



Friends of Sylvania

Promoting the protection and careful management of the Sylvania Wilderness

<http://www.friendsofsylvania.org>

info@friendsofsylvania.org

Dear Friends:

The Friends of Sylvania would like to wish you a happy and peaceful 2015 and to thank you for your interest in Sylvania and your support of our work. In 2014 we had another successful year assisting the US Forest Service in protecting and preserving the Sylvania Wilderness.

SYLVANIA ROAD & BUILDING RENOVATION

The Sylvania Recreation Area underwent major road renovations in 2014. The roads, sidewalks, and parking areas were completely redone, including culvert replacement, drainage improvement, and paving of all of the roads, parking lots, and campground loops in the western half of the Recreational Area. The early winter weather delayed project completion. The final layer of asphalt will be laid in 2015, which should only take a few days once weather permits.

The Clark Lake Day Use Building was completely renovated and modernized, inside and out. A completely new water system and septic system were installed, which include modern bathroom and shower facilities. The exterior of the building had some siding replaced and repaired, a new roof was installed, and a new color scheme was chosen! The Ottawa National Forest (ONF) hopes you enjoy the new green that will blend nicely with the surrounding area and fits in with the wilderness setting. Some work in the interior of the buildings will need to be completed early in the 2015 summer season, but ONF anticipates that the building will be open for much of the summer.



Road to Clark Lake in fall [W. Brinkmann]

In 2015, the Forest Service anticipates receiving funding to renovate the road between the Entrance Station and Crooked Lake. This work would cause delays or a road closure. The public will be notified of the schedule if and when a contract is awarded. Please consider this information when planning your trip.

Please visit recreation.gov, the ONF website, or call the Visitor Center at (906) 358-4724 for the current access status. *M. Simpson*

INVASIVE WEED PROJECT

2014 was the fourth year the Friends of Sylvania (FoS) worked on the control of invasive weeds in Sylvania and we are already seeing evidence of the effectiveness of our work in the form of a reduction in the number of plants at several sites. This permitted our 2014 Invasive Crew to expand the search for invasives to new areas and for new species.

Over 500 known sites of invasive species were revisited. In addition, about 150 new sites were identified; this increased the

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VOLUNTEERS

Many of our volunteers belong to groups that organize work days in Sylvania for their members. Significant contributions have also been made by individuals unaffiliated with formal field work. Here are two examples:

Paul Wagner and **Cindy Schlosser** are frequent summer guests at a private property located on Big Bateau. For the past two years, they have devoted part of their vacation time to paddling and walking the shoreline of Big Bateau searching for and removing

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number of known sites in Sylvania from the original 134 sites provided by the Forest Service at the beginning of the project in 2011, to almost 900 sites. The increase in the



Invasives Crew (Emma, Julie, Sarah, Wally) on break after removing spotted knapweed plants. [D. Wallace]

in the number of sites is mostly due to the fact that we are covering more area and at a finer grid than was done prior to 2011. Most of the invasive plant species are thistles: European marsh thistle, Canada thistle, and bull thistle.

Many thistle sites, however, were inaccessible this summer. During the 2013-14 winter (October 2013 - April 2014), precipitation totals were above normal for 5 of the 7 months. As a result, lake levels were about a foot higher than the previous year. This situation made searching for known and new sites along lake shores very difficult. The high water levels drowned many invasives along lake shores but increased the potential for the establishment of new sites in interior locations because of high soil moisture content which is favored by some weeds, especially European marsh thistle.

With the 2014 road closures in Sylvania, we adjusted our invasives removal program for accessing search areas and also



Evelyn with a large, unfriendly, resprouting, European marsh thistle [D. Wallace]

for lodging student interns. In previous years interns camped in the Perimeter Campground and we used the Day Use building as our organizing location. For the 2014 field season, the Conserve School generously offered FoS a dormitory for intern lodging, indoor cooking, tool storage and organizing space. This proved highly beneficial since the very wet spring from the late snow melt resulted in an oppressive mosquito population. We also benefited from great home-cooked food and comfortable beds after long days of field work. Thank you, Conserve School! After the mosquito population declined, the invasives team camped in the wilderness for 4 days to reach more remote locations.

Since its inception, our Invasive Weed Project has been financially and logistically supported by the US Forest Service because of Sylvania's wilderness designation, rare habitats, and relatively low invasive species infestation. We thank the ONF for the Title II RAC grant which we used to pay our students and to buy supplies during the 2011-2014 field seasons. The remaining funds in this grant will support most of our needs in 2015 but continuation of the RAC grant funding beyond 2015 is uncertain. We therefore invested a significant amount of time in November/December 2014 writing and submitting grant proposals. Our need for volunteers and continuing funding to protect Sylvania from invasive species is great. *W. Brinkmann*

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thistles. **Lorena** and **Bob Evans** have adopted Devil's Head Lake. For the past three years, they have checked known invasive sites and removed thistles around that lake using maps provided by FoS.

