

# Pere Marquette to Offer Night Hike, Other New Programs

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
January 23 2024 4:21 PM



GRAFTON - Pere Marquette State Park boasts several new programs in the new year, including a special night hike event planned for Feb. 3, 2024.

Lev Smolianski, Pere Marquette's [new Natural Resource Coordinator](#), explained that the night hike will start at 8 p.m. and run for two hours as the group takes a 2.5-mile hike through the park.

“It’s just different at that time of day. It’s the same but different. So I think it really brings people out of their comfort zones,” Smolianski said. “It’s not something that people go out and get to do. When you go hiking, you go from sunrise to sunset. I think that when you go into the woods at night, it’s a completely different ballgame. I think it’s going to be a really unique experience and I think people are going to really enjoy it.”

He pointed out that attendees will be able to see different wildlife, including bobcats and raccoons, as well as city lights from St. Louis and constellations in the night sky. Smolianski hopes to bring more kids and families to the park, and he noted that this is a great opportunity for families to get a different view of Pere Marquette and enjoy some time outside.

The night hike is completely free, though Smolianski asks people to call (618) 786-3323 to RSVP. The group will meet at the Visitor’s Center at 8 p.m. and the hike will begin at 8:15 p.m. Attendees are asked to wear closed-toed shoes and weather-appropriate clothing. Pere Marquette will provide flashlights, and people can enjoy s’mores and a campfire after the hike.

While the night hike is a unique way to engage with Pere Marquette, there are many other activities and programs that the park sponsors every week. Smolianski offers a tree ID hike every Saturday morning at 9 a.m., where guests hike through Pere Marquette and learn about different trees and plants native to Illinois. He also goes on an off-trail hike every Saturday at 1 p.m., and those who join him get to see a new side of Pere Marquette that they might not normally notice when they follow the trails.

Pere Marquette has 9,000 acres and is growing every year. Smolianski noted there is a lot of geological, ecological and cultural history throughout the park if you know where to look.

“Aside from just hunting, because we have a huge section of our trails and park systems that’s for hunting, there’s probably 4 or 5,000 acres of property that you can just go hike up into and disappear for hours,” he said. “There are secret waterfalls that people don’t know about in the park. We have a wildlife refuge up there. We have camps, we have places to camp. It’s really interesting... We also have really cool cultural history at Pere Marquette. We have Native American burial grounds up there, we have old home sites, homesteads. I’ve been hiking up there and found old copper wire from moonshine operations. It’s a very cool spot.”

You can learn more about Pere Marquette's history and native plants and wildlife by contacting Smolianski, who is happy to host field trips or travel to schools to provide programming. While Smolianski is new to the Natural Resource Coordinator role, he assures everyone that he's "here to stay" and eager to "hit the ground running" with new programs and activities for Pere Marquette visitors.

"I really, really love bringing people into the natural world and the outdoors. And so I think that if I can get somebody to go outside for an hour, I've done my job. I've made my day," Smolianski said. "Two weeks ago there was a young man who went out with me, and at the end of our hike, he said, 'This is the best day ever.' I still think about that every day. That's what I want...I really hope we get to inspire the next generation of land stewards."

For more information about the night hike or Pere Marquette State Park, call (618) 786-3323.