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Summer Newsletter 2020

Director's Update: Zooming Out

With our son Eli turning 14, and me turning 40, we decided to take a big trip out west. Most of our time was spent outdoors and with a few friends which we were able to reconnect with along the way. As we traveled westward, water became elevated in our consciousness and priorities. Camping in the desert near Moab, each gallon of water had to be hiked up a steep hill to our camp. Backpacking along a high ridgeline in the San Juan Mountains, the Nalgene bottles we carried were like the hourglass measuring how long we could stay there. We crossed the continental divide, swam in the mighty Colorado, and experienced forms of precipitation that I was unfamiliar with (our friends called it graupel). We also visited the ruins at Mesa Verde, which begs the haunting question of why the builders left—water is probably part of the answer.

While the western landscapes call to my sense of adventure and exploration, I'm always glad to come home to the Ozarks. In the west the water situation is often hard, the cost of living is relatively high, and during our trip, the smoke from wildfires was intense. You may have noticed too that the California and Colorado smoke followed us home. The particulates up there made for some beautiful but strange sunrises and sunsets, and also an earie reminder that our Ozarks "bubble" is less isolated from the aforementioned issues than we might think. It was also a reminder that we are living in a rapidly changing climate. We all have plenty of existential threats to ponder these days, and I won't dwell on this. I would submit, however, that we work urgently, locally, and collaboratively to build the resilience of the land we love and community we call home. Glad to be back. —Mike Kromrey, Executive Director



Mesa Verde—Why did the people leave these magnificent homes?



Mike and son Eli hunting a burn scar from the "416 fire" in the San Juan Mountains.

Watershed Center Update

Educational Update

Like all educational programs, we continue to adapt to the changing conditions brought about by COVID-19. During these times, it is especially worth remembering the value of outdoor educational programs. Outdoor learning can improve children's motivation and well-being, can inspire children to be more physically active, and improve their learning outcomes. Moving classes outdoors also allows individuals to remain comfortably apart in fresh air that is less conducive to transmitting germs. While most area schools canceled their traditional summer programs, some schools and organizations found ways to safely travel to Valley Water Mill Park for outdoor activities. As always, our field trips policies are modified to follow local safety guidelines. Let us know if your group would like to participate!



Wetland living up to its name this spring

Our **Watershed Natives** Program continues to grow. One of the side benefits of hosting plant sales is meeting people who share similar passions and the opportunity to build stronger connections with them. Many organizations have reached out to the Watershed Committee for programs about native plants and their impact on both the environment and water quality. We are excited to be partnering with Springfield Public Schools (SPS) and Ozark Empire Fairgrounds to establish a high tunnel and other structures for SPS students to use as part of their curriculum and Future Farmers of America programs.



Brentwood Gardening Club learning about native plants

Our fall native plant sale was Saturday, September 26, and we added a few additions that turned out to very popular: Prickly Pear, Wild Ginger and Three-Leave Stonecrop. The Watershed Natives Program was made possible by grant funding from the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and the Darr Family Foundation. —Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Coordinator



Prickly Pear



Watershed Center Update (Continued)

It has been a fruitful summer of service at the Watershed Center, in more ways than one. Summer growing season has not only given me the opportunity to grow native plants, but has led me to grow with this organization, with my community, and as a person. The native plant sale at the beginning of summer was a huge milestone for Watershed Natives. For our first ever public sale, Watershed Natives sold over a thousand plants! The goal for next spring is to double that amount and gain more local interest in planting native plants. I would like to thank Ozark Soul and Missouri Wildflower Nursery as a native plant partner and a supporter of our mission. I would also like to thank all the volunteers who have contributed their time to collecting seeds, growing plants, and caring for them here at the Center.



The work with native plants has also been a gateway to connect with the community and generate new volunteers. A simple conversation (about plants of course!) with a group of people here visiting the park ended with a commitment from the group to come out every other week to volunteer. The Developmental Center of the Ozarks (DCO) has had a handful of individuals and their staff take on an exclusive project here at the Watershed Center, deemed The Raingarden Project. The individuals from DCO volunteering at the Watershed Center focus their time upkeeping the raingarden area and have done an awesome job so far! This opportunity between two local organizations has made way for these individuals to gain hands-on skills and experience with landscaping, while also building relationships with WCO staff. I look forward to seeing more progress in the raingarden from their commitment and anticipate teaching them skills about growing native plants in the future.

