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Christy Wilder, *Watershed  
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City Utilities of Springfield  
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## 2021 First Quarter Newsletter

### Director's Update: Springing Forward

Spring always has a special energy. This spring, the energy of the season seems to reflect the energy I feel at WCO and the opportunities we have before us. We are exploring our mission in new and exciting ways, and some of the seeds planted in previous years are really flourishing. We started a major new endeavor at Fellows Lake, our Watershed Natives Program is in its second year, the Watershed Conservation Corps Program turned 4, and the Watershed Center is going on 10. We now proudly employ 22 full and part-time staff, which makes me do a double-take each time I see that number in print. In WCO's work, people are our greatest resource, and it has been thrilling to see the team grow in size, skill, and experience.

Growing can be confusing and even hard. Amidst the excitement of our new endeavors, we have been problem solving almost nonstop, especially with the backdrop of the pandemic factoring into nearly everything over the past year. I want to thank our board, staff, and sponsor representatives for applying their talent and insight to help guide us in the right direction, keep us safe, and make progress throughout such uncertain times.

If you are a new subscriber to our newsletter and the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, welcome, and we hope to help you find your niche with us. With our Fellows Lake endeavor and our mission in general, we recognize that building community and relationships are key to our shared mission and success. Thank you for being a part of it. Looking forward, we plan to have a major, post-pandemic party. We have many things to celebrate.

Mike Kromrey,  
Executive Director



*Serviceberry, blooming March 25, 2021, photo  
by Mark Bowers*



## Watershed Center Update—Park Improvements

Recent visitors to the park will have noticed a woodworking shop set up near the fishing piers as Springfield Greene County Parks' staff work to repair damaged railings along the boardwalk and fishing piers. The replacement of the 15-year old top rails is made possible through a Corporate and Agency Partnership Program (CAPP) agreement between the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), Springfield Parks Department, and Watershed Committee. Our thanks go out to MDC for funding the cost of materials and the expertise provided by Tom Highfill and the Parks' staff for installing the new railing. The fishing piers remain a very popular attraction to the park, and are one of the few accessible fishing accesses in the area. We hope to expand accessible fishing opportunities at Fellows Lake over the next year. A special thanks to Tom Highfill and his team for their excellent repair and replacement job.



*Tom and crew fixing fishing piers*

## New Staff

In February, we welcomed our newest member as Sammi Gisselbeck joined the Watershed Team as an AmeriCorps member. Sammi has a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources from Missouri State University. Her course work and experience as a graduate assistant make her a tremendous asset as we grow our Watershed Native, educational, and volunteer programs.

Christy Wilder joined the Watershed staff in January as the Nursery Manager for the Watershed Natives program. Christy graduated from College of the Ozarks with a Bachelor of Science studying Conservation and Wildlife Management. Her courses in horticulture, seed and tissue propagation, pest management, and her years of experience in both commercial greenhouses and forestry make her an excellent fit for this position, and we look forward to seeing Watershed Natives grow and students learn with her on board.



*Christy working with Hillcrest students*



*Sammi and Christy preparing soil*



## Field Trips Return to the Park

With the new year, we saw our in-person field trips begin to return to the Park. Students from Springfield Public Schools' WOLF Program braved the cooler weather at the end of January to learn about watersheds, topography, and orienteering. WOLF is an innovative program for fifth-grade students who have an interest in nature and the outdoors. In addition to the WOLF Program, we are beginning to see more schools schedule field trips for this spring and early summer.

Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Director



## School of the Wild

School of the Wild meets Tuesdays at Valley Water Mill Park to spend the day in our favorite classroom—the great outdoors. Currently, we have 23 students from ages 6-12 in our nature school family. We begin in the Lakeside Pavilion and often return there for lunch and art projects. We spend our days enjoying hands-on learning through mini-nature study sessions that may incorporate science, geography, language arts, math concepts, art, or engineering. We usually have two of these learning sessions per day, which we alternate with hiking through the park, outdoor skills, free play, and exploring. And don't forget poetry tea time. Our afternoons conclude as we snack and sip tea and lemonade while we listen to poetry. School of the Wild's mission is to inspire an appreciation and love of nature by connecting children with the outdoors, and Valley Water Mill is an amazing location for us to do that.

