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## 2021 2nd Quarter Newsletter

### Director's Update:

You probably know this, but I really enjoy fishing and pretty much always have. The work of watershed improvement and clean water is certainly important from a human-centric perspective focused on drinking water. I would be lying, however, if I didn't admit my own motivations stem from fish-love and the ecosystems which support them.

A life of fishing and river running is rich with metaphors, and fishing literature is replete with quotes. My fishing buddies are subjected to this one from John Buchan on a regular basis: "fishing is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope." In addition, you will *almost* never catch a fish without your hook in the water. The "almost" part is a story for another column...

In work, and in fishing, we proceed with hope, skill, knowledge and persistence. Every once in a while everything goes right and something remarkable happens. In April, Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO) announced a \$4 million anonymous gift that funds endowments for four local environmental organizations: James River Basin Partnership, Ozark Greenways, TrailSpring and Watershed Committee of the Ozarks. This gift will be transformational for our organizations and allow us to work in ways we have never been able to.

At the risk of carrying the fishing thing too far, allow me one more: This gift is like catching and releasing an amazing fish—the CFO will help this catch grow and multiply, for maximum future impact. Fish on, friends, fish on.

Mike Kromrey,  
Executive Director



Brent Stock, Jessica Pearson, Mike and Mary Kromrey with aforementioned nonprofits (photo courtesy of CFO)



## Field Trips Return to the Park

Summer brought the return of field trips to the Watershed Center. While Springfield Public Schools continued to modify their Explore! summer programs, many area schools returned to a more traditional field trip centered approach. Watershed staff followed all

recommended safety protocols regarding Covid-19 while hosting the various groups. The students and staff seemed very excited and happy to be able to participate in a field trip. For most schools these were the first field trips students were able to participate in over one year. Fall planning and scheduling currently underway indicates even more schools hope to return to a more normal schedule. Area colleges are also coming back to the site to utilize the Watershed Center 's resources for hands-on learning and research.



*MSU students utilizing the South Dry Sac stream for their research*



*How will this view of Jordan Creek change in years to come?*

## Jordan Creek Tours

Jordan Creek and our community's relationship with the waterway continues to evolve, and we have learned much from the journey. Recently, and probably due to the **Renew Jordan Creek project**, we have seen a significant increase in demand for Jordan Creek tours. This project is part of a large-scale planning effort focusing on water quality improvement and flood reduction in the downtown area. Design components will also improve pedestrian access and greenway connectivity that will provide a safe environment for a variety of activities. Please visit their website at [renewjordan creek.com](https://renewjordan creek.com) to learn more about these exciting plans for Jordan Creek. For groups interested in **Jordan Creek tours**, please click on the Education tab at [watershedcommittee.org](https://watershedcommittee.org).

Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Director



## AmeriCorps VISTA Update

As a member of AmeriCorps, my first four months at the Watershed Center have been filled with many new and exciting experiences. One of my most impactful experiences occurred when I assisted with our summer outreach events. The excitement and level of participation from the youth involved in these events exceeded my expectations, and their zeal gave me hope for a future filled with environmental scientists, advocates, and general enthusiasts. Truth be told, I had just as much fun catching macroinvertebrates in the streams as the kids did. Luckily, I get to continue catching aquatic macroinvertebrates outside of outreach events. One of my projects involves writing a stream bioassessment narrative and create collection of real, preserved aquatic macroinvertebrates. With this activity, students can practice identifying different taxa to determine stream health on occasions where an actual stream may not be accessible to them.

I am also working on a couple other projects that will increase visitor engagement at the park and further the mission of the Watershed Committee. Currently, I am in the process of creating an entomology display case that will be viewable to visitors. Insects from around the park will be collected, pinned, labeled, and organized inside the display based on how they were found (e.g. pollinating, near water, etc.). This display will raise awareness for local insect diversity, increase insect appreciation, and encourage visitors to search for insects while hiking the trails.

