

Naturalist Notes



MISSION

El Paso County Parks Nature Centers connect people to their natural and cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards for the parks and our environment.



Superhero Team Announcement

by Theresa Odello, Recreation & Cultural Services Manager



The award is currently on display at Bear Creek Nature Center

We are excited to announce that Visit Colorado Springs awarded El Paso County Nature Centers the Superhero Team Award during their annual Tourism Awards Celebration held October 14, 2021 at The Antlers. This award recognizes an organization or business that went above and beyond in 2020 and 2021 to address the needs of the community during a time of great distress and uncertainty.

“The VCOS Tourism Awards celebrate a year of hard work in our local tourism community,” said Kim Griffis, Director of Partnership Development at Visit Colorado Springs. “It’s always an honor to recognize those who go above and beyond at our annual Tourism Awards



Staff and volunteers enjoyed a superhero-themed evening

Celebration. During a time when it was difficult to get out and adventure, El Paso County Nature Centers found creative ways to encourage families and visitors alike to continue exploring and learning.” Since 1976, Bear Creek Nature Center and Fountain Creek Nature Center have persevered through fires, floods, budget cuts, and more, but none of those compared to the pandemic. During this challenging time, staff and volunteers at the nature centers worked on building bridges to connect people to nature, often when no other activity was



Doug Price and Kim Griffis of Visit Colorado Springs present Nature Center staff and Friends Board President Risë Foster-Bruder with the Superhero Team Award.

available due to the quarantine. This team rose to the occasion by providing numerous innovative programs to connect people to nature, both virtually and in person. “We are honored that our amazing team was recognized and received the Superhero Team award,” said Theresa Odello, El Paso County Parks & Recreation Division Manager. “The staff and volunteers at El Paso County Nature Centers are proud to serve and help connect the community to their natural and cultural resources.” 🐾

Why Do I Give to the Nature Centers?	2
Volunteer Highlight	3
Meet the New Staff!	4-5
Recreation Roundup	6
Fountain Creek Happenings	6
Happy Trails Report	7
Bear Creek Sightings	7
Rick’s Cartoon	8
Fall Program Highlights	8

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers

President

Risë Foster-Bruder

Vice President

Donn Weipert

Secretary

Diane French

Treasurer

Lynn Wilson

At Large members

Sally Miller

René Chatham

STAFF

Division Manager

Theresa Odello

BCNC Supervisor

Mary Jo Lewis

Interp. Program Coord.

Heidi Seals

Interpreter

Brenda McCreight

FCNC Supervisor

Jessica Miller

Interp. Program Coord.

Brianna Fett

Interpreter

Andy Talley

Volunteer Consultant

Paula Megorden

Bear Creek

Nature Center

245 Bear Creek Road

Colorado Springs, CO 80906

719-520-6387

Fountain Creek

Nature Center

320 Pepper Grass Lane

Fountain, CO 80817

719-520-6745

Editor: Jessica Miller

elpasocountynaturecenters.com



Why do I Give to the Nature Centers?

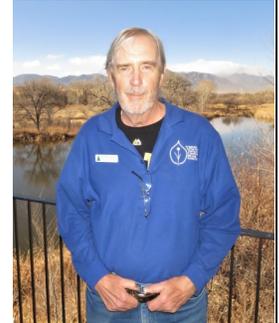
Featuring Kerry Quick *An Interview by Jessica Miller*

For the past three years, Kerry Quick has been a regular fixture at Fountain Creek Nature Center, volunteering at the desk twice a week and donating generously each year to the Nature Centers. He's often walking our trails with friends or his daughter Shannon (when she visits from England), sharing the peace and beauty of the park.



Kerry with Lois and their daughter Shannon

Kerry and his late wife Lois discovered Fountain Creek Regional Park in the 1990s by accident during a motorcycle ride. They quickly fell in love with the park's lush cottonwoods and willows, trickling creeks, and wildflower meadows. Our "oasis on the plains" reminded them of home in Connecticut. Lois especially loved discovering and learning about the plants and animals they would see during their walks, and enjoyed sharing her knowledge with Kerry.



