



A Citizens' watershed conservation organization

# Reading the River



Volume 13, Issue 2~ Summer 2016

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## What's happening here?



See page 4 for the answer. Photo by Tom Teeples

## Greetings from the President

Summer is here again. Warm and sometimes hot weather along with humidity comes with the season. So, it's enjoyable to be on or near the water to help stay a little bit cooler.

However you use our waters in the state, I hope you are respectful of other people using this resource as well.

We invite everyone who would like to try kayaking or canoeing to join us at one of our events. We have a great resource right here with the Black River for these activities.

Our Friends organization has received a great deal of community support. We

*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 meeting, programs and events schedule for 2016

**July 2**—Paddle on the Black River and Paddle in the Park

**August 13**—Prairie wildflower walk

**August 27**—Annual river cleanup

**September 14**—Monthly meeting, Paddling the Driftless

**October 12**—Monthly meeting, program on bird photography and identification

**November 9**—Monthly meeting, topic to be determined

**December 5**—Annual holiday party  
(Dates and programs subject to change)

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

## Upcoming paddles

FBR will sponsor a paddle on the Black River reservoir landing just above the Black River Falls dam from 10:30 a.m. to noon, Saturday, July 2, as part of the Karner Blue Butterfly Festival.

FBR will again hold the Paddle in the Park in the kids' fishing pond at Lunda Community Park Saturday, July 2, from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. as part of the Festival in the Park. Kayaks and paddle boards and related gear will be available for those who want to try paddling. FBR will collect freewill donations at the Lunda Community Park paddle for the park's maintenance fund.

Whitewater paddling can be experienced during a number of Hatfield dam releases. The releases will be from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., July 9, August 13 and September 10 (second Saturday of each month during the summer). Paddlers wanting to take advantage of the release should meet by the County Hwy K bridge on West Clay School Road for put-in around noon.

The annual paddle on Lake Wazee will be



Saturday, July 16, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the lake's beach. Paddlers can try kayaking and learn basic as well as advanced skills such as rolling given by FBR paddling instructors. Visitors to Lake Wazee will need to pay admission to enter the county park.

To borrow boats and/or gear, contact Jeff Polzin at 715-896-5534. For more information about the paddles or FBR, email [info\\_fbr@yahoo.com](mailto:info_fbr@yahoo.com).

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

have again received a grant from the Black River Area Foundation to continue our activities to carry out our mission. We thank the Foundation, as well as the Lunda Charitable Trust, for their past and current support.

Since the organization was started we have the good fortune to have had some very dedicated board members as well as general members willing to volunteer their

time and effort to promote our goals. I personally want to thank all the people who have helped to make this organization as successful as it is.

Again if you can think of a good program for us to sponsor, please contact one of our board members with your ideas.

Have a great summer and keep mowing that lawn....

~ Steve Rake



## Meeting raises awareness of shoreline erosion by wave boats

The thrills enjoyed by one group of boaters on the Black River reservoir have become troublesome for others trying to enjoy the lake. Property owners and other recreational users on the lake report they have experienced damage to their property and threats to safety caused by the growing number of wakeboarding boats using the flowage.

They report the large waves created by the boats have increased shoreline erosion, damaged docks and watercraft tied to the docks and created a safety issue for other boaters as well as swimmers and anglers.

"It's apparent that the narrow channel of the river leads to problems from the enhanced wakes," said FBR President Steve Rake. "The wakes are so bad residents with floating docks or piers can't stand on them when the wakes hit them."

To raise awareness and inform the public about the issue, the Friends of the Black River invited stakeholders and other concerned citizens to attend a meeting in the Jackson County Bank. About 70 people attended the May 11 meeting to give and receive input on the situation. Guests included representatives from state and local governments.

"We don't have an answer, but wanted to bring the issue out in the open," said Rake. "We want responsible recreation and to protect the shoreline."

Wakeboard boats are designed to create larger wakes than other motor boats. The large waves provides wakeboarders lift for performing aerial maneuvers when they jump the waves. The boats create the large wakes by weighting and lowering the stern of the boat. The boats were designed for larger bodies of water, which allows the wakes they create to at least partially, dissipated before hitting the shoreline.

Kurt Haas, conservation warden with the Department of Natural Resources stationed at the Jackson County office, discussed boating regulations and asked the public to assist him by reporting incidents in a timely manner.

"Be my eyes and ears," said Haas. "I can't be everywhere. To do it all myself is almost impossible. I need to get reports that day. I've been getting people contacting me a day later or the



Department of Natural Resources resource manager Dan Hesel (right) presented information about responsible recreational use of the Black River at the May 11 public informational meeting. FBR President Steve Rake (left) moderated the meeting. Photo by Pat McKnight

next week. No one wants to turn in their neighbor; I get that."