Last, but certainly not least, the Watershed Center will have a new docent program for our volunteers. Docents will interact with the public and educate visitors on a variety of subjects. Topics for discussion may include water quality, fossils, native and invasive plants, habitats, topography, and fishing. Docents will either lead a tour on the trails or have a station set up at the lake-side pavilion. We will have docents volunteering before summer's end. Come to the park, meet a docent, and you may learn something new!

Rachel Wilkins, AmeriCorps VISTA Member



*Students exploring a classic Ozark stream!*

## Volunteer Update

The last several months have been spent getting back to a better sense of “normal” with the volunteer program. Many of our most dedicated volunteers have graduated and moved on to different things and we couldn’t be happier for them! This means we are gearing-up for more recruitment opportunities and we look forward to seeing some fresh faces in the park.

During the last quarter, we have had several groups volunteer their time both at the Watershed Center and at Fellows Lake, many of which have gone above and beyond with their projects. We would like to point out a few, in particular, to give them a special “Thanks!”

In June, the Youth Volunteer Corps spent a week incorporating service and learning through numerous projects both at the Watershed Center and the Native Plants Nursery. This group of young adults was able to return home every day with new knowledge and experience. That same week, 29 interns from Bass Pro participated in a trash cleanup at Fellows Lake. Also in June, we held this year’s first Day of Caring, which had a great turnout. There were 79 participants from four area businesses: 417 Magazine, Bass Pro Shops, JMark, and John Deere Remanufacturing. Together, they contributed over 270 volunteer hours and five different projects in one day! This year, United Way is holding another Day of Caring on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, so stay tuned for more incredible results.

Looking forward, we are excited to announce a few other volunteer opportunities—some new and some returning—and can’t wait to see what changes these opportunities will bring. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Volunteer-Palooza has begun and will continue through the month of August. This event is a way to bring in new volunteers and encourage more hours worked in the park through a bit of friendly competition. Finally, Rachel Wilkins, one of our AmeriCorps members, has been working hard to start up a new program for volunteers interested in providing education and we are excited to unveil it!

Our volunteers are amazing, and we are so thankful for all the work and time they contribute to our organization. We are equally thankful for the contributions of our volunteers who have moved on and so proud of their accomplishments!

Rowan Castle Hoffman, Watershed Fellow/Volunteer Coordinator



*Youth Volunteer Corps experiencing service and learning*



*Day of Caring volunteers*



## 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 and extending the grant until September 2022. 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.

On July 21, Missouri Forage Grassland Council sponsored a “Foraging for Soil Health Workshop” in Everton, MO the workshop was made possible by partners including Missouri Cattlemen’s Association, Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Missouri Department of Conservation and MFA. The workshop reached maximum capacity with 100 participants and WCO collected 62 water quality surveys during the event. Speakers included soil health experts Ray Archuleta, Dale Strickler and Doug Peterson. To learn more about the importance of soil health for agriculture visit: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mo/soils/health/>



*Ray Archuleta presenting at the workshop*

## Little Sac Grazing Demonstration

The Little Sac Grazing Demonstration (LSGD) showcases riparian protection, prescribed/rotational grazing, warm and cool season paddocks, and solar fence and watering system, and provides an opportunity for research and education. Over the last two years, MSU master’s student Shelby Mundy conducted her thesis research at the LSGD to evaluate how things are going and lay the foundation for long-term monitoring at the site. Her thesis work titled “Exploring Regenerative Pasture Systems in the Ozarks” was the topic of the WCO August monthly meeting, and was presented by her advisor Dr. William McClain from the Missouri State University, William H. Darr College of Agriculture School. He explained that the study looked at soil health and soil quality by measuring chemical, physical and biological elements. Shelby took several hundred samples and tested soil parameters including soil organic carbon, total soil nitrogen, water stable aggregation, microbial substrate inorganic nitrogen, calcium, potassium and phosphorus. The extensive soil sampling and geospatial mapping produced a high resolution soil map of the LSGD. In addition, the samples revealed that soil health is in the normal range for what you would find in a healthy Ozarks pasture and that the soil health is showing signs of improvement likely due to prescribed grazing practices at the site.



