Sleigh Rides & Winter Fun on Valentine’s Day!
Join us for the 2nd Annual Winter Sleigh & Ski Festival at Prairie Woods!!

The Winter Sleigh and Ski Festival at Prairie Woods is a community gathering to celebrate the outdoor life and share winter activities both indoors and outdoors. Last year over 600 people enjoyed sleigh rides, skiing, snowshoeing, a chili feed, great music and a variety of exhibits. The Cedar Creek Band will be back this year by popular demand. Vicki Vogt will be serving up chili, provided by Jennie O’Turkey Store, from 11a-1pm. Fred & Joy Zwart and Gary Stai are organizing sleigh teams to provide free sleigh rides and a sleigh parade. We already have a good group of volunteers slated to help with this great event, but we can always use more help.

If you have a winter hobby or passion to share please give us a call. Exhibitors thus far include MN Darkhouse Anglers, Willmar Curling Club, Willmar Nordic Ski Club, woodworkers, woodcarvers, birdwatching enthusiasts, and more. If you would like to bring a horse drawn sleigh to the festival please contact Fred Zwart or Gary Stai. Individuals, businesses and organizations who would like to bring exhibits or help with food, parking, music or activities, please contact Dave or Mari at the PWELC office.

The Sleigh & Ski Festival is a free event made possible through free will-donations, volunteers, and generous community minded individuals and businesses. There will be an equipment rental charge of $15 for those who wish to ski, snowshoe or climb.

Please help to promote the Sleigh and Ski Fest by posting the center insert of this newsletter prominently out in the community. All are welcome!!
Welcome to 2015! As I write this, the temp is -14F. The wind is howling and the moon hangs full in a clear sky. When the wind hills, I can hear expansion cracks shoot across the frozen Crow River outside my window. Yesterday, my daughter Marie and I enjoyed a ski on the river on a sunny warm (+25F) day. The wind tonight will surely erase our ski tracks but pleasant images of our ski adventure will long remain in a fold of the brain that harbors happy memories.

My life has been shaped by time spent outdoors, both alone and with friends. I was blessed to have older brothers who helped feed my appetite for adventure, and supportive parents who somehow understood my need for wilderness travel and just being outdoors in nature. Many kids are not so lucky, and that’s where you and I and Prairie Woods have a key role to play. It is hard to care for something if we have no direct experience or connection with that thing. Getting kids connected to the wonders of nature and the enjoyment of healthy outdoor recreation is a critical first step in developing an ethic of environmental stewardship.

This newsletter will provide updates on some ways that Prairie Woods is connecting kids with nature and environmental stewardship and also describes some ways that you can help. Please check out the “5 Cents for YES!” waste oil collection partnership between PWELC and East Side Oil Company and the WorldWear shoe donation fundraising project. Please read the article on the sustainability endowment and consider joining the Prairie Woods Legacy Circle. And definitely plan to join us for the Sleigh & Ski Festival in February, and Earth Day and the Recycled Outdoor Gear Sale in April. Please help publicize these events and put them on your calendar.

Thanks for being a partner with Prairie Woods! I wish you a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Sincerely,
Dave

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**THANKS UNITED WAY OF WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA!**

Prairie Woods received a $10,000 grant from United Way of West Central Minnesota, to support youth programs in 2014-2015. These funds are critical for keeping programs available and affordable for the thousands of kids who participate in our challenge course and environmental education programs each year. Funds awarded by United Way to PWELC have a great ripple effect, as many UnitedWay agencies also utilize services at Prairie Woods for team building, healthy outdoor recreation and environmental education. Thanks United Way! and thanks to all who help to support United Way of West Central Minnesota.