—Kaitlin Marshall, Development Coordinator, Americorps VISTA

Our **Watershed Center Fellowship** Program, made possible by the generosity of our sustainers, has been a huge success since its inception in 2017. This program provides recent college graduates a unique educational and work experience, while assisting us meet our critical needs of volunteer coordination and ecological restoration. We are thrilled to welcome two Fellows this year to the Watershed team. This year's Fellows will work closely with both the Watershed staff and the Watershed Conservation Corps. Meet our newest Fellows:



Angelica Smith grew up in Homer, Alaska before relocating to Kansas City and eventually attended Missouri State University (MSU) where she graduated in 2019 with a Bachelor's in Wildlife Biology. While spending time in Springfield, she developed a love for its community and parks. Now as a Watershed Fellow, she is directly involved in community education and improvement of Springfield's natural beauty. Outside her fellowship she loves to hike, camp, and spend a lot of time with her pup, Zoey. Angelica plans on taking her education further, hoping in the future to study small mammals as a wildlife biologist or share her knowledge with others as a conservation educator.



Brooks Burrell is a MSU graduate and has lived in Springfield most of his life with some time spent in the Pacific Northwest. He joined the Watershed Committee as a Fellow in 2020 and is looking forward to helping to restore our ecosystem and increase biodiversity through regenerative practices. He has studied ecology and permaculture independently for the past three years and hopes to both apply and expand this knowledge in participation with others. When not working he enjoys kayaking, playing music, and reading at home with his cat.

Volunteer Update

“It is, by common consent, a good thing for people to get back to nature.” Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, Part III, The Conservation Esthetic* (pg. 155)

With new safety procedures in place and guidelines recommending we all spend more time outside, we decided to open the volunteer program once again this June. After months away, the start of summer saw the slow return of volunteers to Valley Water Mill Park, and among them many new faces. For our veteran volunteers, it was a welcome step back towards “normal.” Our new faces, on the other hand, were in search of a “new normal.” Some were looking for new ways to stay involved while their lives were shaken up, and others were simply looking for ways to (safely) get out of the house. Most of them, however, were total newcomers to the outdoors. While on lockdown they began spending more time outside starting gardens or hiking local trails, only to realize that they’ve been missing out on all the fun. What a renewed sense of spirit our volunteer team has with the influx of “first-timers,” as we all get to reminisce on the joy and wonder we felt when we first embarked on our own outdoor journeys.

The summer kicked off early with United Way’s Day of Caring in mid-June. Although this annual event looked much different than years past, it wasn’t enough to slow down volunteers from Bass Pro Shops, Communication Workers of America and Miller Engineering, Inc. as they spent the day at Valley Water Mill Park recovering and clearing trails, cleaning trash from our park and lake, and helping to restore portion of riparian area.

New challenges and new energy brought about new ideas and creativity throughout the summer as well. Virtual orientations and volunteer-at-home activities, like seed preparation and our “Grow-in-Place” Program, are only a few examples of how we were able to remove barriers to volunteering and encourage our community to stay engaged. However, none of our new programs can compare to the success of Volunteer-palooza.

To celebrate National Water Quality month in August, we kicked off the first annual Volunteer-palooza, a month-long volunteering competition where we invited volunteers to “be a part of the ripple.” Volunteers dedicated their time to support our mission and serve our community, all while they competed for prizes. The goal of starting an annual volunteering competition was to create a frenzy of support for our mission in a fun and exciting way. Volunteers rose to the challenge and participated in activities that included mitigating erosion, building and fixing trails, supporting native plants, improving our rain garden, restoring habitats, and cleaning waterways. Our winners, Tri-Beta Honors Biological Society (community organization) and Chase Rose (individual competitor), dedicated more time to our mission than any other competitors in their division. Through all of their efforts, this August we more than tripled the number of hours served in August 2019, making our new tradition at the end of summer a success in no uncertain terms. —Kelly Owens, Watershed Center Asst. Coordinator



Miller Engineering volunteers



Tri-Beta Honors Biological Society volunteers

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 \$49,000 on September 15, 2018. On September 9, 2020, a grant amendment was awarded, bringing the total grant funding to \$78,000. 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. Currently, WCO is planning virtual educational workshops as part of the grant.

