

Friends of Potato Creek State Park

Spring Newsletter

May 2024

Mission Statement

The purpose and mission of the Friends of Potato Creek State Park is to develop and support projects and events that help preserve, restore, manage, and interpret the natural and cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities of Potato Creek State Park.

Board Members

President – Chere McKinley,
chereyehoo@yahoo.com

Vice President – Linda Matzat,
lmbuthmatzat@earthlink.net

Treasurer – Delores Stiffler,
stifflerdelores@gmail.com

Secretary – Colette Stevens,
colette.stevens@ymail.com

At Large – Marlene Brown,
nmhoosier@gmail.com

At Large – Linda Laney,
llaney@earthlink.net

At Large – Vicky Rydzynski,
vryd@aol.com

Ex-Officio – Jim Webb,
Park Property Manager



Potato Creek Says Good-Bye to Park Naturalist

Jessica Filer, the naturalist at Potato Creek State Park for the past three years, took a new position in April as Park Naturalist at McCormick's Creek State Park near Spencer, Indiana.

Prior to coming to Potato Creek State Park, Jessica had been a naturalist at McCormick's Creek State Park. She is returning to the park as it needs a lot of restorative work following destructive tornadoes and winds that toppled many trees and did considerable damage in March 2023.

While at Potato Creek State Park, Jessica was instrumental in scheduling and hosting new programs. She initiated more contact with school groups and nature programs at schools. She hosted several Weed Wrangles® at which volunteers gained hands-on experience identifying and removing invasive plant species at the park.

Jessica was the Park's liaison with the Friends group, so she worked closely with the Board on events, fund-raising, special projects and the summer concert series.

The park staff hosted a farewell luncheon for Jessica on Wednesday, April 17, 2024, at the Nature Center. Members of the Friends group were also invited to wish her well. Jessica received several parting gifts from the Friends as well as the Park.

We will miss Jessica at Potato Creek State Park, but wish her well in her new position at McCormick's Creek State Park in Owen County, Indiana.



Summer Concerts Return to Beach Area of Potato Creek State Park

By Linda Laney

The popularity of summer concerts at Potato Creek has been building over the last four years. For 2024, the Friends of Potato Creek will be proudly hosting six concerts! Bands are now approaching the Friends group to ask if they can play at the park. They love the venue with the beautiful scenery and the 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. All concerts are free and open to the public, after paying the park's gate entry fee.

If you are interested in sponsoring a concert, or have suggestions for food trucks and other bands, please contact Linda Laney at the email address: info@laneyhoney.com.

Summer 2024 Concerts (All concerts performed outdoors at the beach concession area. All times listed are Eastern Daylight Time.)

Saturday, May 25, 6:30 – 8:00 pm, *Riely O'Connor & Molly B. Moon, Singer/Songwriters* (folk, bluegrass music).
Sponsor: 1st Source Bank.

Saturday, June 15, 6:30 – 8:00 pm, *High 5 Band*
(classic rock, disco, pop music)
Sponsor: Crystal Logistics of South Bend.

Saturday, July 6, 3:00 – 5:00 pm, *Kennedy's Kitchen* (classic Irish music).

Sponsors: McCormick Electric Services, Inc. of North Liberty, VFW of North Liberty, Private donors.

ALSO: 6:30 – 8:00 pm, ***Blue Holler Band*** (bluegrass). **Sponsor:** Laney Honey Co.

Saturday, July 20, 5:00 - 7:00 pm, *The Hillsiders* (folk, rock, sing-along).
Sponsor: Private donors.

Saturday, August 31, 6:30 – 8:00 pm, *PT & The Cruisers* (blues, oldies, classic rock).
Sponsor: Delores & Bob Stiffler.



Kennedy's Kitchen playing classic Irish music at the beach.



PT & The Cruisers playing classic rock to a large crowd at the beach.

Does Anybody Care?

By Marlene Brown

The Indiana General Assembly and Governor Holcomb have provided funding for a new inn at Potato Creek State Park. This funding will be spent on sleeping rooms, dining rooms, a conference center, an indoor aquatic center, a gift shop as well as some additional features. Potato Creek also has a huge campground nestled in the woods along with large modern family cabins. Visitors flock here all seasons to enjoy a wide range of activities including bike riding, boating, hiking, horseback riding and fishing. Wildflowers in the spring, fall colors in autumn, and migratory bird-watching are also cherished activities at the park. Osprey return every year and eagles are also taking up residence at this northern Indiana gem!

