

PRAIRIE'S EDGE

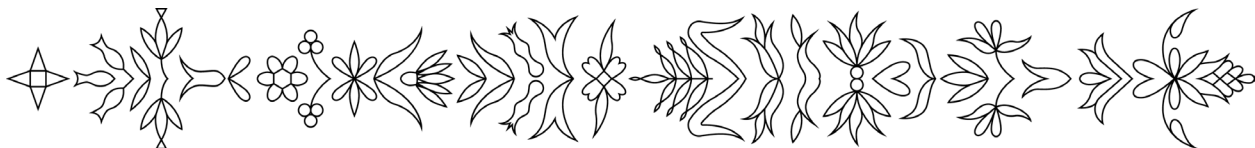
A NEWSLETTER FROM FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

WINTER 2024



Friends Board member BearPaw Shields, a member of the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, spoke to guests participating in a Native blessing of the amphitheater.

Artwork (below) by Holly Young



Amphitheater Complete: Sacred Community Space Blessed

"It is an honor to stand with you all today on this beautiful land, a place that holds deep significance for so many. The creation of this amphitheater is a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together with purpose, passion, and respect for the land and its history," Chief Executive Virgil Wind, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

A Community Space

Historically, Tribal Nations including the Dakota and Ojibwe were connected to the land and waters of the present-day Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. In fact, village sites more than 700 years old have been discovered on the refuge.

The recently completed amphitheater adjacent to the Oak Savanna Learning Center honors these original stewards of this land. And descendants of the Dakota and Ojibwe were commissioned to imbue the amphitheater with Native values. Native Peoples blessed the completed structure during an August celebration, the first

sanctioned event at the new facility.

Native American Community members present in August included Native artists, elders, and Red Tree and Hinckley Native American Student Association (NASA) drum groups as well as Anishinaabe Virgil Wind, Chief Executive of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. During his speech, Chief Executive Wind pointed to the designs etched into the amphitheater and called them "a reminder that we walk in the footsteps of those who came before us, and that we are stewards of this land for those who will come after."



Chief Executive Wind

A Welcoming Space

The blessing ceremony and celebration of Native values is one outcome of the Friends board efforts to be

more inclusive and welcoming to people of all backgrounds, according to former Friends president Myrna Krueger, who led the Friends effort to fund and build an amphitheater.

"In 2021 BearPaw Shields joined the Friends Board and brought new perspectives and possibilities," said Krueger. "With encouragement from Steve Karel, the refuge manager at the time, BearPaw and the board developed a project plan that would honor Indigenous Peoples, the original stewards of the land.

"In 2023, the Friends commissioned artwork for the new amphitheater from Holly Young, Dakota artist, and Giizh Agaton Howes, Anishinaabe-Ojibwe artist. The artists created an engravable design that incorporates Native values and languages and includes plants and animals significant to the refuge. The presence of traditional yet contemporary Native American art at the refuge gives visibility to the important past

Continued on Page 4

FALL: My Favorite Season

By Carol Mertesdorf, Friends President

Well, here it is, fall 2024, and winter is right around the corner! I hope that all of you have had a chance to visit the refuge during the summer and/or during our sandhill crane-populated, leaf-changing, and beautiful fall season.

I also hope that many of you were among the more than 1,000 who attended the 28th annual Wildlife Festival. It was a success due to the work of the refuge's great Park Ranger, Jade Paulsen, and the scores of volunteers she helped to recruit and organize. Jade also arranged for a variety of educational and interactive booths and activities as well as presenters. A big THANK YOU to all of the refuge staff and volunteers whose efforts were essential to the festival's success. Thanks as well to Friends members for their support; Friends funding allows the Wildlife Festival to be offered as a free public event!

The refuge's nature education program was also off to a good start for the 2024-2025 school year with approximately 400 students visiting for standards-based lessons in October. Almost 2 dozen nature education volunteers as well as the Friends assistance with bus funding make this program possible. Princeton 4th graders will be visiting again in the winter and spring; Zimmerman 2nd graders will enjoy a second visit in the spring, and Zimmerman 1st graders will make their first visit in the spring as a preview for more visits next year.

It is making a difference! One of the 2nd grade teachers asked her students, "What was your favorite thing about first grade?" Two of the students said, "The refuge field trip." When she asked them to tell her more, one little boy said, "I never liked going outside. Now I love learning about nature."

And about the amphitheater! Friends – we did it! Many thanks to all of you who contributed



Carol Mertesdorf

money and/or time to our fundraising campaign that made it possible to construct the beautiful amphitheater (see article and photos in this issue). If you haven't seen it yet, make a trip to the refuge to view the magnificent Native art honoring the original stewards of the land. Then take some time to sit in the space and enjoy the sights and sounds. This amphitheater has and will continue to provide a space for education, relaxation, presentations, and nature enjoyment for many, many years.

Speaking about "many, many years" for those of my age and wiser, estate planning is a very important part of life. It is easy to set aside, not to think about, or save for later. When my husband died unexpectedly several years ago, I made it a priority to "get my affairs in order" since we hadn't done so together. Then when the Friends of Sherburne's longtime treasurer passed unexpectedly, followed a short time later by her husband, the Friends became the beneficiary of life insurance funds. This was a bittersweet time. We missed our friend, but Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge was a place that she loved, and they wanted to leave a legacy. The funds that she and her husband donated helped us to fund the amphitheater and, through our endowment fund, will continue to help us support nature education, transportation to the refuge for underserved communities, the annual Wildlife Festival, printing of refuge brochures for visitors, and more. Anyone can do the same if so desired, just ask us how. You can donate stocks, cash, property, or even cars through our partner, the Initiative Foundation!

Lastly, as the refuge's Community Outreach Coordinator, I continue to hope to inspire those who are interested in representing the refuge at community events and activities to volunteer throughout the year! The refuge staff need our support, outreach, and advocacy. For those of you who have volunteered for one of these events, I sincerely thank you for your time and enthusiasm for representing the refuge. The events are always fun, entertaining, and informative.

You can contact me at friendsofsherburne@gmail.com with any comments or concerns. I hope to see you soon!

Join Friends of Sherburne (or Donate) Online at ExploreSherburne.org

The Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (EIN: 41-1763001) that supports refuge projects and educational programs. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

The Prairie's Edge newsletter is published twice annually for members in cooperation with the refuge. Editor is Sue Hix.

Contact Sue or the Friends c/o Sherburne NWR, 17076 293rd Avenue NW, Zimmerman, MN 55398, or at FriendsofSherburne@gmail.com



New Project Leader Welcomes Migrating Birds and Visitors

INSIDE THE REFUGE

By Bill Peterson, Project Leader

Happy fall, everyone! This is my favorite season when each day brings the potential for new arrivals of migrating waterfowl. Refuge staff and volunteers spent the past year updating our wetland management plan and working through a wet summer to ensure wild rice beds remained healthy. Decades of habitat management and monitoring teach us that abundant food and minimal human disturbance are the keys to



**Bill Peterson
Project Leader**

welcoming large numbers of travelling waterfowl. Our efforts were rewarded when pintails, ringnecks, and other visiting ducks spent several weeks at the refuge refueling and recuperating before the next leg of their journey.

Refuge staff and volunteers similarly strive to make the refuge a welcoming destination for new and returning visitors. Longstanding features like Mahnomen Trail and the Prairie's Edge Wildlife Drive provide terrific opportunities for visitors to enjoy the refuge at their own pace. More recent additions such as the Drive's roving naturalists and our brand-new amphitheater help to emphasize that all visitors are welcome at the refuge.

Our continual efforts to make the refuge a better place for visitors evolve as our community grows. I'm part of that growth as my fami-

ly settles into our new home and I reconnect with the area. Thanks to those of you who've reached out to me with advice on nearby restaurants and recreation sites. I've also heard from community members with suggestions to make the refuge a more welcoming and pleasant place for families.

While some of those ideas will need to be formally considered during the next long-term refuge management planning process, I've begun incorporating new suggestions for improving the Wildlife Drive for bicyclists into the refuge's 2025 work plan. How do you think that we can make the refuge a more welcoming place for our community? I'd love to hear from you, so please reach out to me with your suggestions.



Glimpse the 28th Wildlife Festival!

