



# Horton's Clips

Phi Yehle, Editor

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## FUTURE OF BRIDGES DISCUSSED AT 2006 ANNUAL MEETING

On August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006 the annual meeting was held by the Friends of McGilvray Road/ Seven Bridges in the Seven Bridges Restaurant in Onalaska.

Discussed was a plan to renovate the parking area to give it a more appealing appearance and accessibility. Details include adding new signage to improve visibility of the Bridges site, resurfacing the parking lot, removing brush and trees around the parking area so native prairie plantings may be applied. Improved handicapped access will also be incorporated into the plan. It was also suggested that we work with the DNR in acquiring some acreage to widen the trail between the 6th bridge and the river.

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The FMR will also join the Friends of the Black River in a cooperative gathering of the Lake Arbutus Association, Sierra Club, and Mississippi Valley Conservancy to see what these groups are doing for preservation.

Grants will be written to cover the cost of these projects. Anyone interested in helping with these efforts in the form of time or money would be appreciated.

The annual election of officers was held. Nancy Hill continues to be President, while Phil Yehle was elected Vice President. Karla Pierson was re-elected as Treasurer. She will also be interim Secretary till Rick Staszewski is once again available to perform this function. The board of directors remain the same.

Next meeting will be held December 11<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm at Pizza Corral.

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## A FEW THOUGHTS FROM THE PRESIDENT

NANCY HILL

We have just had the Annual Meeting, September 18. I find that is an occasion for reflecting on what we have been doing and what we wish to accomplish. The minutes, the treasurer's report and the finance report will be on the web site, so I will let them speak for themselves.

I believe it is important to underscore the positive situation of the Bridges being in good shape, and our organization being in its 17th year. The Road is complete to the main channel of the Black River, and the trail is in fair condition. We need to continue to grow our endowment fund, of which only the interest is to be used for repairs when they may be needed. We must continue to encourage new and active membership, for in that, is the future of the bridges.

Now, we are attempting to set goals for the next few years. For a number of years, we had a plan with the DNR where we'd talk about what was to happen next. It is time to set another plan. We have been brainstorming with the members who have come to meetings. From some of that discussion, Ron Lichtie, Wildlife Manager, Phil Yehle and I are attempting to sketch out See Page 2

## THOUGHTS FROM THE PRESIDENT CONT'D

the next steps in making the Road and the Bridges a safe, attractive and educational trail.

We have been talking about the trailhead, or area around the parking lot. We'd like to have a better surface on the parking lot and improve the appearance of that area by cleaning up and repairing the important plaques on the large rock. There's plans to place a sign that is perpendicular to the road, so people can find the Bridges site more easily when they are driving by. We'd also like the habitat to be more like it was years ago, by removing non-native trees and plants and replacing them with indigenous flowers and plants. This openness may reduce vandalism.

We would like to make the Bridges and Road more accessible for the elderly and physically challenged. We know that this might only be the first few Bridges. For some of these issues we will need some professional design help. Later, we could probably use some volunteer labor and some workdays to move the landscaping along.

While we are in the mulling stage, we will appreciate ideas for improvement.

There are some things that seem small, that we could perhaps take care of without a lot of expense. I would think some signs near the 6th Bridge, indicating that the trail was public land, and that by staying on the trail, one was not trespassing, would be helpful. I think that the "no trespassing" signs that are off the trail could confuse people.

I thought the weight limits for the number of people that used to be on some of the bridges and may still be there in a case or two, were confusing. I'd even like the Bridges to be numbered, so people using brochures could know where they were.

It would be good to have some statistics about use of the trail. We are looking at some grants, and having data is always useful. If someone wants to help with that, please contact Phil or Nancy. We need to know not only who uses the Bridges, but for what – hunting, fishing, running, walking dogs, bird-watching, etc. And if it were possible to figure out, who might use the Bridges if handicapped and elder access were easier. Do you know of someone who would appreciate this access? Let us know.

We believe it is important to include the effort of as many people as possible in this. This would include school and Scout groups, as well as the many organizations that have expertise that affects the project.

There is currently a tremendous amount of interest and energy in creating good trails around Holmen and Trempealeau County. Many of these are connecting further to a larger area. We know we have a treasure in our walking trail. We are aware that it could fit well into eco-tourism with people coming to walk and perhaps staying in small hotels or bed and breakfasts or rooms in the area. This kind of tourism is popular in Europe, and very likely to become more popular here, as the infrastructure makes it easier for the tourist.

We are interested in your ideas and input on these and other ideas.

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## CRITTERS FROM THE BOTTOMS

Red fox are no strangers to the Van Loon Wildlife Area or to Wisconsin. Prior to logging and farming they were not overly abundant but these practices created habitat more conducive to the critters. However, over the last few years Wisconsin DNR Annual Mammal Surveys have shown their number to be in decline.

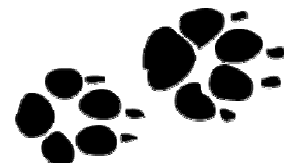
Generally, red fox appear as deep brownish red to sandy blonde with black legs, feet and backs of the ears and white under parts. They are 3 to 3.5 feet long and weigh 9-12 lbs.

Males are referred to as dogs while the female is a vixen.

Breeding typically begins in January. There are anywhere from 5-6 kits born in mid March and begin hunting with their parents after 3 months. They are on their own after 7-8 months.

