

# 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.*



Introducing New Staff	2-3
Nature Camp Photo Mélange	4-5
Recreation Roundup	6
Bear Creek Sightings	6
Volunteer Highlight	7
Fountain Creek Happenings	7
Volunteer Corner	8
Rick's Cartoon	8
Fall Program Highlights	8

## COVID Inspired Outreach and Partnerships *by Nancy Stone Bernard, FCNC Supervisor*



Innovative, COVID-compliant, reaching underserved audiences—that is what the summer of 2020 has been about!

### Nature Adventure Activity Outreach Kits

Since spring school field trips were all but cancelled, nature center staff developed another way to reach students and families who we may not be currently serving. We developed Nature Activity Adventure Kits to be given for FREE to students at Title I Nutrition Distribution Sites in three school districts.

Fountain Creek Nature Center Teen Volunteers spent three mornings assembling 1,000 kits in early July. The kits included a drawstring backpack, activity booklet, magnifying bug box, tree cookie slice and yarn.

The activity booklet contained over 14 activity pages of word searches, stories, crossword puzzles, and creative hike activities produced by staff. The pages were not park specific so that activities

could be done from their own apartments, parking lot, backyard, or neighborhood park. Each page included a short description of an activity with an illustration, short story relating to the lesson, nature activity, and an online resource.

Almost 1,000 total kits were issued to students at Monroe, Adams, Rogers, and West in District 11, 500 to Harrison District 2, and also to Aragon & Mesa in Fountain/Ft. Carson District 8.

The project was funded by **The Front Porch Giving Circle** who donated \$2,200 in December. We hope that this gift to the community gave families a boost to getting outside with their kids in these challenging times!

### Magic of the Marsh Theatre Hikes



The Nature Center staff forged a very successful and unique partnership with a new theater company, *(continued on page 3)*

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

*Friends of EPC Nature Centers*

### President

Anne Schofield

### Vice President

Donn Weipert

### Secretary

Diane French

### Treasurer

Lynn Wilson

### At Large members

Sally Miller

René Chatham

Meg Poole

## STAFF

### Division Manager

Todd Marts

### BCNC Supervisor

Mary Jo Lewis

### Interp. Program Coord.

Molly Hamant

### BCNC Interpreter

Autumn Moser

### FCNC Supervisor

Nancy Stone Bernard

### Interp. Program Coord.

Jessica Miller

### FCNC Interpreter

Andy Talley

### Recreation Coordinator

Theresa Odello

### Volunteer Consultant

Paula Megorden

### Bear Creek

### Nature Center

245 Bear Creek Road

Colorado Springs, 80906

719-520-6387

### Fountain Creek

### Nature Center

320 Pepper Grass Lane

Fountain, CO 80817

719-520-6745

Editor: Nancy Bernard

elpasocountynaturecenters.com



## Introducing Seasonal Staff *by Andy Talley and Autumn Moser, Interpreters*



*Brenda McCreight*

Creek Nature Center. It was not until her last year of teaching that she discovered Fountain Creek Nature Center, when she brought a class here on a field trip. She fell in love with Fountain Creek. She loves being around the water and all of the wildlife that water brings. Brenda has been volunteering for the El Paso County Parks Nature Centers for 3.5 years.

Unfortunately, Brenda's position as teacher-coach was recently cut from the school district's budget. Fortunately for us, this cut happened just as we were looking for seasonal staff. Brenda is thrilled to be part of the team here and we are thrilled to have her. When she is not working, Brenda enjoys reading FBI thrillers and spending time with friends. She and her husband Andy will be welcoming their first grandchild in April. 🐾

**A** big welcome to Bear Creek's Seasonal Interpreter Hailey Robe! This isn't her first time with Bear Creek though, she actually started volunteering Spring of 2019. As a volunteer, she became an exceptional interpreter for our educational programs and those skills made her a perfect candidate for this year's seasonal position. On top of that, Hailey has her Associates Degree from PPCC and is studying Environmental Studies at University of Colorado in Boulder.

