PACK & PADDLE

Summer
June 2026

"The challenge goes on. There are other lands and rivers, other wilderness areas, to save and to share with all. I challenge you to step forward to protect and care for the wild places you love best." - Dr. Neil Compton

Little Panther Creek Purchase

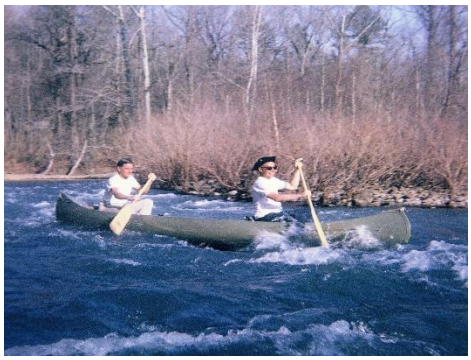
By Ross Noland, Executive Director, Buffalo River Foundation

On April 8, 2026, the Buffalo River Foundation ("BRF") closed its months-long campaign to purchase 120 acres on Little Panther Creek near Buffalo Point and the Indian Rock House. The project protects 2/3 of a mile of riparian area on Little Panther Creek and acres of mature, undeveloped oak-hickory forest. The property is visible from the Indian Rock House Trail, thus conserving the recreational experience on a popular trail within the National River Boundary. The Indian Rock House is a massive bluff shelter with a natural skylight in the overhanging rock, an exposed underground stream, and 9,000 years of human history.

BRF targeted the property several years ago after learning the same family from whom BRF purchased the Boxley 40 (the first 40 private acres on Whiteley Creek when leaving NPS lands hiking towards the Penitentiary) owned it. In this process, BRF also made contact with the owner of 80 acres between the Little Panther Creek property and the Indian Rock House bluff shelter. BRF completed a conservation easement on the adjoining 80-acre property in late 2025, meaning the recently purchased Little Panther Creek property adjoins both NPS land, for ¾ of a mile, and privately conserved conservation easement land for ¼ of a mile. Absent land trust protection, property in these areas is subject to development.

Filing the deed for Little Panther Creek brings Buffalo River Foundation to 31 completed projects protecting over 4000 acres. This includes 20 conservation easements, 9 BRF-owned properties, and 2 properties owned by partners. Of these, 17 holdings border existing public lands (NPS, USFS, or State), and 9 adjoin other BRF holdings or other protected private properties. By sharing a border with both NPS and BRF-easement properties, Little Panther Creek contributes to BRF's core objective to expand existing protected land in the Buffalo River watershed.

The Ozark Society, its members, and chapters, were instrumental in this acquisition, by contributing approximately 50% of the total project cost. These leading gifts inspired others to contribute to private lands conservation in the watershed. Of particular note is the namesake gift from the Jay F. and Patricia P. Hill Family Fund, directed by trustee Congressman French Hill. Cong. Hill remembers his father, Jay F., and his fellow adventurer, Don Hamilton, as "two lifelong friends that shared a passion for the Natural State and its trails, caves, and whitewater." These family adventures led them to many areas of the Buffalo, including the Indian Rock House at Buffalo Point which the gift now helps conserve for future generations. The full name of the project and property is now denoted in BRF records as "The Hill-Hamilton Preserve at Little Panther Creek" in honor of Jay F. Hill and Don Hamilton.



Jay Hill and Don Hamilton on the Buffalo River near Little Panther Creek

BRF and the Ozark Society are planning a joint outing to the property on November 14, 2026. This date coincides with the Ozark Society's weekend long fall meeting at Buffalo Point. BRF, Ozark Society members, and their guests will commemorate the conclusion of this campaign, and conservation of the property, by hiking the Indian Rock House trail to Panther Creek, near its confluence with Little Panther Creek, and bushwhacking onto the Little Panther Creek property. We hope to see you there!

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Little Panther Creek Purchase continued…...

BRF is always searching for conservation easement and acquisition opportunities to protect private lands in the Buffalo River watershed. As BRF works to find properties visible from the river corridor, adjoining existing protected properties, and those with mature forest and riparian areas, we value the support and partnership of the Ozark Society. Thank you, from BRF to the Ozark Society, for making this project, and previous ones, a success.

