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2022 First Quarter Newsletter

Director's Update: Migration Time

Each spring, the woods at the Watershed Center come alive and the bird feeders bustle with migratory birds taking a short layover on their journeys north. For a brief time, intensely colored gold finches, indigo buntings, rose-breasted grosbeaks, purple finches, ruby throated hummingbirds, and Baltimore orioles shine in stunning contrast to the thousand-shades of green emerging in the woods. We have a friendly competition to report the first sighting of each species, and take short "nature breaks" to admire and observe.

We know through global data sets provided by networks of scientists, that migrations are changing, and that's not just for the birds. Populations of people are continually moving and changing, too. Here in Springfield, it seems like almost weekly I encounter a person who is new to the area. I have a habit of asking what brought them here and am genuinely interested in their stories. Folks usually mention the beauty of the area, relatively low cost of property and living, and often mention our trails and water. While my observations are anecdotal, Roddy Rogers recently gleaned an article from the *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* stating: "...strain on water resources, especially in the Western United States, will likely pose additional challenges as people begin to relocate away from the coasts to the interior of the country."

We know the Ozarks Region is an awesome place. The birds know too. It is not at all surprising that folks are moving here, and here in Greene County, we do better than most for water resource protection. That said, we are entering new times, and everything I can think of is happening faster. We all must focus on the future and working with nature, for us, and for the birds.

Mike Kromrey,
Executive Director



A migrating Northern Parula, stopping on our windowsill to admire his reflection



Watershed Center Update

Summit Preparatory School All Service Day

We were thrilled to have the return of Summit Preparatory School All Service Day. This is one of our favorite days here at the park! Almost 200 students and many parents found time to help with a variety of projects throughout the park. Students ranging from preschool to seniors worked to improve trail access, eliminate invasive species, aid in timber stand improvement, and restore native habitats. Many students have participated in this program over the years and were able to see the positive impacts of their efforts. We always enjoy hosting these terrific students, parents, and teachers and are looking forward to having them back out next year.



Mulching the trails



Restoring native plants in the glade

Guidelines for Excellence

In April, WCO hosted the Missouri Environmental Education Association's Guidelines for Excellence Workshop. Participants experienced techniques for presenting hands-on activities aligned to both Missouri Learning Standards and Environmental Education Standards. This workshop not only provided participants important knowledge about standards-based curriculum, but also provided ready-to-use activities for grades K-5. Presenters included MDC Curriculum Coordinator Wendy Parrett, MEEA Board Member Sarah Holmes, and MO DNR Interpreter Jamin Bray.



Jamin Bray leading an outdoor program

A Busy Field Trip Season

Despite the frequent rains and thunderstorms, it has been a busy spring for field trips to the Watershed Center and Jordan Creek tours. School groups ranging from kindergarten to college students have participated in field experiences this spring. Activities ranged from guided nature hikes exploring the connection between healthy land and healthy water to underground tours of Jordan Creek investigating stormwater issues and its impact on urban streams to the classic wading in an Ozarks stream and catching critters to learn about stream ecology.

Jeff Bircher—Watershed Center Director



Project WET stream crossing activity



Central students studying Jordan Creek water quality



Clarissa leading a Jordan Creek Tour



Clarissa leading a Watershed field trip

Volunteer Update

Over the first several months of 2022, we have had several individual volunteers and groups help us with projects in the park. So far, the volunteer hours for this year are close to being on par with last year's and we are looking forward to seeing what we can accomplish during the rest of the year.

Groups

We have already had many groups, some new and some returning, complete volunteer days. Projects they have worked on include adding mulch and gravel to trails, weeding and cleaning out the rain garden to make room for new growth, cleaning up the trails after this year's flooding event, and picking up trash at Fellows Lake. We also have a few groups already booked into the summer and we look forward to working with all of them! Youth Volunteer Corps, who has volunteered with us for several years, will be returning for a week in June. Our biggest volunteer day of the year, Day of Caring, is also quickly approaching with multiple groups already signed up. Last year Day of Caring was split between two separate events but this year it is returning to one large event in June. We are already gearing up to have a larger number of volunteers than we did during either of last year's events.

Docents

We are nearing the one-year marker since we started the Docent program, and we currently have docents in the park roughly once a month. We are actively looking for more to join us in providing education and park tours to the public. Lesson plans have already been created by Watershed staff and docents, but we are also accepting new lesson plans and ideas from docents. We are looking to expand the program to Fellows Lake in the near future.

