



### *From the President:*

Becky Leuer, Friends of Wild River State Park president

Winter Greetings from FRWSP,

I hope this newsletter finds you healthy and in good spirits as we forge into 2022. The park has been beautiful this winter with the trails in great shape. Thank you to park staff for grooming the cross country trails despite all that nature has thrown our way...little snow, lots of snow, above freezing, below freezing, and a little rain thrown in for good measure.

Thank you to everyone who participated in or helped with the Otter Trotter 5K. It was so nice to host an event again!

Unfortunately, the Candlelight Night was on hiatus for another year due to COVID, but fingers crossed for 2023.

Be sure to mark your calendar for the FWRSP Annual

Meeting and Pancake Breakfast on Saturday, March 12, 2022, being held at Immanuel Lutheran Church in downtown Almelund. Pancakes start at 9 am and the meeting at 10 am. Enter the door by the driveway on the east side. The annual meeting is the perfect time to renew your membership. We hope to have a community service event for Earth Day on April 23, 2022, and fingers crossed for the return of Seegwan in June. Check our website or Facebook page for updates.

Finally, a fond farewell and thank you to Naturalist Mike Dunker, who has accepted a new position with the DNR. His sense of humor, love of the park, and all things nature will be missed.

### **Two New Naturalist Grants**

Stan Nelson's generosity to the Friends of Wild River State Park continues to benefit the park. After receiving a surprise gift of \$25,000 from the estate of Stan Nelson, the Board has used the money to establish two new grant programs. Both grants are designed to augment the naturalist programming at Wild River State Park.

The Master Naturalist Grant will pay the tuition for the Master Naturalist Program of the University of Minnesota. The grant will cover the full cost of registration for the program. Recipients will be expected to complete their Capstone Project and yearly hours requirement at Wild River State Park.

The Stan Nelson Project Grant has a broader focus and is designed to support projects that will complement naturalist activities at Wild River State Park.

The grants will require the approval of both the Park Naturalist and the Friends of Wild River State Park. Interested parties can request more information and access the applications at the website for the Friends of Wild River State Park, [friendsofwildriver.org](http://friendsofwildriver.org)

Stan, of Harris, MN, was the husband of Barb Ledbetter Nelson, one of the founding members of the Friends of Wild River State Park. Stan's generosity to the Friends began years ago with donations to fund additional summer interns to assist the Park Naturalist. He then established a fund in honor of his wife through the St. Croix Valley Foundation with the goal of providing income to the Friends group. He continued to contribute to that fund and make substantial donations to the Amphitheater Fund of the Friends (earmarked for improving the amphitheater area at Wild River State Park with a stage area, electricity, and storage). Upon his death, his estate donated \$25,000 for the specific purpose of augmenting naturalist programming at the park.

The first Stan Nelson Project Grant was awarded to a Girl Scout Troop to help pay their expenses when visiting the park to work on their Think Like a Scientist project.

Please share the information about the grants with any persons or groups who might benefit.

## Park Updates from Park Manager Kris Backlund

### FERRY ROAD

Wild River was able to operate more normally in the spring, summer, and fall of 2021. Nevertheless, with some activities, events, and projects on hold at the park and elsewhere due to COVID-19, it was satisfying to see a significant project completed at Wild River State Park in the fall of 2021. Work on paving Ferry Road into the Sunrise Landing at Wild River State Park began late summer. Paving was completed in early November.

More formal discussions about paving Ferry Road began in 2018. Many entities came together to make the paving a reality: Sunrise Township, Wild River State Park, DNR-Parks & Trails, DNR-Management Resources, DNR-Lands & Minerals, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and Bolton & Menk Engineering, retained by Sunrise Township to coordinate the project and oversee construction.

