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NEWSLETTER

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FIRST GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING OPEN HOUSE SUCCESSFUL

Many THANKS to Karen Chotkowski of Wedington Woods who hosted the first of five planned sessions to receive public input. Forty residents attended to discuss what natural features within western Washington County are most valued and what are the area's conservation priorities. Protecting the Clear Creek watershed was a frequently mentioned priority; parks and trails in the area are recreational needs. County Judge Marilyn Edwards was quoted by the NWA Times saying "This is a rural state, and we have to preserve our roots. We don't want to lose our identity. I think this is a good group, and the direction they're taking is certainly good for the county". The next Open House (Fayetteville) will be October 1, 2009 from 5:30 to 7:30 at the Fayetteville Public Library. Sessions for Johnson, Greenland and Farmington will be scheduled soon.



County Judge Marilyn Edwards speaks with guests attending the open house.

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Remnants of a Former
Prairie, Lake Fayetteville
Photo by Chris Wilson

FALL CLEAN-UP SCULL CREEK

The Adopt-a-Trail: Scull Creek Cleanup held on 9/28/09 joined FNHA and the Washington County Extension Service, who are involved in the Adopt-a-Trail program and have adopted portions of the same trail, to clean the trail and the creek.

The cleanup effort covered two sections of the creek, trail, and surrounding conveyances to pick up just over a quarter-ton of trash including a shopping cart,

paint bucket, car tires, suitcases, steel pipes, and other assorted trash.

There were 36 volunteers at this event, from 4 different local organizations and they put in a combined 108 hours of cleanup time.

Perhaps the neatest aspect of this cleanup is that citizens who were not involved with any of the organizations or the Adopt-A-Trail program wanted to participate in showing stew-

continued on page 7

WHAT IF WE SAVED IT?

In the late summer of 1858, the Butterfield Stagecoach began following a mail route from St. Louis to San Francisco that passed through Fayetteville. Just north of present-day Lake Fayetteville, travelers along the route likely observed a rich landscape of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna. Remnants of this endangered ecosystem still exist at this same site, alongside the actual path of the Butterfield Trail. In the center of the site, big blue-stem, Indian grass, and a suite of other tallgrass prairie species still hold on against a brutal onslaught of eastern redcedar, sericea lespedeza, fescue, honeysuckle, and other invaders.



Old Butterfield Stage Coach route, near Lake Fayetteville
Photo by Chris Wilson

The Ozark hills of Northwest Arkansas have changed dramatically in the time since the Butterfield Stagecoach made its early runs. Growing towns and farms con-

sumed most of our original prairies and savannas. Without fire or something that mimics it, those that remained were soon degraded by woody encroachment and alien invasives. The resulting brushy thickets inexorably followed the unforgiving path of natural succession to become dense forests where prairie was all but forgotten.

We know with virtual certainty that without intervention, the Prairie at Lake Fayetteville will slowly but very surely become something far less desirable. The loss of this important piece of our local natural heritage is not, however, a foregone conclusion. We will indeed lose this last small upland prairie

remnant if we do nothing. **But what if we decided to save it?**

What if the burgeoning forest of cedars could be eliminated? What if we fired up our chainsaws,

dropped the cedars one by one and left only wood chips and sunshine behind? Could we again hear the once familiar songs of the meadowlark and the dickcissel?

What if the alien invaders from Europe and Asia could be eradicated? What if we selectively applied herbicide to knock back the sericea lespedeza, tall fescue, and Japanese honeysuckle? Would blue grosbeaks and scissor-tailed flycatchers return each summer to gladden our hearts?

What if we could return fire to its vital role in the prairie ecosystem? What if the City could conduct prescribed burns to consume decades of thatch and slash? Would pale-purple coneflower, butterfly milkweed, and blazing star surprise us by bursting forth from the ashes?

What if we could bring back the scores of prairie wildflowers that have likely been lost over time? What if we collected seed from other remnants in the region and scattered it throughout the prairie? Would we be rewarded with a suite of swallowtails, satyrs, and skippers?

What if areas of the site that were converted in the past could be restored? What if we were able to acquire a mix of local genotype native prairie plant seed that could be planted in these areas? Would stands of compass plant and Maximilian's sunflower again reach skyward on hot summer days?

What if this prairie could become an educational tool? What if interpretive signage explaining the importance of prairie restoration were placed along the well-travelled Lake Fayetteville Trail loop that encompasses the prairie on 3 sides? What if thousands of students from Fayetteville and Springdale could hike through Tallgrass Prairie as part of their visit to the adjacent Environmental Study Center? Would these kids grow up with a greater appreciation for our imperiled natural areas?

What if this prairie could provide a model for a public-private partnership for habitat restoration? What if a cadre of volunteers were mobilized to protect and restore the wild places we value? **But then we have decided to work to save it!**

What if the trail users 150 years from now could experience the same vibrant prairie that the riders on the Butterfield Trail experienced 150 years ago? What if visitors young and old came to appreciate that somewhere along the way somebody decided that this unique piece of our natural history was worth preserving? Would they then be inspired to ensure that their own inheritance was protected for future generations?

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

This newsletter edition introduces two new and exciting efforts for FNHA and highlights the first of five public input sessions that are a key part of our Green Infrastructure Planning project.

