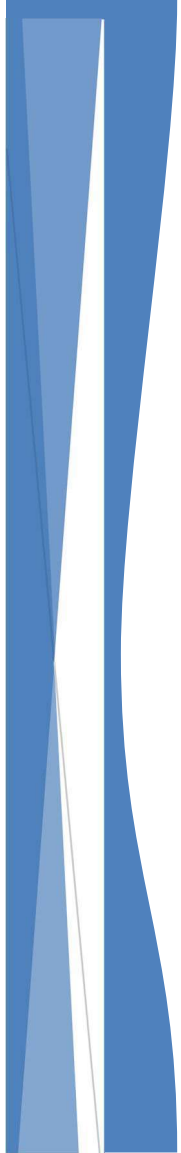




Friends of Potato Creek State Park

SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Friends of Potato Creek State Park Summer Newsletter!



In this issue...

New board members and staff

The latest President's message

A look back at Easter in the park

NEW Summer concert lineup

The little known (but very useful!)

Indiana Heritage Barn Property

Tax Deduction

Potato Creek's wetlands

**Our trail map and recent hiking
fun**

**Ways *you* can become a Friends'
sponsor or donor**

The Friends of Potato Creek State Park meet the 3rd Tuesday of each month, January through October, at 6 PM in the Park Nature Center.

ALL ARE WELCOME !!!

NO meeting in November or December.

2026 FOPC board meetings are:

- May 19, 2026
- June 16, 2026
- July 21, 2026
- August 18, 2026
- September 15, 2026
- October 20, 2026

Please come join us !!!

Friends of Potato Creek Welcomes New Board & Staff

The Friends of Potato Creek held elections in March 2026, welcoming two new board members...

Jackie Nicodemus works for DNR and was elected to an At-large position.

Jean Deary, also a DNR employee, was elected to the board and will be the Friends' Secretary.

Reelected to board seats in March were...

- **Linda Laney** to At-large and Concerts
- **Delores Stiffler** as Treasurer
- **Vicky Rydzynski** as Vice President

President **Chere Mckinley** and At-Large member **Marlene Brown** retain their current board roles.

Additional roles include:

- **Maggie Hesters**, Facebook Administrator
- **Cory Dennie**, Webpage Administrator
- **Brian Sittley**, Newsletter Editor

BOARD MEMBERS

President

Chere McKinley

Vice President

Vicki Rydzynski

Treasurer

Delores Stiffler

Secretary

Jean Deary

At Large

Jackie Nicodemus

At Large

Linda Laney

At Large

Marlene Brown

Easter at the Park



The postponement of the park's annual Easter Egg hunt & festivities did little to dampen the spirits of the kids, parents and grandparents who attended. Every bunny had a good time!

From the President

Greetings! The Friends of Potato Creek are working to make your visit or stay at the park more fun, interesting and enriching. Since elections in March, you'll see we have a full board and some new administrators (prior page). We thank you all!

In this issue you'll also see that the concert schedule is now finalized, and we again thank those who have made donations to the park for which we are most grateful (see donor list).

You may notice some bat houses as you drive through the park. These were supplied by DNR to house bats that had nested in the barn. Also watch for owl houses that will be put up soon. Trees were ordered for the campground and planted, and a new kayak loader will be available this year!

The Friends wish to thank all who participated in the Easter Egg Hunt. This was the first year the event had to be canceled and rescheduled. April 25th was a beautiful day, a bit cold but with plenty of sunshine and no rain. We had around 80 egg hunters that day who with their families hunted easter eggs and enjoyed the pets from Prairie Winds Nature Farm and a visit from the Easter Bunny. There were lots of smiles. This day would not have been possible without the many volunteers who met the afternoon of March 28th to fill Easter Eggs with age-appropriate candy that was donated to the Friends for this purpose. A special thanks to Mr. E. Bunny for his appearance, and to all the volunteers who escorted Mr. Bunny, and who helped set up, spread the eggs and clean up afterwards. It was a very successful event!



The Friends group will again have speakers throughout the Summer on various topics. Professor Deb Marr will present "**Tracking Pollinator Diversity**" at 2:00 PM on June 13th to discuss plants that attract bees, bats, butterflies and birds! Check out any of our communication avenues for future announcements and details. Also watch for details on the Annual Friends group get together coming soon! Our communications for events on social media platforms include email, [Facebook](#), [webpage](#) (where you can join The Friends, or donate to special projects) and postings in the park.

Potato Creek State Park needs volunteers. State Park budgets have really been cut for 2026-27. If you have time to volunteer, please contact Alex de Groot at 574.850.9347. The Friends group also can use your help! Contact FriendsofPotatoCreek@gmail.com for volunteer opportunities. The FOPC board meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month January thru October at 6:00 PM in the Nature Center and ALL ARE WELCOME!!!

