



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 38, July 2007

Harriet Mason, President 934-3253
[Merrill Frydendall, Pres.-elect, 388-7249]
Tom Weigt, Treasurer 387-3617
Gordon Herbst, Secretary 625-8393

Tim Pulis, ex-President 388-7622
Mary Hollingsworth, Board Member 947-3908
[two board members still needed!]
Minneopa State Park 389-5464

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

Steve Kittleson, DNR Wildlife Specialist! – Don't Miss the Summer Meeting

The summer meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, July 19, 2007, at 7 p.m.** in the basement of City Hall at 1004 Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato, across the parking lot from our usual meeting room.

Steve Kittleson, wildlife specialist for the DNR, will present the program on the subject of shallow-lake ecology. These prairie lakes abound in this region, including Swan Lake, the famous bird mecca in Nicollet County. This is the program that was postponed in April.

Refreshments will be served as usual. We hope to see you there!

* * * * *

Manager's Corner

By Park Manager Howard Ward

Since I began writing these a few years back I've often tried to give readers a brief glimpse into some of the challenges facing management of a Minnesota State Park. After all, one of the comments I and other managers often hear from visitors goes something like, "What a great job you have, working outside and experiencing nature."

[See Park Manager, p. 2]

President's Column

By Harriet Mason, president

What is bright orange, vivid blue, yellow, pale purple, gold, lavender, and white in myriad shades of green? Like solving a riddle posed by a child, the answer comes to you when you envision the correct place and time. In this case, July in Minneopa State Park. The orange is Butterfly Weed; the blue, Verbena; the yellow, Gray-headed Coneflower; the pale purple, Purple Coneflower; the gold, Brown-eyed Susan; the lavender, wild Bergamot.

Colors and plants are scattered throughout the park, catching your eye as you walk or drive. You experience different views and color combinations as you move through the park. Sometimes the combination of colors is soothing, other times striking, but always amazing. Occasionally, you will get a glimpse of colorful birds, butterflies, moths, insects and other animals, adding to the enjoyment and educational experience.

The best place to view them all at the same time is by the office as you enter the falls area. This area has been seeded, allowing **[See President, p. 2]**

[Park Manager, from p. 1] Indeed, it is a great job, and I am grateful for it. But little do most folks realize that it is more akin to running a small business than it is to being a naturalist or biologist or even a facility maintenance worker. I consider myself fortunate if I can get out even twenty minutes a day to check on staff or review facilities and resources.

It has been a trying spring. What had been an anticipated vacancy of one staff person turned into two. Then one of the new hires had his responsibilities redirected to help Steve Rose out at Kilen Woods and his backfill made it three new positions to train. That person then resigned and it became four new positions. Recently one of the four has announced he will be taking a promotional opportunity with Division of Wildlife and so there is still a fifth transition yet to come.

Let me just give you one small example of how these events can impact park operation. With each turnover there is a period of being understaffed and then a delay of at least two weeks of training before the new employee is able to function independently without supervision present. During one of the turnovers the resigning employee had been scheduled to work a 1-9 p.m. office shift. Because there was no one to replace him the office was closed at 4:30 p.m. The last person leaving that day, unaccustomed to there not being a later shift, failed to check to see if a camper cabin guest was due in that evening. Sure enough, the guest arrived and found himself locked out. Needless to say, this person was more than a little upset the next morning, and rightfully so.

Now don't get me wrong, the intent here is not to convey, "Woe is me". It is instead an attempt to explain that despite our best efforts in life things are not always as they should be. Human failings, short budgets, unexpected circumstances, and a bureaucratic system can sometimes creep in to make this less than a perfect world. Years ago there was a period when all Minnesota State Park staff wore buttons that proclaimed "Expect Our Best". That saying still holds true and hopefully we still deliver – most of the time!

[President, from p. 1] all the colorful species to grow in close proximity, creating a beautiful array. It is certainly worth the trip to see.

In the coming weeks and months, the colors and combinations will change as the different species bloom, fruit, and seed. In August the prairie will take on a beautiful blue cast, as the Blazing Stars are glorious. By September, the prairie will start to fade and in October the prairie will turn copper and brown. I urge you to visit Minneopa State Park in every season and enjoy the colors and beauty that nature provides.

* * * * *

Friends Notes

The shortage of officers continues, but one person has stepped forward. **Merrill Frydendall** has agreed to become president-elect, with the proviso that he travels frequently and long and will miss a meeting now and then. The appointment must be approved by the general meeting, of course, but just try and object! We still need two board members. In general, the Friends of Minneopa will welcome anyone who is willing to help with our work.

The **2007 Minneopa Photo Contest** is underway and open to all amateur photographers. Pictures must be taken in the park in the last two years. Entries are to be postmarked no later than Oct. 31, 2007. For more information, contact Tim Pulis or an officer.

Don't forget that the Friends of Minneopa have a **website** that provides some interesting stories and pictures about the park. Go to Minneopa.com or Minneopa.org and see.

Following tradition, the first Sunday in June was **Open House** in the state parks, and the Friends again took an active part. Merrill Frydendall led a nature walk, while Win Grundmeier gave his talk about the Seppman Mill. Visitors admired the 2006 Photo Contest winners on display at the Friends booth in the pavilion.

The Benches of Minneopa

By Tim Pulis, past president

As the years slip by and the cartilage in my knees disappears while the arthritis in my back increases, the sight of a well placed bench along a trail is a most welcome sight. If the bench gives you a good view in a great setting it becomes a respite not only for the body but for the soul.

