

View from the Hill

A newsletter for friends and members of Friends of Mosquito Hill, Inc. | Winter 2025



Mosquito Hill Nature Center's New Era: The Next Chapter-Part 4 Master Plan

By Naturalist Adam "Doc" Brandt

What is a Master Plan? A future vision and policy guide for the Outagamie County Parks Department and specifically Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC). A master plan is the document that establishes the extent and types of uses on a public property, gives a general overview of facility development and acts as a guide for effective and efficient long-term planning.

In 2018, Outagamie County Parks initiated a series of listening sessions and surveys to develop a master plan for MHNC. In the 2018 plan, several concept drawings were prepared that included campgrounds, zip lines, pavilions, multi-use buildings, boardwalks through the lowlands, amphitheaters and so much more. That master planning process was not completed due to other parks' department priorities; however, MHNC needs this vital tool to function.

Parks Director Justin Schumacher and I revisited the 2018 master plan draft and then reviewed the original surveys and the data collected in 2018.

From this information, we revised the master plan concept to one that we thought best fit the mission, values and long-term needs of MHNC. This revised plan was presented to the Outagamie County Property, Airport, Recreation & Economic Development Committee. After many questions and a lot of discussion, the group concluded that we needed fresh data to ensure the master plan fit the current needs of the public.

We received approval to amend our contract with Rettler Corporation of Stevens Point, WI, to reopen the public survey and hold additional listening sessions. Rettler Corporation is a consultant firm hired by Outagamie

(continued on page 2)



Our Mission

The Friends of Mosquito Hill (FOMH) support, promote and enhance Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC). We realize this mission through volunteerism, fundraising and our shared passion for nature.

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*Published by
Friends of Mosquito
Hill, Inc.
New London, WI
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The Next Chapter-Part 4 *(continued from page 1)*

County to assist in helping to collect and interpret the data and information from the surveys and input sessions. For more than 35 years, Rettler Corporation has specialized in parks, recreation and open space design.

Through the month of October, we held sessions in Seymour, Hortonville, Combined Locks, Freedom, Appleton and at MHNC. Simultaneously, we reopened the public survey and collected feedback through early November. We will review all of the feedback and revise the master plan based on the comments and suggestions we have received from the community input sessions and surveys.

We will present this again to the Property, Airport, Recreation & Economic Development Committee and with their approval seek formal adoption from the Outagamie County supervisors. From there we can implement a master plan to help guide projects, collaborations, programs and funding requests. We will be able to make informed decisions that allow for efficient use of resources and budgets. The master plan will be an invaluable tool for our growth and development.

This has been a year of learning and collecting information. I started as the new naturalist in January and have learned so much about Mosquito Hill, the staff, the Friends of Mosquito Hill and all the visitors that make this such a wonderful place.

Thank you to all who participated in this process. We value your opinions and feedback and we are listening to each of you in developing a master plan. We look forward to sharing the final plan in early 2026.

Why Plan?

- Manage growth and change
- Provide for orderly and predictable development
- Protect environmental resources
- Set priorities for developing and maintaining infrastructure and public facilities
- Create a framework for future policy decisions
- Promote open, democratic planning



Friends of Mosquito Hill Master Plan Survey Results

by Keith Bassage, President, Friends of Mosquito Hill

In early October, a survey was sent to Friends of Mosquito Hill (FOMH) membership households. The survey's focus was to seek opinions and positions on a few issues related to the development of the Outagamie County's Mosquito Hill Nature Center's (MHNC) master plan.

The MHNC draft plan currently has a great deal of focus on future development of the former Kamp's property on top of the hill. The draft plan is causing concern to neighbors, FOMH members and the public about increased noise, loss of habitat and not aligning with MHNC's mission. FOMH contributed to the purchase of the Kamp's residence with the desire to keep it wild and protect MHNC from further development.

The request was made to return the master plan survey as quickly as possible due to the short deadline for getting input shared with Outagamie County (OC). On behalf of the FOMH board, I would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete and return it promptly. We are also very pleased with the number of members who participated. There were 200 surveys mailed out; more than 100 surveys were returned and are still coming in as of this writing. There is something

that stands firm in the responses so far. There was unanimous positive consensus to three of the questions:

1. Restoring the hilltop area to a more natural habitat area, such as prairie, or bird-friendly habitat, or supporting a dark sky environment with walking trails would be more in line with the stated educational mission.
2. Any amount of development on the former residential site will reduce the serenity of the east side of the hill.
3. As much as possible, any building addition should be added on to or near the existing nature center building.

Thank you

*to all members,
supporters and
Friends for
returning the
FOMH survey
and participating
in listening
sessions.*

The FOMH board utilized these three core opinions to develop a statement of position for our agreed-upon desired future project direction. We also used the data collected on the other six questions to guide our final statement that will be shared with OC. FOMH's goal is and always has been to support MHNC's mission.

On behalf of the FOMH board and membership, we hope for the success of a new or revised master plan that does not include an event-focused space on top of the hill.

View From The Hill is published four times per year by Friends of Mosquito Hill, Inc., New London, WI.

