

»» NEWSLETTER ««

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER

"The color of springtime is in the flowers, the color of winter is in the imagination." - Unknown.



THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Upcoming Programs | 2 |
| From the Director | 3 |
| The Amazing Aurora | 4 |
| Snowy Programs Return | 5 |
| Conservation Corner | 6 |
| Business Members | 7 |
| RBNC Board/Staff/Hours | 8 |

River Bend Nature Center's mission is to inspire curiosity, respect, and care for nature.

QUARTERLY TOP NEWS



»»» LUMINARY SNOWSHOE HIKES

Save the date and join us for a family friendly event **Thursday, January 29 and February 12 from 6:00-8:00 pm**. Snowshoe rentals available, but you can bring your own. Hit the trails under twinkling lights then warm up with hot chocolate and a bonfire!

Pre-register online at rbnc.org/upcoming-programs

»»» ARTS & NATURE MEMBERSHIP

Membership promo runs January 15 through March 21. Join us at the Paradise Center for the Arts for a kick-off event to become a joint member of RBNC & the PCA!

Thursday, January 15, 5:00-7:00 pm
The Paradise Center for the Arts

ARTS & NATURE FAMILY MEMBERSHIP

River Bend NATURE CENTER - PARADISE CENTER Arts for the A

Members Night: Jan 15th, 5-7 pm @ The PCA
Give yourself the gift of Art & Nature this year!
Promo runs Jan 15 - March 21, 2026



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

visit www.rbnc.org/upcoming-programs for more details and to register

➤➤➤ JANUARY

Jan 3, 10-11am

Jan 3, 11am-12pm

Jan 5, 9:30-11 am

Jan 5, 1-3 pm

Jan 10, 10-12 pm

Jan 19, 9:30-11 am

Jan 19, 1-3 pm

Jan 21, 12-2pm

Jan 24, 10-12 pm

Jan 29, 6-8 pm

Jan 31, 10-11:30 am

Bagels & Birds

Storytime: Winter Animals

Little Sprouts: Animal Tracks

Homeschool: Animal Adaptations

Stewardship Day: Biochar

Little Sprouts: Icy Weather

Homeschool: Snowshoeing

Lunch & Learn: RBNC Land Work

Stewardship Day: Biochar

Luminary Snowshoe Hike

Little Sprouts: Icy Weather

➤➤➤ FEBRUARY

Feb 2, 9:30-11am

Feb 2, 1-3 pm

Feb 7, 10-11 am

Feb 7, 11-12 pm

Feb 12, 6-8 pm

Feb 14, 10-12 pm

Feb 16, 9:30-11am

Feb 16, 1-3 pm

Feb 18, 12-2 pm

Feb 21, 10:30-12 pm

Feb 28, 10-12 pm

Little Sprouts: Rocks Rock!

Homeschool: Intro to Plant Life Cycle

Bagels and Birds

Story Time: The Mitten by Jan Barrett

Luminary Snowshoe Hike

Stewardship Saturday: Biochar

Little Sprouts: Animal Homes

Homeschool: Making Tracks

Lunch & Learn: Fruit of the Forest MN's

Edible Mushrooms

Little Sprouts: Animal Homes

Stewardship Saturday: Maple Syruping!

➤➤➤ MARCH

Mar 2, 9:30-11am

Mar 2, 1-3 pm

Mar 7, 10-11 am

Mar 7, 11-12 pm

Mar 14, 10-12 pm

Mar 16, 9:30-11am

Mar 16, 1-3 pm

Mar 18, 12-2 pm

Mar 21, 10:30-11:30 am

Mar 21, 12:30-1:30 pm

Little Sprouts: Weather

Homeschool: Intro to Maple Syruping

Bagels and Birds

Story Time: Maple Syruping

Stewardship Saturday: Maple Syruping

Little Sprouts: Maple Syruping

Homeschool: Syrup Making

Lunch & Learn: Saving MN's Pollinators

Maple Syruping Programs

Maple Syruping Programs

PLEASE BE PART OF INVESTING IN RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER

By Brad Bourn

Dear friends-

A few days ago, I opened up a wonderful piece of mail from a lifelong friend and supporter of River Bend. This friend told us that they were including a substantial gift in their will to the Nature Center. Now- I fully expect this friend to continue to come to brainstorming lunches with staff, volunteering for and enjoying River Bend for at least another fifty years. That said, it was the most lovely piece of mail I've opened all year and it reminds me just how important River Bend is to each of us.

As River Bend staff are leading an unprecedented period of growing our environmental education programs and while a whole generation of friends of River Bend are starting to plan and execute legacy gifts to the nature center, I wanted to take this opportunity for you to reengage with me, our leadership team, and board of directors over a coffee, lunch, phone call, or visit if you have time to ensure your investment makes the most impact.

As River Bend grows, our needs are becoming more complex and we have the ability to help facilitate your strategic giving goals to the nature center. Whether you're making a \$20 donation to River Bend this year, making us part of a required minimum distribution from your retirement account or are making River Bend part of your estate plan- Thank you. We'd love to have a conversation with you about how your gift can be best leveraged to make sure we have the resources we need today while planning for tomorrow's work to inspire curiosity, respect, and care for nature.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter and feel free to drop me a note or a phone call at bourn@rbnc.org or 507-332-7151

See you outside!



BEGIN YOUR NEW CAREER TODAY!

Interested in the Outdoor Conservation Career Pathway?
Free Winter and Spring Career Training
at River Bend Nature Center!

- Self paced
- Income eligibility requirements apply
- Info Sessions Tuesdays -Dec 30, Jan 6 & 13
Virtual 11am-12pm or In person 1:30pm-2:30pm
email Quanda Arch at arch@rbnc.org



Enter for a chance to win \$250 Hy-Vee Gift Card!

Attend these events, become a member to enter to win!

Thursday, January 29 - Luminary Snowshoe Hike @ RBNC

Friday, January 30 - Buddy Holly Show @ PCA

Drawing will be Monday, February 2 between 9:30-10:00 am on KDHL

Arts & Nature Membership \$100 - Enroll at rbnc.org/membership

THE AMAZING AURORA

BEAUTIFUL, BRIGHT LIGHTS OF THE NIGHT

By Matt Johnson

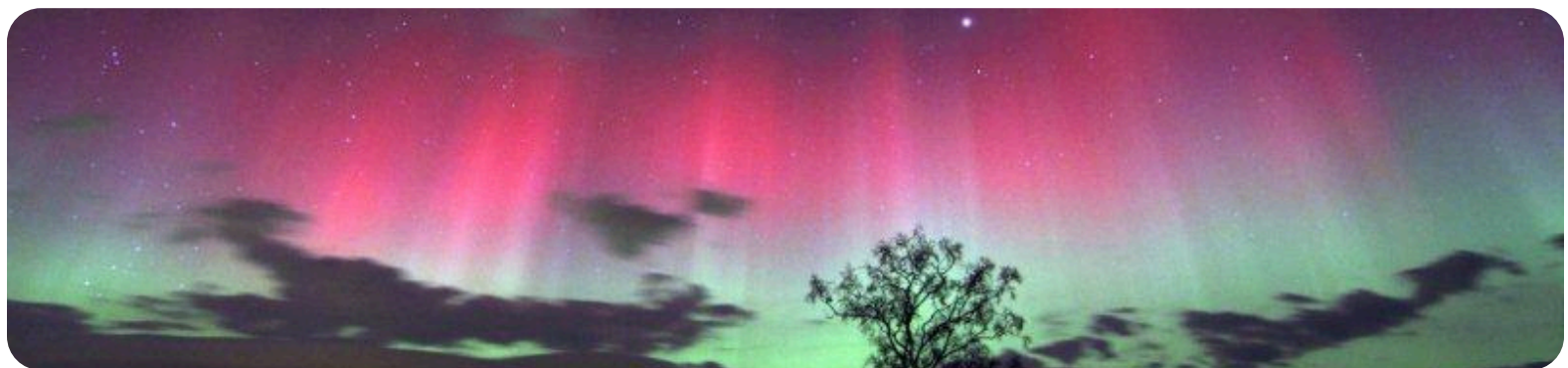
Winter has always been a time of year where we look to the night sky. Perhaps it's because so much of our day occurs in darkness as our daylight hours reach their shortest period. Maybe it's because our cold and dry air makes the stars and planets appear more clear and mesmerizing than ever. Or possibly we hope to catch a glimpse of one nature's most stunning displays, the aurora borealis, also known as the northern lights. While it's not hard to appreciate the beauty of this natural phenomenon, understanding what causes it and how you can best catch a glimpse, isn't so easy.