Guest Contributor,

Laura Stroup with School of the Wild



## Volunteer Update

The weather has been warming up and volunteers are returning. After a long and rough year last year, we are looking forward to having more volunteers take part in our new projects in 2021. Since the beginning of the year, volunteers have already gotten to be a part of WCO's growth and work on new activities.

We started our second year of the Grow in Place kits for volunteers to do from home. With these kits, volunteers are able to volunteer from home while helping out with the Watershed Natives Program. Grow in Place volunteers grow native plants from seed, then transplant them into individual pots for our nursery and plant sales. So far, there are six kits being looked after by volunteers.

Volunteers were also able to be a part of the beginning of the new Fellows Lake marina. On Sunday, March 7, multiple community organizations worked together to clean up Fellows Lake and the trails throughout the lake's park. The cleanup day was organized and put on by Trailspring, but the Watershed Committee had three groups and several individual volunteers take part in representation of our organization. Bear Service Team, Tri-Beta Honors Society, and Youth Volunteer Corps all came out to volunteer for WCO.

At Valley Water Mill Park, our volunteers do so many things behind the scenes. The garbage is picked up, trails are graveled and mulched, invasive plants are removed and signs are kept clean, all thanks to our volunteers. This spring, we will continue to do on-site projects at Valley Water Mill Park and work to clean up the trails, help prevent erosion and keep our drinking water clean and park beautiful.

Rowan Castle Hoffman, Watershed Fellow



*Sam Grove, a volunteer, planting trees with Hillcrest High School*



*Volunteers at Fellows Lake*



*Youth Volunteer Corps cleaning up trash at Fellows Lake*



## 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 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 February 23 and 24 the 37th Southwest Missouri Spring Forage Conference was held virtually and Stacey Armstrong Smith from WCO attended. This conference helps provide agriculturists with the “need to know” information each year and helps us learn ways to be helpful to producers. Conference affiliate organizations include MU Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Missouri State, USDA, Missouri Forage and Grassland Council, Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Presentations this year included Missouri climate trends, year-round pasture management and warm season grasses-testing vs. performance.

### Little Sac Grazing Demonstration (LSGD)

The LSGD is located between Fellows Lake and McDaniel Lake. The land is owned by City Utilities, which has leased the parcel to WCO to manage. The LSGD showcases riparian protection, prescribed/rotational grazing, warm and cool season pastures, and alternative watering systems. The LSGD will be used for classes, tours, and scientific study, and offer sub-leases to local farmers who want to use the land within the restorative farming principals. Partners for this project include City Utilities of Springfield, the NRCS, Greene County Soil and Water District, USDA, and Missouri State University. The riparian corridor for the tributary on the LSGD has undergone some significant changes. Many hours of labor from dedicated watershed professionals over several years has transformed this stream’s riparian corridor from nonexistent to full of mature healthy native trees. A short video showing the historical changes the LSGD has undergone is available to watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-sbqwiwoTU>

Stacey Armstrong Smith, Projects Manager



*Little Sac Grazing Demonstration Site. Photo credit: Dr. Toby Dogwiler, Missouri State University*



## Watershed Conservation Corps

The Watershed Conservation Corps has already accomplished a lot in the first quarter of 2021. From tree planting to ecological management plan development, 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. So thank you for your continued investment in our region's future conservation

professionals, and the water upon which we all depend. We also appreciate many of you who participated in our Give Ozarks Day campaign to support the Watershed Conservation Corps; we met our goal of raising over \$3,000 with your help!

### January

WCC and James River Basin Partnership coordinated the removal of bush honeysuckle and planting of over 500 woody species along Wilson's Creek at Rutledge Wilson Farm. The project was funded by the EPA's Section 319 initiative and will provide bank stabilization and riparian corridor restoration within the park.

