



FRIENDS OF WILD RIVER STATE PARK

# Newsletter



A community organization devoted to preserving and enhancing the experience of Wild River State Park **Summer 2025**



*Ten volunteers participated in the St. Croix River Cleanup in July.*

## EarthFest Recap

Read all about the 2025 celebration of spring

Page 4

## Otter Trotter 5K

Get ready for the Wild River fun run this fall

Page 7

## New Event

Experience the Festival of Belonging with JG Everest

Page 8

## Park Programs

Check out the exciting ways to get involved in 2025

Page 9



# Welcome

## *From the President*



Summer and fall provide opportunities to participate in a variety of volunteer activities at Wild River State Park. Thanks largely to the initiatives of park naturalist Sean Hoppes, it has been an exceptionally busy season. This spring and summer, groups of volunteers have pulled invasive weeds, cleared buckthorn, collected wildflower seeds, continued restoration of the oak savannas, cleaned up the river banks, and more.

It's great to see new faces joining in to help at these volunteer events, and this includes a number of individuals from outside the Friends group. I attribute this success to two things: 1) our team efforts in communicating through this newsletter, social media and other channels and 2) Sean Hoppes' outreach through his emails and postings. Many hands make light work, and more folks are pitching in!

The coming months will bring more volunteer opportunities, including the new Festival of Belonging for four weekends in August and September and our annual Otter Trotter 5K run on October 11 (details on both events in this newsletter). Check out our website ([www.friendsofwildriver.org](http://www.friendsofwildriver.org)) for information about upcoming Friends events throughout the year. You'll also find a link ("Current Naturalist Programs and Activities") to DNR events, including volunteer opportunities, at the park.

Thanks to all who've given so much of their time and talent to help improve the park and the park experience. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at Friends and DNR events in the months ahead.

Jim McCarthy,  
Friends of Wild River State Park President



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

## Sweet! Maple Syrup Day attracts 189 curious visitors

Talk about a fun hands-on — and tasty — day at Wild River State Park! Maple Syrup Day on April 5 gave 189 visitors the opportunity to learn about and participate in the making of nature's rich sweetener using sap from the park's own maple trees. Many also enjoyed sampling the end result.

During the spring of 2025, 115 gallons of sap were collected at the park and boiled down into three gallons of syrup, according to park naturalist Sean Hoppes. About a half gallon of finished product was made on Maple Syrup Day. Attendees picked up a "maple syrup passport" and visited 10 stations where they tried their hand at the many steps involved with syrup-making.

Other highlights of the day included Native Games, hosted by Tony Drews (Chinoodin), intended to help people to learn the Ojibwe language. Also, MNPAiR artist-in-residence JG Everest presented a sound garden using a spatial score originally composed for a sugarbush in northern Minnesota.



Above: What kind of tree is this? Visitors examine buds from various types of trees, including maples. Friends volunteer Doris Ikier, right, places samples under the microscope.



Top right: These guys are really cookin'! FWRSP board members and volunteers Dan Otto and Dave Kozlovsky at the evaporation station.



Bottom right: Friends volunteer and board member Jeske Noordergraaf serves up sweet samples.





## EarthFest 2025 shines spotlight on oak savannas and red-headed woodpeckers

Red-headed woodpeckers have made a comeback at Wild River State Park, so naturally they were the “star of the show” at EarthFest 2025 on April 26. Sharing the spotlight at our “celebration of spring” were the park’s oak savannas, where red-headed woodpeckers have been sighted since establishing a colony here in 2024.

EarthFest offered opportunities for visitors to get acquainted with these avian celebrities and their habitat. Michelle Terrell of Wild River Audubon led an early-morning bird walk that identified 18 bird species, including red-headed woodpecker. The elusive woodpecker also was spotted later in the morning on a walk co-led by University of Minnesota researcher Caitlyn Jacobson. Following the walk, Caitlyn gave an audiovisual presentation on Minnesota’s resident woodpecker species.