The red fox is known as a "crepuscular" creature, meaning that it is generally most active during the twilight hours of the day. However, the encroachment of humans and their night lights have driven many

fox into a nocturnal state. The red fox have a home range of 150 to 400 acres depending on the quality of habitat. They feed mainly on small mammals like mice, squirrels, woodchucks, snakes, turtles and frogs. When they catch a meal larger than they can feed on in one meal, they will bury it in the ground (cache it) so they may feed on it later.



## BIRDING WITH BOB

Late summer provides some great bird watching opportunities. The birds are done nesting so there's more of them and they spend more time being active. As the young birds perfect their flying skill, they move about to new areas which can make them easier to spot. Some birds are quite secretive during nesting time!

During August the fall migration begins for some songbirds. With insect production falling, the birds feed longer and often will be in small flocks. I look for "a flurry of activity" by feeding

birds and try to slowly walk near them. This is a great way of seeing birds up close.

Often a flock of only a dozen birds will have 3 or 4 species, especially with migrating warblers and vireos. September and October is when the yellow rumped warbler migration peaks. This is among the most numerous bird species on earth. Thousands of them will come through the 7 Bridges area. The eastern blue birds use the Black River bottomland while migrating also. They form very large flocks, often with hun-

dreds of birds.

When I hike the 7 Bridges, I'll always look for red headed wood peckers. Their population has dropped off around here and are mostly found in river land forests. Some over winter near the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> bridges.

Another bird I look for is the winter wren. This little known bird migrates during early November. I've only ever seen four of them. All in the Black River bottoms. They are fun to watch and you can get real close to them. Maybe getting up



Yellow warbler

close and personal with the birds is why I enjoy bird watching so much.

Good birding,

Bob

## THE KING POST BRIDGE

The following article is an excerpt from the book, "The Historic McGilvray Bridges and the Friends Who Saved Them", by Ray Kyro.

"From 1920 to 1986, when it was demolished for "public safety," a wooden king post bridge stood guard on the McGilvray Road. Until 1980, when this span and five bowstring arch truss-bridges were listed on the National Register of Historic

Places, few realized what a treasure it was."

"History records that the king post bridge design, the most simple of all truss spans, dates back to the Middle Ages. Like the stone arch bridges in Outagamie County, the Van Loon Wildlife Area's king post was from another era. Although several remain throughout the country, engineers tell us that due to its light load capacity and short

span, this type of bridge fell into disfavor after the mid-nineteenth century. A king post bridge is located in Fisherman's Park in Port Washington, Wisconsin."

"A historic low truss bridge from Pierce County, Wisconsin is now on the site of the old king post bridge and is commonly referred to as the fifth



## BLACK RIVER BOTTOM MEMORIES

W.E. Severson of Cassville, Mo. has supplied us with memories of her father Edwin, who along with her mother Lillian, lived on New Amsterdam Road from 1918 to 1926.

My dad helped build the original road, "across the bottoms." He used to brag on occasion about the fact that he "dumped" scrapers for 17

teams of horses. No bull dozers, front end loaders, or turn-a-pull in those days. He told of an incident involving two herons. It seems the older heron landed on one high voltage transmission wire and the younger bird settled on another wire and when the two touched beaks (the older to feed the younger), there was just a

puff and two tiny feathers floated down.

Then during the Prohibition one or the other of the several bridges was used as a rendezvous because of its isolation, for the transfer of liquor from Canada to Chicago.

One of my uncles, while burning off dead grass down there, actually saw a truck

(loaded with liquor) stop at a pre-designated bridge to await the arrival of the other truck. The people in the first truck got out grumbling about the "damn fire", and set up a machine gun with a tripod on the bridge. Because my uncle had his wife and daughter with him, my uncle decided to forget about the fire and go home.

Friends Board of Directors 2006:

Nancy Hill 782 1753 or 386 6237  
D.A. Ferguson 784 7865  
Jim Lakey 526 4277  
Fred Pierson 608 269 6111  
Karla Pierson 608 269 6111  
Mark Hein 526 2200  
Mariel Carlisle 782 4281  
Rick Staszewski 788 3596  
Phil Yehle 399-1155

The primary purpose of the Friends of McGilvray Road, Inc. (FMR) is to preserve, protect, and help maintain the historic McGilvray Road and its unique bridges which are located in the Van Loon Wildlife Area, in the County of La Crosse, in the State of Wisconsin. The Van Loon Wildlife Area is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). McGilvray Road is more commonly known as the "7 Bridges Road. "

For more information go to our website at [www.7bridgesrd.org](http://www.7bridgesrd.org) or contact any of the board members.

Friends of McGilvray Road  
P.O. Box 2976  
La Crosse, Wi 54602-2976

**Renewal date for your membership is on the address label.**

### 2006 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

\_\_\_ Yes, you can count on me. I'd like to continue supporting the bridges and receive the newsletter and notices form time to time.

\_\_\_ I would like to make a contribution to FMR for the endowment fund. (State if you wish it to be in honor of or I memory of someone else so we can respond appropriately.)

\_\_\_ I may be interested in FMR as part of my estate planning.

- Corporate or business: \$100.00
- Lifetime: \$100.00
- Supporting: \$25.00
- Single/Planning \$15.00

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