



“Canoes on Wheels” Program

Scott Peterson, Executive Director, Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters (www.fotsch.org)

Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters is an energetic, four-year old, citizen-based organization that has a strong commitment to community outreach as part of our mission to protect, preserve and celebrate the upper St. Croix River and its watershed.

Recent examples are our June 2008 St. Croix Riverfest community/watershed celebration, our stipend-based youth stream monitoring program for Solon Springs high school students, and our financial support for a freshwater mussel study conducted by Matthew Berg’s Grantsburg High School Advanced Research Biology class.

Our current outreach initiative is “Canoes on Wheels.” This program will make available a canoe trailer, eight canoes, and associated equipment to local schools, lake associations and civic groups on a scheduled basis. The Canoes on Wheels program provides enough canoes to take a high school class or other lake/civic group on an outdoor adventure to learn first-hand about the wonders of our natural resources. We are working closely with local teachers who will integrate these outing opportunities and state standards into their curriculums. They will provide positive education and outdoor experiences for the next generation of public stewards of our natural resources.

This adult-supervised program will help provide support for grades 9-12 curriculums (e.g., Science, Ecology, Biology, Aquatic Studies including invasive species identification, History, PhyEd), and will be the basis for on-going partnerships with these schools and students.

In addition to providing funding for the equipment, we are helping to develop teacher workshops and suggested curriculum materials for three schools in our watershed: Solon Springs, Drummond (Barnes), and Northwood (Gordon/Wascott).

This work is being spearheaded by John Kudlas, one of our Board members. John has 35 years of high school science teaching (Biology and Ecology) and curriculum development experience, and has developed “activity-based” outdoor ecology programs.

As a brief history, as part of St. Croix Riverfest we held a watershed conference and presented a local student with a state-wide youth water-quality monitoring award from the UW-Extension Water Action Volunteer program. She was given a scholarship by Bayfield LWCD to a conservation camp as part of the award. The student (a high school junior) expressed concern that she would not be eligible to attend, as she had never canoed and the camp program included many paddling activities. Further investigation showed that many local students never have a paddling experience before high school graduation. We felt this was a situation where our organization could and should help provide these opportunities to our students. A quick look found strong community interest in a canoe-equipment scheduling program. As an aside, the student attended the camp and learned to canoe.

We strongly encourage other conservation organizations to roll-out similar programs and to play the following role: (1) fund and acquire the equipment and maintain it on an on-going basis; (2) establish and organize school contacts; (3) develop operational policies, help define school curriculums, define and host teacher workshops, and establish periodic evaluations; (4) establish contacts at partnering organizations such as the National Park Service, Department of Natural Resources, and nearby colleges to provide natural sciences and history interpreters for outings; (5) establish an on-going companion fund to defray operational expenses and to promote ecology-related education; (6) promote the program on an on-going basis; and (7) provide volunteers to help supervise outings and provide logistics support.

Individuals or organizations wishing to contribute to this important effort or who would like to share ideas regarding community outreach and youth program ideas should contact Scott Peterson at scott@fotsch.org.

FOTSCH will be offering a one day canoe-curriculum workshop this Spring in Solon Springs. Teachers and civic/lake association leaders who complete the workshop will have access to the canoe equipment. The objectives of the workshop are to: (1) develop basic canoe paddling, handling, portaging skills and ethics to safely explore local waters; (2) review safety concepts necessary to conduct classes and community groups within the aquatic environment; (3) learn how to utilize COW equipment and their responsibilities; (4) review state standards and how to merge them with aquatic curriculum activities; and (5) learn how to read water and weather. Individuals interested in attending or having questions concerning the workshop should contact John Kudlas at 715-795-2031/jkudlas@cheqnet.net.