

Efforts to save state park are ongoing

By
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IVN Contributing Writer

Great strides have been achieved over the past year to keep Illinois River Forks State Park from being permanently dismantled by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD).

This latest chapter of the park's history goes back to 1996 when a Master Plan was created by OPRD with local and government stakeholders to develop park facilities. However, OPRD never followed through on funding this plan.

Since 1996, the I.V. Community Response Team (IVCRT) acquired a grant and installed a pavilion at the park. The IVCRT became the Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCDO) which then became the fiscal sponsor for Back Country Horsemen, led by Sue Riegel Williams, to develop seven miles of equestrian and hiking trails on the west side of the river.

The primary issue threatening the survival of the Forks has been the fact that 80 acres in the center of the park are owned by the federal government's Bureau of Land Management. Until seven years ago, the acreage was leased by the state; but since that time, the federal and state governments have failed to sign a new lease.

The 50-year-old lease agreement with BLM stipulated that OPRD must return the 80 acres to nature – and tear out the paved roads, all buildings and improvements, if control of the land were to revert to BLM. This almost happened

last September.

"It's understandable that the state doesn't want to develop property it doesn't own," states IVCDO president Roger Brandt. "It's comparable to someone not wanting to spend money to renovate a house he's only renting."

In November 2011, the OPRD Board of Commissioners decided to close Forks State Park and the agency informed the IVCDO of the decision in July 2012. A delegation representing IVCDO, the City of Cave Junction and others traveled to Salem to appeal the decision in August; and after much negotiation, OPRD committed to a one year Adopt-a-Park agreement with the IVCDO. If successful, a five-year agreement will be established with the IVCDO being responsible for organizing volunteers to help with routine maintenance, vandalism and storm mitigation. Cultural and nature-based interpretive programs for residents and valley visitors might also take place.

A planning team of IVCDO and OPRD representatives has worked steadily since January to create this innovative program. OPRD recently hired Justin Aiken as a part-time ranger for the park. Aiken has worked for state parks in Eugene and Florence and most recently in Massachusetts as a supervisor in historic preservation. Aiken will work at the Forks between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays.

"I've been impressed with how diligently OPRD representatives have worked to help our community keep Forks Park open," Brandt said. "At a time when budgets are shrinking, OPRD has invested a great deal of effort to give us an opportunity to keep the Forks open as a community project. We have five years to demon-

strate how this is going to work and our efforts will determine if the park gate stays open or if it will close once and for all."

The park will be closed from dusk on June 26 to June 28. Beginning at 7 a.m. June 27, crews will seal and repaint the parking lot and road into the park. Park supervisors are also in the process of installing vault toilets and securing

a new well site. Another potential development might be the installation of a state park sign, near Hwy. 199, similar to standard entrance signage for most state parks. Inquiries will be made as to whether the county or ODOT controls potential sites. The IVCDO will announce an organizing meeting in the near future to find volunteers to help with park maintenance.



The Forks Park planning team met at the KBB / SOG gallery this week. Back Row L to R: Jan Walker, Jack Walker, Roger Brandt, Justin Akin, Nancy McLeod, Tammy Baumann, Menno Kraai. Front Row: Kenny Houck, Willa Gustavson and Curtis Smith.



Cub Scouts (left photo) from pack 880 present a sample knot board to the Illinois Valley Volunteer Firefighters Association. Wednesday, June 5. (L-R), Cole Conner, Zachary Burns, Tommy Medina, Austin Sitton, Activities Coordinator Robert Sitton (in the back) Deborah Land presented cupcakes as a way to show appreciation to the Volunteer Firefighters for helping her family.

New members (right photo) are being sworn in to the Illinois Valley Volunteer Firefighters Association. Leading the swearing in is President Elect Jeff Bradshaw (L-R) front- Bryan Sowell, Austin Elesky, Connie Hoke, Jeannette Rogers, (L-R) Back- Carol Davis court, Larry Smith, Ken Smith, Justin Mason, Chief Dennis Hoke, Tom McCauley, Emily Ring.



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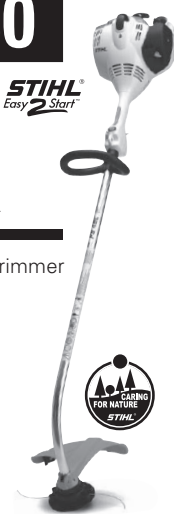
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