



**FRIENDS of the
BLACK RIVER**

A Citizens' watershed
conservation organization

Reading the River



Volume 21 Issue 3 ~ Summer 2025

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The Friends of the Black River
PO Box 475
Black River Falls, WI 54615
www.friendsoftheblackriver.org
info_fbr@yahoo.com

Newsletter Editor
Pat McKnight
pmcknight@centurytel.net

Board of Directors

President
Steve Rake
(715) 284-2087

Vice-President
Mitch Wester
(715) 284-9637

Secretary/Treasurer
Jill Clark
(715) 299-4491

Members of the Board
Sue Bitter
(715) 896-1632

Dan Moore
(715) 937-5097

Jeff Polzin
(715) 896-5534

Jackson Burgau
(406) 334-9331.

Staffer
Pat McKnight
(608) 526-9873

What's happening here?



For the answer to what's happening in the photo, see page 3

President's Greetings

Summer is here, the season of warmth and humidity. Plenty of rainy weather but no big rains yet.

Also, the time to get out on the river with your watercraft whatever you have.

I was paddling with my daughters yesterday and the river was up several feet that made the paddle go much quicker.

We have a great prairie walk coming in July that has a tremendous variety of prairie

President's 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 meetings and events for 2025

Saturday, July 12: Paddle in the Park, Lunda Community Park Kids Fishing Pond, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Tuesday, July 15: Prairie flower walk, 6 p.m. Meet at Thiesen's parking lot at 5:30 p.m. to carpool or caravan to the site. Rain date: Wednesday, July 16.

Saturday, August 23: Annual River Cleanup, 8 a.m. to noon, meet at Al Young Park (see information below)

Wednesday, September 10: Jim Hoffman, beavers and beaver dams in the Black River watershed.

Tuesday, September 23: Fall Highway K Cleanup, 9 a.m., meet at intersection of CTH K and State Highway 54 East

Wednesday, October 15: Annual meeting, year's end reports and election of board members, Jessica Ross, DNR rare plant agent, rare plants in Jackson County area

Wednesday, November 12: Program to be determined

Tuesday, December 2: Annual movie night, film to be determined.

Monthly meetings are free and open to the public. Programs subject to change. Unless otherwise indicated, the Wednesday evening programs are held at 6:30 p.m. in The Hub meeting room at the Lunda Community Center. The community center is located at 405 State Highway 54, Black River Falls.

Announcements about FBR activities are also posted on FBR's Facebook page and website, Black River Area Chamber of Commerce's calendar of events, broadcasted on WWIS and WCCN Radio and published in the Banner Journal and Clark County Press.

Volunteers needed for River Cleanup

The Friends of the Black River is looking for concerned volunteers to help with the group's annual river cleanup. The cleanup will be held Saturday, Aug. 23. Volunteers are asked to meet at Al Young Park in Black River Falls at 8 a.m. to be assigned a section of the river. Al Young Park is located at the south end of South First Street.

Volunteers may choose to help by paddling the river or patrolling along the shoreline. Those wanting to paddle are asked to contact FBR President Steve Rake so enough canoes will be available. Volunteers wanting to use their own canoes or kayaks are asked to let cleanup organizers know by contacting Steve at 715-284-2087 or emailing info_fbr@yahoo.com.

In appreciation for helping with the cleanup, volunteers will be provided a lunch beginning at 11:30 a.m. at Al Young Park.

Please RSVP to Steve or Jeff at 715-896-5534 by August 22 so organizers can get a count for the lunch. More information is also available by emailing info_fbr@yahoo.com.



FBR's annual river cleanup helps keep the Black River watershed inviting.

President's Greetings, continued from page 1

plants. Don't miss it. It will be Tuesday, July 15th with a rain date of Wednesday, July 16th starting at 6:30 p.m. (watch for more information in your email inbox).

So for you warm-weather fans, don't sit around in the air conditioning; get out and enjoy the heat...

Steve Rake
FBR President

Clark County FBR Chapter cleans up on Earth Day

Volunteers in Clark County turned out Saturday, April 19 to remove trash from the environment and clean out illegal dumpsites in the Neillsville area.

Twenty-three concerned citizens of all ages cleaned out the dump sites and properly disposed of the trash.



Answer to page 1 photo question:

Volunteers equipped with trailers large and small worked to remove appliances and other discarded items at the Clark County annual Earth Day Cleanup.

Spring Wildflower Hike



A group of hikers spent a spring morning learning to identify wildflowers found along a trail located off Pettibone Pass.

WAV volunteers needed

Volunteers are needed to monitor streams in Jackson and Clark counties as part of the Water Action Volunteers program.

Stream monitors collect data on the long-term trends of water quality in the Black River watershed.

Volunteers work in pairs to collect data about the water quality of streams in the watershed. Data collected by volunteers is then entered into the statewide water-quality database.

Monitoring takes about two hours per month from May through October. Training and sampling equipment are provided.

The activity is a family-friendly project that benefits the environment.

