



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 36, January 2007

Tim Pulis, President 388-7622
Harriet Mason, President-Elect 934-3253
Tom Weigt, Treasurer 387-3617
Gordon Herbst, Secretary 625-8393

Merrill Frydendall, ex-President 388-7249
Mary Hollingsworth, Board Member 947-3908
Alan Fitterer, Board Member 386-0707
Minneopa State Park 389-5464

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

Bob Douglas on Local Waterfalls – Don't Miss the Winter Annual Meeting of the Friends!!

The annual elections meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, January 18, 2007, at 7 p.m.** in the Police Annex Community Meeting Room at 1004 Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato, the usual meeting room for the Friends.

Geography professor Bob Douglas from Gustavus will talk about his long study of local waterfalls. We all know that this area is blessed with many falls, but Bob will reveal even more and tell about them all.

There will be a short business meeting with annual elections before the program. The Photo Contest winners will be on display. Refreshments will be served as usual. We hope to see you there!

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Manager's Corner

By Park Manager Howard Ward

While most folks are ringing in the New Year, park management is always busy with year-end procedures. January 1 is a hectic day as there are year-end inventories, revenue reports, fee changes, archive procedures and other transactions that must be completed. These cannot be done prior to January 1 and normal office operations cannot resume until the entire process has been completed. There are a number of fee changes that take effect this January 1 that may be of interest. To list a few, camper cabin rates will increase from \$39 to \$45 per night, rustic camping rates will increase by \$1.00 per night, a new annual motorcycle permit will go on sale **[Manager, Cont., p 2]**

President's Message

By Tim Pulis, President of the Friends

In the history of Minneopa State Park there were two significant periods where the community was heavily mobilized to assist the park.

The first was in 1905. The falls area was private property, not public. It was part of a farm. The owner was thinking of harvesting the trees for lumber. A committee of prominent Mankato people was formed and in cooperation with area legislators money was obtained from the state to form Minnesota's third state park. It was not a given, however, and only the persistence of visionary and dedicated locals kept it alive.

For over 60 years the park remained essentially a 120-acre picnic ground surrounding the double waterfalls. In the late 1960s a 1,000-acre parcel between Highway 68 and the Minnesota River became available. A local committee with the acronym ACT (Active Community Thought) was the driving force in obtaining funds. With help from State Senator Kelly Gage, Representative Gus Johnson, US Senator Walter Mondale, and US Representative Anchor Nelsen, most of the money became available. Local money was still needed and through fund raising buttons, dinners, and donations it was raised just in time. Check the large plaque near the group camping area to see how much of the Mankato area came forward to help financially with the park expansion. Once again this addition was not a given and only by citizen action did it become reality. Many ideas on what to develop were discussed. Some that did not see the light of day were horse trails, a buffalo enclosure, a canoe campground, a boat launch, and a swimming beach. **[President, Cont., p 2]**

[President, Cont.] That brings us to today's park. We don't need additional land so much as enhancing what we already have. Minneopa will never be an Itasca or Gooseberry or Whitewater. However, with a relatively small sum of money, I think we could greatly improve what we've got, making it better for those who currently enjoy it and attracting a new generation of users. The things I think need attention are fixing the falls washout, expanding the trails system including the bluff trail and a trail down to the Minnesota River, more electrical sites in the campground, regular interpretive programs, and a new camper cabin. If Fort Ridgely State Park can get \$1.3 million for improving their golf course, I'm hoping that Minneopa can also secure funding to make needed improvements.

So what's next? Achieving these goals will likely take a combined effort of the DNR, the Friends of Minneopa, and the community at large. You can be part of the solution by joining the Friends of Minneopa. In addition, we are currently looking for a president-elect on our Governing Board. If anyone is interested, please call a Board Member (see phone numbers listed on the masthead). My year as president is over. I enjoyed it immensely and hope to stay involved because Minneopa Park is important to the Mankato area and to me. Thanks for your time.

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[Manager, Cont.] for \$20, and daily vehicle permits will be reduced from \$7 to \$5. By the next issue of *Minneopa Messenger*, I will have the year-end revenue and visitor numbers to share with readers.

December has been a bad month for park vandalism. Incidents included damage to one of the Seppman Mill windows, the Plexiglas in one of the panels of the falls kiosk was smashed, parts of the old railing around the north side of the falls were damaged and our courtesy drop box at the campground contact station was stolen. This was a convenience for cabin guests to deposit keys on checking out. When visiting the park please keep your eyes open and report any suspicious activity or facility damage you see.

