



Friends of Wild River State Park

Summer 2019

# Newsletter

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## From the president:

### A new season

By Becky Leuer, Friends of Wild River State Park board president



It is a season of open water, beautiful sunsets, budding leaves, and the forest floor coming to life. After a long winter,

what could be better than time spent at Wild River State Park. Visit the park for a relaxing hike, the sound of rushing water in a stream, or the smell of new growth. Whatever your reason, make Wild River State Park your destination.

After a successful Candlelight Night enjoying the park in winter, now it is time to join us for Seegwan, a celebration of spring, on June 8. Special thanks to Gary Noren for spearheading the revival of this great celebration in the park. Your board of directors of Friends of Wild River State Park work hard to provide special events for all to enjoy. More information about this event and others are available in the newsletter. Pick one of interest and we hope to see you there.

The Friends of Wild River and the park staff look forward to seeing you enjoying the park. What a treasure we have in East Central Minnesota.

## Seegwan is back!

For the last few years Seegwan has been relegated to seed sowing of native prairie seeds, a worthy goal but not what was envisioned by planners back in 1983. Seegwan – the Ojibwe word for spring – has had many interpretations during its 35 years at Wild River State Park, including canoe trips, Ojibwe dancers, Voyageur encampments, storytelling, Charlie Maguire, Doug Wood, Big Top Chautauqua and even park history by bicycle. This year, Seegwan will return to its former glory at the park on June 8, which coincides with a state-wide Free Admission to State Parks day. The day will begin with a bird hike at 8 a.m., programs by naturalist Mike Dunker and former naturalist Dave Crawford during the day and ending with a rousing guitar performance at the amphitheater at 7 p.m., featuring Mark Keating.

The schedule includes:

- Audubon Bird Walk, led by Joe Sausen, 8 a.m.
- Annual Prairie Seed Sow, 10 a.m.
- Seegwan stories (bring your own bag lunch), 12 p.m.
- Wild River State Park Snakes, presented by Dave Crawford, 1 p.m.
- Woods & Wildflowers Walk, 3 p.m.
- Mark Keating concert, 7 p.m.



*Hepatica*

*Photo by Kris Backlund*

### Mark your calendars: River Cleanup is July 13!

The Friends is looking for volunteers to help clean up any trash found in or along the river between Sunrise Landing and Wild River Landing. Volunteers should meet at the Wild River boat landing at 9 a.m. and expect the paddle to last the majority of the day with a midday lunch break. Please bring your own water, lunch, hat, sunglasses and sunscreen. Volunteers will be shuttled from Wild River Landing up to Sunrise Landing; help with shuttling would be greatly appreciated. Contact Park Naturalist Mike Dunker at 651-583-2125 ext. 227 or via email at [michael.dunker@state.mn.us](mailto:michael.dunker@state.mn.us) to RSVP.

## And the Wild Friend Award goes to...

Longtime volunteer and Friends of Wild River State Park board member Bob Kessen was chosen to be this year's Wild Friend Award recipient, which was presented during the Friends Annual Meeting on March 9, 2019. Bob started volunteering at Wild River State Park in 1997 as a Visitor Center Host for Naturalist Dave Crawford. Bob spent 40 hours a month for the next 13 years as a Visitor Center Host until Dave Crawford retired.

Former park naturalist Dave Crawford said, "Bob is one of the volunteers at Wild River who are in for the long haul. He's participated in many roles, from visitor center host to maple syrup cooker to prairie restoration seed collector. I particularly recall how Bob was willing to keep experimenting with ways to keep the rubber animal tracks for the track table attached to their bases - practically a full-time task. I can't count how many pounds of prairie clover seed (along with many other species) he's brought in over the years, but I can say that a good number of plants of the three species of prairie clover in Wild River's restorations grew from seed he collected. He'd also gamely go out year after year for some of the more challenging species, such as prairie smoke and swamp milkweed. Top all of that off with a wry wit, and you have a great volunteer!"

In 2010, Bob was looking to reduce his hours at the park. Former president Dave Kozlovsky happened to meet and talk to him a few times while cooking sap at the park, and discovered he was a data base expert employed by the University of Minnesota. Dave was President of the Friends of WRSP at the time and asked if Bob would consider joining the board of the Friends, and he agreed. At this time, Bob took over the newsletter from Kia Donais, and with the help of new naturalist Kacie Stanek, created the

new color version we have now until 2018 when the job was passed to Marjorie Otto.