*Little Sac Grazing Demonstration site*

Stacey Armstrong Smith,  
Projects Manager



## Watershed Conservation Corps

The Watershed Conservation Corps accomplished a great deal in the second quarter of 2021. From riparian buffer improvements, to invasive species management, the WCC has diversified the certifications, experiences, and job opportunities we are able to provide to local young adults. Extending our training opportunities also allows us to do more skilled-work in our local watershed, and do more for water quality. None of what we do would be possible without you, our partners. Thank you for your continued investment in our region's future conservation

professionals, and the water upon which depend.

### April: Tackling Invasive Species for the National Park Service

This summer marks our third year of partnership with the National Park Service. We currently have four individuals employed full-time working on watershed improvement projects on our National Parks across the Midwest. This crew is led by our long-term employees, Trey Thompson and Dillan Simmons, who bring to the table a wealth of knowledge of rural Arkansas and project management.

This crew has primarily worked on collecting data and removing tree-of-heaven from Buffalo National River, a species that threatens the rich and sensitive riparian community along the river. In the coming months the crew will also be working on invasive species management at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, George Washington Carver National Monument. The crew will be concluding their one-year term with a two month project treating invasive species in the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in the Current River area.



*WCC NPS Crew standing along the river at Kyle's landing after a long day's work*



## May: The Month of Maintenance

We renewed our contract to conduct **green infrastructure maintenance** for the City of Springfield this year and added additional project sites along South Creek, Jordan Creek, and West Meadows. The City has been working hard to continue to beautify our public spaces with green infrastructure and we are happy to help.

The WCC crew is continuing to manage the **riparian tree planting** which provides a riparian buffer along Wilson's Creek at Rutledge Wilson Farm Park. The trees were planted in January in partnership with Springfield Greene County Parks and the James River Basin Partnership. This work, while sometimes forgotten after tree planting, is probably the most important aspect to achieving a successful planting. JRBP has generously provided funding for the planting area to be managed for a two year period by the WCC.

The WCC has had the privilege of working with local private landowners on extremely important water quality improvement projects over the past few years. One of our most dedicated partners has been Dr. Robert Elworth, a landowner along the little Sac. Bob has spent the better part of 30 years making ecological improvements to his property, and the WCC has recently assisted in planting 600 trees to extend his riparian buffer. Dr. Elworth has since made the decision to place his entire property under a **conservation easement**—effectively protecting his part of the Little Sac River in perpetuity.

In addition to all this, the Watershed Conservation Corp managed to find time to help out with the **forest management and trail work** at the Watershed Center at Valley Water Mill Park.



*Loading curly dock to be taken to the yard waste recycling center*



*Local Landowner Bob Elworth discussing his plans for placing a conservation easement on his property. Nic Rogers of Ozark Land Trust listens in.*

## June: Native Warm Season Grass Installation at Bass Pro

Remember that native warm season grass planting (NWSG) at Bass Pro's Basecamp that we discussed in our last update back in March? Now we have some before and after pictures (below). After a slow start due to the unusually cool spring, the NWSG stand grew robustly with the well spaced rains. Some of the plants reached maturity (produced seed) in only four months which is remarkable. In a typical seeding, we wouldn't see NWSG produce seed until the second year. The Hamilton Native Outpost method, which relies on techniques to reduce cool season grass competition really does work. We now feel confident that we can replicate for other local partners. The plot is becoming ecologically performative and improving diversity, soil health, water absorption and carbon capture. We think that is beautiful...and it looks good too.



*Before: fescue removed, ready for NWSG planting*



*After: a robust NWSG stand in late June*

## July: Remnant Prairie Management with Missouri Prairie Foundation

Watershed Conservation Corps is entering our second year of partnership with Missouri Prairie Foundation (MPF) to skillfully and carefully manage invasive species on over 700 acres of intact remnant prairie. Under the leadership of Carol Davit and Jerod Huebner, MPF continually purchases and protects prairies within our region and manages them with the respect and a delicate hand that these places deserve. For our part, the WCC is able to utilize our well trained and knowledgeable team to help MPF manage their prairies. This requires plant identification, knowledge of treatment methods, GIS capability and more. We are happy to assist MPF in their mission which is complimentary to ours. Clean water starts on the land, after all.



*WCC crew doing delicate work at La Pettie Gemme Prairie. Notice the treated patches of *Sericea Lespedeza*.*

*Brown = Success*

Caleb Sanders, WCC Program Director



## WCC Trailblazers: A Crew Leader's Perspective

This summer I had the honor to work with some of the hardest working individuals I have ever met. We had the daunting task of repairing and relocating sections of trail in the Willow Springs district of the Mark Twain National Forest. Fighting through sweat and spider webs, we were able to repair roughly two miles of trail on Ozark Trail, and Noblett Loop Trail.

We had a variety of experiences in addition to trail work during the course of the summer. The crew met some local residents of the Ozarks, and found types of amphibians, reptiles and plants that we have not seen before. At the end of the day we took advantage of the nearby creeks and springs to seek refuge from the summer heat. The long walks to the work sites often sparked impromptu mad libs, or a barrage of plant naming and nature facts to pass time.



*Our trail crew at the end of a .87 mile reroute completed this summer*

Trail work is physically demanding with days filled with walking, hand tool use, and a decent amount of heavy lifting. There were many days of sore muscles, which make you really look forward to the cool shower waiting for you at the house. There were some days where one rock may seem like a one person job, then turns out to be an “iceberg” and it may take the whole crew to remove it. However, we became stronger each day, not only on an individual level but as a team.

If I was given the opportunity I would do it again. Trail work is probably one of the most rewarding jobs I have ever done and would strongly recommend it to anyone to experience it. This job gave me new skills that help me stand out from others in the job market. I enjoyed the experience and feel great knowing that the crew and I were able to create more sustainable trails designed to last decades.

Jeremiah Cline, WCC Crew Leader



*What we call an “Iceberg” in trail-lingo*

## Business Sustainer Spotlight: Ozarks Coca-Cola Dr. Pepper Bottling Co.

Watershed is grateful to count Ozarks Coca-Cola Dr. Pepper Bottling Company (Coke) as a Business Sustainer. Coke is a global company with a multi-faceted approach to corporate stewardship including waste reduction, water resource leadership, empowering women, and more. Here locally, Coke recently embarked upon a major facility expansion. The facility is located in the headwaters of Jordan Creek, the body of water which the community of Springfield first grew up around. We are excited to embark on a project in which the Watershed Conservation Corps will help improve the riparian areas at the Coke property by helping to establish native plants and trees, remove invasive species, and clean up trash in the waterway. The work will help improve the beauty and functionality of the site, and align with both the goals of Coke and our Mission at WCO.



### Join the Watershed Sustainer Team

Watershed Sustainers are a dedicated group of local individuals, families, and businesses who support clean water and give back to the community by automatic monthly or yearly contributions. Sustainers provide WCO with a reliable stream of support for projects and education and outreach programs to sustain and improve the water resources of Springfield and Greene County.



If you, your family, or your business would like to become a sustainer, you can learn more and sign up on our website on our Donate page. Please join us!



## Watershed Summer Gala

"The most fun gala ever!" Statements like this were pretty consistent for attendees of the 2021 Watershed Summer Gala at Fellows Lake. The evening was shared with our partners City Utilities, Ozark Greenways, Trailspring and Fellows Lake, LLC, and kicked off the dedication of Miller Park in honor of Scott Miller and his outstanding contributions to the community. It was hot out, but attendees beat the heat and enjoyed the beautiful outdoors at Fellows Lake, boat rides, live music, cold beverages, great food and silent auction. Some even stayed for the Moonlight Paddle after the sunset. We look forward to making a few minor tweaks and doing it again next year. Thanks to all of our partners, business and individual sustainers, and guests for a great event!



