



A Citizens' watershed  
conservation organization

# Reading the River



Volume 12, Issue 1 ~ Winter 2015

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## Winter flowing into spring



High water on the Black River from spring snow melt.

## Greetings from the President

Spring has come ... I think....  
While I don't mind winter and I enjoy winter activities, it's always good to have spring come. The ice has melted, and the river has finally opened up, so we can enjoy a variety of activities with the open water.

Hopefully we will have a nicer spring than we had last year. I can't remember a spring so cold

and wet.

So, the Friends will be sponsoring a variety of activities again including paddles, a wild-flower hike and a cleanup around Earth Day.

We always hope to have good member participation and support for our activities and

*Greetings, continued on page 2*

## Vision

The Friends of the Black River is a citizen-led organization that is a well-informed, respected, active contributor to projects and decision-making enhancing the river and its watershed.

## Mission

The Friends of the Black River will foster community appreciation, understanding, and sustainable use of the river and its watershed by hosting educational and enjoyable programs, events and conservation projects and by promoting wise decision-making when issues affect the health of the Black River Basin.

## Upcoming events for 2015

The following are the events and dates of events planned for future meetings:

**April 8** - Monthly meeting, presentation on the second Breeding Bird Atlas

**April 18** — Earth Day Cleanup

**May 9** — Wildflower hike (will be held in lieu of the regular monthly meeting)

**June 10** — Monthly meeting, presentation on Karner blue butterfly research and survey

**July 4** — Paddle in the Park, Lunda Community

Park kids' fishing pond

**July 15** — Prairie walk at Christian Youth Camp

**August 29** — Annual river cleanup

**September 9** — Monthly meeting, program TBD

**September 12** — GreenLifeXpo

**October 14** — Annual meeting, presentation on the project to reintroduce elk to Jackson County

**November 11** — Monthly meeting, program TBD

**December 7** — Annual holiday party, TBD

Unless otherwise noted, regular monthly meetings will be held in the lower level community room of the Jackson County Bank at 6:30 p.m.

## Topics of future meeting presentations

**April 8**— Representatives from the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II will talk about the process to map where bird species are breeding in the state and how birdwatchers can help collect data for the atlas.

**June 10**— Robert Hess (DNR) and colleagues will give a presentation about their work to con-

serve the Karner blue butterfly and information about how volunteers can help with collecting data.

**October 14**—Scott Roepke will give a presentation about trapping elk in Kentucky for the reintroduction project in the Black River State Forest.

## Upcoming paddles

The Friends of the Black River will host paddles this spring on the Black River and its tributaries.

**March 28**—Robinson Creek with Sierra Club, 10 a.m.

**March 29**—Halls Creek, 10 a.m.

**April 19**—Whitewater paddle at Hatfield, 10 a.m.

**May 17**— Flat water paddle on the Black River, time and starting point still to be determined.

Dates are subject to change. To confirm date and time, contact Jeff Polzin at (715) 896-5534.



## Greetings from the president, *continued from page 1*

organization. We depend on volunteers for the success of our activities and they are appreciate for all they do.

So check out our programs and plan to attend!

We are in the process of needing to update our website and could use some help. If you could be of assistance and are knowl-

edgeable about websites, please contact one of the board members.

Also, if you know of someone who could present a good program relating to our natural environment or conservation issues, please contact a board member. We are always looking for good presentations for our meetings. Think spring!!!

~ Steve Rake



## FBR to partner with county for annual Earth Day cleanup

FBR will be working with the Jackson County Forestry and Parks Department for this year's Earth Day Cleanup, Saturday, April 18.

In the past, the Earth Day Cleanup was held in partnership with the Black River State Forest. However, this year, the staff at the Black River State Forest has not identified new illegal dumpsites on state land that need to be cleaned up. So the superintendent has indicated the state forest will not be hosting the cleanup this year.

The cleanup with the county will start at the Lake

Wazee Park Beach parking lot at 8:00 a.m. After working in groups cleaning up dump sites, the trash and recycled materials should be brought back to the parking lot to put into dumpsters. Lunch will be provided by the county around noon.

In conjunction with the cleanup with the county, FBR will also be seeking volunteers to help with the Adopt-A-Highway cleanup on County Highway K. FBR has adopted County Highway K for clean up from State Highway 54 east of Black River Falls to Hryz Road.

## Cleanup volunteers need to be alert for "one-pot" meth labs

Law enforcement is cautioning volunteers taking part in cleanups to be on the alert for portable methamphetamine labs. The "meth labs" can be as small as a plastic soda bottle. The new "one-pot" process of making meth is more dangerous than "garage labs" because the person making the substance – the "cooker" – will mix the ingredients in a container – often a plastic soda bottle – and then leave it unattended by the roadside for a couple hours.