Sassafras Award Winner Evan Walden

By Brian Thompson, Ozark Society President

Our eighteenth Sassafras Hiking Award winner is Evan Walden, a farmer and preacher who lives close to the King's River. Evan is a reserved fellow who is easily recognizable as he is usually sporting bib-overalls. Both Evan and his wife's families go back several generations in this little corner of Arkansas. I asked Evan how he became interested in the Sassafras Hiking Award: "When I started, I didn't even know about the award. The truth is, hill people like us look at hiking trails as something for rich folks." But Evan is an avid reader, and the story of Grandma Gatewood's Appalachian Trail adventures, captured his interest. He got to talking with a work buddy by the name of Jacob Williams. Together, they scrounged up some gear and set about doing the entirety of the Ozark Highland's trail. "I was still smoking back then and I didn't think I'd make it up Dockery Gap."

Evan and Jacob did the Highland's in large sections. Lots of adventures, including sleeping on a shelf in the rafters of the Ozone pavilion during a terrible thunderstorm. Jacob's girlfriend had been supporting them with resupply. Now; as any long distance-hiker will tell you, you get a lot of time to think out there, and at some point, Jacob concluded that it was way past time to marry this girlfriend of ten years. In between their hikes, they scheduled a small service up at White Rock. Evan, being a minister, conducted the ceremony, and proudly notes that the marriage is still going strong.

Back on the Highlands, Evan and Jacob had put in eighteen tough miles near Arbaugh and were counting on ending their day at a particular site. But it was taken. So, they pushed on a few more miles into the dusk, until at last they found a flat spot. At breakfast, Jacob was looking around and said "Evan, let me see that map." After examining their location carefully, Jacob exclaimed "We slept in Eldridge Holler last night. That's where my grandfather's people settled. He was born in that holler."

When they finished, Jacob had had his fill of hiking, so for the Buffalo River trail, Evan brought along his ten-year-old daughter Faye Lynn. They first learned about the Ozark Society by doing thirty-six miles from Pruitt to Boxley, as part of the Ozark Society fifty-year challenge. On a subsequent day between Erbie and Ozark, they arrived at the Cedar Grove picnic area. Evan had been reading about this overlook, and he explained to Faye Lynn that Ken Smith designed it to be wheelchair accessible so that handicapped folks had a place where they could see the river. Faye Lynn promptly burst into tears. Apparently, the thought that there were folks that couldn't easily enjoy the beauty of the Buffalo, touched her deeply.

Evan saved Missouri's Ozark Trail for last. First trip out he gashed his foot and had to get off trail. But before he healed up, he broke his back in a car wreck, and had to wear a body brace for the next six months. The doctors noted that all that muscle in his back probably helped his healing process, and they asked what sort of sports he played. He noted he was just a walker and a backpacker. They encouraged him to keep walking, and soon he was doing ten miles a day, body-brace and all. When he finally got the brace off, he felt really good, but couldn't immediately get back on trail as he had to find a new job. As a result, it took him awhile to build up vacation credits so he could get back on trail. He finished up the Ozark trail on the anniversary of getting his brace off. appreciate that persistence Evan. We suspect there is more trail in his future.

The Doug James Swift Tower

By Janet Nye, Pulaski Chapter

The Ozark Society has frequently worked with other conservation organizations to meet goals and gain from other's expertise. This has meant that many times we have worked with professionals in fields or organizations that have also overlapped.

In 1953 Doug James came to the University of Arkansas to teach biology, ornithology and many other natural science subjects. He was there for more than 60 years. While there he helped found the Arkansas Audubon Society (1955). Dr. James was doing research for Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) on different bird populations. His contact with AGFC was Harold Alexander, their rivers specialist, who was adamant about protecting rivers from dams (remember, this is the 1960's). It was through Harold Alexander that Doug James met Neil Compton.

Dr. Compton discussed the idea of the Ozark Society with Dr. James and asked him to find a place to meet. The first meeting of the Ozark Society was May 25, 1962 at Waterman Hall in the School of Law on the University of Arkansas campus, which Dr. James arranged.