State boating regulations restricts boats pulling water skiers to a 100-foot limit away from the shore. "On the upper Black, it's difficult," said Haas. "Ninety percent of the upper Black (River) isn't over 400 feet."

Along with Haas' presentation on boating regulations and method for reporting violations, former president and FBR founding member Geoff Alford showed photos of damage to his shoreline as well as the docks of other lake property owners.

"There's no question the damage is from recreation activity," said Alford. "The damage to the docks is done during the boating season."

Sue Bitter, FBR board member and a resident with property on the reservoir, reported needing to install shore tie systems exceeding a thousand dollars to protect her boats and docks from the waves. The larger wakes cause her boat and dock to bang together and the rebounding waves pull them away from the shore.

"The river didn't use to be high traffic," said Bitter. "We all used it together. It's different now. With three-foot wakes, it isn't safe. The bottom line is it didn't use to be this way. Now, I'm afraid to let my children go in the river."

*Wave boats, continued on page 4*

## Hikers take in annual spring wildflower walk



Despite cool weather, seventeen hikers walked the trail on the hillside above Morrison Creek to check out the wildflowers and other spring plants. Youngsters joining the walk were provided with field guides to help with plant identification. Those who have been on past walks were able to locate plants in places they've been found in the past. Photo by Pat McKnight

### WAV report

Water action volunteers (WAV) are monitoring streams in seven locations in the Black River basin and adding the data collected to a statewide database. WAV monitors measure water clarity, flow, temperature, dissolved oxygen, habitat quality and macro invertebrates. Two sites are being tested for phosphorous levels as requested by WI DNR, one at Cisna Creek and the other at East Fork Halls Creek.

Citizen monitoring of streams provides WI DNR with important information and is fun and easy to do. Training and gear are provided, and we are always looking for new monitors to check stream sites in the Black River basin. Stream monitors have to get to their sites once each month from May through October. It takes about a hour to measure the six data collections at a site, and then the data is entered into the statewide database by the monitors.

Contact Pete Segerson at 715-333-2033 if you would be interested in monitoring a stream site in the Black River basin in 2017.

### Wake boats, continued from page 3

Alford also reported seeing kayakers get tipped over by the large wakes, and Bitter cited other safety concerns caused by the large waves.

The Meek family admitted they are one of about six families on the river who use wakeboarding watercraft, stating the family enjoys the activity.

"It's something we can do as a family," said Laurel Meek. "We are all paying for that river to be part of the community."

Current boating regulations prohibit operating a vessel within 100 feet of the shoreline, any docks, rafts, piers, or restricted area on any lake at greater than "slow, no wake speed."

Regulations also restrict the operation of a vessel in a manner that creates hazardous wave or wake conditions while approaching or passing another vessel. Court cases have resulted in rulings making boaters responsible for damage caused by their wakes.

Several shoreline property owners are looking at way to address the situation. Among the actions they are considering is approaching the county to enact an ordinance regulating the boats' usage.

## Wildlife biologist talks about restoring wildlife habitat

The survival of monarch and Karner blue butterflies and other wildlife depends greatly on the private landowner. With the majority of land ownership resting in private hands, landowners who want to restore their land to benefit wildlife can partner with the USFWS to reach their goals.

Pfost, biologist with the USFWS, works with landowners to restore native plants and the environment for wildlife through the agency's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Pfost gave a presentation about land restoration at the Friends of the Black River's June 8 meeting.

"I have the best job possible," said Pfost. "I get to work with people who give a damn. Everyone has their own take on this. We make it work more often than we don't, and if we can work together, we can make a difference."

Based at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge for the past six years, Pfost has worked with landowners in a 10-county territory stretching from Adams to Jackson to Rusk.

Pfost believes partnerships are key for conserving land and natural resources. Along with the USFWS, other agencies and organizations such as Duck Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Natural Resources Conservation Service get involved in private-land restoration projects. The partnerships help landowners with funding, equipment and information.

The habitat restoration program's objective is to restore privately held acres to vegetation that will support pollinators and other wildlife. Private lands are needed because the amount of public land isn't enough to help endangered species survive and thrive.

"There's not enough public land or money to have enough habitat for wildlife," said Pfost. "We have to have the private landowner."

The wildlife agency has set a goal of increasing monarch butterfly numbers to 300 million by 2020 from its estimated population of 56.5 million today. Over the years, monarch numbers have declined 90 percent. The decline has been attributed to habitat loss, the increase use of pesticides and changes in the climate.