Kerry Quick

After Lois passed away in 2018, Kerry honored her by donating to the parks to have a memorial bench placed along the nature trail. Her bench is in a shady spot the two of them would often stop and rest in. Thank you Kerry for supporting the Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers with your donations and your time! 🐾

An Enduring Gift

Be like Kerry. Give a year-end gift to the Friends of El Paso Nature Centers. Here are some ways to give:

Donate by mail

Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers

245 Bear Creek Rd.

Colorado Springs, CO 80906

Donate by PayPal

Scan this QR Code with your phone:



For planned giving opportunities

Call Theresa Odello at 719-520-6981.

Become a Volunteer - If you are interested in donating your time to the Nature Centers, please contact Volunteer Consultant Paula Megorden at bcfevolunteers@gmail.com

Our Mission: El Paso County Parks Nature Centers will connect people to their natural and cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards for the parks and our environment.

Thank you!

Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization and your contribution is tax deductible to the extent of the law.

Volunteer Highlight: Peppergrass - Having Fun Making Music *by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant*

Ten years ago, three talented musicians brought a guitar, a harmonica and a banjo together and discovered they created lively, great sounding music. Two of the three musicians were volunteers at the nature centers, Rick Flores and Theron Jeppson, and the third was staff member, Ian Wilson. Nancy Bernard, Fountain Creek Nature Center Supervisor at the time, encouraged the trio to consider using their talents to play for events at the Parks. And so, Peppergrass began a musical journey.

Peppergrass began performing for El Paso County Nature Center functions such as holiday programs, volunteer recognition programs, children’s programs, and others. Evolving throughout the years, Diane French replaced Ian on banjo and Donna Flores, Debra Rhodes and Brenda McCreight added vocals. Geoff Dunn now plays the harmonica and adds light acoustics and vocals. Al Kinsel, the only member that is not a volunteer, currently plays percussion instruments, excelling on the washboard!



Peppergrass performed at the 2021 El Paso County Fair. From left tot right: Al Kinsel, Rick Flores, Donna Flores, Geoff Dunn, Diane French, and Brenda McCreight



Peppergrass performs at Bear Creek by Candlelight in 2016. From left to right: Ian Wilson, Theron Jepson, Rick & Donna Flores, and Deb Rhodes.

Performing at a variety of other venues such as The Black Rose Acoustic Society and the El Paso County Fair, Peppergrass plays several music styles – old folk songs, mild folk-rock, country and familiar sing-along tunes. Rick has written 14 nature-related songs and Peppergrass is currently preparing to record these songs on CD to be distributed by and for El Paso County Parks. Included in these songs is one entitled, “Grandfather Cottonwood”, about a nearly 200 year-old Cottonwood tree that stands tall near Fountain Creek.

Peppergrass began with just a trio of folks getting together “to have fun making music”, and the current band consists of folks still getting together “to have fun making music”. 🐦



Peppergrass at Fountain Creek Nature Center’s 2019 Nature Hikes with Santa. From left to right: Theron Jepson, Brenda McCreight, Donna & Rick Flores, and Diane French



Fall Seasonal Interpreter at Bear Creek Nature Center

by Heidi Seals

Bear Creek Nature Center welcomed Victoria to the team in late August. Family camping trips and adventurous older siblings played a key role in developing Victoria's passion for the outdoors. A passion that led her to pursue a degree in Recreation and Outdoor Education with an emphasis in Environmental Education from Western Colorado University. Some of her favorite positions she has held before coming to the nature center include: Lift Operator at Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Interpretive Cave Guide at Glenwood Caverns Adventure Park and Adventure Day Camp Instructor with Avid4 Adventure. All positions that involve spending time outdoors and sharing knowledge with youth and adults alike – something she is very excited to continue with as the Seasonal Interpreter!



