



Friends of Oil Creek State Park~Winter 2022 Park Manager's Report

Careful Where You Step

One thing I love about Mother Nature is that she always lets me witness something new every year. For me, 2022 started off with another first. I have had some close encounters over the years with bear. I frequently have them in my yard, chased them out of dumpsters, and even had them climb up the same tree that I was hunting out of. But, early in January I inadvertently set a new first for myself.

As I was feeling the constraints of the office, I decided to take a little hike through one of my favorite areas of the park. This area was fairly steep and had quite a few blown down trees. These trees can provide excellent shelter for a variety of animals from opossums to raccoons, owls, fishers, bears and so on. This one particular tree caught my eye from about 100 yards away. There was an area beside the tree that looked as if someone or something had raked all the leaves away leaving only bare ground. The rest of the forest was covered in leaves so this struck me as a little odd. As I began walking over, I remember thinking to myself... I wonder if a bear gathered up those leaves for bedding material?? I stood there for a moment or two and figured I would check out the hole that was going under the root ball of this tree. I mean, what else do you do when you find a hole in the woods but stick your head in it?

As soon I stepped around the trunk to examine the entrance I glanced down and that's when I noticed the black paw resting inches away from my boot. This is when things began to happen fast! My head was already halfway into the hole as a 300 plus pound boar was on its way out. A hundred different thoughts raced through my mind in a fraction of a second. No one knows I'm here. Do I have cell signal? This might be it!? It's funny how your brain works when you are faced with a highly stressful situation. Anyway, as our noses almost smushed together I started my retreat.

It's been a long time since I've moved that fast, and I remember thinking to myself that you're not supposed to run from a black bear. However, he had no backdoor to his home, and I was blocking his one and only route of escape. As I bounded across a small creek, stopped, and looked back to see where he was, I saw him standing on top of the downed tree staring at me. At this point I knew things were going to be ok. We were still only about 10 yards apart, but I could tell by his body language that he was just as surprised as I was. Plus, if he wanted me, he would have had me. I fumbled around with my phone and was able to capture a short video of him as he hopped down from the log, ran a short distance, and sat down in the brush waiting for me to leave. And leave I did.

The chances of someone getting attacked or killed by a black bear are extremely rare. However, one should not tempt fate too often. So, if you are out and about and notice a bald area void of leaves, there might just be a bear den nearby. If you find a hole in the woods, I encourage you to think twice before sticking your head into it. I know I will. This was an awesome experience! An experience that I will always have and be able to share for years to come.

See you on the trail,

David Hallman

The downed tree (den). Notice the bear retreating mid-picture.



Encountering a Black Bear



- If you see a bear and it hasn't seen you, leave the area calmly. While moving away, talk to help the bear discover your presence.
- If you have a close encounter, back away slowly while facing the bear. Avoid direct eye contact, which a bear may perceive as a threat. Give the

bear plenty of room to escape. Wild bears rarely attack people unless they feel threatened or provoked. If you're on a trail, step off on the downhill side and slowly leave the area.

- Don't run from the bear. Running may prompt the bear to give chase and no human can outrun a bear.
- If a cub is nearby, try to move away from it. But be alert, there could be other cubs. Never climb a tree to escape, because sows chase their cubs up trees when they detect danger. If you climb a tree, a sow may interpret that as an attempt to get her cubs. Stay on the ground and don't make any sudden movements.

Bears will use all of their senses to figure out what you are. If they recognize you as a person, some may stand upright or move closer in their efforts to detect odors in the air currents. Don't consider this a sign of aggression.

Once a bear identifies you, it will usually leave.

If the bear stays, it may pop its jaws as a warning sign that it's uncomfortable. That's a sign for you to leave. Back away and slowly leave the area.

If the jaw popping warning is ignored, some bears have been known to bluff charge to within a few feet. If this occurs, wave your arms wildly and shout at the bear.

If a bear attacks, fight back. Bears have been driven away when people have fought back with rocks, sticks, binoculars and even their bare hands.

(Information from Pa. Game Commission website)



Cross Country Skiing



Sun Valley Nordic is the cross-country ski agreement at Oil Creek State Park. It is run by John and Peg Sims. John does the ski track grooming and trail maintenance end while Peg runs the communication end—emailing the snow and ski reports, posting on social media as well as various websites.