Throughout the day, EarthFest included a variety of events for visitors of all ages, from an interactive story time for the kids to a keynote presentation, “What Fills the Open Spaces: Savanna Stories,” by poet and essayist Laurie Allmann. The day wrapped up with an oak savanna stewardship project; volunteers planted 50 native species in the area undergoing restoration.

**Note: The 2026 celebration of spring will take place on Saturday, May 2nd, 2026. It may have a new name.**

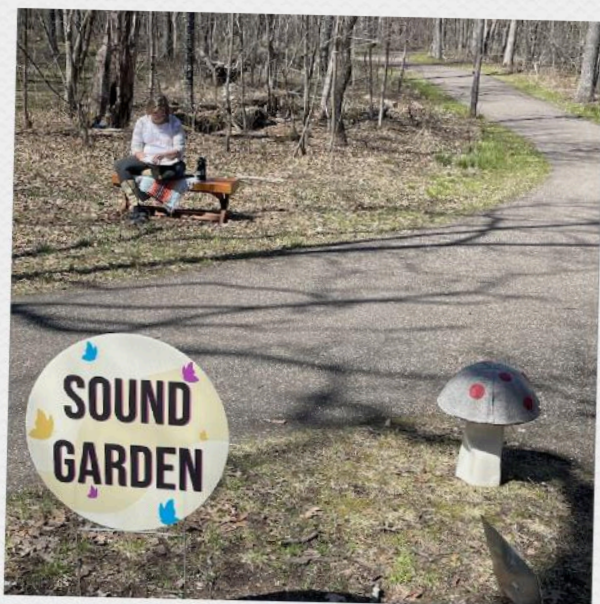




University of Minnesota researcher Caitlyn Jacobson, who co-led the red-headed woodpecker walk with park naturalist Sean Hoppes.



Jenni Webster, naturalist at Interstate State Park near Taylors Falls, led an interactive and entertaining story time.



Visitors paused to take in an Earth Day sound garden presented by the park's artist-in-residence JG Everest.



Red-headed woodpeckers made cameo appearances for eagle-eyed visitors!



## Our river clean-up crew!

Ten volunteers paddled the St. Croix from Sunrise landing to the Wild River State Park landing on July 12 to clean up trash along the way. They didn't find a lot of trash — which is a positive — but participants did enjoy an abundance of nice weather and companionship. Definitely a success by any standard!

**Next year's Friends river clean-up will be Saturday, July 11; check our calendar at [www.friendsofwildriver.org](http://www.friendsofwildriver.org) for details.**



## FWRSP welcomes Eric Reed, assistant park supervisor

Please join FWRSP in welcoming Eric Reed as the assistant park supervisor at Wild River State Park. Eric assumed his new position in April 2025 after serving in a variety of roles with the Minnesota DNR since 2010, starting with watercraft inspector in the Chisago Lakes area and most recently as 3B assistant area supervisor in St. Paul.

Eric knows Wild River State Park well, having grown up eight miles from the park, which he visited frequently in his younger years. In addition, one of his DNR jobs was night security intern at the park in 2012. Eric studied environmental sciences at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He enjoys a broad range of outdoor activities, including fishing, hunting, and spending time with his two young children Oakley (2) and Willow (8 months). He's especially passionate about passing on his love for the outdoors to the next generation.





## Mark your calendar and register for Otter Trotter 5K run on Oct. 11

You know the scenery will be spectacular, the camaraderie unparalleled, the fresh air exhilarating. The big question surrounding this year's Otter Trotter 5K run on Saturday, October 11, at Wild River State Park: Will someone surpass last year's course record time (18 minutes, 32 seconds) set by Cody Anderson?

Plan to participate — as a runner, walker, spectator or loud cheerleader — and find out for yourself! This year's Otter Trotter, also known as the Wild River Run, starts at 10 a.m. and follows a course both on paved and unpaved surfaces. Here are other key details to know:

- The race begins and ends at the park's picnic shelter.
- Day-of-race registration is 8:30 to 9:45 a.m.; register before Oct. 1 for a discounted entry fee and to purchase an Otter Trotter t-shirt.
- The top finishers will receive awards, and all runners under age 12 will receive a nice prize.
- Enjoy refreshments and socializing with other participants before and after the run.
- Park staff will have woodpecker activities in the picnic area.