### February

WCC sent a skilled crew to Arkansas to begin a year-long effort of mitigating invasive species and conducting habitat restoration projects with the National Park Service's Invasive Plant Monitoring Team (IPMT). In preparation for the work in Arkansas, crew members took part in trainings, including fire safety and physical fitness. The four-person crew conducted cedar removal at Pea Ridge National Military Park, and prescribed burns



*WCC and NPS employees teaming up for a prescribed burn in Hot Springs, Arkansas*

at Hot Spring National Monument. The crew is based out of Harrison, Arkansas, to work primarily within the Buffalo National River Valley in 2021. The local WCC crew took part in invasive species removal along Jordan Creek in Springfield, removing tree-of-heaven and bush honeysuckle from the riparian area along the new West Meadows Trail. In association with Ozarks Greenways, the WCC has taken part in the initial development of Lone Pine Bike Park, which is a new mountain biking area in southeast Springfield. WCC and Ozark Greenways hosted a volunteer workday to removed invasive species and build cedar spilt rails for the new bike trails.



## March

As the growing season takes off in March, so does our number of projects. The NPS crew in Arkansas is currently involved in glade restoration efforts in the Buffalo River Valley, removing cedar and other invasive species from areas within the park. They will continue to remove cedar and tree-of-heaven throughout the year, following the direction of the NPS and IPMT management plans. Locally, the WCC plans to seed over 6 acres of warm-season grass at Bass Pro Shops National Headquarters. BPS has been a founding supporter of the WCC, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with them. Additionally, the WCC has planted inland sea oats and rose mallow in Southern Hills Neighborhood, which was made possible by funding from the Missouri Department of Conservation. WCC has taken part in several private land projects consisting of native plantings and invasive species management. Most recently, over 1,500 walnut tree seedlings were planted in a bottomland field adjacent to the James River near Northview, Missouri, for riparian corridor establishment and erosion reduction.



*Warm-season grass seed from Hamilton Native Seed Outpost to be planted in spring*

## Grant Awards

The National Park Foundation awarded the WCC \$75,000 in funding to continue our work with the National Park Service and expand our role across other NPS sites in the Ozarks. We are planning on having two NPS crews operating simultaneously this summer, along with our U.S. Forest Service trail crew continuing its work. The Conservation Federation of Missouri awarded WCC funding to continue our community outreach through land management at Lake Springfield Park & Boathouse and in conjunction with the Springfield-Greene County Park Board. Being able to carry out projects in areas of high recreational value serve as a avenue for the public to come face-to-face with conservation while bringing awareness to a larger audience. Overall, 2021 is shaping up to be yet another busy year for WCC!



Adam Barton,  
Watershed Conservation Corps Program Manager

## Business Sustainer Spotlight: Vital Farms

Watershed is grateful to count Vital Farms as a Business sustainer, and we love the work they do! Vital Farms is on a mission to bring ethical food to the table. Inherent to this mission is a commitment to all of Vital Farms' stakeholders—farmers and suppliers, crewmembers, communities and the environment, customers and consumers, and stockholders—and treating them as partners. This model guides Vital Farms far beyond producing the highest-quality, ethically produced foods to improving the lives of people, animals, and the planet in everything they do. In 2020, Vital Farms increased the number of farmers in its network of small family farms to over 200, giving 2.5 million hens a life outdoors on pasture and enabling 6,000 acres of farmland to rejuvenate naturally. Vital Farms also donated to 43 non-profit organizations and provided 15 million eggs to food banks across the country. And, its carbon neutral lid saved 25,000 trees. Read Vital Farms' recently published 2020 Stakeholder Summary here: <https://vitalfarms.com/vital-farms-2020-stakeholder-summary> and learn more about Vital Farms and its ethically produced pasture-raised products at: [www.vitalfarms.com](http://www.vitalfarms.com).



## 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 to sustain and improve the Water Resources of Springfield and Greene County. The pandemic has taught us the importance of our sustainers as in-person fundraising events have nearly disappeared. We hope to soon return to an environment in which we can all get together and celebrate, and do plan to have a Summer Gala style of sustainer recognition event in the not-too-distant future.