Potato Creek along with other state parks are in trouble! Invasive species are diminishing the natural beauty in our state parks and are also diminishing productivity of private landowners. Our soils, water quality, forests, fisheries, parks and preserves all are being negatively impacted. Costs of crop production are increasing, forest health and tree growth are diminishing, our rare and endangered native species are being threatened. As if this isn't bad enough...our human health is even at risk! Exposure to one of the invasives, **poison hemlock** (*Conium maculatum*), can result in respiratory distress and even death for children and adults.



- 1: Poison hemlock rosette
- 2: Poison hemlock in bloom
- 3: Common reed in bloom

The current budget for this Inn is \$100 million dollars. Shouldn't some of this budget include provisions for maintenance and removal of invasive species that are destroying the natural beauty of the park? After all, isn't this the reason people come here to recreate?

An important aspect of DNR's mission is to protect and preserve natural resources, yet there is no funding for this. Consequently invasive species have no enemy, and they are flourishing and wiping out native species! The state relies primarily on staff and volunteers from agencies such as State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM) and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA). These are partnerships of federal, state and local government agencies, including tribes, individuals and various groups interested in protecting our environment. Most of the individuals doing the actual labor are volunteers. This problem is far too massive to rely on dedicated volunteers – that's like putting out a wildfire with a garden hose.

Take a drive in the country this summer and you'll see **common reed** (*Phragmites australis*) and **poison hemlock** overtaking our natural prairie grasses and woodlands. These are some of the invasives that are most prevalent in northern Indiana. As you hike the trails in Potato Creek and kayak the lake you can readily see them, and with no management they are multiplying like crazy!

Indiana can and should become proactive in protecting our valuable natural resources. We have a responsibility to preserve our public and private lands for future generations. Politicians and governing agencies need to realize that the "revenue" that is so important to them needs to be spent on more than material things. It should also be used for funding to protect the beauty of the natural environment, the reason visitors flock to the parks!

We don't need more lodges, marinas and swimming pools if the beauty of the natural environment is destroyed by our lack of foresight.

Does Anybody Care?

For more information about invasive species, visit:

- SICIM Website: <https://www.sicim.info/>
- Purdue Extension-Forestry & Natural Resources: <https://www.purdue.edu/fnr/extension/resources/publications/> and search "Invasive"

2024 Friends Easter Egg Hunt

The Friends of Potato Creek State Park sponsored a morning of spring fun at the park with the annual *Easter Egg Hunt* on Saturday, March 30, 2024.

Families, including children young and older, parents and grandparents, came to the beach area to hunt for over 5,000 eggs beginning at 10:30 a.m. EDT. Volunteers had filled and hidden the eggs in four different areas to benefit different age groups. Because of light rain overnight and earlier that morning, the number of participants was down considerably. This gave those who participated ample opportunity to gather lots of sweets from the plastic eggs the kids found from each designated area! Some kids also got lucky to visit the special prize table to choose a fun item.

Participants also enjoyed petting the farm animals brought to the park by Prairie Winds Farm and a local farmer. They cuddled up to bunnies, ducks and chickens. They also chose to pet a ewe with lamb and a miniature pony.

The highlight of the morning was a visit by the "Easter Bunny"! The Easter Bunny gave hugs, stood with kids for pictures and greeted guests as the furry friend helped collect tickets for each age group.



2024 Easter Egg Hunt Highlights



About Lead and Toxicity

By Chere McKinley

In late January 2024, an experienced birder and photographer was at Potato Creek State Park and noticed a juvenile bald eagle near its nest. The eagle's head was hung low. When the bird was startled, there was no visible reaction. Park officials knew there was something wrong with the bird. The bird was taken to Humane Indiana Wildlife Rehabilitation where the young 3-1/2 year-old eagle was tested for lead poisoning. The level of lead in the bird's body could not accurately be determined because it was "off the chart." The eagle died overnight from a lethal level of lead.

When the young eagle was x-rayed and eventually autopsied with permission from the Federal government, it was determined to have seven small pieces of lead in its stomach. A piece of lead the size of a grain of rice can kill ten adult birds.

In 1991 the federal government passed laws that made it illegal to use lead shot when hunting waterfowl. Birds are especially sensitive to lead. The birds were ingesting spent shot in small confined wetlands where they were dying of lead poisoning. Steel shot, copper shot and zinc as well as bismuth now replace the lead formerly used in shot gun shells. Bismuth, for example, is 86% as dense as lead. Hunters can even reload shells with steel or other kinds of metal for shot as a result of the ban on lead used in hunting waterfowl.

