



December 2016

Happy Holidays!

THE OFFICIAL
NEWSLETTER OF THE
FRIENDS OF MCGILVRAY
ROAD
PO Box 2976
La Crosse, WI 54602-2976

President's Message

The Friends of McGilvray Road organization is undergoing some change. We have been together since 1989, and we weather change well, thanks to the love and support and intelligent decision-making that have guided us over the years. This positive work will continue. In 27 years of our existence, we have been handed challenges, and we have met them.

We do note that there are two major changes this season. Our DNR Wildlife Manager, Tim Babros, Area Supervisor, retires December 16. We wish him a long, healthy and interesting retirement and we plan to fold him into the on-going work on the volunteer side of the "Friends."

The second change is the realignment of the DNR. We will continue to work with Anna Jahns, DNR Wildlife Technician, and Ron Lichtie, Wildlife Biologist. It is good to have familiar personnel to work with who love the project. Ron remains in charge of Property Management, and we will continue to work with

Who's Who in the Friends of McGilvray Road

Board of Directors

Nancy Hill
D.A. Ferguson
Linda McMullin
Mike Howe
Pat Caffrey
Jay Fernholz
Herbert Grimek

Officers

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Vice President - Mike Howe
Treasurer - Pat Caffrey
Secretary - vacant
Media - Linda McMullin

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Join us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofMcGilvrayRd>

Anna on most matters. There will be new personnel added and other changes in the DNR structure that aren't known to us yet.

Some things stay the same. We continue to wait for better weather and conditions to do the trail lowering, tree work and ford creation that has been put on hold since the September flood. This work is planned, has permits and should proceed well.

Some of the best things about the 7 Bridges stay the same. The seasons change and bring us a new experience each time we venture out. How's that for a contradiction? Familiarity and change.

Let us enjoy winter at the Bridges... Please share photos and stories with Linda, so she can put them on our Facebook page or on the web site.

Sincerely, Nancy Hill

Tim Babros' Retirement

On Monday December 5, the FMR Worker Bees met to discuss work and repairs for 2017. After the business meeting we took the time to thank and honor our DNR liaison for the last six years, Tim Babros, who is retiring in December.



After the record flood of September 2010, a large number of the Friends and the general public met at the Pizza Corral in Holmen to determine how to repair the damage.

Participants were also concerned that we would lose the work we'd already accomplished if we did not take steps to prevent damage in the future. Tim joined us at that meeting and has worked with us to implement many changes. We are very close to completing most of projects to prevent road damage and preserve the bridges from the ravages of nature.

Over the years, Tim enlisted the help of experts who determined that the McGilvray Road, while serving as a roadway, also acted as a dam. The result was that great amounts of water were forced under and around the bridges scouring soil from under the abutments and stressing the structures. When the flood waters did get high enough to go over the road, the high current velocities washed out sections of the road, carrying soil into downstream wetlands. The solution to the problem was to lower the road between bridges 3, 4 and 4, 5 to allow water levels to equalize upstream and downstream during floods.



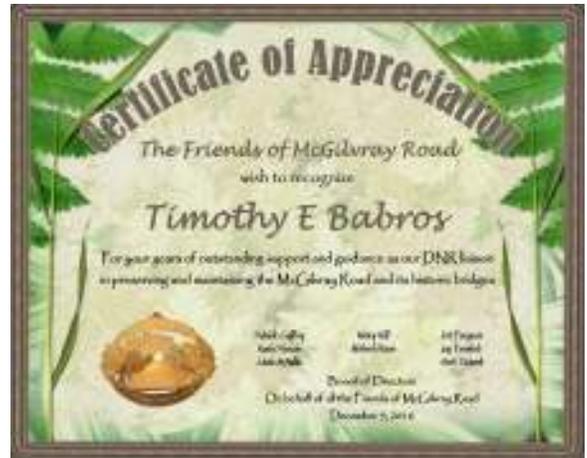
Experience matters. Tim found money to repair an access road to the west half of the trail, and worked with private property owners to get an easement for a portion of the access road that crosses private property. He knew the procedures. The amount of planning, negotiating, and paperwork was considerable. The road sections between bridges 4, 5 and 6 now could be lowered and repaired. The lowered road meant these bridges were safer from high water damage.

With volunteer labor and additional monies from FMR the two road sections between 4 and 6 have been lowered. The most recent near - record level flood in September (6th highest) proved the success of these projects.

The final step in preventing further damage to bridges and supporting structures is the construction of a ford along side of bridge 1, which will enable construction equipment to access to lower the road bed between bridges 3 and 4. The ford is a necessity, as the old bridges are not permitted to support more than 1000 pounds. As indicated earlier, these last two steps will be accomplished in 2017, with the cooperation of Mother Nature sending us a period of little rain in the summer and / or fall. This means we will have good access from either end of the road, and be able to work on any bridge

Tim and the DNR were also able to acquire some other private land that came up for sale in the Van Loon Wildlife area, including one property that the trail runs through the middle of.

Tim Babros' dedication and support in the above endeavors has been invaluable. To detail all of his actions and help is more than this article can address. His experience with paperwork, teamwork and getting a project through to completion is remarkable. He deserves so much thanks, and will be missed. He is truly a Friend of the McGilvray Road.



The Friends celebrated Tim's contributions with a cake, a gift and the presentation of a Certificate of Appreciation.

Bridge Repairs at 110 years

Pat Caffrey

The five Horton Bowstring Truss Bridges on McGilvray Road were constructed between 1905 and 1908, making them about 110 years old. Each of the “bows”, which appear to be continuous arches, were constructed from three steel beams, joined at the ends with bolted splice plates. Two Horton “clips”, a steel bracket with a tapered slot, fits over the flanges of the beams at each joint, helping to hold them in place.

