



**FRIENDS of the  
BLACK RIVER**

A Citizens' watershed  
conservation organization

# Reading the River



Volume 15, Issue 1 ~ Spring 2018

## In this Issue

Vice president's message	1
Upcoming events	2
Earth Day Cleanup	2
Cornerstone memberships	2
Winter hike	3
WAV Report	3
Upcoming paddles	3
School forest program	4
Alaska trip program	5
Economic impact of Black River program	6
Membership information	7

The Friends of the Black River  
PO Box 475  
Black River Falls, WI 54615  
[www.friendsoftheblackriver.org](http://www.friendsoftheblackriver.org)  
[Info\\_fbr@yahoo.com](mailto:Info_fbr@yahoo.com)

Newsletter Editor  
Pat McKnight  
[pmcknight@centurytel.net](mailto:pmcknight@centurytel.net)

## Board of Directors

### President

**Steve Rake**  
(715) 284-2087

### Vice-President

**Mitch Wester**  
(715) 284-9637

### Secretary/Treasurer

**Lucas Annear**  
(608) 475-1204

### Members of the Board

**Sue Bitter**  
(715) 896-1632

**Deane Chase**  
(715) 964-1067

**Jeff Polzin**  
(715) 896-5534

**Pete Segerson**  
(715) 333-2033

**Tom Teeples**  
(715) 896-1949

### Recording Secretary

Pat McKnight  
(608) 526-9873

## What's happening here?



For the answer, see page 3. Photo by Tom Teeples

## Greetings from the vice president

Hi everyone,

Since President Steve Rake is out west watching the Brewers, your vice president, Mitch Wester, gets to welcome you to our spring happenings.

With the arrival of warmer weather, lots of things are planned for our group. The big-

gest is our annual Earth Day Cleanup on April 21st. This year, we'll be assisting the Jackson County Forester Jim Zahasky with cleaning up areas on county land.

We need volunteers to help with the cleanup.

*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

**Wednesday, April 11**—Monthly meeting, program: Beaver Creek Reserve to present a program about frogs.

**Saturday, April 21**—Earth Day Cleanup

**Saturday, May 12**—Wildflower hike, meet at Black River Area Chamber of Commerce parking lot, car-pool to trail head with hike beginning at 10 a.m.

**Wednesday, June 13**—Monthly meeting, program: Wisconsin Wetland Association presentation

**July**—Prairie plant walk, time and place to be determined

**Saturday, August 25**—Annual river cleanup

**Wednesday, September 12**—Monthly meeting, program to be determined

**Wednesday, October 10**—Annual meeting, program to be determined

**Wednesday, November 14**—Monthly meeting, program: Author and artist's paddle down the Mississippi River

**Tuesday, December 4**—Holiday party and movie night

The Wednesday evening programs will be held at 6:30 p.m. in the lower level community room of the Jackson County Bank.

## Volunteers needed for annual Earth Day Cleanup



Young volunteers at last year's Earth Day Cleanup.

Friends of the Black River and Jackson County Forestry Department are looking for volunteers to help with this year's Earth Day Cleanup. The cleanup will be held Saturday, April 21, and volunteers are asked to meet at the beach at Lake Wazee at 8 a.m. to receive assignments. Cleanup volunteers will have free admission to the county park that morning.

Lunch will be provided by the county at noon. To get a count for the lunch, volunteers are asked to contact Steve Rake by calling 715-284-2087 by April 20. To sign up or for more information contact Rake or email to [info\\_fbr@yahoo.com](mailto:info_fbr@yahoo.com).

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

Volunteers are asked to meet at the Lake Wazee Beach at 8 a.m. to help do our part to keep our Earth clean. We welcome everyone to help and we'll supply gloves, garbage bags, pickers, and Jim will feed you lunch.

Jeff Polzin has done his usual great job organizing many kayaking events on our local waters. Some coming up soon include: April 7 Robinson Creek Paddle at 10 a.m., April 8 Morrison Creek Paddle at 9 a.m., April 22 the Whitewater Paddle at 10 a.m.

