



Fall 2024

[friendsofmaplewoodstatepark@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmaplewoodstatepark@gmail.com)  
<https://friendsofmaplewood.org>

# The Maple Leaf

## MEMBER UPDATE

The fall colors in Maplewood State Park were astounding this year. Perhaps it was nature's way of saluting retiring Park Manager Don DelGreco.

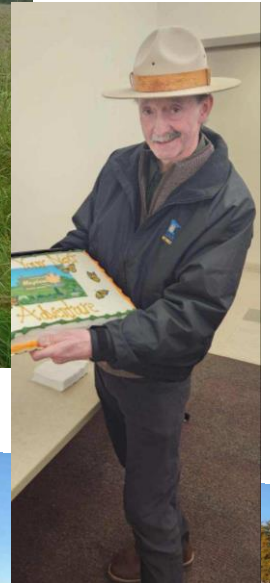
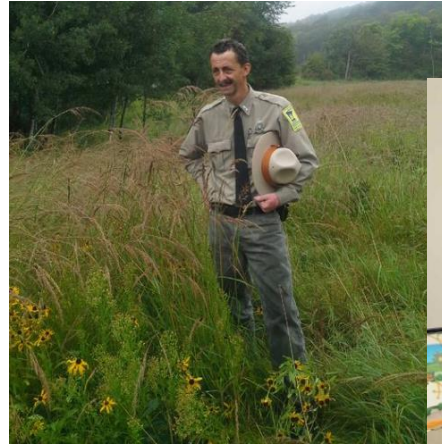
"I'm an artist. I'm a singer. I'm a biologist. Maybe a poet. Maybe a preacher," added Don Del Greco during his retirement announcement at the Friends of Maplewood annual meeting. Del Greco, long-time Park Manager at Maplewood State Park, is hanging up his park ranger hat after nearly forty years with the MN Department of Natural Resources.

Nearly every morning or evening, Del Greco climbs the Hallaway Hill trail to the overlook on south Lida Laka. When fall approaches, questions about peak leaf day in Maplewood State Park are common. "Peak color is the day you are here," is DelGreco's usual response.

DelGreco is a humble man who takes great joy in serving. "God is calling," he said. "I'm thankful for the gift of living—the gift of preserving natural resources for a new generation."

Del Greco and his wife won't be going far. "Maplewood captured my heart. . . Maplewood is our home."

Del Greco is leaving big shoes to fill. And a hat to match.



*Dear Don,  
We wish you the best of everything as you move on to your next great adventure. It has been a privilege and a pleasure working with you and witnessing your love for Maplewood State Park. Our park has never had a better friend.*

*Friends of Maplewood*

## Upcoming Events:

Candlelight Trek – February 22, 2025

Maple Syrup Education – April 12, 2025

## Heart of Lakes Trail Update

The Maplewood State Park segment of the Heart of the Lakes Trail in Otter Tail County is progressing rapidly. After weeks of delay earlier in the year, the dry fall helped the contractors make an astonishing amount of progress on the trail. We anticipate that by late fall two-thirds of the bike trail will be paved! It's an incredible feat given that in July we were prepared to finish it next year due to the unrelenting rain! We still have a long road ahead of us but it's shaping up to be a beautiful addition to the park. We hope to have it fully open and ready next summer! The 3.8-mile segment is the final part of the trail to be completed and will connect the Pelican Rapids and Perham segments.

The Heart of the Lakes Regional Trail is a 10-foot-wide, 32-mile-long, multi-use recreational trail that will connect the communities of Perham and Pelican Rapids via Maplewood State Park. The trail is an important component of the state and regional trail system in west central Minnesota and is intended for use by walkers, joggers, bicyclists, dog walkers, inline skaters, and snowmobilers. It provides direct access to several popular lakes and allows users to experience many breathtaking vistas.

"Building and constructing a sustainable trail through Maplewood State Park is a tremendous opportunity to create an outstanding outdoor recreational experience for future generations,"



## O'Brien hired as a Naturalist for Maplewood and Glendalough State Parks.



**Dora O'Brien hiking in south Lake Tahoe, before heading out to fly fish the alpine lakes.**

Dora O'Brien, the Park's new naturalist, "will bring a whole new way of approaching the park," said Don Del Greco. Dora brings a tremendous background in interpretation and a passion for sharing it. A park naturalist educates visitors about nature, including plants, animals, and geological formations. They lead programs and activities like nature walks, campfire talks, and demonstrations. The position will be shared with Glendalough Park.

