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Spring Newsletter 2020

Director's Update: Pivot time and Silver Linings

Plenty of big, heavy topics undoubtedly weigh on your mind right now. Hopefully, you will find the next few paragraphs and pages heartening. These challenging times have offered some unique opportunities!

First, and Jeff mentions this later in this newsletter, people have been flocking to the outdoors in **unprecedented numbers**. John Muir knew that “everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and cheer and give strength the body and soul alike.” Many Valley Water Mill Park shared their impressions with us. Some commented on the beauty of the Park and how thankful they are to have this resource in our community. Several folks mentioned it was their first time and what a surprise the place was.

Responding to the coronavirus pandemic allowed us rethink our **Watershed Summer Gala** and connect the event with our **Watershed Sustainer** program. We quickly realized that the Watershed Summer Gala must be virtual in 2020. We are focused on keeping the connection to our mission along with the fun, fellowship, and fundraising aspects of this wonderful event. To attend, make sure you and/or your business, family or organization are Watershed Sustainers (more details on the back page). We hope to see you there!

Our 35+ year tradition of hosting our **monthly meeting** rebooted on June 5th via Zoom. We look forward to returning to the face-to-face interactions and wonderful meetings-after-the-meeting which usually occur, but having the meeting virtually gives us the opportunity to record, archive, post and generally make the meetings more widely available. **Watershed Natives** is growing too—check out that and lots more in the following pages!

Mike Kromrey, Executive Director

Watershed Center Update

Educational Update

What a difference a few months make. A spring calendar full of scheduled school field trips to the Watershed Center, Jordan Creek underground tours, and classroom visits morphed into working from home, virtual conferences, and distance learning. Let's take the "glass half-full approach" to this educational update.

While we do not have the hard numbers to support our conclusion, we can safely say it has been a **record setting spring for number of guests** to have visited the park. The combination of shelter in place and extended cool spring has brought out regular visitors and many first-timers to Valley Water Mill Park. It has been rewarding to watch young and old get out and enjoy nature. And what a year for experiencing nature! We have been blessed with extended viewing of Baltimore orioles, rose breasted grosbeaks, indigo buntings, and so many other birds. The wildflowers are also putting on their own show. Spiderwort, coreopsis, and beard-tongue are blooming out my window right now. Soon the birds and staff will be racing to see who can be the first to get to the tasty serviceberry berries. If you have not been out to the park in a while, come on out and see what you are missing. Mother Nature is really putting on a show this year.

Our spring **Watershed Natives plant sale** was a huge success. Thanks to all who purchased plants! This is the first step in a long journey. Our Watershed Natives program is part of a collaborative effort with Springfield Public Schools. We knew going in that there would be many positive outcomes from this project:

- Improved soil health and biodiversity
- Providing pollinator and wildlife habitat
- Reducing both erosion and nutrient runoff
- Funds raised supporting educational programs
- Students benefitting from hands-on educational opportunities

During the sale we had many other additional "Aha!" moments. The sale introduced WCO and the park to a new audience. Many of our customers were new to our website and/or new to the park. We often heard comments like "What a beautiful place, I never knew this was here." Many lingered to hike the trails or made plans to soon return. Conversations with people picking up plants lead to new connections for future projects or events. Many of the discussions lead to plans for future endeavors like field trips, planting additional natives, or other potential future projects. Please look for updates regarding our upcoming fall plant sale. We hope to offer an even larger variety of plants.

Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Coordinator



Wetland living up to its name this spring



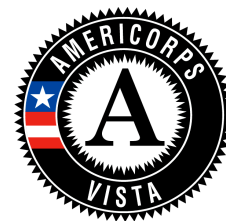
WATERSHED
natives



Hillcrest High School FFA students

Watershed Center Update (Continued)

With warmer weather and softened ground comes the time for farmers and gardeners to begin their planting season. Here at the Watershed Center, I have been busy doing just that. But, at the Center our focus is not the dinner plate, it is water and the natural environments water is connected to. Our water and ecosystems are at their most healthy when surrounded by native vegetation. So, what better way to support the health of our watershed and natural environment than by helping distribute native plants to our community?



