



FNHA Newsletter



Guest Speaker, Dr. J.D. Willson, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Arkansas, presented a lively and engaging talk about area herpetofauna, or herps.

FNHA Annual Meeting Recap

The 2020 annual meeting held on Sunday, February 16, at 3:00 pm at the Ozark Mountain Smokehouse drew more than 50 FNHA members and guests.

We are grateful to Frank Sharp for hosting the meeting and for leading a hike to Rock City, with retired geology professor Walt Manger, afterward. We also appreciate the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust for letting us give tours of the Kessler Classroom.

FNHA President Jennifer Ogle introduced officers and members of the FNHA board of directors and Elizabeth Smith, who had been nominated to fill a board vacancy, and who was elected unanimously at the meeting.

Jennifer then gave an information-packed brief history of FNHA, which has conserved, restored and managed 582 acres of natural spaces in Fayetteville since the organization's founding in 2003.



Mount Kessler, Fayetteville, AR

The most recent FNHA project, the Kessler Mountain Reserve, was purchased for \$3 million, \$300,000 of which, in cash and in-kind contributions, was raised by FNHA. The final check in fulfillment of our pledge has been presented to the City of Fayetteville and educational signs have been drafted and will soon be installed. Kessler Mountain is also the site of FNHA's annual fund-raiser, the Kessler Trail Run and its follow-up Afterparty, which this year netted more than \$10,000 for FNHA endeavors.

The 97-acre Mount Sequoyah Woods was the birthplace of FNHA, which raised \$300,000 toward its purchase, also building the rock and timber pavilion and providing informational signage. With partners and volunteers, we have worked to restore the area. One of those partners, the Beaver Watershed Alliance, has just completed work on a National Fish and Wildlife grant to create a habitat management plan for Mount Sequoyah Woods.

The Brooks-Hummel Nature Preserve is a 14-acre, true urban natural area with upland and riparian forests, a field and a perennial stream. FNHA donated \$179,500 in 2007 toward its purchase and we hold the conservation easement. Brooks-Hummel was intended as a nature preserve with low-impact walking trails. It is home to a variety of valuable native plants and far too many invasive non-natives. Twice a year since 2013, volunteers have removed bush honeysuckle and privet. We hope to work with the City on a large-scale professional removal of invasive species. We are also concerned that the City of Fayetteville has proposed a pedestrian and bicycle trail that would go through part of the preserve. Jennifer urged people to visit the area, record their observations of plants and animals on iNaturalist, volunteer to help remove invasives, and contact city staff and council members about protecting designated nature preserves.



Crawfish frog photographed by Joe Neal at the Woolsey Wetland Prairie.

Discovering NWA's Hidden Diversity of Amphibians and Reptiles (Recap from Dr. Willson's talk)

Jennifer introduced Dr. J.D. Willson, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Arkansas, who gave a lively and engaging talk about area herpetofauna, or herps.

Willson showed the evolutionary relationship of amphibians and reptiles, noting that birds may be flying reptiles. Although not necessarily closely related, amphibians and reptiles share a similar ecological niche. All are cold-blooded, having a low-energy lifestyle. They can shut down and go for about seven years without food, and they can hide underground.

Kessler Mountain has at least 35 different amphibians and reptiles; four new ones were found last year. Rare species, such as Graham's crayfish snake and the ringed salamander, which is found only in the Ozarks in Arkansas and Missouri and in part of Oklahoma, have been seen recently. Willson found a rare cave salamander in his family's yard in downtown Fayetteville.

Herps are both important predators and important prey in many food webs. Rattlesnakes, for example, keep populations of squirrels, rabbits and other small mammals in control. Herps are much more abundant than many of us realize, with up to five times more biomass in a given area than birds and a biomass equivalent to that of mammals.

Glades, outcrops and open forests are good habitat for reptiles. The open canopy creates hot areas, which they need for temperature regulation. But fire suppression, hiking trails and bicycles can threaten such habitats.

Wetland loss is a major issue in species decline. As areas develop, wetlands are drained or filled in, diminishing the habitat of frogs, which eat algae, and of salamanders, which eat mosquito larvae.

Willson ended with a list of some herp mysteries, primarily specimens in museums which purportedly were found in this area at one time, but which have not been seen in recent years. We don't know if they were mislabeled or were once here and are now gone.

He urged us to contribute our observations of reptiles and amphibians to the Herp Atlas, to educate ourselves and others about herps and to support local conservationists.



The Kessler Classroom was a big hit with some of the younger crowd at the FNHA annual meeting.

Additional FNHA activities and accomplishments:

- For the past six years, FNHA has sponsored scholarships for several area 5th and 6th graders to attend the Arkansas Audubon Society Halberg Ecology Camp.
- It has sponsored the Seeds and Suds native seed program, with participants collecting native seeds and then drinking a beverage (the suds part.)
- FNHA donated \$5,000 to a project outside of Fayetteville, but consistent with our local efforts, which added 2.5 acres, or 25%, to Searles Prairie Natural Area, a 10-acre unplowed remnant of virgin prairie in Benton County. Only one-half of one percent of what was nearly 10,000 acres of the Osage Prairie remains today; it is home to numerous rare species not found in any other habitat type.
- FNHA worked to protect a 41-acre tallgrass prairie near Woolsey Wet Prairie, near the westside wastewater treatment plant, which will be named West Side Prairie. As part of its sustainability initiative, the City of Fayetteville wanted to install a solar array that would power the treatment plant with renewable energy, but had chosen a site on the property that is a degraded, but still ecologically significant, prairie remnant. Jennifer Ogle from FNHA and Terri Lane, executive director of the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust met with Environmental Director Peter Nierengarten and Mayor Lioneld Jordan about the problem with the proposed solar array location. They immediately agreed to find another site that would spare the prairie – no fight, no argument, no hard sell, just a

shared commitment to prairie preservation.

- Jennifer noted that recent studies show that there were once 21,000 acres of contiguous prairie, stretching all the way to Prairie Grove. Although the area all around the westside site is being developed quickly, we know that this area is restorable because all of the Woolsey Wet Prairie is being restored and has seen a large increase in the number of native plant species since restoration activities began several years ago. A recent bio-blitz identified 262 species in the West Side Prairie, 209 of them native.



Prairie trout-lily (*Erythronium mesochoreum*)
Photo Credit: David Oakley

Are you a member of the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association?

Help our community balance economic growth and conservation priorities. Help create a land and water legacy for future generations. Conserve wildlife habitat, rural landscapes and neighborhood open space.

Sign up or renew your membership on our website at www.fayettevillenatural.org.

Memberships:

Single \$20
Family \$40
Supporting \$100
Sustaining \$250
Steward \$500
Landmark \$1000 (Lifetime)
Heritage \$5,000 (Lifetime)

Copyright © 2020, Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association, P.O. Box 3635, Fayetteville, AR 72702