Looking Forward

Our volunteers work on a variety of projects including general park management (cleaning signs, filling birdfeeders, sorting recycling, picking up trash), trail maintenance, invasive plant species removal, helping with the nursery, and providing education. Our volunteers are the backbone of Valley Water Mill Park, providing behind-the-scenes work that helps us accomplish our mission. With the summer quickly approaching, many of our individual volunteers are graduating and moving on, so we are looking for more volunteers for the summer and fall. We are always accepting volunteer applications, and anyone can sign up to help, including families and groups. No previous knowledge or experience is necessary—we provide all training and tools to get the job done!

Rowan Hoffman, Watershed Fellow/
Volunteer Coordinator



Drury students volunteering their time at the Watershed Center

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.

The USDA Area Soil Health Specialist Drexel Atkisson brought the NRCS Soil Health Truck to Hillcrest High School for an educational field day on Friday November 19, 2021. Three classes including Restoration Ecology class, Agriculture and Water Quality got to hear the presentation and see the rain simulator. On May 19, 2022 the Soil Health Truck visited Stockton High School students. Mr.



Soil Health Truck educational field day at Stockton High School lead by Drexel Atkisson

Atkisson gave 6 presentations to about 130 students throughout the day. These are valuable opportunities that help educate on the importance of soil health and available farm bill programs to future landowners and producers in our drinking watershed.

Upper Little Sac Watershed 319 Grant

October 2021, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources announced the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks received a \$400,000 grant to the for restoration and improvements to the Little Sac River. The funding is provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act.

The project focus is on reducing bacteria in the Upper Little Sac River basin while also helping to decrease soil erosion and lower nutrient levels in the watershed. This will be accomplished by using practices proven to be effective in reducing pollution from stormwater runoff.

Community partners will provide a contribution of \$266,667 over the life of the project which helps make this project possible, bringing the total cost of the project to \$666,667. The project is expected to be completed in the summer of 2025.

Water quality improvement efforts will include stream restoration, riparian corridor enhancement, bioretention, volunteer tree plantings and septic tank maintenance. Project partners will assist with implementation and performance monitoring of the selected practices.

Stacey Armstrong Smith, Projects Manager



Watershed Conservation Corps

The Watershed Conservation Corps (WCC) first quarter was full of exciting projects and new faces. We continued our efforts in invasive species management, habitat restoration, and trail maintenance, while building the professional skills and certifications our crewmembers need to be successful young adults in the field of conservation. As our crew experience grows, our ability to effectively plan, coordinate, and complete projects in our local watershed increases. This directly aids in the protection and quality of our water while improving

native habitat and quality of life. Our work is not possible without you and your support, and we thank you for your continued investment into the corps and the future of conservation in the Ozarks. We look forward to continuing our work this summer around the Ozarks with our crews.

Late Winter: Prescribed Fire Season

WCC crewmembers received training in wildland firefighting and prescribed burn procedures at the beginning of the year. The purpose of the training was to gain certification for our federal crew and allow our local crew to conduct burns within municipal boundaries. Our crews had to complete two courses and pass two final exams to be certified. A physical fitness test was completed as well, to ensure that our crews were fit to work on federal lands. Controlled burning can be used as an exceptional management practice to replicate the periodic fire that historically came through the Ozarks. It is vitally important in mitigating the spread of undesirable species and invasive species, which threatened and outcompete our native species.



WCC Local Crew conducting a prescribed burn on private property in rural Webster County

Over the course of the late winter, we conducted multiple prescribed burns on public and private lands. Our local WCC crew safely carried out burns at Lake Springfield Park, Rutledge-Wilson Farm Park, and at our very own Valley Water Mill Park. Our federal crew began their season assisting with prescribed burns at the Buffalo National River and Pea Ridge National Military Park in Arkansas. These burns were quite large in terms of total area, and gave the crew a fantastic opportunity to work alongside National Park Service burn crews while gaining additional fire education. In total, WCC conducted over 200 acres of prescribed fire with the National Park Service.

March: Trail Maintenance & Construction

WCC has partnered with the United States Forest Service to aid in the continual upkeep and new construction of trails in the Mark Twain National Forest. Our crews have been working diligently to clear downed trees and obstacles from heavy-use trails in southern Missouri. Another facet of trail maintenance is keeping the tread surface intact and wide enough for use. Our crews have been working primarily around trails constructed over eight decades ago by the Civilian Conservation Corps, many of which are in need of repair. Crew leaders Jeremiah Cline and Trey Thompson have extensive trail building experience, and have led the crew through this process.



