

The Otter's Tale

Newsletter of the Friends of Pool 9

October, 2008

Friends of Pool 9 Applauded for Mississippi River Adventure Day

By Wildlife Refuge Specialist Tim Loose

In my 25 plus years of working for the Federal government I have seen some wonderful education programs, including many that helped introduce families and individuals to the beauty and wonder of their National Wildlife Refuges. But nothing compares to the recent Mississippi River Adventure Day sponsored by the Friends of Pool 9.



Kids helping Pat Short, Fisheries Biologist with the Wisconsin DNR, pull in a seine. Photo by Scott Boylen Photography.

Nearly 190 kids and parents converged on the Lansing Ball Diamond on the morning of July 21st, full of excitement and anticipation as they checked in for a day of exploration and adventure on the Mississippi River. And what a day it was, as everyone had a chance to pollywog for mussels, seine for fish, and explore the floodplain forest. If that alone wasn't enough excitement, they also learned about turtles, frogs, mammals, and aquatic insects. And to top it all off they were treated to a backwater excursion into Lansing Big Lake to learn about commercial fishing and the importance of protecting this national treasure for generations to come.

A special thanks needs to be extended to all the Friends of Pool 9 volunteers and co-sponsors (Allamakee County Community Foundation, NE Iowa and National Audubon



Mammal presentation. Photo by Scott Boylen Photography.

Societies, Iowa and Wisconsin DNRs, US Army Corps of Engineers, Allamakee County Conservation Board, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Iowa State Extension) for making the day a success. Many people worked behind the scenes, putting up shelters, driving boats, parking cars and preparing lunches to make the day a success.

The following excerpt from a letter we received probably says thanks more eloquently than I ever could. "I just wanted to let you know what a wonderful day my children and I had on the river yesterday. In their words, it was "awesome!" My kids had never been on the river before, and when we received the literature to sign up, I thought it would be a great opportunity . . . I had concerns about letting two of my children go in a different group than I was in, but once we arrived and saw all the people there to help out, my worries were set to rest. You seemed to have the perfect group of people lined up to help! Thank you very much for offering this special, " a w e s o m e event!"



Examining a newly hatched turtle and turtle egg.

Friends of Pool 9 Receives Sand on Area Beaches

For only the third time in 35 years, sand has been added to some of the area Mississippi River beaches between Lansing and DeSoto. Through a cooperative effort of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Iowa and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources, Friends of Pool 9, and Newt Marine of Dubuque, Iowa three area beaches have received a rebirth of thousands of cubic yards of sand.



Lansing Beach showing Newt Marine Bulldozer, barge, and crane in background. In foreground, L. to R. are John Verdon (President FOP9), and Al VanGuilder (U.S. ACOE).

Sue Stirn, Vice President of the local Friends group and liaison between the local group and the Agencies involved spoke highly of the cooperation between all parties. “The Corps of Engineers really went to bat for the Friends of Pool 9 to make this happen. My appreciation and thanks go to them; without their help this would not have happened! Thanks also go to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Iowa DNR, and the Wisconsin DNR. Without their blessings the project would not have been completed. Final thanks go to Newt Marine; their cooperation and expertise was a vital part of this success.”



Lansing Beach on September 4, as it appeared prior to sand deposition by Newt Marine.



Sand added to Wisconsin Beach at Mile Marker 664.6 makes the beach area more stable and useable for beach goers.

Sand accumulates in the channel near Mile Marker 665.5 of the Mississippi River and requires dredging by mechanical means nearly every year. The deposition site is below Black Hawk Bridge on the Wisconsin side of the channel, where it is made available to other agencies and construction companies. Since the three sandbars were part of the original Corps Channel Maintenance Plan and either in the proximity of the dredge site or were located between the dredge site and the deposition site, it was economically feasible to drop sand at the beach areas. Friends of Pool 9 (FOP9) agreed to pay the cost of moving the unloading crane from the Black Hawk site as well as the dozer, needed to push the sand along the beach once it was unloaded from the barge.