More than 1000 visitors attended the 28th annual Wildlife Festival, which included opportunities to study pollinators, harvest milkweed seeds, identify invertebrates and much more.

Above: Puddles, the NWRS Mascot, tests its wings against the "Spread Your Wings Banner" with 4-year-old Clara Cooper and her 7-year-old brother Torin.

Above Right: A Peregrine Falcon delights a crowd at the amphitheater's Live Raptor Program.

Right: Volunteer works School House Pool to collect live samples for the Aquatic Invertebrate Exploration booth.



Photographs by Bruce Ellingson

Amphitheater Blessed In Native Celebration

Continued from Page 1

and current presence of Indigenous Peoples in Minnesota,” said Krueger.

BearPaw Shields, who is a member of the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Wolf Point, MT, is currently working as the Indigenous Learning Community Program Coordinator at St. Cloud State University and as an independent consultant.



Amphitheater Sandhill Crane engraving detail.

Including Native art in the project was important to Shields “because representation matters.” Shields says the Native art engraved in the amphitheater “gives a beautiful representation of all Native Nations within MN and beyond. It shapes the reality in which Native People see themselves and those who are not Indigenous.”

Shields believes these efforts, “will slowly dismantle the negative picture painted of us by the media and other outlets for over a hundred years. It is inclusive, as it creates an environment in which collaboration can be fostered and gives a voice to all Native Nations and their people within MN and beyond.”

The Native blessing ceremony was important to Shields. “I believe when we all work together for the greater good, we can accomplish beautiful things,” she said. “The land, water, and air do not belong to us, it belongs to our children’s children, for generations to come regardless of one’s ethnic background, and this amphitheater is a good example of that.”



Giizh Agaton Howes, BearPaw Shields and Holly Young.

Friends board member Stephanie Tatum, Ojibwe heritage, agrees that “this project is a symbol of peace and unity. Incorporating the language and art from two very talented Indigenous artists, is the most beautiful part about it because it keeps our culture alive. Alive in spirit, alive in our thoughts and alive in our hearts. I’m deeply grateful to have been a part of it.”

A Cultural Space

Evidence of that respect for the past and hope for the future is the artwork etched permanently in the surfaces of

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the amphitheater.

Holly Young, Dakota multidisciplinary artist of Standing Rock Reservation, North Dakota, was invited into the project by Native artist Giizh Agaton Howes. When Young recently viewed the completed amphitheater, she “was genuinely surprised!”

“To experience the place in real life as opposed to photos is vastly different. It was amazing and humbling all at once,” she admitted. “I felt immense gratitude in being a part of a project such as this.”

Young was responsible for creating the floral circle that encircles the animal figures engraved on the “floor” of the amphitheater. The design “is often referred to as *Dakota Floral*,” according to Young. Her ancestors used “these floral motifs to decorate and beautify their clothing, moccasins, tobacco bags, and such.”

Young’s art incorporates plants found in the area such as wild rice, purple coneflower, “and some stars to signify two things, that we come from the stars and also those stars are found in many plants and their buds when they are newly getting ready to flower in the summertime.” (See *Young’s design on Page 1 above the headline.*)

A Place for Stories

Giizh Agaton Howes of the Fond du Lac Reservation, Minnesota, brought the images of native animals to the surfaces of the structure, including a crane, deer, bison, eagle, bear, and turtle. And the seat walls of the amphitheater depict her designs

and words of special significance. Visitors can explore for the tracks of each animal and then note the Dakota and Ojibwe words for each of the animals next to the tracks.



“Our design hosts the beloved animals of this land,” says

Eagle’s Wing engraving detail.

Howes. “Created in the Ojibwe ‘X-ray’ style, these animals are linked together to represent how we are all related. The center set of tobacco pods points at the four cardinal directions, reflecting how we can send our good thoughts and intentions out to all those around us.”

“This area is an historic and contemporary land base for Dakota and Ojibwe people,” says Howes. “Holly Young and I are proud to have collaborated to mark this beautiful location where our people continue to thrive alongside our plant and animal relatives.”

“As we celebrate the opening of this amphitheater, let us also celebrate the enduring connection between the land and the people. Let us commit to working together to protect this sacred space, to teach our children the ways of the earth, and to honor the legacy of those who have come before us.

“May this amphitheater be a place of peace, learning, and connection for many generations to come. Miigwech,” Chief Executive Wind



The largest crowd to occupy the newly completed amphitheater gathered for the live raptor program at September's Wildlife Festival, which included an owl, hawk and peregrine falcon. Photographs by Bruce Ellingson

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Goals Achieved. Amphitheater Complete. Crowds Enjoy!

By Myrna Krueger

With the generosity of so many, we made the goal and raised \$410,000 to build the amphitheater and install the artwork! As we reached out to donors, businesses, and civic organizations, we received an amazing level of support from the community. Over 80 businesses and organizations and over 525 individual donors contributed. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

With construction completed in August, the Friends hosted a Native Gathering for a traditional blessing, celebration, and welcome to Friends and the Native community. At the Wildlife Festival, an official ribbon cutting welcomed people and programs into the facility.

SUPPORTING GRANTS

The Friends are pleased to acknowledge grants received from the Initiative Foundation, Knife River through MDU Resources Foundation, Bernick Family Foundation, and the Central Minnesota Arts Board.

The Initiative Foundation manages the endowment of the Friends of Sher-

burne National Wildlife Refuge Fund, which made an important grant to fund the amphitheater project.

Artwork for the amphitheater has been made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Central MN Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.



Initiative
FOUNDATION



Endowment that will keep supporting Friends work at the refuge into the future. In the amphitheater, on east side in the second row, you will find a gray squirrel etched into the concrete in Carol and Dan's memory. They loved their gray squirrels and were enthusiastic supporters of the amphitheater project.



The seat-wall engraving of a squirrel, an animal much loved by Carol VanHeel, long-time board treasurer.

CAROL VANHEEL TRIBUTE

As construction of the amphitheater came to an end, we remembered Carol VanHeel, long-time board member, friend, and "Money Honey" Friends treasurer. Carol and Dan's generous donation from their estate plan helped fund the amphitheater and provide a significant boost to the Friends

GO WILD!

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Guests at the Native Blessing of the amphitheater inspected the details of the bear engraving.

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Firehouse BBQ
Fitness Evolution
Home Depot
Hudson Hardware
Misty River Merchants
Nelson Nursery
Princeton Insurance Agency
Rocks and Things
Santa Lucia's Ice Cream
Securian Financial Foundation
St Paul Saints Baseball Club
Urban Bird Collective
Vita Bella Ristorante Italiano
Walmart Princeton
Zimmerman Home & Garden



Visitor Services

Finding My Refuge; Embracing Opportunity As SNWR Park Ranger

By Jade Paulsen

Three years ago, I found myself lost when I first drove into Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. It was in the coldest part of winter in an unfamiliar area and my Maps app had taken me to the Wildlife Drive instead of Refuge Headquarters.

In that moment, I was not just geographically lost, I was also exploring the realm of Visitor Services, unsure of what awaited me in my new role.

Since that first day, I have found my place at the refuge. Sherburne is a sanctuary

– a place to find peace, foster companionship with nature and people, and where I can come to be a part of something greater.

Now, as the newly appointed permanent Park Ranger for Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, I am eager to embrace the opportunities that lie ahead. Sherburne is a place where nature and community converge, and I am excited to play a pivotal role in nurturing those connections. Whether someone wishes to hike to the top of Blue Hill Overlook, participate in volunteer seed collection, or listen in on a program in the amphitheater during the Wildlife Festival, there is a little something for everyone at the refuge.

Looking to the future, my focus will be on accessibility and collaboration. It's essential to me that visitors from all backgrounds and with diverse abilities can find their place at the refuge. I intend to build and strengthen partnerships with our community to ensure that we fulfill our mission of making Sherburne a sanctuary not only for wildlife, but for people as well.

By working together, we can ensure that Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge continues to be a cherished destination for people and migrating birds alike. I am excited to continue working with and for you all as I take on this new title.



Jade Paulsen

Wildlife Officer Rod Hansen Promoted to USFWS Region 3 Law Enforcement Chief

Story and Photos
By Bruce Ellingson

Surveying the wetlands along the Wildlife Drive of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, the law officer described his mission, “We protect the wild critters that can’t protect themselves.”