Minneopa State Park has several benches that provide such a great sit that they could be a destination for your walk in the woods in and of themselves. Between my own accidental discoveries and the quizzing of park workers the census of benches in the park tallies 11. Four of these are the more modern style of bench consisting of plastic composite 2X4's with black metal posts set in concrete for the base. They were part of the upgrade at the falls to make it handicap accessible. While these benches are very nice, my musings will focus on the remaining 7 traditional ones scattered throughout the park.

These traditional benches consist of double 2X10's for each of the three legs and 2X6's to support the 2X4's that comprise the seat and back. Long lag bolts and nails hold it all together. Tom Weigt and I put in two of these benches (#6 and #7), one in the summer of 2006 and the second this past spring. After picking the two sites for the benches and ordering them we needed to wait for the DNR to give the ok. Then it had to pass the desk of the archeologist. When the paperwork was done, the physical part started. We averaged 15 hours of work per bench. Three holes are dug precisely the right distance apart and 2 1/2 feet deep. Because bedrock is only 8 inches deep it was a lot of hammer and chisel work. The bench is lifted into place, leveled, and five hundred pounds of cement is poured into the holes. Assuming no vandalism these benches should provide decades of use as places for quiet contemplation.

Bench #1 is located on the north side of Minneopa Creek looking directly down on the upper falls. I only recently noticed this bench. Most people who walk across the concrete bridge separating the two falls are intent on

heading right to view the lower falls. This bench gives you a multi-sensory experience as you can see, hear, and smell the cascading water of the creek. There are two old cedar trees flanking you on each side and a large red oak overhanging the water. Visible to you on this great sit are people picnicking, the bridge, and the pavilion.

Bench #2 is also on the falls side of the park and is located at what I call the middle picnic ground. Walkers used to be able to go to the right of the falls and reach this area with a short stroll on the south side of the gorge. This trail has been closed for a dozen years because of a washout. The bench can be reached now by going across the bridge, down the WPA stone stairway, across the creek and then back up another steep set of stone steps. Because of vandalism there are no picnic tables here anymore. The bench is alone now under a wonderful canopy of mature trees.

The remaining five benches are all on the campground side of the park.

Bench #3 is located a very short walk east of Seppmann Mill. This bench is a true classic because it provides a panoramic view of the prairie below and the river valley for miles east and west. I often imagine I'm looking down on an African savannah with lions stalking a herd of zebras in the tall grass. You can, in fact, see an occasional deer, wild turkeys and soaring hawks. 150 years and more ago there would likely have been a large herd of bison.

Bench #4 is located next to the contact station as you enter this part of Minneopa Park. This bench gives you a view of the prairie looking west and is at the end of the prairie trail.

Bench #5 is located down a path at the western end of the bluff trail. If you want a deep woods location, this is the spot. The bench is surrounded by mature bur oaks and maples. The only sounds you hear are from robins, nuthatches and pileated woodpeckers. Continuing on from here you descend an old farm road to cross a bridge over a spring fed creek, the DM&E railroad tracks and eventually the banks of the Minnesota River. **[see Benches, p. 4]**

[Benches, from p. 3] Years ago when this was part of the cross country ski loop, I used this bench to catch my breath after skiing up the narrow steep trail.

Bench #6 is located on the edge of the bluff looking down on Minneopa Creek back by the farthest group campsite. Go here on a Sunday morning with a thermos of coffee, a couple of blueberry muffins, and the newspaper. Watch the creek sparkle below as flycatchers do their thing overhead. The Friends of Minneopa installed this bench in June of 2006.

Bench #7 is the latest addition to the park's benches, put in by the Friends this year. It is located a half mile west of the campground, right on the edge of the hillside looking north. Below you run the railroad tracks and a bend of the Minnesota River. It is such an irony that the river runs along the entire north side of the park and yet the average visitor would never know it. What this bench gives you is at least a visual connection with the river. As you sit here in the shade on a warm sunny day, imagine you're back in the 1850's and steamboats are pushing against the current heading upstream to supply the hardy Germans in New Ulm.

There you have the story of Minneopa State Park's benches. Whether you use them as a brief resting spot or a place to read a book or compose a poem, the benches provide you a huge variety of settings. Enjoy the sit.

* * * * *

2007 Minneopa Bird Count

Saturday, June 2, was a fine day to be outdoors. It had rained in the night, and the morning sky was cool and crystal clear. The temperature rose from 60 early to about 70 by noon, and all 11 of us knew from the start that it would be a good day.

It turned out to be the best Bird Count yet, not so much because of the number of birds (and new, unusual ones) that we saw as because of the general good spirits and shared pleasure, the friendly joking and interesting stories. It was a fine

morning to be at Minneopa. (And speaking of the weather's cooperation, about half an hour after we closed up and headed home a heavy downpour soaked the park – but we were dry and happy with the record already in our pocket.)

So what about those birds? We identified 78 different species (the previous best was 72) and saw six species for the first time, including two dramatic additions right at the end: a peregrine falcon flew over as we were tallying results, and the experts agreed that the bright little warbler spotted by Team 3 earlier was a prothonotary (some had never heard of it). The most common songbirds were goldfinch (56) and field sparrow (46), but most numerous of all were 57 Canada geese seen flying over the park, and counted. All the beautiful birds, the Baltimore and orchard orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, indigo buntings, and others were on our lists, with the exception of the scarlet tanager. We have seen them five years out of nine, but not in 2007.

In nine years of the Minneopa Bird Count we have spotted 111 species, and I am sure we will find more in the future.

Many thanks to the participants: Mariel Adams, John Frentz, Merrill and Karen Frydendall, Chuck Frost, Gordon Herbst, Mary Hollingsworth, Tim Pulis, Jim Robinson, and Jean Whitman. See you next year! Brand Frentz

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.