



Sara Blood <hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org>

December Currents - News from MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge

1 message

MN Valley Refuge Friends <hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org>

Thu, Dec 9, 2021 at 11:29 AM

Reply-To: hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org

To: Sara Blood <hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org>

Fox Sparrow bouncing in the snow. Photo/[@brennan_stokkermans](#)

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends Currents

Issue 5, Volume 3 | Dec. 9, 2021

Dear Friends,

After joining the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends as its first interim executive director in 2019 and now as executive director, I leave to return to full-time work in public relations. I am grateful to work with Friends' founder Steve Sutter, the board of directors and welcome new board members Shannon Breimhurst, Mark Jensen, Michael Kurtz, Loreen Lee, and Jes Tormoen. I am also grateful I had the opportunity to work with a woman I have long admired

and consider one of my mentors, Deb Loon, the executive director of our partner organization Minnesota Valley Trust.

From the very beginning of my tenure, we had a challenging task to tackle: to modernize the inner workings of the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends. We implemented a new online tool to manage member relations and donations, which also helps us create and distribute this newsletter and our occasional email communications. We hired our first accounting firm and designed a more streamlined accounting process. We also created committees, one of which overtook the momentous task of identifying and installing a newer and simpler point of sale system for the Nature Store. And we worked toward meeting the standards of the Charities Review Council. I am confident that I am leaving the Refuge Friends in excellent shape for the board and its new leader to take it forward.

The only real hiccup in my tenure was the pandemic. The visitor center was only open for six months after being named executive director. I credit the Fish and Wildlife Service — the ones who manage our refuge — for being open to ideas when we came with suggestions like, *Could the refuge host an art exhibit virtually?* Our largest source of revenue, the Nature Store at the Bloomington Visitor Center, has been closed since March 2020. In this case, our committee and the store manager had to be agile to ideas like, *Could we implement a sales system that we can take to events?*

I know I've said this before, but a refuge can't get by without a little help from our Friends. We saw paid memberships grow 270% from fiscal year 2019-20 to fiscal year 2020-21. Thank you! I enjoyed putting a face to a name when running into one of you at a refuge event or on a trail. And, I know it sounds a bit nonprofit nerdy, but I received a little chill down my spine every time I saw a member, especially one dating back to 2008 or 2009, renew their membership. (I'm an executive director to the very end. Please consider joining or renewing your membership to the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends [here](#) on our website.)

Finally, thank you to the refuge staff members. Thank you for helping unlock cabinets, release my first brook trout, invite me to intern outings, and for putting up with me knowing I wasn't *exactly* in my element when a visitor center was not visible or without access to a cell signal.

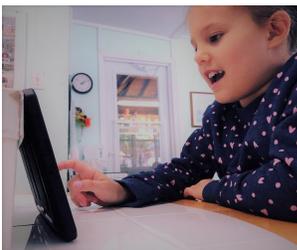
May we meet again on a refuge trail.

With gratitude,

Sara N. Blood

Executive Director

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends



Keeping kids busy this winter

This winter break the Minnesota Valley NWR has quick, easy, and free suggestions for keeping kids busy while off school. Visit the [Just For Kids page](#) of the refuge website to download the free activities or pick up a copy outside of the visitor centers.



Headwater of Mississippi by Ellen Sandbeck. Sandbeck's series, "As Long as the River Shall Run" will be featured at the refuge's confluence gallery now until Dec. 31.

Refuge happenings

Winter visitor center hours and free equipment to borrow

The Bloomington Education and Visitor Center information desk is open Saturdays from 12-4 p.m. for general refuge information and America the Beautiful pass sales. The rest of the visitor center is closed at this time. Snowshoes are available for free rental on a first come, first serve basis on Saturdays from 12-4 p.m. when there is 6 inches or more of snow. The Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center information desk is currently closed but will be open for free snowshoe, field guide and binocular lending on Saturdays from 12-4 p.m. once there is 6 inches or more of snow.

Please call the main line at 952-854-5900 or visit the [Facebook page](#) for current snow conditions and equipment availability.

Virtual artist talk

Wednesday, December 15, 6:30 p.m.

Please join us for a live online discussion with exhibiting artist, Ellen Sandbeck. Learn about Ellen's process and the artwork that is on view in the virtual exhibition. Join the virtual event at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89801325390>

Gallery reception with Ellen Sandbeck

Friday, December 17, 6-8 p.m.

Please join us for in-person discussion with exhibiting artist, Ellen Sandbeck. Learn about Ellen's process and the artwork that is on view in the virtual exhibition, *As Long as The River Shall Run*, in the Confluence Gallery. Masks are required and entry may be staggered as needed to maintain social distancing. For more information, a Virtual Tour, and the Exhibition Catalog visit the gallery website at <https://artistrymn.org/confluence-gallery>.