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**NEEDS & GIVING OPPORTUNITIES**

- Volunteer to help organize the Sleigh & Ski Festival
- Volunteer to help with trail work and small building projects
- Volunteer to help sew and mend Time Travel costumes
- Volunteer to help with firearms safety
- Apple cider press and grinder for Time Travel
- Cool silent auction items for Prairie Stars 2015
- Donations of good used outdoor gear for the Recycled Outdoor Gear Sale
- Donate shoes for WorldWear project

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**SOME OF THE NICE THINGS DONE RECENTLY FOR PRAIRIE WOODS BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU!**

- Jack Woodball donated Spars of skis and 13 sets of boots and poles
- Hans Dahl donated a Celestron telescope
- Joel & Cathy Halbritter and Ron & Dee Erpelnd made contributions to the sustainability endowment
- Rick and Jodi Losch gave memorial gifts in honor of Jay Kiest and Anine Picard
- Dan and Cheryl Rauschert contributed at a $2500 Benefactor Level.

Other recent membership renewals at various Benefactor Levels included: Bob & Judy Snook, Jeff & Pat Olson, Jeff & Cheryl Johnson, Michael & Joan Meyer, Karen Schneider, Wanda Malone, Tim & Mary Pieh, Tom & Julie DeBoer, Tom & Cheryl Glaser. Friends who renewed family memberships or made other contributions over the past few months included: Tom and Jeanie Groth, Lynn Edwards, Susanne Miller, Ken & Karen Damhof, LeRoy Dahlke, Gwen Steffen and Erik Hatlestad.

**KWLM and 106.5 The Train featured Prairie Woods on Community Spotlight throughout the month leading up to Prairie Stars. Thanks to West Central Sanitation and Anderson & Larson for sponsoring Community Spotlight.**

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**SITE UPDATES:**

*Conservation Pays! A look back at our utility bills produced an interesting factoid. Our heating bill for 2003 was $11,713 with propane at $1.05/gal. Our heating bill in 2013 was $5000, relying almost entirely on biomass pellets for heating. Had we not changed behavior and adapted our technology, our cost for propane in 2014 could have been a whopping $51,425 (Jan. 2014 propane price was $4.61/gal) and this figure does not even factor in that our building square footage increased 25% in 2007. Our primary savings came from paying attention, intelligent use of existing HVAC systems, adding insulating shades to all windows, and installing biomass stoves, a biomass boiler system and a solar air heating system. Virtually all of our costs for upgrades were recovered during just one year when propane prices spiked due to shortages.*

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**THE PRAIRIE WOODS LEGACY CIRCLE…….. & YOU**

In October of 2002, longtime Prairie Woods supporters, Ron and Dee Erpelnd made the first pledge of $10,000 over three years to a newly established PWELC Sustainability Endowment Fund. The Erpelndings made their pledge contingent upon it being matched dollar for dollar by other donors. PWELC Trustees Karen Schneider, Paul and Sandy Volland & Lake Region State Bank and Mary Merlin quickly answered the challenge and the PWELC Sustainability Endowment was underway! In 2005, $80,000 of a bequest from Ruth & Helen Peterson Estate was placed into the Sustainability Endowment fund and a dream of a one million dollar fund was well on its way to a reality.

Since the Sustainability Endowment was established, many additional donors as well as the founding donors have continued to make contributions. The endowment total to date stands at nearly $250,000 and, with announced pledges, will exceed $500,000 within six years. Prairie Woods was recently listed by anonymous donors as a beneficiary of a lead untrust. This one gift alone, subject to market performance, is expected to contribute over $200,000 to the endowment fund over the next seven years. Dennis and Karen Peterson set a great example by listing PWELC as the beneficiary on a life insurance policy. Others have directed memorial gifts to the sustainability endowment or made annual contributions. Step by step, gift by gift, we are creating a legacy that will position Prairie Woods for growth and service far into the future.

It is a profound act to contribute to a fund and a cause that will benefit literally hundreds of thousands of people for many generations to come. Contributions to the endowment will earn interest in perpetuity. Only interest earnings up to 5% will be spent annually to support the programs and operations of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center. Please consider a gift to the sustainability endowment and become a part of the Legacy Circle by notifying us that you have included Prairie Woods in your charitable gifts and estate planning. Gifts in any amount are welcome and important.

