



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 26, July 2004

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DM&E SETBACK IN COURT RULING

The U.S. 8th Circuit Court of Appeals recently affirmed the earlier ruling of a three-judge panel that the federal regulatory agency's approval of the DM&E Railroad's coal train project must be suspended pending a proper study of certain major environmental concerns. The specific issue is far-reaching and very complex: what impact the increased use of coal for power generation as the result of building the new DM&E line would have on global warming and on air quality in the United States. The only appeal by DM&E is to **[Cont., p 4, DM&E]**

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SUMMER MEETING -- WILDFLOWERS

The summer meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, July 22, 2004, at 7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. The program, entitled "Wildflowers," will be presented by Friends member **Norma Carstensen**. Norma is a talented photographer who has given close attention to local wildflowers for many years. She has been a winner in the Minneopa Photo Contest several times. Norma will show and talk about some of her favorite slides of the flowers. There will be refreshments too. See you there!

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Harriet Mason, President of the Friends

Many visitors took advantage of the free entry to Minneopa State Park on Sunday, June 6, 2004, and came to the open house. It was heartwarming to have so many people in the park, at the Seppman Mill, on the nature walk, and at Minneopa Falls. All of us wish to thank Professors Win Grundmeier, Merrill Frydendall, and Bob Douglas for their participation.

Once again, I invite all members to attend the board meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 pm. The meeting location is always "to be announced," so do check with a board member if you wish to attend.

Since the last newsletter much has transpired concerning Minneopa Creek and the Northstar Ethanol Plant planned for Lake Crystal. Minneopa Creek is no longer the preferred destination for discharge water from the plant. According to the Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW), the discharge water will be piped to the Minnesota River, entering the river near Judson. However, surface runoff, including runoff during the construction phase, will pass through two **[Cont. p. 2, President]**

Manager's Corner

Howard Ward, park manager

Summer is in full swing and all systems are up and running. Camping has been slowed somewhat by unusual amounts of rainfall. The hordes of mosquitoes are most likely having an impact as well. We currently have two campsites closed due to flooding but these are drying out rapidly and should be reopened in July unless there is more rain.

Engineering has been working on plans for our trailer dump station and I have hopes that this project will be completed yet this fall but nothing is ever certain. We also had a water pipe fail in the falls area stone drinking fountain. Repair required disassembly by a stonemason and many of the stones were cracked and crumbling and could not be reused. A local quarry is now searching for limestone of the same color and material as that which was used in the original 1930s construction. Once a source can be located the rock will be cut to the original dimensions and the fountain will be reconstructed.

Visitors will also notice a new parking area on the west end of our hiking trail. This was constructed by park staff in response to a desire expressed by citizens during the park planning process in 1998. Things may move slowly but we keep pecking away at those projects, when we have the time and money to implement them.

We have two new employees at Minneopa this summer. Sarah Isebrand has filled a vacancy created by the resignation of Mark Peterson. Sarah's responsibilities include night security, public contact work, and some maintenance. Eric Larson is fulfilling a Student Internship requirement and is a student at Vermilion Community College in Ely, Minnesota. Please welcome Sarah and Eric if you should happen to see them.

Indications are that the Assistant Manager position will remain vacant at least until winter. Human resources and division personnel are looking at the possible need to revise the NR Supervisor-I eligibility requirements in order to establish a new list of candidates. This and identifiable salary savings have slowed the filling process.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer at Minnesota State Parks.

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[President, cont. from p. 1] detention ponds into Lily Lake via county ditches and ultimately into Minneopa Creek. The quality of the water entering the creek is of great concern to us.

Officials of the Broin Company, which is building the plant, were asked by a member of the Friends if they were planning to increase the ethanol output beyond 49.9 million gallons per year. They explained that the output of 49.9 million was chosen to avoid the need for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Since that conversation the Blue Earth County Board has removed the cap of 49 million gallons a year from the conditional use permit for the ethanol plant, citing the new law written just this year (referred to in the Free Press, June 16, 2004). Under the new regulation the plant may produce up to 125 million gallons in a year without having to prepare an EIS. As yet, I have seen no published report about the actual annual output planned for the Northstar Plant in Lake Crystal.

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WALK THE PRAIRIE WITH MERRILL

Did you miss the nature walk that Merrill Frydendall led on Open House Day? You're in luck. He is doing it again on August 15. It is the best way there is to see Minneopa. Check the Calendar on page 4 for details.

MY SUMMER CAMPING TRIP

[Editorial note: Friends secretary Richard Keir is an experienced long-distance bicycle rider, and the southwest leg of the Parks and Trails Council's 50th anniversary "50 Parks in 50 Days" bike tour left from Minneopa, so Richard was a natural to represent us on the trip. His report follows. We should note that although Richard makes light of it, he and Bob covered some 350 miles in 6 days, which is quite a feat. And they did it in winds that – from the way it sounds – almost made grown men weep.]

The morning of June 19th I rode to Minneopa where I met former Congressman Dave Minge and his friend Jim. We took pictures of each other and the park sign. Then we rode to Flandrau State Park (more pictures) and located Bob Beck, DNR regional naturalist, who was chosen to be our tour leader. The group of four riders had lunch and made our way to Ft. Ridgely State Park. More pictures of park signs. Camping went well with little mosquito problem. The first day seemed to be the day for flat tires, as Bob and I both had to use our patch kits.

