



A Wilderness Close to Home

Trail Mix

A Monthly Newsletter of Afton State Park

Volume 1, Number 1



Welcome to the First Edition

This is our first of what we hope to be many more editions of Trail Mix. The purpose of this newsletter is to update park visitors and friends of the happenings in Afton State Park. We would appreciate any comments or suggestions that you have to improve this newsletter. Thank you for signing up to receive Trail Mix.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT UPDATE: Bluebird Recovery Program

The Eastern Bluebird was once abundant in Minnesota but over time agricultural development wiped out most of their available nesting areas. Fortunately, the Eastern Bluebird has made a spectacular recovery with the help of bluebird boxes put up in parks and back yards and prairie restoration projects such as those found at Afton State Park. The recovery rate would not be possible without a dedicated team of volunteers who monitor 120 bluebird houses.

“ Their spring song is sweet and happy while their fall song is sad and melancholy. They just don’t like to leave this beautiful valley.”

Oliver Charlie

2008 Bluebird Statistics

14 Volunteers
118 Boxes Monitored
321 Birds Fledged
84.41% Nest Success Rate



The Bluebird Recovery Program at Afton State Park began back in the ‘30s with the vision of one man. Oliver Charlie had been an Afton resident since 1919. Soon after his arrival, he purchased 96 acres of land that is now part of Afton State Park. He paid \$10 an acre. He raised some cattle and grew a little wheat and soybeans. But he was much more interested in examining the habits of the wild creatures around him and discovering rare plant species on his land than tending crops. In 1923, he arranged to have 10,000 trees planted to stop soil erosion. He was constantly involved in environmental causes. His work with bluebirds and the formation of what we believe is the first bluebird trail in the state continues to this day.

In 1993, Oliver visited Afton State Park on his 100th birthday and died just before turning 101 years old.

-Shirley McVey

About 190 luminaries were placed along the trail.

It took a month to create the 48 ice luminaries located around the visitor center.

4 gallons of apple cider and 3 giant bags of marshmallows were consumed.

Last year's high for February 7th was 21°. This year it was 38°!

Candlelight Event a Success

On a warm beautiful night, February 7, the park held its first candlelight event in a number of years. Approximately 350-400 park visitors



attended. The warm conditions melted plenty of snow resulting in poor snowshoeing but made for a very pleasant evening for walking the two-mile loop. Plenty of visitors stopped by the bonfire halfway through and had a marshmallow snack. Back at the visitor center, hot cider



and cocoa were served to warm up the many visitors. The beautiful icy luminaries and indoor and outdoor fires at the visitor center enticed a number of visitors to stick around and relax after their walk. The staff and volunteers had a great time and can't wait to do it again next year.

INSIDE AFTON STATE PARK FROM THE STAFF What is your favorite place to visit in the park in the winter?

“I love skiing over the Trout Brook Bridge near Afton Alps.”

Steve Stelmach, GreenView

“The backside of the beginner's ski trail through the pines and to the overlook are very beautiful this time of year.”

Gary Thompson, General Repair Worker

Upcoming Events

May 2 – MNOC Orienteering Meet
Wildlife Safari Geocaching Kickoff
Opening of Permanent Orienteering Course

June 7 – Open House Day

July 4 – Afton Trail Run

July 17 – Universe in the Park

Volunteer Opportunities

Become a bluebird monitor.

Collect sumac seeds to be placed in a hardwoods restoration area.

Clean seeds collected last summer.

Give an interpretive program on a topic you're an expert on.

For comments, questions, more information, to volunteer, or to remove yourself from the mailing list, send an email to Rachel.Hintzman@dnr.state.mn.us.