So what causes this spectacular night time light display? Ironically, it has everything to do with the Sun. The Sun being a gigantic ball of plasma, releases an immense amount of energy. This energy is released through the Sun's outermost atmospheric layer in the form of charged particles known as solar wind. Given the proximity of Earth to the Sun, these particles end up interacting with our own planet's magnetic field. Most solar wind ends up being deflected, but what isn't, is drawn to our magnetic poles. As these particles enter our atmosphere, they react with the many gases present, exciting these atoms and molecules with energy. As these atoms and molecules attempt to return to their normal state, excess energy is released through light, providing us with a stunning display.

The colors that we associate with the northern lights are caused by specific interactions within our atmosphere and also the altitude at which they occur. One of the most common elements in our atmosphere, oxygen, is responsible for much of what we see. Excited oxygen is often expressed in bright greens when found between 60-120 miles of Earth, while appearing red when above 120 miles. Similarly, nitrogen is responsible for giving off a blue light when between 60-120 miles, while appearing purple to pink when closer to Earth's surface. Sometimes these colors will also appear to mix, creating various captivating hues. The northern lights can also seemingly appear to change in a matter of minutes. That is because solar wind is in the form of plasma as it enters our atmosphere. Plasma behaves in unpredictable fashion, which can create ripples, waves and other interesting formations.

To give yourself the best chance to see the aurora, you must consider your location on Earth. Since our poles are where most charged particles are drawn to, it makes sense that these areas tend to have the most consistent viewing. Northern latitudes, including Minnesota, have far more opportunities than areas closer to the equator. However, solar wind can be quite variable. Certain events can lead to a higher amount of particles resulting in a much more dramatic and wider viewing range. It's usually not hard to get a warning when these conditions exist, as modern technology allows us to have a pretty good idea when the lights may be visible in your area. If conditions are right, be sure to get far away from any light pollution that might hinder viewing and allow some time for your eyes to adjust to the darkness. It is recommended that peak viewing is usually around midnight, although you can often get a great show beforehand as well.

While winter is often thought of as a dreary time of year by many, the aurora borealis proves otherwise. If you've never been able to catch a glimpse of the northern lights, now is a great time to try! The clarity of our cold and dry atmosphere gives us a perfect backdrop to view this natural wonder. It is truly an amazing experience watching the colors dance across the night sky.



AS THE SNOW RETURNS, SO DO OUR FAVORITE PROGRAMS!

SNOWSHOEING, LUMINARIES AND MAPLE SYRUPING!

By Molly Dulka

River Bend is thrilled to share what's ahead in 2026, with a mix of exciting new offerings and the return of beloved community favorites that celebrate our connection to nature year-round.

One of the new programs launching this year focuses on biochar. Biochar is created by heating wood at high temperatures without oxygen, and it plays an important role in land stewardship. Participants will learn what biochar is, how it's made, and why it's an effective method for managing invasive species at River Bend. Weather permitting, guests will also have the opportunity to see the process in action at one of our on-site biochar kilns. **Biochar programs are January 10, 24 & February 14, from 10-12pm.**

Alongside these new offerings, several longtime community favorites are returning this winter and spring. With this season shaping up to be snowier than recent years, conditions are ideal for snowshoeing programs, including **luminary snowshoe hikes on January 29 and February 12.** In March, our popular maple syruping programs return, giving participants a hands-on look at the science of tapping maple trees and processing sap—plus the chance to help with the process themselves.

As the seasons change, programming continues into spring and summer. **Join us on Saturday, May 2, for the Maple Syrup Fun Run and Pancake Breakfast.** Whether you're new to trail running or a seasoned runner, there's a distance for everyone, followed by a celebratory pancake breakfast with friends and family. Registration is now open.

Looking ahead to summer, camps at River Bend are set to be a roaring good time. Kindergarten through 9th grade campers can experience engaging day camps with themes ranging from archery and atlats to dinosaurs, outdoor cooking, and sports. These fun, hands-on experiences are designed to connect, or reconnect, kids with the outdoors. **Summer camp registration opens in January 1 for members and January 16 for the general public.**

Register for our programs at rbnc.org/upcoming-programs. We hope to see you soon!

MAPLE SYRUP FUN RUN
Pancake Breakfast



May 2, 2026
Faribault, Minnesota

One Mile, 5K, 10K, 25K, 50K

Registration is now Open!



Summer Camp
Priority Membership
Opens January 1st!



Priority Registration for River Bend Members opens Thursday, January 1st!

General public
registration Jan 16

Adventure is
OUT THERE!