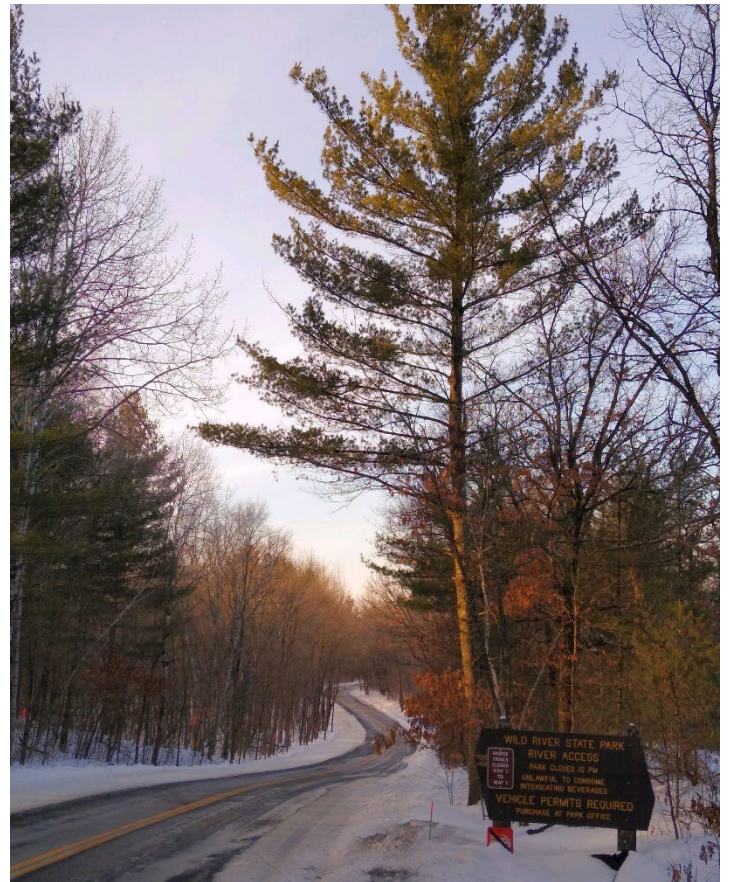
Of course, this long-standing road has a history of its own, which other sources have documented. The Ferry Road name references access to the ferry crossing the St. Croix near the mouth of the Sunrise River. The ferry operated as early as 1909, and operations ceased in the late 1930s after the ferry washed away in spring floods. The ferry—which was attached to a cable—transported people, goods, two or three cars at a time, and even moonshine. Check out the links below for more ferry stories.

<http://stcroixscenicbyway.org/audio-podcasts/sunrise-ferry/>

<https://www.stcroix360.com/2015/02/history-highlight-the-st-croix-river-ferry-the-carnes-sisters/>

### WILD RIVER NEWS NUGGETS

- The hiring process is underway to bring on a new, year-round naturalist and seasonal naturalist corps intern.
- The prairie pollinator outdoor exhibit near the bike trail crossing on the Visitor Center road is slated for completion by summer 2022. We hope you will come check it out!
- A team is working on development of new exhibits for the Visitor Center to include in the unheated shelter/lobby, the inner exhibit area, and the deck.



*Ferry Road*

## Nature Play Area Coming to WRSP

Children coming to Wild River State Park will soon have a new play area featuring natural features like boulders, logs, and sand for imaginative and independent fun in a Nature Play Area.

The Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota has awarded the Friends of Wild River State Park a \$2500 grant to support nature play area development, including design and



*Courtesy of Friends of Nerstrand Big Woods State Park*

*One of the features of Nerstrand's natural play area.*

construction. The project will be a partnership between the Park, the Friends, and the Parks and Trails Council.

A Board committee submitted the application in December, emphasizing that the Friends were eager to accomplish something concrete for the park and engage our members in the process.



*Courtesy of Friends of Nerstrand Big Woods State Park*

*Friends of Nerstrand Big Woods State Park constructed a natural play area at the park in 2018.*

Nature Play Areas are growing in popularity for physical fitness activities and imaginative play. In addition, the play areas are eco-friendly, with the components easily returned to nature as opposed to metal or plastic components to recycle or trash. The Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota awarded three grants for 2021 and two for 2022.

Now that the grant has been awarded, planning the design and scope of the project will begin. A site near the campground is being considered. There will be an opportunity for community feedback before the design is finalized. Actual construction is slated for spring of 2023.

If you are interested in being involved with planning and/or construction, please contact a Board member.

## Annual Meeting: We'll See You In Person!

We are back to meeting in person for this year's annual meeting. Join us Saturday, March 12 for our annual meeting and pancake breakfast. Pancake breakfast starts at 9 am and the meeting starts at 10 am. The meeting venue will be a little different this year due to DNR COVID-19 restrictions; we'll be meeting at Immanuel Lutheran Church in downtown Almelund (37515 Park Trail, Center City).

Breakfast will include our prized pancakes and maple syrup. Some of the items on the agenda include awarding our Wild Friend award, a guest speaker, updates about the park, and board member elections. Any members interested in serving on the board should plan on attending the annual meeting to voice their interest and seek election by members. This will also be the time to renew your membership!

For more details, visit our website at [friendsofwildriver.org](http://friendsofwildriver.org).

Looking forward to seeing you all at the meeting!

