

Buffalo River Ramblings



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Newsletter of the Buffalo River Chapter of the Ozark Society

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Buffalo River Reflections

by Laura Timby

Despite all the damage from the January ice storm, the promise of spring, and the new life it brings, has managed to soften the look of the ravaged hillsides. No longer are the twisted limbs and broken trunks so brutally visible. Tender young leaves unfurl, in the most beautiful shades of green imaginable, and lend a healing touch to the forest. Even though the damage is still there, this vibrant green mantle provides comfort and relief. Never before has spring, with all its glorious redbuds and beautiful clouds of white dogwoods, been more welcome.



Conservation Notes

by Shawn Porter

In late January, the most devastating ice storm in memory struck the Ozark Highlands. The damage was widespread, especially above 1400 ft elevation. The power grid was down in some areas for several weeks. The US Forest Service estimates approximately 185,000 acres of the Big Piney District were damaged (includes Bayou and former Buffalo Districts). This required immediate action to salvage the marketable timber and clear debris from roads and trails. The Ice Storm Salvage Project was quickly developed; two public meetings were held, and the EA was fast-tracked under the "Healthy Forest Restoration Act".

In a nutshell, the project proposal includes salvage logging on 14,000 acres in the district. Some of the logging will include the removal of healthy trees in order to create access (skid trails) and log landings for the operation. (Other USFS or NPS salvage plans may also be developed in other affected areas.) While the USFS should be commended for its prompt response, the Ice

Storm Salvage Project offered just one salvage option. It is anticipated there will be an increase in prescribed burning for the next 10-15 years in affected areas. The environmental assessment for the project includes no calculations of the harm caused by the burning, nor do they assess the benefit of leaving the leftover slash from salvage operations (tree limbs, tops, etc.) to decompose back into the soil.

Many people in the conservation community agree that the salvage operations are needed. There is also concern that the proposed increases in prescribed burning are going to further impact the affected ecosystems. Direct impacts include harm to species whose habitats and populations are susceptible to fire regimes (reptiles, amphibians, bats, migratory birds). Longer term impacts from the salvage operations and subsequent burns will cause an increase in the size and numbers of tree canopy openings. This will result in a drier forest floor where natural decomposition and soil production occurs much more slowly. This further affects the stability of existing soils, increasing sedimentation and run-off.

Even before this catastrophic ice storm, either by accident or design, the USFS has been engaged in forest conversion. We are moving from a forest where fires are small and infrequent, to a forest where burning is a frequent and widespread practice that alters and changes the entire landscape.

While prescribed fire may be a useful tool for creating fire safe zones around communities and farms, landscape scale burns are not necessary in an ecosystem where wildfires are historically small and infrequent. Using some very rough averages based on actual data, the problem can be easily described as follows:

The USFS plans to burn well over 50,000 acres per year in the Ozark National Forest for the foreseeable future. This number is low, especially given the expected approval of the 09 Ice Storm Salvage Project and additional subsequent annual prescribed burning. The actual fire data collected over 5 decades shows that the average wildfire damage per year on the forest amounts to less than 1000 acres per year, with the majority of fires falling under 100 acres in size.

The USFS is intentionally burning over 50 times the acreage that might otherwise be fire damaged in an average year. Why, you may ask? Because the federal government designates a large sum within the USFS budget to be used for prescribed burning. Communities within fire dependent ecosystems (mostly in western states) benefit from prescribed burns and wildfire interventions. Other US Forest districts like those on the Ozark NF, where the ecosystems are not fire dependent and fire is not necessary, have equal access to the money and are often able to execute large scale burns for which they are recompensed by the Federal government (i.e., taxpayers). In simple terms, the more a particular district or forest can plan and execute prescribed burns, the larger their operating budget then becomes.

The best way to reduce prescribed burning in our region may be to bring the issue before our congressional representatives and request a decrease in this regions funding. At the same time, we must continue to voice our concerns to the forest service.

The deadline for comments for the Ice Storm Salvage project is imminent (early May). More information is available by contacting the USFS / Roger Gunter at 479-284-3150 ext. 3159.



BRC Meeting Recap

by Tom Longwell

In March the Buffalo River Chapter gathered at our home near Buffalo Point. After introductions 16 of us headed down our recently constructed network of trails into the headwaters of Caney Creek. We walked about a mile, stopping frequently to view our three springs and stream, as Tere and I shared our experiences and pictures of restoring them from decades of road building and logging operations. We continued further down the stream to a picturesque 12-foot waterfall.

After about an hour and a half we wound our way back up the trail to tour our garden and orchard. Next I showed and explained how our solar panels, rain catchments and composting toilet worked. There were three other families present who shared their wisdom and experiences living off grid for the last twelve years. I certainly learned things from them.