Common places are along roadsides and near water areas.

If the bottle is opened before the process is complete, the chemical mixture could burst into flames when it is exposed to oxygen. If someone picks up the bottle and uncaps it too quickly, the bottle could burst open, splashing the hazardous chemical mixture over the person and anyone around him or her. The chemicals can cause third-degree burns. If the victim absorbs enough of the chemicals through the skin, death could occur through a meth overdose.

If the bottle hasn't failed, the cooker will collect the meth, pouring out the remaining chemical in the

ditch. The chemicals are an environmental and health hazard. Ingredients can include anhydrous ammonia, pseudoephedrine (cold medicine) tablets, water and a reactive metal such as lithium, lye and solvents.

Should anyone encounter a bottle meth lab while conducting roadside cleanup, the authorities recommend the person move away from the container, secure the area and dial 911. Items should not be touched because of dangerous residue, explosion, fire and/or deadly exposure.

It's important and it is recommended to call law enforcement for identification and disposal.



A plastic bottle meth lab contains a finished product along with some liquid. Some "one pot" meth labs might be equipped with a tube sticking out of the cap.

## Water Action Volunteer Report

Water Action Volunteers is a citizens' stream monitoring program that trains volunteers to gather data on the health of streams in a watershed.

The data is sent to the state's SWIMS (Surface Water Integrated Monitoring System) database where it is monitored by UW-Extension Service personnel and DNR water biologists.

Information about the water monitoring program can be found at the following link: <http://watermonitoring.uwex.edu/wav/monitoring/>.

Anyone not currently a volunteer who is interested in monitoring this year is asked to con-

tact Chris Kelley, WAV coordinator, at 715-896-5477 or e-mail her at [creekpeeps@gmail.com](mailto:creekpeeps@gmail.com).

Training will be provided for new volunteer stream monitors. A kickoff gathering is being planned so WAV volunteers can get to know each other and share monitoring experiences.

Kelley is also looking for any water monitoring kits that might be collecting dust in a past volunteer's closet. Any former WAV volunteer who still has a stream monitoring kit is asked to contact Kelley.





## Amphibians were topic of March presentation

By Tamara Relyea

When the weather begins to warm up, we tend to open our windows to let in some fresh spring air. Our slumber may be shattered by some alarming noises coming through those opened windows. Do not be alarmed as what you are hearing are the mating calls of some of the species of native frogs.

Andrew Badje, conservation biologist for the Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation, was the guest speaker at the March 11 FBR meeting. Badje's presentation was about amphibians with frogs being the primary focus.

Worldwide there are over 5,200 species of frogs and toads, with new species being discovered quite frequently. Frogs native to Wisconsin include the wood frog, boreal chorus frog, spring peeper, Northern leopard frog (the population is in decline, and this frog really does have a terrifying croak), pickerel frog, American toad, gray tree frog, Cope's gray tree frog, Blanchard's cricket frog, mink frog, green frog and the American bullfrog.

Frogs are an indicator of a healthy ecosystem, function as ruthless predators of the mosquito population and help keep algae blooms down. Frogs in turn are a huge food source for other wildlife and people. The population decline of certain species is due to loss of habitat, introduced species, over exploitation, global climate change, environmental contaminants and emerging infectious diseases.

Citizens are encouraged to become advocates for frogs by conducting a survey during the spring and summer mating season.

In a follow-up e-mail to FBR, Badje announced there's an open route in northeastern Monroe County/



Riley Teeple joined his grandfather Tom at the March 11 meeting and got close look at a turtle shell. **Photo by Tom Teeple**

southeast Jackson County.

Information about the open Monroe/Jackson County Route #422 along with a map can be found by going to the webpage using the following link: <http://wiatri.net/inventory/frogtoadsurvey/Volunteer/googlemaps/DrawMap.cfm?RouteID=422>.

Any interested volunteers living near the route or who are willing to travel to survey this route three times in 2015 are encouraged to contact the biologist at [Andrew.Badje@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Andrew.Badje@wisconsin.gov).

More information can be obtained by contacting Badje or by going online to the Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey.

### Changes to website

This past winter, the FBR website was moved to a new hosting provider. However, the current program for uploading new copy to the site is obsolete.

The board is investigating ways for addressing the situation and to work out the technical difficulties.

Until the situation is remedied, updates regarding events will be posted to the FBR Facebook page. The FBR Facebook address is [www.facebook.com/friendsoftheblackriverWI](http://www.facebook.com/friendsoftheblackriverWI).