As always, we appreciate your continued support of the Friends of Potato Creek State Park.

Have a great summer and come out to the park and enjoy the season!

Chere McKinley, President, FOPC

Summer Concerts Return to Beach Area

By Linda Laney

Summer concerts at Potato Creek have grown into a family favorite over the last six years. For 2026, the Friends of Potato Creek will be proudly hosting four must-go concerts!

Bands and fans alike love the park's lakeside venue with its beautiful scenery and laid-back family atmosphere. Some campers even tell us they choose specific weekends to stay at the park so they can hear their favorite band.

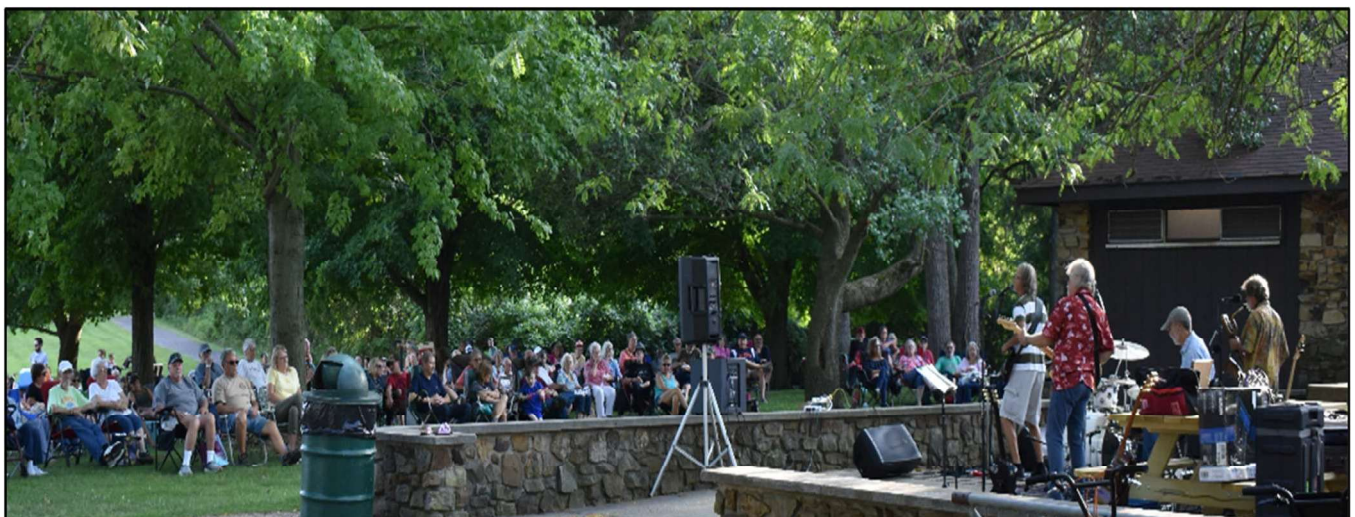
The lineup of bands playing in concert this summer are sponsored by local businesses and individuals. The Friends group would not be able to bring these concerts to the community without the generous sponsors listed below. (Mark your calendars!)

All concerts are free and open to the public, after paying the park's gate entry fee.

A HUGE Thank You to our sponsors!

Lippert Components, Jeff & Maggie Schwartz, 1st Source Bank, Laney Honey Co., Tial & Travis O'Brien, Creative Hotstamping, Brian & Anna Krueger, Bashor Children's Home, A Rosie Place, Bowen Printing, Prairie Winds Nature Farm, Unity Gardens.

DATE	TIME	BAND	STYLE
May 23	3:00–5:00	Kennedy's Kitchen	Irish/Folk
July 3	6:30–8:00	Blue Holler Band	Bluegrass
July 18	6:30–8:00	S0entimental Journeys	1940s Big Band
August 1	6:30–8:00	Darryl Buchanan	Soul / Motown
September 5	6:30–8:00	PT & the Cruisers	Classic Rock



Summer concerts at Potato Creek draw large crowds to the lakeside venue.

Indiana Heritage Barn Property Tax Deduction

Submitted by Eugene Matzat

Timber frame barns once dotted the rural landscape of Indiana about 100 years ago when most Hoosiers were directly involved in agriculture. Sadly, as farmers moved to the cities for employment, farms were consolidated and many old barns were no longer needed and were demolished. Other barns, as agriculture technology changed and equipment got bigger, were no longer functional and were left to fall into disrepair. These heritage barns could no longer help tell the stories of Indiana's settlement and early agriculture.

Indiana Barn Foundation and Indiana Landmarks organizations support the preservation of historic Indiana barns. **Indiana has a tax deduction for heritage barns.** *Did you know this? If not, read on. And spread the word!*

If you are the owner of an old barn and you have not yet filed for the Heritage Barn Tax Deduction, you may be eligible for some property tax savings. And be sure to spread the word to others in your community. You may want to look into this benefit before the end of the year.