Afterward we all enjoyed a wonderful potluck lunch and conducted chapter business. I hope you can take advantage of the opportunities to attend gatherings in May and June, where both months you will have a chance to visit families living off the grid.



Cliff Hollow by Farrel Couch

On March 14, 2009, a group of eight hikers gathered at the Center Point Trailhead in the Ponca Wilderness area for a day of comradery and exploration. Our Group had folks from many different professions, all ready to dive into the unknown that is Cliff Hollow.

Cliff Hollow Creek flows into the Buffalo from the northwest, below Steel Creek. The hollow has no maintained trails and is seldom visited. Twice before I have visited the hollow on scouting trips, spending only a short time there. After acquiring a Ponca Wilderness map (by V. E. Kurtz), I decided to visit for a more in depth look at this deep, thickly wooded hollow. After a short shuttle to our exit spot along Hwy 43 above Ponca, we were off down the Center Point Trail, which is an old roadbed leading toward the Buffalo at Sneed's Creek. As we made our way downward, we noticed where the Park Maintenance crew had cleared the trail after the January ice storm. Looking down into Cliff Hollow from the trail, I wondered what we might find and how bad the damage might be.

Soon it was time to leave the trail and get on another old road that would lead us down and around to the head of the hollow, where we planned to walk down the creek and explore. While descending the hill we found some areas

littered with treetops and limbs, but other areas seemed to have been barely touched. The road we were on must have been a logging road, as we found no evidence of old home places or fields along our route. The road bent back toward the head of the hollow, just above an area of rock that runs along the east side of the hollow. This rocky glade with few cedars and cacti was easier for hiking than the road. We were still a couple of hundred feet above the bottom, so the view of the hollow was grand. Our rocky glade ended on the low side at a bluff top where at certain spots we could step out on jetting rocks and peer into the hollow below. As small tributary streams flowed over the bluff, waterfalls of all types splashed downward, each one creating its own miniature hollow. We intended to explore each after we were below the bluff. Soon we had made it to where the road crossed the main creek. It was time to see if we could make our way down. We found ourselves at the top of a very steep millrace where the creek had carved its path into the rock much too steep for us to descend. After scouting a bit further along the bluff top we found a steep stair stepping way down and everyone made it to the bottom safely. It was time to do some exploring!

We walked back up the creek to the bottom of the millrace that we couldn't get down, viewed from below, it was beautiful. The water had cut sharp curves part way up making exploring beyond possible only by a couple of daring hikers.

After lunch we explored a small bluff shelter, which had a few dug pits and an old sifter from years ago. Apparently there wasn't much there for them to find. As we made our way downstream we explored many of the small streams that tumbled through the boulders and over waterfalls to reach the main creek. On the creek and surrounding low country there was little damage from the ice storm. The feeling of isolation and untouched beauty was around every turn. Tall bluffs in one area stepped back from the creek in several layers and seemed to reach for the sky. The creek played hide and seek, dry in spots, and then upwelling into beautiful moss lined pools and small falls.

As we drew closer to where we were to climb back to civilization a feeling of dread came over me. Not only was a steep climb ahead, but with the storm damage much greater on this side of the hollow, I knew it would be a challenge. After a short break we began to climb, everyone at their own pace. The higher we climbed the worse the going got, as we picked our way through the debris. I was disappointed by the number of hollow trees destroyed, which provide a home to a variety of wildlife.

We finally reached the Chimney Rock Trail, which had been partially cleared. After another short break we made our way down the trail to our shuttle cars on Hwy. 43. We all made it out tired but unscathed and happy to have visited the little known Cliff Hollow on the Buffalo. Thanks to all that participated.



Leave No Trace Weekend

by Janet Nye

On March 28th –29th nine Ozark Society members met at Devil's Den State Park in the falling snow to become Leave No Trace (LNT) trainers. Jennifer Hazelrigs and Mike Hoover of the University of Arkansas Outdoor Education Center, both Master LNT instructors, led us through the weekend. The goal of this training is to insure that when the Ozark Society leads a hike, canoe float or any event in the outdoors, we practice and teach the seven LNT principles. Simply put, LNT principles teach us to leave the natural world as it is and allow all who travel to these special places to have their own "natural" experience.

The training started at the pavilion at Devil's Den with some review of learning styles, history of LNT and basic understanding of what we would be learning for the two days. We huddled together while the snow and rain fell beyond the pavilion. Each Ozark Society member had been given a topic to teach for the weekend. These topics were based on one of the 7 LNT principles. After our morning session several of us went to the heated gift shop to "look around". The state park's staff person understood our situation and opened the closed restaurant for us to get out of the cold. She was so gracious to us. From that point on, we were able to relax and even take off a layer or two.