*If you are considering a donation to Prairie Woods, please contact Dave Pederson, PWELC Executive Director at 320-354-5894, THANKS for considering a gift to further the work of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center!*
It seems that most of my EE newsletter notes start with something about the weather. Which I guess makes sense since we do try to do most of our "Environmental" education outdoors in the environment. So, I guess it is always on our minds.

With that, how does the saying go? "If you don’t like the weather in Minnesota just wait 5 minutes." That was an appropriate saying for the end of 2014 when the weather was toying with my emotions (and programs). The 10 inches of snow in November got us really excited for the winter ski season. We groomed trails and had a couple of weekends of O.K. skiing. We even booked some ski and snowshoe classes. Then came a week of 50 degree weather.

Most Minnesotans were happy about the warm weather and melting snow. However, it does make it hard to teach kids how to ski and snowshoe. The show must go on… and it did with melting snow. However, it does make it hard to teach kids how to ski and snowshoe. The show must go on… and it did with

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By the time you get this newsletter I hope the snow is back, the trails are groomed, and we are ready for our winter school groups to arrive. While we have the regulars (like Hutchinson, St. Francis Xavier, KMS, Litchfield) already on the winter schedule, we still have room for more winter groups (unlike May which is already booked solid for 2015).

Are you an individual or a family looking for something to do this winter? We have programs for you too. Check out our website for public programs including skiing and snowshoe classes. There is even something for the kids to do on President’s Day when they don’t have school. Don’t let winter weather turn you blue, get out and enjoy it.

~New for 2015~

$5 ski rentals for members and students (pre-K thru college).

Also, remember that you and your family can ski free one day with the purchase of a new family membership at Prairie Woods.

In the last newsletter I wrote about the 67 youth that participated in our MN DNR all day field and range day programs and also our Forkhorn Camps in collaboration with Minnesota Deer Hunters Association and the Minnesota DNR. On the behalf of those participants I thanked the conservation groups that made those programs possible. In this newsletter I would like to add to that list all of the 2014 Prairie Stars attendees.

With the support of all these groups we were able to add to our educational supplies for these programs and all future participants. Among the list of items that we were able to purchase were:

- .22 lever action rifle – for demonstration of actions and use at .22 live fire portion of classes
- Break action shotgun – for demonstration of actions
- Trail camera- to see if we picked the right place to put up our deer stand
- Nikon camera- to check trail camera photos "in the field"
- Range finder – to tell us how close we were in our yardage estimation

Thank you again for your support. All of these teams will greatly enhance youth sporting programs at Prairie Woods.

*Call now about 2015 Forkhorn Camps! Forkhorn 1 June 14-18, Firearm Safety • Forkhorn 2 June 21-25 Bowhunter Safety
This year's major sponsors included:

**Event Underwriters $2500**
- Jennie-O Turkey Store
- Lakeland Broadcasting
- PWELC Trustees

**Eco-Sponsors $1000**
- Affiliated Community Medical Center
- Family Practice Medical Center
- Mary Merlin
- Dee Johnson

**Prairie Partners $500**
- Anfinson & Thompson & Co.
- Jeff & Sue Danielson
- Energy Concepts
- Harvest Bank
- Heritage Bank
- Lake Region Bank
- John & Mary Lindstrom
- Northern States Supply
- Dennis & Karen Peterson
- Dr. Roger and Kay Strand
- Louise Thoma

**Voyagers $250**
- Bremer Bank & Bremer Trust

We had a fantastic Prairie Stars silent auction thanks to the following contributions:

Special Thank You:

This camp posed by Autumn Lanners from the Royalton Youth Energy Summit (YES!) Team, started a whole chain of new opportunities. After doing some research, Autumn made contact with East Side Oil Companies (ESOC) out of St. Cloud, MN and found that they have a public-drop-off oil recycling program. After some persistent groundwork, the RoyaltonYES! team put in place their very own (ESOC) Oil Recycling Drop-off site. These sites provide a valuable service to the community and open up a source of revenue from donations at the site for future YES! projects. This worked so well that two other YES! teams, Westbrook-Walnut Grove and Lac qui Parle, jumped on board and put up their own ESOC Oil Recycling Sites.

