



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 87 January, 2020

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Friends of Minneopa State Park Box 5172 • Mankato, Minnesota 56002

Winterfest, January 11th, 2020

Minneopa State Parks' winter celebration is Saturday, January 11th from 5-8pm. Meet at the group camp parking lot and enjoy a cup of hot chocolate by the fire. Walk the trails lit by luminaries and soak in some of Minnesota's wintry outdoors with your friends. A state park sticker is required on your vehicle.

Manager's Report

Todd Dailey, Assistant Manager

The calendar says winter and with a little snow on the ground it sure looks like winter out here at Minneopa State Park. We have been experiencing some mild temperatures the past few weeks which means people are still willing and able to get out and explore the park. Snowshoeing and skiing are popular winter activities at the park. Before we received the first snowfall, we went out on the trails and put up some signs for those who use the multi-use trails to ski and to snowshoe. Understanding that it takes a lot of effort to keep a nice clean ski track, we have asked that the folks who ski stay to one side of the trail, and those that like to snowshoe or hike, stay to the other side of the trail. We hope this will resolve any issues between the two user groups and provide both groups with a quality experience.

Thanks to some Friends of Minneopa members, a new boardwalk was constructed on a section

of trail between the group campground and the red fox campground. This will eliminate a very wet section of trail and make it more user friendly. We also repaired a foot bridge on the wetland loop trail that had some damaged decking boards and made that safe to walk over once again.

Tree removals continue inside the bison range and around the wetland loop trail. We have several brush piles along the road and in the group camp parking lot. We will be adding to these piles all winter long and when conditions allow we will be hauling the brush out of the prairie and onto a burn pile.

A new roof was installed on the camper cabin. The old roof utilized cedar shakes which were said to be the original shingles. They were weathered and due to very limited sunshine in this area the shingles had some moss growing on them. New asphalt shingles were installed to match the exterior color of the cabin.

A fence that was installed around the wildlife pond that was constructed below Seppmann Mill was removed. Almost immediately, the bison had to check it out and spent a few days in that area. The main purpose of the fence was to allow for the native plant life to establish itself before allowing bison on the freshly seeded areas. We hope that the bison enjoy this area as well as other wildlife within the park. A late season bison round-up was conducted before

staff was placed on seasonal layoff. The purpose of doing this was to test the fit and function of the facility before an actual round-up takes place next fall of 2020. For many of the animals, it was the first time going through a facility like this so we wanted to make sure everything worked the way it was designed to work. Aside from a few minor tweaks needed, the facility works great. We were able to run all 30 bison through in less than 2 hours and did so in a safe and humane manner.

A big thank you to all the volunteers and friends group members who have spent countless hours on programming, resource management work, and trail improvements this past year. We appreciate everything you do for the park and look forward to working with you all again in the New Year.

Cutting Buckthorn

By Scott Kudelka, Minneopa Area Naturalist

We transitioned fairly quickly from autumn to winter with a couple of light snowfalls and colder temperatures including a few below zero. The cold always transforms the waterfalls into something pretty spectacular, especially when there is still a lot of water moving through Minneopa Creek. Every day you walk down to check out the waterfalls it looks different in some way or fashion as ice builds up or collapses depending on the temperature along with the spray creating frost on the surrounding trees and vegetation. A day with clear blue skies makes for some beautiful photos.

Before winter descended on us, most of the St. Peter 9th graders came out to Minneopa over five days to spend a few hours removing buckthorn and other woody vegetation. They also learned a little bit about the state park and bison herd. Despite some colder days, very few complained and most got into helping us restore and maintain the oak savanna prairie in the Group Campground area. Each class tried to outdo the previous one in how big of a pile they could build of cut branches and trees/shrubs. Dan Clark from St. Peter H.S. wanted the students to get some experience helping others

and this is exactly what they did. We really appreciate their hard work and effort!

Buckthorn and other woody vegetation both invasive and native is a constant battle especially in our prairie areas. Over the last few years, volunteers and park staff have done an incredible job at clearing numerous areas and we've seen native prairie plants respond in turn. The fight is ongoing and there are some places (between the Bluff Trail and campground) that need a lot of work with many berry-producing buckthorn. We are always looking for more help and this is something a volunteer can do at your own pace and schedule.