Last spring as I was approaching Bridge 1 from the west just before sunset, the angled sunlight illuminated something on top of one arch, and aroused my curiosity. I climbed up and discovered it was



a badly corroded splice plate. The steel had rusted to the point where it was flaking apart and expanded to several times its original thickness. That discovery triggered an inspection of other splice plates, revealing nearly all were badly corroded.

With approval of the WDNR and the Wisconsin Historic Preservation Office, the Friends took quotations for replacement splice plates matching the originals, and for bolts and nuts (square headed to maintain historic integrity). Mid City Steel offered a special price for fabricating the splice

plates, and used a special steel that forms a self protective rust coating, so they will rust to match the rest of the bridge, but the surface rust will form a protective coating to prevent deeper corrosion.

I was concerned the ends of the beams might shift when an old splice plate was removed and before the new one could be installed. I made a large timber frame was made to clamp over the beams and hold them securely in place during the work. I started by picking a splice plate in better condition than most on Bridge 1 to try first. To my surprise I was able to loosen the old bolts with penetrating oil, special square sockets and a long "breaker bar." I had assumed that after 110 years in the weather they would break off rather than unscrew, but with few exceptions I was wrong, although removing the nuts was a good workout.

On the first splice plate I removed one old bolt and replaced it with a new one before removing the next bolt and replacing that, and cautiously proceeded until all eight bolts were replaced. Then, with the new bolts slightly loose, I held my breath and tapped the splice plate with a hammer. The plate moved easily and the beams did not! The Horton clips which fit over the joint on each flange of the beams held the beams ends in place while the splice plates were replaced, helped by the fact there are no vehicles bouncing over the bridges any more. That meant the timber frame was not needed, and I could haul all needed materials and equipment (including a step ladder) to the bridges in one wheelbarrow trip.



All 30 splice plates were replaced in the fall of 2016, with minor delays due to flooding. Thankfully Murphy's Law played only a minor role in the project. The original splice plates were measured on Bridges 1, 2 and 3 and were all identical, so I ordered all splice plates to fit those dimensions. After transporting all the equipment and materials to Bridge 6 (naturally, the furthest from the trail head) I discovered those splice plates were smaller than the other four bowstring bridges. Fortunately the hole pattern was the same, so I was able to bring the splice plates home, cut them to fit, and return another day to install them. Additionally one wrench, one C-clamp, and four old bolts were respectfully sacrificed to the River Gods to assure their support for the project. In retrospect, that is a minor offering considering two hundred and forty 110 year old bolts were removed over the water from a ladder. Now if someone can just remember to check the splice plates again in 2126!



Karla Pierson

Karla Young Pierson has worked tirelessly with the Bridges for over 20 years. In our early years she worked with the annual project of the art prints that helped give us financial stability. It was like running a business for a short time, intense and painstaking work for each of 8 years. In addition there was the sale of plates and the sale of the McGilvray book.

Karla served as treasurer for many years, and for many more years as secretary. She's been on the Endowment Committee since its inception. Karla has helped set up and staff events for the Bridges, has attended endless meetings and seen the group progress throughout the years.

Karla has the institutional memory of all of the FMR events and has helped place records in the Area Research Center for future researchers, and for ourselves. I'm not sure what she hasn't done! We are sorry to have Karla's resignation from the Board and hope that she will return.

Thank you, Karla! Your presence, dedication and work will be sadly missed, but we understand that health demands in one's family must take precedence.

Some Reminiscences of the McGilvray Road

**Herb Grimek
December 3, 2016**

I first became familiar with the McGilvray Seven Bridges Road in about 1950 when I was about 10 years of age. Back then it was still possible to drive on the McGilvray Road all the way to the Black River. The area just south of the west end of the road evidently had been cleared of woody vegetation, fenced off and used as a pasture. As a result there was now a large open, park-like area just south of the road and adjacent to the Black River. This area extended for about a quarter mile along the river, and it was dotted with large American elms, and small elongated ponds. These ponds were sparsely lined with prickly ash, and in the spring the mating calls of numerous chorus frogs filled the air. One could drive into this area, park close to the river under a large elm and fish in the river.

My father would often fish for catfish, but as I recall the fishing was rather slow. I soon became bored and looked for insects and salamanders in the woods just south of the pasture. The elms have long since succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease, and the open area is now almost completely overgrown with prickly ash and other shrubs. This area also has apparently changed ownership and is now posted.

Later when I was in my mid-teens, my best friend and I became avid and competitive insect collectors. We occasionally rode our bicycles from Onalaska to the McGilvray Road in order to collect beetles. The area on either side of the west end of the road was an especially good habitat for ground beetles (Carabidae).

Back in those days the DNR was still releasing pheasants in this area, and one day when we were collecting, there were several pheasants in the brush next to the road. Two people were shooting arrows at them, and after several tries they finally managed to bag one hen. Later when we were licensed to drive and hunt, we occasionally would hunt ducks and pheasants in the Van Loon area. Although pheasants were being released in the area, the habitat was not ideal for them. The area often was too wet, and the vegetation was not of the right type. I recall that one day when my brother and my friend were in the area, the water was high and many of the newly released pheasants had taken refuge in the trees and could easily be shot.

Late in 1961 I moved to Madison, Wisconsin, and lost touch with events in Western Wisconsin. I frequently returned to Onalaska on week-ends and occasionally visited the McGilvray Road and hunted in the Van Loon area. Each time I returned the condition of the road and the bridges was worse.

[Editor's note: If anyone else has early memories of McGilvray Road and the bridges, they are encouraged to please share. They will be published in a later newsletter. Please email them to me at mcmullinda@gmail.com or mail a copy to our address on page one.]