A committee from the Friends of Pool 9, chaired by Stirn has been working with the Agencies for several years to inspect area river beaches and keep them in good shape for swimmers and boaters alike. The committee meets regularly with Agency personnel to review beach areas that are part of the Channel Maintenance Plan and may need sand for island nourishment, bank stabilization, or for recreational uses.

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Rejuvenated Lansing Beach at Mile Marker 664.2 after addition of sand and bulldozer work, looking up the beach toward Wisconsin.

The cost of this beach work will be in the neighborhood of \$5,000. Friends of Pool 9 will pay this restoration expense because it's part of their ongoing commitment to maintaining area beaches for future generations to enjoy. Upon completion of the Pool 9 Beach Maintenance Plan additional sites will be identified for possible sand placement in the future. The Friends of Pool 9 also sponsored the Annual Pool-wide Clean Up and had a very successful and educational Mississippi River Adventure Day for 185 kids and parents this summer.

While grants represent a major source of their income, Friends of Pool 9 still depends on donations from its members, area residents, businesses, and corporations to finance their projects and activities. If you enjoy the beaches and support the projects of Friends of Pool 9, please consider becoming a member and making a donation. Membership forms can be obtained by calling John Verdon (563-538-4836) or Sue Stirn (563-538-4055).

The Friends of Pool 9, Upper Miss Refuge, Inc. is a 501 c 3 not for profit organization and all donations are tax deductible. Their address is:

Friends of Pool 9,
Box 455,
Lansing, Iowa 52151.

7th Annual Rivers & Bluffs Fall Birding Festival – Nov. 7-8-9 A New Schedule of Events

With early November concentrations of elegant and musical Tundra Swans growing into the 20,000+ range, and combined numbers of all other waterfowl swelling beyond the half-million mark, the Rivers & Bluffs Fall Birding Festival takes place during a nationally-recognized wildlife spectacle.

This fall's festival will offer much more extensive field trip and excursion boat coverage of the ecologically-rich Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Maximum emphasis will be given to family-oriented on-site education about the river and its wildlife. Indoor activities are greatly reduced from previous years.

The 7th annual event begins Friday evening, Nov. 7, at the United Methodist Church, 490 Center Street, Lansing, Iowa. Registration for excursion boat trips with Captain Jack Libbey's Mississippi Explorer Cruises, will take place between 5 PM and 8 PM. A new program about the refuge and its wildlife by refuge Wildlife Biologist Tim Loose, will take place at approximately 7 PM.

A special sourdough pancake breakfast will be held at the same church beginning at 7 AM on Saturday, Nov. 8; and registrations will continue at this location from 7 AM until 9 AM.

A new feature in 2008 will be an evening "Owl Prowl" from 8 PM to about 9:30 PM on both Friday and Saturday evenings. Friday's owl adventure will leave from the church immediately following the program. The Saturday "Owl Prowl" will leave from the parking lot at Lansing's baseball field. Each evening vocalizations will be played to entice a variety of owls that inhabit our area into view. Then large lights will be used to facilitate easy viewing and photography.

The schedule for Saturday and Sunday consists of field trips by car-caravan to enjoy wildlife at key habitats in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota; and simultaneously scheduled excursion boat trips on the river with Captain Jack. These fun and informative activities will take place 9 AM to Noon, and 1:30 to 4:30 on both Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 8 and 9. Field trips will begin at the parking lot of the baseball field, and boat trips will launch from the Mississippi Explorer dock across the street on the river bank.

Participants are asked to pre-register by mail for the birding festival. Doing so will ensure that a sufficient number of knowledgeable field trip leaders will be on-hand for boat and on-land field trips, and appropriate arrangements can be made. *Only those who have registered for the festival* will be able to reserve a space on an excursion boat cruise this weekend. It may be necessary to limit the number of participants. Consequently, reservations are on a first-come, first-served basis.

The costs of the festival for adults and youth are just ½ of what they were in 2007. The costs are: adults \$10.00, youth 7-17 years of age, \$1.00; ages 6 and younger, free. To register please send a list of registrants, and a check made out to Ric Zarwell, to P.O. Box 299, Lansing, IA 52151.