*Mike with Kathy and Scott Miller in the newly dedicated Miller Park*

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# WATERSHED natives

The spring rains brought plenty of moisture for the nursery. April was full transplant-mode as we prepared for the spring sales. Hillcrest students and Watershed volunteers helped transplant natives once they had germinated. In May we added native aquatic plants to the grow-list. Producing aquatics will be a new skill for staff and students to learn. We are excited to see the response to the availability of native aquatic plants in our area. Starting in August seed collection is officially underway and will continue throughout the fall season. Collection will be a group effort shared by Watershed volunteers, staff and the students in the Hillcrest Pathway program.

## Partnerships

With the end of the school year winding down in April and May the nursery was in full swing. Students in the Springfield Public School College and Career Pathway's program at Hillcrest High School help in germination, transplanting and pulling orders for the upcoming plant sales.

In furthering the partnership with Hillcrest High School and the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, the Watershed Natives have transitioned some of the flower beds at the fairgrounds to native plantings. This project was organized by our AmeriCorps member Sammi Gisselbeck.

After months of delay the long-awaited delivery of the Nursery's High Tunnel arrived in Mid-August. The high tunnel plays a key role in the day-to-day operations of the nursery and the Pathway's education programs. Construction will continue through the end of August with the help of fairground's staff.



*High tunnel being delivered*



## Watershed Natives—Activities

The Watershed Natives had a unique partnership with City of Springfield and Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO) to participate in Clean Green Springfield. Each weekend neighborhood and points of pride cleanups took place to clean the city of Springfield. Through the support of CFO, participants during each weekend in April and May traded trash for treasure. Treasure was in the form of Native Plants. Over the span of six Saturday's 499 native plants/trees were handed out to the participants.

In May Watershed Natives had a chance to honor Jan Horton by participating in her memorial service. Jan was a well-known community advocate with a heart for service and nature. She was involved in many community organizations, including serving as director of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks from 1993-2003. Attendees at Jan's memorial took home about 145 young trees and shrubs to take home and plant in her memory. Jan truly loved trees and each tag had the Nelson Henderson quote: "The meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

In the spring Watershed Natives had two plants sales in conjunction with Missouri Prairie Foundation GrowNative!. The first sale was pre-order and took place at the Fairgrounds on May 8<sup>th</sup>. From this sale, sixty-six families took home new native plants for their property. A small walk-through sale was held at Mother's Brewery on Saturday May 29<sup>th</sup>. Thirty-six families took home native plants and enjoyed some brews.

In July Watershed Natives worked with Fellows Lake to start on small native planting in front of the Lake Store. This fall the bed will be extended and educational signs will be placed to show the importance of native plants and provide an example of what lake guests can do at their home. Look for more Watershed Natives events this fall. We have a walk-through sale at the Watershed Center October 2nd from 11am- 2pm. This sale will be in conjunction with Missouri Prairie Foundation's GrowNative! fall plant sales. Keep an eye on the Watershed Committee Facebook page and website for more activities in which the nursery will be participating.

-Christy Wilder, Watershed Natives  
Nursery Manager



*Trees for Jan Horton Memorial*



*Trees and shrubs ready for the spring plant sale*



## Fellows Lake Update

We are more than halfway through our first season at Fellows Lake, and it has been a wonderful learning experience so far. We have learned a lot about the needs of visitors to the area, how our set-up and staff can provide a good customer experience, and how to deliver programs and communication which help people “connect and protect.” People are eager to share stories and the connections they have with Fellows Lake, which makes the experience of working at Fellows very interesting and fulfilling.