Anyone interested in volunteering in the program is encouraged to contact Pete Segerson at 715-333-2033 or email ps205v@hotmail.com.

History of life on the Black River topic of presentation

Stories about the logging, ice harvesting and steam boating era on the Black River were relived at the April 9 Friends of the Black River meeting. La Crosse river historian Robert Taunt presented "Logs, Ice & Steam on the Black River" at the Lunda Community Center.

While he gave a brief history of the time Europeans discovered the source of the Black River at Black Lake in 1688, Taunt concentrated his talk on the logging heyday of the 19th century. Notable lumbermen Jacob Spaulding and Robert and Andrew Wood as well as the Mormons played a significant role in logging the pine forest of Jackson and surrounding counties.

Timber harvesting generally took place in the winter because the hard ground made it easier to haul logs over the ground to the river. Many farmers became sawyers as they were able to work in forest during the off season.

"There were also Lumber Jills," said Taunt. "They helped at the camps with cooking and cleaning. They were especially needed when the men went to war."

Tabitha Babbitt, a Shaker woman, is credited with inventing the circular saw blade. She got the idea from her spinning wheel. By cutting teeth into a metal circular sheet, cutting through trees became faster and safer than using two-man saws.

Tree species harvested included hemlock, cedar, spruce and tamarack. But white pine was the most sought because it "floated very well." However, the harvest wasn't limited to white pine as the practice was to clear-cut the timber.

Because so much lumber was floating on the river, the timber became entangled. Some sawyers became adept at opening up the jams or became "sweeps," responsible for keeping logs off the shore.

Large rafts were created to float the logs down the Mississippi River to lumber mills as far away as St. Louis.

"Because so much lumber was floating down the river, log jams resulted," said Taunt. "Some sawyers became adept at opening up the jams and became 'log drivers' responsible for keeping logs off the shore."



La Crosse area river historian Robert Taunt (left) discusses highlights of the logging and steam boating era on the Black River with Ryan Howell at the Friends of the Black River's April 9 public meeting.

Early rafts had large oars called 'sweeps' at each end to help keep the raft off the shore. One raft had 16 men working sweeps at each end. It is estimated that more than six billion board feet of logs came down the Black River alone between 1855 and 1899. The newspaper in 1867 reported a log raft 440 feet long and 320 feet wide contained over one million board feet of lumber. It was said to be the largest raft ever started out of the Black River at that time."

While the large steam-driven paddle wheelers were too large to travel up the Black River, a few smaller steam-powered boats were able to maneuver their way up the river.

One large steam boat of special interest to Taunt was the War Eagle. He has researched and published a two-volume book, "The War Eagle Years." The steam boat burned at the mouth of the Black River in 1870 when a new type of fuel leaked from its containers. A workman called in to repair the containers used an open flame lantern to light the site. The fuel caught on fire and not only completely engulfed the boat, the fire spread to buildings on land. The total loss of property was estimated at \$250,000 and five people were lost. It was the largest fire in the history of the state until the fire at Peshtigo in the eastern part of the state.

Winter harvest also included ice blocks. The ice was used to keep food chilled during the warmer months. Ice from the Black River was especially prized for its clarity. The ice blocks were stored in shed insulated by sawdust from the lumber mills.

History, continued on page 6

Rock art researcher talks about petroglyphs in Jackson County

As an archaeology student, Robert “Ernie” Boszhardt didn’t have much interest in rock art. However, as he encountered various sites found in the Driftless Region, he became more knowledgeable about and appreciative of their history. His research led him to start Driftless Pathways, a consulting and touring service of archaeological sites.

Boszhardt shared his journey with rock art at the Friends of the Black River’s May 14 public education meeting. He focused a virtual tour of petroglyphs in the Jackson County area. The three sites were Gullickson Glen in the Taylor area, Silver Mound in the Hixton area and Roche-a-Cri near Friendship.

They are three of the 200 Native American rock art sites identified in Wisconsin. These sites are concentrated in the Driftless Region where glaciers didn’t destroy outcroppings and rock shelters as they did in other parts of the state.

“Rock art was made on pillars, overhangs, deep caves, crevices and rock shelters,” said Boszhardt.

The variety of artwork found at the sites is categorized as petroglyphs (carvings) and pictographs (paintings), which depict natural animals in abstract form. Other art showing groups of figures are classified as compositions (stories).

A sandstone grotto-like formation, Gullickson Glen became known by archaeologists and historians in 1917 when H.F. Roberts, a local school principal, sent photos of the carvings to Charles E. Brown, founder of the Wisconsin Archaeological Society and museum director of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

In 1933, Brown visited the sheltered sandstone outcropping and traced the art. He and his crew made casts of some carvings that were then put on display at the State Historical Society Museum.

In 1958, the Gullickson family turned the site over to the Jackson County Historical Society during a ceremony that included historians, researchers, Ho Chunk Nation representatives and county dignitaries.

Archaeologist Warren Wittry excavated the site with Ho Chunk workers. They removed the sandy floor, finding two layers of Indigenous use dating about 2,000 years ago.

“He lowered the floor to keep people from being able to reach the art,” said Boszhardt. “Wittry made rubbings of the carvings with ink on muslin.”

The rubbings have served as a record of the art as it was discovered earlier, providing a reference of art’s condition nearly 60 years ago. Since their discovery, the rock art has eroded over the years and has been defaced by visitors. Large sections of Gullickson’s Glen have collapsed and many glyphs continue to fall away.



At the May 14 Friends of the Black River public meeting, Driftless Pathway co-owner, Robert Boszhardt (left), discusses rock art photographs with Yvonne Mair, a member of the FBR Board.

“Unless the paintings are deep in a cave, they will naturally weather,” said Boszhardt.

The figures carved or painted in the sandstone outcrops and caves were eventually identified. They included sturgeon, deer, thunderbird and a canine. An unexpected figure is a buffalo nursing a calf. Buffalo in the Driftless Region are connected with the Oneota culture around 350-800 years ago.

In the 1970s, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources took ownership of the Gullickson’s Glen site, making it a state natural area. The agency tried to restrict access to the sandstone arch by fencing it off to the public between 1990 and 2010.

Silver Mound is a sandstone hill where the sandstone became cemented into silicified sandstone known as orthoquartzite. This hardened rock is like glass and early native people were able to chip spear tips, arrow heads, scrapers and other tools from it.

“Silver Mound was like a hardware store,” said Boszhardt. “Some Silver Mound tools have been found as far south as Kentucky.”

Rock art, continued on page 6

Second annual Cops and Bobbers experiences growth

Coordinating with Jackson County game warden, Carolyn and Shaun Lescher hosted the second annual Cops and Bobbers June 7 fishing event on Lake Lee near Millston. The event gave youngsters the opportunity to fish with area first responders.

More than 100 people attended the event with 54 kids trying their luck with bait and hook during the hour event. The young fisher-folk received instruction in how to cast, safely unhook and release a fish.

This year the event included raffles, several hundred door prizes, a casting booth and a game called "Bobber 'n a Bucket."



Group of volunteers from various departments helped make this year's Cops and Bobbers a success.

After last year's success with 42 kids participating, organizers knew the event should be continued as a tradition going forward.

History, continued from page 4

Crossing the river by foot or horse was also possible during the winter as pedestrians and draft teams could travel over the ice. However, there were risks involved because people and horses were lost when the ice gave way under them.

Taunt has given presentations about local history

to groups at national, state and local historic sites.

His presentation in Black River Falls was part of FBR's ongoing mission to bring educational programs about the environment and conservation issues to the community.

Rock art, continued from page 5

Hundreds of prehistory quarries have been located on the mound as well as 10 rock shelters, two of which contain rock art. One has paintings and the other carvings that depict animals and abstract designs.

"Long-tailed animals were equated with underworld spirits," said Boszhardt, "and human figures with upraised arms and large hands are often thought to represent shamans."

Anyone wanting to see rock art, Roche-a-Cri State Park is the only site in Wisconsin open to the public. The park contains a sandstone bluff with carvings and drawings that are easily accessible and interpreted with panels. Unfortunately, it has suffered the fate of many rock art sites and have been defaced by historic graffiti.

"Rock art is fragile, but it's cool," said Boszhardt.

In addition to the art, researchers look for other artifacts such as pottery or animal bones which provide information about the people who lived at protected shelters during the winter for thousands of years.

"Some might have been meeting places for groups or for an individual's vision quest," said Boszhardt.

Boszhardt's rock art research led him and artist Geri Schrab to write the award-winning book, "Hidden Thunder Rock Art of the Upper Midwest," which includes perspectives from a dozen members or regional tribes.

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 and 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.

FBR sincerely thanks our members and other supporters for their continued dedication to FBR's mission to preserve and enhance the sustainable use of the Black River and its watershed.

New and renewing memberships always welcome

Memberships help Friends of the Black River continue its mission to preserve and care 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's 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

Become a new member by filling out the membership form below and mailing it with your membership dues to the mailing address listed on the form. Renewing members do not need to submit a membership form

Support your watershed - Join the Friends of the Black River

- ☐ **Enroll me as a member**
☐ **I would like to give this membership as a gift**
(Card will be sent to recipient)

Occasion _____

Your name _____

Membership Categories (check one)

- ☐ Free Youth (up to age 18)
☐ \$20.00 Individual
☐ \$25.00 Family
☐ \$30.00 Business
☐ \$50.00 Cornerstone Member

I would like to make an additional contribution in the amount of \$ _____

I'm interested in serving on a committee:

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

PLEASE PRINT

Name _____

Address _____

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___ Jackson County Chapter

___ Clark County Chapter

Return registration form and checks payable to:

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

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

Memberships are being gratefully accepted for 2025!

We depend on your support to keep Friends of the Black River a strong effective protector of the watershed.

Your membership will keep this newsletter coming to your e-mail or mail box!

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