Shoulder Seasons

By: Anders Hanson

One of the best parts about living in the upper Midwest is that we get to enjoy 4 unique and equally lovely seasons. I struggle to pick a favorite season, but I do know that the transitions between fall and winter and winter and spring can be hard for me. Some people refer to these periods of change as shoulder seasons. In the outdoor recreation world, shoulder seasons usually refer to the time of year when weather is too cold for warm weather activities but not cold and/or snowy enough for winter activities. In Minnesota, we often experience these conditions in November or December and March and April; although, thanks to climate change, we might experience a small taste of shoulder seasons in other months as well (like the end of February this year, for example).

Now...you might be wondering: “Anders, how can you not enjoy it when the weather warms up and snow starts melting at the end of the winter?” or “Anders, don’t you realize that dreary and windy weather in late fall means the holidays and winter are just around the corner?” Continued on pg. 2

Volunteer Spotlight:

Barclay Kruse

How do you spend your time volunteering at CRD?
I have a variety of volunteer commitments, like doing the phenology survey and helping with public programs. My favorite is the rafting program, hands down. What a great way to spend four hours on a summer day!

What is your favorite part about volunteering at the Dam?
There is a real team feeling among volunteers and the staff. The naturalists work hard to build that team spirit and make the volunteers feel welcome and valuable. I’ve also come to love walking across the dam. I love observing the changes in the river in all the seasons of the year.

What’s your favorite thing to do in your free time?
I grew up hiking and climbing in the Cascade Mountains in the Northwest, so when I moved to Minnesota (without mountains) I took up canoeing. My happy place is now the Boundary Waters.

What is one area of nature you want to learn more about?
I’ve always been a serious amateur photographer, and that’s something I think I’m pretty good at. But I’m always trying to learn new skills and get better.

What’s your favorite tree?
I’d probably pick a Douglas fir. Trees so big it takes three people to wrap their arms around the trunk. The fir forests of the Pacific Northwest cover the mountains like a green blanket.
Volunteering Opportunities

April Public Programs
- Saturday April 11 (9am-12pm) - Elf and Fairy Houses
- Saturday April 18 (1pm-3pm) - Geocaching for S'mores
- Sunday April 19 (1pm-3pm) - Mississippi River Clean Up

***If you are interested in volunteering for any of these, email Ashley or call the front desk to let us know! 763-694-7790 ***

Escape Room—Without Walls
... a NEW volunteering opportunity!
We are looking for volunteers to assist in hosting our new Escape Room—Without Walls program, eventually being able to host a group on their own (a naturalist would still be the lead, but you would spend most of the time with a group on your own).

Training requirements include:
  - Coming to at least 2 of the following programs to observe:
    - June 10, 5-8:30pm
    - July 18, 1-4:30pm
    - July 19, 1-4:30pm
    - August 18, 5-8:30pm
  - Doing a training with Ashley
  - Availability on Weekends and Evenings during warm weather months.

Curious? Interested? Email Ashley at ashley.smith@threeriversparks.org for more info!

Shoulder Seasons, cont.

These are valid questions! I pride myself on generally being optimistic, so I am working to expand this optimistic world view to my thoughts on the shoulder seasons.

The main reason I struggle with these periods is that it means I have to adapt what my outdoor recreation looks like and, as many of you know, most of my outdoor recreation and transportation is by bike. The freeze/thaw cycle that happens as we fluctuate between above and below freezing temps causes the mountain bike trails in the fall to close as they are muddy and highly vulnerable to damage. Fat bike trails in the winter deteriorate or become icy and rutted, and sections of our tremendous network of bike paths turn into puddly messes with icy booby traps—thank goodness for studded tires and fenders!

Even though I can be a grouch about the shoulder seasons’ effect on my biking obsession, I also try to be flexible and focus on the new opportunities that the outdoors provide us as the weather changes. Shoulder seasons can be a busy time for animals. Migrators are coming or going and other animals are prepping for the next season, whether that means storing food or building a nest or finding a mate, so they are great times to observe animals. The late fall and early winter is a nice time to get cozy by a campfire or search for the first frozen puddles and ponds. Late winter and early spring bring maple syrup season, so many local nature centers are busy with collecting and cooking sap. Trout fishing, looking for shed deer antlers, listening for spring bird calls, and downhill or cross country skiing at places that make and groom snow are also great activities as we wait for true spring to arrive. Finally, if you are like me and sometimes are bogged down by the changing seasons, you can prolong the current season or jump ahead to the next season by simply taking a little road trip. Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin generally have snow earlier and later in the year than us, and the region of Southeastern Minnesota, Southwestern Wisconsin, and Northeastern Iowa generally start spring a little bit earlier than us.

If…no, WHEN…you do venture out, make sure you are prepared for a variety of weather and potentially icy, wet, or muddy trails (perhaps all 3!). And remember, change is a good thing and Minnesota wouldn’t be the same without the changing seasons.

Just for Volunteers

Thank you to all who came to the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner! We had a wonderful time, and to those who could not make it you we thought of you and celebrated you just the same.