Hailey was born in Missouri but moved here when she was young and considers herself a Colorado native. She enjoys playing with her dogs Ella & Pickles, paddle boarding, hiking, painting, and spending time with friends. Hailey has made quite the impression here at Bear Creek, not only for her dedication to the job but her magical ability to find bears. She is a true "Bear Magnet" and has run into at least FOUR bears this summer out on the trail! Thank you for all you do, Hailey. We are so happy to have you as part of the team! 🐾



*Hailey Robe*

# New Interpretive Program Coordinator, Molly Hamant

by Mary Jo Lewis, BCNC Supervisor

**B**ear Creek Nature Center welcomes their new Interpretive Program Coordinator, Molly Hamant! Molly relocated to Colorado from Cincinnati for this nature center position. Molly joins the El Paso County team from the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden where she worked seasonally with their summer camp programs before completing a term of service with AmeriCorps in Public Programs. She is joined in her move by her fiancé, Raul, and her German Shepherd, Koda.

Molly holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Minor in Theatre from Maryville College in Maryville, TN where she also completed an independent thesis project on Eastern Box Turtles. Molly finds that the field of Interpretation allows her to connect two worlds that she loves—biology and education. As she explained, “All the research in the world means nothing if you can’t share it.”

Molly’s father was in the Air Force, which meant that Molly and her family, comprised of her parents and two sisters, have lived in a variety of places including Mississippi, Washington D.C., Knoxville, TN, Cincinnati, OH, and Germany!

Molly’s favorite aspect of her time at Bear Creek so far has been leading nature camps. She appreciates the opportunity to form a relationship with campers during a full week of camp programming. We know that Molly will form many positive relationships with staff, program participants, and others as she joins our team! 🐾



Molly Hamant

(continued from page 1)

**Theatre Across Borders** <https://theatreacrossborders.com/52-2/> which produced a new, interactive, outdoor theater experience for ages 5 and older, while adhering to COVID-19 regulations. The audience enjoyed a journey of mystery, humor, discovery and fantasy as they hiked the nature trails. By the time the audience reached the end of the hike, they saw the entire show! Each of twelve daily performances was limited to 10 people every 15 minutes, two Saturdays at Fountain Creek and one at Bear Creek. The live performances were sold out days before the first production. Melissa Law, the founder and director of the production, who teaches Creative Dramatics at The Colorado Springs School said, “It’s been such a pleasure working with El Paso County Nature Centers and I truly hope that we can again!” We hope so too! We served about 360 people and made \$1,700 to support Nature Center operations. 🐾



Magic of the Marsh monster and magician

# 2020 COVID-Compliant



*Keep up the good work!  
You've made a difference.  
~Parent*



*I can't tell you what a lifesaver camp was for my son this year. He was getting very depressed by not being able to do things with other people and see friends. Thanks to the safety precautions put in place we felt comfortable sending him to camp and this week has been such a benefit to his mental health. ~Parent*

*My son always comes home happy, excited and ready to go back. He seems to like the content of the camps and found them very interesting.  
~Parent*



# Nature Camp Memories



*The staff recognize my kids and know their names, makes us feel like we are a part of it. ~Parent*

*My daughters learned a lot and came home every day telling me what they had learned. Thank you so much for holding the camp despite the COVID pandemic. We really appreciated the camp. ~Parent*



*Thank you for doing such a great job with COVID-19 safety measures. We felt very safe leaving our son with you. We so appreciate you! ~Parent*

*The girls really enjoy the nature camps. They always comment on how much wildlife they get to see. They really love the counselors also! ~Parent*



## Recreation Round-Up *by Theresa Odello, Recreation Coordinator*



*Archery Camp*

Site had a very busy summer averaging over 600 people per day. Besides daily attendance, we also hosted a Geology Walk, History Walk, Flow Patterns and Boat Races (children's program), and a Clean-Up Day. Rainbow Falls will be open on Saturdays and Sundays between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and will close for the winter beginning in November. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events! Highlights on page 8. 🐾