John spends countless hours making sure the trails are groomed for optional skiing. He drives a tracked ATV which is fitted with an apparatus that compacts and also sets tracks in the snow. Notice when John grooms, he sets the tracks on the level and gradual sloping sections and lifts the tracks for the down/up hills allowing for more control in these areas

which vastly improving the skiing experience. Unfortunately this is something that not all ski areas do. There are many variables to setting the tracks which include the type of snow, the temperature of the snow and air, the condions of the already groomed tracks, the snow depth, and countless other circumstances. John grooms over 11 miles of trails. These tracks are marked by red blazes (6 mile loop), blue blazes (3mile loop), green blazes (1 mile), and white blazes which connect trails and offers numerous options for skiing loops on the various ski trails. To help people get oriented there are trail maps signs at each intersection with a "you are here" notation. When doing the entire 11 plus miles, it takes all day- at least 9 to 10 hours or more depending on whether there are many trees down that need to be cut out and also the number of sticks and branches that need picked up. If the snow depth is sparse, he often just packs the trails, but this year conditions have been ideal, and all trails have been maintained with set tracks. John has a great understanding of how to preserve the tracks when the snow conditions are limited.

Both he and Peg are pleased with this season. There have been many familiar as well as new faces skiing this year. The ski trails bring people in from a wide area; Pittsburgh, Erie, Eastern Ohio, and everywhere in between. The cross country skiers have been truly delighted to have perfect conditions this year. The tracks have been pristine. Unfortunately, there have been snowshoers and runners who have chosen to run or snow shoe down the middle of the tracks. This breaks down the tracks and

makes skiing harder as well as a bit dangerous. It truly undermines John's hard work. Thankfully, there have been only a few problems, but it only takes one to ruin the trails for everyone.

Our Park is so fortunate to have the Simses.

Views of the back of the tracker with weights.





CROSS COUNTRY SKIING



Beautiful trails, snow sparkling in the sun, and many nice folks enjoying the winter weather have truly made the 2022 ski season at Oil Creek stellar. I just started skiing a couple years ago and still remember my first time. My sister and brother-in-law were visiting and brought me a set of used skis, poles, and boots (they live in Colorado and are avid cross country skiers). For me, just learning how to put on the 3-pin skis was an experience. Then came the part where I had to let go of the ski rack and move along. My sister showed me how to kick and glide through the snow, and she was very patient as we made slow progress from the warming hut to the confluence of the Derrick and Blue trails. The idea wasn't to go fast, it was to learn how to ski safely, with proper technique, and to enjoy the woods. We had a wonderful afternoon outside in the cold fresh air having fun and getting exercise.

I'm so glad that we're having such wonderful weather and many thanks to Peg and John Sims for their work to make cross country skiing accessible and so much fun :)

Glad you got out on the trails with John!! ~Jen McAlevy

WINTER SCENES

The pilings at the dance hall in the Wildcat Hollow



The Wolf Rig along the wetlands trail





Winter Training

There's an old saying that says 'summer bodies are made in the winter.' This winter, as the temperatures dip below freezing, many people may start to second-guess their love for outdoor running. I would like to convince you that not only is running in these cold, sub-freezing temperatures good for you, but you can actually make it so enjoyable, you will want to do it more!

Let's start with the basics; the key is safety and layers. You need to have some very warm, wicking base layers that you build upon depending on what temperature it is. Once you get moving, you do warm up, so the key is learning about what works for you! I start with a cold gear Under Armour base layer on my top and bottom. The colder it gets, the more layers you can add to start. Neck gators or buffs protect your neck and face, and gloves with light mittens over are key to keeping your hands warm. Nice wool blend socks are key, along with shoes that grip. Trail shoes work great, but if ice is involved, you will want to add some extra help to even trail shoes. I am part of a winter running group, and we all buy 3/8 inch hex head steel screws. Screw your shoes, four on each side, staying close to the edges, with a total of eight per shoe. The grip you will get with screwed shoes will surpass anything you have tried in the past... roads, trails, ice, it won't matter!

The winter wind can make it feel up to 20 to 30 degrees colder than what it is! Don't let the wind change your mind about running outdoors. A windbreaker can make a world of difference! Most shoes allow wind to penetrate easily, so a quick fix is a duct tape temporary cover on the toes of your shoes and that cuts the wind out dramatically and saves your toes from freezing.

How cold is too cold, when talking about temperatures? I encourage everyone to be safe at all times and consult your doctor if there are any questions. In January of this year, I ran a half marathon in -6 degree temperatures, layered up properly and felt great! A few years back, I found my personal limit when I ran in -17 degrees for 6 miles; my body told me it was time to stop and get warm. Never wear cotton when it's below freezing, and always listen to the cues of your body.