Eagles are scavengers. Likely the young eagle at Potato Creek State Park ate the entrails or guts of an animal shot with lead ammunition. Hunters are supposed to field dress deer, for example, and retrieve the shot or fragments from the animal and bury them or otherwise remove them from the area. A hunter, after finding the deer they harvested, may return to their ride, pick up a shovel, rope and tag, and return to the deer. There they can bury the shot and tie the legs together and use the shovel handle to pull the deer out of the woods. Most hunters are also very considerate stewards of the land and wildlife. Obviously others are not.

Non-lead ammunition is available for all guns. In most cases, the cost is similar with "non-toxic" ammunition being slightly higher. In sporting clays and target shooting, lead shot is still used almost exclusively due to the lower pricing but animals are not involved. Fishing tackle also contains lead. Alternative metals for tackle are available. Now, instead of pinching the lead weight on the line, you will need a pair of pliers.

The toxicity of lead has been known since 2000 BC. In 1978 AD the US banned the use of lead in paint. In 1996 AD the US required lead to be removed from gasoline. Some research studies suggest that IQ levels of half the population could have been reduced by gasoline fumes. Lead in water has caused illness and lower IQ scores for children in cities with lead pipes. ADHD has similar symptoms of lead poisoning - lack of attention, irritability, hyperactivity, learning disabilities, memory loss and insomnia. Could those diagnosed with ADHD actually be suffering from lead poisoning? California has banned all lead from ammunitions and fishing tackle since 2013.

Most hunters are conservationists. They enjoy hunting and fishing in a very responsible manner realizing that they must respect all the wildlife in order to continue to do what they enjoy. This means that hunters should not use lead ammunition. Instead choose cooper, aluminum, stainless steel, tungsten, zinc, bismuth or alloys of these metals for shot. It also means that hunters should remove the shot from the carcass of the animal and then bury or bag it.

Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles were protected under an act established in 1940. Eagles were removed from the endangered species list in 2007. They are, after all, a symbol of strength in the United States. Let's continue to protect them by keeping our waters lead free and hunting and fishing responsibly using non-toxic ammunition and tackle.

For more information about lead toxicity in wildlife, visit:

- Cornell Wildlife Health Lab website:
<https://cwhl.vet.cornell.edu/disease/lead-toxicosis>
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources:
<https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/wildlife-resources/effects-of-lead-on-wildlife/>

Indiana State Park App for Smartphones

Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Indiana Office of Technology present a smartphone app for both Android and Apple iOS users. Features of this app include:

- DNR Property Maps
- Links to Camping and Trail Maps
- Listings of DNR events and press releases
- Fishing and hunting regulations
- Ability to report polluters and poachers
- Information to assist with orphaned and nuisance wildlife

Visit

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/communications/smartphone-apps/> for download information.



2024 Summer Programs and Speakers

The following line up of programs and speakers sponsored by the Friends of Potato Creek State Park is scheduled for this summer at the Nature Center of the Park (unless otherwise noted):

- **Saturday, June 22**, 2:00 pm EDT, *Potawatomi Zoo*, a "hands-on" presentation with live native mammals.
- **Saturday, July 13**, 2:00 pm EDT, *Rescue Dogs* demonstrated by Gary Hays, trainer.
- **Saturday, August 17**, 2:00 pm EDT, *Raptors* led by Interpretive Naturalist from Salamonie Raptor Center.
- **Saturday, September 28**, time(s) TBD, *IDNR Woods on Wheels*, tour a mobile resource center that focuses on Hoosier forestry.



NOTE: These are in addition to programs scheduled by Park staff. Questions? Visit: <http://www.friendsofpotatocreek.com> or Friends of Potato Creek State Park Facebook page or call the park office at 574-656-8186

Newsletter Disclaimer and Opt-Out Notice

This newsletter is published by the Friends of Potato Creek State Park. This newsletter is not affiliated with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. If you do not want to receive this newsletter, and wish to be removed from our mailing list, please contact the Friends at friendsofpotatocreek@gmail.com or write:

Friends of Potato Creek State Park, P.O. Box 471, North Liberty, IN 46554

You can also contact us with newsletter corrections, questions, comments, or if you would like to provide content for future newsletters.