Dr. James was instrumental in teaching about birds, doing research and leading the Arkansas Audubon Society. He received many, many honors and awards for his work. Most recently, the Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society has announced it will be dedicating a swift tower on Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville to the memory of Doug James. When I read this, I wanted to share with Ozark Society members because of the importance to hear what other conservation groups are doing and to celebrate a person who used his passion for birds and conservation for at least two organizations. Here is a description from Joe Neal of Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society:

"One project involves a Chimney Swift tower. These towers mimic mature trees that are hollow. They also mimic old fashion house chimneys. Swifts roost at night and nest during the summer in these "chimneys." Research shows they readily adapt to towers.

"The swift tower will be dedicated to the memory of Dr Doug James, long time professor at University of Arkansas who taught ornithology classes. Building a Chimney Swift tower was one of his goals when he was NWAAS".

I encourage Ozark Society members to read Neil Compton's book, The Battle for the Buffalo and search Ozark Society on the Pryor Center website (Pryor center.uark.edu), both of these were reviewed to gain more understanding of Doug James' influence with the Ozark Society.

Chinquapin Reconstructed

By Fred Paillet, OS Education Chair

The Ozark chinquapin, a member of the chestnut (*Castanea*) family, is a sometimes-forgotten feature of our local folklore. I have been personally interested in the tree through my New England botanical background in the study of the American chestnut. The loss of that tree after 1904 to an introduced fungal disease was a huge economic loss in terms of timber for construction, bark tannins for the leather industry and abundant nuts for human and livestock consumption. The Ozarks had its own local variety of chestnut in the form of a chinquapin that has long been of questionable classification. It was often confused with a shrubby version (Allegheny chinquapin) growing throughout the southeast. Field work by my students and other researchers now has DNA analyses and other data to show that the tree is indeed its own distinct species. But questions have remained about whether this was a real forest tree of substantial size or something of less stature than the oaks, hickories and pines with which it was associated.

My work with local graduate students addressed the stature issue by surveying the fallen remains of local chinquapin trees we showed were killed by the chestnut blight fungus in 1957. That was easy to do because the wood is so rot resistant that relatively intact chinquapin logs could be found more than fifty years after they were killed. A definite date for that event was derived by taking tree ring cores from nearby trees to identify the year when those adjacent trees suddenly accelerated growth after chinquapin competition was removed. Our work showed that Ozark chinquapins were growing as canopy trees when blight felled them. But examination of the fallen logs showed an unusual twisted and contorted shape to their trunks. That posed a challenge for me as an amateur artist. Would it be possible to find chinquapin logs in old growth forest representing former mature canopy trees, and would there be some with enough of the branches in the deteriorating crown intact to reconstruct the trees' shape?

Because my survey work in mapping Ozark chinquapin made me familiar with the general distribution of the original blight kill in relation to various forest conditions, I decided to focus on forest plots with no obvious signs of past disturbance history and now dominated by oaks and hickories appearing more than a century in age. The most likely candidate was a narrow upland ridge in the Wedington block of the Ozark National Forest in Washington County. There were a pair of large old chinquapin trunks lying on the ground beneath mature post oaks and mockernut hickories with about 45 feet of their central trunk intact surrounded by old-growth trees that were about 65 feet in height – typical for mature forest on narrow, well-drained ridges. Both logs had a single trunk such as we found for the vast majority of old blight kill in the most undisturbed areas investigated earlier. Enough of the branches radiating off the central trunk remained to provide an idea of how they once spread out to form the tree's crown. The only remaining question was the nature of the fine branches that would have been at the very top. I first tried using the crown structure of the largest chinquapin sprouts that still survive as understory trees, but figured their form was not typical of mature trees. They were either severely stunted by competition, or in the process of rapid upward growth after release by disturbance – only to be killed back by another blight attack once again. The best old-growth chinquapin image available was a photo I made of what could be a last survivor of the original attack shown to me by a USFS biologist in 1990. Even if not a true remnant, this tree escaped blight long enough to have a fully rounded, canopy-emergent crown similar to that of adjacent oaks.

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Chinquapin Reconstructed…….continued

After carefully measuring the diameter and width of every section of the two old chinquapin logs, I began my illustration by showing the two logs as if still standing upright. Using that guideline, I then sketched in the fully bark-covered trunks, then the main branches extending up to the approximately 65-foot height of the surrounding canopy. One of those two examples is shown in my illustration here using my 5-foot-ten self as a handy height scale. You see the planform of the log as measured next to my reconstruction of the tree when it was still alive.