The first 6 Rivers & Bluffs Fall Birding Festivals brought interested people to the Pool 9 area from 23 states, including East Coast, Gulf Coast, up and down the West Coast; and from Canada. The average attendance at previous festivals was about 250.

More information about Mississippi Explorer Cruises can be obtained at their website: <http://www.mississippiexplorer.com/>. Captain Jack's popular cruises feature large, enclosed, and heated boats that provide festival-goers with eye-level views of swans and other wildlife. Participants are asked to pre-register for boat trips by phone, at 877-647-7397. Then sign-up for your choice of boat trips at the United Methodist Church on Friday, Nov. 7.

Field trips and boat trips will be slower-paced, more relaxed, and more oriented toward education and interpretation than in previous years. A 1-page festival itinerary can be obtained by email here: Ric.Zarwell@mchsi.com. Full-day and half-day field trips will be led by Ric, Nov. 10-15, and are available by appointment.



President's View

Autumn is in the air. The water temperature has dropped 20 degrees in the past two weeks. One can only imagine the impact this has on the feeding habits of aquatic critters as they scramble to adjust to the change. The land plants and animals will likewise be adjusting their biological time clocks as we await the arrival of our traditional Midwest winter. I look forward to the changing of the seasons and the colorful panorama along the Mississippi River bluffs; it's spectacular, as well as the wintry wonderland that follows.

Thanks for all your hard work this spring and summer on our various projects and activities. The river clean up was as enlightening and successful as ever. Our newly added river adventure day for kids was amazingly popular. We've heard lots of good comments and are making plans for another next year. The Annual Meeting boat ride and dinner at Black Hawk Park was both inspirational and satisfying. The latest accomplishment of receiving sand on three area beaches was certainly "icing on the cake."

Glen Springer deserves our thanks for his attention to detail on the clean up, as does Tim Loose for his time spent organizing the Mississippi River Adventure Day. Sue Stirn gets thanks for her persistence in getting sand for our beaches, and finally Mark Schneden and Bob Seeley organized the Black Hawk Park meeting and prepared some scrumptious kabobs. At a special meeting the present Board agreed to serve another term and was elected unanimously. The present officers were also reelected by the Board.

I'm excited with the direction our group is going. There are so many good things to do to help the river and so many helpful and supportive people getting it done. We've placed porta potties at two access ramps and are making plans to add a third next year. The Virtual Geocaching activity is up and running. Stop at the Lansing Library and S&S Rentals for GPS units and instruction sheets. Our website is close to becoming active and we should be online later this fall, so check us out. FOP9 has been to the Washington, D.C. area twice this year; others have heard about our success and are trying to duplicate it. I picked up several neat ideas

and activities from the recent trip; we'll try to get some added to our agenda for next year. The Fall Birding Festival is going to be strictly field trip oriented; contact Ric Zarwell for information. And we recently received a nice award from the Izaak Walton League of America and it makes me proud to be a member of the Friends of Pool 9.

Our plates are full of activities and the river is going to be better because of it. Incidentally, all of these projects require a financial commitment and we need your support to continue to make them happen. Consider making a tax deductible donation yet this fall.

Have a good autumn enjoying the transitional spectacle; see you on the river.

John

Friends Encouraged to Report Refuge Incidents

The Board of Directors (BOD) heard a report from Nick Stavroplus (Enforcement Officer for the McGregor District) at the September 8, 2008 meeting on an incident that occurred on the Lansing Beach this past summer. He was quick to compliment the observation and clean up activity organized by FOP9 members. He also noted that Friends members probably helped to save the individual's life by notifying law enforcement of his presence. However, a better approach would have been to contact Nick via his cell phone (608-306-0476) prior to disturbing and cleaning the site. In the case this summer it was a situation involving a person who had stopped taking his medication for depression and while he did not appear to pose any threat to others, he was contemplating suicide. But it could have been a crime scene. Nick has prepared a set of specific instructional materials indicating the proper procedure to follow when this kind of situation is observed on a beach or anywhere on the Refuge. If the site is simply littered with a few cans or items feel free to clean it up, but if it appears to be something larger, or out of the ordinary, give Nick a call and contact any member of the BOD. They have the report form he would like to have you complete. It includes a section for reporting the location/site, violation/incident, type of vessel/boat number, number of persons observed at the site, as well as other details; but remember to call Nick first.