The Farm Bill continues its strong support for conservation efforts of America's farmers and ranchers through reauthorization and expanded flexibility of NRCS conservation programs. NRCS offers financial and technical assistance through conservation practices, activities, and enhancements to help agricultural producers make and maintain improvements on their land. To learn about available programs visit:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mo/programs/farmbill/>

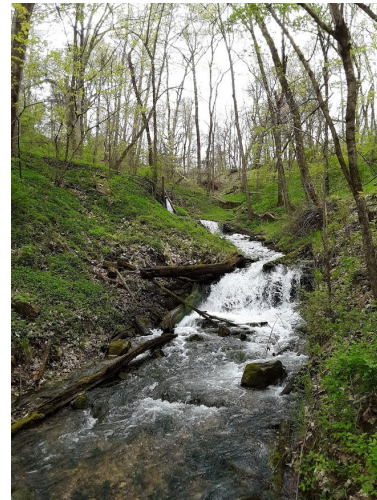
Groundwater Monitoring

The Watershed Committee of the Ozarks did a revamp of the former Adopt-A-Spring Program and launched a groundwater monitoring program in partnership with City Utilities of Springfield beginning in April 2019. The program provides a proactive groundwater monitoring collection of quarterly water samples from area springs to measure water quality parameters and identify any existing or emerging groundwater contaminants in our region. The first year of sample collection has gone well. Continual sample collection will build the local groundwater dataset and yield background water quality trends.

Celebration of Collaboration!

On August 12th, WCO participated in a hydrilla inspection and an afternoon of touring project sites. It was a pleasure to have Sara Parker Pauley, Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation as the lunch speaker. The theme of the day was collaboration. Collaborative efforts of community partners in Southwest Missouri have led to many successful outcomes for local natural resources and citizens that depend on them. One prime example of that is the Hydrilla Working Group which was presented with the Invasive Plant Action Award for their outstanding collaborative work to fight the spread of invasive hydrilla. At times, the amount of work to be done can be overwhelming, but we are not alone in our efforts. We are very fortunate to have a community full of bright minds protecting and improving our natural resources who are willing to join efforts toward a common vision. Remarkable work can be accomplished when we join together. As Andrew Carnegie once said, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

Stacey Armstrong Smith, Projects Manager



Hoffmeister Spring



Mike Kromrey, Tim Smith, MDC Director Sara Parker Pauley, and Loring Bullard at Little Sac stream stabilization project site

Watershed Conservation Corps

The WCC has had another successful summer improving natural habitat and water quality in Springfield and across the Ozarks. Since our last update we have completed the following projects:

43 acres of glade restoration at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield

A crew of nine WCC employees worked for 3 months with Wilson's Creek National Battlefield and Heartland Inventory and Monitoring Network on a cultural and natural resource improvement project. The Heartland Network takes inventory of the species and natural features in its parks, monitors them over time to see how they're doing and works with partners to use science, management, and education to understand and preserve the Heartland's unique resources and special places. The WCC's role at Wilson's Creek mostly involved cutting and stacking Eastern Red Cedar. This marks the third year that the Corps has worked to improve glade habitat at Wilson's Creek. We know from previous experience that this restoration activity has an immediate impact on the ecological health of these habitats. We fully expect a flush of Missouri Bladderpod in these areas next spring.



WCC crew at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield

Prairie Management with Missouri Prairie Foundation: This summer marked our first year partnering with



Missouri Prairie Foundation to help manage La Petite Gem Prairie. The WCC worked over a three-day period to carefully treat diffuse patches of *Sericea lespedeza* and a few other non-native invasive species.