Our Mother's Day weekend Wild Flower Hike is coming up May 12. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Chamber of Commerce if you would like to car-pool. The hike will start at 10:00 a.m. Every year

our guides show us flowers I would never even see without them.

Smile and enjoy our beautiful outdoors!

~ Mitch Wester

## Cornerstone members

Cornerstone members support FBR's mission with a \$50 annual membership:

New members Robin and Mary Percy of La Crosse

Renewing member Margaret Legois

*Thank you.*

## Snowshoe outing held on High Banks Trail



More than twenty winter enthusiasts joined FBR hosts on a snowshoe hike Sunday, Feb. 11. Hikers of all ages donned snowshoes or other winter foot gear to take in the winter hike on the two-mile long stretch on the High Banks Trail.

*Answer to question on page 1: Hikers take a warm-up break around a fire during the winter hike. Photos by Tom Teeples*

## Water Action Volunteer report

We are actively recruiting anyone who wants to be a WAV monitor. Training and gear is provided and a monitor would have to provide a couple hours each month, May through October, to sample a stream segment for air and water temperature, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, measure current flow, and sample stream insects.

Several monitors also sample phosphorous at sites selected by WI DNR water quality biolo-

gists. Monitors can choose sites for general monitoring. It can be for convenience or personal interest.

Current stream monitors are Ruth and Larry Casper, Chris Kelley and Jerry Schmidt, Mitch and Sue Wester, Luke Annear, Mike Brauner, Pete and Rose Segerson.

If you are interested in being a WAV stream monitor contact Pete Segerson at 715-333-2033.

## Upcoming paddles

**Robinson Creek paddle**—Saturday, April 7, 10 a.m.

**Morrison/Halls creeks paddle**—Sunday, April 8, 9 a.m.

**Whitewater paddle on Black River**—Sunday, April 22—10 a.m.

**Flatwater paddle on Black River**—Sunday, May 20—noon (tentative)

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

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



## FBR and guests learn about school forest program

Dan Nortman has fond memories of attending outdoor classes when he was a student at the School District of Black River Falls. He is now working to give school district students similar experiences.

"I remember going out with Mr. Rensick to band birds," said Nortman. "We all got off the bus and Mr. Rensick had us all be quiet because there are birds caught in the net. He showed us how to band them. It left a lasting memory."

Nortman, SDBRF fourth-grade teacher and forest coordinator since 2007, presented a program about the school district forest at the March 14 meeting.

The SDBRF created a School Forest Advisory Committee in 2002; the committee works to continue natural resource management and educational programming of the 40-acre forest located in the town of Brockway.

Before becoming an outdoor education facility, the land was used as a landfill for the city of Black River Falls and the towns of Adams, Albion and Brockway. The school forest lies within the school district boundaries, surrounded by Jackson County forest land.

The school district was given the land after the land fill was closed. Since the school district acquired the land, it has installed a shelter, well house, outhouses, fire pit and a challenge course. There is also a pond and benches for students to sit on during instruction sessions.

Initially the land was generally used for nature walks until Nortman and colleague Gretchen Marshall applied for and received a couple Environmental Education grants.

"Teachers didn't want to use the forest because the outdoors posed challenges," said Nortman. "Outdoor education can be scary for teachers because it's a classroom without walls."

Nortman and Marshall attended environmental education classes to learn ways to make better use of the outdoor classroom and develop a curriculum to incorporate the various topics and lessons covered with regular classroom subjects. Along with developing lesson plans, the nature educators created kits for the students going to the school forest.

The kits contain lesson plans and the



Black River Falls School Forest coordinator Dan Nortman (left) discusses aspects of the School District of Black River Falls' outdoor education program with Friends of the Black River Vice President Mitch Wester. Nortman presented a program about the district's outdoor education facility at

tools to be used during the outdoor class time. Lessons are developed around themes such as ecosystems, forestry and wildlife. Academic skills incorporated in the outdoor learning range from critical thinking and artistic writing to GPS instruction.

