



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 34, July 2006

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

JOHN CROSS WILL SPEAK AT SUMMER GENERAL MEETING

The summer meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, July 20, 2006**, at **7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room below North Mankato City Hall, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. **Please note** that this is across the parking lot from the usual Police Annex meeting room.

John Cross, prize-winning photographer who has worked for the Mankato Free Press for more than 30 years, will talk about his philosophy of photography and photo-journalism and show some of his pictures taken through the years. Among his other activities, John has been a judge in the Minneopa Photo Contest several times, so he knows what makes a good picture. Come and learn from the master!

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

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Tim Pulis, President of the Friends

Whenever I go to a Minnesota State Park that's new to me, I find it a most exciting time. After admiring the colorful entrance sign and checking in at the contact station, I can't wait to look at the park map and find out what trails are the best to hike. The trail systems are the heart and soul of the park experience for most visitors. They provide maintained and safe ways to get to a myriad of natural and cultural niches. The trails can vary from short and flat to long and strenuous, appealing to all varieties of visitors.

This past spring I went to Frontenac State Park to bird watch. This park is located on the Mississippi River and has trails leading to a wide variety of habitats. There is a bluff trail leading to a panoramic view of Lake Pepin, a three mile prairie loop, and a trail thru bottom lands over a raised board walk to a sandy beach on the river. Frontenac has 13 miles of trails compared to Minneopa's 4 miles. Of the 65 state parks in Minnesota, only three have fewer miles of hiking trails than Minneopa.

I recently explored Beaver Creek Valley State Park, a park half the size of Minneopa yet with twice the miles of hiking trail. Last fall I fished the Minnesota River and camped at Upper Sioux Agency State Park. This Park is again half the size of Minneopa, yet has 4 times as many miles of hiking trails plus many miles of horse trails.

At Minneopa State Park I feel there is a need for work on three trail areas. The first is to rebuild the washout on the trail around the falls. This washout occurred in 1993 after a 100 year rain event of 9 inches. It has been barricaded ever since. Whenever I'm hiking [Continued on page 2]

[Cont. from page 1] below the falls, I've had people ask about why they can't get through. By repairing this section, it would provide once again a wonderful short loop over the falls bridge, down the WPA stone stairway, over the creek on the wooden bridge and then back up stone steps to the pavilion area. Our Friends of Minneopa group is willing to pay \$3,400 to a local engineering company to design a permanent fix. We hope the State looks at this as a jumping off point to repair a problem that is at the heart of our park, the falls area.

The second improvement is to expand an existing trail. This would be a two mile extension of the existing bluff trail west of the camping area. The trail would continue to be level and extend past the mill road into a beautiful wooded section with several views of the river and then loop back to the mill road.

Access to the Minnesota River is the third trail area I feel needs consideration. The original trail proved to be a maintenance issue with floods damaging bridges and washing out the bank. I have fond memories of cross country skiing the three mile loop down one old wagon road, along the frozen river and back up another old wagon road. While the loop aspect of this trail is no longer feasible, I believe we could formalize a hiking trail down the westernmost old road, under the RR tracks and down to the river. It seems a shame to have a park on the Minnesota River with no easy access to it.

Minneopa Park is an important part of our local recreational picture. I hope we can improve and energize it by bringing more miles of trails to get to some truly gorgeous areas of our park.

Managers Corner: New Assistant Manager Steve Rose Introduces Himself

Park Manager Howard Ward

I am happy to be able to report that the vacant Assistant Manager position at Minneopa has been filled by Steve Rose. We are fortunate to have been able to acquire an individual who brings with him so many years of valuable education and practical experience operating and protecting our state park resources. When visiting the park please take a few minutes to stop in the office and say hello to Steve. Here in his own words is his letter of introduction:

"I was born and raised in New Ulm, Minnesota and graduated from Minnesota State, Mankato in 1979. I have a double major with a BS in Parks and Recreation, resource management emphasis, and Geography.