In 2014 the Indiana State Legislature passed Indiana Code 6-1.1-12-26.2, becoming effective with assessments after that time. The Indiana Barn Foundation and Indiana Landmarks were leaders in pursuing this legislation intended to encourage barn owners to maintain and repair their old barns. Yet, many barn owners have not taken advantage of this tax deduction, no doubt because existence of the deduction is not well known.

Did you know that Indiana has a tax deduction for heritage barns?

To find out if your barn is eligible, start in your County Assessor's office. Staff can look up your property assessments and determine if your barn is assessed as a "heritage barn" meaning it: (A) was constructed before 1950; (B) retains sufficient integrity of design, materials and construction to clearly identify the building as a barn; and (C) is a mortise and tenon barn. (A mortise and tenon barn is a barn built using heavy wooden timbers, joined together with wood-pegged mortise and tenon joinery, that form an exposed structural frame.) This does not mean that nails cannot be present in the barn construction.

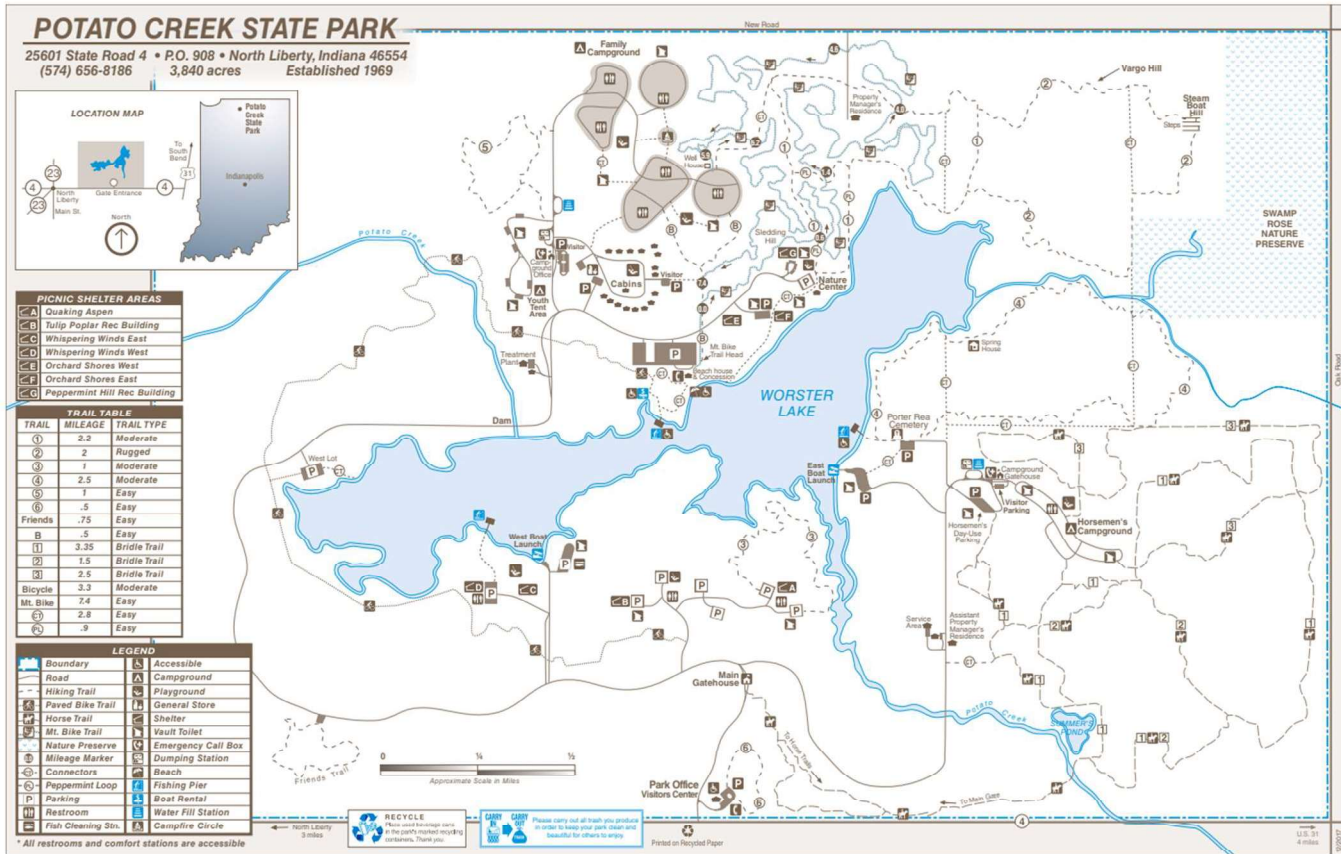
The Assessor's office will give you an application form you must fill out, State Form 55706 (R/6-16). Upon verification from the Assessor's Office, the form is then taken to the Auditor's Office. The County Auditor makes the final determination for the heritage barn property tax deduction. The application must be completed and signed on or before December 31 of the year for which the deduction is sought and filed or postmarked on or before January 5 of the following year.