"We usually have a Ho-Chunk Nation biologist present a program on mammals," said Nortman. "He'll bring furs to show the students. The lesson on forestry includes fire control."

Student trips to the school forest generally run from September to November, but the program is expanding to develop winter programs for upper grades. Nortman said high schoolers have been using the forest more and a biology class has been conducting experiments to determine an effective means for eradicating buckthorn, an invasive shrub.

Environmental education can integrate education concepts such as art, technology, music and physical education. The benefits of environmental education are increased student motivation, improved performance in other subjects, hands-on learning and the development of problem-solving skills.

Some of the challenges outdoor educators face include the tendency to put a low priority on outdoor education, a decrease in nature literacy and a shortage of funding.

To raise funds for the school forest, the advisory committee has organized and held an annual 5K Fun Run/Walk since 2010.

## FBR members show film about Alaska trip

During their 2016 trip to Alaska, Black River Falls' residents Steve Rake and Steve Firkins took in the scenic wilderness, wildlife, tourist attractions and a number of auto repair shops.

Firkins documented the bucket-list trip, and he and Rake presented the film, "To Alaska and Back," at the Feb. 14 Friends of the Black River meeting held in the community room of the Jackson County Bank.

"We'd never been to Alaska and thought this would be a good trip to do," said Rake.

The auto repair shops weren't on the trip's itinerary, but the drive to the 49th state and the touring proved too much for Rake's 1999 conversion van.

"We had some troubles that made it more of an adventure," said Firkins. "All adventures seem to have their troubles. Enjoy your troubles, they make it more memorable."

Wanting to keep the expedition economical, the two adventurers fixed up the inside of the van so they could "stop anywhere to sleep" during their nearly month-long journey. They left BRF Aug. 15, 2016, and returned Sept. 9, 2016.

The two drove on Canada Highway One to Calgary, Alberta, where some of the transportation problems started, but they were able to continue on to Banff, Alberta, and up through the Canadian Rockies to Yukon Territory.

Reaching Alaska, Rake and Firkins made stops in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Seward and Homer. During their visit to Denali National Park, they were able to join in the celebration of the National Park Service's 100th anniversary.

They enjoyed Christmas atmosphere at North Pole, AK, where they were able to tour the gift shop and give Santa their wish lists early. Rake also visited a musk ox farm north of Palmer where the animals are raised for their high quality wool.

The stop in Palmer also included a visit to the Alaska State Fair where they hoped to see the world's largest cabbage. However, the largest cabbage contest was held the day following their visit.

Because of the endless daylight the state has during the summer, vegetables grown in Alaska can reach record-setting size. In the past, top cabbages have tipped the scales at more than 100 pounds.

One of the more unusual tourist stops was a Russian Orthodox cemetery where the pair saw burial spirit houses. The colorful miniature doll house-like constructions cover gravesites, a tradition formed from a mix of Russian religious beliefs and Native American practices.

Among the highlights of the trip for Firkins was learning to pan for gold, which his travel partner dutifully taped for the travelogue.

In Seward, the two toured the Alaska Sealife Center where Sadie Ulman, daughter of Tom and Denise Gearing of Black River Falls, works as a researcher.

When the van began showing signs of needing mechanical work, the adventurers returned to Anchor-



Friends of the Black River President Steve Rake (left) and FBR member Steve Firkins hold souvenirs they picked up on their 2016 trip to Alaska. Photo by Pat McKnight

age to have the vehicle looked at. While the van was receiving a brake job and oil change, Rake and Firkins toured the Anchorage Museum.

With the van back on the road, the two traveled to the ocean where Rake joined a group on a charter boat to take in some halibut fishing. He caught five but was only allowed to keep two.

Then it was back to Anchorage because the van was showing signs of transmission problems. Repairs to the transmission resulted in a \$3,000 bill. Unfortunately, problems with transmission fluid hoses and steering cables found the two again with a breakdown.

