



**FRIENDS of the
BLACK RIVER**

A Citizens' watershed
conservation organization

Reading the River



Volume 14, Issue 1 ~ Spring 2017

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What's happening here?



Wildfires are prevalent in the spring. To learn more about this wildfire see pages 3 and 4. Photo courtesy of Department of Natural Resources

Greetings from the president

After an erratic winter, spring is on our doorstep. This is always a busy time due to many activities we need to do. This includes clean-up of our yards in preparation for the growing season.

And of course the Friends always schedule an Earth Day Cleanup.

We will be working with the Black River State Forest this year on April 22nd. We can always use your help and lunch is provided.

Spring also means that we will start kayaking again. We will have paddles on Robin-

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, programs and events schedule for 2017

Wednesday, April 12—Monthly meeting, program about wolves and wildcats

Saturday, April 22—Earth Day Cleanup, Black River State Forest

Saturday, May 13—Wildflower hike to take the place of May meeting, (no regular meeting), time and place to be determined

Wednesday, June 14—Monthly meeting, program about Black River fish and fisheries

Friday, June 30—Paddle in the Park in conjunction with the Festival in the Park, 4:30 p.m. until 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 12—prairie walk to be take place of regular meeting, time still to be determined

Saturday, Aug. 26 - Annual river cleanup, 8:30 a.m., meet at Al Young Park

Wednesday, Sept. 13—monthly meeting, program to be determined

Saturday, Sept. 23—County Hwy K Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup (tentative)

Wednesday, Oct. 11—Annual meeting, program to be determined

Wednesday, Nov. 8—Monthly meeting, program to be determined

Monday, Dec. 4— Annual holiday party

Dates and programs subject to change.

Anyone with suggestions for future programs is encouraged to submit them by emailing info_fbr@yahoo.com

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 dates and times

Saturday, April 1, Morrison Creek, 10 a.m.

Sunday, April 2, Robinson Creek, 9 a.m.

Sunday, April 23, Whitewater paddle below Hatfield Dam, 10 a.m.

Sunday, May 21—Flat water paddle on the Black River, noon

Saturday, June 3 (tentative)—Robinson Creek Preservation Society annual paddle, time to be determined

Saturday, June 10— Hatfield release, 11 a.m.

Saturday, July 1 - Paddle in the Park, Lunda Community Park, 4:30 p.m.—6:30 p.m.

Saturday, July 8—Hatfield release, 11 a.m.

Saturday, July 15—Lake Wazee kayaking instruction, 11 a.m.—1 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 12—Hatfield release, 11 a.m.

Saturday, Sept. 9—Hatfield release, 11 a.m.

For more information, contact Jeff Polzin at 715-896-5534.

Dates and time subject to change depending on weather and water conditions.



Greetings from the president, continued from page 1



son, Halls and Morrison Creeks. They are wonderful paddles when the water levels are high enough for paddling.

Check our website at www.friendsoftheblackriver.org and Facebook page at www.facebook.com/friendsoftheblackriverWI/ for our activities. We also publicize them in the paper and on the radio.

Come to our meetings and enjoy our programs. We are always open for ideas for programs.

Enjoy Spring!

~ Steve Rake

Forestry agents talk about dangers of wildfires

Spring is the season for wildflowers and wildfires. As Wisconsin's winter-weary residents celebrate the warmer weather, the lack of snow cover and still-dry vegetation create prime conditions for wildfires to start and spread.

To educate homeowners to be "firewise" and about steps they can take to reduce property damage from wildfires, Department of Natural Resources forestry team leader Eric Zenz of the Black River Falls Service Center and Amy Luebke of the Wisconsin Rapids Service Center presented a program at Friends of the Black River March 8 meeting.

"Jackson County is a fire prone area," said Zenz.

The sandy soil of the central forest is the underlying reason Jackson and surrounding counties are at a greater risk for wildfires. The sandy soil was formed during the last Ice Age when Glacial Lake Wisconsin covered the area where the pine forest now stands.

Most brush fires are caused by people burn-

Continued on page 4, Becoming firewise



Friends of the Black River member Rose Schaper (right) discusses wildfires with DNR forestry specialist Amy Luebke of the Wisconsin Rapids Service Center at the Friends of the Black River's March 8 meeting. Photo by Pat McKnight

2017 Water Action Volunteer report

Water Action Volunteer stream monitors will continue to monitor six sites in the county for general water quality by testing the streams for dissolved oxygen, temperature, invertebrate life, turbidity, current flow and habitat parameters.

Monitoring consists of visiting a site once a month May-October and then entering the data into a Wisconsin water quality database.

FBR WAV will monitor phosphorous at two sites in Jackson County in 2017. The sites are chosen by DNR water quality staff. Monthly water samples are taken at the stream locations and sent to the State Lab of Hygiene in Madison for testing phosphorous content. Phosphorous is a primary factor in nuisance algae blooms. WAV monitors enable the DNR water quality staff to collect phosphorous data at more sites than the agency's staff can cover themselves.

