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Summer Newsletter 2019

Director's Update: A Season of Growth

The summer of 2019 burgeoned with growth. Around us, the well-spaced and above average amount of rain kept the Ozarks greener than I ever remember, all summer long. Our team has grown, with the addition of Kelly Owens as Watershed Center Assistant Coordinator, Seth Wheeler as Watershed Conservation Corps Program Manager, Allison Terry as our Watershed Center Fellow, and the two teams of five Watershed Conservation Corp members for summer seasonal field work. The landmark Greener Greenspaces program for 7th graders, in partnership with Springfield Public Schools, expanded to encompass all the SPS middle schools in the fall 2019 semester. The seed of a new "college and career pathway," focused on environmental education and growing native plants, has sprouted at Hillcrest High School. More broadly in the community, there is a growing awareness of the connectedness of water quality, water quantity, trails and riparian buffers, as well as the best approaches to invest limited resources to achieve multiple benefits.

As our 13 year old son Eli would attest, growth is usually associated with some growing pains. Due to the increased number of staff and usage of the Watershed Center, we are no longer renting the facility to private individuals, and we are hosting meetings on a very limited basis—and only during off-hours. Someday, we may need to add on!

But now is no time to bask in the growth and flourishing which we have recently experienced. The City of Springfield is beginning "Forward SGF," a planning process to create a new comprehensive plan. The result is intended to be a blueprint for the next 20 years. The City and the firm hired to implement this process are seeking input from residents to create the plan. At this juncture, it is important to remember that our community is a collection of interdependent parts, and those parts include the waters, soils, plants, and animals which sustain us. It is important to plan community response to and mitigation for the effects of climate change. During the 20 year planning horizon, it will be more important than ever to grow in a balanced, sustainable way. Please consider becoming personally involved in charting the future and helping create a plan that strikes the balance. Google "Forward SGF" for more information, or contact Randall Whitman at Rwhitman@springfieldmo.gov.

Watershed Center Update

Summer Field Trip Season

Despite a damp start, it was a record setting season for summer field trips. Over 2,700 visitors participated in field trips to the Watershed Center. As area schools' summer programs continue to grow, we are excited to offer impactful field experiences for these students. This was the fourth year we have been part of the **Splash!** summer Explore program with Springfield Public Schools. This four week course for second and third grade students allows them to make three field trips to the Watershed Center. The first visit focuses on an introduction to watersheds and pollution, the second gets students in the stream catching critters, and the final visit is a fishing trip to Valley Water Mill Lake. For many students this is their first chance to wade in a stream, catch a crayfish or fish. Thank you Springfield Public Schools for making this possible!

Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Coordinator



Splash! students learning about macroinvertebrates and water quality.

New Faces at the Center

WCO is thrilled to welcome our most recent **Watershed Center Fellow, Allison Terry**. Ally is a recent graduate of Stetson University located in Deland, Florida. Ally majored in Environmental Studies with multiple minors in Management and Communication and Media Studies. While attending Stetson, Ally was also the Sustainability Fellow where she created many environmental initiatives on campus. Ally immediately put her skills to use, assisting with educational field trips, improving our recycling and composting programs, and taking on a variety of habitat improvement projects.



Kelly Owens

Another welcome addition to the Watershed staff is **Kelly Owens**, our new **Watershed Assistant Coordinator**. Kelly comes to us from Wonders of Wildlife where she was the Volunteer Recruitment Coordinator. Kelly's experience working with volunteers has proven invaluable as she has taken over the role of volunteer coordinator at the Watershed Center. Under Kelly's guidance our volunteer program has become a more meaningful experience for the individual volunteers. The streamlined management and training system she has put in place will allow our volunteer program to meet the demands of our growing organization.

Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Coordinator



Allison helping students in the stream

Watershed Center Update (Continued)

Volunteer Program

There have been many exciting changes to the Watershed Committee's volunteer program throughout the summer, with even more to come later this year! Volunteers now have access to their own personalized WCO profile page. This increased ease of access helps to encourage more participation in a variety of available activities, keeps volunteers up to date with the Watershed Committee as a whole, and creates a forum for online training and education. However, don't think that means the volunteers spend all their time online—our volunteers have tackled projects all over Valley Water Mill Park this summer. In everything we do with our volunteers, we emphasize that each of them should “Observe, Participate, and Reflect” during their time with us. Using that structure, we encourage volunteers to use their service to connect to their community and environment. This means that not only are they here working hard to make Springfield and Greene County a great place to live, but they're building relationships with the land and water resources that will continue to provide for this community for years to come.

Kelly Owens, Watershed Center Assistant Coordinator

Fascinating Fungi Finds Fanfare

This is *Enonaema liquescens*, a tropical fungus rarely found in the U.S. Dr. Mark Bower discovered it is common at VWM—we have no idea why or how. This unique fungi has a fruiting body which is gelatinous and convoluted with a liquid center. Believe it or not, it is related to fungi such as Dead Man's Fingers. Mark has shared many weird and wonderful fungi facts with us, and we are excited his photography work was recognized on the world stage—this photo placed first in the Documentary category at NAMA (North American Mycological Association).