The monarch depends on milkweed plants and the Karner blue butterfly need lupine to



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Mark Pfost (left) answers a question posed by Wally Capper following Pfost's presentation on habitat restoration. Photo by Pat McKnight

propagate. The butterflies lay their eggs on the plants so their larvae have food when they hatch.

Last year, Pfost worked with the Jackson County Master Gardeners to plant milkweed at the Spaulding Road Community Garden to provide a food source for monarch butterfly caterpillars.

In addition to the monarch and Karner blue butterflies, other wildlife species populations are struggling. "All grassland birds are in decline," said Pfost. "We've lost our grasslands and prairies."

However, Pfost advised habitat restoration tends to be species-specific. "You can't manage any piece of ground for every species," said Pfost. "Some are going to win; some are going to lose. One piece of dirt can't do it for everything."

However, Pfost encourages audience members to do what they can to provide habitat for pollinators. "Even a small area can provide habitat for insects," said Pfost, showing a photo of a backyard native plants flower bed.

In addition to providing food and shelter for pollinators and other wildlife, other benefits of the habitat restoration programs are improved water quality and reduced soil erosion.

## Wildlife biologist presents program about bears

The arrival of spring means plants start green-ing, insects begin moving about and bears wake from a long winter nap. And, when bears wake up, they're hungry.

"Bears will pretty much eat all day long," said Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Scott Roepke. "They are active all day long and don't have to worry about hiding because they are a top predator."

Roepke presented information about black bears and the DNR's practices for managing the species at the April 13 Friends of the Black River meeting. The agency's management objectives are to prevent conflicts with the animals and humans while maintaining a viable bear population in the state.

Before being stationed in the Black River Falls DNR office more than two years ago, Roepke was the state's assistant big game specialist in Madison. In his presentation, Roepke dispelled the misconception that bears are blood-thirsty carnivores.

"They are omnivores," said Roepke. "They have a diverse diet and are mostly herbivores. In the spring, they eat mostly grasses and other vegetation. Bird feeders are an easy meal for them; they'll take an easy meal when they can find it."

As fruits ripen during the summer and into the fall, bears will dine on berries and nuts; however, they will also eat insects, frogs, grubs and fawns and they'll even feed on carrion.

Along with incidents of bears damaging bee hives and attacking small livestock, they have damaged fields by eating the corn and making nests of the stalks.

Bears can eat 10 to 18 pounds in a day. Adult males can weigh between 250 and 350 pounds with some reported to have reached a weight of 700 pounds or more. Female bears tend to be smaller than the males, weighing between 150 and 250 pounds.

Female bears can give birth to one or as many as five cubs with the size of the litters generally increasing as the sows age. They don't give birth every year as they raise their young into their yearling year. "They give birth every other year, at the earliest," said Roepke.

In presettlement times, bears ranged throughout North America from Alaska to Mexico, but by 1995, the populations declined and were mostly found in Canada. At that time, a small population of bears could still be found in the upper third of Wisconsin.

"In the early 2000s, sightings began to increase," said Roepke. "Bears were expanding in both numbers and range."

While the majority of the state's black bears in-



Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Scott Roepke (left) takes a question about black bears from Larry Gasper and Andy Ellingson. Photo by Pat McKnight

habit the northern part of the state, the Jackson County State Forest is considered primary habitat in the southern part of the state.

"The bear population continues to grow and there are more sightings outside their primary territory," said Roepke. "Sightings generally occur during mating and when yearlings begin to range to find new territory."

The DNR conducted a two-year study asking state residents to report sightings and the agency received accounts of bear visiting counties as far south as Iowa and Green. Residents living in the corridor running along the Mississippi River known as the Coulee Region, a secondary habitat for bears, have also reported more bear sightings in recent years.

The DNR has been developing management plans for maintaining a healthy bear population.

"The statewide population goal is 11,000 bears," said Roepke. "We are hoping to keep that level through habitat maintenance and hunting. We do issue permits to slow the growth into southern territories."

The agency issues about 12,000 bear hunting permits out of the 100,000 applications submitted each year. However, the success of bagging a bear goes down as larger numbers of permits are issued.

Wildlife officers will trap and relocate bears in situations where there's immediate threat, but advise people in preventing encounters with bears. To reduce human-bear conflicts, Roepke advises people secure food sources and minimize encroaching on bear habitat.

"If you encounter a bear, make noise and don't approach the bear," said Roepke. "Back away slowly and get into a vehicle or structure until bear leaves."

## 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.

## Memberships always welcome

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 below and mailing it with your membership dues to the mailing address listed on the 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Comments/Questions:

