

# 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.*



Volunteer Corner	2
BC Bear Run	3
Welcome Seasonal Staff	4
Bear Creek Sightings	5
Fountain Creek Happenings	5
Summer Nature Camp Montage	6
Volunteer Highlight	7
Thank you Sponsors	7
Fall Program Highlights	8

## 2017 Progress Report by Todd Marts, Manager

Our mission to connect and inspire stewards continues successfully with 601 programs for over 18,000 participants so far. Staff and a cadre of wonderful volunteers led 10 weeks of nature camp for 271 children. Staff and volunteers also conducted 245 environmental education field trips for 4,494 students. While the numbers are impressive, the exciting part is that these children and adults were in the outdoors and learning about the environment for thousands of hours!

### Awards

This year started with the **Nature Center Innovative Programming Team** winning the 2016 El Paso



**County Innovative Award.** This award is for County Employees who are responsible for innovative changes that have led to improved customer service.

**Fountain Creek Nature Center** was selected as the **Gold Award for Best Field Trip in the Gazette.** Pikes Peak Earth Day Committee and Veda Salons selected the **Fountain Creek Nature Center** for a **Greenie Award** in the

Community category.

**The Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers** was awarded



**the 2017 NACPRO Award in the Outstanding Support Organization** category presented to an organization that has responded in an exceptional manner by making a major contribution to benefit park and recreation programs or facilities. These awards are not for the building or the programs, they are for the great staff and volunteers. Some examples of the innovative programming the past six months include the following new programs and events:

### New Programs

At Fountain Creek Nature Center eight stellar teens were trained as the **first class of Junior Docents.** They began doing demonstrations in June on the topics, Wild About Wildlife (with pelts, tracks, scats, skulls), Cattails, and Uses of Yucca. Stationed just outside the



*Continued on page 2*

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

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Nature Centers*

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### BCNC Supervisor

Mary Jo Lewis

### FCNC Supervisor

Nancy Stone Bernard

### Bear Creek Nature Center

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Colorado Springs, CO  
80906

719-520-6387

### Fountain Creek Nature Center

320 Pepper Grass Lane

Fountain, CO 80817

719-520-6745

Editor: Nancy Bernard



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## Progress Report *continued*

nature center they each completed six, 2-hour presentations each and touched almost 300 people.

Bear Creek Nature Center staff began providing **'Wildlife Explorers' to the Salvation Army Red Shield After-School Program** for children. As part of this program, they will work on an improvement project with the children by creating a pollinator garden at their site.



Nancy Bernard started a new **Women's Nature Retreat at Fountain Creek Nature Center**. Twelve women connected to nature through a variety of activities and have already asked for this to be a bi-annual program.

**Bear Creek Nature Center partnered with Fossil Brewing Company for a new fundraiser, 'Nature on Tap.'** The brewery donated to Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers for every beer sold while staff and volunteers provided an educational station about the life of honeybees.

### **Bear Creek Nature Center held a Pollinator Festival and Plant Sale.**

This community event aimed to increase appreciation for the diversity and importance of pollinators while raising funds for the Nature Centers.

### *A Milestone*

400 people attended the **Fountain Creek Nature Center 25th Anniversary**. It was so exciting to see past volunteer and staff reactions to the expanded facility and participate in lots of activities.

My sincere thanks to all of you who made this possible. After reviewing the wonderful evaluations, it is safe to say that the participants thank you too! 🐦

## Volunteer Corner *by Paula Megorden*

### *Welcome New Volunteers*

Welcome to our new volunteers **Brenda McCreight, Laurie Ann Mayer, Jonathan Barnes** and **Linda Haglund**. We appreciate your volunteer service and look forward to working with you.

### *Environmental Education Leader Training*

September 12, 13 at Bear Creek Nature Center, 12:30-5:00 p.m.  
September 19, 20 at Fountain Creek Nature Center, 12:30-5:00 p.m. This training is for new volunteers interested in becoming school program leaders and current program leaders who have not taken this training in the last four years.

### *Become a Volunteer*

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or would like to sign up for the training in September, please contact the Volunteer Consultant at [bcfcvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:bcfcvolunteers@gmail.com) or the nature centers. 🐦

## A "Beary" Exciting Fundraiser! *by Mary Jo Lewis*

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, Bear Creek's trails will be teeming with bears! Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual 3K Trail Fun Run & Walk will give participants an opportunity to don a bear suit and traverse the trails for a good cause. This fun run & walk for all ages will include a pre-run costume-embellishment contest, crafts, and other festivities. The registration cost for new runners includes a cozy bear suit to keep- which can be picked up before Halloween! We hope you'll join us on November 4 to support environmental education in our community while dressed like a bear! For more information, call 719-520-6387. 🐻



## Register for Creek Week & Help Your Community



Creek Week, September 30-October 8, 2017, has become the largest cleanup in the state of Colorado! Creek Week aims to bring the Fountain Creek Watershed communities (Monument, Palmer Lake, Woodland Park, Green Mountain Falls, Manitou Springs, Colorado Springs, Fountain and Pueblo) together to foster the health of our local waterways for its citizens and wildlife alike. Do your part and register now! 🐻



Register at:  
[www.fountaincreekweek.com](http://www.fountaincreekweek.com)

## Welcome to Seasonal Staff *by Mary Jo Lewis & Nancy Stone Bernard*

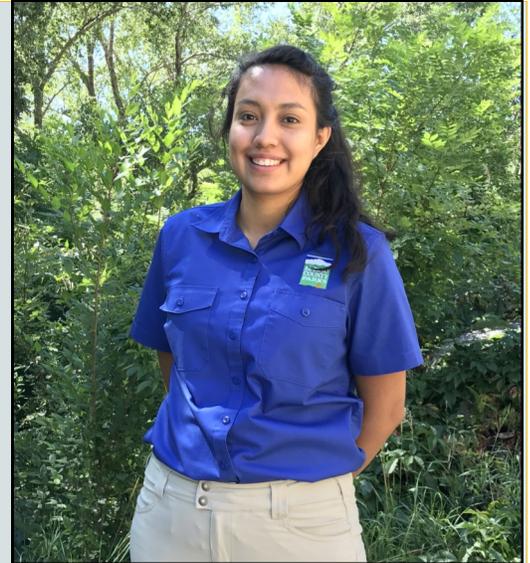
Welcome to Bear Creek Nature Center's new Seasonal Park Interpreter, Berenice Amezcua! Berenice is currently a student at Pikes Peak Community College and hopes to transfer to UCCS to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies and Geography with a Minor in Biology.

Berenice most recently served as an Americorps member at CSU Extension, where she delivered S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education to school-aged youth in vulnerable populations.

In her free time, Berenice enjoys outdoor activities such as snowboarding, hiking and camping as well as artistic pursuits including drawing and painting.

When asked what aspect of this position she is most excited about, Berenice explains, "I believe that having a job where you can spend the whole day in nature is the most ideal situation.

Although I am excited be working with all age groups, I am very eager to work with youth. I am super excited that I found a place where I can work outdoors and with youth." Berenice hopes to one day join the Peace Corps but for the moment, we are happy to have her as part of our Bear Creek Nature Center team! 🐦



*BCNC Seasonal Interpreter, Berenice Amezcua*



*FCNC Seasonal Interpreter, Jacob Skinner*

Jacob Skinner joined the Fountain Creek Nature Center team in June just in time for summer nature camps. He is pursuing his Bachelor's degree, at U.C.C.S. majoring in Geography and Environmental Science with a minor in Spanish. He expects to get married in June of 2019 and graduate in 2020. He loves watching nature documentaries in his free time, but he loves being in nature even more and hopes to be a documentary wildlife photographer someday. Jacob confides that he is more comfortable being around bugs and snakes than people because nature doesn't talk back! He spent several years employed by Mile High Youth

Corps working in the mountains and forests doing trail work and mentoring new workers. He says it opened his eyes to how important the environment is. "People don't think about mountains and forests as part of their lives; we've lost ties to nature through technology. Everything we do affects the planet and it is the planet that will keep us alive." Jacob is excited to be at Fountain Creek Nature Center to be part of the rare wetland environment and teach people about its critical role to wildlife. As the saying goes, "Where there is water, there is life!" Welcome aboard, Jacob! 🐦



## Bear Creek Sightings

by Maria Petkash, BCNC Interpretive Program Coordinator

Though the monsoon season hasn't been kind to those who prefer a dry Colorado climate, it isn't hard to see that our vegetation begs to differ. Whites, blues, and yellows—our flower populations have been booming! Common forb sightings include knotting onion, golden aster, and geranium. These late summer bloomers appear to be enjoying this temporary Pacific Northwest-like habitat.

