As 2017 approaches its end, I would like to reflect on a few of the significant things that have happened or changes that have occurred in our Olmsted County Park Department. One of the most notable changes would be that of staffing. The Parks Superintendent retired in April. This position was left unfilled until mid-summer when Karlin Ziegler was hired as the new Superintendent. Karlin had previously been the park manager at Oxbow Park before moving to the Public Works office in Rochester. With her move, of course there was now a vacancy at Oxbow Park, in which Lonnie Hebl, the park foreman, interviewed for and was hired on as the new park manager. Which brings us up to the current state of hiring a new Park Foreman at Oxbow Park! Aside from staffing shortages and changes, Oxbow has also been busy constructing a new badger and prairie dog exhibit in the Zollman Zoo. This project began in the spring and will continue into next year. Once completed the critters will have a beautiful new home in the center of Zollman Zoo! The exhibit was a planned project, however, not all projects are planned…. The park suffered not one but two failed septic systems this year, so work had to be done on those as well. It is a good thing that the staff and volunteers of Olmsted County Parks are such patient and understanding folks! As for Chester Woods Park, there weren’t any big construction projects planned, or staffing changes, however the park somehow became a target to several severe storms. Chester Woods Park was hit by two significant hail storms and two tornados! Now what are the chances of that!?!?!? Due to the storms, staff and volunteers have spent numerous hours clearing storm debris and cleaning up the park. The hours of chainsaw work and brush clearing are in the hundreds! The park lost acres of beautiful mature oaks and aspen as well as other trees. We have just now begun to plant and replace some of the trees that were lost during the most brutal of these storms that hit on July 19, 2017. Other than Mother Nature taking her toll on the park, it has been a very good year! The campground was busy all season, boat rentals were CRAZY, the beach was a popular destination to beat the heat and enjoy all the other beautiful spots that the park has to offer!
Everyone knew that with the retirement of longtime Park Superintendent Tom Ryan things would begin to change within the Olmsted County Parks Department. Soon after his retirement Karlin Ziegler was appointed the new Park Superintendent leaving a void that would need to be filled at Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo. Lonnie Hebl has been hired to fill that position as of September 18th 2017. Prior to accepting the Manager’s position Lonnie was the Park Foreman/Construction Crew Lead, at Oxbow, for 4 1/2 years. He began working for the Parks Department in 2013 after working 20 plus years with the Olmsted County Sheriff’s Department/ Minnesota Department of Correction’s Sentence to Service Program. He has a wide range of abilities that qualify him for managing the park and zoo. Lonnie is looking forward to the many opportunities and challenges that this position will afford, such as, hiring a new Park Foreman and completing the new badger/prairie dog exhibit. Future construction of a new nature center, implementing the new Park Master Plan that has been adopted by Olmsted County, and continuing to work with the great employees and volunteers that work within Olmsted County will be among his top priorities. Lonnie’s hope is that every visitor has an enjoyable and educational visit to Olmsted County Parks and that they will continue to learn lifelong lessons in natural places.

A small member of the canine family, the gray fox, is an animal unlike most other canines. Gray foxes appear similar in shape and size to their close cousin the red fox, yet gray foxes have adaptations such as flexible wrist joints and long curved claws on their paws to make them the only well adapted canine to climb trees.

When identifying a gray fox look for the gray colored back with red or buff colored underside that reaches up around the neck and ears. The fur will be white under the chin and on the cheeks contrasting with the black around the eyes and muzzle. The tail will have a black streak along the top. The pups or kits coloring is darker at birth. The young are born blind in a den with 2-7 littermates that will stay with their family until mature at 10 months. Their habitat consists mostly of deciduous forest across the state, but not seen often in the northeast portion and the central parts of Minnesota.

At the Zollman Zoo the two species of foxes are located side by side on exhibit, yet rarely are seen cohabitating in the wild, even though their ranges overlap.
When the Strong Winds Blow

by, Tom Eckdahl

For many of us, we may live a life time and never see a tornado or experience a tropical storm. Through the media, I think we all have witnessed the destruction and havoc that storms create.

On June 28th, I observed my first F0 tornado and a little too close for comfort as it passed between the park residence and the campground. Touching down just enough to suck water up from the reservoir and breaking a few trees off before passing over Highway 14. If that wasn’t enough, on July 19th a F1 tornado passed between the campground and beach running nearly a 3 mile stretch between Chester and Eyota. This tornado created a larger disturbance to the park. Thankfully, there was only minor building structure damage with both storm events and no one was hurt. The trees on the other hand did not fare so well. A conservative estimate of upwards of 500 trees were either damaged or destroyed, just within our picnic grounds and beach areas. The Chester Lake Trail took the brunt of the wind and most visible damage to our park patrons. There are two pockets within the woodlands that many people do not traverse that had upwards of 3 - 5 acres of trees completely leveled.

Thanks to the out pouring of help from the Friends of Chester Woods volunteers, a private arborist service, Olmsted County Highway staff, and the use of their equipment, Olmsted County Sheriff’s Sentence to Serve Correction staff and crew members, and fellow coworkers from parks staff, the park’s beach and trail was reopened within two days. Providing a safe, environmental, recreational opportunity is our concern and removing the hazardous trees has been our focus.

Chester Woods Park has taken on a different appearance at first glance, and though it is not what we are used to seeing, it is a new view and an opportunity for things to change. The habitat that is created or lost in a storm can only be determined by an individual’s perspective. The plants and critters that have already began to take advantage of an opening in the woods, or a broken tree laying on the forest floor, the wide array of insects that will find a decomposing log inviting is yet to be determined. Will it return to a dense forest, or become an open glen within the forest?

Our natural environment that we live in and that we share with others is forever changing. I hope that you will be willing to except, observe, and participate in this change.

-Tom Eckdahl

A Whirlwind of a Year (cont.)

heat, and the horse trails were steadily used.
As the season winds down, we are looking forward to hosting the annual Disabled Veterans Deer Hunt and prepping for the upcoming snow season.
One area that is often forgotten about when discussing parks, is the campus shop and staff. Pat Gerken and Roger Harty work hard for the parks department in keeping the grounds of the campus facilities looking nice, as well as keeping all the equipment up and running. The campus crew also maintains the grounds at Root River Park. This year, Pat has also been spending a lot of time working on the new exhibit at Oxbow, both Pat and Roger have done quite a bit of metal fabrication for it as well.

This article by no means explains all that went on in the parks in 2017, but it may give you a brief idea, and a little motivation to get out and see all that has been done!
Save The Date: ZooDazzle 2017!!!!

By, Ruthann Yeager

Save these dates! The ever-popular FOX Zoo Dazzle will be held on Friday December 8th and Saturday December 9th, 2017! Join us for Santa, snacks, cider, activities for the young ones and of course, all the pretty lights in the Zoo area. The Zollman Zoo will not be open in the evenings during the week-day nights, but the lights can be seen the following weekend. The Zoo will be open extra hours for evening viewing Friday, Dec 15th and Saturday, Dec 16th from 4 pm to 8 pm. No activities will be offered at those times, just self-guided tours for the lights. Parking concerns have been addressed and there should be room for everyone – come one, come all!

Zollman Zoo Nature Center Entrance all lit up, for last year's ZooDazzle!

***Check out Oxbow Park’s wish list on Amazon:***

https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/ref=cm wrp_dv_t?ie=UTF8&cid=A39PU6GV6VJ829