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Tuesday-Friday:
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Saturday & Sunday:
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

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Layout & Design - Jayne
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NEW Printing, Appleton

Outlook Graphics, Neenah



No matter how technologically advanced we become, how fast we travel, how much stuff we accumulate, humans will always need a place like Mosquito Hill Nature Center," said Mary Swifka, staff assistant. "We all need wild places to unplug, to slow down, to remember that it is Mother Earth that feeds our bodies and souls. I'm grateful that our community knows and remembers that on some level, and continues to support us with their financial gifts and gifts of time."

- Post Crescent article June 30, 2014

Calendar of Events



www.mosquitohill.com

Please note: Advance registration and payment are required for all programs. To register and pay online, please visit: <https://friends-of-mosquito-hill.square.site/program-registration>. You may also register over the phone and pay by credit card or mail your check payable to MHNC. To check the status of a program, visit www.mosquitohill.com or our Facebook page (@MosquitoHillNatureCenter). Please contact us with questions at 920.779.6433 or mosquitohill@outagamie.org.



Wall Basket

Sunday, December 7, 2025
10:00 AM–3:00 PM

Weave this wall basket that can catch your mail or hang your keys. It can also hang on a doorknob and be filled with seasonal decoration. It can be woven in very basic colors or themed around a particular holiday—it is your choice, as Jeni will come with many beautiful, dyed reeds to weave into your basket.

Class fee: \$50 Registration through Woven Blessings Website



Snowshoe Rentals

Every Tuesday through Sunday
10:00 AM–2:00 PM

Take advantage of the snow and enjoy the quiet beauty of Mosquito Hill Nature Center. We have snowshoes to fit just about everyone, ages 4 and older. Sleds are available to assist younger trekkers on their journey. Advanced reservation for groups of 8 or more is recommended. Please call ahead to check on trail conditions.

Cost: \$4/adult, \$3 students/seniors.
No charge for snowshoe rental for FOMH members.



Shiocton Christmas Bird Count

Friday, December 20, 2025
8:00 AM–4:30 PM

Take a break from the holiday hustle and join nature center staff and volunteers for a day of counting birds in the field. We'll break for a potluck lunch. Call ahead (920-779-6433) if you would like to take part. No charge.



Holiday Make & Take

Saturday, December 13, 2025
9:00–11:00 AM or 11:00 AM–1:00 PM

You will not want your kids to miss this one! With the assistance of our volunteer team, they will make and wrap eight unique gifts. Voila! Your child's holiday shopping is complete. The crafts are geared to elementary-aged children. In addition, join us for the Bake Sale and Holiday Sale at Hillside Gift Shop.

Cost: \$20/child





Winter Family Fun Day

Saturday, January 31, 2026
12:00 PM–3:00 PM

Join us for some family-friendly activities at our annual fun day in the snow. Activities will include winter fun, games, sledding and winter crafts. Warm yourself by the campfire and roast some marshmallows. Hot food and beverages will be for sale. Stick around to cheer on the bike race participants. More information is available on the [MHNC Facebook page](#).

No admission fee.



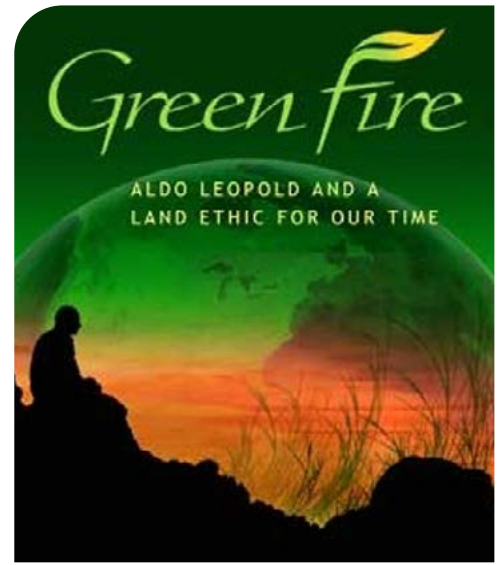
Photo by Gregory T Photography

Bike the Hill Fat Tire Bike Race

Saturday, January 31, 2026 | 2:00 PM

Have you ever wanted to bike the trails at Mosquito Hill? Well, here is your chance. This one-hour race course will loop through the various terrains and habitats of Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC). The race will be open to fat tire bikes only (tires must be 3.7+ inches wide). This will be the fourth annual race. Categories for males and females are age 16 years and younger, and 17 years and older. Special thanks to Blake and Faith Schlaeppli and Greg Prellwitz for helping to organize the event. Outagamie County Parks Department prohibits the use of bikes on its trails, including at MHNC. However, this is a one-time event and an exception to this ordinance. The registration fee covers race entry, race swag and the after-party ticket for food and beverage for the racer. Fans are welcome to attend the after-party and winner ceremony that will feature food and beverages for purchase in the nature center building. All proceeds benefit MHNC.

Cost: \$40 Early Bird through December 24, 2025; \$50 December 25, 2025 to January 31, 2026.