As the two were heading home, the van lost transmission fluid and ended up getting towed to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. The van was abandoned there, and the two travelers bought airline tickets to Vancouver and then on to The Cities.

When asked by his fellow traveler whether he had an opinion about the situation, Rake was hesitant about verbalizing his frustration. "Nothing I can say on camera," said Rake.

During those times he waited for the van to be repaired, Firkins found occasion to wax philosophically. Those waits resulted in a poem about killing time that Firkins shared at the FBR meeting.

When a member of the audience asked the two how much the trip cost, Firkins said, "It was priceless." But they did consider passing the hat.

## Speaker talks about economic potential of Black River

The “Quiet Economy” has a telling impact on Jackson County’s economy. And, according to Chris Hardie, former Black River Area Chamber of Commerce director, the “Quiet Economy” could be expanded through enterprises catering to the silent sport industry.

Hardie offered suggestions for capitalizing on recreational opportunities offered by the Black River at the Jan. 10 Friends of the Black River meeting. His presentation covered the economic impact the Black River has had and can continue to have on the area.

“The river has long had an economic impact on the region, especially during the lumber era when billions of board feet of pine were harvested and floated down the Black River to saw mills in La Crosse,” said Hardie. “Today, the river’s main importance is recreational, providing the base for a variety of activities from fishing to boating and canoeing and kayaking.”

The logging era was a major economic boom for the area in the nineteenth century.

“The 1837 treaty opened the forests to logging,” said Hardie. “Thirteen sawmills sent 300 million board-feet down the river by 1873. In today’ economy, the lumber taken out of Jackson County forests would be worth more than \$2.5 billion.”

Although today’s recreational activities might not have the same level of economic impact as the logging industry of the nineteenth century, the activities could be an economic driver for the area. Hardie cited data from the Outdoor Industry Association that found those engaged in outdoor activities nationwide produced \$17.9 billion in spending annually.

“The quiet economy attracts highly educated people and they spend money, an average of \$468 per trip,” said Hardie. “With silent sports, they come, they enjoy and spend money and then they leave. They support jobs and don’t stress the infrastructure as much as other development.”

A study conducted in the Ashland, Bayfield and Sawyer counties showed the recreational opportunities available in those counties brought in a significant number of visitors.

“Ninety-five percent of participants were from outside the area,” said Hardie. “Nonresidents spent \$26.4 million in 2012 in total trip spending



Black River Falls Administrator Brad Chown (left) discusses economic opportunities in Black River Falls with former director of the Black River Area Chamber of Commerce Chris Hardie following the Feb. 10 Friends of the Black River meeting program. Photo by Pat McKnight

in the three counties. The number one activity here is outdoor recreation. We have the assets and it’s not just the Black River; it’s the streams. You have to go a long ways north to get the same experience. Here we have the Northwoods closer to home.”

Starting at Rib Lake and flowing to its confluence with the Mississippi River at La Crosse, Black River is the 10th longest river in Wisconsin. Hardie suggested the 190-mile long Black River could become a state part of a water network as a possible economic resource.

“Why not designate the Black River as a water trail?” asked Hardie. “It could be an interpretive route with a network of access points.”

By means of those access points, water trail users could take in amenities such as campsites and enjoy local attractions along the river as they experience the natural beauty through a mode of travel used even before recorded history.

Catering to the visitors would be an important part of a mix that could include businesses providing guided trips as well as sporting goods suppliers, groceries and restaurants.

“I was recently approached by someone with just that sort of idea,” said BRF Administrator Brad Chown. “The idea is out there.”

Other ideas Hardie suggested were creating development near the river and use of social media to attract visitors or new residents who want to unplug.

## Ways to support FBR's mission

*Donations made to assist FBR with its mission since the fall newsletter:*

Thank you to the Tuesday Club for its \$25 contribution and to Nyla Musser for a \$20 contribution.

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 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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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:

