Check out the new John Muir Nature and History Route mobile app available on your smart phone, tablet or PC.

WFJM host John Muir’s Great Grandson

Bill Hanna, great-grandson of John Muir, came from his home in California with wife Claudia and was given a tour of John Muir sites by WFJM. Then, Mark Kearns, great-great grandson of Thomas Kearns took the Hannas on a tour of Hickory Hill Farm, first started by Daniel Muir, John Muir’s father in 1856. Hanna was here to read the words of his great grandfather during an Earth Day celebration event that took place at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

When John Muir left Marquette County he left behind the little kettle lake that he loved and three times tried to buy. WFJM took Hanna to John Muir Park as well as the Wee White Kirk and adjoining cemetery where relatives and friends of Muir are buried. Hickory Hill farm, and Observatory Hill. Daniel Muir moved the family from Fountain Lake Farm to Hickory Hill in 1856. About 1871 he moved them to Portage, selling Hickory Hill, but never finalizing the sale. He then sold it to John Mahaffey who sold it to Thomas Kearns in 1873, 144 years ago. Mark Kearns who showed the Hannas around Hickory Hill and a farmer himself, is the great-great grandson of Thomas Kearns.

John Muir Park Endowment Fund

The legacy of John Muir is needed today more than ever. As founder of the Sierra Club and father of the National Park Service, John Muir reminds and provides each of us a personal connection to nature. Muir showed us the need to preserve and protect the natural world we rely on and that nourishes us. John Muir Memorial County Park commemorates the location of Muir’s first home in Wisconsin. The Park remains in its natural state where you can experience the land much as Muir did. The 80-acre Muir Fountain Lake Farm was designated a National Park Service National Historic Landmark in 1990. It is also a State Natural Area.

The John Muir Park Endowment Fund will protect Muir Park and continue Muir’s legacy. The Fund will be used to manage and restore the park lands, provide information about Muir and the Park, and promote his legacy in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Friends of John Muir will manage the Endowment Fund and work with other partners on its use.

The goal is to raise $50,000 and only use the interest. No interest will be spent until the fund reaches $25,000. Help WFJM maintain Muir’s heritage in Wisconsin, and preserve his legacy and teachings. Your gift today also gives to future generations, so please give generously. Donations are tax deductible. To consider John Muir Park in your estate planning or for other questions, contact johnmuirwi@gmail.com.

Our Mission:
To preserve the spirit and legacy of John Muir, the landscapes of his boyhood, and the park that is dedicated in his honor.

Highlights of 2017

- John Muir’s Birthday Party clean up at the park
- Fall Color Hike
- Popcorn and Ideas
- Development Board Training and Planning
Summary of Activities in 2017

The WFJM had well over 400 people attend activities in 2017. Activities included celebrating John Muir’s birthday and Earth Day with a park clean up and eating delicious birthday cake in John Muir County Park. Those interested also took a hike around the lake. Another yearly event was the Fall Color Hike at the Fox River Refuge. Once again people were allowed access to the federal US Fish and Wildlife lands of the Fox River Refuge to experience the glories of fall colors.

Popcorn and Ideas is an informational series offered free to the public. It provides information and community conversations about important environmental topics. In 2017 the main issue addressed was water resources. Three presentations included research on the impact of high capacity wells on lakes and streams in the Central Sands, how geology impacts groundwater, contamination, recharge and flow of surface water, and the interface of agriculture and the community resource of water.

The WFJM also assisted with the building of birdhouses for International Migratory Bird Day and collaborated on the Children’s Saunter Program that involved four hikes around Marquette County. Two successful fund raising events took place: an organic dinner at MORE Health Food in Montello and the National Resource Foundation Hike to John Muir Park and Observatory Hill. A special thank you to Kathleen McGwin and Mark Martin for organizing and sharing their knowledge on that hike.

2017 Fundraising Committee Update

The WFJM Fundraising Committee has been keeping busy over the past year. We were awarded a $1,000 Besadny Grant from the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin (NRF) for our Mobile John Muir Nature Center project in October. The NRF provides sustainable funding for Wisconsin’s imperiled species and public lands, while connecting citizens of all ages to our state’s unique creatures and habitats. Over the years, NRF has provided over $6.25 million to conservation efforts in Wisconsin. The grant, named after former DNR Secretary CD “Buzz” Besadny, has awarded $504,000 since its inception in 1990. All grants, including the one supporting our Mobile John Muir Nature Center project, must be matched 1:1, often through volunteer hours. Over the past several months, our Besadny Grant Subcommittee (comprised of Karen Wollenburg, Kathleen McGwin, Seth Taft, Tiffany Lodholz, Lila Waldman, and Shaila Werner), have been meeting regularly to develop lesson plans for the Nature Center related to three key themes: Learning about the boyhood history of John Muir in Wisconsin; Learning About Muir’s connection to nature; and Learning about actions Muir took to preserve wilderness and how they might apply to what children and families can do today. Once plans are complete, we will purchase supplies connected to the activities that fit with each of the three themes, and use them at upcoming WFJM events, including, but not limited to the annual Muir Birthday Celebration on April 21 in Montello, and the Muir B’earth Arbor Day Fest April 28 at Whitehorse Middle School in Madi­son. In addition, we will offer to loan the Muir Nature Center to schools, nature centers, or other groups around the state. We are extremely grateful to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin for their critical support of the Mobile John Muir Nature Center, and we are excited about the possibilities that this project will bring to our organization, and to people throughout Wisconsin!