Looking back at this crazy summer, there are many things that will be remembered for the rest of our lives. Hopefully your family was able to take the time to get outdoors and enjoy nature safely. Recreation Services stayed busy with a few adjusted events. Archery Camp was seven weeks of success, with each camp totally full of participants ranging from 5 to 57 years old. First Aid, CPR, and AED classes have now been successfully adjusted so participants complete most of the classes on-line, then come in for a skills demonstration before becoming certified through the American Red Cross. Look for more of those classes this Fall. We also offered a First Aid for Outdoor Kids class, where children learned how to bandage a wound, take care of blisters, and more. **Rainbow Falls Historic**



## Bear Creek Sightings *by Hailey Robe, Seasonal Interpreter*



*Bear-y hungry bear*

We have had a bear-y exciting summer at Bear Creek Nature Center! The black bears have been extremely active and bold, and we have had multiple interactions with these amazing animals (and so many sightings, we've started to lose count). In June, one of our middle school camp groups ran into some unexpected company at the creek – a black bear arrived and ate their snacks! A camper's lunch was stolen, but eventually the bear was scared off. Later, at the Magic of the Marsh theater hike, a black bear arrived to snack on a candy bar, and that same bear visited a few days later to eat out of our birdfeeders. These bears were very bold and sometimes difficult to scare away. We think that these bears may have been able to access more human food or trash than usual, causing them to associate humans with food. Although these interactions make great stories, this is not healthy black bear behavior – this summer has been a welcome reminder to always be bear aware when living and recreating in Bear Country! 🐾

Updated dates for the

**6th Annual Birding and Nature Festival**

**May 14-16, 2021**

**[www.pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org](http://www.pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org)**



# Volunteer Highlight

## Noelle Windesheim--World Nature Traveler

by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant

Recruiting volunteers doesn't usually involve traveling to Alaska, but I met Noelle when she was interning at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. She planned on returning to Colorado Springs for school and thought volunteering would expand her experience. Assisting others to gain knowledge and an appreciation of wildlife and the outdoors motivates her. She graduates from UCCS in December and her dream is to work with the National Park Service.

Perhaps it was playing in mud puddles or camping with her family that fostered her enjoyment of the outdoor world. Her family also embraced exploring the world and its cultures. Noelle joined Give Volunteers, which provided an opportunity to travel and volunteer in local communities. In Thailand and Laos she went bungee jumping, elephant trekking, taught English, and built a bathroom out of recycled water bottles. "This trip really opened my eyes to world travel, amazing cultures, sustainability habits, and interconnectedness. This is a memory and a time in my life that I will never forget."

Volunteering has brought other memories- observing the bee hive at Bear Creek and searching for the queen to show visitors, taking in the spectacular view of Pikes Peak from Fountain Creek, and "racing" at Pollinator Camp. At Bear Creek she even used her "bear training" to deal with a Black Bear that wanted to be part of an outdoor theater program. Thank you, Noelle, for sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm for sustainability and conservation of our great outdoors with our visitors. 🐾



Noelle Windesheim, photo credit Ali Bastek Films & Photography



## Fountain Creek Happenings

Fountain Creek was bursting with babies this summer! Two does each raised twins, three turkeys banded together to raise their army of poults, the cooper's hawks fledged four noisy youngsters, and the Say's Phoebe that nests above our front doors fledged two sets of chicks. While summer is coming to a close, the baby excitement continues. Word on the trail is our resident bobcat has three new kittens! While our staff haven't seen them yet, we've been seeing her hunt around the nature center more and more often. One afternoon she trotted by staff office windows with a prairie dog in her mouth!

It may seem strange for us to be seeing her during the day so much, but bobcats are crepuscular. They are most active in the hours around sunrise and sunset, and our mama bobcat must be expanding those active hours to feed her kittens! She's a small carnivore, likely weighing about 20 pounds and standing perhaps 20 inches high. Bobcats normally hunt small prey like rabbits, rodents, reptiles, and birds. While bobcats adapt fairly well to life around people, they prefer to keep their distance and aren't considered a danger to humans.

