

Friends of the Wapsi Center Minutes
Thursday, January 18, 2018
Wapsi River Environmental Education Center

Attendees: Becky Horton, Bill Robbins, Lucia Dryanski, Ingrid Bogdanowicz, Carol Rogers, Norm Nichols, Cindy Flockhart, and Joy Sheeley.

This month the group met at 350 Grill in Eldridge. The November meeting minutes and treasurer's report were approved. The current bank balance is \$9,611.61.

Becky told the group that the Quad Cities Women's Outdoor Club has donated half of their \$700 proceeds from a recent Holistic Healing event to the Wapsi Center, with the remaining half going to Muscatine County Conservation.

In addition, a local Girl Scout troop will sponsor four of the Center's box turtles.

Staff news: Although Wapsi Center caretaker Brandi Turner is officially "off duty" this month, she can still be contacted for cabin rentals and snow removal. Staff members will attend fire training during February. Due to inclement weather, there were no burns at the Center this fall, so a burn may be done in the spring.

Grounds: The road ditches have been seeded with native plants. Hard surfacing will take place in the spring.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has set up a bat detector near the Aquatic Lab, to learn which species of bats are in the area. Their equipment is set up near a bat hibernation area now, to see if they can hear anything during the winter. The observation will continue throughout the summer.

Becky told the group to feel free to replace suet and refill bird feeders if needed, or to leave a note if they need to be filled. Suet is in the lab freezer, and bird seed is in a bin in the fish tank room.

Facilities: New computers will arrive soon, including a new laptop. Becky said she will see if she can get a login for guest users, so that Friends can use it when they are hosting.

Education: The Environmental Education assessment has been presented to the Scott County Conservation Board, and the Wapsi Center staff is awaiting their direction as to next steps. Lucia asked whether the Friends group could read the assessment report. Becky will send it out.

Becky told the group that school attendance at the Wapsi Center has been declining, with lack of funding for bus transportation as a major factor. Also, groups that might otherwise spend the night aren't able to without a certain ratio of adults to students.

She suggested that the Friends group might consider hosting fundraising events, such as a trivia night, 5K, or triathlon, in order to provide bus scholarships for schools or to provide funds for an internship for a high school senior who planned to go into a related field. This person could serve as an additional adult for school overnight visits. Relatively few high school age students participate in Center events; Becky said she also would like to find ways to increase high school involvement.

Programming in December was offered to 3 on-site groups totaling 48 participants. There were no off-site programs in December. In November, 34 people in 3 groups took part in on-site programs, while 162 people in 3 groups attended off-site programs. The weather program was cancelled, but has been rescheduled for April 7.

A new Scott County Conservation Board activity book is being planned, with conservation staff members from throughout the county collaborating to put the activities together. Some of the activities are specific to certain sites, while others such as mazes, crossword puzzles, and mazes can be done anywhere.

Old Business:

The group approved using the memorial money from Lucia's mother to purchase a heated granite bird bath from Wild Birds Unlimited. It will be placed near the bird feeders next to the Eco Center.

New Business: Becky thanked program volunteers, hosts, and everyone who helped with Bald Eagle Days. She also thanked Joann Denklau and others who have renewed their Friends' membership, and James and Jane Varcho, for their donation to the Wapsi Center.

The Center will host Winter Fun Day on Feb. 3. Becky said that the snowshoeing and skiing programs will be combined into one two-hour block, and the two-hour Wild Edibles workshop will run concurrently with the fire-building workshop this year. The chili cook off will be held at lunchtime, rather than at the end of the day. Friends members and Center staff provide the chili; attendees are not expected to bring chili, unless they want to.

The Center is still looking for donations of the following items: old wall calendars, one-gallon ice cream buckets, five-gallon buckets, old, clean t-shirts with or without emblems, peanut butter and Crisco for pine cone feeders.

The group discussed ideas for refurbishing and updating the gift shop. Items suggested for sale include pocket nature guides, Wapsi Center t-shirts, compasses, first aid kits, arrowheads, geodes, bug boxes, and butterfly nets. Becky said many nature centers feature homemade items. She shared wooden Christmas ornaments, wooden mushroom, and birdhouses that her father makes, and said she has a recipe for lip balm made from beeswax. Lucia makes hand-dipped beeswax candles, Bill makes pottery, and Ingrid makes note cards featuring nature prints. Reusable shopping bags, hiking sticks, and local honey were also suggested. We will research possibilities and continue the discussion at next month's meeting.

Misc Announcements/Events/Sharing from Friends

Becky said that many new visitors to the Center say that they heard about it in Facebook, and encouraged members to share SCCB posts in order to get the word out.

The next meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, February 15 at the Eldridge Library.