



Friends of Oil Creek State Park~

Fall 2020

Park Manager's Report

Last Newsletter I mentioned about the large increase in attendance which was directly related to the current Pandemic we are all going through. Hunting license sales have also increase, not only in PA but throughout much of the country. I have been a firsthand witness to the increase of hunters within our park's boundaries. It is starting to look like what it used to years ago. Hopefully, this trend will continue moving forward. Hunting license sales and the sales of certain hunting related items help to fuel conservation related projects and initiatives. Through Pittman-Robertson, hunters have contributed over 14 billion since 1937. I take some comfort in the fact that every time I buy a license it is going towards the greater good of our environment.

As far as the hunting in the park goes...I'm not sure? People always ask me how many bears were taken out of the park, or if I've seen many bucks taken? They only bear that I witnessed being taken was the one I was lucky enough to get on the last day of the season. But I'm sure I wasn't the only one in the park to harvest a bear. As often as I'm out and about, I don't often see hunters with their harvest. Although I know there is a fair share of game taken off the park. I usually find out through Facebook or by word of mouth. As I made my daily rounds throughout the park this year, I seem to always spy good numbers of deer and various other critters traveling about. Even after the hunting seasons ends, I am always surprised by how many deer and bear were able to make it through the seasons. A direct result of good wildlife management.

As I wrap things up, I want to wish you all well. This has been very hard year for everyone. One that has concerned and frightened many and unfortunately, taken some lives. I pray that you all have a safe and healthy Holiday Season. Any remember, if you need some fresh air, or a place to take your mask off, please come out to the park and enjoy!

Best of Health,

David Hallman Park Manager



Environmental Education Specialist



As we wind down the 2020 season, I thought it may be a good time to introduce myself. I had planned to utilize this season to really get to know and work with our volunteers and Friends Group members, but as we all know, this year was not exactly conducive to spending time with new people. Although I am saddened by that, I am hopeful and looking forward to next season. I have met a number of people in passing, and had the chance to introduce myself to a few folks at the tail-end of 2019, but I do not want to feel like a stranger to anyone who helps to care for this park.

I'm the new Environmental Education Specialist here at Oil Creek, and I am absolutely thrilled to be here. This is my 'home park,' being that I grew up on Kunz Road (take a look at the park map.) I spent my free time as a child riding my bike down to Drake Well and hopping on the bike trail. I still remember the first time my oldest brother let me ride all the way to Petroleum Center with him, even though I definitely slowed him down. On hot summer days we would swim in Oil Creek, occasionally getting a glimpse of a deer or two crossing the water. My family used to take walks on sections of the Gerard Trail and along the access road by the railroad tracks. This place is incredibly important to me, and I am blessed to spend most of my days sharing Oil Creek State Park with others. Speaking of sharing the park, programming so far this year has been very interesting. My original plans for this season went out the window pretty quickly, and it took me an honest bit of scrambling to figure out where to

pick back up, but I think members of the local community were glad to have some kind of programming available to them. We've had great attendance, though group sizes are limited. A lot of folks just need a mental break from the stresses of the rest of the world right now, and taking a hike or learning about salamanders is a great way to escape! I absolutely love being able to provide that service.

One of my favorite things about working here so far has definitely been the sense of community. I moved around quite a bit after high school, but every time I came home I was reminded how caring people around this valley are. The people coming in to programming have been wonderful and kind. Also, I was quickly accepted by the rest of the park staff, being welcomed in like part of the family. I have felt supported and appreciated, and it has only made my love for this place grow. Sometimes I cannot imagine how working here could make me any happier, and then I think of all of you wonderful folks who I will get to know and spend time with (hopefully soon!)

Although I haven't had much time with you yet, I have heard stories and seen your work. I am deeply moved to know that there are people out here as dedicated to protecting, preserving, and sharing the park as you are. Every moment of your time spent bettering and maintaining the park is appreciated more than we can express, and I do not believe we could ever properly thank you for that.

I look forward to spending time getting to know you and the park better in the coming seasons. I hope that you stay happy and healthy as we make our way into the cooler months.

-Ivy Kuberry

Environmental Education Specialist



One of Ivy's projects is sprucing up and creating new gardens around the Park. She is doing this as a collaborative effort with the Venango County Master Gardeners. Pictured above is Marie Veon working in front of the Park office



Spectacular Fall

What an amazing fall we had on the trails at Oil Creek this year. The trails were in excellent shape thanks to the Over the Hill Gang, and Nature certainly showed her best form with endless days of perfect weather and amazing colors. For those of us who felt the apprehension of being isolated due

to the pandemic, our woods brought the perfect remedy for worries. It didn't take long, once in the woods, for the concerns of the world to be left behind. Even though fall is at an end, hikes do not need to be. Winter hiking is just as rewarding. Once the leaves are totally down, it is amazing how far into the woods one can see. Do yourself a huge favor this winter and get out on the trails!