SUMMER CAMP

MEMORIES THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME...

Full day camps for children grades K-9

Members Save
\$25!!

CONSERVATION CORNER

RIVER BEND HAS SECURED GRANT FUNDING FOR RESTORATION EFFORTS

By Brittany Smith

»»» 300+ ACRES IN ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

A lot has happened in the past year at River Bend and there is a lot on the horizon! River Bend has been fortunate to have received a handful of multi-year grants to conduct critical habitat work across more than 300 acres of land. The initial phase has been focused on invasive species removal and site prep for native vegetation enhancement and establishment. Watch for stewardship opportunities this spring! Including but not limited to invasive species removal, tree plantings, woodland seeding, and prairie seeding.

River Bend was also awarded a Wood Waste Utilization Grant through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. This grant has created a pathway to utilize non-native trees and dead ash to create biochar! Biochar can be used as a soil amendment and is created when carbon-containing biomass is broken down into various components during a process called pyrolysis. This process highly reduces emissions compared to traditional open burning. Watch for upcoming programs and demonstrations on Biochar at River Bend!

River Bend continues to make strides in critical habitat work and it would not have been possible without the financial support of River Bend donors, State of MN and Foundational Grantors (State of MN Conservation Partner Legacy Funds, MN Pollution Control Agency, Xcel Energy Foundation and the Carl & Verna Schmidt Foundation), and the continued investment of dedicated volunteers! Thank you for your continued support!

If you are interested in a more in depth "report" of 2025 accomplishments and 2026 plans, join me on Wednesday, Jan 21, 2026 for the Lunch and Learn program!



»»» WINTER REMINDERS

River Bend has 7 miles of groomed cross country ski trails that are part of the Grant-in-Aid Ski Trail Program through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

- Ski passes are **REQUIRED** and can be purchased through the MN Department of Natural Resources website.
- Please do not walk or allow your dog to walk down the middle of the ski tracks; most of the trails are wide enough to walk along either side.
- Snowmobiles are **NOT** allowed on all River Bend Trails. Only the designated snowmobile trail.

Please remember whenever visiting River Bend

- Please stay on the designated trails.

Dogs must be leashed and picked up after. River Bend's policy is dogs must be on a leash no longer than 6 feet and pick up after your dog. No matter how friendly your dog may be, not everyone who uses the trails enjoys being up close to unfamiliar dogs. Loose dogs can chase the wildlife, cause issues for skiers, bikers, and cars. Training collars are not considered a leash so please use a leash for your dog.

PURCHASE A MN SKI PASS

On the MN DNR Website
<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/skiing/skipass/index.html>



BUSINESS MEMBERS

AS FARIBAULT BUSINESSES SUPPORT US, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO SUPPORT THEM!

»»» STAR MEMBERS

Faribault Rotary Youth Services, Inc



»»» WELLNESS MEMBERS



»»» FOUNDER MEMBERS

Faribault Flyers Bike & Ski Club



»»» PATRON MEMBERS

Faribault Area Retired Educators . Schroder Concessions
Sertoma Club of Faribault



LEARN HOW TO BECOME A BUSINESS MEMBER

Becoming a member is easy!

Visit our website, email or call!

www.rbnc.org/members
rbncinfo@rbnc.org
507-332-7151

»»» ADVOCATE MEMBERS

Anderka Construction . Community Co-op
Donahue's Greenhouse . Faribault Rental Equipment, Inc.
Faribo Sno-Go Club . Glenn's Service & Towing
Marathon Tech Company . Mill Town Cycles
Pamela Rezac Real Estate . Quality Appliance
Tom's Lock & Key

| | Bluebird | Heron | Owl |
|--|---|---|---|
| Small Employer (0-10 employees) | \$500 | \$1000 | \$2000 |
| Medium Employer (11-49 employees) | \$1500 | \$2500 | \$3500 |
| Large Employer (50-99 employees) | \$3000 | \$4000 | \$5000 |
| Regional Employer (100+ employees or franchises, etc.) | Contact us to discuss pricing and benefits | Contact us to discuss pricing and benefits | Contact us to discuss pricing and benefits |

Scan the QR
Code to
Join Today!





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Patrick Schaefer



River Bend
NATURE CENTER

1000 Rustad Rd - PO Box 186
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Trail Hours: 6 am - 10 pm
Building Hours: Mon 8 am - 7pm
Tues-Fri 8 am - 4 pm
Saturdays 10 am - 2 pm