Our mama bobcat and her three kittens from last year were spotted somewhat frequently all last fall and winter. To catch a glimpse, tread lightly around the nature trail in the morning or late afternoon. Purrsonally, each time I see a bobcat I feel like I'm seeing a unicorn! 🐾



Fountain Creek bobcat

## Partners in the Parks for EPC Nature Centers



Thank you to our generous Happy Trails Sponsors



## Volunteer Corner

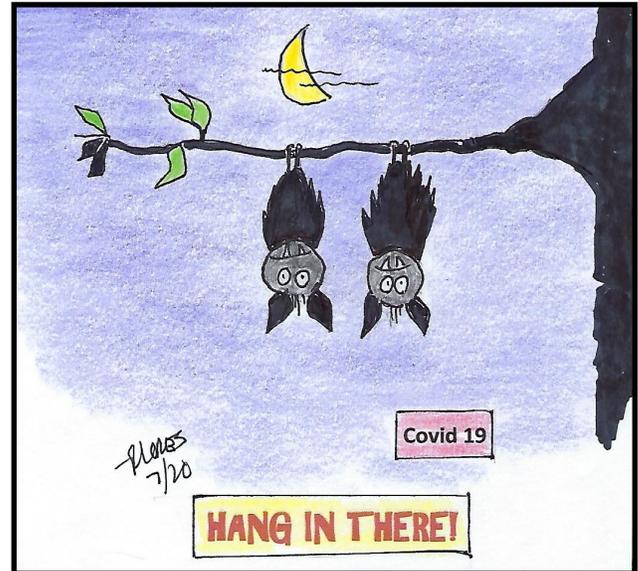
Thank you for your commitment to Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers during this time. Many of you have helped at the information desks, with nature camps, and public programs as we carefully operate the nature centers. We appreciate your help!

People are flocking to the outdoors and our mission of connecting them to their natural and cultural resources is more important than ever. You are welcome to volunteer at the front desk and/or help with programs and activities, as you feel comfortable. We are looking forward to seeing you.

Check the *Program and Events* brochure for programs of interest to you. The staff is scheduling some very innovative programs, so please invite your friends and enjoy these great programs and events.

Become a Volunteer-[bcfcvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:bcfcvolunteers@gmail.com).

## Rick's Cartoon



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

## Fall Nature Program Highlights



### Be Bear Aware!

Saturday, September 12, 9:30-10:45 a.m.

### About the Trout of Bear Creek

Saturday, September 26, 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.

### Active Adults: Hike and History of the Greenback Cutthroat Trout

Saturday, October 10, 8:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.

### Boo! At Bear Creek

Friday, October 23, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

### Bear Creek's Bear Run

Saturday, November 7, 10:00 a.m.

### Living Dinosaurs

Saturday, November 21, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

### Girl Scout Badge Event

Saturday, September 19, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

### Walk with Women of the West

Saturday, October 3, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

### Jack-o-Lantern Carving Party

Saturday, October 24, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00 a.m. & 1:00, 2:00 p.m.

### Spooky Tales Along the Trail

Saturday, October 31, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

### Talking Turkey & Thanksgiving Traditions

Saturday, November 14, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

### Fall Sprawl Crawl

Saturday, November 28, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

## Fall Recreation Highlights

**Yoga at Rainbow Falls**, Saturday, September 5 & October 3, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

**Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day**, Saturday, September 19, 9:00-11:00 a.m.—Fox Run Regional Park

**First Aid/CPR/AED classes**, Wednesday, September 30, 6:00-7:30 p.m.—Fountain Creek Nature Center, Wednesday, November 18, 6:00-7:30 p.m.—Bear Creek Nature Center

**Photography at Rainbow Falls**, Monday, October 12, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

[www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com](http://www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com)