Andrew Badje (center) points out characteristics of a couple turtle shell samples to Tamara Relyea during his presentation March 11. **Photo by Tom Teeple**

## Members and guests learn about clams and mussels

Mussels and clams have greater value in improving environment than in producing pearls and buttons. The mollusks filter the water in which they live, removing pollutants suspended in the streams.

The members of the Friends of the Black River hosted Lisie Kitchel, aquatic biologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation, at its January 14 meeting.

Kitchel has studied Wisconsin's native mussels and other organisms around the state for 18 years. Despite her years of research, Kitchel admitted more study needs to be done on freshwater mussels.

"There's a lot we don't know about mussels," said Kitchel. "We do know they filter the water, help stabilize river bottoms and are food for fish and wildlife, and their shells can provide habitat for other species. Some of the mussels can be pretty tiny; while the washboard mussel can get to the size of a dinner plate."

Along with learning that the mollusks are the rivers' clean-up crews, the members and guests of the Friends of the Black River heard how mussels propagate and how their shells were used in the garment industry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

According to Kitchel, the terms mussels and clams can be used interchangeably. Wisconsin has 50 native species of mussels; 18 are now considered threatened or endangered. Some are very rare and reproduce few offspring; while others are endangered due to over-harvesting.

Invasive species such as the zebra and quagga mussels are also creating difficulties for native species.

According to Kitchel, mussels prefer moving water that isn't very cold. "Mussels don't do well in headwaters or in trout waters," said Kitchel. "In the right environment, they can live a long time. Some species in Europe have been found to be 200 years old. They are aged like trees; the rings on the shell tell us how old they are."

Most mussels need fish hosts as nurseries for their offspring. When the mussels release their larvae into the water, the spawn attach to the gills of fish when the fish take in water. Certain mussels

don't leave to chance finding of the right "childcare" for their offspring.

"Some have appendages that look like food to a predatory fish," said Kitchel. "The appendages lure the fish close, so the mussel can expel their glochidia directly



Lisie Kitchel, aquatic biologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation, gave a presentation about mussels at the January 14 meeting. **Photo by Pat McKnight**

into the fish. The glochidia stay attached to the fish's gills from two weeks to three months."

While humans generally didn't go clamming for mussels as a food source, the earliest residents did use the shells for tools and vessels for special ceremonies. However in the late 19th century, settlers began harvesting clams and mussels heavily, taking millions of clams from the Black and Mississippi rivers for the button-making trade.

"The clambers could harvest a ton of clams in a day," said Kitchel. "At one time, there were 500 clambers in the state harvesting on a seasonal basis. With the development of plastic after WWII, the industry died."

Clamming became regulated in the 1960s, and because poaching endangered native mussel populations, clamming was essentially shut down.

Those clambers gave the mollusks names many are still known by today such as pistol grip, maple leaf, snuffbox, monkeyface and pimpleback.

The Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation is the DNR agency charged with preserving the mussels and other aspects of the state's natural heritage. The agency's staff has been working to restore the mussel populations.

"We've been propagating mussels at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery," said Kitchel. "We have lots of species we've been putting back out there."



## Proposed state budget would suspend stewardship program

The program to preserve environmentally sensitive lands in Wisconsin will essentially be unable to function if the state legislature passes the 2015-2017 budget.

The governor's next biennium budget suspends the use of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to acquire land for public use for the next 13 years.

In a February 6 news release issued by the West Wisconsin Land Trust, the land trust warns the suspension would result in untold missed opportunities to conserve irreplaceable gems of outdoor Wisconsin. The statement also warns such opportunities might be lost forever.

The High Banks parcel on the east side of the Black River was acquired for public access through funding from the KNSP. The parcel has been conserved through funds from the stewardship program, WWLT and FBR members.

"Other conservation projects in your area were completed by the city of Black River Falls and Jackson County, both using Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funding," said Rick Remington, WWLT's conservation director. "I think it is safe to say that these public amenities would not have been accomplished without the Knowles-Nelson Steward Program, and the citizens of Jackson County and the surrounding area are benefitting every day because of it."

The KNSP has participated in twenty-four projects that have permanently conserved nearly 8,000 acres in western and northwestern Wisconsin. All of these lands are now permanently protected and available to everyone wanting to enjoy outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking and skiing. In addition to generating millions of dollars in non-state conservation funding, these KNSP-funded projects have made a significant contribution to the tourism economy in our region.

