



# Minneopa Messenger

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park  
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## SUMMER GENERAL MEETING, JULY 17

### ANTHROPOLOGIST MIKE SCULLEN ON NATIVE AMERICANS IN MINNEOPA

The summer general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, July 24, 2003 at 7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato.

At the meeting Professor Mike Scullen of MSUM will present a program with slides entitled, "Native American Utilization of the Minneopa Area." He will focus in particular on plants and how the early inhabitants used them ("With their knowledge of plants they could treat the common complaints like colds and sore backs about as well as the Mankato Clinic can"). As always, there will be coffee, tea, and snacks.

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### ELAINE FEIKEMA IS THE NEW ASSISTANT PARK MANAGER

*[In place of the usual "Park Manager's Corner," Elaine Feikema, the new assistant park manager, was invited to write her own introduction to the Friends community. It follows. Welcome, Elaine!]*

After 17 years of service, my state park career brings me to Minneopa, a place where people have gathered for thousands of years. I graduated from Mankato State University in December, 1983 with a biology major. Following college I worked for The Nature

**(See "Elaine Feikema," p. 3)**

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well, we finally know how our State Parks came out in this year of NO NEW TAXES. The yearly sticker went up from \$20 to \$25, still a good buy. The daily fee is a different matter. It went from \$4 a day to \$7, which could hurt people and cut down on visits to the park. I would encourage people to get the annual pass. We also should take time to thank the staff, who are asked to do more with less. That is not easy to do, and we hope things are better next budget session.

The program for our July 17th meeting is something I love, trying to get a glimpse at the past. Mike Scullin will give a program on the prehistoric inhabitants of the Minneopa area. We are lucky to have a professor from MSUM as a friend and neighbor who will take his time to show us slides and speak to us. So bring a friend and join us for a fun evening.

Just when you think it has gone away, the DM&E Railroad is in the news again. They have made a deal with the Union Pacific Railroad to use two miles of their track to get through Owatonna. Will a Mankato deal be next?

The Board is always looking for program ideas. Can you help us? If you have a topic or speaker you would like to have for our October or January meetings, please give any of the board members (listed above) a call or drop us a note.

In closing I will remind you what a gem our Minneopa Park is and ask you to show it off to someone who has not been there recently.

LaVonne Craig, President of the Friends  
**MORE BIRDS THAN EVER!**

The 2003 Minneopa Bird Count set records for number of different bird species (72) and individual birds (1,048). The participants had a good workout in the woods, and were rewarded with some interesting sights. Among the species spotted for the first time in the park were the American Pelican and Bald Eagle. The very young and scraggly eagle was perched in the high branches of a dead 30-foot-high tree along the river bank. When the counters approached in a canoe, it stayed put -- maybe it was still unsure of its ability to fly. After several minutes of close observation, the canoeists moved on. The young eagle remained in the treetop.

It had rained during the night, and it still looked like rain when the crew gathered in the prairie picnic parking area at 7 a.m. on Saturday, June 7. But luck was with us again. The clouds came and went and came back again, but it stayed dry and the count went smoothly. This is the fifth year the Friends have run this activity, and most of the counters have been there almost every year, so they are getting familiar with the territory (except Merrill Frydendall, of course, who was completely familiar with the Minneopa habitats before we started).

A new feature of this year's count was the addition of a fifth area. This was the Minnesota River, and it was counted by Brand Frentz and Jim Robinson in a canoe. The new counting area produced some predictable results, e.g. more kingfishers -- they saw five of them, compared to the two seen in all four previous counts. And the eagle would not have been seen without the canoe either.

For total number of birds seen, the prairie area counted by Merrill and Karen Frydendall was the leader with 361 individuals. The hardest work was probably done by Larry Filter, Mike Weigt, Gordon Herbst, and Tim Pulis, who tramped up and down the hills and through the high weeds on the falls side. John Frentz with Chuck and Diane Frost had the pleasure of spotting the flock of pelicans in synchronized flight, their black wing tips and snowy white bodies all

perfectly aligned and moving together. Pelicans in flight are a wonder to see.