Over the past few months I have stratified seeds, initiated germination, transplanted seedlings, and maintained several native plant species. All the plants I have had a hand in growing and caring for are destined to find forever homes with citizens of Springfield and the surrounding area. The plants are being included in the first ever Watershed Natives plant sale being held at the center at the end of May. As people purchase and plant Watershed Natives in their gardens and on their land, they are not only enhancing their property, but their contributions to wildlife as well as water and soil quality. The purchase also benefits the continuance of this program which will provide learning opportunities with local schools.

I have been thankful for the service I am currently enveloped in at the Watershed Center. Working with plants, and native plants at that, has been rewarding. Spending my days outdoors and covered in dirt is laborious joy. One could say I found my niche; I am doing what I love. I am hopeful this service will bring people in my community healthier gardens, land, water, and wildlife. One plant at a time.

Kaitlin Marshall, Development Coordinator, AmeriCorps VISTA

Volunteer Update

Throughout this Spring, our community has been challenged in ways I could not have imagined. Volunteer projects scheduled at the end of winter were interrupted, as our community began following stay-at-home guidelines, and to keep our team safe volunteer activities were suspended through mid-May. However, that didn't stop our volunteers from wanting to support our mission and our organization through these unprecedented times. I was truly humbled as phone calls and emails poured in, while volunteers expressed their regrets for being unable to help, students apologized for projects being cut short, and many among them expressed their fears related to volunteering on site.



*Volunteers observing a prescribed burn
(March)*

In response, our volunteer team decided to participate in weekly challenges that would keep them connected during their time apart. Volunteers identified plant species in their own backyards, participated in birdwatching activities, and even took the time to send each other pictures from all of their socially-distanced, outdoor activities. As a group, I believe they are more connected now than ever before, and I am finding myself increasingly more grateful to them every day. To all of you, thank you for everything you do. Volunteers like you are our community's heart, and you are why I know that we will all get through this together.

Kelly Owens, Watershed Center Assistant Coordinator

Watershed Conservation Corps Update

The Watershed Conservation Corps is getting ready for some exciting work this summer with the National Park Service. But, we've also been busy here in Springfield for the past four months too, with projects including planting 555 trees on a riparian buffer improvement project along the Sac river, a 25 acre riparian improvement project along Jordan Creek, a native tree planting with the City of Nixa, and numerous private landowner watershed improvement projects. The WCC is also preparing to begin work on several grant funded conservation projects including a continuation of the glade restoration work at Lake Springfield, and an 8 acre glade restoration project at Riverbluff Cave with Missouri Institute of Natural Science, Greene County, and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

While we did lose a few contracts due to the Covid pandemic, we have managed to continue strong during this challenging time, thanks to our partner's support. If one thing is true, our area's municipalities, state/federal land agencies, and residents are serious about conservation and work tirelessly to protect and invest in the future of our beautiful city and its water resources. We are honored to play a part in the incredible work they are doing.

One of the best parts of this watershed work is engaging with the talented young people we get to hire and work with. This year's seasonal team brings a wealth of passion, experience and enthusiasm. We welcome Chyanne Brown, Hannah Stinnett, Jeremiah Cline, Jeremy Graham, and Trey Thompson to join Dillan Simmons, Adam Bardon, Seth Wheeler and me. Also, a special thank you to the Watershed staff and board for supporting this program and ultimately watershed health improvement.

