

Natural Features

River Ice

The rivers are interesting year round, but from November through March, they are worth checking often to see what changes are happening.

The Pine and Chippewa Rivers often freeze sometime in December and remain more or less frozen until mid-March. Some years the rivers freeze early like they did on November 13, 1986. In other years they continue to flow freely until late January like they did in 1987. The freezing process is gradual with ice forming along the edges and in slow moving areas. Sometimes ice 'pancakes' can be seen floating downstream. The ice grows out from these slow areas and the pancakes until the entire river has a solid surface.



Throughout the winter occasional holes, cracks, or thin spots will develop, but barring a serious warm spell, the river generally remains frozen until mid-March.



When the temperature warms slowly and precipitation is minimal, the ice on the river gradually melts, first in the areas of rapid current, and then across the entire river.

However, if the river is still solidly frozen

when we receive heavy rainfall or a lot of snow melts, the river rises with huge sheets of ice floating on it. The ice careens down river crashing into other blocks of ice, taking on trees, and scouring the banks and islands of all vegetation.

Check out the webcam to keep an eye on the Pine River at www.chippewanaturecenter.com/webcam.htm.

Nature Notes

Some years the river ice breaks up in dramatic fashion. When the conditions are right - a little extra rain or a fast warm spell that melts the snow, and the river ice is thick - the ice break up is an amazing experience.



Chunks of ice float down the river cracking and crashing the whole way.

The river lifts huge chunks of ice onto the banks when it floods due to rain, snow melt, or getting backed up behind an ice dam further downstream.



Herbaceous vegetation on the banks and islands recovers quickly from the scouring, but trees bear scars for years.

Visit the Visitor Center Office for program information.

This inSTALLation is available online at www.chippewanaturecenter.org under the Naturalist Section.