WCC Conservation Specialist Adam Barton treating invasive species at La Petite Gemme Prairie

City of Springfield-Environmental Services-Green Infrastructure management

Beginning in 2019 the WCC partnered with the City of Springfield to improve the ecological health of a stretch of Jordan Creek's riparian buffer. While still managing this stretch of Jordan Creek, the WCC is now working to preserve other valuable buffer projects that the city owns and manages. We are very proud to play such a direct role in helping to improve our local waterways and water quality.

Caleb Sanders, WCC Director



WCC crew working in South Creek

Watershed Summer Gala & Watershed Sustainers

This year really highlighted the importance of your sustaining membership versus the more traditional, event or project-based fundraising efforts we (and most nonprofits) have done in the past. We will certainly carry on the Summer Gala tradition as times return to normal, but as a celebration of our sustaining members. A huge thank you for all of our sustainers!

Business Sustainers

Arkifex Studios
Bass Pro Shops
Crawford, Murphy & Tilly
Commercial Metals Company
Elite Promotions
Greater Ozarks Audubon Society
Missouri Master Naturalist Springfield
Plateau Chapter
Ozarks Coca-Cola Dr. Pepper Bottling Company
Roto-Rooter Plumbing and Drain Service
Wildscape Environmental Services

Individual Sustainers

Aaron J. Scott
AdriAnn Rode
Andrew Schiller
Ashley Beard-Fosnow
Barry and Debbie Bellotti
Benjamin Tegeler
Bill Cheek
Brian Edmund
Bruce Adib-Yazdi
Bob and Barb Kipfer
Bob Wilson
Brendan Brothers
Bud and Mary Hogan
Calvin and Barbara Armstrong
Carmen Poff in honor of Cedar Joseph Pearson
Cathy and Alex Primm
Charlie Burwick and Lisa Berger
Chris Ball
Cody and Erin Danastasio
Dan and Diane Hoy
Dave and Elisa Coonrod
DeDe Vest

Eric Dove
Gary Gibson
George and Sandy Kromrey
Greg and Martha Swick
Harwood Ferguson and Carrie Coleman
J.D. Slaughter and Gail Emrie
Jacob Painter and Kelly Owens
Jane Earnhart
Jason and Amber Hainline
Jeff and Kathy Munzinger
John and Nicole Montgomery
Jordan and Casey Wilson
Kira Howerton
Lara and Jason Plass
Laura and Chuck Greene
Leslie and Ron Carrier
Loring and Beth Bullard
Mark and Janet Bower
Mary Sturdevant
Michael Stelzer
Mike and Mary Kromrey
Mike Pessina
Nicole Brown
Paden and Jamie Wilcox
Piper Lee
Rick and Debbie Smith
Rina Edge
Saki Urushidan
Sam Freeman
Shae and Dick Johnson in memory of Linda Ellis
Stephanie and Jacob Hurt
Tamera Jahnke
Tammy and Wes Trantham
Terri and Dennis Barnicle
Tim and Sally Smith
Todd Polk
Tom and Angela Blevins
Trent Jackson



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Living Waters: The Springs of Missouri

Living Waters: The Springs of Missouri, written by Loring Bullard, is a collaborative publishing effort between the Ozark Studies Institute and the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks. This book explores the rich variety of Missouri springs, placing them in the state's patterns of settlement and development. From the founding of towns — including Springfield, MO — to the establishment of wagon-road rest stops, to largely forgotten spas and resorts, Missouri springs were, and continue to be, centerpieces of the landscape.

"What you will experience in the following pages is, in my opinion, a masterpiece—a rare confluence of experience, passion, and skillful writing. It tells the story of humanity's ever flowing, ever changing journey with springs." (Mike Kromrey from the Foreword)

We have limited copies available at the Watershed Center. Call or email to reserve your copy today, 417-866-1127, kelly@watershedcommittee.org. (Pick-up Only)

You can also purchase online for delivery at <https://www.ozarksociety.net/product/living-waters-the-springs-of-missouri-by-loring-bullard/>