The next day was a very windy (W-SW at 15+ mph) 62-mile ride to Upper Sioux Agency. A few more pictures of park signs. At the end of the day we parted company with Dave and Jim. Bob and I spent the night in a tepee, and to our surprise without the company of mosquitoes. The plains people knew something about avoiding the little pests. We were fed pizza and heard about cataloguing reptiles in the park, which was done by a volunteer group of herpetologists from Minneapolis.

The next day was a short ("only" 54 miles) ride to Camden State Park, but with NW winds at 20 mph gusting to 28. Our camp was in the open, so again we were spared the need for a blood transfusion.

Another "short" ride brought us to Lake Shetek, and a few more pictures. It was nice to have two easier days so that I had a chance to recover from the second day's ride. We met Elaine Feikema, now assistant manager at Lake Shetek. With all the rain this year, the lake has more water than it can handle. They will need

funds to repair the flood damage. As luck would have it, after we had set up our tents we learned that some campers had to leave early and we could have the cabin. We moved to the cabin.

The wind seemed to look forward to our long days, and the ride from Shetek to Blue Mounds was no exception. Winds were generally NW at 25-30 mph with gusts to 53! Since it was a 74-mile trip we stopped at Split Rock State Park only long enough for a picture of the park sign. We got to Blue Mounds a little road weary. After setting up our tents and showering we rode seven more miles into Luverne in search of food.

The last day would take us to Kilen Woods. Neither I nor Bob planned to ride beyond that park. It was a good place to quit -- we had covered all the parks. We hoped for a westerly wind as forecast, but it started out in the north and seemed to want to switch to the northeast. After fighting the wind for 35 miles I sent a distress message to Grace to meet me in Brewster. I had had enough fun. Bob rode on to Kilen Woods to complete the route.

Comments: The parks were not informed until the last minute that the number of riders had been reduced from several to two. They did their best to provide us with great camp sites... The number of riders was to be expected in that most organized bike rides today are "supported rides," i.e. someone hauls your stuff. Few riders are equipped to carry everything themselves (but Bob and I were)... Our fears of being eaten alive by mosquitoes were never realized, thankfully... Food was a concern, as I expected – state parks are not located near restaurants.

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MINNEOPA CENTENNIAL

Sometime in the year 1903, according to Roy Meyer's history of Minnesota state parks, the owner of the land around Minneopa Falls was thinking of clearing the land of trees and pasturing his cattle below the falls. The Free Press found out and an emergency committee of local business people was formed to persuade the state to buy the land for a park. A bill was introduced in St. Paul in 1905, passed, and on April 19 Minneopa State Park was born. The 100th birthday of the park is less than a year off.

[DM&E, cont. from p. 1] the U.S. Supreme Court. It appears that the agency (Surface Transportation Board) and DM&E will not appeal and are preparing to conduct the study.

But DM&E may have a tough time winning the argument. Richard Liebendorfer, MSUM professor and co-coordinator (with Nancy Hamer) of the Mankato Area Coal Train Coalition, believes that this is going to be the end of the line for DM&E. Burning huge amounts of coal, as the DM&E project envisions, would have a significant impact on air quality and contribute to global warming. And, he says, these things are becoming more clearly understood. Indeed, the court's reasoning shows this recognition. Dick points out that the costs of the project are multiplying, far beyond the original estimates, which could stop it too.

Friends of Minneopa should be happy for the park's sake if this project is abandoned. There is no question of the devastating impact 40 huge coal trains running through the park every day would have.

It is too soon to celebrate, but maybe time to be encouraged. And we should thank the two excellent organizations who are pressing this lawsuit all the way: the Sierra Club and Minnesotans for an Energy-Efficient Economy (aka M3E). Now if the winner in the presidential election this fall supports clean air and wants to minimize global warming, we may be rid of the DM&E coal train threat for good. You can beat City Hall!

FRIENDS NOTES

Open House at the Park. This year was our best Open House. Gordon Herbst set up the table in the Falls Pavilion with a display of 30 Photo Contest winners and assorted literature. The crowds showed a lot of interest. In addition, we had three programs: Bob Douglas talking about the falls, Win Grundmeier recalling Lewis Seppman and his mill, and Merrill Frydendall taking his group for a nature walk on the prairie. All three were well attended.

6th ANNUAL MINNEOPA BIRD COUNT

Birds may be the most popular feature of the natural world, with their great variety of colors and songs, and their numbers. And Minneopa is a fine place to see them. Thunderstorms were forecast, but that did not stop the 10 Friends – as young as 9, as old as “don’t ask” -- who gathered at 7 am on Saturday, June 5 to count the birds of Minneopa. We stayed dry and saw nearly 1,000 individual birds of 73 different species. John Frentz’s team estimated that they saw 175 Bank Swallows in a nesting area along the river bank, making them the most numerous species. The next most common birds were Goldfinches (73), Canada Geese (71), Cedar Waxwings (57), and Crows (45).

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2004 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 22, Thursday, 7 p.m. Summer meeting of the Friends of Minneopa, Norma Carstensen will show her slides of “Wildflowers” in the North Mankato Police Annex meeting room

August 15, Sunday, 3 pm, “Vegetation and Animal Life,” walk on the prairie with Merrill Frydendall, meet at prairie side picnic area parking lot.

October 21, Thursday, Fall meeting of the Friends of Minneopa, details later.

November 30, Tuesday, 2004 Minneopa Photo Contest entries must be postmarked by this date.

Note: The Friends’ Governing Board meets monthly on the second Thursday.

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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.