Game Warden Rod Hansen paused and added, “The wildlife here, the migratory birds, the habitat itself, the land base. We protect the natural resources, and we protect the visitors who come out here to enjoy them.”

Hansen himself is officially “a Federal Wildlife Officer,” but he has

sen began supervising the regional law enforcement program, including 24 Federal Wildlife Officers in the eight states that comprise the Midwest Region. One of his tasks will be to replace himself in the Sherburne Complex.

The Work of a Wildlife Officer

“The Sherburne job is one of the premier federal game warden jobs in the country,” said Hansen. The patrol area of the Sherburne Refuge Complex includes Rice Lake NWR, Crane Meadows NWR, Mille Lacs NWR, and the Litchfield, MN, Wetland



Looking for poachers is a year-round quest requiring old-school technology.

the refuge goes into “sanctuary” from March 1 through the end of August. One of the Wildlife Officers’ tasks is eliminating human disturbance to the avian parents-to-be. “Every time a bird gets flushed, a bird has to move, we call that a disturbance event,” noted Hansen. “That bird is having to expend energy that it needs for reproduction. You can get to the point where the birds are so stressed—they’re using so much energy—that they don’t actually nest or they’re not able to properly care for their young.”

Truthfully, a wildlife officer is concerned about every creature that walks or slithers here as well. It’s “poaching” to pick up turtles or snakes for your home pond or for re-sale at pet stores. “We get a lot of that,” said Hansen. “Of course, everything’s protected here.” And during nesting time, with turtles all over the roads, officers make a few more passes through trafficked areas “just trying to keep an eye on that or at least let people see that law enforcement is out.”

The Challenges of a Game Warden

A game warden’s day varies by season and situation. This time of year, during the September through January hunting seasons, officers spend most of their time doing compliance checks. “Talking to a lot of hunters, checking hunting licenses, checking their bag limits,” said Hansen. “With waterfowl, we’re also checking their ammunition, their firearms, traditional game warden stuff.”

An officer’s job is to detect violations, apprehend violators, and work with the court systems to hold them

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Hansen has all the tools, including the internet, available in his Wildlife Officer’s truck. The Sherburne Refuge Complex is a wide-spread area stretching from Duluth to Renville County and including a county in Wisconsin.

always introduced himself to the public as a federal game warden because “game warden is something the public understands.” Hansen toured the refuge with The Prairie’s Edge, describing the duties of a federal game warden, prior to accepting a promotion to US Fish & Wildlife Service Region 3 Law Enforcement Chief. This fall, Han-

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Management District. The complex covers 20 counties in Minnesota and one in Wisconsin, stretching from Duluth and Ashland, WI, to Renville County, MN.

The primary mission of the Sherburne Refuge Complex is refuge for migratory birds, especially nesting migratory birds, which is why most of

The Life of A Game Warden: Treating Violators With Respect

Continued from page 10

accountable. Sometimes that's a warning. Sometimes a citation. Sometimes seizing weapons or equipment like the trucks and ATVs used in poaching.

"I try to be friendly through the whole contact," said Hansen. "I'm trying to find intent. They'll tell you all about their hunt, and where they set up. And they've all got a limit of geese that they've shot out in an area that is not open to the waterfowl hunting."

Wildlife officers get calls about violations from refuge staff, volunteers, and law enforcement dispatch centers. Many people who see violations call the Minnesota DNR Crime Stoppers TIP program (800-652-9093), which then contacts officers.

"Capacity" is a game warden's biggest challenge, he said. "We

The refuge management, visitor services, and law enforcement teams at Sherburne came together to re-design their public messaging system. They created a sign that could be placed anywhere—parking areas, trail heads—with their "*global thou shalt not*s."

And, depending upon the location, they added signs that listed legal recreational opportunities of a particular area at the refuge. "We've just seen a reduction in the violations, which should be better for wildlife, and better for the nesting birds," said Hansen.

Thirty years of work in Wildlife Law Enforcement have left Hansen with some life lessons. "Most people who come out here are good people," he says. "Most people are coming out here to enjoy a good time, to see wildlife. Their intentions for being here are good."