University of Dubuque

2014 was the second year Professors Popp and Hoffman taught an environmental science class that has as one of its requirements participation in a field trip to the Sylvania Wilderness. The service learning component of that class consists of volunteering in Sylvania under the guidance of FoS.



University of Dubuque students and staff pulling thistles in the forest [W. Brinkmann]

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This year, they worked in one of the most heavily infested thistle spots in Sylvania that FoS had discovered the previous year. This invasives site is located in a secluded depression and surrounded by dense forest at the southern end of Crooked Lake. The students faced an enormous task but they cheerfully and efficiently pulled about 1,000 European marsh thistle rosettes. Thistle rosettes re-root if they are near any moisture and therefore needed to be placed on dry surfaces. Because of the large number of plants pulled, the students ended up covering all logs and rocks in the vicinity with thistle rosettes. *W. Brinkmann*

Sierra Club Service Trip

After a very successful service trip in June of 2013, FoS again organized an invasive weed removal project through the Sierra Club in June of 2014. The intention was to camp at Whitefish Lake for 4 days and remove thistle rosettes to minimize future work during the busy growing season. With the oppressive mosquito population and good input from the group we made the wise choice to use the Conserve School as our base and attack the thistles on day trips. This allowed us to keep our sanity, cook in a fine facility and enjoy the good company in a comfortable dorm. A significant amount of work was accomplished and we had a fine time. When we returned during the flowering season with the FoS invasives crew, their work went much faster thanks to this effort. We thank the Conserve School for their generous hospitality. If you are interested in assisting with this effort in June of 2015 please contact Dan at djwallac@wisc.edu. *D. Wallace*



Sierra Club & FoS Invasives Crew members ready for work and bugs [D. Wallace]

Conserve School

In May, FoS field leaders Dan and Wally organized a problem-solving workshop to introduce Robert Eady's Environmental Science class to the concepts of invasive plants and their control. The following afternoon was spent getting hands-on field experience by searching for and pulling thistle rosettes along the shore of Big Bateau.

Since school is not in session in summer, Conserve School students are not able to participate in FoS invasives work in

in summer. They can, however, provide an invaluable service by checking the islands in the fall. Landing on islands is prohibited from ice-off to July 15 to protect nesting loons. By checking the islands in the fall and removing first-year rosettes few if any second-year seed-producing thistles will be growing on the islands the following summer when the FoS invasives crew cannot land on the islands.

On the Conserve School's 2014 fall Community Stewardship Day, Robert Eady and his Environmental Science class, armed with tools, maps, and guidance provided by FoS, went in search of thistle rosettes on the islands and some of the shoreline of Big Bateau. They planned to fit in a second day of pulling on the Deer Island Lake islands "before the weather changes" but ended up working one day after a snowfall. According to Robert Eady "this slowed the students down a bit" but they were able to pull in excess of 100 plants. We thank the students for their enthusiasm and determination! *W. Brinkmann*



Conserve School students working in the snow, removing thistles [R. Eady]

Fish and Game Club

Three mornings this mid-summer, Land O'Lakes Fish and Game Club members assisted the FoS invasives crew. Annually the Club will join FoS to help keep Sylvania's perimeter area free of invasive weeds that could threaten the beauty of the wilderness. This year we achieved our Club's goal to cover a 7 mile stretch of Forest Road 6320, which looked beautiful after our third outing! New friends were made and the knowledge about invasives gained was taken back to our own property.

Many thanks to club member participants: Bob Casscarano, Bob Turnquist, Susie Whipp, Andy and Nancy Kosseff and Cheryl Pytlarz. We invite Fish and Game Club members and others interested to join us in 2015. *C. Pytlarz*



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Trail Clearing

2014 was again a busy year for trail clearing in Sylvania. Wind events, heavy snows and an aging forest contributed to our job security for clearing the wilderness trails. Multiple contributions to this effort made the task much easier this year. The ONF provided additional staff who were able to clear some of the main trails to minimize our work load. This was a nice return on our investment of training Dave and Karl in the art of safe wilderness cross-cut sawing. Bob Turnquist and his team of “geezers” cleared trails in the SE quadrant of Sylvania during 5 outings. Dan’s crew led and trained 8 students from St. Norbert College on two cold and windy days in the fall. We returned later with a skeleton crew for an easy and sunny paddle to clear the portages in the NE quadrant. Before the early snows fell all the main trails and portages were clear. Bob’s crew and Dan’s crews returned on skis in December to fix problems caused by heavy snows. The skiing was excellent thanks to all who contributed to clearing the Sylvania Wilderness trails.