Throughout the weekend we would each give our presentations and then the instructors would have further discussion and always a great learning activity. The activities were very helpful in giving us hands on understanding of the principles. We continued through the evening on Saturday and concluded early afternoon on Sunday. Fortunately Sunday's weather returned to spring and we sat in the sunshine at the campsite.

As we lead trips into our beautiful state and country it is very important that we continue to care for these great places. The seven principles help us to focus on how we can do that and give us specific ways to be a great steward. The seven principles are: 1) plan ahead and prepare 2) travel and camp on durable surfaces 3) dispose of waste properly 4) leave what you find 5) minimize campfire impact 6) respect wildlife 7) be considerate of other visitors.

The Ozark Society will have more training opportunities for others to become LNT trainers. In addition, those who attended this training are now certified to lead LNT workshops for groups, classrooms, outings, etc. Those who attended are: Bob Cross, Ti Davis, June Murdoch, David Hicks, Richard McFadden, Rodger Keese, Brian Stephens, Mike Adelman and Janet Nye. I encourage you to contact any of those for training for any type of outing or group.

Devils Den State Park was especially helpful to us in being very flexible in providing shelter for us in the winter weather. We also had the privilege of hearing a park interpreter on Saturday evening discuss the park's bat population and Sunday he joined us to discuss all of the park's wildlife (in keeping with the principle of "respect wildlife").

Our instructors were wonderful and the whole weekend was so much fun. It was great to be with other Ozark Society members in a setting that allowed us to learn new things about each other. I encourage you to sign up for the next training.



News & Notes...

The Buffalo River Chapter is in the process of developing a new format for our newsletter, as well as a change in the frequency of our publication. Instead of receiving the newsletter every two months, we will now be sending it out only once every three months. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause our members. BRC Chapter Chair Tom Longwell has established a chapter email list, so he will be sending out email notifications about time sensitive events that did not make it into the newsletter. With this change we hope to save the chapter money as well as reduce our carbon footprint. To further this end, if you notify Tere Moody, BRC Secretary/Treasurer that you wish to receive your news electronically, it saves even more. Happy Earth Day!

New Members: Welcome to the BRC!

Marc & Patti VanCamp, Jasper, AR
Steve Hemick, WI
Michael & Judy Murray, Buffalo Point, AR
Tom & Linda Tyler, Russellville, AR

Ecology Camp Seeks Applicants by Barry Haas

It's that time of year again when we are actively recruiting 11- and 12-year old boys and girls for the two June sessions of the Arkansas Audubon Society Halberg Ecology Camp. The 1st session will begin Sunday June 14 and end on Friday June 19th. The 2nd session will begin on Sunday June 21 and end on Friday June 26.

Students may choose which of the two separate sessions suit their schedules best.

This is the 30th year for this superb, hands-on Ecology Camp. We have capacity for a total of 48 new students each session, and some of those available spaces have already been filled. If you know of one or more youth that age who are interested in the natural sciences- ornithology, herpetology, mammalogy, aquatic biology, entomology, geology and botany- please make sure their families are aware of this terrific educational opportunity.

The staff consists of 16 instructors, most of whom teach in pairs (for example, two ornithology instructors with a class of about 10 students), co-directors to oversee and coordinate camp activities, an activities director, a full-time registered nurse and an excellent kitchen staff that serves meals that are both tasty and nourishing. The instructors are mostly high school science teachers and college professors. Can you imagine having the opportunity as an 11- or 12-year old of getting to work with college professors and high school science teachers?

Rather than trying to describe everything about the camp to you, I suggest you visit the Arkansas Audubon Society web site at:

http://www.arbirds.org/halberg_ecology_camp.html

Here you will find information about the Ecology Camp plus a downloadable application form and camp brochure. If you still have questions, you can contact me at: bhaas@sbcglobal.net or 501-821-4097

Remember this can be your child, grandchild or some other 11- or 12-year old girl or boy that you know or know of. They will need a recommendation from their teacher and must have an interest in the study of nature. Please help us find some good kids that will benefit from this terrific experience.

BRC March Meeting Minutes by Tere Moody

On March 15th Tom Longwell and Tere Moody hosted a gathering of the Buffalo River Chapter at their homestead near Buffalo Point. Sixteen people attended. After a delicious potluck lunch a business meeting was held.

Tere reported that 42 chapter members have renewed for 2009. Last year we had 82 members. Our present bank balance is \$563. Chapter dues cover the cost of the newsletter plus other items the chapter members vote to support (see below).