Dora is originally from Livermore, California, a San Francisco Bay Area town. She spent summers at her family cabin in the Park Rapids area. She attended the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph and graduated in 2018 with a degree in environmental studies. After graduation, she moved back to California, working as an interpretive national park ranger intern and local park district naturalist. She is thrilled to be back in Minnesota.

Welcome Dora! We look forward to working with you!



## Four Days of Fall Fun

Friends of Maplewood hosted our annual autumn celebration during Leaf Days at Maplewood State Park. The gathering was an excellent opportunity to see the Park strut its dynamic colors and participate in family-fun activities. The four-day festival was held September 28-29 and October 5-6.

The event began in 2002 and has grown through the years. “We enjoy hosting the event,” said Scott Stenshoel, of Friends of Maplewood. “Our volunteers do a tremendous job of planning and organizing the activities and food.” There’s something for everyone at Leaf Days. “Some of our most popular events are building a birdhouse or feeder, shelling corn, making rope, and pressing apples for cider,” said Denise Laymon, President. Food was available for purchase at the Josh Hanson Memorial Picnic Shelter.

The event is a key fundraiser for Friends of Maplewood. “We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit,” said Laymon. “We rely on donations and memberships to fund activities like Leaf Days, the Candlelight Trek, and our summer workshops.”



### Ranger Update – Riley Finnegan, Acting Park Manager

It is difficult to capture what it’s like to be at Maplewood during the fall. Fortunately, you all have cherished memories of being in this colorful place of wonder to lean on when words fail me. As a first-time observer of the grandeur this place has to offer, I am impressed. Between September 26 (Leaf Days) and October 20 (MEA) Maplewood welcomed approximately 38,500 fall color enthusiasts. These folks were able to experience the same awe and wonder we all do when we visit. Park staff and Friends of Maplewood worked hard to prepare the park and what fall brings to Maplewood. I want to thank them and all of you for participating in such a wonderful time of the year.

#### “Father” Don Del Greco

As many of you know on October 1, 2024, after forty years of service for the State of Minnesota, Don Del Greco retired. Working with Don was a wonderful life changing experience. Maplewood was lucky to have him in the saddle as the manger. We are all sad to see him go but we are happy he has the rest of his life to pursue his many passions. Regardless of his retirement Don will still be at Maplewood both physically and spiritually. Keep an eye out on Hallaway Hill now and then and you might catch a glimpse of him taking breathtaking photos.

#### Maplewood State Park

39721 Park Entrance Road, Pelican Rapids, MN 56572

Phone: 218-863-8383

[https://stateparks.com/maplewood\\_state\\_park\\_in\\_minnesota.html](https://stateparks.com/maplewood_state_park_in_minnesota.html)



# Summer Events 2024



## Friends of Maplewood Misson

The MISSION of the Friends of Maplewood State Park is to support and encourage the Park's recreational, interpretive, educational and environmental activities through leadership, volunteerism, program development and fund raising.



## 2024 Projects

As 2024 comes to a close, we want our members to know how much we appreciate your support. Membership dues, memorials, and donations go toward events and projects in the park. Looking back on 2024:

- A new well was installed at the Sugar Shack.
- Friends purchased a small utility trailer.
- New hitching posts and more gravel were added to horse campsites.
- We rocked a FULL calendar of four-season events.
- Record attendance at Candlelight Trek and Maple Syrup Days.
- Partnered with Lake Region Electric on their annual meeting. More than 1,000 people attended.
- Defibrillator Donated!
- Evensons of Pelican Rapids provided a large trailer to store our items instead of purchasing a trailer or paying for a storage site.
- Purchased a new refrigerator for the Josh Hanson Memorial Shelter.
- Sugar Shack maple syrup volunteers collected and boiled between 900-1,000 gallons of raw sap, resulting in about 25 gallons of finished/bottled syrup.
- Maple Syrup Education Days resulted in 1,400 visitors!
- Close to 9,000 people visited the park during the Friends' Leaf Days four-day event.
- Friends of Maplewood applied for a grant from the MN Horse Council for phase 1 to install corrals in horse camp. Stay tuned!