But we did not "see" all the birds we counted...because some were identified by song only. Larry Filter, a member of the Mankato Bird Club who has helped out in all five Minneopa counts, explains, "Some of the songs, like the cardinal, are so familiar that you don't have to see it to know it is there. When I know definitely what bird sings that song, I count it." Larry says that he knows at least 30 bird songs for sure. Having seen him in action, that number seems low. In any case, the purpose of the Minneopa Bird Count is to know what birds are present, and a bird whose song is identified is certainly counted.

The most common species seen in 2003 were Canada Goose (79), Tree Swallow (76), and American Goldfinch (73). For five-year totals the Goldfinch is the leader, followed by the Tree Swallow and the American Crow.

A great deal of data has been collected since the first count in 1999 (anyone wanting a copy of the statistics should contact Brand Frentz). The data suggest some things about the birds and nature in general at the park. For example, they suggest that if you spend a few hours on a June morning walking the hills and fields on the falls side, you have a pretty good chance of seeing a Scarlet Tanager and you will definitely see a few Red-bellied Woodpeckers. And there is one broad conclusion from the data that you can bank on: Minneopa State Park is a good place to find a broad variety of resident birds.

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### **FRIENDS ADOPT LOGO**

At the June 2003 business meeting the Governing Board adopted an official logo for the Friends of Minneopa. It is shown below, and appears on the masthead of the *Messenger* too. The logo is the work of member Kim Musser, as is the masthead (with the shrike!). The Board thanks Kim for the generous contribution of her time and talent.

## Elaine Feikema (Cont. from p. 1)

Conservancy for three field seasons doing preserve management and prescribed burning throughout Minnesota. In 1986 I was hired as Seasonal Park Naturalist at Flandrau State Park in New Ulm. Two years later I accepted a year round position at Myre-Big Island State Park near Albert Lea. In 1996 I moved to Area Naturalist for Sakatah Lake, Nerstrand Big Woods and Rice Lake State Parks. I live in Faribault with my husband, Bill, and especially enjoy biking, fishing, hiking and spending time with my family and friends.

As I walk down to Minneopa Falls in early July, the air is filled with the fragrance of basswood trees in bloom. Elsewhere in the park raspberries and mulberries are attracting wildlife and visitors alike. The falls are running fast with all the rain and folks are taking advantage of the spectacular view.

As you can probably tell, the natural world continues to reward me. I enjoy my work of preserving and protecting resources as a way to provide a much needed service in our community. As Minneopa's Assistant Manager I find my interpretive background a valuable tool to apply to the various day-to-day tasks. Today, park managers work hard to balance the three-fold mission of resource management and protection while providing services to our visiting public and interpreting the important park stories. It is a tremendous responsibility to accomplish amidst greatly reduced budgets and staff hours.

In spite of the economic times I am happy to be at Minneopa among capable staff. Each day I learn more about the park and appreciate meeting folks who are weaving Minneopa into the fabric of their lives. Over the summer I hope each of you will take the time to stop at the park and introduce yourselves. I'm looking forward to meeting members of the community and Friends of Minneopa State Park.

Elaine Feikema, Assistant Manager, Minneopa State Park

## Are There Any Junior Naturalists Out There?

If you know a boy or girl who is interested in nature and likes to learn, the Minnesota DNR has a program that could be rewarding for them. It is the "Junior Park Naturalist" program. The program is free of charge, and leaves the initiative to carry out the activities and meet the requirements up to the young person and a supervising adult. A grandparent and grandchild might be a perfect combination!

The program has three sections, for the three Minnesota biomes -- prairie, hardwoods, and pinelands. A boy or girl who completes a section gets a handsome badge that can be sewn on a shirt or jacket. If they complete all three, they get four badges, one for each section plus a "Nature Expert" badge.

But it is not so easy to meet all the requirements. You must attend three interpretive activities and work through an interesting, well-designed, and demanding workbook. The program is aimed at kids from 7 to 14 years old. It might be hard work for a 7-year-old (but possible), and it is not too simple for a 14-year-old. A kid who has completed all the requirements should have a solid knowledge of the ecology of the chosen area, prairie, hardwoods, or pinelands. And it is a very good thing for a young person to feel that they know important things about the real world around us.