But he knows that when visitors have an encounter with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Officer, often, it's on their worst day. "Oftentimes, this is a day that they're probably going to look back on in embarrassment. For whatever reasons, they're tempted by something in the outdoors, and they do what they wouldn't normally do.

"We protect the wild critters that can't protect themselves," says Hansen

can't address even half of the complaints that come in. We have our seasons when a lot comes in at once and, unfortunately, we'll be lucky if we have time to even just document them."

Successes of a Game Warden

The Sherburne Complex was without a Wildlife Officer for several years prior to Hansen's arrival in the spring of 2019. Trespassing—disturbing the nesting season—"was out of control," Hansen recalled. "There were people at every parking lot. Lots of people is going to equate to lots of disturbance and reduced nesting activity. People out on bikes and trails. People collecting mushrooms."

"My grandparents were big fishermen, and they are the ones who taught me how to fish. They would inevitably get checked by the local game warden back in Nebraska. You remember those as a kid! When you're eight years old and your grandfather gets checked by the game warden and you have a really positive interaction and talk to him! Those things stick with you.

"I try to always remember to treat people fairly and with courtesy. And that's something I've not lost track of as I've interviewed tens of thousands of people over my career.

"I know that many of these, if not most of these people, are going to remember this interaction probably for the rest of their lives. And many of these are dads in trouble, or grandpas

in trouble. You want them to understand why the laws are there," said Hansen. "In the end, they may not agree with getting the ticket. They may be upset with it, but I don't want them to say, 'I was treated unfairly. I was treated like a criminal'."

"This is a beautiful refuge," said Hansen as we roved the Wildlife Drive prior to his promotion. "It's a



Improved signage is part of a public messaging campaign that is resulting in fewer refuge violations.

family friendly area. One of our main enforcement goals is to have this place remain an area where people can come and enjoy with their families. They can feel safe here. If we can accomplish those goals, then at the end of day, that's what we're looking for."

Today, Hansen's goals extend well beyond the Sherburne Complex. As the Regional Law Enforcement Chief, he supervises 24 Federal Wildlife Officers in the eight states that comprise the Midwest Region (Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio).

The position is responsible for directing and managing all aspects of the law enforcement program including training, budgeting, investigations, and planning for the protection of natural resources on National Wildlife Refuges in the Midwest Region... and all 24 of their *Game Wardens*, including Hansen's replacement in the Sherburne Complex.

Friends of Sherburne Annual Meeting Thursday, January 16, 2025, 6:30 PM CST

All Friends members are invited to the annual hybrid (in-person and Zoom) meeting where the Friends of Sherburne and refuge staff discuss 2024 accomplishments and 2025 plans and budget. The meeting will start with a brief social time at 6:30 pm and convene at 6:45 pm.

In-Person Meeting

Oak Savanna Learning Center
16797 289th Ave NW – Zimmerman, MN 55398

Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/2843006080?pwd=MEhJd1JNaWdrMTdqWVRMQXVmaWs2QT09>

Call in only: 1 (408) 638 0968

Meeting ID: 284 300 6080

Participant number, press #

Agenda will include:

Introductions, 2024 Friends Accomplishments, What's Coming in 2025, Vote to Approve 2025 Budget, Refuge Update, Election of Board Members.

FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NWR 2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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LIAISON TO THE BOARD

Jade Paulsen – Park Ranger

What's Up!

Friends Annual Meeting - Thursday January 16, 2025, 6:30 PM CST

Regular hours for Refuge Headquarters are now Monday – Thursday, 10 am – 4 pm. This change will allow staff to have time in the field in the mornings and should reduce instances where the office is temporarily closed during open hours.

Stay tuned for information about refuge events and updates!

- **Friends Facebook page**, <https://www.facebook.com/sherburnerefugefans>
- **Friends e-news, the *Prairie Insider*. Not a subscriber yet?** Sign up by typing your email address in the space at the bottom of the Friends website home page, <https://www.exploresherburne.org>
- **Refuge website**, <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/sherburne>

Shop at the Eagle's Nest Nature Store!

- **In person** at the Oak Savanna Learning Center, Thursdays and Saturdays, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm (Store closed January & February)
- **Online** at <https://sherburneeaglesneststore.com>

Sherburne Photography Club

- Meeting and activity plans available on the club's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sherburnephotoclub>