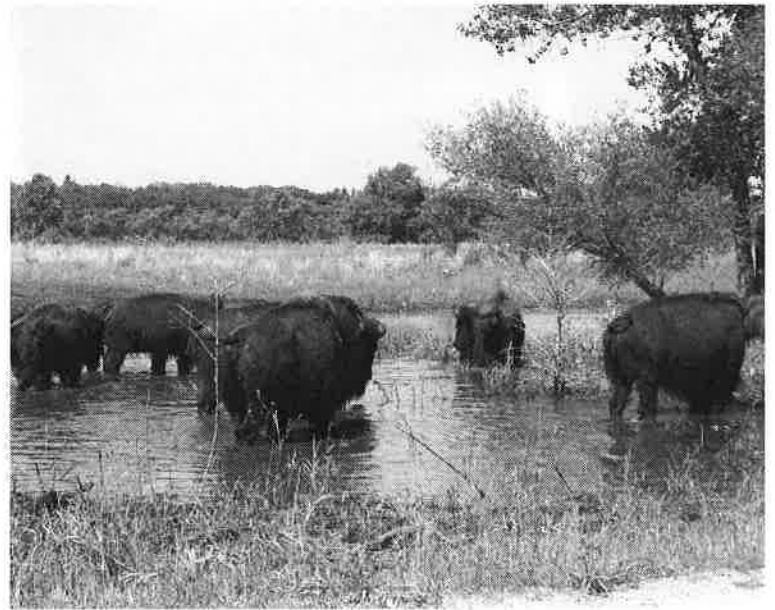
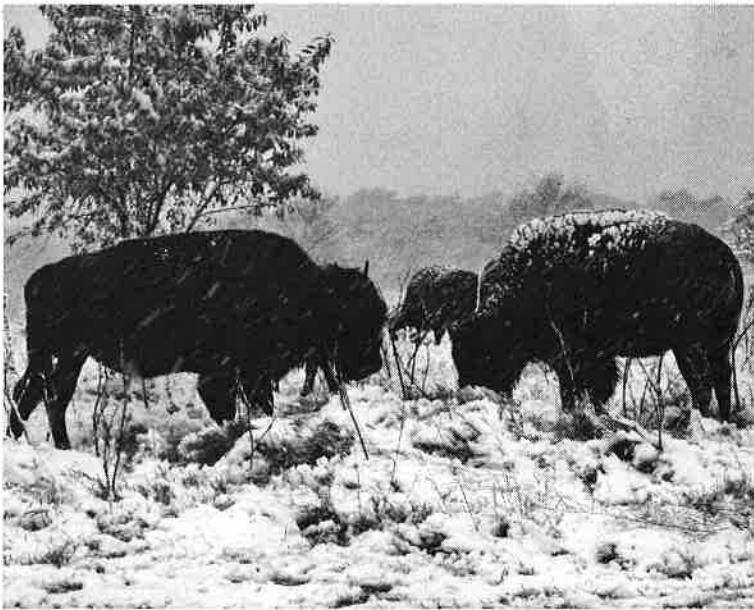
Last year turned out to be good one when it came to interpretive programming, special events and volunteering. The Bison Ambassador program continues to expand with more volunteers and we had a couple of special guests talk to the group. A spring training will be held on April 25th (Saturday) from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and we are always looking for more volunteers. You can contact me by email at scott.kudelka@state.mn.us. In September, Ed Quinn the Parks & Trails Resources Manager has agreed to come down from the Twin Cities to talk about his work with the MN Bison Conservation Herd. Volunteers spent a lot of time up at Seppmann Mill last year talking with visitors and also making sure people were being safe inside the bison range.