Kacie Stanek said of Bob, "What a well-deserved award for Bob! The fact that he is still volunteering over ten years later speaks volumes. I remember days when he would sit

in the bitter drizzly cold boiling maple sap down so that we could stay ahead of the melting snow - saving us from having to dump spoiled sap later on. He was humbled and happy to do it. There were other days when he would welcome a hundred visitors to learn from him. He would listen to their questions, involve them in the process and spark their interest in a new outdoor activity. He's a natural teacher and interpreter. From boiling sap to hosting the visitor center to working long hours behind the scenes at special events, Bob's efforts never went unnoticed by staff or visitors and words couldn't say 'thank you' enough. Bob has impacted the lives of countless people and made more of a difference than he'll ever

know. Congratulations to a wonderful person inside and out!"

Since 2010, Bob has been in charge of Communications and membership on the Friends of WRSP board. He has taken over the Friends website, created a data base from which he tracks membership, and advertises Friends upcoming events as well as being a behind the scenes helper at all the Friends events.

As you can see Bob Kessen has been a vital member of the "volunteers" at WRSP for the last 20 years and may have raised the bar for future "Wild Friend Awards" for which he certainly deserves.



*Bob Kessen, left, and Dave Kozlovsky, right at the March 9 Annual Meeting.*

## News & Notes from Wild River

From Park Manager Kris Backlund

- I am greatly honored to have recently been appointed the new manager of Wild River/Interstate State Park. Former park manager Paul Kurvers is now a District Supervisor. We will be working to fill the assistant manager position I vacated. I hope to share more about my background and goals for the park in a future issue of this newsletter.
- A snowy February (into March, and again in April!) delayed the start of spring slightly. Take heart though—many signs of spring are here including: the arrival of migrating birds; nesting; spring ephemerals; prescribed burns; budding trees; longer days; and even the snakes are sunning themselves and getting reacquainted after a winter underground!
- Our slow spring was preceded by a prolonged period of flooding. We started with road flooding just before the vernal equinox. We don't normally have flooding on the bluff level of the park, but snow melt on both sides of the road coupled with ice build-up led to nearly a foot of water over the road near the Visitor Center turn. We had to plow a temporary detour using the bike trail so cabin guests could make it back and forth. Park visitors were very kind and accommodating.
- Once water receded from the park road, water started rising on the St. Croix River. Water levels went up and down several times this spring, which led to some temporary trail and/or campsite closures. We stopped short of building an ark. Now we're drying out.



*Spring time flooding on Wild River roads. Photo by Kris Backlund*



*Ruffed grouse*

*Photo by Kris Backlund*

- At this point, it looks like some rental opportunities in or near the park will be limited this season. The park's canoe concessionaire chose not to renew their contract, so we do not have a canoe vendor in the park. The neighboring horseback riding operation has also suspended operation. Horse trails and the horse campground opened May 1 for riders with their own horses. If you want to get out on the water, we can point you to other outfitters in the area, or why not sign up for one of the paddles periodically offered by the park naturalist? Whatever your mode of travel, we look forward to seeing you at Wild River this spring and summer!

# If You Care, Leave It There

Mike Dunker, Interpretive Naturalist

Every year I get dozens of phone calls and visitors stopping by to ask what to do with an animal they found that looks injured or orphaned. With the number of park visitors increasing every year, it only makes sense that there would be an increase in people and wildlife interaction. The park staff works hard to make sure these interactions are as positive as possible, both for the park visitor and for the animals involved. Unfortunately, many users with good intentions can have a negative impact on the animals within the park.

The most common concern from visitors are animal babies found alone and considered orphaned. This is not usually the case. Baby birds, deer, squirrels and others may be left unattended as parents move the young from nest to nest or allow their young to hide under distant watchful eyes. My own childhood consisted of experiences gained where my parents may not have been right next to me, but were close enough to protect or help me if I ever was in real danger. Without those moments, I would not have learned independence.

Occasionally someone will also come across a sick or injured animal in the park. Like the animal babies, things may not be as they appear. Unusual behaviors may be noticed for wildlife at different times of the year or stages in the lifecycle, but is a normal part of this animal's life. There is also the danger of a sick or injured animal biting or scratching as it tries to defend itself. This could expose you to a possible disease or injury.

On an even greater scale, intervening at all can interrupt the health of the ecosystem and the wildlife community in the park as a whole. Predators need to eat in the park and sick or dying animals are an important source of food for many. A number of animals have large litters or multiple young due to this natural selectivity and mortality rate.