"I have worked in numerous capacities for the state of Minnesota since 1977. Some of the parks that I have worked at are Fort Ridgely, Flandrau, William O'Brien, Minnesota Valley Trail, and Kilen Woods. My longest terms have been as the Minnesota Valley Trail Specialist for about 8 years and Manager at Kilen Woods for the last 9 years.

"My hobbies include backpacking, canoeing, hiking, XX skiing, bird watching, bowling, and disc golf.

"I continue to reside in New Ulm, Minnesota and have two daughters.

"I'm looking forward to working with the Friends of Minneopa. I'm a strong believer in working with the local support groups because they have the ability to petition the legislators, and as employees of the State we cannot.

"I believe that our Minnesota State Parks are one of our most valuable assets. They are a depository of landforms that existed when man settled the state. They also contain cultural and historical artifacts that tell the story of our past.

"I have dedicated my professional career to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the Minnesota State Park system. I have traveled extensively to gain knowledge and understanding of the wonderful natural areas that we in the United States have access to. I plan on continuing that tradition here at Minneopa State Park. "

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2006 Minneopa Bird Count

The first Saturday in June this year was a mild, sunny day, offering good conditions for the annual nesting bird count at the park. Thirteen people hiked and climbed through the park and identified 585 birds of 62 different species. This was about average compared with the previous seven years. Several species that had not been seen before were added to the list, most notably the park's signature bird, the Loggerhead Shrike (also the Marsh Wren, Savannah Sparrow, Cooper's Hawk, and American Bittern). The list is now over 100 and still growing. Of course, we also had the pleasure of seeing the colorful birds – Orioles, Cardinals, Indigo Buntings, Goldfinches, and more – and plenty of plain little gray birds too.

The Rambling Editor: Missouri Changes His Thinking

By Brand Frentz

My daughter and her family live in Fort Worth, Texas. She called recently and suggested that we go camping, meet somewhere in the middle and spend a few days out of doors. I jumped at the chance and met her, her husband, and four kids aged 2-11 at Watkins Mill State Park outside Kansas City, Missouri. We knew nothing about the park except that it was the right distance from our respective homes.

The family get-together was fine. We swam and hiked, built fires and threw Frisbees, and generally had fun living out of tents for four days. I also had a close look at a Missouri State Park and was impressed in ways I did not expect.

I knew that Missouri has the dedicated sales tax funding for parks that our Legislature debated this year. Since 1984 Missouri parks have been funded primarily (75%) by a 1/10 of one percent sales tax. That system is now up for re-approval this fall. Signs were posted at various places in the park saying, in effect, "This is what your money was spent for. Keep it coming."

What was it spent on? I don't have official figures, but I know what Watkins Mill State Park pointed out, that a large amount was spent to build a beach on the reservoir (behind a dam built earlier) and to put in a paved trail through the woods around the "lake." Improvements such as two very nice shower buildings were also made in the 98-place campground (which, incidentally, was nearly full on Thursday June 23, and completely full Friday and Saturday, June 24-25, at least half with RVs and trailers).

Two vignettes to give you a feel for the place: Friday morning at 6 am I hiked down to the lake as the sun came over the hill and found a flock of vultures on the shore, turning their backs to the sun and spreading their wings to soak in the morning's first warmth. I went by them, 30 feet away, and they were not disturbed. On my hour-long walk I met four other people, also enjoying the morning quiet. Then Friday night at 11 pm as we bedded down in our tents we had

to gather the kids in from other campsites where they had found friends who were still up and running. About half of the sites had groups of people sitting around fires or lanterns, talking, relaxing, enjoying the evening, which was soothing if not exactly quiet. There was a friendly spirit to the whole campground, sleeping and awake. People smiled and spoke when they met. I had a feeling that almost everyone was having a good time.

I like solitude. I like to be alone on the river and paddle right up to a swimming muskrat or pull into the weeds and watch the swallows swooping and darting as they snatch insects out of the air. I can do that on the river that runs through Minneopa and seldom see another person. But we all enjoyed the Watson Mill campground and park too. And it was clear that several hundred other people, many driving big RVs with strings of lights to hang out around their tables at night, people who hardly left the campsite, were also enjoying being outdoors. The big crowds at the nightly naturalist programs were made up of all kinds of campers.