Fresh air is good for the soul. Safety first, but you won't ever find me on a treadmill. Snow covered roads and ice won't stop me. Lace up those duct-taped shoes and hit the ground running!

- Rebekah Deal

{Rebekah is training for the OC100 which she has run many times. In addition to the OC100 she runs many races throughout the year.}





Crackle. Snap. Crunch. Snort. Chirp. Or growl?

No matter where you are in the 6,250 acres in the Park between the north end near Titusville or the southern end near Oil City; on the hilltops or Creekside, you will experience encounters with the most amazing variety of wildlife.

The resilience of the Park’s ecosystem from near total obliteration approximately 150 plus years ago to the lush and abundant natural preserve never ceases to astound even the most leisurely hiker.

Among the many photographers who haunt the Park for their best shots, here are a few highlights from two local wildlife photographers who have assembled a prolific array of photos featuring the wide variety of birds and animals that call the Park their home. Nancy Hunt of Swamprat Photography is also the local restaurant owner of Coal Oil Johnny’s located near the northeastern edge of the Park. Timothy Rudisille Photography is local to the southern side of the Park. Both photographers have spent many hours over the years seeking to capture the stunning creatures of the Park that we all enjoy. More photos from both Nancy and Tim can be found on their Facebook pages. ~ Tambra Sabatini



Thank you Tim and Nancy for sharing.

Tim’s are to the left.

Nancy’s are to the right.



Over-The-Hill Gang

Persistent cold weather and deep snow have significantly limited the activity of the Over The Hill Gang this winter. We have processed firewood for the shelters but deep snow has made it very difficult for the Park maintenance crew to access logs the past several weeks. However, we should soon be able to resume working on firewood.

We have worked on equipment maintenance, including chainsaws and weed trimmers, although it is difficult to visualize trimming weeds while there is over a foot of snow on the trails.

The gang has removed a couple of trees that were blocking trails but we will have to wait for a significant thaw before we are able to inspect the entire trail system. We do have a list of maintenance projects to address this spring and summer.

Enjoy the trails and the beauty of our Park.

Denny Pattison

For the Over the Hill Gang.



President's Report

Sharing Winter Together

Friends of Oil Creek
Board of Directors

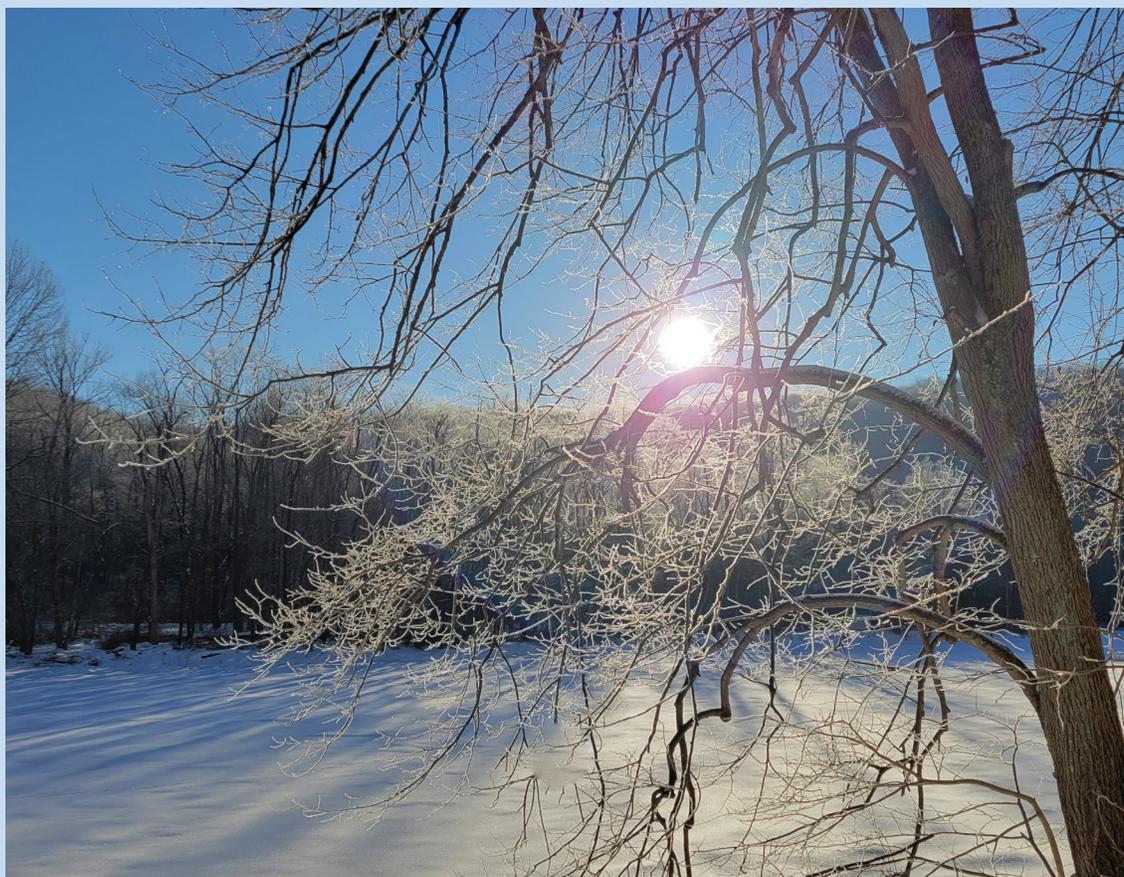
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Oil Creek State Park is big enough for all winter enthusiasts including cross country skiers, snowshoers, dog walkers, hikers, and runners to share and enjoy. During winter, just 12 miles of trails are designated for cross country skiing only. The trails are machine groomed and track set making for safe and enjoyable classical skiing. Much time, effort, and money goes into the grooming, and skiers pay a trail fee for the experience that often only lasts a month or two. It doesn't take much for the tracks to be ruined and made unsafe for the skiers if someone walks or snow shoes on them.