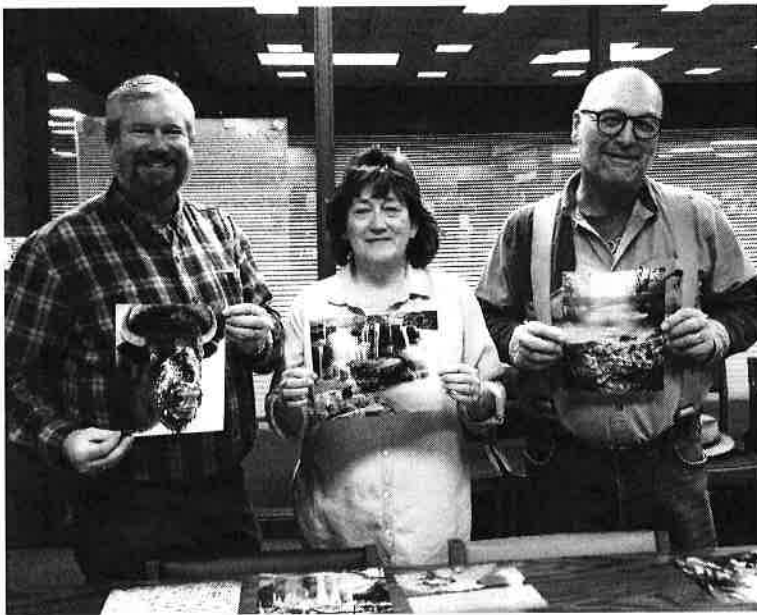
Minneopa State Park lost a wonderful friend with the death of Brand Frentz, the person most responsible for organizing the Friends of Minneopa State Park back in the late 1990s. I first met Brand while working at MSUM's Water Resources Center when Kim Musser and I interviewed him and Joe Michel about their paddling experience. Brand was a champion of the natural environment and always looking for some way to connect more people to the outdoors. A couple of years after I started working here at Minneopa, Brand contacted me about doing a big trees program at the state park and later came out for a Leaves nature hike around the wetland trail. The mosquitoes were so bad even after dosing ourselves with bug spray you didn't dare stop for more than a few seconds. I will always be grateful for Brand's



Clockwise from upper left; Photo of Minneopa Creek from 1932. The frozen lower falls at Minneopa on Christmas Day 2019. The Bison seeking refuge from the insects in the water hole this past summer. Bison enjoying an "insect free" winter.

Tim Pulis photos





Above left; from left to right, judges for the 2019 annual Minneopa Photo Contest. Pat Christman, (Mankato Free Press), Sue Duffy, (Art History/humanities teacher, retired), John Cross (Mankato Free Press, retired).

Above right; Friends of Minneopa State Park members, Randy Wood, Doug Wood, and Tom Weigt moving materials for the construction of a new boardwalk.

Below left; The new boardwalk between the campground and the group campground nearing completion.

Tim Pulis photos

Below right; Brand Frentz - 1938-2019



wisdom and passion for the natural world around us!

Historical Note: Brand Frentz played an instrumental role in the formation of the Friends of Minneopa State Park and Judson Valley in September of 1996 to push back against Minneopa serving as a National Guard training site. A couple of years later, Brand again took up the cause of Minneopa by leading the effort to form what became the Friends of Minneopa State Park which continues to be very active and supporting what happens at the park.

The first organizational gathering of "Friends of Minneopa State Park" was announced by Brand Frentz, organizer of this effort. According to Frentz, he and others would like to see the park improved through the addition of horse trails and other attractions. Frentz said about two-thirds of Minnesota's state parks have private-citizen organizations supporting their activities. He said state parks typically operate on small budgets, and in many case improvements are made only when local supporters take up the cause.

Enjoy Minneopa this Winter!

By Linda Engstrom, President Friends of Minneopa

As I write this, the first cold snap has come and adjusting is tough. Sitting by the fireside snuggled up with a good book and a cuppa is inviting. I encourage you to get outside.

Living across from Minneopa, my chance comes everyday. It is my playground.

These are my suggestions:

- Make it a priority to get out each day. There is something in the air that clears my head.
- It's not the cold. It is what you wear. We Minnesotans know to dress in layers. My basics, something to stop the wind and wool to keep me warm. Some days I'm covered from head to toe in wool. Socks, underwear, a couple layers of SmartWool or Ice Breaker T's, a heavier shirt, maybe a vest, longer coat with a hood, muffler that can be pulled over my nose, liners inside my mittens, hat with a

hood over, boots, and maybe a scarf. Takes awhile to get dressed.

- My route depends on temperature and the wind. On windy days one stays in the trees. That is the day for the Ridge Trail. On calm days the Sepmann Mill Trail opens onto the prairie.

The important piece is finding what you like to do. Ski, snowshoe, hike, bike, etc. They all make winter do-able. If you are lucky enough to be the first out after the snow, you have hit the jackpot of animal tracks and sparkly snow. Early morning and late afternoon have magical light.