And when the sales tax comes to a vote in Missouri this fall, I am sure that all those folks camping at Watson Mill Park will approve. They had a wonderful time at the park, outdoors, "camping," whether it was in a simple tent or a train-sized RV. And it is one person, one vote.

Here is the punch line, something I am surprised to be saying: I think we should be talking about more development of our Minnesota State Parks. If Missouri can do it so can we. We should make it easier and more pleasant for large numbers of people to come to the parks, enjoy themselves outdoors, and go home believing that the state parks are a precious asset that needs strong, reliable funding.

By the way, I'm sure you can guess what the entry fee is at Missouri State Parks. That's right – there isn't any. Admission is free. The state parks, after all, belong to the people.

[The above is my personal view and does not represent the position of the Friends of Minneopa. I welcome arguments and will gladly print differing opinions in the October issue.]

Friends Notes

Alan Fitterer has agreed to fill the vacancy on the Friends Governing Board. With Gordon Herbst assuming the job of secretary for the remainder of the year and Harriet Mason taking the position of president-elect, the Board is now at full strength.

The DM&E Railroad building project is looking more likely, as they received final approval from the federal authorities and more or less beat the most recent court challenge. The Mayo Clinic has not given up, however, and Senator Dayton is still trying to stop it.

Photo Contest. The 2006 Friends of Minneopa Photo Contest is underway. Rules are available from any Friends officer. The summer program with **John Cross** could offer some useful tips.

Wildflower Survey. President Tim Pulis is working on the survey and would welcome any reports of wildflowers in bloom, especially the more unusual varieties.

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New Minnesota Outdoors Magazine

Here is one more reason that people who love the outdoors and value our state parks and trails might join the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota. The PTC now gives members a subscription to the magazine Minnesota Trails, and it is worth your time. The magazine is a continuation and expansion of the magazine Minnesota Bike Trails and Rides, but for me it is a whole new thing.

Above all, Minnesota Trails is a source of information, a tremendous source. There are various articles about Minnesota outdoor people, places, and events. But on top of that there are hundreds of pictures plus ads for almost every kind of place and activity you could imagine – information galore.

If you think like I do, you'll like Minnesota Trails. And then maybe you should join the Parks and Trails Council (send \$20 to PTC, 275 East 4th Street, Suite 642, St. Paul MN 55101 – you can mention that you heard it here).

Legislature Comes Through, Partially

The 2006 session of the Minnesota Legislature ended on a mixed note for state park supporters. On the one hand, the bonding bill that was passed included \$25 million for state parks and trails, an amount that pleased us. On the other hand, the proposals for a dedication of part of the sales tax for long-term funding never got reconciled between the House and the Senate. Supporters had hoped that a proposal could be put to the voters this fall, but that will not happen. The bonding bill provides well for the coming two years, but the long-term problem of ensuring funding for the state parks and trails remains up the air. (See "Rambling Editor" on page 3 for what Missouri has done about this.)

The bonding money was split about 50-50 between park and trails, but there was nothing specifically for Minneopa or for the Sakatah Trail, our local state trail. Some of the general funding for state park programs might come to Minneopa, of course. But not for camper cabins; our proposal to help fund a second cabin at Minneopa was apparently submitted too late and we were left out of the official plan.

All three Mankato legislators have been friends of Minneopa over the years and have given support to parks legislation, and all three are retiring this year. We owe thanks to our friends in St. Paul: Senator John Hottinger and Representatives John Dorn and Ruth Johnson. (In passing we should note and thank two other local friends of the parks, Representative Bob Gunther of Fairmont and Senator Dennis Frederickson of New Ulm.) As candidates campaign to replace the three Mankato legislators, we should watch closely to see how they present their positions on support for Minneopa.

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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.