**5 CENTS for YES!**
- The YES! Oil Recycling Drop-off sites have been going so well that ESOC asked what else they could do for the YES! Program.
- With this question in mind, they came up with the “5 Cents for YES!” program. This program allows any new or existing ESOC oil recycling account to support YES! by simply switching to ESOC or staying with ESOC and pledging to support YES! After that, ESOC donates 5 cents to YES! for every gallon of waste oilcollected from participating accounts. This helps ESOC gain more business and provides YES! with a continued source of funding for future community projects.

**What happens to used oil?** What began as a simple question posed by Autumn Lammers from the Royalton Youth Energy Summit (YES!) Team, started a whole chain of new opportunities for YES! Autumn discovered that motor oil, when not disposed of properly, can equate to a mini environmental disaster. To put this in perspective, one quart of oil can contaminate 250,000 gallons of water. Only a couple of decades ago it was common practice to dump oil on gravel roads to keep dust down. People now understand the environmental degradation caused by dumping oil and that we need a better place to put it. This is where the story gets really cool! After doing some research, Autumn made contact with East Side Oil Companies (ESOC) out of St. Cloud, MN and found that they have a public-drop-off oil recycling program. After some persistent groundwork, the RoyaltonYES! team put in place their very own (ESOC) Oil Recycling Drop-off site. These sites provide a valuable service to the community and open up a source of revenue from donations at the site for future YES! projects. This worked so well that two other YES! teams, Westbrook-Walnut Grove and Lac qui Parle, jumped on board and put up their own ESOC Oil Recycling Sites.

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Please help spread the word about “5 Cents for YES!” Contact Jonathan Morales (320.354.5894) if you know a service station, implement dealer or trucking company who may have waste oil they wish to sell. East Side Oil will pay participating businesses for their oil and donate 5 cents a gallon to YES! at no additional cost to the vendor.

Learn more about YES! at www.youthenergysummit.org

Major funding for YES! is provided by the MN Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commissions on MN Resources (LCCMR)

Please help us thank these businesses in the Willmar area for participating in the “5 Cents for YES!” program:
- Beto’s Auto Repair, Clark’s Auto Clinic, Fatty Daddy Auto Import & More Repair, Fleet Pride, Grand Rental Station, Jennie-O Turkey Store, Larry’s Power Equipment, Little Crow Sports Center, Robbie’s 9 & 71 Auto Body and Glass, Spicer Power Products, and Walt’s Soft Cloth Car Wash.

We need your SHOES!! You can donate gently worn shoes to Prairie Woods for the WorldWear Project. The shoes are sent to developing countries or recycled and kept out of the landfill. You reduce clutter and Prairie Woods earns approximately $1 for each pair of donated shoes. Please bring your shoes to the Sleight & Ski Fest or EARTH DAY and help us fill our shoeboxes. THANKS!
2nd Annual
Prairie Woods Sleigh & Ski Festival

Saturday February 14, 2015  11:00 am to 4:00pm
Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center
12718 10th St NE   Spicer, MN

Join us for a day of winter fun!
Chili Feed (11a -1p), Sleigh Parade, Music, Exhibits and More.
Sleigh Rides from 1 to 3 pm.
Try XC Skiing, Snowshoeing & Rockclimbing

General Info Contact:
Prairie Woods @ 320-354-5894
Sleigh Contact Info:
Fred Zwart @ 320-220-0843
Gary Stai @ 320-905-0519
Web—www.prairiewoodsele.org
PWELC COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFERINGS

WINTER/SPRING 2015

INDOOR ROCK CLIMBING GYM .......................... All Ages
Climbing offers a chance to challenge yourself both physically and mentally at your own pace. Rock climbing is a true adventure sport. Beginners can learn about the sport, exercise, and have fun! Experienced climbers can come train and refine their skills. The Prairie Woods ELC instructors are here to help every climber reach new heights! Equipment will be provided. Meet at main building.