WCC crew repairing trail in the Mark Twain National Forest. Crew leaders Trey (yellow hard hat) and Jeremiah (chainsaw)

We have also been involved in the construction of new trails, including a trail near Poplar Bluff, Missouri, and the Greer Mill Trail near the Eleven Point River in Oregon County, Missouri. We look forward to more projects like these as we continue to partner with the United States Forest Service.

April: Warm-Season Grass Seedings

We have been carrying out site preparation and seeding of warm-season grass stands around Springfield. Invasive species management, intense mowing, and calculate seedings took place in the early spring to increase the germination rate of the native grass seed. We have partnered with Hamilton Native Outpost in Licking, Missouri, to supply us with enough seed to cover our project areas. Warm-season grasses are a great way to heal a broken landscape, while providing vital habitat for many wildlife and pollinator species.



Broadcast seeding a warm-season grass stand in Springfield (Or practicing dance moves?)

The goal of these projects is to increase native species diversity of both grasses and forbs. Very small patches of remnant prairie exist in Missouri these days, so recreating these historical landscapes is an exciting challenge for the WCC.

Adam Barton, Watershed Conservation Corps Program Manager

Sponsor Spotlight: Roddy Rogers

Sometimes in the water world, we refer to champions of the resource as “Water Warriors.” Roddy Rogers exemplifies this term. During his 29 year career at City Utilities, Roddy has worked in nearly all parts of water projects and management, and served as a leader in state and local efforts, always with an eye on the future and the well-being of people. Roddy has lived his personal mission helping other communities get clean water too, from rural Haiti, to Africa, and beyond. He has been recognized by the American Society of Civil Engineers for service to the global community for his work.



Roddy Rogers with his best pal Deets after a cold prairie adventure

We are tremendously fortunate that Roddy has served as the sponsor representative of City Utilities for the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks. Our community is also very fortunate that Roddy is beginning a new chapter of water warrior-ing as the executive director for Tri-State Water Coalition and its sister organization the Southwest Missouri Joint Municipal Water Utility Commission. The focus of this ongoing effort is to procure water resources for the next generation(s). Roddy will be focusing on getting a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reallocation of water from Stockton, and then working with communities in Southwest Missouri to create infrastructure to treat and deliver this water. We wish Roddy all the best, and hope that he will have plenty of time afield too, with his best beloved pal Deets. Cheers Roddy!

Join the Watershed Sustainer Team

Watershed Susters 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. Susters provide WCO with a reliable stream of support for projects and education 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. Please join us!



Watershed Sustainers

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Arkifex Studios
Arvest Bank
At Home Real Estate
Bailey Pyle Builders
Ball Architects
Bass Pro Shops
Central Bank of the Ozarks
Crawford, Murphy & Tilly
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Ben and Jodi Caruthers
Bill Cheek
Blayne Redford
Brent Stock
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WATERSHED natives

This season at the nursery has been busy with planting, programs and construction on the high tunnel. Construction began in December and continued through the early spring. With the help of Ozark Empire Fairgrounds and WCO staff and the Hillcrest Academy program the top plastic was raised and secured into place just in time for spring sales. This season we have watched the new love for native plants extend into our community.

Partnerships

In February the Watershed Natives was awarded a second Collective Impact Grant from the **Community Foundation of the Ozarks** in continued support of the nursery. These funds will allow the nursery manager to continue facilitating the program and working with area schools through education and plant propagation.

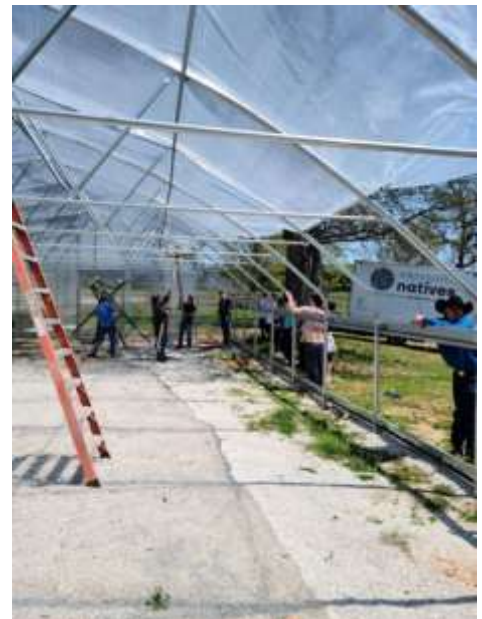
In May the nursery was awarded a grant from the **Springfield Rotary** to continue infrastructure within the greenhouse. These funds will provide tables, potting benches, soil containers and a shed to store supplies during the season.