If we ever get any snow, Minneopa will have a new snowmobile to use for grooming trails. Our old machine was nine years old and had met its DNR fleet life expectancy. It will soon go on auction. The new replacement is a 2007 Yamaha four-cycle with amenities that include hand warmer handlebars. I was surprised to learn that it weighs 758 pounds. When I asked our regional repair shop supervisor what we should do if we ever get it stuck in deep snow the answer was, "You pull out the key and wait until spring". Let's hope that we get a chance to get it stuck.

Congressman Walz Meets with Friends

The Friends of Minneopa is a non-profit and non-political organization. Its purpose, as the Charter says, is "to preserve, manage, and promote the resources of the park." To maintain our tax-exempt status, the Friends group stays out of election politics and does not support individual candidates. But we have been very lucky to have state legislators who supported Minneopa. Some have been members of the Friends and others have come to meetings and communicated with us. We know that we have friends in St. Paul (and we hope that the newly elected representatives will be among them too).

But we have never had dealings with the federal level, with our Congressman. That changed dramatically when Mankato West geography teacher Tim Walz was elected. He and his family have visited and enjoyed the park many times. Board Member Allen Fitterer knows Tim from school and invited him to meet with the Friends Governing Board about the DM&E. In mid-December Congressman-elect Walz came to Friends President Tim Pulis's home and spent better than an hour laying out his position on the DM&E, responding to questions, and listening to what we had to say.

Tim Walz made a thoughtful and forceful presentation regarding, among other things, the backroom techniques used by DM&E in their loan application and specific problems along the proposed route. We filled him in on Minneopa's problems with it. I believe he was being optimistic, but Congressman Walz said he thinks that DM&E's chances of getting the federal loan money are "about 50-50." His reasoning is that Congress has to authorize the money, and they have serious reservations. He intends to insist that all federal loans be granted with full transparency and full consideration of the proposal's impact. We should be optimistic -- the fight is not over yet!

The Friends Board sent letters to the Federal Railroad Administration and Congress stating our problems with the DM&E proposal. Individual members may express their opinions and feelings by writing, calling, or e-mailing our representatives in Washington: Congressman Tim Walz and Senators Norm Coleman and Amy Klobuchar.

Minneopa Bluebird Trail in 2006

By Merrill Frydendall

Winter is upon us, which means that the breeding season on the Minneopa Bluebird Trail has come to its conclusion. Winter weather indicates that the birds using the nests should have gone South for warmer conditions, but at the Christmas Bird Count on December 16 four Eastern Bluebirds were observed. I guess that the warmer temperatures kept some here. This is the third Christmas Bird Count that we have found bluebirds in the area.

This year was a quite good year for the number of nests started and reaching a successful conclusion. I consider a successful nest as one where the birds built a nest, laid eggs and at least one young was fledged from the box. Again this year there were four species that used the boxes; Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and Black-capped Chickadees. This year 56 nests were attempted and 48 of these (85.7%) were successful. These 56 nest attempts mean that there was 112 % usage of our 50 boxes (several nest boxes were used more than once). Six of the boxes were not used this year. From the 56 nesting attempts there were 289 eggs laid with 234 (81%) hatchings and 207 (72%) of these young birds left the nest boxes. This made for a great breeding success. Following are the records for each of the four species nesting in the boxes.

The bluebirds attempted 27 nests this season, 16 first nestings and 11 second nestings, which produced 115 eggs, of which 87 (76%) hatched; 85 (98 %) fledged. During the first nesting three nests were unsuccessful; two nests were destroyed by House Wrens and the other by a snake. During the last 24 years that the trail has been checked I have banded 1,483 young raised in the nest boxes.

The Tree Swallows did not do quite as well. They attempted 6 nests. They laid only 29 eggs and 26 (90%) of these hatched and they all fledged. Two eggs that did not hatch were infertile and one young was abandoned by its parents.

House Wrens were quite successful this year. They produced 21 nests and were successful

with 15. The unsuccessful nests were destroyed by other House Wrens. The wrens laid 120 eggs, of which 93 (77.5%) young hatched and 75 (81%) of the young fledged.

The Black-capped Chickadees built 4 nests, all of which were successful. There were 25 eggs laid, with 23 (92%) hatching, and 21 (91%) young fledged.

That's it for another year. The nest boxes have been opened for the winter to keep mice from using them. All boxes are bird usable next spring, however, there is some repair that is needed for long term use; maybe this can be done next spring. I hope you and all the birds we raised have a good winter and that next spring the birds will return and present us with another active and interesting season. Until then here's wishing you and all a Wonderful Winter and a Happy New Year.