Victoria Dinkel

As a Colorado Native, Victoria enjoys all things outdoors including: rock climbing, mountain biking, snowboarding and especially camping. When she isn't outside, she is probably reading about true crime, tending to her houseplants or experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen! 🐾



Part-time Interpreter at Bear Creek Nature Center

by Heidi Seals



Brenda McCreight

Brenda is very excited about being the Bear Creek Nature Center's Part-Time Interpreter! After volunteering for several years and working as the seasonal interpreter at Fountain Creek in 2020, she feels that the nature centers are her second home.

Field trips to both nature centers with her students during her 34-year teaching career created a warm spot in her heart for the hands-on teaching that is embedded in nature center curriculum. Added to that, a love of the natural world led her to start volunteering at summer camps the first month after she retired. Last year, Fountain Creek Nature Center was lucky enough to hire her as the Seasonal Interpreter from May through October of 2020. With the team there, she enjoyed innovative programming to deal with COVID restrictions while still allowing guests to connect with nature.

Brenda enjoys walking, completing seven miles a day on average. She loves spending time with her friends outside, reveling in the natural world. Although she once was extremely afraid of birds (blame it on Alfred Hitchcock!), she's joined a birding club and now finds birds fascinating rather than frightening. 🐾

Introducing New Interpretive Program Coordinators!

by *Andy Talley and Mary Jo Lewis*

Fountain Creek Nature Center is pleased to welcome Brianna Fett as their new Interpretive Program Coordinator! Brianna is a Colorado native, born and raised right here in Colorado Springs. She attended college at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. There she earned a degree in Fish and Wildlife Management and Ecology.



Brianna Fett

Her professional experience has included banding ducks for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. She worked for Colorado Parks and Wildlife as an Area 14 intern, which she describes as a “jack-of-all-trades” type of position. She gained experience leading programs with children as a Camp Counselor with the Catamount Institute. Her most recent experience brought her back to CPW as a fisheries technician.

All this experience has prepared her well for any task she may face here at Fountain Creek Nature Center. When she is not at work, she enjoys horseback riding, reading, hiking, hunting, fishing and “anything outdoors.” Here at Fountain Creek, she is also known as Cinnamon Teal; one of her favorite ducks and a species which she has banded. 🐾

Welcome Heidi Seals, Bear Creek Nature Center’s new Interpretive Program Coordinator! Heidi joins the El Paso County team from Fontanelle Forest in Omaha, NE where she worked for nearly eight years, most recently filling the role of Outreach and Public Programs Manager. Prior to discovering her passion for Environmental Education, Heidi worked as an Air Traffic Controller in the Air Force.

Heidi’s father was in the FAA, which led Heidi down the Air Force path and also led Heidi’s family to reside in various locations throughout her childhood, including Puerto Rico and Alaska! Heidi recalls her time in Alaska as an only child, living on 47 acres of land and playing outdoors with her imagination to guide her.

Heidi has two adult sons, Tyler and Aaron, who she shares, “are the pride and joy of my life.” She also has three grandchildren under the age of three. In her free time, Heidi enjoys baking & cooking, collecting antique postcards, and history. In fact, History was Heidi’s

college major with a focus on frontier history. When asked what she is most looking forward to as a Bear Creek team member, Heidi shares that she is “excited to learn how to do the job well and to learn more about Colorado’s flora and fauna.” What Heidi loves most about working as an interpreter is “getting kids outdoors, especially those that wouldn’t normally have the chance.” We look forward to Heidi’s contributions to our team as we work to connect more children to the natural world! 🐾



