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What's happening here?



See page 6 to learn the answer to the question.

Greetings from the president

Winter is here. We'll be dealing with cold weather and snow for at least the next four months.

But I want to bring attention to the activities in Clark County. Over a year ago we were contacted by Adam Marciniak from Neillsville. He was interested in pursuing activities relating to the Black River in Clark County. The board had previously dis-

cussed expanding our mission in that area but the opportunity didn't arise until now. Adam joined our board and has worked to build a sub-chapter in Clark County.

He has already held two river cleanups there and is recruiting members from that area. Another board member from that area is Sherrill Anderson. Adam and

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 2020

January 15, 2020—Monthly meeting, meet-and-greet with DNR warden, 6 p.m. at the Clark Cultural Art Center in Neillsville

February 12, 2020— Monthly meeting, Terry Schmidt, Jackson County Zoning, program about recycling

March 11, 2020— Monthly meeting, Pete Zani of UWSP, program about turtles

April 8, 2020—Monthly meeting, Jeff Boyne of NOAA, program about clouds

May 2020—Wildflower hike, time and place tbd

We welcome suggestions for programs and for 2020 meetings. Send ideas to FBR by emailing info_fbr@yahoo.com.

Watch for messages sent to your email box for up-to-date announcements of future events.

Announcements about FBR activities are also posted on FBR's Facebook page and website, the Black River Area Chamber of Commerce's calendar of events and broadcasted on WWIS and WCCN radio.

Monthly meetings are free and open to the public. Programs subject to change. Unless indicated otherwise, the Wednesday evening programs are held at 6:30 p.m. in The Hub meeting room at the Lunda Community Center.

Documentary about planet shown at annual movie night

FBR held its annual movie night December 3 with about 30 people attending the showing at the Lunda Community Center.

The documentary, One Planet, is the first film in the BBC nature series, "Our Planet." Narrated by British naturalist David Attenborough, the documentary was filmed in 50

countries over four years. The film's unsurpassed videography captured close-up images of the planet's inhabitants in their native habitats. The documentary also discussed the impacts human activities have on the environment and why action needs to be taken to reverse changes in the climate.

Greetings from the president *continued from page 1*

Sherrill are holding meetings there to work with area residents to care for the river in that region. We are pleased with this development and appreciate their efforts.

Our activities and plans will probably be similar to previous years but we have decided to not hold a meeting in Black River Falls in January. Instead, the Clark County Chapter will host a public meeting with the new DNR warden in Neillsville on January 15.

It's getting harder to find applicable topics, so if you have ideas for a good topic, let us know.

Happy Holidays and plan to support us next year!

Steve Rake

Fair photo contest winner



Owen Zenz entered this winning photo of the Black River taken at Cormican Landing in FBR's photography class at the Jackson County Fair.

Clark County Chapter reviews 2019 and plans for 2020

By Sherrill Anderson

After successfully launching two area cleanups on the banks of the Black River in 2019, the Clark County organizing committee is planning some exciting activities for 2020.

Thanks to committee head Adam Marciniak's initiative, the group installed its first fishing line recycling bin in Greenwood Park in October. With the first installed, the committee plans to add bins at Mead Lake, Rock Dam, Lake Arbutus and other areas.

The Clark County group will host a public meet-and-greet with the new WDNR Clark County warden January 15 at the Clark County Art Center in Neills-

ville beginning at 6 p.m.

Adam is considering beginning water quality monitoring on the North Branch of O'Neill Creek, using the protocols of the Water Action Volunteers Program.

Other plans for next year include holding organized area canoe paddles and creating informational signs for installation at key Clark County canoe/kayak landings.

The chapter hopes to expand activities to Greenwood and Owen as well and invite young people to get involved. Adam would like to add more family friendly events to get people out and about on the Black River to experience its beauty and importance to the entire region.



A photo of one of the illegal dump sites cleaned up during one of the cleanups held by the FBR Clark County Chapter.



Members of the Clark County Aktion Club assisted the FBR-Clark County Chapter with making fish line collection bins. The discarded fishing lines collected in the bins can be recycled and are kept out of the environment where they can harm wildlife.



It took teamwork to drag a car door out of the woods during a Clark County cleanup this past year.



Clark County cleanup volunteers had a productive year in cleaning out illegal dumpsites and along the Black River.

Fungi of Driftless Region research shared at October meeting

Wisconsin's Driftless Region is home to a wide variety of mushrooms, and Sabrina Aspenson, a local researcher, has been finding and studying the plants for a several years.