Elsewhere in western Wisconsin, projects include the Maiden Rock Bluff State Natural Area, Inch Lake SNA, Pine Creek State Fishery Area (Birch Creek (Lower Chippewa River SNA), the Red Cedar River Cut-off and the Heron Rookery acquisition.

FBR members wanting to support the KNSP and preserve its funding are encouraged to contact their state representatives to urge the legislators to keep the current levels of funding for the program.

To contact Senator Kathleen Vinehout, state senator for the 31st Senate District, telephone 608-266-8546 or go to her website and click on the "Email Senator Vinehout" link and fill in information in the boxes. To contact Assemblyman Chris Danou, representative for the 92nd Assembly District, call 608-266-7015 or email to Rep.Danou@legis.wisconsin.gov.

## Volunteer training sessions for Karner blue butterfly survey

The Karner Blue Butterfly Recovery Project is looking for volunteers to gather data about the presence or absence of Karner blue butterflies in oak savanna and jack pine barren habitats.

The data will help researchers track the progress of KBB populations and whether native blue lupine and KBBs exist on sites.

A spring training session for volunteers willing to collect data on KBBs in the Jackson County area is being planned in Black River Falls June 15. The site for the training is yet to be determined. Beginning volunteers will need to attend volunteer training.

The morning of the training session will be spent in the classroom and the afternoon will be the field session.

Training session volunteers will learn to locate KBBs in open areas with lupine and wildflowers using road maps, aerial photo maps or personal knowledge of the area. They will also learn to identify KBBs from other native look-a-like butterflies using field guides. They will be asked to photograph KBBs at field sites with digital camera or cell phone and submit the digital photos and data.

Volunteers will need to provide their own transportation to field sites. The field work needs to be done during the summer months when weather conditions

can be quite variable. Volunteers are advised to be prepared for field work which would include bringing water and snacks and wearing a hat, sunscreen and bug spray.

Trainees will become familiar with the wild lupine plant. The wildflower is essential for the KBBs survival as it is the only host plant the butterfly's larvae will eat. Wild lupine prefers dry, sandy soils in open to partially shaded habitat.

Sites for collecting data on KBBs are located in central, western and northwest Wisconsin. In addition to Jackson County, volunteers are needed to conduct surveys in Adams, Burnett, Clark, Juneau, Monroe, Eau Claire, Chippewa, Green Lake, Marquette, Washburn, Oconto, Portage, and Menominee, Waupaca, Waushara and Wood counties.

A brochure describing the training session and containing a registration form can be obtained by emailing Joan Voigt at [joan.voigt@wisconsin.gov](mailto:joan.voigt@wisconsin.gov) or [Robert.hess@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Robert.hess@wisconsin.gov). A copy of the brochure can also be obtained by e-mailing [info\\_fbr@yahoo.com](mailto:info_fbr@yahoo.com).



## Ways to support FBR's mission

You can help support the mission of the Friends of the Black River by remembering FBR in your will or with memorials or honorariums.

Checks can be made out to Friends of the Black River and contributions should be sent to PO Box 475, Black River Falls, WI 54615. Thank you.

## It's membership renewal time

Memberships help Friends of the Black River continue its mission of preserving and caring for the Black River.

Show your support for that mission by renewing your membership.

If you are renewing your membership, you do not need to send in a membership form unless there has been a change in your contact information.

### Please help us stay current

**Please help us keep in touch by letting us know your new e-mail and/or postal addresses when they change.**  
**Send your e-mail address changes to [info\\_fbr@yahoo.com](mailto:info_fbr@yahoo.com)**

Become a member by filling out the membership form located below and mailing it with your membership dues to the mailing address listed on the membership form.

## Support your watershed - Join the Friends of the Black River

### Enroll me as a member

Membership Categories (check one)

- ☐ \$1.00 Youth (up to age 18)
- ☐ \$15.00 Individual
- ☐ \$20.00 Family
- ☐ \$30.00 Organization or Business
- ☐ \$50.00 Cornerstone Member

- ☐ I would like to give an additional contribution in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I would like to give this membership as a gift  
(Card will be sent to recipient)  
Occasion \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of recipient \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please check here \_\_\_ if you would like to receive a receipt.

Return registration and checks payable to:

**Friends of the Black River**  
PO Box 475  
Black River Falls, WI 54615

I'm interested in serving on a committee:

- ☐ Land Preservation and Advocacy
- ☐ Fundraising and Membership Recruitment
- ☐ Programming
- ☐ Cleanups and Special Events
- ☐ Landings
- ☐ I am Interested in becoming a board member

Comments/Questions:

**Memberships are being gratefully  
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We depend on your support to keep Friends  
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We want to keep this newsletter coming to  
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The Black River Watershed

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