Heidi Seals plays a convincing toxic mushroom

Recreation Round-Up *by Theresa Odello, Division Manager*

Anyone who thinks fallen leaves are dead has never watched them dancing on a windy day,” -Shira Tamir. While I don’t love the windy days, it is amazing to see the leaves dancing across the streets and trails. I’m trying to enjoy the trails now before the winter weather sets in. Winter will be slow at Rainbow Falls Historic Site as it has closed for the season, but it was busy in the fall with Geology & History Talks, Photography Classes, and a volunteer day where we removed ten bags of invasive weeds. This year there were over 28,000 visitors to this small site. The Paint Mines Interpretative Site was also busy with a steady stream of visitors and a few staff-lead tours. We are still celebrating El Paso County Park’s 50th Anniversary and offered two hikes at Pinerias Open Space and Kane Ranch Open Space, which is not yet open to the public. For special events, there was a Cornhole Tournament at Fountain Creek Regional Park, where parents and children teamed up to compete against others. Children also got an opportunity to learn how to mountain bike at National Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day in Fox Run Regional Park, which drew a crowd of over 100 people. In addition, there was a new element added to the popular Jack-O-Lantern Trail at Fountain Creek Nature Center: a Scarecrow Contest! Six teams competed and had to create their scarecrow within an hour from scratch! Stay tuned for more fun recreation events! 🐦



Aye aye! The pirate scarecrow took first place at the Scarecrow Contest.



Fountain Creek Happenings

by Brianna Fett, Interpretive Program Coordinator



A bullfrog hides among the duckweed

Winter is on its way and animals everywhere are preparing for it. Fur is getting thicker, food is being stashed, and burrows are being dug deep and warm. This is something we all expect from creatures such as bears, deer and squirrels, but what do we expect from frogs? The answer is both simpler, and more complicated, than you may think.

Many frogs, such as the American Bullfrog, go into brumation come winter. Aquatic frogs will simply lay at the bottom of the lake, somewhere with well oxygenated water. They can spend all winter in this state, no matter how cold the weather gets. “What if they freeze?”, you may ask, and this is where it gets truly bizarre. You see, frogs can’t freeze! Yes, you read that right. Extra glucose is present in frogs’ vital tissues and organs, such as their heart. This acts as a sort of antifreeze. So, while ice crystals may form in some parts their body, all essential organs remain unharmed. The American Bullfrog is an incredible animal who survives winter in a very unique way. While the ponds may seem a little quieter without them in winter, come spring we are sure to hear and see them once again throughout the park. 🐦

Happy Trails Report *by Mary Jo Lewis, BCNC Supervisor*

2021 was a noteworthy year for the nature centers' Annual Happy Trails BBQ Fundraiser. This year saw a welcome return to an in-person Happy Trails format, as well as a new location at Fox Run Regional Park. In addition, Happy Trails was a highlight celebration of the 50th Anniversary of El Paso County Parks.



While there were some changes, Happy Trails offered the quality food, drink and entertainment that the event, now in its 12th year, is known for. Buffalo Gals Catering, supporters since the inception of Happy Trails, served up their signature Santa Maria style tri-tip steak and delectable accompaniments. Other event Sponsors included Heuberger Subaru, Sovereignty Wines and Black Forest Brewery.

One hundred and seventy-five participants mingled and dined lakeside under the canopy of Ponderosa Pines at Fox Run Regional Park. Americana band Wirewood Station provided a perfect musical soundtrack to the evening, and Nature Camper Ambassadors did a wonderful job visiting with guests and sharing knowledge they have gained at nature camps. Millibo Art Theatre's Birgitta DePree and Hannah Rockey made a special appearance as "Girl Sprouts" who amused and entertained while soliciting donations from guests.



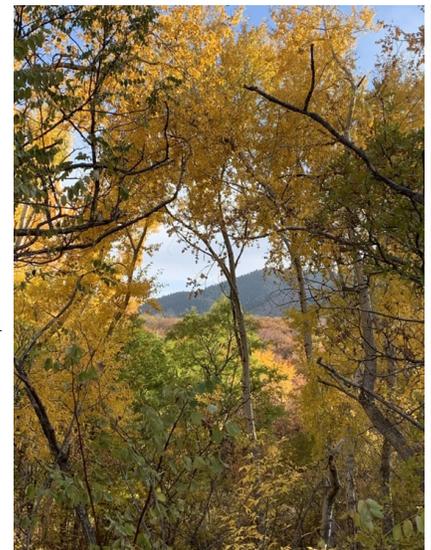
The evening was successful as both a wonderful celebration of the 50th Anniversary of El Paso County Parks Department and a fundraiser. Through the generous support of Sponsors, ticket-buyers, and donors, we reached the impressive goal of raising \$20,000 to support the creation of a new nature center in Fox Run Regional Park! 🐾