First, we are a partner on an effort led by John Pennington (County Agent for the University of Arkansas - Division of Agriculture - Cooperative Extension Service) to work with creekside landowners in the Clear Creek Watershed (an impaired sub-watershed of the Illinois River) on options to manage creekside areas to protect water quality and wildlife habitat. We have reprinted John's first assessment/float trip article from his newsletter (The Clear Creek Current) that describes the current condition of about 6 miles of Clear Creek. For more information or to get on the distribution for the newsletter, contact John at 479-444-1755.

Second, the Green Infrastructure Planning Environmental Working

Group survey of the area for prairies found an upland prairie remnant in Lake Fayetteville Park and Chris Wilson asked "What If". He has developed a plan for FNHA to partner with the Fayetteville Parks Department to restore a 4 acre upland prairie to help educate folks about how most all this region looked when the Butterfield Stagecoach went by. By the time you read this, work on removing invasive plants will have begun. Details of the upland prairie demonstration will be posted on our website soon.

Our current focuses on regional planning and these riparian and prairie areas along with our past successes in preserving our natural heritage are all possible because of the continued support of our members. Your help is really appreciated. Thank You.

Bob Caulk



Blessings Course

Clear Creek Chronicles

Since I believe that a person must see or experience a particular situation or problem first hand before they can attempt to correct or address that situation or problem, I set out in my canoe on the first of several trips on Clear Creek and its tributaries. This



Stream Bank Erosion Near Bridge

story is the description of that trip. I put my 16 foot Buffalo canoe on the main stem of Clear Creek at its confluence with Mud Creek at the Ball St. low water bridge in Johnson after a night of rainfall and after the stream was coming down from flood stage. When I put on the water was running just a little bit above base flow – or about half way up the whistles that convey water underneath the Bridge.

I have never heard of anyone floating this stretch before, and there are no descriptions of this stretch of creek in any whitewater book of Arkansas. So this trip was a mystery to me and I was excited to see what types of wildlife, streambank erosion problems, cross-stream fences, and nasty river-wide logjams I would encounter.

I have always wanted to see this creek first hand and after a mile of floating I was very glad that I chose to float the creek at a lower level. To float this creek at higher levels would be life threatening and difficult to do for even the most professional of boaters. In fact, I absolutely do not recommend for anyone to float this creek in its upper reaches!

I encountered all eight of the river wide logjams that I would see on this day between the low water bridge in Johnson and the hwy 112 bridge on

the first 2.5 miles of the float trip. I admired the way the water could just work its way flowing through the obstructions in my path. The only way that I could navigate around, through, or above them with my boat and gear was with extreme care, and I was very aware of the consequences of an unsuccessful attempt. Despite having to slowly work through these eight logjam areas, I was surprised that there were not more out there after the ice storm and repeated floods. I also encountered two low-head dams and six cross-stream fences (lucky for me – the recent flood had taken down four out of the six) – which left me with only two to navigate around (On the Fence note, I am proud to say that I never mess with another persons fence).

On the remaining 4 miles from Hwy 112 to the Wheeler Rd Bridge of this 6.5 mile float from the Ball St. low water bridge I realized just how severely the streambank is eroding away on one side of the creek or the other for the whole stretch. It is scary to think that if this problem is not corrected that the landowners along this stream reach will continue to lose pieces of their property, fences, barns, and/or houses, but that is the reality. Once streambank erosion starts, it only gets worse unless it is dealt with properly, and if it doesn't get the attention it deserves or demands it will get a landowners attention after it has taken acres of land, a barn, a house, or a bridge. So on this trip, I took pictures of the streambank along the way so that I can have educational material to use when working with you, the creekside landowner.

I guess it's a good thing that I was able to get pictures of the streambanks, because I sure couldn't get any pictures of the wildlife – they acted like they had never seen a person in a canoe before and flew, slid, or hopped away before I could even pull out the camera !

Article by: John Pennington

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Dan & Deborah Coody move some of the trash to the pick-up point.

ardship for a valued community resource which they also use. It is very encouraging when people both young and old from diverse backgrounds can understand the need to take care of resources that get used often such as water for drinking, or trails for many forms of recreation. It's one thing to clean a creek and it's another thing to teach a volunteer something about the valuable resource and functions of that creek in addition to teaching them how to better take care of the creek. During this creek cleanup many individuals came away with a new understand-

ing of stewardship for the watershed in which they live, work, or play.

The organizers of this event were the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association and the Washington County Cooperative Extension Service. Sponsors of the event were: Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association, Tyson Foods, Pack Rat Outdoor Center,

Ozark Natural Foods, Farm Credit Service, and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission- Stream Team. Total gifts from our sponsors were valued at more than \$ 550.00 dollars and contributed toward leaving the Scull Creek Trail and Scull Creek in a little bit better condition than it was found.

John Pennington of the Washington County Extension Service grilled hotdogs and veggie burgers for the volunteers after the clean up. All remaining food and refreshments were

donated to Seven Hills Homeless Shelter. The shopping cart that was recovered was in working condition and is being used by the Washington County Environmental Affairs & Recycling staff.



John Pennington disposed of most of the trash.

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