Celebrating Aldo Leopold Weekend: Green Fire Documentary Screening

Saturday, March 7, 2026 | 11:30 AM

Green Fire is a full-length documentary about legendary conservationist Aldo Leopold. The film explores Leopold's life in the early part of the 20th century and the many ways his land ethic idea continues to be applied all over the world today. The 73-minute film shares highlights from Leopold's life and extraordinary career, explaining how he shaped conservation in the 20th century and still inspires people today. Although probably best known as the author of the conservation classic, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold is also renowned for his work as an educator, philosopher, forester, ecologist and wilderness advocate. No charge.



Wish List

- Large holiday bags for Holiday Make & Take
- Gift wrap and gift bags for Holiday Make & Take
- Fabric ribbon for Holiday Make & Take crafts
- Gift cards for Kwik Trip, Hobby Lobby, Amazon, etc.
- Holiday baked goods or candy for Holiday Make & Take

Naturalist's Corner

Winter Owling

by Adam J. Brandt, Park Ranger

Owls are birds that often capture the curiosity and fascination of many people. With their beauty, grace and mysterious nocturnal habits, it is easy to see why. These birds of prey are packed with unique adaptations from head to toe. Their beautiful colors and patterns perfectly camouflage them. Their large eyes and sensitive ears allow them to locate prey with pinpoint accuracy in broad daylight or the darkest nights. Their flight feathers are lined with extra “fringe” that allows them to fly silently. Their legs and feet are covered in feathers that help maintain that silence as well as also allow them to stay warmer than diurnal (daytime) birds, even on the coldest winter night. Of course, we cannot forget about their impressive talons with such strength that ensures any prey they catch is a guaranteed meal.

One of the most impressive and iconic owls we have in Wisconsin is the Great Horned Owl. These birds are comfortable living in deep wood lots or even suburban neighborhoods. Despite their name, those are not horns on their heads. Those “ear tufts” are not ears either. They are decorative feathers that can help the owl display emotion or disguise their presence.

While they are most active after dark, owls can be spotted during daylight hours as they attempt to blend into their environment or catch a midday nap. Since they

impressive owls can hold their own, however, and are very strong. They are one of the only predators that actively hunt both skunks and porcupines.



Image by HMaria from Pixabay.com

Winter is the perfect time to watch and listen for these birds. Great Horned Owls are one of the earliest nesting birds in the state. While most birds lay their eggs in the spring and summer, these owls lay their eggs in January and February. A big reason for this is their nesting behavior, because they do not build their own nests. Instead, they will use a big tree cavity or take over nests made by crows, hawks or herons.

To avoid competition, the owls use the nests and get out before those other birds are ready to use the same nest. Because of this unique behavior, they begin their courtship and stake out their territory in December and January. Like other birds, this means they become more vocal.

Great Horned Owls have a traditional owl “hoot” that is a deep, resonating “Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoooo!” During these winter months, you can listen for this call after dark.

are experts of camouflage, spotting them can be difficult. You can sometimes rely on other birds, especially crows and blue jays, for help. These birds will often “mob” owls if they find them. If you see or hear an angry group of crows, it may just lead you to an owl. These

Volunteer Voice

*"What good is the warmth of summer,
without the cold of winter to give it
sweetness?"*

~John Steinbeck

2025 Volunteer Service Award–Catherine Yurk

by Amy Cutter, Volunteer Coordinator

Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC) staff and Friends of Mosquito Hill (FOMH) are so fortunate to have such a fantastic volunteer support group. We thank you all for sharing your time and talents to fulfill the missions of both the Friends group and the nature center. MHNC staff are able to offer programs, outreach and events because of the volunteer contributions of time.

The 2025 Volunteer Service Award was presented to Cathy Yurk at the volunteer recognition meeting. We are grateful for Cathy Yurk's continuous act of helping everyone care for MHNC; it is a well-deserved award for her dedication. She is a special volunteer who jumps into planning, set-up, event activities and clean-up at all of the events. Her organization skills are amazing and very helpful. Every detail of the event, craft or task is done with care.

There is so much preparation before the events, and Cathy helps every step of the way. Cathy has given hundreds of volunteer hours to support MHNC. She is always enthusiastic and willing to assist. She is the best button-maker ever! She is also serving as the new membership chairperson and a *View from the Hill* editor, as well as working with the event committee for the FOMH. Your dedication is so appreciated.



Volunteer Appreciation

Pat Brown has decided to retire from her role on the editing crew of *View from the Hill*. We thank Pat for her 25+ years of dedicated service. This retirement means we could use some extra “eyes” on the newsletter. If you are interested in filling the vacancy, please email mosquitohill@outagamie.org.

Friends of Mosquito Hill, Inc.

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**Membership Categories:
(Please check one)**

- ☐ Senior Citizen/Student [\$15]
- ☐ Individual [\$20]
- ☐ Family [\$35]
- ☐ Business/Organization [\$50]
- ☐ Patron [\$50]
- ☐ Supporting [\$200]
- ☐ Benefactor [\$500]
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