Bear Creek Sightings *by Victoria Dinkel, Seasonal Interpreter*

While nights have been growing longer and temperatures dropping lower, deciduous trees have been putting on a spectacular show in preparation for winter. A stroll along The Creekbottom Loop immerses one in the golden yellows, coppery oranges and vibrant red hues of cottonwood trees, gambel oak, Rocky Mountain maple and Virginia creeper. On a breezy day, the magic is intensified as the leaves float down in a warm, autumnal 'snow'.

As winter draws near, the decrease in sunlight hours has triggered a chemical response within these plants to cease their production of green chlorophyll. This process unveils the warm colors that have been hiding underneath all along! With the natural world being one of our greatest teachers, I enjoy the gentle reminders that autumn brings every year; embrace change, let go of the things that no longer serve you or may weigh you down, and to remain ever present because much like fall, the moments are fleeting. 🐾



Fall colors along Bear Creek



Partners in the Parks
for EPC Nature Centers



Winter Recreation Highlights

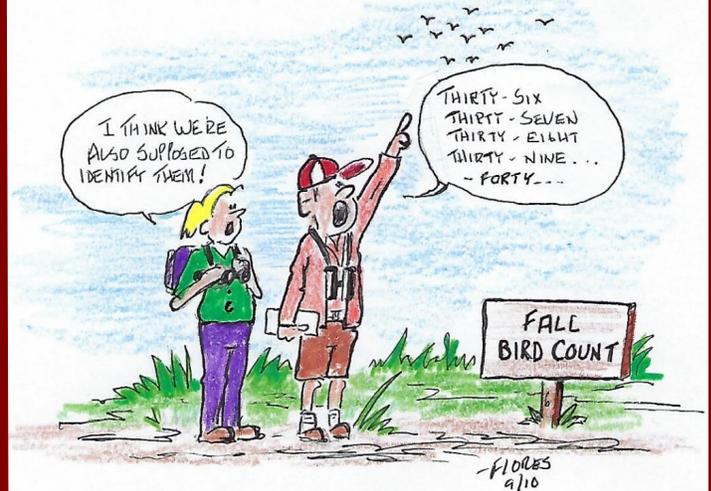
Rainbow Falls Geology and History Talk
Saturday, January 15, 10:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

First Aid/CPR/AED Class
Tuesday, January 25, 6:00 p.m.—7:45 p.m.
Fountain Creek Nature Center

Hobby Wine Awards and Tasting Event
Saturday, February 19, 7:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.
Bear Creek Nature Center

Rainbow Falls Winter Waterfall Viewing
Saturday, February 26, 11:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

Rick's Cartoon



Rick Flores is a nature center volunteer who keeps us laughing with his nature observations.

Winter Nature Program Highlights



Gingerbread Habitat Decorating
Saturday, December 18,
10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m., 12:00 p.m.-1:30 p.m.

Active Adults: COS History Walk—LAW & ORDER
Saturday, January 22, 2:45 p.m. or 3:00 p.m.

Souper Bowl Saturday!
Saturday, February 12, 12:00 p.m. - 2:00p.m.

Kids' Night Out
Friday, February 4, 5:30-9:00 p.m.

Forest Bathing Walks With Summer Lajoie at Listening Pines
1:00-3:30 p.m.
January 8, January 22, February 5, & February 19



Nature Hikes with Santa
Saturdays, December 11 & 18, 10:00a.m. & 1:00p.m.

Morning Hike & Campfire
Tuesday, January 4, 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Frozen Fauna
Saturday, January 15, 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Live Birds of Prey!
Saturday, January 29, 10:00 a.m.—11:00 p.m.

Children's Mindfulness Series
Saturdays, February 5, 12, & 19
10:00a.m. - 12:00p.m.

Long Distance Relationships: Exploring Bird Migration
Saturday, February 12, 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.