Two unusual features stand out in this depiction. First, the series of shifts in the line of the tree's trunk. Foresters call these bayonet joints from their resemblance to the offset where bayonets are attached to the barrel of a rigidly straight rifle. My explanation is that this strange growth form results from the ability of our chinquapin to put on rapid growth that lasts late into the growing season whenever conditions such as death of an overstory tree prevail. The tree is equipped to take maximum advantage of good times when they occur. Since we live in the interior of a vast continent, our climate is decidedly continental. That means that sudden early frosts can occur to damage the terminal growth leaders of these precocious little trees. The loss of the topmost growth center of the growing trunk causes the tree to resume growth the following spring by means of what was originally intended to be a lateral branch bud. A shoot from this new growth center must bend around to point upward – hence the observed shift in the axis of the trunk.

The other unusual feature seen here and on the majority of former large chinquapin trees that we examined showed small and stunted little stems attached to the base of the large tree. I describe them as natural bonsai trees because they appear as slow-growing dwarf trees perched on the basal bulge of the main trunk. Lots of other forest trees have a habit of sprouting from the base in response to injury to the main stem, but these little basal twigs seem to always be there with or without an obvious injury to the "parent" tree. It is hard to see what kind of ecological advantage this kind of basal sprouting would have. Perhaps it is just an incidental residual in a species that was once growing as a shrub before it evolved into a forest tree. Sort of like the residual organ called an appendix that we have which seems to be of no real positive use and may be a relic of a very different ancestral digestive process.

Now that you have seen my reconstruction of Ozark chinquapin in all of its old-growth forest splendor, where might you go to see remains of old growth chinquapin for yourself? Most of the locations where such big trees can be found are off the beaten path or otherwise hard to pinpoint on the map. But there is one easily accessed location you can get to on the Bella Vista Back Forty trail. You can find this location by traveling several miles east on AR route 340 (E Lancashire Blvd) from where that route crosses US71. Go past Bethnal Road on the right and into a curve turning to the north (left). You will see a large water tower looming on your right. Coming out of this curve, stop where you can pull off to the right onto a relatively flat grassy area about 100 yards before reaching a posted trail crossing (coordinates: lat. 36.494, long 94.184). Go across the road and find the trail where it comes back towards you on the roadside opposite your parking spot and then winds down into the head of a steep little ravine. Wind around a hundred yards or so (a bit longer if you account for the winding path) until the trail flattens out and the ravine widens substantially. There will be fallen chinquapin logs on the right side of the trail at two adjacent locations (coordinates: lat 36.495, long 94.186). The logs of a multi-stemmed tree at the first location have split open and deteriorated, but you can get an idea of their substantial size. At the second site the logs are in better shape because they are partially propped up off the ground on the stubs of their branches. These were obviously once large trees, even if their shapes with multiple trunks indicates they had been growing in far from undisturbed woodland. My surveys had shown that trees in old growth woodland almost always had a single trunk. Multi-stemmed chinquapins were found adjacent to old homesteads or in formerly grazed woodlots nearby, probably as a result of livestock browse. You will note the distinctive striated texture of the chinquapin wood with its decay resistance indicated by a lack of fungal growth such as found on other logs after only a few years, and the inability of much lichen or moss to gain a foothold. Then consider how often you might see similar remains of old Ozark Chinquapin on future hikes along trails in NW Arkansas.

Marble Falls Nature Park… Someday?

By David Peterson, Ozark Society Past President

In 2000, when Johnny Morris, owner of Bass Pro, bought Dog Patch, the defunct eyesore along highway 7, in Newton County, there were visions of 600 construction jobs, 170 park employees, $1.4 million in sales tax revenue, and $324 thousand in annual property taxes. Plus, a hotel with comfortable rooms, golf courses, a waterfall of course, trout pond, exotic animals, caverns, and nature trails, and a good restaurant.

Entrance to Nature Park property today

It hasn't happened. But recent action suggests maybe the real construction is about to begin - a pipeline to the once problematic Marble Falls wastewater plant and continuing gnawing into a hillside looking for a waterfall. And then an Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) permit to expand the plant capacity from the current 10,000 gallons per day (G/D), to 15,000 this year, and then in a phase III to 30,000 G/D.