D. Wallace



View of Katherine Lake during trail clearing [J. Kettle]

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WILDERNESS ACT

2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, one of the most significant pieces of environmental legislation ever enacted. The Wilderness Act is well known for its succinct and poetic definition of wilderness: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The act established the National Wilderness Preservation System, which currently encompasses 109.5 million acres (5% of US land). Of this wilderness acreage, 56% is managed by the National Park Service, 22% by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, 18% by the US Forest Service, and 2% by the Bureau of Land Management.

Throughout 2014, nearly 850 community-level events took place to celebrate this anniversary. The ONF hosted one of these events on July 26. The celebration included guest speaker Doug Scott,

a John Muir Award recipient, and guided field trips into wilderness areas within the ONF. The Friends of Sylvania provided two guides for the wilderness hikes in Sylvania.

In conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, FoS organized and led an additional hike for the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation that “circumnavigated” Clark Lake. Participants appreciated the beauty and serenity (but not the rain) of the wilderness and the old growth forest. *W. Brinkmann*



Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation hikers

[D. Wallace]

SYLVANIA LOON SURVEY

The ONF has been monitoring loon breeding territories across the forest for over 20 years. For Sylvania, the lakes surveyed usually include Katherine, Helen, Clark, Loon, Deer Island, Crooked, Mountain, West Bear, Devil’s Head, and Big Bateau. The most recent statistics of loons in Sylvania is for the year 2013. During that year, Sylvania had a total count of 18 adult loons and 2 chicks, which means the average productivity was 0.11 fledged chicks per pair, which is very low. However, this is not the lowest for Sylvania, since in 2011 productivity was even lower at 0.09 chicks per pair. Since 2005, the average productivity has ranged from 0.09 to 0.44, with most years falling between 0.2 and 0.38. Research suggests an average of 0.48 chicks/pair/year (cpy) will sustain a loon population. The long-term average in the ONF is 0.38 cpy. This productivity has been fairly stable across the entire Forest and is close to or slightly higher than that for other areas in the Great Lakes Region.

Nest failure can be caused by several factors; one is a native black fly that parasitizes loons (which may have been the cause of up to 80% of the nest failures in 2014) and another is human disturbances during the critical nesting period. While we can’t prevent fly infestations, we can help to reduce our human disturbances. Some adult loons can be sensitive to visitors getting too close and flush off the nest, leaving the eggs to cool and potentially fail. New chicks can also be killed or injured by water-skiers and boaters because they’re so small and gray, making them very difficult to see. They are also very buoyant during this stage and can’t dive to get out of the way. Please be extra cautious during the spring when loons are nesting and through July when new chicks are out. For more information, please contact Lauren Romstad, ONF Wildlife Biologist, at 906-358-4025. *L. Romstad* 4

Wishing you a happy and peaceful 2015. Friends of Sylvania Board of Directors,

Wally Brinkmann Craig Coleman Bob Evans Dan Wallace

The Friends of Sylvania sincerely thank all those who assisted, donated and/or volunteered to protect Sylvania during 2014:

Jane & Roger B., Madison WI
Robert & Sara B., Land O'Lakes WI
Dan B., Land O'Lakes WI
Michelle B., Monclova OH
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Anke B., Madison WI
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Yvonne & Greg C., Watersmeet MI
Craig C., Minneapolis MN
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Conserve School - Environmental Science Class, Land O'Lakes WI
Land O'Lakes Fish & Game Club
Northern Lights Websites, Ben S., Ardoch ND
St. Norbert College Environmental Class
Sylvania Outfitters, Bob Z., Watersmeet MI
Sylvania Wilderness Cabins, Tim & Jill S., Watersmeet MI
University of Dubuque IA, Environmental Science Class
The Gateway Lodge, Land O'Lakes WI
Anonymous, Hales Corner WI
Anonymous, Chicago IL

Donations in memory/honor of:

Sandra B., Hortonville WI (in honor of Wisconsin Green School Network)

SAVE THE DATES: (see Upcoming Events on our website, more information will be posted as it becomes available)

June 19 – 23, 2015 **Sierra Club** invasive weeds removal project – volunteers needed/please contact Dan Wallace 608/698-5144

June, July, August, 2014 **Fish and Game Club** work days. Dates TBD - will be posted in the F&G April newsletter and by email. Volunteers needed/please contact Cheryl Pytlarz 906/544-2524

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Loon and chick in Sylvania [W. Brinkmann]