It is also a good reminder to note that it is unlawful for an unlicensed citizen to attempt to rehabilitate an animal on his or her own. It is also unlawful to possess or transport injured wildlife for more than 24 hours unless permitted to do so. A great phrase to keep in mind is "If you care, leave it there."

You can still drop by the visitor center or front office and let us know your concern. In the past year, we have transported eagles and a pelican from the park for rehabilitation due to camper tips. Please do not pick it up to take a picture with it or bring it to us, that added stress could be fatal.

Please help us to make this a great park for human and wildlife users alike!



*Gloria Peterson, who monitors bluebird nesting boxes and is a snake research volunteer at Wild River State Park, recently snapped this picture of a female Eastern Bluebird sitting on some eggs. If you're interested at volunteering at Wild River, see page 5 for a list of opportunities.*

## Changes in Membership Year

At the March 9 meeting of the Board of Friends of Wild River State Park a change in the membership year was approved. Previously the membership year was recorded from the date dues were paid. The month and year of "paid through" dues were included on the mailing label for the newsletters. To simplify record keeping the membership year will be March to March (annual meeting to annual meeting). Dues collected starting in January will be for the coming membership year.

Following that decision there was a discussion of how long to "carry" members who were behind in dues. As a result, postcards were sent to former members to encourage them to continue to support the Friends by paying annual dues. As was expected, some cards were returned due to changes of address and a few members send dues checks.

A third topic for discussion was whether to continue to mail newsletters to members who were behind in dues payment. For the time being, newsletters will be mailed to members who have paid dues within the past two years. Of course, all newsletters continue to be available on our website at [www.friendsofwildriver.org](http://www.friendsofwildriver.org)

To date in 2019 we have 37 paid members with a total of \$1,750 in dues collected. In 2018 we had 49 paid members for a total of \$2,945. Dues collection remains our primary means of supporting programs at Wild River State Park.

## Volunteer at Wild River State Park

Are you interested in volunteering at Wild River State Park? There are a number of projects to help with year-round. For those interested in helping out, send an email to Park Naturalist Mike Dunker at [michael.dunker@state.mn.us](mailto:michael.dunker@state.mn.us). Here are some projects:

### Prairie Care (*Sp, Su, Fa*)

- Seed Collection
- Seed Sowing
- Seed Processing

### Visitor Center Hosting (*Sp, Su, Fa*)

- Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays

### Garden Weeding (*Sp, Su, Fa*)

### Buckthorn Pulling (*Sp, Su, Fa*)

### Bird Counts/Recordings (*Sp, Su*)

- Henslow's sparrow
- Red-headed woodpeckers

### Snake Research (*Sp, Su, Fa*)

### Maple Syrup (*Sp*)

- Collection
- Cooking Sap to Syrup

### Park Photography (*Sp, Su, Fa, Wi*)

### Program Assistance (*Sp, Su, Fa, Wi*)

- Archery
- Canoeing
- Friends of WRSP Events

## Help with the Free Little Library

The Friends of Wild River State Park has a Free Little Library for visitors to the park to share books. The Friends is looking for donations of books – nature books, children's nature books, and other light reading. If you have books you'd like to share, feel free to drop them off at the Free Little Library, located near the driveway to the amphitheater, or connect with Friends board member Jeske Noodergraaf at [jnoodergraaf@yahoo.com](mailto:jnoodergraaf@yahoo.com).

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



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| City:    |  |      |  |
| State:   |  | Zip: |  |
| Email:   |  |      |  |

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

**Option 1:** Mail above with check to:

Jan Kozlovsky, FWRSP Treasurer  
(make check out to "Friends of Wild River State Park")  
17190 410<sup>th</sup> St.  
North Branch, MN 55056

**Option 2:** Sign-up Online and use your credit card:

[www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org](http://www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org)

*We will never sell or trade your email address*



#### Help Wanted: Web Programming

Would you or someone you know want to volunteer a small amount of time to help with the website and database programming behind the Friends web site – FriendsOfWildRiver.org? Our Communications Officer, Bob Kessen, has been doing this for the past 8 years and would be happy to teach you the various languages and systems currently in use: HTML, JavaScript, PHP programming, and MySQL relational database. Most of the work is simple maintenance and usually takes only 2 or 3 hours a month at most. But sometimes we get a new project that can take a couple weeks or more – and these are real fun (according to Bob)! For more information, contact Bob at bobkessen9@gmail.com or call him at 651-462-8487. Thanks!

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