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Photo Contest Winner – Ashley Paegel!

A striking picture of the falls picnic area by Ashley Paegel, titled "Loneliness," was named the winner of the 2006 Minneopa Photo Contest. Ms. Paegel will receive the first prize of \$50.

Second place went to Friends Treasurer Tom Weight for his "Cabin Sunset" picture of the camper cabin, and named third was an amazing flower picture: "Lady Slipper Glory" by Nancy Haag. The photograph shows a small yellow lady slipper with 17 blossoms!

Four pictures received Honorable Mention: two unusual shots by Kay Helms titled "Self-Portrait at Minneopa Falls" and "Colors of Autumn"; "Radiant Hoar Frost," Norma Carstensen's beautiful photograph of the falls in sunlit frost, and "Streaming Change," another shot by overall winner Ashley Paegel.

The judges selected three Special Choices, two by Randy Wood named "Grass, Tree, Sky" and "Mill in November," and the almost scientifically titled "Tiger Swallowtail on Wild Bergamot" by former Friends president Merrill Frydendall.

The top 20 photographs from the 2006 contest will be on display at the January 17 meeting.

The Rambling Editor: Let's Make a Trail

Anybody knows that a straight line is the shortest way between two points. But it may not be the best way. That certainly applies if we are talking about trails.

Modern highways generally go straight; foot trails meander constantly. The reason is simple: our road builders modify the landscape to accommodate the highway because cars want to get there fast, but trail makers adapt the trail to the landscape because hikers and walkers are taking their time and want to see the natural landscape. So trails go around obstacles, find the gentlest, safest routes up and down, maybe even stay inside the woods rather than traveling in the open where you can be seen. Minneopa is crisscrossed with deer trails, aka game trails. The deer meander along, headed in some general direction but neatly sidestepping trees, rocks, and brush and trying to keep level, avoiding dips and humps. They leave behind trails that people can adopt.

Some years ago I asked park manager Howard Ward if a person could walk "anywhere" in the park and was a little surprised when he said, "Sure, anywhere that isn't marked 'keep out'" (e.g. the cliff just below the falls on the right side). Since the park's trail system is limited (even more since the 1993 flood took away the floodplain trail and the falls loop trail) I have often found myself following game trails or bushwhacking. And enjoying it. Those deer know how to go. There is now a new opportunity for hikers in the park, a game trail that is being adopted by people.

Friends Treasurer Tom Weigt and President Tim Pulis came up with a plan for a new trail last year, in effect extending the loop trail farther west along the crest. Predictably, there was no money for building it, let alone maintenance. So Tim and Tom proposed that we just start walking on the game trail that is there and make the trail with our feet. Howard said that would be all right, and we are doing it. We are the trail makers. It is a primitive trail, but promising.

To try the new trail out for yourself, park at the mini-parking area halfway out on the prairie road

and walk down the loop trail toward the river. A little past the sign where the main trail turns east into the woods there is a clearly beaten-down but narrow trail heading off to the left. That's it. Take it.

At first everything is easy, but a few complications arise as you go along. First, unless you are in fact a deer, there will be some low branches where you have to duck way down. Then after you pass the Anderson Cut-Off, where birches mark the old field road down the hill to the railroad (and the floodplain), the trail is not so clear. Sometimes there are two (or even three) alternatives, and sometimes it's hard to find any. But then you fall back on Howard's Law: you can walk anywhere in the park. Just keep tracking the crest, swing gradually left toward the Mill Road and loop it out. Each time you hike the trail, part or all of it, you are helping develop our trail system. And I'll bet you enjoy the walk too.

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Friends Notes

Have you seen the new bench at the overlook into the Minneopa Creek gorge near the group camp area? It is a handsome piece and solidly rooted, and there are now plans for the Friends to put another one in on the loop trail overlooking the Minnesota River. Special thanks to President Tim Pulis and Treasurer Tom Weigt for handling this project.

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2007 DUES ARE DUE!

If you did not have a chance or forgot to pay your dues with the envelope from the last newsletter, there is still time. Dues are \$5 for students, \$10 for individuals, \$15 for families, and any amount you want to give is welcome.

Simply send the dues to Friends of Minneopa, 20499 555 Lane, Mankato MN 56001. Thanks.

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The Minneopa Messenger, 20499 555 Lane, Mankato MN 56001, is edited by Brand Frenz, who is responsible for any unattributed material. If you have comments or questions or want to submit material, call Brand at 947-3268.