An online application form can also be accessed at the Indiana Barn Foundation website: <https://www.indianabarns.org/>. Look for "Barn Tax Deduction" under *Resources*. Also, once on the website, you should review the booklet, *Indiana's Heritage Barns: Their History, Uses and Preservation*. This publication of the Indiana Barn Foundation presents the history of some of the more common heritage barn types found in Indiana. Also, the Indiana Barn Foundation's Barn Preservation Grant Fund launched a matching-grant program in 2018 with the purpose of assisting Indiana barn owners in repairing and maintaining their historic barns.

We should appreciate Indiana's heritage barns and make practical efforts to preserve them.

Potato Creek State Park – Trail Map

A quick reminder that our park is home to several beautiful hiking trails. Most can be traversed in an hour or two, and are of easy to medium difficulty. Most trails will be found in the north half of the park, as shown below.



For your own map, click [here](#).



Have you walked any of our wonderful park trails lately? Each year, thousands of visitors take advantage of them... like those pictured here from local Boy Scout Troop 173 (St. Jude's) who recently hiked Trails 1, 2, 3 and 4 over six miles to prepare for an upcoming High Adventure. And in true scout-like manner, picked up lots of trash along the way!

Ask the Property Manager: Potato Creek Wetlands History

Recently, FOPC President Chere McKinley sat down with Asst Park Mgr. Alex de Groot, who together explored Potato Creek's Wetlands History. Highlights are shared below.

The land that is now Potato Creek State Park was actually the far eastern part of the Grand Kankakee Marsh which started a bit further North on the west side of South Bend in St Joseph County, Indiana. It was often called the Everglades of the North. The Grand Kankakee Marsh extended into 9 counties and was 90 miles long and as much as 20 miles wide. At that time there were many wetlands and marshes in the area including swamps, bogs, fens, forests, prairies, wet meadows, oak savannah and barren vegetation, each with its own specific characteristics.

Wetlands are known for their ability to clean water and filter out toxins and sediments, and for the large array of habitat that call the wetlands home. The Grand Kankakee Marsh was home to fish, snakes, turtles, frogs, insects, invertebrates, herons, ducks, sandhill cranes, beavers and muskrats plus additional wildlife and a number of plant species.

Settlers, land speculators and the Indiana General Assembly largely destroyed the Grand Kankakee Marsh between 1882 and 1917 by channeling rivers and streams in order to make the land available for agricultural purposes and to farm the land. This land was found to be especially rich in nutrients for growing row crops. Additional drainage was needed for these crops and tiles were laid on the individual farms that later became Potato Creek State Park.

In the 1990's Tim Cordell, DNR Naturalist at Potato Creek State Park, worked to restore the wetlands that had been drained for farming. The water features in and around the Friends Trail were linked together by what became known as 'Spud Run,' which included creating channels, levees (small dams) and control structures which are used to change and manage the levels of water to create and manage more wetlands. The Friends Trail is the only trail in the park that is completely surrounded by wetlands.

In April, 2026, a culvert crossing under the main road was replaced. That culvert was original to the construction of the park. It had been showing signs of erosion and failing, and contained organic material inside as well. A complete failure of this culvert would have closed the main road. The culvert which was replaced is actually one of two culverts passing under the main road. One culvert flows in one direction and the other flows in the opposite direction. The second smaller culvert is functioning well at this time. This project had long been on the list of IDNR projects.

Another issue affecting the Friends Trail and Spud Run was a gigantic beaver dam above the trail. It was the size of a Volkswagen and was affecting water flow in the area. The blockage has been removed and water is flowing through the area as of this printing. Beavers do not like the sound of flowing water and it is a matter of time before the beaver will be rebuilding a lodge in this area.

Still another issue is a control levee just off Redwood Road on the west border of the park. That structure is large and goes down about 10 feet. It affects the water level and is a part of Spud Run, but has completely failed and totally emptied. This problem is however on the list for IDNR and will be addressed in the future. Unfortunately, on the hierarchy of IDNR issues to be addressed, the control levee just off Redwood Road is not on the top of the list but will be addressed in turn.

The wetlands of Potato Creek State Park add to the biodiversity of the area. The wetlands are teeming with a great number of species that thrive in this ecosystem. We are very fortunate that Tim Cordell and the IDNR saw the benefits of restoring the wetlands to Potato Creek State Park for our enjoyment today.