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





# Watershed Sustainers

## Business Sustainers

Arkifex Studios  
Arvest Bank  
Bailey Pyle Builders  
Bass Pro Shops  
Central Bank of the Ozarks  
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  
Vital Farms  
Wildscape Environmental Services

## Individual Sustainers

Aaron J. Scott  
AdriAnn Rode  
Andrew Schiller  
Ashley Beard-Fosnow  
Barry and Debbie Bellotti  
Benjamin Tegler  
Bill Cheek  
Brian Edmund  
Bruce Adib-Yazdi  
Bob and Barb Kipfer  
Bob Wilson  
Bobbilynne Koepke  
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  
Christina Moore  
Cody and Erin Danastasio  
Craig and Ann Young  
Dan and Diane Hoy  
Darlene Haun  
Dave and Elisa Coonrod  
DeDe Vest  
Eric Dove  
Fredrick Eck  
Gary Gibson  
Gary Leonard  
George and Sandy Kromrey  
Georgia Virnig  
Gerry Erb

Greg and Martha Swick  
Harwood Ferguson and Carrie Coleman  
Harold and Darlene Bengsch  
J.D. Slaughter and Gail Emrie  
Jacob Berger  
Jacob Painter and Kelly Owens  
Jane Earnhart  
Jason and Amber Hainline  
Jean Marie Lewis  
Jeff and Kathy Munzinger  
Joel and Melody Sanders  
John and Nicole Montgomery  
John Chiles  
Jordan and Casey Wilson  
Karen Myers  
Kate Baird  
Kira Howerton  
Lara and Jason Plass  
Laura and Chuck Greene  
Leslie and Ron Carrier  
Linda Regan  
Loring and Beth Bullard  
Marisa Frazier  
Mark and Janet Bower  
Mary Sturdevant  
Melinda Barton  
Michael Stelzer  
Mike and Mary Chiles  
Mike and Mary Kromrey  
Mike Finch  
Mike Pessina  
Mona Menezes  
Nicole Brown  
Paden and Jamie Wilcox  
Piper Lee  
Rick and Debbie Smith  
Rina Edge  
Russell Pavin  
Saki Urushidan  
Sam Freeman  
Shae and Dick Johnson in memory of Linda Ellis  
Stephanie and Jacob Hurt  
Summer Trottier  
Tamera Jahnke  
Tammy and Wes Trantham  
Terri and Dennis Barnicle  
Tim and Sally Smith  
Todd Polk  
Tom and Angela Blevins  
Trent Jackson



# WATERSHED natives

The Watershed Natives Program kicked off the 2021 season by stratifying seeds in early January. The majority of native seeds have to go through a cold season (winter), and this process can be mimicked in cultivation through a process called stratification. This process takes place by keeping seeds in the refrigerator for the appropriate number of weeks. Stratification breaks the built-in dormancy allowing the seed to begin the germination process. In March, the first seeds begin germination. The following weeks in March will be the busiest for the Natives program as seeds are sown to germination, and then transplanted in pots for our plant sale May 8.



*Plains Coreopsis  
germinating*



*Common milkweed beginning  
stratification*

## Partnerships

The Watershed Natives Program partners with Springfield Public Schools to support the Pathways Program at Hillcrest High School. This program developed between the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks (WCO) and Springfield Public Schools focus this 3-year “college and career pathway” to provide readiness in both college and career opportunities through the agriculture, environmental and science fields.

Through the partnership of Springfield Public School and the Ozarks Empire Fairgrounds (OEF) our Watershed Natives program has been able to move operations to the fairgrounds. With the support of the Darr Family Foundation, Community Foundation of the Ozarks and plant sales the Natives program is currently waiting on the delivery of a high tunnel. We are looking for the delivery late spring and are excited to start using the space to continue growing.



*Germination trays under grow lights at the Darr  
Agriculture building at OEF*



## Watershed Natives—Activities

The winter weather in mid-February pushed back our Missouri Department of Conservation tree seedling order. The first week of March, staff and volunteers worked with Hillcrest High School students potting up 650 tree seedlings on our nursery site at the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds.



*Hillcrest students potting seedlings at OEF*

A total of 40 students from the Environmental and Watershed pathway, along with FFA students potted up 22 different varieties of native trees and shrubs. These seedlings will be available for purchase at our plant sale May 8.