## Rental Boats

Canoe and Kayak rentals have been brisk with many customers returning almost weekly to enjoy the serenity of the lake. It has been our immense pleasure to have introduced countless individuals to paddling for the first time. We cannot express the joy it brings to us when we have a new paddler come back ready to go purchase their first boat. We were fortunate enough to partner with Ozark Mountain Paddlers on an introduction to paddling course. The two classes were full, 20 students each, learning to improve novice paddlers skills and the basics of safe boating. We look forward to offering more classes with James River Basin Partnership and Ozark Mountain Paddlers.

## “Dock 426”

When will the new dock be done? This has been the question of the year, and we joke that we will name it “Dock 426,” because it will be done in four to six weeks (we just don’t know which four to six weeks in particular). City Utilities contracted with a dock/marina building company and coordinates the dock project as the landowner. The contractor building the dock has experienced shortages of materials and possibly other issues leading to months of delay. Upon writing this, construction has picked back up, and so have our hopes that the structure may be complete with some of the season left—we will be open through October 31. Our boat-slip renters are eager to utilize the dock, and we are eager to launch the fleet of 3 fishing boats and two pontoon boats donated by Bass Pro Shops and Tracker Marine for visitors to rent, in addition to our fleet of kayaks and canoes.



*Kayaks on Fellows Lake*



## Wind in Our Sails

Sailing is a wonderful, low-impact way to enjoy Fellows Lake. People often express interest in sailing, in learning how to sail, or share experiences they've had sailing on Fellows Lake in the past. Paul Nahon, Eric Peterson and I are three of those people who actually learned how to sail right here, and have carried that skill and passion our whole lives. Now, we share a vision of bringing sailing back to the lake. Eric Peterson put wind in our sails by generously donating \$15,000 for sailing program start-up costs. We have since obtained national recognition as a sailing lake, and enrolled in sailing instructor certification programs. I am also donating my 22' Catalina sailboat to be used as an instructional boat. We plan to offer our first sailing lessons this fall. Many other individuals have stepped forward by offering to donate boats and we are working to have a functional fleet of sailboats soon.

## Programs and Events

Having the Watershed Summer Gala here at the lake was a wonderful experience capped off by a moonlight paddle with over 150 Kayaks registered and on the water that night. We also enjoyed providing tours of the lake aboard our new pontoon boats. Much fun was had by all!

We have been fortunate enough to host many other events, National Youth Fishing Association kayak tournament, invasive species training for the water responders of Springfield Fire Department, a youth fishing/paddling program with Missouri Division of Youth Services, A moonlight paddle with our friends at 37N, The Greater Ozarks Audubon Society annual meeting (first since COVID), with many more to come.

## Trails

Nearly every day, more feet of trail are added to the Dirt 66 trail system which is planned to eventually encircle the lake. A road crossing and new section of trail extends east almost to Highway 65 and loops down to the east arm of the lake above the causeway. The trails are some of the best in the region, and are constructed for longevity and to prevent erosion. Cyclists add a good energy to the place. They can come to the Fellows Lake Store to get a map, refreshments, and a friendly reminders about where to park and not to ride in the mud.

Matt Taylor, Fellows Lake LLC Operations Manager (and sailing enthusiast)



*Eric Peterson with a generous gift for a sailing program*



*22 foot Catalina donated by Matt Taylor to use for sailing lessons*



2400 E. Valley Water Mill Rd.  
Springfield, MO 65803



*None of the work detailed in this newsletter would be possible without our talented, dedicated team and your help. Above is much of the 2021 team before the Watershed Summer Gala at Fellows Lake. Left to right: Stacey Armstrong Smith, Mike Kromrey, Christy Wilder, Rachel Wilkins, Sammi Gisselbeck, Brett Houston, Rowan Castle Hoffman, Grant Denbow, Clarissa Hatley, Adam Barton, Brendan Brothers, Caleb Sanders, Henry Wilbers, Pat Bond, Evan Petrich, Matt Taylor, Trey Thompson, Tomiann Brashers, Jeff Birchler, Amanda McConnell, Kelly Guenther, and Kelce Arrington.*