One forb in particular caught our attention: Butterflyweed. We do not often see members of the milkweed family (family *Asclepias*) around Bear Creek Nature Center, though we wish we did. Monarch larvae ONLY EAT milkweed. Not only do they gain needed nourishment for development whilst milkweed munching, they also obtain an extra kick in warding off predators. The monarch caterpillar is able to digest and store the plants' cardenolides (toxins) making themselves poisonous to hungry-eyed birds. Unfortunately, milkweed populations are on the decline. Take away the milkweed, and we say goodbye to monarch butterflies. Fortunately, you and your fellow neighbors have been spreading the word, "Plant that milkweed! Save the monarch!" With hope in our hearts and milkweed in our gardens, we can ensure these natural beauties are enjoyed for future generations. 🐦



Butterflyweed at BC Nature Center



## Fountain Creek Happenings

by Tim Weaver, FCNC Seasonal Park Interpreter

Here at Fountain Creek Nature Center, time is moving on just like the seasons are. This summer change is more evident than usual. Few guests who are familiar with our Cattail Marsh Wildlife Area Trail can go without noticing our beloved Grandfather Cottonwood Tree which recently lost one of its largest branches. Unfortunately, this is a sign that our wonderful cottonwood's life is nearing the end. This enormous cottonwood tree is in fact two tree species with an intertwined root mass and trunk. They are the



Grandfather Cottonwood

Plains Cottonwood (*Populus deltoids*), and the Narrowleaf Cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*). Time is something even these old cottonwoods cannot resist. We believe our Grandfather Cottonwood to be approximately 170 years old. On average cottonwoods grow from 70- 120 years old. It is not unheard of for a cottonwood to reach 200 years old, but this must be under perfect growing conditions. While it seems sad, this tree will slowly decay, making new habitat and soil for plants and wildlife. Socrates once said "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." This is just what our Grandfather Cottonwood is doing. 🐦

# Nature Camp Montage



**“THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE!”**  
Frequent Nature Camper comment.



# Volunteer Highlight

## Holly Niewinski, “The Dog Lady” *by Paula Megorden*

It was a college course in environmental conservation requiring 30 hours of volunteering at a nature center that brought Holly to volunteer with El Paso County Nature Centers. That was 17 years ago and she still enjoys volunteering at the information desk meeting visitors and sharing something she loves: wildlife and nature. Holly was raised in Chicago. She was an active child, so her dad gave her jobs baiting hooks for fishing and working in the garden. Most of us know Holly as a school counselor. She never intended on being a counselor until she was a monitor at an elementary school. “I realized I loved working in a school and with kids.” Then a community service project and her love of animals led her to training Guide Dogs. Her husband Paul, also a nature center volunteer, has joined her in this puppy-training passion. Currently she is raising her 18<sup>th</sup> puppy, Bunny. Paul has helped raise eight of them. “I am proud to be called “The Dog Lady,” a name given to me by a student early in my counseling career.” In her work with kids and dogs she sees how the human to animal bond can help her build

trust and relationships with students she counsels, and in speaking with children at the nature center. And what does she say about her path to volunteering? “It was formed by many life experiences and the fabulous people I met along the way.” Holly still seems to have that energy she had as a child. Isn’t it amazing that with everything she does and enjoys, she still has time to give to the nature centers? Thank you, Holly! 🐾



*Holly Niewinski and Guide dog puppy*



Pikes Peak Beekeepers Association

*Thank you to the generous supporters of Bear Creek Nature Center's Pollinator Festival on June 10!*

El Paso County Nature Centers  
245 Bear Creek Road  
Colorado Springs, CO 80906



Gold Hill Mesa is Bear Creek Nature Center's "Partner in the Park."



## Fall Program Highlights

### Harvest Moon Storytelling Hike at Fox Run Regional Park

October 6, 6:30PM

### Webelos Scout Day

October 14, 9:00am-3:00pm

### Bear Creek's Bear Run

Saturday, November 4, 10:00 a.m.

### Fairy House & Gnome Home Party

Saturday, September 2, 10:00a.m.—Noon

### Life Vision Journey: Medicine Shield Workshop

Saturday, October 14, 9:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

### Pumpkin Carving Party, 9:00 a.m.—Noon

### Jack-o-Lantern Trail, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 28, 9:00 a.m.—Noon

For a full listing of Fall programs visit [www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com](http://www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com)