Caleb Sanders, Watershed Conservation Corps Director



WCC permaculture planting for a riparian landowner



WCC crew working with the City of Nixa



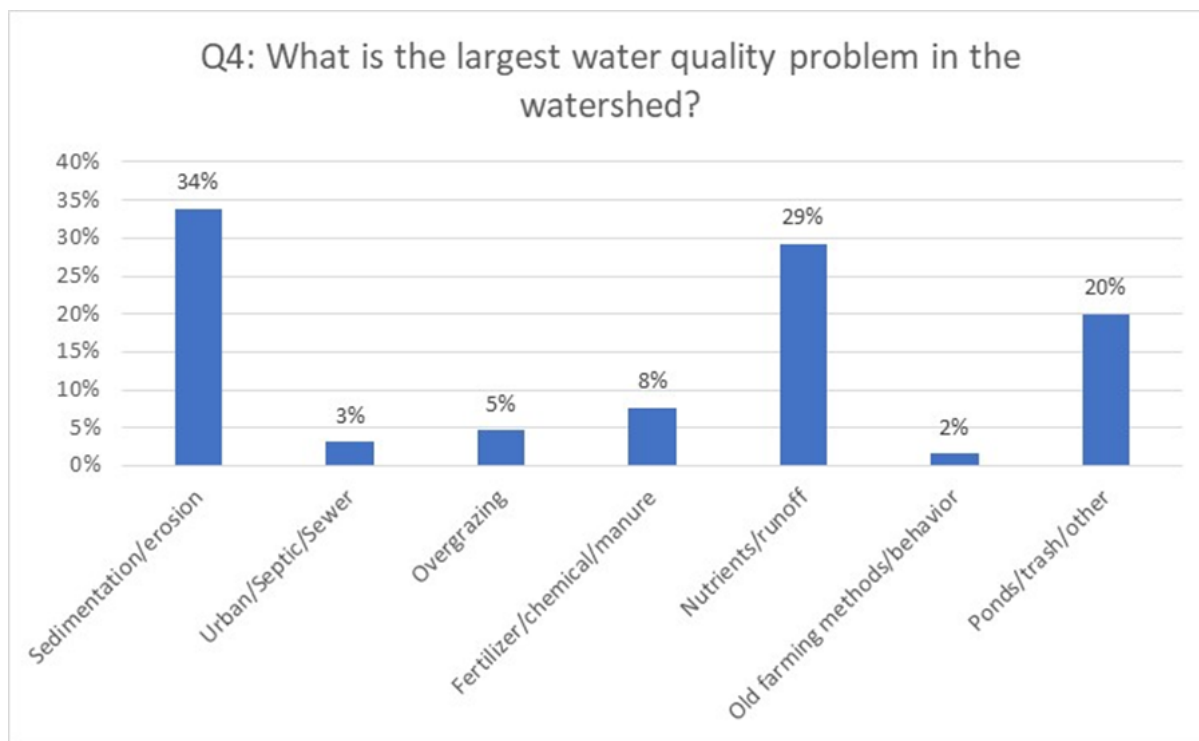
WCC restoring cultural landscape and watershed health at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield

Projects Update

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 this grant, WCO created a twelve-question survey to gather information about familiarity with current farm bill programs and primary water quality concerns. A total of 92 surveys were collected from three workshops which included a soil health workshop and two regional grazing schools. Results yielded information such as erosion, sedimentation, excess nutrients, and runoff are water quality problems listed by respondents. Also, no till, cover crops and better water quality practices are improvements that respondents would like to occur in their watersheds. Information collected from the survey will help guide topics of interest for future workshops.



Upper Little Sac Watershed Management Plan

WCO has been working in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to update our Upper Little Sac Watershed Management Plan. This plan is an Environmental Protection Agency (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 has been accepted by EPA which will allow future potential federal funds to be awarded in the Upper Little Sac River watershed.

Stacey Armstrong Smith, Projects Manager



YOU'RE INVITED

WATERSHED

SUMMER

Gala

PARTY IN PLACE

2020

**SATURDAY,
JULY 18**

Watershed Summer Gala 2020

Join us for our annual celebration of clean water via Zoom. The virtual event will feature tangible prizes, including a Watershed Conservation Corps "property makeover," some wonderful beverage related packages, and some special surprises! Our ever-popular silent auction will be held online preceding the event.

To attend the event and be eligible for fantastic prizes, become a **Watershed Sustainer** on our website:
https://watershedcommittee.org/get_involved/become-a-watershed-sustainer/

Watershed Summer Gala Business Sustainers

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Refreshing a Classic

Many are familiar at some level with the work of Aldo Leopold, and some reading this are probably devotees of the ideas he proposed in *A Sand County Almanac*. Leopold gently pushes readers to see the beauty and interconnectedness of the natural world, and examine our role as humans. Recently, the Leopold Foundation worked with one of America's best authors, Barbara Kingsolver, to pen a new introduction to the seven-decade old work.

Kingsolver brilliantly uses her pages to walk us through the book, Leopold's personal journey and make some poignant observations to put this work in context for our time. Arguably, this book has never been more relevant. I hope you will, as Kingsolver puts it, "look forward to cracking open (Leopold's) door, *A Sand County Almanac*, for another chat." If you haven't yet, it is time! You can order a copy from the Aldo Leopold foundation, or borrow one from our Library at the Watershed Center.