Cross Country Skiing

All our fingers are crossed with the hopes of a great ski season this year.

John Sims and volunteers made great progress clearing the trails on the first two work days.

Then there was a huge wind storm leaving the trails littered with

trees. John initiated two more work days as well as the last scheduled day to focus on tree removal. After long and hard days they



were able to clear most of the fallen trees leaving the trails clear for skiing. John is very grateful to all the regular volunteers and the new ones...especially the couple who recently moved to the area from NY.



Why Groom? (The Cross-Country Ski Trails)

5

By John Sims, Groomer, Sun Valley Nordic

For those of you reading this article who are not aware of it, Oil Creek State Park with its 12+ miles of ski trails have what I feel, and I'm sure I'm not alone, the best Classical Cross-Country Ski trail system in the state. There's a trail for everyone and for every ability from the relatively flat Blue Loop for the beginner/novice skier to the more advanced Red Loop. All trails intersect with several of the White Connector trails for the more experienced/advanced skiers. Being located in northwestern PA generally ensures lake effect snows during most winters.

Now on to the Grooming question which is a very good one, and one I've asked myself many times over the years. As always there are at least two sides to every argument, and I can say I've experienced both, the pros and the cons. Many of the "cons" I've experienced over the years generally bring a smile to my face when I take the time to reminisce; although I wasn't necessarily smiling at that time. When it comes to grooming, there is a cost to doing it in both time and money. First, one has to purchase and then maintain the necessary equipment. Then there's the time involved in performing the pre and post season trail maintenance and improvements, and then the actual grooming when it snows. Every year presents its own unique set of challenges.

Here are a few of my favorite experiences: One night after finishing up grooming... It was around mid-night and was at least -12 degrees F or colder, and of course I was tired, sweaty, and cold after spending the last 10 hours out on the trail grooming... I was out at that hour because we had just received a nice snow fall, and I wanted to have the ski trails in great shape for the next morning. I had to do it that time of night because conditions were right for grooming. When you groom, you need to work the snow when the temperatures are below freezing and the snow is dry. You never want to work the snow when it's wet; all you'll make is ice. Finally when I was finished and all the equipment was cleaned up, and on the trailer, and I was finally ready to head home for a hot shower and bed, I put the key in my truck, hit the ignition, and CLICK. Oh no. What do I do now? Cell phones are great; I called home, no answer. I tried several friends who said if I was ever in a jam and needed a hand to give them a call--all no answers. Eventually the truck did start. Another time there was well over a dozen large trees down across the trail that all needed a chain saw to cut them into manageable pieces. There're always a few downed trees to deal with, but this time it was well above average. The only gas I had was what was in the saw, which is typically plenty, so as I continued making my rounds I hoped I would have enough gas to cut them all up. On what was (luckily) the last tree and on finishing the last cut, the saw spit and sputtered and ran out of gas. Wow, I was really lucky since I was only half way around the trails, and thankfully I didn't run into any more downed trees. Another gas experience only with the ATV occurred on the first grooming of the season a few years ago. I thought I had brought along all the necessary equipment to do the job so I headed out. Typically, when I'm about 2/3 of the way done, I stop to top off the gas in the ATV. Well guess what I forgot to bring along? The extra can of gas. I wasn't going to quit and come back the next day to go through the whole tear down, clean up, and set up process again when I was almost done. So I went back out to finish the job. Heck I had between 1/4 and 1/2 a tank of fuel I'll be ok, I thought. Well I was about as far out as I could be, and I was on my back to the truck when the ATV's sensors started flashing and buzzing telling me I was "low" on fuel. Luckily, I made it back to the truck. Needless to say, I haven't forgotten to bring the extra gas can since. Of course, one can always throw in the usual low snow/snowless winters, wet spots, rocks and roots, and even rain and flooding wiping out all the snow from our beautifully groomed trails.

Now for the more enjoyable fun side of the story. Our Park is blessed with the most dedicated loyal hardworking group of volunteers that anyone could ever ask for. It's amazing the number people and the amount of manhours they've devoted to making improvements and maintaining, not only the X-C Ski trails, but also to other areas of the Park as well. We've all heard the saying "if you build it they will come", and this definitely applies to ski trail grooming. Well come they do: young, old, and families. They aren't only locals, but people from areas all around Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Erie, State College, and beyond. One weekend there was this cute out of town couple who came. They had such a fun time that they didn't want to go home so they got a hotel room. Since they arrived with only the ski clothes they were wearing, they went to Wal-Mart to buy some regular clothes to go out to dinner. They came back the next morning and experienced another great day of skiing. When the word goes out that conditions are good, it's amazing the number of people who come to the Park to ski. There have been several days with well over a hundred people skiing in the Park. Bus loads of college students from Slippery Rock and Pittsburgh often come. Many of us skiers have made new friends that we generally only see during ski season. It's funny, because typically they're only recognized when they're wearing all their ski gear.

