



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 30, July 2005

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Tim Pulis, President Elect 388-7622
Tom Weigt, Treasurer 387-3617

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Friends of Minneopa State Park • 20499 555 Lane • Mankato, Minnesota 56001

SUMMER GENERAL MEETING: PARK MANAGER SEEKS LONG-RANGE PLANNING INPUT FROM FRIENDS

The summer general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, July 21, 2005**, at **7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. Howard Ward, park manager, will present an unusual program dealing with strategic planning for the park. Specifically, he wants to hear from friends of the park, that is, from us. As part of the long-range planning process in the DNR Division of Parks, park managers are talking with the Friends groups to get ideas, hopes, and fears for the future. It should be an interesting conversation, and our opinions are being requested. So come out and let our voices be heard!

As usual, refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

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The new picture book of the park by Gordon Herbst will soon be available – see story on page four!

**HAPPY CENTENNIAL,
MINNEOPA STATE PARK!
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE**

Merrill Frydendall, Friends President

Happy Birthday to Minneopa State Park!

July 3 marked our third attempt to celebrate the park’s 100th birthday. Our first event, the Spring Fling on May 14, took place on a cold, rainy, and windy day. The bird banding was canceled. Small groups of people, bundled up for protection against the cold and rain, attended the plant walk, photo display and the talk about Minneopa’s water.

On State Park Open House Day (June 6) the bird walk, with concentration on the Eastern Bluebird trail, drew only five participants, all members of the Friends of Minneopa. The afternoon events highlighting Minneopa Cemetery, Seppman Mill, and Minneopa Falls were better attended.

On July 3 we put on a birthday party, featuring the Blue Ox Jazz Babies, birthday cake, root beer floats, and games (sack race, three-legged race, spoon egg race and egg toss). The early morning thunderstorm passed quickly, leaving a comfortable warm day for the picnic. Hearing Howard Ward’s estimate of more than 1,400 guests who obviously were enjoying all the activities and **[Continued on page two]**

[President’s Message, from page one]

the display, along with exploring the falls, I feel the birthday celebration was a great success. Thanks to all the Friends members who spent a part of their day serving cake, root beer floats and helping with the games.

I want to send a special thanks to Tim Pulis. In April I suffered a heart attack, followed two weeks later by a stroke. During these critical days of preparing for and carrying out the Centennial activities, Vice President Tim pitched in and took over the President's duties. With help from other Friends and board members he carried out the responsibility of celebrating Minneopa's birthday very well. Thank you to Tim and everyone else!

On a personal note, I am continuing to gain strength after the heart attack and have regained full mobility after the stroke. As the saying goes, "I'm in pretty good shape for the shape I'm in." I hope that soon I will be able to relieve Tim of the Presidential duties.

Merrill

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A NOTE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

It was Merrill's idea to have the "old time" games at the centennial celebration for Minneopa Park. I had some serious doubts that sack races, three legged races, and egg toss would attract many kids raised on computer games. I'm happy to report that I was dead wrong. The games were a huge success. My wife Nancy and I had a lot of fun helping out. Way to go, Merrill – nice job of being master of ceremonies with a lot of energy and cool prizes.

Tim Pulis, Vice President of the Friends

Manager's Corner

The last of three special events commemorating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Minneopa State Park has come and gone. By all measures each was a resounding success. First the Spring Fling held May 14 saw 142 vehicles enter the park for the day. Using the standard Division of Parks factor of 3.2 persons per vehicle, that translates to 454 visitors. Minnesota State Parks Open House Day on June 5 saw 619 vehicles passing through Minneopa's gates. This yields a figure of 1,981 visitors for the day. Finally, our most recent event held July 3 resulted in a vehicle count of 557 vehicles, which means 1,783 visitors. While the July 3 event saw slightly fewer vehicles than the June 5 event, the July visits appear to have been longer and as a result roads and parking were overflowing throughout the day. Park staff received many compliments on the event and I would like to thank all of the volunteers who helped make each event a success. We could not have done it without you.

Some additional July 3 information; we served 400 pieces of birthday cake in approximately two hours. Two kegs of 1919 Root Beer and seven five-quart pails of ice cream were distributed as well during the same period. Merrill Frydendall reported approximately 36 children participated in the games he supervised. Our revenue for the week of July 4, 2005 was 41% above that for the same period in 2003 and 19% above what it was in 2004. This is despite the fact that camping was below normal for the holiday weekend due to the uncertainties of a possible state government shutdown.

I hope those of you who were in attendance had an enjoyable day. It was a celebration fitting for the birthday of one of our state's most treasured resources.

Howard Ward, Park Manager
THE RAMBLING EDITOR

Wednesday, June 29 Free Press – “Shutdown would cancel Minneopa party.” Thursday, June 30 Free Press – “State parks may not close.” Friday, July 1 Free Press – “Parks yes, rest stops no. State in partial shutdown.” Then on Monday, July 4 the newspaper reported a huge turnout and a successful old-time picnic to celebrate Minneopa’s 100th anniversary. Division of Parks director Courtland Nelson came to the party, and spoke briefly to the crowd at the pavilion. He mentioned that we all had feared the picnic might be canceled, and he beamed with pleasure at all the happy people who had gathered to say “Happy Birthday to Minneopa,” and – as always – to enjoy a day in the park, one of the prettiest, most peaceful and welcoming parks in the state. And one of the oldest too.