So what you do is, get the boy or girl you think might want to become a junior naturalist, the kid who is curious about birds and animals and plants, and take them out to the park. (If you have an independent, self-motivated youngster, just send them out to Minneopa on their own.) The gift shop has many interesting things to buy, but this one is free! Ask for the Junior Park Naturalist booklets, and look them over, see if you and your protege want to do it. It could lead to many rewarding hours for you both, and a nice badge too. Or two or three...

(The programs by Merrill Frydendall described on p. 4 can be applied to meet part of the requirements of the Young Naturalist program.)

## The Editor Speaks Out

For years I have said that entry to State Parks should be free, that the parks belong to the people and we shouldn't be charged for using them. So what do I think of the Legislature's wisdom in raising the daily fee from \$4 to \$7? It stinks. A step in exactly the wrong direction.

It is a vicious circle that began with the idea of charging park users to use their own park. That is wrong and it annoys many people right from the start, no matter how nominal the fee. But then as the price goes up, the money itself becomes a real factor. Someone says, "Let's go for a picnic," and everybody wants to go. The question comes up, "Where should we go?" and a certain number of people, hearing Minneopa, will think of the \$7 and decide to go somewhere else. Does \$7 really make a difference? Yes. Think about public reaction to gas prices: does two cents a gallon really make a difference? It sure does -- the station that charges two cents a gallon more will not get the business.

Not only will the new charge discourage a certain number of potential users from coming to the state parks, it also creates a kind of class division between those who have the money to pay the fees cheerfully, and those who don't. In a recent trip to Utah and Arizona we visited some pretty expensive state and federal parks. For the most part the cars were new and the people were well-dressed -- the parks seemed a little like upscale resorts, with the fabulous Canyonlands as a setting. And I had the impression that if the daily fee at these parks were bumped up, say to \$20 or \$25, the people who are visiting the parks wouldn't mind much. The people who would mind already aren't coming. I know it's not so simple, but I felt that there was something unfair, that it costs so much that a certain part of the population is discouraged from visiting these beautiful public places.

There is one case of a great park that welcomes everyone free of charge. That is our own Minnesota National Park -- Voyageurs. Again, I know that there are special circumstances, but

the bald fact is that you do not have to pay to visit Voyageurs National Park, you do not go through an entrance and get admitted by a ranger, you just go to the park and enjoy it. No hassle at all. Really. It is one happy exception to the pernicious trend to make the public user pay to use public property.

If the Legislature truly has wisdom, this daily fee increase will be repealed at the first opportunity, and if they want to blaze a pioneering trail they should abolish entrance fees entirely. It's right in principle, and I would love to see it. But I am not going to hold my breath until it happens...

*[The opinions expressed in this column belong to editor Brand Frentz personally and do not in any way reflect an official position of the Friends organization. The Messenger encourages exchange of ideas and opinions and invites submissions on this or other park subjects.]*

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## Friends Sponsor Nature Programs

Merrill Frydendall, retired biology professor and stalwart Friends member, has volunteered to share his time, expertise, and experience with the public at Minneopa this summer. He will offer two Sunday afternoon walking programs, on July 20 and August 17, beginning at 3 p.m. and lasting about two hours.

Merrill's topics will be "Prairie Birds" (July 20) and "Vegetation and Prairie Ecology" (August 17). Interested persons should meet at 3 p.m. in the picnic area parking lot on the prairie side of the park. The programs will involve moderate walking while Merrill explains what we are seeing, and what is happening on the prairie that we don't see.

As anyone who has had the good fortune to walk in the woods (or on the prairie) with Merrill knows, it is both a pleasure and an education. He not only explains things clearly, but he will answer almost any question you can come up with.

This is an opportunity for the whole family, adults and children. While it is directed primarily at adults, the events also qualify as "interpretative programs" under the Minnesota State Parks "Junior Naturalist Program" (see story on p. 3).

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*The Minneopa Messenger, 20499 555 Lane, Mankato MN 56001, is edited by Brand Frentz,*

*who is responsible for any unattributed material.  
If you have comments or questions or want to  
submit material, call Brand at 947-3268.*