

1000 Islands Environmental Center

February 2026 Naturalist Report

Brad Garrity – Naturalist, 1000 Islands

Admin/Finance

- Brad and Kat attended the Wisconsin Parks and Recreation Association conference in Wisconsin Dells with others from Community Enrichment, Parks Dept and Street Dept. Sessions and trade shows were held over two days that provided new insights and ideas for the Conservancy Zone including trail signage, educational displays and playscape items, as well as topics on native plants and grasses, urban trees, leadership, team building, inclusion, and more. We were able to network with other professionals in similar roles and make some key connections.
- Cassie received her new computer, a long overdue upgrade! All staff now have updated computers within the past two years. The intern computer is still an older model but was updated with current software and cleaned by Tim in IT and will be sufficient for their work.
- The Summer Intern position was posted at the end of February, and we have received many applications of which about half are qualified and viable candidates for the position. Phone interviews begin in mid-March.
- Brad attended the biannual NEWNA meeting at Neville Public Museum in Green Bay, networking and collaborating with other nature centers and organizations on a variety of topics and current events. Of note was the presentation by Neville staff and tour of their upgraded Discovery Center for kids which features many hands-on stations, a gorgeous mural that ties into the learning, and multilingual books and materials.
- The 1000 Islands Committee Ordinance modifications that reflect the changes from a governance committee to advisory were approved and adopted by Council. Attorney Greenwood advised that the ordinance update and language supersede any existing 1000 Islands operating policies or resolutions to the contrary, and City policy and operating procedures take precedence where there is any conflict with 1000 Islands policy. 1000 Islands is able to continue with department specific policy where allowed under the City guidelines and/or Mayor or Council approval.

Education / Programming

- Wisconsin DNR Hunter's Safety was held at the Center in early February through River Valley Outdoorsmen. Ron Van Nuland coordinated and taught the class to around 20 participants. This year was earlier than in past years and was just as successful. This continues to be a very popular program, and many people in Kaukauna remember coming to 1000 Islands for Hunter's Safety.

- Bald Eagle Nest Watch Training was held via Zoom on Feb 7th and the Nest Watch officially began February 15th, coinciding with the usual start of nesting season in the central section of the state.
- A winter survival skills and tracking program was held Feb 7th, led by Naturalist Garrity. We had 25 people show up and it was a gorgeous day. We were able to snowshoe along the Valley Trail, marking our first public snowshoeing program since 2020, and the first since getting the new snowshoes in 2021.
- Kat put together a wonderful self-guided program for participation in the Great Backyard Bird Count through Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants had many resources provided for bird identification, use of binoculars, and support in downloading and setting up the e-bird app.
- Brian and Paula Jacobs, along with Megan Knuth led a Valentine's Day Lip Balm Make and Take program. This popular program gives the opportunity to learn about products made of bees wax and then a hands-on maker session to produce flavored lip balms. Given the popularity of these types of programs, two sessions were held with 18 attending the morning and 21 in the afternoon.
- The Fox Valley Technical College Environmental Education class spent an afternoon with Brad to learn more about 1000 Islands and how we develop and deliver programming. They were presented with our Sugar Bush Maple Syrup program and had hands on training as they will be participating at Pancake and Porkie Breakfast presenting educational information and hand-on experiences.
- Our Junior Naturalists were invited to volunteer and work alongside the FVTC students at Pancake and Porkie at the educational stations.
- We had some off-site field trips at Park Community Charter School. Brad presented a lesson on Sound and Light with learning stations for two First Grade classes, and both Brad and Kat presented for two 3rd grade classes on Fossils and led the groups in making their own plaster of paris fossils.
- We had a special Saturday Edition of 1000 Little Wonders which was done drop-in style. Participants could read stories, had a bird themed scavenger hunt for the hiking portion, and were able to do a fun craft inside the Center.

Building and Grounds

- A group from SOAR volunteered, helping to spruce up around the Nature Center, as well as doing some early cleaning and prep in the Sugar Shack.
- Eric has built a new enclosure for Gonzo the Russian Tortoise with a larger viewing space as well as an upper deck with a ramp for Gonzo's enrichment. He and Kat are working on locating the proper reptile lamps, and as long as Gonzo is done with his brumation period, he should be moving in very soon.
- The painted turtles have moved into their new aquarium. It will eventually be moved into the Fox River Room by the fish tanks once we are ready to remove Gonzo's old enclosure as the turtle tank currently sits on top of that display.

- The solar water heater has spring a leak and has now been emptied. We are working on quotes for a new tank as well as energy cost savings calculations to decide on eventual replacement or removal of the system. Through the process it was discovered that a few of our valves for shutting down water to the solar tank system and also for diverting to full use of the main water heater had failed and were replaced.