Family geocaching program at Rapids Lake

Saturday, December 18, 12-3 p.m.

Families are invited to join refuge educators at the Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center trails for a geocaching adventure. GPS units will be available for family groups to borrow as they explore the Forest Loop Trail searching for animal clue boxes. Discover your mystery animal after collecting all clues and receive a fun prize. Free and open to anyone. Especially fun for ages 4-12. Register for your one-hour adventure time slot at https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Minnesota_Valley/Events.html

Bird watching walks

Sunday, December 12, 9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Old Cedar Avenue Trailhead – [9551 Old Cedar Ave S, Bloomington, MN 55425](#)

Join us on a beginning bird walk at the Old Cedar Avenue bridge. You'll have an opportunity to learn about using and choosing optics and field guides for bird watching and about some of the better locations to search for birds at the refuge and other locations around the Twin Cities. Afterwards we will take a walk and search for some of the birds that migrate to the refuge during the Winter season. If you have them, bring along your binoculars and favorite field guide. The program will be held rain or shine, dress appropriately for the weather.

Bird watching treks

Saturday, December 11, 8 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

[Bass Ponds - 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington, MN 55425](#)

Explore some of the best Refuge units for bird watching in the winter season. We will spend time on these walks searching for birds that over winter on the refuge or are late migrants. We will study the different species of birds and learn about some other local locations to search for birds during the Winter Season. Birders of all skill levels are welcome to attend these walks. If you have them, bring along your binoculars and favorite field guide. The program will be held rain or shine, dress appropriately for the weather. An outdoor restroom is available at the lower trailhead of Bass Ponds. No restrooms are available at the Wilkie trailhead.

Now showing at the Confluence Gallery

Date: Now through Dec. 31

The exhibit will be available for online viewing: <https://artistrymn.org/confluence-gallery>

Virtual Artist Talk: Wednesday, Dec. 15, 6:30 p.m.: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89801325390>

Artist Ellen Sandbeck's series, "As Long as the Rivers Shall Run," is an exploration of four major rivers and features some of their endemic species, including those endangered and recently extinct. The text for this series includes the scientific name, conservation status, and a snippet of natural history for each of the featured species, as well as brief comments about the environmental challenges faced by the river depicted.

Sandbeck is an artist, writer, organic landscaper, and vermicomposting specialist.

Please join us for a live online discussion with Sandbeck on Dec. 15 at 6:30 p.m. on Zoom.

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A red northern cardinal rests on the bare branches of a tree in winter. **Photo/Creative Commons**

Wildlife watch: Phenology

by Teagan Oxley-Hase

As winter begins to make itself known, a quiet hush has begun to fall over the refuge. With the first frosts of the season, the last of the migratory birds are making their way south. Trumpeter swans finally take their leave as the water begins to freeze, beginning their long journey as the last of the waterfowl to leave Minnesota. The cold has started the process of hibernation for many animals. Ladybugs can be found in large colonies, huddled together in groups called aggregates for warmth, garter snakes retreat to their underground homes, and northern leopard frogs swim down into oxygen rich water to hibernate for the winter. It can feel as though much of the wildlife has left the refuge for the winter, though that isn't quite true. The refuge is still teeming with life, if you know where to look.

Black-capped chickadees and northern cardinals can still be spotted flitting through the trees, gray squirrels can still be heard chattering in the forest, and beavers can still be seen in their

wetland habitats. Animals who have adapted to the cold of Minnesota make the refuge their winter playground, taking advantage of their ability to survive the cold and snow. The first morning after a snowfall proves to be the perfect time to visit the refuge in winter. Come out and see if you can spot animal tracks in the freshly fallen snow, or bring your binoculars to look for the red-tailed hawks that stay at the refuge through the winter. Be sure to bundle up as the weather gets colder so you can enjoy your visit to the refuge.

Before we go

Refuge Friends now on Instagram

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends is now on Instagram. Find us on the popular photo-sharing app at [@mnvalleyrf](#). Be sure to tag [#mnvalleynwr](#). We may just spot you and feature your photos here in *Currents*.

Support MN Valley NWR with AmazonSmile

Plan to do some online holiday shopping this season? AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you.

AmazonSmile is available at smile.amazon.com on your web browser and can be activated in the Amazon Shopping app for iOS and Android phones. To select or your charity to MN Valley Refuge Friends:

1. Sign in to smile.amazon.com on your desktop or mobile phone browser.
 2. From your desktop, go to Your Account and select the option to Change Your Charity. Or, from your mobile browser, select Change Your Charity from the options at the bottom of the page.
 3. Pick your own charitable organization by typing Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends.
 4. Remember to use smile.amazon.com for future purchases. With eligible purchases, Amazon will donate .5%.
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Engaging People with Nature.

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your support!

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