Find more details and a registration form at <https://friendsofwildriver.org/5Krun.php>.



## New upcoming event: Festival of Belonging, presented by artist-in-residence JG Everest

Everyone is invited to Festival of Belonging, a new event at Wild River State Park, scheduled for the following weekends:

- August 23-24
- August 30-31 (Labor Day weekend)
- September 12-14
- September 20-21



Festival of Belonging is the culminating project of composer JG Everest's yearlong MNPAiR Artist Residency at Wild River State Park. It will feature a variety of performance installations, all tailored to the park. In various park locations, visitors will experience music, dance, storytelling, nature walks, and presentations.

The event is free and family-friendly; however, state parks vehicle permits are required. For more details, including a daily schedule, check the Festival of Belonging web page at: <https://waveletscreative.org/festival-of-belonging/> or the park's events page. Note: Some events require advance registration; this will be noted with the event descriptions.

## ECRAC grant will extend MNPAiR Artist Residency

The groundbreaking work of Wild River State Park's artist-in-residence JG Everest will be extended, thanks to a \$5,000 grant awarded by East Central Regional Arts Council (ECRAC) to Friends of Wild River State Park.

This means you'll be able to enjoy JG Everest's signature sound gardens into September. His MNPAiR Artist Residency ended on August 30. The ECRAC grant enables the Festival of Belonging to continue for an additional two weekends in September (see separate article).



Submitting the application for an ECRAC grant was a collaborative effort between JG Everest and FWRSP. This arts grant is a first for FWRSP, according to Jan Kozlovsky, board member and treasurer. It will be augmented by matching and in-kind funds from FWRSP (\$2,000) and Wavelets Creative, JG Everest's community arts organization.



*This activity is made possible in part by a grant from the East Central Regional Arts Council with funds appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature from its general fund.*



# Connecting deeply with Wild River State Park

By Park Naturalist Sean Hoppes

Spring was skipping along just fine, until bam — garlic mustard popped up! The aroma was intoxicating...if you enjoy the smell of a thousand pieces of roasting garlic bread. Garlic mustard is a lovely plant in its Eurasian homeland. But released into the wilds of Minnesota, it outcompetes the cherished woodland species that are homes and grocery stores for native wildlife. Thanks to early detection and a rapid response by volunteers, we pulled all the patches, except for an area on the River Terrace Loop that's too large. We will do our best to keep it contained to that area.



Park staff do the best they can with their time to keep the park looking nice. But with about 7,000 acres and many invasive species, volunteers help us do more to steward the land. You can help, even if you only have a couple hours to spare:

- Sept. 21: Cut understory brush on an Oak Savanna Restoration Volunteer Day.
- Sept. 14 and 28, Oct. 5: Join a team on a seed collecting workday to continue diversifying prairie plant communities.
- Oct 25, Nov 1, 15, and 22: Enjoy soup and bread with other “Buckthorn Buddies” before cutting an invasive species.



For those who wish to engage in another way, come to an interpretive program!

The fall astronomy programs feature University of Minnesota graduate students at Universe in the Park and naturalist Sean for Look to the Stars in September and October. Also, mark your calendar for September 20, 10 a.m. to noon, for Oaks, Fire, and Climate Change with author Heather Holm.

These and many other programs can be found on the park's events calendar (use the QR code below).

Scan here to view the Wild River Event Calendar





## We help keep bicycles rolling at the park

When he noticed a bike station at another state park, FWRSP board member Dave Kozlovsky was inspired — or maybe we should say pumped. Anyway, Dave thought this would be a good investment for Wild River State Park, and the idea became reality. Currently, the park has two Friends-funded bike stations, located outside the trail center and campground shower building. Besides air pumps for tires, the stations feature a variety of tools to make bicycle adjustments. In this photo, Gary Noren tops off the air in his tire at the trail center bike station.