The spring 2017 FBR WAV monitor meeting is planned for Wednesday, April 26, at 6:30 p.m. at Skyline Golf Course. State coordinator Peggy Compton will be there and equipment and supplies will be distributed.

Anyone interested in participating as a WAV monitor contact Pete Segerson at 715-333-2033.



A group of WAV volunteers get stream monitoring training on one of the county's creeks. FBR archive photo

Becoming firewise (continued from page 3)

ing debris and then losing control of the fire. According to Luebke, the 69 percent of wildfires in 2016 were caused by people who didn't have burn permits.

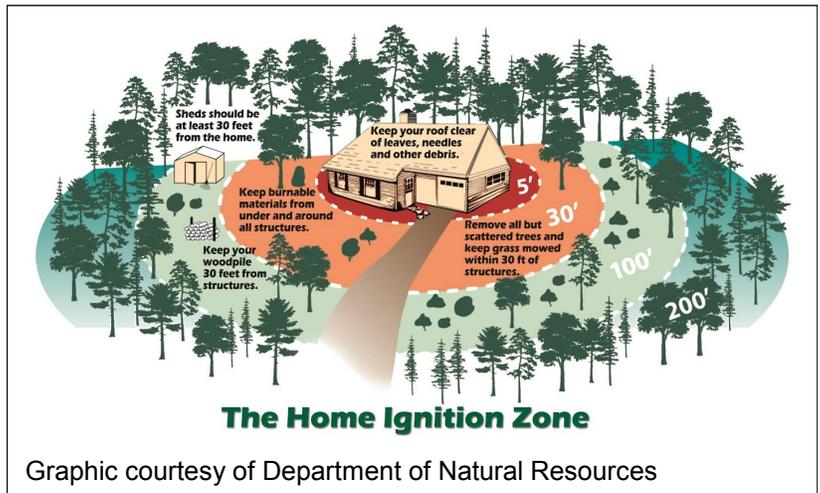
"They try to put it out themselves," said Luebke. "They call when it gets out of control. The best thing to do is call 9-1-1 right away."

As an outreach educator in wildfire prevention, preparation and planning, Luebke suggested homeowners with property in wooded areas take steps to reduce the ignitability of their homes and be better prepared for wildfires.

She recommended easily ignitable materials, such as firewood, be kept away from buildings. Along with landscaping practices such as keeping lawns mowed, removing lower branches on evergreen trees and those hanging over roofs and keeping wood mulch away from the house, Luebke recommended keeping other combustible materials away from homes.

"Keep evergreen shrubs away from the house and use rocks in landscaping," said Luebke. "Reducing the amount of burnable materials right next to buildings gives them a fighting chance."

"Firewood on the deck is more Wisconsin than cheese. Firewood shouldn't be stored on the deck or under it; it should be kept 30 feet



away from a building. It's OK to put firewood on the deck in the winter when the ground is snow-covered."

She also recommended shrubs, other vegetation and machinery containing ignitable fuel be kept at least 10 feet away from propane tanks.

The two DNR representatives pointed out firefighters must determine which structures they will try to save in the event multiple buildings are threatened.

"With limited resources, we are forced to make choices," said Luebke. "We are going to go first to houses where we have the best chance to succeed. That's why it's so important that homeowners do their part to make their homes firewise."

Early detection helps the effort to keep fires from getting out of control, and the DNR appreciates the public's assistance in reporting forest fires. If residents see a forest fire, they should call 9-1-1.

The program also included an overview of the 1977 Brockway and Airport fires. Because of the proximity of the Airport Fire to the town and city of Black River Falls, 1500 residents were evacuated.

"With the fire-prone nature of our area, firefighters say that it is not a matter of if a wildfire will occur, but when it will occur," said Zenz. "The large fires of 1977 were a result of the 1976 drought. The vegetation was still dry in the spring."

Caused by a westbound Chicago and Northwestern train sending out sparks along its track and an illegal cooking fire, the Brockway Fire burned more than 17,000 acres in Jackson County and 14 houses were consumed with damages totaling over \$1.4 million.



The 1977 brush fire on Buckeye Road captures the level of destruction caused by wildfires. Photo courtesy of Department of Natural Resources

Biologist talks about importance of pollinators

Life on earth would be severely compromised if the world's pollinators disappeared. That was the message UW-Eau Claire entomologist and conservation biologist Paula Kleintjes-Neff presented at the Feb. 8 Friends of the Black River meeting.

"Ninety percent of flowering plants need insects to move pollen, and 75 percent of all food crops depend on pollinators," said Kleintjes-Neff. "About 100 varieties (of plants) in this country depend on pollinators for about a third of the fruit production.

Most people are familiar with the European honey bee as a pollinator as well as the main producer of honey. However, Kleintjes-Neff told those attending the meeting butterflies, moths, some flies, some wasps and birds can also pollinate plants. Some species of beetles and male mosquitoes are also pollinators.

