



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 32, January 2006

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

WINTER ANNUAL ELECTION MEETING & WILDLIFE MANAGER JOEL ANDERSON

The winter general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa, at which new officers will be chosen, will be held on **Thursday, Jan. 19, 2006**, at **7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. Joel Anderson, the DNR Area Wildlife Manager for the last five years (26 years in the DNR), will give a program on shallow lake management. Joel's territory includes wildlife mecca Swan Lake in Nicollet County and much more.

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

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***“Come to the falls
Come to the falls
Shadows lie down there
The cool river calls.”***

***(Opening lines of the poem “Minneopa”
by Richard Robbins, 2002).***

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Merrill Frydendall, Friends President

The year of 2005 has ended and so has my term as president of the Friends of Minneopa. It was a great year at the park, especially the celebration of the centennial. The first two events ran into some weather problems, but the day of the birthday party was just about perfect. We had a good crowd and they enjoyed the food, the old photos, the music, the games, and walking around the falls. I hope that the park gets even greater during the next 100 years. I want to thank everyone who helped in any way with our activities at the park this year. Especially, I want to thank Tim Pulis for taking over the leadership of the Friends during my illness.

At the present time two projects are in progress. The first is extending the hiking trail to the far west end of the park. The other is to volunteer our help getting a second camper cabin built.

One of my last duties as president was to take down the Minneopa contest pictures that have been on display at the Blue Earth County Library since early December. I hope that you were able to see them there. If you didn't, be sure to attend the next Friends general meeting. The 20 pictures, **[President, cont. on p. 2]**

[President, from p. 1] showing the awards given by independent judges, will be displayed.

Thank you for allowing me to serve the Friends again. Also, remember that the way to make an organization strong and effective is to volunteer your time, your enthusiasm, and your abilities whenever and wherever a need exists.

Happy New Year to each of you. Enjoy the park. Your Emeriti President, Merrill.

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Manger’s Corner

Sometimes it seems things move slowly in state government and at times it’s easy to become frustrated with the rate at which projects are accomplished and decisions are made. Those feelings are even felt at times by those of us within the system. Oftentimes, however, there are many “behind the scenes” considerations that come into play before a project or idea can be advanced. Some of the constraints are statutory in nature. Examples would be the Federal Land and Water Conservation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act or the American Antiquities Act. Other decisions are tempered by limited funding. Decisions to fund projects at any given park must be looked at from the perspective of the Division as a whole. For example, is a trailer dump station at Minneopa more important than upgrading the sewer system at Lake Shetek? Finally, changes that occur must fit the park management plan mandated by the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1965. The bottom line is that we all want to make the best decisions possible that will affect our natural resources and the users who visit them. Sometimes a little extra thought and review helps assure that we make the right decision.

When we reflect on 2005 there have been many accomplishments we can all be proud of. We conducted three successful events celebrating the centennial of the establishment of Minneopa State Park. None of those events could have occurred without the help we received from Friends of Minneopa members. While numbers have not yet been compiled, it appears that revenues generated are up in nearly every category for calendar year 2005, and I am certain we set a new record for total income. In October we began construction of the new falls walkway that will give persons with disabilities access to view the falls. Completion will be prior to July 1, 2006. Engineering work has been completed for a trailer dump station and I have been assured construction will be a high priority in the next bonding bill. We have good reason to believe that we may be receiving a second camper cabin and a decision on a trail extension is pending. We began the winter with the best skiing conditions we have seen in four years and with a little help from Mother Nature we hope that can continue.

In conclusion I would just like to thank everyone for all your help this past year and for the common goal we share, that of making Minneopa State Park as good as it can be. May the New Year bring you peace, happiness and a renewed appreciation of our natural resources.

Howard Ward, park manager

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A SECOND CAMPER CABIN?

At its December meeting the governing board discussed the possibility of a fund-raising drive to build a second camper cabin at the park. The current cabin is very popular and there is room for a second one. The estimated cost is about \$20,000. The Friends have substantial savings and the DNR would probably share the cost. In-kind services by the Friends could help out too. The board will continue to study this.

DM&E – STILL COMING!

The Mankato Free Press has given extensive coverage to the latest developments in the DM&E Railroad saga, so the story is probably familiar to friends of Minneopa. But it is important enough to review here so that no one misses it.