Planting and germination will continue through the month of March as our nursery prepares for its Spring Plant sale May 8. The Spring sale will be in the same drive-through format as last year plant sales. In the coming weeks the plant store will be updated on the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks website. Once inventory is updated, plants can be purchased through the online-store only; plants will not be for sale on site. The plant sale this year will take place at the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds. Look for updates in regards to the plant sale on the WCO's website and Facebook page. <https://watershedcommittee.org/store/>

## Clean Green Springfield

The City will be hosting a cleanup at significant locations in Springfield each week throughout April, and Watershed Natives will be there to provide **free native plants to participants, thanks to the Community Foundation of the Ozarks!** Come with family and friends to lend a hand to make these locations the points of pride they are, pick up trash, and leave with treasure. Each "Point of Pride" event takes place from 9:00 to noon at these locations:

April 3: West Meadows – Parking at Trailhead of Birthplace of Route 66 Roadside Park Trail and clean-up of surrounding property

April 10: Jordan Creek – Parking at Cruz Dog Park Kansas Expressway Grand to Mt. Vernon and clean-up Greenway Trail and Creek

April 17: Wilson's Creek & Scenic – Parking at Ewing Park and clean-up Greenway Trail and Creek

April 24: Fasnicht Creek at Grant Avenue – Parking at Fasnicht Park and clean-up surrounding area

For a full list of neighborhood clean-ups, Point of Pride events, and some other beautification projects, visit the City of Springfield's website.



*650 tree and shrub seedlings ready for the spring plant sale*



# FELLOWS LAKE LLC

What an exciting time...we are open for business at Fellows Lake! In 1984, Watershed Committee of the Ozarks was essentially created out of concern for this resource. We've worked to sustain and improve local water resources since then, and we share that mission with City Utilities, the City of Springfield, and Greene County. When the opportunity to come on board at Fellows Lake presented itself, we jumped in! Since this is the first time to report on this in our newsletter, let us take the time to explain how we got here, what we hope to do, and what you can expect in the future.

## How we got here

Over the last few years, several developments related to Fellows Lake came into play. The marina dock structure had reached the end of its useful and safe lifespan. TrailSpring developed the Dirt 66 master plan including proposed new trails, the Springfield Kiwanis Club expressed interest in an expanded playground, and City Utilities dedicated the main recreation area as Miller Park, after former general manager Scott Miller. With so many interests and opportunities in play, City Utilities took the time to step back and assess how the pieces fit together and what Fellows Lake means to the community. They invested in a consultant to help with this process and create the "Miller Park at Fellows Lake Recreation Master Plan." This is an excerpt of the executive summary of that plan:

"Miller Park at Fellows Lake is an amenity that all communities would love to have adjacent to their community. It provides a close to home outdoor experience that many users travel long distances to enjoy. Although its number one priority is to provide a dependable water supply for the community, its location in a natural environment has given City Utilities an opportunity to serve its citizens in two ways that virtually no one else can; a) The un-equalled priority of providing drinking water; and b) an outdoor close-to-home opportunity that is the type of amenity near the top of reasons that citizens live where they do.

This master plan emphasizes the condition of existing amenities surrounding the lake, possibilities for new/additional recreation uses of the lake itself, and recreation trends that would increase the appropriate future use of the park/lake when they are implemented. The consultant has developed an opinion of probable costs for planned improvements. All of the costs can be phased over a number of years and are organized in a manner that considers the sequence that should be followed for orderly growth. Miller Park at Fellows Lake is a magnificent facility! Each comment in this master plan study respects its undeniable role as a primary water source. The balance between that undeniable primary role and its recreation use is achievable and appropriate."



## The Role of WCO at Fellows

Concern for the Water Quality of Fellows Lake was the spark that started the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, and keeping Fellows Lake clean remains core to our mission. Now more than 30 years later, our basic idea was to apply the Watershed Center model at Fellows with the purpose of balancing increased future use and recreation *at the lake* with increased education and stewardship activities to protect the water *in the lake*. We developed a business model, and in late 2020 secured a lease with City Utilities for Miller Park and the new marina dock structure when built. We then formed Fellows Lake LLC, a subsidiary of Watershed Committee of the Ozarks to operate at Fellows. We recognize that each time Fellows Lake LLC (FLLLC) sells a boat permit or beverage, we have the opportunity to provide important information to citizens and build the community which understands and embraces the lake.