Continue to be a good example, be vigilant and good stewards of our wonderful natural resource. When you see someone who appears to be unfamiliar with the Leave No Trace philosophy, you might consider sharing more about it with them. Your example and enthusiasm can have a very positive influence on their behavior. We're proud of our organization and want to assure the survival of our river resource well into the future.

Friends of Pool 9 Receives Prestigious Award

The Friends of Pool 9 recently received the Honor Roll Award from the Izaak Walton League of America for their activities and accomplishments in 2007. It was presented at their National Convention in July and awarded to Friends of Pool 9 at their Annual Meeting on August 23, 2008.

Mr. Don Freeman, past National Izaak Walton League President and member of the Board of Directors of the Izaak Walton League made the presentation to the Friends of Pool 9.

In his presentation Freeman developed a correlation between Will Dilg (Chicago area advertising executive and conservationist), and one of the founders of the Izaak Walton League of America, and the Friends of Pool 9. He relayed how we are bound by history through the same river area called Winneshiek Bottoms, as well as similar conservation goals and ethics. Dilg was familiar with the area and had fished and hunted the area around Lansing for many years. In the 1920's developers devised a plan to drain thousands of acres of bottom land above and below Lansing. Dilg sprang into action to protect the area for future hunters and fishermen. He wrote that it was "so beautiful that it is beyond the power of the human mind to describe, and that the Upper Mississippi River valley was the last stand for wildlife." He mounted a campaign with the newly formed Izaak Walton League America and together persuaded Congress to create the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge on June 7, 1923.



Don Freeman presents the Honor Roll Award to the Board of Directors of Friends of Pool 9. L. to R. (Don Thran, Bruce Re Voir, Sue Stirn, Jerry Boardman, Don Freeman (IWLA), John Verdon, Natalie Baugher, Mark Schneden, Ric Zarwell, Bob Henkel, Dan Porter. Absent from photo Al Wuennecke and Tim Loose (Ex-officio USFWS).

The plaque is entitled "**Honor Roll Award – 2007**, and says these words "**This award is presented to Friends of Pool 9, in recognition of outstanding work performed in the fields of conservation, public information and publicity in keeping with the League's goals**".

The Award had been presented at the 86th Annual Izaak Walton League of America National Convention in Indiana, on July 23, 2008. The Friends of Pool 9 Board of Directors accepted the Award on behalf of the Friends of Pool 9, Upper Miss Refuge, Inc.

Tim Loose (USFWS) is an ex-officio member of the BOD, and the success of Friends of Pool 9 is a direct result of his leadership and inspiration. He has been a true friend of Pool 9 and the Mississippi River, we owe him a great deal of gratitude and appreciation and could not have done it without him. Thanks Tim.



Denny and Jerry Boardman display fish they caught in their nets during Mississippi River Adventure Day.

Friends of Pool 9
P.O. Box 455
Lansing, IA 52151



Calendar of Events:

Rivers and Bluffs Fall Birding Festival
Friday-Sunday, November 7-9, 2008
(See enclosed article)

Volunteer Appreciation Banquet
Saturday, January 24, 2009

Pool Wide Cleanup Day
Saturday, April 25, 2009

The Friends of Pool 9, Upper Miss Refuge, Inc. is a grassroots citizen action group, whose sole purpose is the protection, restoration, and preservation of our natural resources. The 400 member organization has no due requirements, and pays for its activities through donations and grants. It is a 501c3 federally tax exempt organization, all donations are tax deductible. The communities that border Pool 9 are its primary contributors and supporters.



*Tom Brady, Mussel Biologist at Genoa National Fish Hatchery talking to kids about the mussels they found during Mississippi River Adventure Day.
Photo by Scott Boylen Photography.*