The DM&E's primary concern in recent years has been to get financing (reportedly \$2.5 *billion*) for the huge project. There have been court battles (notably the environmental challenge, which appears to have ended with an administrative order on Dec. 30) and there may be more, but money was the main hang-up. DM&E President Kevin Shieffer said that the free market would provide for them, but years passed and no private sources would support the project. The market was not providing, so the DM&E turned to Uncle Sam.

During the 2004 Senatorial campaign in South Dakota, Republican candidate John Thune was employed by DM&E in a public relations capacity. Needless to say, DM&E supported him strongly; he was a paid consultant for DM&E and also received campaign dollars. Thune defeated incumbent Tom Dachle and took office in 2005.

What happened then can be called legitimate legislative procedure, but if so it is a pretty sneaky process. Thune added a few phrases to a huge transportation bill in the Senate. No one appears to have paid any attention to this, and Thune himself made no announcements. In the big debate over the main provisions of the bill, including public outcry about pork barrel projects, Thune's additions went unnoticed. The bill was finally passed. Not until several months later, in a joint press conference with DM&E president Shieffer, did Thune reveal what his phrases actually meant.

Thune's additions will make it possible – really, almost certain – that the federal government will provide full financing for the DM&E project, and on very favorable terms. Critics call this “corporate welfare,” claiming that what is happening is the government is stepping in to help out a corporation that cannot make it on its own. No private bank would loan them the money, so Thune has fixed it so the federal government will do it.

The DM&E project, if it goes ahead, will have a detrimental impact on Minneopa. The track through the park would be completely rebuilt, causing years of noisy, messy, possibly damaging construction, and the final result could be 20-30 high-speed mile-long trains running right through the park daily. It is sad to contemplate.

Nothing is ever certain, and if we want to make our voices heard about this situation our representatives in Washington are Congressman Gil Gutknecht and Senators Norm Coleman and Mark Dayton.

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Watching Winter with Aldo Leopold

“January observation can be almost as peaceful and simple as snow, and almost as continuous as cold. There is time not only to see who has done what, but to speculate why.

“A meadow mouse, startled by my approach, darts damply across the skunk track. Why is he abroad in daylight? Probably because he feels grieved about the thaw. Today his maze of secret tunnels, laboriously chewed through the matted grass under the snow, are tunnels no more, but only paths exposed to public view and ridicule. Indeed the thawing sun has mocked the basic premises of the microtine economic system!”

From A Sand County Almanac, “January,” by Aldo Leopold, © 1949.

TOM WEIGT WINS PHOTO CONTEST

The 2005 Minneopa Photo Contest was strong in both quantity (over 50 entries) and quality (come to the Annual Meeting, when the top 20 will be on display and you will see). When the three judges had made their final picks, the winners included some familiar names and some newcomers.

The winning photograph was by Friends Treasurer Tom Weigt, a study in black and white – bare winter trees and snow in the falls picnic area near the historic outbuilding. Second place went to Ernie Lombard for his shot of a wide-branching, leafless oak tree silhouetted against a lavender sky. Jeanne Reiner, another new contest winner, took third with a photo of the lower falls in spring, shot from a uniquely low vantage point.

The Honorable Mention awards went to Judy Brown (Seppman's mill), Friends President Merrill Frydendall (fungus on a birch tree trunk), Jeanne Reiner (another look at the lower falls), and Ernie Lombard (the falls again).

In addition to the winners and honorable mentions, each judge can choose one more photograph deserving of special notice. The

Judge's Awards went to Ashley Paegel (a woman and child on the stone stairs to the creek), Merrill Frydendall (close-up of a honey-bee in a daisy), and Jeanne Reiner (black-and-white photo of graffiti – "fools' names" – on a rock wall in the creek gorge).

Tom Weigt donated his first prize of \$50 to the Friends. Because Tom is an officer of the organization, it is worth mentioning that when the judges examine the photographs there is nothing that tells them who the photographer is. That information is kept secret until the awards are decided on, so that there can be no question of favoritism.

Second prize was \$30 and third was \$20. In addition, all winners receive a one-year subscription to the Messenger.

The 2006 Minneopa Photo Contest is now open, using the same basic rules as before, and will run until October 31. You can request the flier with full rules from any officer of the Friends.

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.