Over the winter season Watershed Natives with the help of the SPS Environmental pathways and Greener Greenspace harvested and packed seed to donate and support the **Springfield-Greene County Library** Heirloom Seed Library. The Seed Library had its grand opening early February, and the nursery presented the importance of native plants. From this program just over 800 seed packets were taken home and planted in our community. Native seed species that were contributed through this program included: Grey-Headed Coneflower, Evening Primrose, Goldenrod Ssp., Virginia Wild Rye, Rose Mallow and Indian Grass.

Hillcrest

Students have been working hard all winter and spring getting things transplanted, direct sowed, and prepping for our plant sales. We were finally able to get the plastic raised in place on the greenhouse and the students worked on moving in flats and arranging plants for the sale.

In early March we had our second "Partners Day". This day we invite all our partners to spend time with the students and work alongside on a project. Students and partners worked to pot tree seedlings to replenish tree inventory. On this Partners Day we were excited to welcome KSMU to cover the day and write a small media piece highlighting the Hillcrest Academies and the Watershed Natives Program.



Laying the plastic on the nursery greenhouse

We rounded out this season with a service day with students from the Environmental Science and Watershed Science Pathway. These students planted natives and weeded beds around the fairgrounds.

This year is the first graduating class of the College and Career Pathways. Students from the Restoration Ecology class participated in the 3-year pathways program. During their time these students have been able to watch the nursery grow, develop work skills, learned plant propagation, greenhouse management and will be able to take these skills into their next chapter.

Plant Sales/Upcoming Events

This year we kicked off the sale season April 30th with our Grow Native! Partner sale with vendors Forrest Keeling and Gaylena's Garden. Sales will continue at the nursery located at the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds every Tuesday through May and June from 10 am- 3pm (Please use gate 10).

The nursery has 3 more off site sales this spring/summer. May 21 we will be attending the Pollinator Fest at Meramec Springs Park. Mother's Brewing Friday, May 27th from 2-6pm and Wire Road Brewing Saturday, June 18th from 10am- 2 pm.

In Partnership with the Springfield Art Museum, we are hosting a Crafting with Native Plants at the Greenhouse located at the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds. Participants will be able to paint/ craft a piece of artwork to take home while enjoying the nursery/ greenhouse. This event is Sunday, July 10th from 4-6pm and has limited slots available.

Through the successful partnership with Springfield Public School's Hillcrest High School College and Career Academy we have watched the need grow for hands-on training through the school systems. The Watershed Natives was born to serve the community and be a beacon for job skill training. Many of us make those connections from classroom learning when we do hands-on activities. If you are an Environmental Educator for a local college, public or private schools we would love to spend the day with your class learning about native plants from a nursery prospective.

Recently we hosted the 7th grade portion of SOPE-Discovery Corps. SOPE stands for **S**uccess + **h**OPE. This is program by the McDonald County School District designed to engage kids in outdoor education and conservation science. Students focus on local issues related to conservation, as well as the history of the issue and how it has played a role in McDonald County. This program allows students to build communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, as well as leadership while focusing on local issues and solutions.

During this visit students learned about: Seed & Bud Characteristics, Dormancy, Stratification & Germination, Methods of Planting and Mixing Soil. These students also got their hands dirty transplanting, making soil and potting trees.

Christy Wilder, Watershed Natives Program Manager



Hillcrest Pathway students helping set up for the sale



Fellows Lake Update

Fellows Lake is a great place to hike, ride, sail, bird watch, run, paddle and fish! Every weekend, hundreds of outdoor enthusiasts make the short drive to this hidden gem of the Ozarks. Today, Fellows Lake continues to work with City Utilities and many other partners making improvements and expanding programs both on and off the water. You can stay up to date on Facebook on the “Fellows Lake Recreation and Marina” page, and “Fellowslakesgf” on Instagram.

On the Trails

Over 25 miles of soft-surface trails are now constructed and open around Fellows Lake. The Dirt 66: Fellows Lake Trails are a part of the regional trail system and are already much beloved by hikers, cyclists, and trail runners. The trail construction was funded by TrailSpring and was completed in partnership with City Utilities and Ozark Greenways—the results are incredible.