# Wrapping It Up...

By former Wild River Park Naturalist Mike Dunker

The end of the year always feels to me like a time when you finish up everything you have planned for one year and get ready for the next one. Although there really is no difference between December 31 and January 1 except maybe a couple more seconds of sunlight, we have made a mental note that it is a new year with new hopes and new opportunities. Perhaps we should look at every morning this way.

I decided myself to pursue one of these new opportunities and have stepped away from the interpretive naturalist position at Wild River State Park. Thank you to so many on the board for your kind words as I shared the news. I will miss some of the planning meetings where you shared your passion of the park with me and volunteered without thought to help the park and the public who visited. I am not going far though.

I have taken the position of Central Region Regional Naturalist. What does that mean? It means I still will be working with Wild River in another capacity. I will be providing interpretive program leadership and guidance to 18 state parks and recreation areas (of which Wild River is one), 17 state trails and a few other areas. Basically, I will be a support for the park interpretive programs and naturalists to provide help to reach their goal of creating unforgettable experiences for those who use the state parks and trails.

This is going to be a big change for me as you can imagine. I loved being in the park visiting with people face to face and helping them to experience it in the best possible way for them. The Prairie Care program that Dave Crawford had started was also close to my heart. Helping the park to be its best was also a joy, with restorations and clean-ups, in the park or on the river, there was always an opportunity to make a difference. Now I will be able to help others make that difference.

Before writing this, I looked back at some of the other notes I wrote for the Friend's newsletter. One of my very first ones included this paragraph: "The best part of being a naturalist in the state park is often being the one that sees and helps with these experiences [connecting users to the park], but I'm sure every one of you has had that same opportunity. I have seen it in the visitor center hosts, volunteers, park staff and more as you share your experience with others. This is the reason we have so many people return to Wild River State Park. We have made that unforgettable experience."

Things haven't changed. This park just does not function with one person. Every one of you has made a difference with someone who has come out and met you at a Friend's event, enjoyed the beauty of the park safely because of a volunteer activity you conducted or even leading a program or talking with someone at the Visitor Center. You bring people back.

As I mentioned, I won't be going far. I will be stationed out of St. Paul but will stay in the area for the time being. You may encounter me out on the trails or at an event. I do have my weekends and evenings free now. There is always an opportunity each morning and we don't need to wait until the end of the year to take advantage of it. Unless that is when it is offered. Like this one.

Thank you to all who have made my experience at Wild River State Park over the last eight years amazing. I wish you the best in your future as an organization and I hope to see you out on the trails.

# Otter Trotter 5K Highlights

It was great to resume the annual fall tradition of the Otter Trotter 5K this past October 2021. This ninth annual rendition featured perfect fall weather, sunshine, and over 60 runners—one of our largest groups in recent years. We want to give a shoutout and thank you to the race’s sponsor G2 Dental, located in Forest Lake. And, of course, a big hats off to Wild River park staff. We’d be lost—quite literally, as they plan and mark the race route, among other tasks—without their help and support.

The Otter Trotter takes place every year on the second Saturday of October and registration opens online in August. For more information about future races, visit our website at [friendsofwildriver.org](http://friendsofwildriver.org).



*And they're off!*



*First place female runner Linda George.*

*Overall first place runner Abram Gordhamer.*



*The race's top youth finisher Linden Youngner.*



*Catching a ride.*



*Our youngest racer to date!*

Thank you for your  
Membership

### FWRSP Membership Options

- Junior **Friend, 12 and under** – \$5 / year  
*Includes an "Action Guide" and other benefits*
- Individual **Friend** – \$20 / year
- Family **Friend** – \$35 / year
- Silver **Friend** – \$50 / year
- Gold **Friend** – \$100 / year
- Platinum **Friend** – \$250+ / year



Name:			
Address:			
City:			
State:		Zip:	
Email:			

*(We will never sell or trade your email address.)*

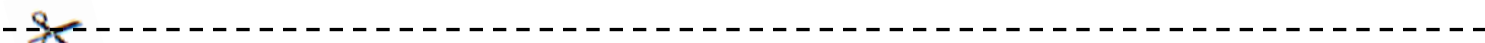
**Option 1:** Mail above with check to:

Jan Kozlovsky, FWRSP Treasurer  
 (make check out to "Friends of Wild River State Park")  
 17190 410<sup>th</sup> St.  
 North Branch, MN 55056

**Option 2:** Sign-up Online and use your credit card:

[www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org](http://www.FriendsOfWildRiver.org)

*We will never sell or trade your email address*



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