It was simply a great day for Minneopa. Manager Howard Ward calculates (see his column) that there were nearly 1,800 visitors! They made quick work of all the free ice cream, soda pop, and cake and had a laughing, jumping good time at the traditional picnic games Merrill Frydendall organized. The spirited music of the Blue Ox Jazz Babies rounded out the picture of a complete success. Congratulations to everyone who participated, and to Minneopa Park itself.

And yet...it almost didn’t happen. A week before the event the state government had not passed a state budget and the governor ordered all departments to prepare and plan for a government shutdown on June 30, the Constitutional deadline for passing a budget.

This is when the Free Press story was headlined: “Shutdown would cancel Minneopa party.” Not just that. Over 3,000 people had camping reservations at state parks for the Fourth of July weekend, but the parks would be closed. And many, many thousands of Minnesotans and visitors from out of state would want to visit the parks in early July, in the middle of the vacation season. But it looked like they would find gates down at the entry roads and signs reading: “Minnesota Government temporarily shut down.” That doesn’t sound so good for a state where we pride ourselves on

good citizenship and leading the nation in voter turnout, educational level, and so on.

But then hope sprang up. A bill appeared in the legislature to get a budget for a few departments only, mainly the DNR. It seemed clear that it was specifically the parks that the legislature and governor felt could not be shut down. And they weren’t. On Thursday before the big holiday weekend, the actual budget deadline day, the House and Senate passed and the governor signed a bill that kept the DNR and a few other departments running.

When the budget deadline passed Minnesota government shut down – partially! The state avoided total disgrace (we could claim a mere “partial shutdown,” still a disgrace, but with an asterisk), and the Minnesota State Parks were open for the Fourth of July weekend and the heavy visitation it always brings.

There is a lesson to be learned from the last few weeks here, and it is this: Minnesotans love the State Parks. They are special. The political leaders were ready to fight for their principles to the point of actually shutting down the government, but when they remembered that this would close the State Parks they knew that was something that they had better not mess with. And they didn’t. And the Minneopa picnic was a huge, deserved success as people from all over South Central Minnesota and farther away too poured into this beautiful place.

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Governing Board Gets Help, Needs More

The Governing Board of the Friends, which meets once a month to take care of ongoing business and planning, has a new member – Mary Hollingsworth joined in June. Her input will be much appreciated, but we still need one more person. As the masthead of the newsletter shows, there is no secretary. Board member Gordon Herbst has been doing the job temporarily, and well, but a “real” secretary would be very welcome.

MINNEOPA BIRD COUNT PASSES 100

The Seventh Annual Minneopa Bird Count was held on a wet, gray Saturday, June 4. Thirteen people came out, the largest group we have had, which was especially surprising for a rainy morning. The weather had an impact on the birds too, but unlike the people it appears that they were staying home. The total number of birds seen was the lowest in the history of the count. Still we saw and/or identified* 486 individual birds of 69 different species.

Two perennial favorites tied for most common: robins and goldfinches (54 apiece). The next most frequently seen were mourning doves and field sparrows (25 apiece). Among the most unusual birds were a green heron, Acadian flycatcher, and Swainson's thrush. The handsomest were a male scarlet tanager and two bobolinks, although the colors on the indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks, Baltimore orioles, and the male goldfinches added cheer to the morning too. By seeing seven species in the park that had not been seen before (during these official counts) we were able to raise the total number of species documented in Minneopa Park in early June to 103. Join us next year as we keep building our list of Minneopa birds.

* How could we identify a bird without seeing it? By its call. For example, everyone knows the mourning dove's call. Or the two species of cuckoos we identified. You rarely if ever see a cuckoo, but their calls are clear and distinctive, and the count usually turns up both the black-billed and the yellow-billed cuckoo. By their calls.

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NEW MINNEOPA MESSENGER EDITOR?

Barb Jackowell wrote the first six issues of the *Minneopa Messenger* and got us on our way. I took over for No 7 in October 1999 and have done the newsletter ever since. Six years and 24 issues! Maybe it's enough. This would be a good time for new blood, new ideas, and a new editor. The organization is riding high on the successful centennial events. I would be happy to show a new editor all I know (not that much, but I do have some shortcuts and tricks) and even work alongside for a while. Is anybody interested? It can be a lot of fun. You get to see your name and your ideas in print, all the time...

Brand Frentz

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"Like wind and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech." (Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac)

COMING SOON – GORDON'S BOOK!

After several years of hard work collecting, identifying and understanding, then organizing historical pictures of Minneopa, Gordon Herbst has completed his book about the park in time for the centennial. It is a book of pictures with captions covering the period from 1905 to 2005. Only Gordon, who grew up on the edge of Minneopa and seems to be related to most of the people in the area, could have gotten all these pictures and figured out what they were. The book, of approximately 175 pages, is being published by Julie Schrader's Minnesota Heritage Press and is expected to be on sale at the park, at the historical society, and through the publisher in September.

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.

The cover of Gordon's Book