"The biodiversity in the Driftless Region is astronomical," said Aspenson. "It's very interesting the number of fungi found in the area. We've found some here that aren't found anywhere else."

Aspenson, a University of Wisconsin-La Crosse graduate student, presented her research at the Friends of the Black River's annual meeting held Oct. 9 in The Hub in the Lunda Community Center.

Aspenson reports more than 400 people have contributed data on mushrooms and other fungi for 20 years, which included three forays led by professionals. The fungi researchers collected 1,612 specimens in the Driftless Region; the specimens represent more than 1,300 species.

For her research, Aspenson collected fungi specimens from three sites – Perrot State Park near Trempealeau, Chestnut Hills near West Salem and Hixton Forest in La Crosse. The ecology of the collection sites varied from hardwood forests to remnant prairie.

Aspenson's work to identify the fungi in the region resulted in discovering some fungi with unusual characteristics and distribution. While some fungi species were habitat specific, 138 mushroom species were common to all three collection sites.

"Some mushrooms are tree-specific," said Aspenson. "Others are mycorrhizal, which means they grow on the ground. Chanterelles are mycorrhizal."

During her forays to collect



University of Wisconsin-La Crosse graduate student Sabrina Aspenson (left) discusses the fungi of the Driftless Region with Jon Bronsdon at the FBR October 9 meeting. Photo by Pat McKnight

specimens, Aspenson encountered a few surprises. "A species usually growing in southern states was found here in the Driftless about five years ago," said Aspenson.

She told those attending the presentation amateur mycologists are encouraged to start collecting fungi and post photos on the iNaturalist website for identification.

Aspenson showed photos of edible mushrooms as well as some to be avoided, such as those in the amanita genus category.

Aspenson cautions the amateur collector about eating the mushrooms they find. One of her slides repeated the adage guiding mushroom hunters collecting fungi for eating. "There are old mushroom hunters; there are bold mushroom hunters, but no old bold mushroom hunters."

The more knowledgeable and trustworthy mushroom hunters are able to sell their finds to restaurants. In addition to chanterelles, other sought-after edible mushrooms are morels, chicken of the woods, hen of the woods, puffballs, honey mushrooms, hedgehog, shaggy main, oyster, lobster and lion's mane.

Aspenson admitted there were other edible mushrooms, but they're generally not collected because they tended to be unpalatable.

While mushrooms can be nutritious, Aspenson advises they should not be eaten raw because they contain chitin. Chitin, a derivative of glucose, is the primary component of fungi cell wall.

"Mushrooms should be cooked," said Aspenson. "Our bodies don't break down chitin."

Aspenson is a founding member of the UW-L Mycology Club, serving as an officer since 2014. The club is open to members of the public as well as students.

Local business owner talks about moss at November meeting

Able to hold 20 times its weight in water, has antibacterial qualities, regenerates in five to ten years, has survived and thrived since Wisconsin's last Ice Age, it's sphagnum moss.

Because of all those attributes, the winter-hardy perennial is valued by nurseries and gardeners for seed germination to prevent pathogens from attacking seeds and for water retention. Mosser Lee is the leading company in the country harvesting and marketing sphagnum moss products.

"As a seed starter, sphagnum's low pH retards the damping-off disease that kills seedlings," said David Epstein, Mosser Lee's owner. "Several patents discovered that it also binds nitrogen which starves pathogens from colonizing and killing seedlings."

Epstein presented a program about Wisconsin's sphagnum moss industry at the November 13 Friends of the Black River meeting held at the Lunda Community Center. His presentation included the history of the prehistoric plant and the processes for managing, harvesting and marketing the natural resource.

"It's (sphagnum moss industry) is Wisconsin's invisible industry because few people know about it," said Epstein. "Harvestable sphagnum moss plants are found in only three Wisconsin counties. No other state produces sphagnum commercially."

Epstein said there are about 180 species of sphagnum moss found growing in China, Japan, New Zealand and Chile as well as the United States.