## What's Next?

We have a remarkable team now operating Fellows Lake LLC, led by FLLLC manager Matt Taylor. Matt 's passion for the lake and prior experience propelled him to tackle the Herculean task of essentially starting a new business in a few short weeks, and thanks to him, the store opened on March 1 as planned. Kelce Arrington, our assistant manager, joined us soon after opening and brings a wealth of experience from the YMCA and other endeavors. Now Matt and Kelce have built a team of multi-talented, lake-loving, dockhand/educators who already provide excellent customer service and serve as the face of the lake. But this is just the start.

New miles of the Dirt 66 multi-use, soft-surface trails are being built every day, to add to the beloved Fellows Lake Ozark Greenways Trail and trail system. A new marina is weeks away from installation, and as soon as the water temperature reaches 55 degrees, we will proudly begin renting paddle craft provided by our long-time supporters in Bass Pro Shops. Two pontoon boats and three fishing boats are waiting in the wings from Tracker Marine and Bass Pro Shops, and a long list of boat slip renters and wait-list folks are chomping at the bit to get their boats back at the dock. Bathrooms, playground improvements, parking improvements, and eventually, a proper education/recreation center are all hopes for the lake we love in the years to come. And what's more, we hope to have a big celebration with our partners this summer, so stay tuned!



*Fellows Lake Crew ready for the opening!*

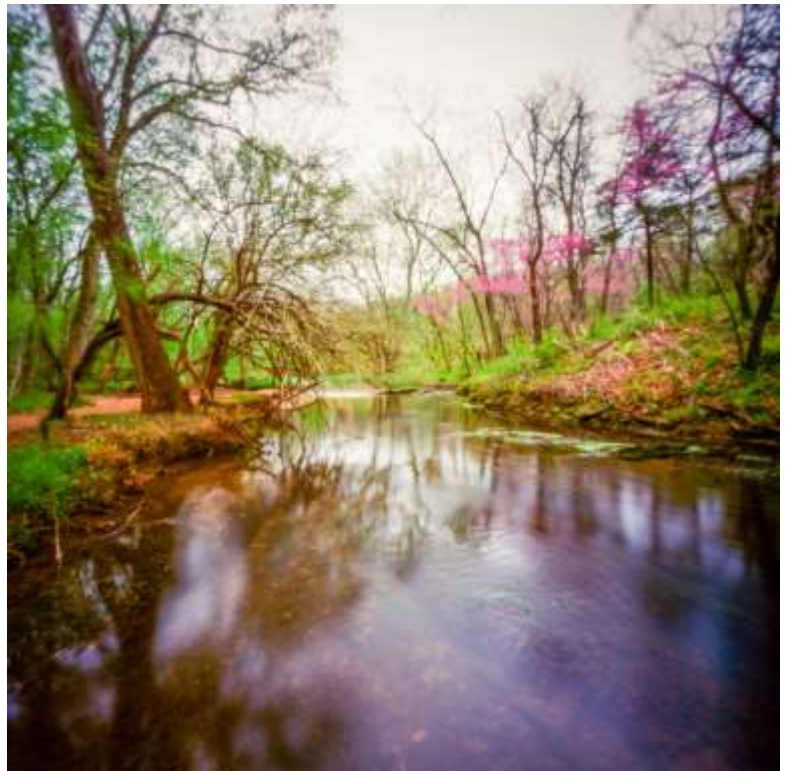


**2400 E. Valley Water Mill Rd.  
Springfield, MO 65803**

Over the past year, people have flocked to the outdoors for mental and physical health. Enjoy these beautiful words about the solace of water and sky from Wendell Berry, a great American poet:

“When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”

Wendell Berry



*Pinhole photograph near Sanders Spring by Aaron J Scott*