Moving forward trail maintenance will be key for continued success. Erosion prevention and management, keeping the corridors clear, and meeting landowner and trail user expectations are top of this list. Ozark Greenways has hired Chelsea Russel Ice as a full-time soft surface trails coordinator to focus on trail stewardship, help plug in volunteers, and connect people to this community asset. In addition to Fellows Lake, she will also be providing support and coordination of trail stewardship at Sac River Mountain Bike Trails and the Lone Pine Trails. Chelsea also works closely with Missouri Off-Road Cyclists (MORC), an incredible group of volunteers that provide tremendous support to our region.



Chelsea Russel Ice, Soft Surface Trails Coordinator —Ozark Greenways

TrailSpring will be hosting a National Trails Day celebration at Fellows Lake on Saturday, June 4th! from group activities from 5 - 9 pm. group rides, runs, and trail challenges.

On the Water

The new, safe and ADA accessible dock is completed and open for business. We looking forward to an upcoming event in partnership with Empower Abilities for “**A Day at the Lake**” on June 11th for kids and adults with mobility challenges to sail, boat and fish with adaptive equipment.

Our rental boats are a hot item these days. We rent canoes, kayaks, three fishing boats, two pontoon boats, and now even sailboats!

The **Springfield Sailing Club** is up and running with regattas and social events planned for the 2022 season. We hosted our first regatta in April and a great time was had by all. The next regatta is on August 11th. Come on out and join us! Visit “@Springfield Sailing Club at Fellows Lake” on Facebook for more info!

We partnered with The Missouri Department of Conservation and held a full day **musky fishing workshop** at the lake. Two groups of anglers were provided instruction, tackle and boats for two four hour sessions on the lake. Special thanks to Lyle Whittaker and his MDC colleagues for putting on such a great event!

On the Horizon

If you haven’t been to Fellows Lake in a while, *now* is the time to visit. If you *have* been up to the lake lately, you know how much has changed in the last few years. Fellows lake is becoming a “silent sports” destination, and low-impact recreational uses can be compatible with the most important purpose of the lake— Our drinking water! We are hopeful that over the next few years improvements will continue. Bathrooms/water, playground improvements, parking lot improvements, improvements to the main entrance, a suspension bridge to connect two trail segments, and other facility upgrades are all in various stages of conversation, planning, and funding.

Don’t forget to visit the Fellows Lake Store is located at the top of the hill from the dock and is open seven days a week from sunrise to sunset through the end of October. Stocking drinks, snacks, light tackle and worms, stop in to get your 2022-2023 boat permits or rent a boat and trade Fellows Lake stories with the staff!

Visit the lake and learn more at www.watershedcommittee.org/fellowslake or call the Fellows Lake Store at 417-840-2965 for more information and boat reservations.



The first Regatta of the Springfield Sailing Club. Photo Credit Jim Blaine



Happy anglers participating in Musky Workshop with our partners at MDC



Moonlight Paddle

Event Dates: May 14/June 11/Aug 13

Moonlight paddles for 2022!
Registration is required to participate in this event, make sure to let us know if you will need to rent kayaks or canoes soon so you don't miss out on a great evening!

- Free event with your permitted canoe or kayak
- Check in at the store from 7-9 pm before putting on the water
- Please call the day of event to verify if the event is still on



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register at: <https://fellows-lake-llc.square.site>

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Thank you to all of the sponsors of our Watershed Summer Gala!



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

Watershed Summer Gala at Fellows Lake

Join us for our annual fundraiser Saturday, July 16, 5pm-8pm at Fellows Lake.

Come and enjoy excellent food catered by Allen Event Group, craft beer provided by Mother's Brewing Company and Wire Road Brewing, wine by the glass or a glass of refreshing lemonade. Take part in our silent auction, whiskey grab, and maybe even go on a boat ride!

Tickets are \$50 and on sale now on our website: <https://watershedcommittee.org/about-us/watershedsumnergala/>

Please note we only have 156 tickets available to the event. Since it is being catered we would like all tickets sold in advance. Due to our growth as an organization and inflation, this will be the last year a Gala ticket to the event will be included with the sustaining membership. To take advantage of the last year of this perk, please RSVP to kelly@watershedcommittee.org and she will mail you tickets.

Proceeds from the Gala support Watershed Committee and all of our programs.