Last year our chapter sponsored a 3rd year student to attend the Audubon Advanced Ecology camp. (Gene Cutrell Memorial Scholarship) The chapter members voted to spend \$175 for a half scholarship and ask the Ozark Society Foundation (OSF) for a matching contribution to sponsor another student this year. (Tom submitted the request to the OSF.)

Editor's Note: This was approved by the OSF at the OS spring meeting. Thank you!

A discussion about the upcoming "Leave no Trace" training followed. Our chapter outings leader, Farrel Couch, is interested in attending. The cost is \$75 for two day training. A motion was passed to subsidize Farrel's education up to \$75. (Note: Due to extremely icy roads, Farrel was unable to attend the training.)

Next gathering: Sunday, May 17th at 11am at Jack & Pam Stewart's off grid homestead near Erbie. For more info and directions email them at: jackstewart_us@yahoo.com

NCWA Benefit Musical

There will be a musical benefit for the **Newton County Wildlife Association** on May 9th beginning around 7 pm at the Murray Community Building, approximately 12 miles west of Jasper, Arkansas. Several area musicians will perform. For more information or directions, call Dave Spencer or Nan Johnson at 870-446-2795.

Meetings...

May 17th, Sunday, at 11AM let's meet at Jack & Pam Stewart's to see another off the grid (Minimal Impact) home, discuss any issues that require consideration (business meeting), potluck, and hike the Cherry Grove loop (about 2 miles) to enjoy the wildflowers and scenery. If some want to bring canoes, depending on the river level at that time, perhaps a float from Erbie to Ozark or Pruitt could be arranged.

Directions: From Route 7, about 3 miles north of Jasper, take Koen Forest (Erbie Road) to Erbie Campground. Pass the campground entrance and continue up the hill, past the 2 small pump houses on the right. At the crest of the hill turn left into their driveway. The driveway is 7/10 mile long. After crossing Webb Creek on a slab, ignore the "Authorized Vehicles Only" sign and continue up the hill into the field from where you will see the house. There are 7 water bars, (drainage humps) so proceed slowly. For more info contact them at jackstewart_us@yahoo.com

The **June BRC meeting** will be held at Randy and Kathy Vaughan's home near Deer. Mark the date of **Saturday June 20th** on your calendar. Plan on arriving at 11am for a potluck and general membership meeting. A short afternoon hike is planned and, if there is interest, a viewing of Randy and Kathy's recent trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.

Directions: Turn off of Hwy 7 onto Smith Mtn. Road (County Road 23). This is about 12 miles south on Hwy 7 from the Square in Jasper. Go 2/10th of a mile and turn left. Go another mile and a half to the top of the mountain and turn right on to the Vaughan's driveway. Kathy cautions that the road is rough. If you need more info or have questions call Randy or Kathy at (870) 428-5387.



Outings...

Editor's note: Please contact the trip leader prior to the event to confirm and to check on any last minute changes. Thank you.

Hikes

Saturday May 9, 2009 -Indian Creek - top to bottom. Approximately 5 miles and rated difficult. Meet Farrel at Kyle's Landing at 10am. For more info and to sign up call Farrel at 479-200-2621.

Saturday June 13, 2009 - Pioneer Museum at Golden, MO and War Eagle Trail at Withrow Springs State Park - Approximately 1 mile and rated easy - Meet at 412 Express Station near Huntsville @ 10 AM. For more details contact Farrel at 479-200-2621

Floats

Richard McFadden and Tom & Tere are planning a Full Moon Float on the Buffalo somewhere around June 5th or 6th. Richard will be posting information on the Arkansas Canoe Club message board and you can type in the following link to access the thread:
<http://www.arkansascanoeclub.com/mb/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=12245>
Tom will also send out group email notices closer to the actual date. So if you are interested contact Tom and Tere by email at buffaloriverchapter@gmail.com

The Ozark Society Buffalo River Float from Tyler Bend to the White River will be held from June 9th through the 13th. The **Ozark Society Colorado Trip** this year is July 19th through the 25th. You can find more info on both these trips by visiting the Ozark Society web page at www.ozarksociety.net or in the most recent issue of the Pack & Paddle.

BRC May June Calendar

- May 9th NCWA Music Benefit in Murray
- May 9th Indian Creek Hike
- May 17th BRC Meeting at Erbie
- June 6th BRC Full Moon Float
- June 9-13 OS Buffalo River Float
- June 13th Pioneer Museum/ Withrow Springs
- June 20th BRC Meeting at Deer
- July 19-25th OS Colorado trip

Did you remember to pay your dues?

"As long as there are young men (or women!) with the light of adventure in their eyes or a touch of wildness in their souls, rapids will be run."

-Sigurd Olson, conservation writer and wilderness advocate, 1899-1982

See you on the River! LT