The rest of the park which includes 36 miles of the Girard Trail and 9 miles of the bike trail are available for all other winter activities. The purpose and beauty of snowshoeing is that it can be done anywhere. This is not so for skiers. Hikers, dog walkers, and runners also have a lot of options. Burns and Russell Corners Roads, which have no winter maintenance, can also be used for these activities as well.

My wish is that everyone can get out and enjoy the spectacular beauty of the park in winter and breathe in the fresh and invigorating cold air but with the understanding and consideration for the unique special needs of the skiers and their groomed trails during their short season. There is plenty of room for everyone in Oil Creek State Park!

Peg Sims
Chair FOCSP



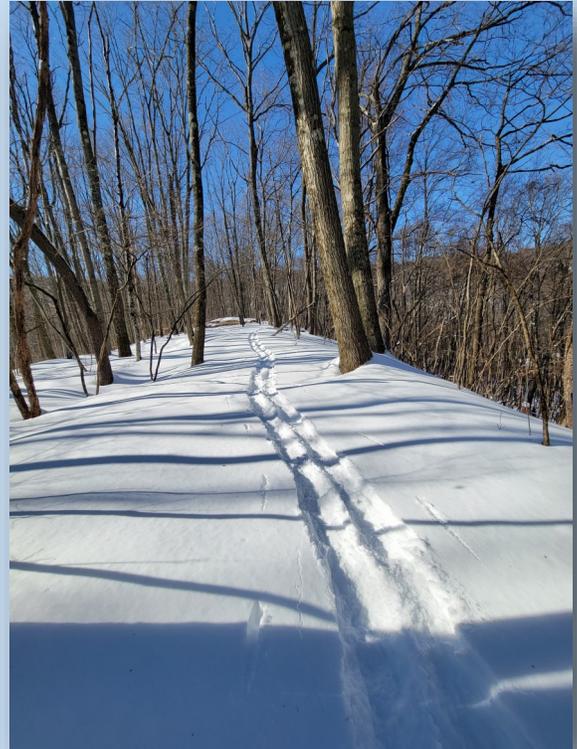
Membership

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

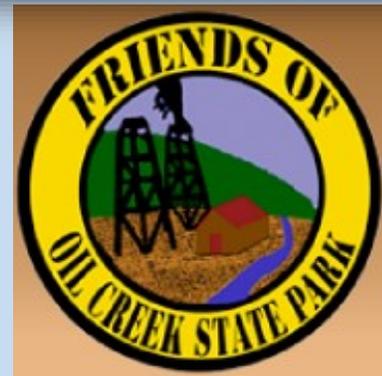
Your membership helps maintain existing projects in Oil Creek State Park. Your contributions also help maintain new initiatives in the Park. Your membership also helps to maintain the Gerard hiking trail, the bike trail, and the ski trails. In addition, these resources fund the “Over the Hill Gang”.

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.