"Pollinators can be specialists or generalists," said Kleintjes-Neff. "There's one species of pollinator that specializes in pumpkins and squash."

Pollination occurs when the insect or bird enters the flower of a plant to feed on the nectar. When the pollinator goes to the flower of another plant, it takes along the pollen it collected from the previous plant. When the pollen from the previous plant is deposited in the flower of the second plant, that plant becomes pollinated. Once pollinated, the plant then begins the process of producing fruit.

Kleintjes-Neff reported there are 3,600 bee species in the United States and about 20,000 worldwide. Alarmingly, many pollinator populations are reported to be in decline. In recent years, biologists have been studying a phenomenon known as colony collapse disorder. Beekeepers report their hives are empty or the bees in their hives have died. Among the suspected causes for the decline in bees and other pollinators is loss of habitat, disease, parasites, pesticide use, poor diet and poor genetics.

The bumble bee and other native pollinators are needed to pollinate such crops such as tomatoes, cranberries and peppers. If pollinator numbers are too low, plants will not produce fruits unless they are pollinated by hand.

One of the native pollinators receiving national attention recently is the rusty patch bumble bee; it has become the first bumble bee to be listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Insect biologist Paula Kleintjes-Neff (left) discusses the characteristics of a pollinator that Ruth Casper is viewing through a microscope at the Feb. 8 meeting. Kleintjes-Neff provided specimens and the equipment for getting a close look at the insects. Photo by Pat McKnight

The agency estimates the insect's numbers have declined as much as 87 percent.

Kleintjes-Neff's program included a tutorial for recognizing native pollinator species and groups along with methods for attracting and conserving them. The biologist also provided samples of insect pollinators for viewing through microscopes.

Kleintjes Neff recommends those wanting to know more about pollinators to check out the Xerces Society, which works to protect the life that sustains the planet and the little things that make the world work.

Master Gardener Patricia Franks brought seed packets of plants that benefit pollinators and made them available to program attendees.

Kleintjes-Neff advised the best way to support pollinators is by planting a variety of flowers that bloom at different times of the year, so the insects will have food sources throughout the growing season.

Winter wilderness survival topic of January meeting

Wisconsinites are very aware that coping with upper Midwest winter weather can be a challenge. When a trek into the wilderness becomes one of survival, knowing ways to stay safe is extremely valuable.

Advice for surviving in nature in the winter was the topic of the Jan. 11 Friends of the Black River meeting. Derek Barkeim of Seekers Wild presented a similar program at FBR's March 2016 meeting and was invited back to offer tips for cold season survival.

Barkeim noted dealing with a winter wilderness survival situation is similar to a wilderness survival at any other time of the year, except it's colder.

He stressed the importance of avoiding survival situations in the first place, but encouraged practicing survival skills as well as having a plan and the right gear. He also stressed those going into wilderness areas need to have the right frame of mind and correctly read the situation.

"People who recognize what's going wrong will survive a survival situation," said Barkeim. "A really good skill is to know when to stop, turn around and pull out."

He didn't sugar-coat the difficulty of survival situations.

"It's not going to be fun; it's going to be rugged," said Barkeim. "You're going to be hungry and scared. When you're in survival mode, all rules go out the window."

Such rules that could be tossed include not eating snow to keep hydrated or not hunting and trapping when a source of food is needed.

"If snow is white, eat it if you're going to die of thirst," said Barkeim. "You'll get more bang for your buck with ice; it's more dense. If you know the skill, you can snare animals such as squirrels."

He recommended looking for caches made by squirrels which are often at the base of trees. A cache of pine cones could still hold pine nuts in their crevices.

"You can make pine needle tea or even dig under the snow for plants," said Barkeim.

He advised determining what sort of shelter would be needed before starting to build. Constructing some shelters could require using energy that would best be conserved. A simple shel-



Owen Zenz (left) shows Derek Barkeim of Seekers Wild a fire-starter kit he made following Barkeim's program on winter wilderness survival. Photo by Pat McKnight

ter of a snow trench is one of the least energy-demanding construction methods.

Conserving energy and not working up a sweat can be crucial for survival. "Try to stay dry at all times in the winter," said Barkeim. "Practice not sweating."

To create warmth, he recommended heating fist-size rocks. The heated rocks can be put into pockets or a sleeping bag and will give off heat for some time.

Despite the possible dangers of spending time in the out-of-doors, Barkeim encourages people to be educated and prepared in order to have good experiences when out in nature. He believes spending time in nature and practicing wilderness skills goes a long way toward building self-reliance.

"The more time you spend outside the happier you'll be," said Barkeim. "Be comfortable in nature; that's going to add a huge level of confidence."

He stressed the need to acquire skills that will help the stranded explorer keep from panicking.

Barkeim has a degree in recreation and tourism studies and with the wilderness skills he has acquired over the years, he started Seekers Wild with the goal of improving the quality of life for individuals and communities through positive outdoor experiences.

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

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.

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:

