



**FRIENDS of the
BLACK RIVER**

A Citizens' watershed
conservation organization

Reading the River



Volume 21 Issue 4~ Winter 2025

In this Issue

What's happening here?	1
President's message	1
Upcoming meetings and events	2
Supporting FBR's mission	2
Monitoring rare plants program	3
Mississippi refuge documentary	4
Winter outdoor activities	6
Season's greetings	6
Membership form	7
Renewal reminder	8

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What's happening here?



For the answer to what's happening in the photo, see page 6

President's Greetings

Winter is here.
This amount of snow we
have now used to be more com-
mon than in the last few years.
We used to almost always have
some snow for deer season.

Lately we haven't had decent
snow for Christmas.

While snow requires some
work to deal with, I want snow in
the winter. It is so much better
than rain this time of the year.

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 2026

Programming for 2026 is currently being developed. Anyone with ideas for possible topics concerning the Black River watershed, environment, outdoor activities, history or other related topics are encouraged to contact FBR.

Topic ideas can be sent to info_fbr@yahoo.com or by Facebook Messenger on the FBR Facebook page.

The FBR Board will be setting its 2026 calendar in January. Event dates will be published in the spring *Reading the River*, on Facebook and the FBR website.

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

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.

Millston candlelight ski/hike/snowshoe

Saturday, February 7, 2026 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.

A candlelight ski/hike/snowshoe will be held at the Black River State Forest.

Participants can enjoy 1.5 miles of lighted ski trails and one mile of snowshoe/hiking trails. They can warm up around a large bonfire or in the indoor heated shelter.

This candlelight event is put on by the Black River Forest Trail Foundation and the State Forest staff. Black River State Forest is located four miles east of Millston, off County Road O.

Sponsored by Black River Forest Trail Foundation and Black River State Forest - DNR.

See more winter events on page 6.

Donors to FBR's mission in 2025

Kathy Carlyle

Dan and Becky Deetz

Tom and Denise Gear-
ing

Patrick and Cherie Go-
dar

Richard Hilliker

Rhonda and Carl

Holmquist

Gil Homstad

Richard and Jennifer
Jaeger

Brad and Monica Loben-
stein

Lost Falls Campground

Michael and Christina
Mahan

Adam Marciniak

Charles Mueller

Peter and Rose Seger-
son

Steven Severson

Joe and Judy Tope

Tom Turk

**Support of our mission is
greatly appreciated**

President's Greetings, continued from page 1

Snow provides us with a variety of activities for enjoying the outdoors. You can ski, snowshoe or snowmobile. In fact, I think snowmobilers are some of the most optimistic people because conditions have not been good for snowmobiling for many years.

So it looks like a good year to play in the snow and kids will have that opportunity over Christmas break.

FBR will continue to provide activities and programs this year. Watch for winter hikes and cross country ski opportunities this winter.

While we have enough snow for now (15 inches), I hope we will maintain snow cover for the rest of the winter.

Steve Rake
FBR President

Monitoring rare plants subject of presentation



Jessica Ross (left) discusses rare plants with a couple attendees following her presentation given at the October FBR public education meeting.

According to Jessica Ross, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources botanist, rare native plants growing around the state deserve to be noticed. Ross is the WDNR coordinator for the Rare Plant Monitoring Program (RPMP) and the program is looking for volunteers to help monitor the plants.

Ross spoke about RPMP at the Oct. 15 Friends of the Black River public meeting held in The Hub at the Lunda Community Center. She gave an overview of rare plant situation in Wisconsin and how citizen volunteers can get involved with helping conserve the special plant species.

Among the species highlighted in Ross's presentation that might be found in the Black River watershed were Virginia meadow beauty, woolly milkweed, dwarf milkweed, rock club-moss, toothcup and sand violet.

According to Ross, of the nearly 1900 native plant species in Wisconsin and 324 of them are considered rare.

"To conserve these rare species, it is critical we have up-to-date information on which ones are most in need of our limited resources," said Ross.

In her talk, Ross pointed out all species, from the most common to the rarest, have value. While the plants intrinsic value to an animal might not be evident or whether a drug can be synthesized from it, all species have value as a piece of a larger puzzle.

"There are many reasons we should monitor and conserve rare plants," said Ross. "Some rare plants have direct utility to humans as food and medicine, others can be indicators of habitat quality and others still are quite beautiful and have aesthetic value. Ecologically, rare plants can play critical roles too."

Two examples of the critical ecological role of rare plants include the federally threatened dune thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*); it's the most important floral resource for pollinators in Wisconsin's dune communities. Another is dwarf huckleberry (*Vaccinium caespitosum*), which is the host for the larvae of the state endangered northern blue butterfly.

The RPMP was developed to engage the Wisconsin botanical community in the conservation of these plants. Volunteers are trained to search for known rare plant populations around the state and collect data in a way that will inform conservation assessments and habitat or species management decisions.

So far, volunteers have submitted over 2,000 reports from almost every county in the state since the program began in 2013.

"They have found plants not seen in Wisconsin in decades, discovered new populations of some of the rarest plants in the Midwest and documented the disappearance of others," said Ross. "In short, they have given us a clearer picture of the state of rare plants in Wisconsin."

It's important to monitor rare species because the data provide a baseline for all other conservation actions. Frequent monitoring helps keeps scientists informed about any potential problems for rare plants.

"The first step in conservation is understanding how rare species are doing," said Ross. "When concerning trends arise, monitoring is the basis for research, which provides better understanding of a problem and management, which actively addresses the problem. Monitoring can also help us understand

Rare plants, continued on page 5

Documentary observes refuge's centennial with message for today's concerned citizens

A conservationist's message from 100 years ago still resounds with prophetic certainty and a call to action today. That conservationist was Will Dilg, the founder of the Izaak Walton League and the driving force to establish the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Dilg's life and work was captured in the documentary, "A Visit From Will Dilg." The film was shown at the Friends of the Black River's November 12 public education meeting held in The Hub at the Lunda Community Center.

Much of the 50-minute documentary was filmed on the river near Winona. Starring Steven Marking who portrayed Dilg, the film was created in 2024 to mark the 100th anniversary of the refuge's creation.

The film showed Dilg's early engagement with the Mississippi River, but that connection was heart-breakingly broken when his young son drowned in the river. The passing years helped to heal the wound somewhat, and eventually, Dilg realized he needed to save the river even though he wasn't able to save his son.

He realized he needed to stop the senseless destruction of the natural



A bird's-eye view of a section of the Upper Mississippi National Fish and Wildlife Refuge was taken from overlook on Pool 10.

world caused by the drainage of wildlife lands along the river. In his view the destruction was unlawful.

"A crime against nature is a crime against mankind," said Dilg/Marking.

At the time the federal government had a policy that promoted the drainage to creating more land for agriculture. The only ones who benefited from the policy were the land speculators. The drained land was not only unsuitable for crop cultivation, they were also prone to flooding.

The response to the flooding led to the creation of levees, another government expenditure. They ended up "squeezing" the river causing the water's flow to have more force and do greater damage.

The drainage also damaged fish nurseries. Because fish didn't have spawning habitat, their populations declined. Focused on increasing fish populations, Dilg determined an organization would need to address the issue. He named the organization he helped start the Izaak Walton League. The author of "The Complete Angler," Izaak Walton was known as the patron saint of fishermen.

Dilg became the league's first president. Over the 100 years of its existence, the league has grown to around 100,000 members.

The organization's first battle was to preserve the Winneshiek Bottoms near MacGregor, IA. To gain more support to enact a ban on draining the river, Dilg looked to a new group of voters to support his campaign. Since women recently received the right to vote, he directed his appeal to them.

That support helped to elect representatives who passed a law to create the Upper Mississippi National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

In his later years, Dilg contracted throat cancer and lost his voice. But

Dilg documentary, continued on page 5



Round leaved orchis

whether our interventions are working and if we need to develop new approaches to conserving a particular species. Monitoring rare plants also helps us prioritize our resources, so we can make the greatest impact with our conservation efforts. “

According to Ross, species become rare for a number of reasons, including habitat loss, habitat degradation, highly specialized habitat needs, disturbance sensitivity, genetic problems, exploitation, predation, competition and parasitism. Rare plant habitats can vary greatly in size and quality as species occur in both large blocks of high-quality undisturbed habitats as well as small, remnant, isolated sites.

Anyone interested in the RPMP is encouraged to contact Ross at Jessica.ross@wisconsin.gov. More information can be found on the WDNR website on the Rare Plant Monitoring Program page.

Ross’s presentation was part of FBR’s ongoing mission to bring educational programs about the environment and conservation issues to the community.

Documentary, continued from page 4

before passing away in 1927, he continued through his writings to urge those concerned about the environment to keep up the fight against policies that put profit over conservation.

He reminded the public, “The refuge belongs to the people.”

“The fish and wildlife can’t speak, so you must speak for them,” said Dilg/Marking. “Speak up for the rights of nature.”

So the fight continues. With climate change, fish and wildlife numbers are declining because waters are warming.

“This is my final plea to you,” said Dilg/Marking. “Live, speak and accomplish diversity.



Photo taken of the Mississippi River at Onalaska by Fish and Wildlife ranger Katie Julian, La Crosse District. Reprinted with permission.

Then beauty, harmony and balance will follow as nature unceasingly demonstrates.”

The documentary showing was part of FBR’s ongoing mission to bring educational programs about the environment and conservation issues to the community.

Jackson In Action offers winter time outdoor activities

FBR encourages everyone to enjoy the outdoors during the winter. The group Jackson in Action has organized a number of activities for keeping active during the winter months.

Snowshoe-On-Your-Own

Marked trails will be available for snowshoeing on-your-own

Wazee Trail: January 17—25

Lunda Park: February 14-22

Looking for a fun way to be active this winter?
Try out Jackson In Action's free

Snowshoe Checkout Program

Snowshoes and hiking poles available for FREE checkout at the Lunda Community Center!

Open to all residents. Membership not required.

Learn more at:
www.jacksoninaction.org/snowshoecheckout



Winter FROSTIVAL

Save the Date

February 14th, 2026
Lunda Community Park, Black River Falls WI

Tenative time: 3 p.m. to 6:30 p.m

Bundle up and join us for a Valentine's Day full of icy magic and cozy warmth! Whether you're a couple or a family, come join us for ice skating, hot chocolate, a candle lit hike and more!

Join us for the 8th Annual

WAZEE WONDERLAND SNOWSHOE RACE



Saturday, January 3, 2026
10:00am @ Wazee Swim Beach Parking Lot

Self-timed, 3 mile snowshoe race
Run or walk; it's up to you!
This is an "at-your-own-risk" event.
FREE event; Awesomeness guaranteed!

For more info, contact
Kathleen Clemons 715-299-0870.

Answer to page 1 photo question:

FBR Vice President Mitch Wester was busy at the annual Movie Night taking memberships and contributions to Friends of the Black River as attendees enjoy a pizza meal.

The annual movie night showed two widely acclaimed films, "Our Great National Parks" with President Barak Obama leading a tour of national parks around the world and "Spirit of the Driftless," the third documentary produced by Sustainable Driftless about special features of the Driftless Region.

The film was dedicated to the memory of George Howe who was a member of the production team for the Driftless series; Howe passed away in 2024.

Season's Greetings
Wishing everyone the very best during
the holidays and in the New Year

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 unless to update contact information.

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 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

___ 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 2026

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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