When I called Bass Pro to confirm a completion date, the nice lady said "not imminent, not in my lifetime." She is 70.

The main problem with Mill Creek water quality is high levels of E. coli which limits water contact for humans in both Mill Creek and the Buffalo River, see right. But algae supporting nutrients nitrate and phosphorus are also a problem. At issue: is the low volume Marble Falls wastewater plant at fault, or is it cattle in the Crooked Creek basin which connects to Mill Creek through Karst, or some other source? A paper by Ozark Society member David Mott, et al in 1991 (sponsored by ADEQ) found that "water quality impacts from Marble Falls wastewater treatment District were insignificant due to minimal flow and low concentrations." The **issue right now.** Does the tripling of effluent capacity in anticipation of the Bass Pro project and other related development mean that this conclusion is still valid?

The Ozark Society recommendation:

Since 2009 when the first water contact closure was issued, there have been periodic studies of water quality in Mill Creek, but not sustained enough to constitute a data base which would include nitrate, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, dissolved oxygen, discharge, and of course E. coli. And even worse perhaps, there seems to be no public record of these characteristics emanating from the wastewater plant at the Marble Falls wastewater plant. Increased monitoring with public access to data should be a joint effort from the National Park, the wastewater plant, and ADEQ, starting now.

Danger sign for water quality

The Ozark Society Membership Application/Renewal

Join us, or renew now! Dues are for one year, January-December, and they include a subscription to the Society's newsletter, *Pack & Paddle*. To join or renew, go online to the Ozark Society website at www.ozarksociety.net and click "MEMBERSHIP."

Or you can fill out this form and send it with a check written to "The Ozark Society." See below for our address.

Name(s):_____Date:_____

Address:_____

City, State, and ZIP:_____

Phone: _____

Email 1: _____Old Email (if changed)

Email 2: _____Old Email (if changed)

Please check one:

- ☐ New Member — Start at **Section A** for your OS and Chapter Membership
- ☐ Renewal — Start at **Section A** to renew your OS and Chapter Membership
- ☐ LIFE Member — Start at **Section B** to renew just your Chapter Membership

Section A: Please specify both the Level of Membership and the Chapter you are joining:

Level: *(choose one)*

- ☐ Friend: $30 = $20 OS +$10 Chapter
- ☐ Associate: $60 = $50 OS +$10 Chapter
- ☐ Supporter: $110 = $100 OS +$10 Chapter
- ☐ Sponsor: $260 = $250 OS +$10 Chapter
- ☐ Patron: $510 = $500 OS +$10 Chapter
- ☐ Benefactor: $1010 = $1000 OS +$10 Chapter

Chapter: *(choose one)*

- ☐ Bayou (Shreveport, LA)
- ☐ Buffalo River (North Central, AR)
- ☐ Highlands (Fayetteville, AR)
- ☐ Pulaski (Central, AR)
- ☐ Schoolcraft (Springfield, MO)
- ☐ Sugar Creek (Bentonville, AR)
- ☐ No chapter, all to central Ozark Society

Section B: For Members who wish to join more than one Chapter or Life Members renewing their Chapter Membership only

(Choose as many as you wish and add $10 for each chapter)

- ☐ $10 Bayou (Shreveport, LA)
- ☐ $10 Buffalo River (North Central, AR)
- ☐ $10 Highlands (Fayetteville, AR)
- ☐ $10 Pulaski (Central, AR)
- ☐ $10 Schoolcraft (Springfield, MO)
- ☐ $10 Sugar Creek (Bentonville, AR)

Section C: Donations to our Funds

(Choose any amount)

- ☐ $_____ Conservation Fund
- ☐ $_____ Endowment Fund
- ☐ $_____ Legal Fund
- ☐ $_____ Youth Grant Fund

My Total is: $_____

Please remit to: The Ozark Society, PO Box 166, Fayetteville, AR 72702-0166.

Please contact ozarksocietymembership3@gmail.com for questions.

Ozark Society
P.O. Box 166
Fayetteville, AR 72702-0166

Please Note: If you would like to save a tree and receive *Pack & Paddle* by email, not through US Mail, please contact Carolyn Shearman at oscomms@ozarksociety.net.

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