Our Fundraising Committee has also been working to make it easier than ever to for our friends to support WFJM. We added a PayPal button to our website in September at: http://www.johnmuir.org/wisconsin/. Website donations can be directed towards initial membership and renewal, general donations, and our Endowment Fund, provided that the donor includes the purpose in the donation in the comments. We encourage you to try it out, and encourage your friends to donate too. Special thanks to Don Ferber, who made a generous online donation through PayPal in December. Save a stamp and make a secure, convenient, online donation through PayPal to WFJM today, and encourage your friends on social media to do the same!

Speaking of the John Muir Park Endowment Fund, we are continuing to raise funds towards our $50,000 goal. Once the fund reaches at least $25,000, interest funds will be used to protect Muir Park through managing and restor­ing Park lands, providing information about Muir and the Park, and promoting John Muir’s legacy in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Friends of John Muir will manage the Endowment Fund and work with other partners on its use.

President’s Report 2017

Dear Friends,

2017 was a productive year for the Wisconsin Friends of John Muir. The highlight of the year was when John Muir’s great grandson Bill Hanna and his wife Claudia visited Marquette County. We enjoyed a wonderful day touring all of the historic Muir sites in the area, including Fountain Lake Farm and Hickory Hill. Thank you to the generous private land-owners and volunteers who made this day possible.

In spring, we welcomed Steve Swensen from the Aldo Leopold Foundation to our annual membership meeting to teach us about Leopold’s life and land ethic. We held a 3 part series of workshops on protecting our water resources featuring experts, Ken Bradbury, George Kraft, and Kara O’Conner. We also celebrated Muir’s birthday with an Earth Day clean up and saunter at John Muir Park.

In summer, we co-sponsored children’s saunters and worked on managing the wild areas near Muir’s boyhood home. In autumn, we explored the Fox River Wilds—Refuge during the annual Fall Color Hike. We were also thrilled to receive a Besadny grant from the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin to develop a John Muir in Wisconsin educational trunk that will be available to the public.

In winter, National Park Service current and retired staff came to Marquette County to lead our Board of Directors through a Desired Future Conditions workshop. This workshop allowed us to dream big about the future possibilities for John Muir’s neighborhood and take tangible steps to make these dreams a reality. Thank you to Pam Schuler, Angie Tornes, and Tom Gilbert for guiding us through the process. Mr. Gilbert then returned to Marquette County for the presentation The Scriptures of Nature about John Muir’s spiritual connection to the land. Throughout the year we focused on organizational development to ensure our ongoing success and longevity.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Friends of John Muir Board of Directors we thank you for your generous support of our work to preserve the spirit and legacy of John Muir, the landscapes of his boyhood, and the park that is dedicated in his honor.

Thank you, Tiffany Lodholz President, Wisconsin Friends of John Muir

Land Management Committee 2017 Summary

The Land Management Committee in conjunction with partners: Marquette County, Department of Land and Water Conservation / parks, Groundswell Conservancy, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Ice Age Trail Alliance, National Park Service, High Marq Environmental Charter School, and Fresh Start, carried out management and maintenance activities at John Muir County Park. These activities included control of invasive species in the existing areas, and on areas of new prairie seeding. The goal for 2018 is to finalize a management plan with Marquette County and the Wisconsin DNR for sustainable methods to control for invasive species, and set priorities for management activities.

Legacy Lands Committee 2017 Summary

This is a long view working committee charged with identifying critical properties in John Muir’s neighborhood and working to secure protection for those properties. The committee has identified important land areas and is working to secure long-term protection for the properties by forming cooperative and collaborative relationships with current land owners, neighbors, interested parties, as well as partner organizations and philanthropic resources.

Membership Committee Report

The Membership Committee is currently working on a major revamping process to focus on various items. This includes (but not limited to): obtain number for current members (and their updated contact information), and finding opportunities to gain new members. We are currently reviewing the membership spreadsheet and will work on obtaining updated contact information. In addition, the WFJM Facebook page recently received over 1,000 likes. We will continue to consider how we can use our Facebook page to increase interest in our organization.