## New and Cool!

We're pleased to announce that we've adopted new online payment options, so you won't have to write a check unless you want to. We've partnered with PayPal to offer payment through major credit cards, Venmo, and PayPal.

Simply click the link or scan the QR code below to complete your membership form, or donate to Friends of Maplewood. You'll receive an automatic email receipt for your records.

<https://form.jotform.com/241023977604153>



## Maplewood State Park adding a 'Boundary Waters' experience

Maplewood State Park is excited to announce a new camping experience on Beers Lake's north island. "The park's first 'boat in' site will be a rustic secluded site," said Riley Finnegan, Acting Park Manager. "It will be a paddle-in-only site due to the sensitive nature of the access point. The site has a food locker, pit toilet, fire ring, picnic table, and two tent pads." A maximum of six occupants are allowed and the site can be reserved by contacting the park or online. "You'll be on the island by yourself," said Finnegan.



## Coming Soon - Friends clothing, hats, and household items!

Friends will soon be offering items for purchase with our logo! We are creating a new online store with clothing, hats, and household items for purchase through a secure portal. We will also be partnering with local vendors for event items. Follow us on Facebook for the most up-to-date information.



## Leaf Days 2024!

# Shout out!

To Dave and Deb Sjostrom  
for the great stash of oak wood!

Our volunteers are busy  
splitting and stacking it for  
the Maple Syrup season!

THANK YOU!!





## 2024 Memorials (Since spring 2024)

### IN MEMORY

### Given By

### NEW LIFETIME MEMBER

Erv Ohman

Iris Ohman

Vergas State Bank, Vergas, MN

Walter and LaVonne Albright

Thomas Albright

Matthew (no last name provided)

Mary Jane Zeini

Richard Nord

Denise Laymon

James Ruud

Brian & Naomi Barber

Thomas Thysell

Christine Thysell

Judy Januszewski

Bill and Tammy Januszewski

Walter Januszewski

Todd and Deb Trygstad

Rodney Ellingson

Lyle Haugrud

Connie Michaelson

Paul & Connie Miller

### Board of Directors

Denise Laymon, President

Linda Today, Vice President

Beth Pladson, Treasurer

Angie Stevenson, Secretary

Lynn Carlson

Judy Engebretson

Ruth Holmgren

Jerry Pederson

Scott Stenshoel

### IN HONOR OF

### Given By

"the Cousins"

Gene & Noreen Smedstad

### 2024 Financial Donations

Doug & Sue Bruggeman

Erik Osberg

Tom Coleman

Jerry & Kim Pederson

Dotty Egge

Angie Stevenson

Jeff & Sue McCracken

Linda Today

Curt & Marie Mecklenburg

### *Leave a Legacy*

Thinking of leaving a gift in your will? Consider a bequest to the Friends of Maplewood State Park.

Make a tax-free gift with an IRA charitable rollover.

Friends of Maplewood is a 501(c)3 Organization

### **We Take Pride in Our Park**

Our organization consists of members who enjoy and appreciate this great natural resource.

We work with park management on various projects and events  
so you and your family can enjoy the park year-round.

# Time to renew your 2025 membership!

## FRIENDS OF MAPLEWOOD

### 3 WAYS TO DONATE OR BECOME A MEMBER

1. Scan the QR code and choose the payment option that works for you.
2. Complete and return this application with a check **payable to Friends of Maplewood** and mail it to PO Box 259, Pelican Rapids, MN 56572.
3. Click on this link to access our membership form and payment options.  
<https://form.jotform.com/241023977604153>



**Choose one:** ☐ I am a new member. ☐ I am renewing my membership for 2025.

**Choose one:** ☐ Single \$10 ☐ Couple \$15 ☐ Family \$30 ☐ Lifetime \$500

☐ I am interested in hearing more about volunteer opportunities! **(check if interested)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City State Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Send my newsletter by ☐ email ☐ mail

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Additional Donation in MEMORY OF \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Additional Donation in HONOR OF \_\_\_\_\_

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Cut here and return to Friends of Maplewood at PO Box 259, Pelican Rapids, MN 56572

**Friends of Maplewood**

P.O. Box 259

Pelican Rapids, MN 56572