A word of etiquette-Skiers and snowshoes have different requirements. If you are first after the snow, chose your side of the trail and stay there. It is hard to ski on packed snow. We can coexist if we consider the other. Please don't walk or snowshoe on the skiers trail. If you wish to snowshoe side by side, chose another place or walk beside the trail. Snowshoes give you freedom to explore. Look for other new places in the park.

- You might spot the bison
- The eagles start to nest in Jan/Feb. View the nest by the river on the Ridge Trail
- Sometimes the owls call near the picnic area
- There is beauty in the snow and cold
- Bring a lunch or hot beverage

You'll feel refreshed when you get back in your warm house. See you outside, I am often in my red coat.

2020 Memberships Are Due

Thanks all for your past support. If you have a moment to renew or start a membership, please do so. Individual is \$15 and family is \$20. It goes to support our activities such as printing and mailing our newsletter, bringing the Minnesota Zoomobile to the June open house, displaying our photo contest and providing modest cash prizes, reserving our meeting room in April and other worthy endeavors. Box 5172, Mankato, MN, 56002.

Founder of Friends of Minneopa, Brand Frentz 1938-2019

By Tim Pulis

Brand Frentz passed away recently. He was the founder of the Friends of Minneopa State Park. I first met him when I joined the board in 2005. Even after he left the board I always thought of him as our moral leader by providing advice and inspiration for the group. For the last ten years of his life, Brand fought Parkinson's disease. Brand was a lover of the outdoors, so it follows that he would spend time at Minneopa State Park.

In the mid 1990's the Minnesota National Guard became interested in using the park and some adjacent private lands for training purposes. This would include the use of tracked and wheeled vehicles. Brand led the public opposition to this plan. A group called "Friends of the Judson Valley and Minneopa State Park" was formed. A public meeting was held and a petition with 619 signatures was presented. Through the Freedom of Information Act, Brand obtained the study on using the park by the guard. It showed that the Department of Military Affairs was dead serious about the project.

Luckily the proposed training site at the park never happened. The DNR standing its ground and the public outcry may have been instrumental in the outcome. From this organization evolved the Friends of Minneopa that has been around now for over 20 years. Brand started the quarterly newsletter that is still being printed, the Minneopa photo contest that is still being held and the nesting bird survey that is still being conducted.

Brand was an avid canoer and after his retirement from the practice of law he vowed to canoe every mile of river in Blue Earth County. While successfully achieving his dream, he GPSed every dump site that he found and gave the information to county officials for them to help clean up these areas. One day while canoeing the Minnesota River near Minneopa State Park he came across a hunting blind set up on a sand bar. The next day he called me and asked me if I would help him with a little

project. We met at the group camp parking lot and then drove down the mill road for a half mile. After we got out of the car, Brand said that he would like me to follow him. We headed straight north toward the river through the woods, down the slope, over the railroad tracks and then through some high weeds and wetlands. I was impressed with his stamina, but eventually we were on a sand bar of the river. There in front of us was a fairly elaborate hunting blind. Brand then asked me if I would help him dismantle it since it was on park land. The passion he had in this task impressed me greatly. This was his park and having someone doing an illegal activity just wasn't going to happen.

Brand is survived by his wife Vycki, brother John Frentz, three children Nick, Sonja and Alexander and several grandchildren.

2019 Photo Contest

By Tim Pulis

This years Minneopa State Park photo contest had nine people enter 40 photos. First place went to Mark McMillan, second place to Randy Wood and third place to Nancy Haag. Other winners were Mary Gitter-Zehnder with an honorable mention and Curtis Hanson with a judge's award.

Other participants were John Zehnder, Marion Hanson, Warren Michels and Terri Michels. Each participant had at least one photo on display during the month of December in the glass cabinets at the Blue Earth County Library in Mankato. According to the workers at the library it is their favorite display during the year.

Many thanks to the judges for the yearly contest. They were art history/humanities teacher Sue Duffy, Mankato Free Press photographer Pat Christman and retired Free Press photographer John Cross.

The Minneopa Messenger, PO Box 5172, Mankato MN 56002, is edited by Tim Pulis, who is responsible for any unattributed material. If you have comments or questions or want to submit material please email Tim at tpulis@hickorytech.net.