In my opinion, ski trail grooming greatly improves the Nordic Skiing experience making it the greatest activity ever. All this gives us "our" notoriety and makes Oil Creek the best Park in the Commonwealth for classical Skiing.

Come out and try for yourself, bring a friend or two, and experience X-C Skiing at its finest, and I can guarantee you you'll be hooked for life.



Over-The-Hill Gang



The Over the Hill Gang completed several building projects and improved several sections of trail from late July through the end of November. Unusually dry weather for this area enabled them to cover the entire trail system several times. The Gang continued to improve wet areas by ditching to divert water. Regular maintenance included weed trimming and attempting to control growth of multiflora rose. Pruning branches and removing down trees and dangerous "leaners" is a perennial priority. Special projects included lengthening and repairing boardwalks and bridges. Railings and shingles were added to a couple of bridges to enhance safety.

Fender/bumper work was completed in three separate areas. A new bridge was constructed over a swampy area about a half mile North of Russel Corners Road. A 40 foot bridge approximately a mile North of Miller Farm Rd on the East side was completely reconstructed, including the addition of railings, bumpers, and shingles.

The OTHG, with the help of Dave Hallman, Park manager, performed much needed maintenance on the historic cemetery in the area of the Miller Farm Rd bridge.

This winter they plan on helping Park staff process firewood for the two shelter areas. Down trees will be removed from trails as needed, and specific needs for spring and summer projects will be identified.

The OTHG greatly appreciates the monetary support provided by the Friends of Oil Creek State Park.

The trails have seen an increase in use during the pandemic and the Gang is pleased to contribute to the enjoyment of the woods and trails



Top—new bridge over a swampy area. Above--lengthened bridge with railings and bumpers added. Above right—reconstructed 40 foot bridge , and right —trimming and trail maintenance

Fondest Memories of Jeanie Snyder

On July 14, 2020, Jeanie Snyder passed away. Jeanie had been our beloved secretary since the inception of the Friends of Oil Creek. Due to failing health, she moved to North Carolina ten years ago.

While Jeanie was with our Friends group, she was endeared by all. She had an amazing attitude, and was a friend to everyone she met. Jeanie had many amazing attributes, but to us at Oil Creek, her love for the Park was always at the forefront. As secretary, she took the notes monthly as well as contributing to many of our endeavors always with a clear focus and innovative ideas. Often the Friends would trek through the Park for various reasons. Even though Jeanie was aging, she was right there with the Friends having a great time.

We will miss Jeanie being in our lives—even from a distant. We are all enriched by having known her.



President's Report

FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP DRIVE 2021

This year the membership drive for the Friends of Oil Creek is more important than ever. Due to all the restrictions surrounding Covid, we were unable to hold any of our regular fund raising events such as the Biathlon and Chicks in the Sticks. We aren't sure yet whether those events will return in 2021. Without our events, we will rely heavily on memberships and memorial donations to keep us going. The upkeep of the trails in the park is one of our regular expenses as we support the Over the Hill Gang and others with regular trail project expenses. Some of the expenses are items such as building materials, tools, chain saws, etc. We also supply bird seed during the winter and other needs and projects as they arise.

Attendance in the park has increased tremendously over this past years as folks are getting outside as a way to stay healthy and cope with Covid. I imagine many of you reading this have been one of those folks. Please take time to consider giving back to the park with a Friends membership. The membership year runs from January to December and is only \$10 for an Individual, \$25 for a family, and \$100 for a corporate or group. Membership donations are tax deductible through Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation. Membership forms will be emailed soon, or you can join on line at our website www.friendsocsp.org. A membership might make a thoughtful gift for the person who has everything. We hope you will continue to enjoy the park and get outside in 2021.

Happy Trails.

Peg Sims, Chair FOCSP



Membership

The Friends of Oil Creek would like to thank all the members who renewed their membership and to thank the many new members.

Your membership helps maintain existing projects in Oil Creek State Park. Your contributions also help maintain new initiatives in the Park. Your membership also helps to maintain the Gerard hiking trail, the bike trail, and the ski trails. In addition, these resources fund the "Over the Hill Gang".

If you haven't renewed your membership or would like to become a member, follow the link to become a friend of Oil Creek State Park:

www.friendsocsp.org. The membership prices: single \$10, family \$25, and corporate/business/group \$100. You can also become a Friends member or renew your membership by contacting the FOCSP in one of the ways listed below:

- Write the Friends of Oil Creek
PO Box# 1273 Oil City, Pa 16301
- E-Mail— oilcreekfriends@gmail.com
- Website— www.friendsocsp.org
- Call Park Office—814 676-5915



The Friends of Oil Creek State Park is a Chapter of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation



Friends of Oil Creek Mission Statement

The Friends of Oil Creek State Park support the Park's mission to preserve, protect, and interpret our natural environment while providing recreational and educational opportunities for residents and visitors to the region.