-- Friends Board & Park Management

IT'S WINTERTIME FUN FOR ALL AGES!

Friends, please cut this portion, then, hang this poster somewhere in your hometown or workplace to invite new Friends and visitors to Wild River State Park for this event!

Thank you for your
Membership

FWRSP Membership Options

- Junior **Friend**, 12 and under – \$5 / year
Includes an "Action Guide" and other benefits
- 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
Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota*

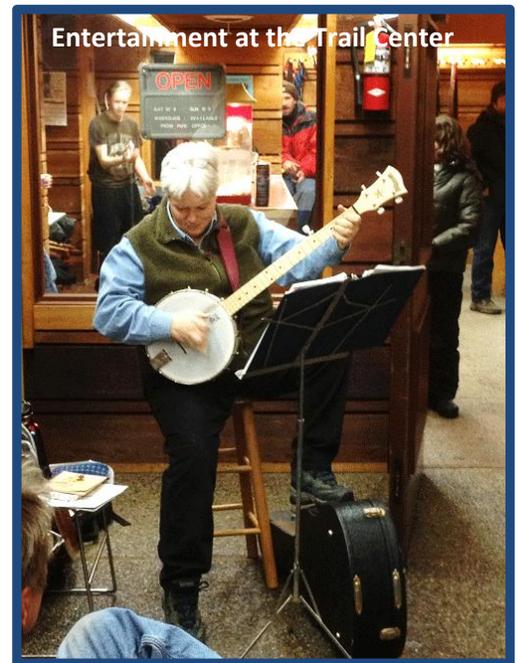
Name:			
Address:			
City:			
State:		Zip:	
Email:			

(We will never sell or trade your email address.)

Option 1: Mail above with check to:
Bob Walz, FWRSP Treasurer
 (make check out to "Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota"
 and put "Friends of Wild River membership" in memo field)
3916B Riverside Ct.

North Branch, MN 55056

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



Happy New Year! From the Friends of Wild River Board

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| President | Tom Dickhudt |
| Vice President | Brad Bjorklund |
| Treasurer | Bob Walz |
| Secretary | Jeske Noordergraaf |
| Communications | Bob Kessen |
| Past Presidents | Gary Noren
Dave Kozlovsky |

- Board Members:**
- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Bill Carlson | Dave Crawford |
| John Eret | Dennis Johnson |
| Tessa Hill | Elizabeth Huselid |
| Bonnie Patrick | Jacquie Zita |

Answer to **WHERE IS IT?**

Luminaries outside the Trail Center during the 2014 Candlelight Ski

Come out to the Park on Feb. 14 to enjoy the 6 miles of remarkable and striking candlelit trails. Hopefully there will be plenty of snow as in 2014 for cross country skiing on the groomed trails or for snowshoeing on separate routes. And there will be trails for hiking too. Then warm up in either the Trail Center or Visitor Center with refreshments and live entertainment. It's a great, fun event!



It's here