Date: Tuesday, Jan 27, Thursday, Jan 29
Thursday, Feb 5 Or Thursday, March 12th, Thursday, March 19th
Thursday, March 26th
Time: 4:00-5:30 pm
Cost: $10/individual class + $24/all 1 sessions

CROSS COUNTRY SKIING CLUB .......................... Grades: 4 and older
In this class we will be hitting the trails to have an adventure on the skinny skis. Prairie Woods has numerous miles of groomed trails. Instruction and equipment provided. Meet at main building.

Date: Thursday, February 19, Thursday, February 26
Thursday, March 5
Time: 6:00-5:15 pm
Cost: $5 per child (adults free)

SNOWSHOEING ............................... Grades: 4 and older
Arcade Adventure or at least Prairie-Wood’s version. On snowshoes, you can explore “off the beaten path” and beyond the trails. Enjoy this magical adventure through quiet woods and hills, while watching for tracks and signs of our animal neighbors. Instruction and all equipment provided. Meet at main building.

Date: Tuesday, February 24
Time: 4:00-5:30 PM
Cost: $8/person

**INSTRUCTOR NEEDED**

SKILL BUILDING CLASSES

BEGINNER ARCHERY CLASS ...................... Grades: 5 and up
This class gives you the opportunity to learn the basics of using a compound bow and arrows. We will be working on form, safety, technique, how to properly use the equipment, etc. A hands-on class of learning and fun while practicing and playing archery games that all ages will enjoy. All equipment will be provided. Meet at farmsite.

Date: Tuesday, March 1
Time: 4:00-5:10 pm
Cost: $10/person

AFTER SCHOOL ARCHERY CLUB ................ Grades: 5 and up
It is lots of fun learning and practicing the skill of archery. We will be using compound bows to improve our skills. We will play games, shoot 3-d targets, Olympic style archery, and use the atlatl’s, all while aiming to have a great time. Equipment will be provided. (meet at farmsite)

Date: Tuesday, March 10, 17, and 24th
Time: 4:00-5:10 pm
Cost: $20/person

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION ............................... Everyone
Open to all
A fun and educational experience for the whole family. Booths, exhibits, and activities offer information about water quality, energy efficiency, land management, and much more. Pancake and sausage breakfast from 8-10am (free will donation).

Enjoy food, entertainment, kid activities and information about ‘greening’ your life. No pre-registration necessary.

Date: Saturday, April 25th
Time: 8:00-1:00 pm
Cost: Free

Remind: Bring shoes for WorldWear project

SLEIGH- FEST AND WINTER FAMILY FUN DAY ...... Everyone
Let it snow. Let it snow. Celebrate winter at PWELC with fun outdoor activities for everyone in the family; snowshoeing, and cross country skiing. Indoors, warm up by the fire and try your hand at the climbing wall. **This year’s fun day is in conjunction with a sleigh festival, which is a free event with sleighs, wagon, horses, riders, chili food, and music.

Date: Saturday, February 14
Time: 11:00-4:00 PM
Cost: $5 per person, $15 max per family (for use of skies, snowshoes, and climbing wall)

Remind: Bring shoes for WorldWear project

In this class we will be hitting the trails to have an adventure on the skinny skis. Learn some winter survival skills. Then we will come inside to finish the day at the indoor climbing wall. Meet at main building.

Date: Monday, February 16
Time: 1:00-5:00PM
Cost: $20/person

NO SCHOOL TODAY-WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

It is lots of fun learning and practicing the skill of archery. We will be using compound bows to improve our skills. We will play games, shoot 3-d targets, Olympic style archery, and use the atlatl’s, all while aiming to have a great time. Equipment will be provided. (meet at farmsite)

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Cost: $20/person

Show times:

“Where the Wind Blows” and “The Fiddler!”
“Making Candy!”
“Dancing!”
“Making the Warbler

Stay tuned for more information about our next offering, next week. Stay tuned for more information about our next offering, next week. Stay tuned for more information about our next offering, next week.