Watershed Conservation Corps Update—Summer Success!

In the second year of the program, the Watershed Conservation Corps (WCC) made significant contributions to the health of our region's watersheds. More than doubling its size from 2018, the WCC was able to expand upon its mission to employ young people in hands-on improvement of the land. Ten crew members and two crew leaders collaborated with multiple project partners and worked 40 hours a week for 12 weeks on various projects throughout southwest Missouri. The two crews worked tirelessly to either complete or continue the following projects: trail reconstruction in the Mark Twain National Forest, boardwalk renovation at George Washington Carver National Monument, glade restoration at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield and Springfield Lake, and habitat improvement projects for Bass Pro Shops and the Springfield Discovery Center. While working on these projects, the WCC provided a strong educational component for crew members focusing on Missouri Ecology, safety, and career building skills. By combining these projects with education, the WCC continues to shape their own Land Ethic while they shape the physical and cultural landscapes around them.



WCC crew at Mark Twain National Forest

Seth Wheeler, Watershed Conservation Corps Program Manager

Projects Update

Little Sac Restoration and Improvement Project

The Watershed Committee of the Ozarks (WCO) was awarded a subgrant agreement from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources in April of 2014, for the Little Sac Restoration and Improvement Project. Recently, in June of 2018, a grant amendment was awarded, bringing the total grant funding to \$380,442 with a required \$225,222 in local match. In addition, this amendment extended the grant to May 31, 2019. The goal of this project is to improve the watershed of Springfield and Greene County for drinking water with implementation of best management practices (BMPs) that will reduce nonpoint source pollution.

The WCO has been working to update the Upper Little Sac Watershed Management Plan. This plan is an EPA nine-element plan that identifies sources of pollution, estimates the load reductions, and describes the management measures to be implemented in critical areas to help reduce those pollutants over a 20-year timeframe. The plan is currently in the editing process with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources before being submitted to EPA for review.

Several other projects completed throughout the grant include installation five prescribed agricultural grazing systems, installation of three bank vegetative buffers strips, improvements to riparian corridors, completion of the Longitudinal Peaked Stone Toe Protection streambank stabilization project, and collection of water quality data at five locations in the watershed.

All of these projects help reduce nonpoint source pollutants from entering the Little Sac River, which will benefit our drinking water supply for many years to come. We are very thankful to our community partners that make these projects possible, including the landowners, the grant steering committee, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Greene County, Missouri Department of Conservation, City Utilities of Springfield, and the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Sac and James River Watershed Conservation Outreach Project

The Watershed Committee of the Ozarks was awarded the USDA Conservation Technical Assistance Grant for \$49,0000 on September 15, 2018. The project is to promote public awareness and implementation of Farm Bill activities, especially in historically underserved communities and in watersheds critical to drinking water supply.

As part of the grant WCO has created a survey to understand what knowledge farmers, producers and growers have of the farm bill practices and cost share programs currently available. A local contact list for the watershed is being generated to disperse the survey. As part of the grant milestones, outreach conservation workshops will be conducted focusing on soil health and managed grazing.



Streambank Stabilization Project on the Little Sac River below Fellows Lake Dam

Projects Update (Continued)

On June 28, WCO and local community partners had the pleasure of hosting J.R. Flores, USDA Missouri State Conservationist, and Karen Brinkman, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives, for a meeting to discuss potential projects to help protect source waters. The strength of our local partnerships and planning efforts in the James and Sac River Basins are helpful when pursuing USDA funding. Often, USDA funds are able to facilitate projects in the “sweet spot” where farmers and ranchers, their animals, the soils and waters benefit. During the meeting they visited the Little Sac Grazing Demonstration site: “a project in the interest of clean water and productive farms.” We are excited to continue pursuing this opportunity!

Stacey Armstrong, Projects Manager



Left to Right: Bob Wilson, Roddy Rogers, George Henshaw, Karen Brinkman, J.R. Flores, Diana Sheridan, Stacey Armstrong, and Michael Squires

Watershed Summer Gala

We are excited to announce our Watershed Summer Gala raised just over \$38,000, our most successful event yet! These funds help us pay for our Watershed Center Fellowship Program and enable us to keep pace with the growing demand for our outdoor education programs.

We are thankful for the generous support of our sponsors, friends and family that came out for the evening. This is our “signature” event, and it is apparent that the heart of the event is the people. Old friends caught up, new friends and connections were made, and water (and the Watershed) is the common thread that connects us all.

Another new development happened for Summer Gala 2019—we sold out the morning of the event! Next year, make sure and get your tickets early just in case. We plan to see you back at MSU’s Darr Agricultural Center on July 18, 2020, so make sure and get this on your calendar for next year!

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