## Check out our Little Free Library in the campground



The Little Free Library (LFL) has become a staple in neighborhoods across the country. But a LFL library in a state park? Not so common! In fact, Wild River State Park may have been the first state park in the country to host a LFL. A project of the Friends group, our library is located near the D Lane shower building in the campground.

The idea for a LFL at the park originated with former Friends treasurer and board member Bob Walz. Former president and board member Brad Bjorkland built the library, designed as a mini version of the park's visitor center; it was installed at its present location in 2014. Current board members Lisa Otto and Micki Husnik now volunteer to monitor the library and keep it stocked with donated books.

The LFL program's premise is simple: "Take a book. Share a book." However, you can imagine that not everyone arrives at a campground with a book to share. For this reason, we welcome donated books for readers of all ages, especially

books on nature-related topics. Drop off donated books at the park office for pickup by our volunteers. Leave a note with your contact information if you need a receipt.

Learn more about the LFL program and its mission here: <https://littlefreelibrary.org>





## Friends of Wild River State Park Membership Options

Thank you for your  
membership!

- ☐ **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

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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 410th St. North Branch, MN 55056

### Option 2: Sign up online and use your credit card

**FriendsOfWildRiver.org**

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



**Join or renew your membership today  
to help make this work possible!**

*Thank you for your support!*

## Apply for FWRSP grant to take Minnesota Master Naturalist course

Are you interested in learning more about the natural world, especially Minnesota's diverse environments? Would you like to share that knowledge with others or put it to use as a volunteer? FWRSP invites you to apply for a grant that will pay for one Minnesota Master Naturalist course, which includes 40 hours of classroom training. You may choose one of three course options: "Big Woods, Big Rivers," "Northwoods, Great Lakes" or "Prairies and Potholes."

Anyone age 18 or older is eligible to apply for the grant. If selected, you'll be reimbursed for the cost of your course. Keep in mind that you'll be expected to volunteer at least 10 hours at Wild River State Park. Get more information about the course at [www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org](http://www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org). Apply for the grant at our website: [www.friendsofwildriver.org/grantfundsdwnld.php](http://www.friendsofwildriver.org/grantfundsdwnld.php).

The Minnesota Master Naturalist grant is made possible by the Stan Nelson Naturalist Fund.



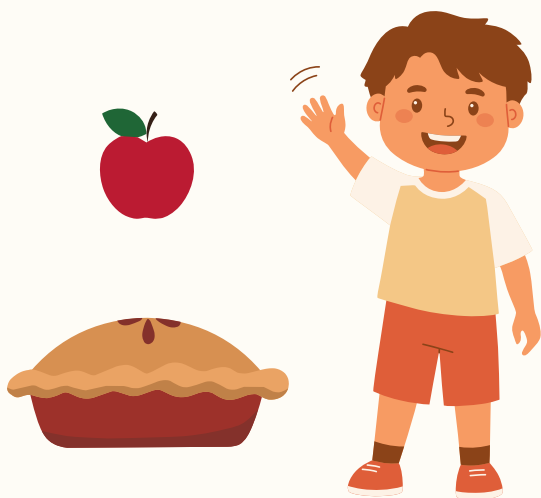


## Friends of Wild River State Park

17190 410th St.  
North Branch, MN 55056



# VISIT US AT THE ALMELUND APPLE FESTIVAL



If you're attending the Almelund Apple Festival on September 21, be sure to stop by the Friends of Wild River State Park table and say hi! The festival, which runs from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Amador Heritage Center Museum and Swedish Immigrant Log Farm, features fun educational opportunities, specially geared toward kids, as well as scrumptious apple desserts, entertainment, arts and crafts, demonstrators and much more. See you there!

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup> FROM 11:00AM-4:00PM**

Find details at [friendsofwildriver.org/Applefest.php](http://friendsofwildriver.org/Applefest.php)