

Friends of Wild River State Park

Newsletter

Winter 2021



From the President:

Becky Leuer, Friends of Wild River State Park president

Greetings Friends of Wild River State Park!

Another year at the park is in the books as we find ourselves in the full throes of winter and the new year of 2021. While COVID has changed much about what we do each day, it has also provided a greater appreciation of the outdoors, and attendance at the park has been fantastic. The park is just as beautiful in the winter; dust off your skis and snowshoes, the grooming equipment has hit the trails.

A special thanks to our park staff for the work accomplished during the past few months. Look for updates from Park Manager Kris Backlund



It's time to hit those ski and snowshoe trails!

and Naturalist Mike Dunker in this newsletter. And while our Candlelight Night will not happen this winter, plans are underway for events whenever we can safely return to whatever the new normal will look like.

Thank you all for being members of Friends of Wild River State Park. Membership renewal will begin again in March and we certainly hope you will join again and maybe invite a few of your friends to become one of our Friends!

Stay Positive, Test Negative,
Becky

2020: A year like no other

In 2020, COVID put a kibosh on many of the annual gatherings the Friends looks forward to hosting at Wild River. However, the importance of our natural resources was highlighted over and over during this pandemic. For example, following the stay-at-home order issued in March, visits steadily increased at Wild River State Park, averaging nearly 5,000 visitors per week near the end of April. That same time period in 2019 saw between 2,500 and 3,500 visitors per week. Staff at Wild River reported consistently high park usage all season, including record-setting numbers during fall colors at the end of September. The DNR reported that many state parks near the Twin Cities experienced similar elevated visitation levels this year.

Looking to the new year, the status of many of the events organized by the Friends will continue to depend on the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic and the guidelines established by the state.

We can say with certainty the Candlelight Night event held in February will be cancelled this year, as the DNR has cancelled all similar events statewide. It also appears that the Friends annual meeting and pancake breakfast will most likely be cancelled, but the Friends may have a virtual substitution. Please visit friendsofwildriver.org for the most up-to-date information.

Park updates from Park Manager Kris Backlund

PROJECTS

- Electricity was added at 3 additional sites in the horse camp, using horse pass funding.
- LED walkway lights were installed at the Trail Center.
- A new drinking fountain, which the Friends helped fund, was installed in the Trail Center in October.
- A couple of deteriorated culverts were replaced on the Sunrise Trail.
- Some of the rotting planks were replaced on the Spring Creek trail bridge.
- A bridge inspection was performed on all park trail bridges by a DNR bridge engineer. We have been trying to get this done for several years, but have not made it onto the schedule. We had to postpone inspections last spring due to flooding. Our next opportunity was July last year, but right after the big wind storm, so we were not able to get out onto the trails with the engineer. Some significant issues were identified with some of the bridges, including the two bridges on the Sunrise Trail. Other bridges have repair needs as well.
- Additional “dam engineering” has been underway beneath the Deer Creek bridge. We have had an ongoing battle with the beavers, who’s efforts started to flood the trail approaches there.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

- We are continuing to work on development of new exhibits at the Visitor Center. This project is funded.
- We plan to make some minor structural changes in the process, including fixing the doors into the exhibit area for example.
- Bridge repairs will be among the key items to complete in the coming year.
- A contractor repairing an electric line in the campground recently cut both the Xcel line and the park water line. Work has been completed.
- The Legislature recently passed the bonding bill. Some of that money should trickle down to state parks, but I do not have details. A high priority continues to be the park roads.



New Trail Center drinking fountain.

DEER HUNT

- The park was closed November 7-8 for a resource management hunt. Hunts were held in 2018 and 2019 also. Usually there are not hunts in successive years, but the park fell within a new Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance area, so a hunt was held this year. The park also has a CWD sampling station through the duration of the firearms season.

COVID IMPACTS

- We are continuing with window service only at the office.
- Trail Center and Visitor Center main rooms remain closed. No building reservations.
- Some sinks and hand dryers are shut off.
- All lodging units have a 24-hour waiting period between reservations.
- Masks are required inside buildings and when riding with another employee.

Looking for your stories

Wild River State Park Naturalist Mike Dunker is looking for your stories about Wild River State Park and its history. As part of the work being done to update the Visitor Center, one area includes creating new exhibits. Mike writes about the work:

“One of the projects that has taken a priority is reviewing the park interpretive plan and moving forward developing themes for our Visitor Center update. Plans are to have new exhibits and exhibit zones installed in 2022, so a Request for Proposal needs to be completed this winter and send out to collect bids from exhibit companies. We know we have some facility updates that need to be done as well, but having the money to update the exhibits is exciting. Going through the park records, we have never had any professionally made exhibits just for Wild River. Many were donations or were created by the park staff and/or Friends members and volunteers. I’m currently meeting twice a week with our State Parks and Trails Exhibit Specialist working through these ideas and themes. One point we continue to look at is bringing in different perspectives of the park. There are many stories to tell, and this is something the Friends group can help with.”

So, if you or someone you know has a story or history to share—either about the park, the area before it was a park, or involvement with the Friends of Wild River—reach out to Mike Dunker via email at michael.dunker@state.mn.us.

Treasurer’s Report from Jan Kozlovsky

Since the 2020 Candlelight Night back in February, our events for the year have been cancelled, but we were able to make two financial contributions to the park. First, we donated \$1,000 toward the printing of new color maps for park visitors. Second, we bought a new drinking fountain for the Trail Center. The fountain includes a water bottle filler, a feature that will be much appreciated once the Trail Center and fountain can be fully open to visitors.

On a sad note, we also marked the passing of the Friends’ most generous supporter, Stan Nelson. Stan’s wife, Barb, was one of the founding members of the Friends of WRSP. In her honor, Stan established the Barb Ledbetter Nelson Fund with the St. Croix Valley Foundation with the purpose of providing income to the Friends. Stan continued to contribute to the fund each year and donated directly to the Friends and the amphitheater project, sometimes more than once in a year. I will miss the handwritten notes he included with each check. In his honor, our second fund with the SCVF is named after Stan. This is the location where we have funds that have been reserved for the amphitheater.

In mid-December we received a check from Stan’s estate. What an incredible surprise—\$25,000! This money is earmarked for naturalist training, a cause to which Stan donated years ago for the purpose of hiring interns for the busy summer months. The Board will be meeting with park officials to determine how to best use this money according to Stan’s wishes.

Plans for the amphitheater stalled along with everything else, but we are still hopeful that a plan will be developed. Funds specifically reserved for the amphitheater in our savings and the SCVF are just over \$30,000.

Dues collected to date in 2020 total \$2,260, with 45 paid members and donations from Amador Township Charities. Four new members joined just this fall. Our membership year is March to March, to coincide with our annual meeting. Please check the address label on your newsletter to verify that your dues are up to date. Encourage your friends to join. Support of all members is genuinely appreciated.

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

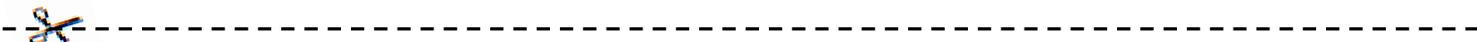
Option 1: Mail above with check to:

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

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

www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org

We will never sell or trade your email address



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