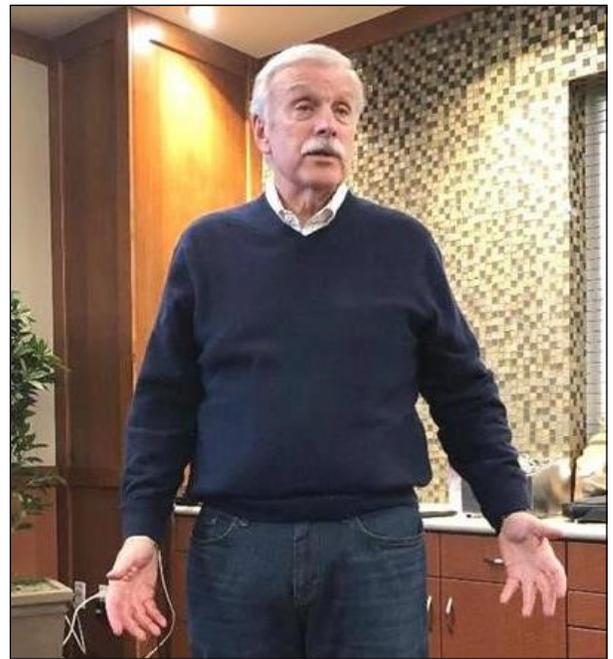
Jackson County has four varieties growing in marshlands in eastern Jackson County, where Mosser Lee harvests and protects sphagnum marshes on about 1,000 acres of wetland.

The moss propagates through sporing and utilizes rhizoids instead of roots to anchor the plants in place.

"It's harvested when it's 10-12 inches high," said Epstein. "If it isn't harvested when it is ready, the stems weaken and slowly drop. Once it decomposes, it becomes sphagnum peat, which does not have the same unique properties and uses as the sphagnum plant."

Considered a wild plant, the moss regenerates in the same water bogs every five to ten years, depending on the severity of the weather and water level. The company uses sustainable harvesting methods to preserve their valuable wetlands.

Aware of its antibacterial characteristics, early indigenous peoples used the long fibered moss to



David Epstein, owner of Mosser Lee, presented information about sphagnum moss at the November FBR meeting. Photos by Sue Bitter

dress wounds and diaper babies. The knowledge of plants beneficial qualities was passed on to settlers moving into the area.

In 1932, Epstein's grandfather and father traveled to Millston from Chicago and bought a bale of the moss from a local harvester.

"They took the bale to Chicago and sold it to a greenhouse," said Epstein. "They (greenhouse owners) said they'd take all they could get. That started the business."

In the late 1800s, the plants were harvest by hand and put on rail handcars to transport the wet moss to drying beds. In the early 20th century, the dry moss was put in rolls, wrapped in burlap and loaded on wagons pulled by horses. Today, much of the harvesting is mechanized.

Epstein took over operation of the business after his father, Lewis' untimely death in 1978. Epstein incorporated the business under the Deli, Inc. name when he bought the company from his uncle and his mother.

According to Epstein, there are thousands of patents around the world related to sphagnum moss. Home gardeners use Mosser Lee's sphagnum moss for lining hanging baskets and

Moss, continued on pg. 6

Winter scene photo wins at fair



William Rogstad's photo of Perry Creek where it meets the Black River received the open class reserve champion placing in the Friends of the Black River sponsored photography class at this year's Jackson County Fair. Rogstad is a retired farmer who has taken up the hobbies of nature photography and gardening.

Contributions assist FBR's mission

Charitable contributions received by the Friends of the Black River will be used solely to support the goals outlined in the FBR bylaws.

Those goals are:

- Educate members and the public about the ecology of the Black River watershed and threats to its health
 - Promote sustainable use and recreation on the Black River and its watershed
 - Increase public awareness and membership
 - Promote sound decision-making when issues affect the health of the river and watershed
 - Support the protection and improvement of the Black River and its watershed for the benefit of the general public
 - Develop a working relationship with local officials and collaborate with conservation organizations
 - Promote improved health of the river and watershed through conservation projects and education
 - Purchase land or easements for conservation purposes
- Information about how to help FBR with its mission can be found on page 7 of this newsletter.



**Thank you for supporting
FBR's mission throughout
2019.
Best wishes in this holiday
season and for a happy
2020.**

Moss, continued from pg. 5

window boxes, seed starting, soil cover, growing orchids, topiaries and planting garden seedlings and trees, just to name a few. Epstein believes there are many more yet undiscovered uses for sphagnum moss.

The company's products are available nationally at major home improvement centers, hardware stores, garden centers and on-line.

Answer to page 1 mystery photo question

Members of the FBR Board of Directors enjoyed the refreshments served at the annual movie night. Pictured are (left to right) Pete Segerson, Yvonne Mair, Sue Bitter and Steve Rake.

Not available for the photo were board members Mitch Wester and Jeff Polzin and Sherrill Anderson and Adam Marciniak of the Clark County Chapter.

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, 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.

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'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.

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)

- \$1.00 Youth (up to age 18)
 \$15.00 Individual
 \$20.00 Family
 \$30.00 Business
 \$50.00 Cornerstone Member

I would like to give 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 _____

___ Jackson County Chapter

___ Clark County Chapter

Phone _____

Email _____

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.

