

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.*



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Restoration Crew to the Rescue!

by Kylee Taylor, Interpretive Program Coordinator, BCNC

Nature has many elements that work together: seeds rely on animals to be dispersed, insects rely on tree snags for a home, and birds rely on the insects for food. But what happens when one of those elements is scarce? Or too abundant? In 2023, Bear Creek Nature Center staff noted a lack of insect larva in Bear Creek. This was likely due to a buildup of debris that increased the nitrogen levels in the creek as it decayed. Nitrogen is important for a creek's health but an overabundance of it is detrimental to the critters living there as it overtakes the oxygen they need.

As stewards of the park, staff and volunteers created the Restoration Crew. This group focuses on fire mitigation leading to habitat restoration. Fire is another element of a healthy foothill's ecosystem, clearing out old debris. Suppression of fire led to a plethora of tree limbs. This debris creates more fuel and a hotter fire. Many trees are adapted to withstand the temperatures of a normal fire, but greater heat levels will kill the tree. Clearing debris from the park creates cleaner and healthier habitats for all wildlife and reduces the risk of fire becoming out of control. If you'd like to join the Restoration Crew at Bear Creek, please contact Kylee Taylor at kyleetaylor2@elpasoco.com. We conduct quarterly workdays with varying activities, so all are welcome and able to become stewards of our beautiful park. 🐾



Many hands make light (and fun) work.



From left to right: Restoration crew members Brandon, Lyn, Esi, and Peter clear combustible debris along Bear Creek and its trails.

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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: Jessica Miller

elpasocountynaturecenters.com



Volunteer Highlight: Fountain Creek Regulars, Holly & Debbie!

by Kelly Ann Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator

Stop by Fountain Creek Nature Center on a Thursday for a real treat! Two outstanding volunteers regularly hold down the fort at the front desk on Thursdays. With Holly Niewinski on the morning shift and Debbie Germeroth on the afternoon shift, staff knows the nature center is in good hands on Thursdays, so they can kick back and relax. (Ha, they wish!)

A volunteer with us for 24 years, Holly Niewinski loves that there is always new wildlife to see every week and most



*Holly and pup-in-training
Siobhan in 2016*

Holly enjoys providing a service that brings joy and freedom to people who are legally blind.

On Thursday afternoons, you will find Debbie Germeroth, a nature center volunteer since 2020, behind the desk dishing out wildlife expertise. Debbie loves helping people learn about nature, and as a veterinarian since 1985, she has lots of



*Debbie often helps at special
events, too. The desk can't
contain her!*

enjoys seeing the awe on children's faces when they walk into the nature center. In addition to bringing a smile to her morning shifts, Holly usually brings a puppy, too! A puppy-raiser for Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc. since 1999,

knowledge to share! The coolest wildlife she has spotted from the nature center windows were two ospreys playing together in a stiff wind.

Thank you, Holly and Debbie, for sharing your time and knowledge with us every Thursday! 🐦



*Holly, pup-in-training
Brandy, and Santa
pose for a picture*



*Debbie loves nature
walks, learning, and
visiting new places.*



2024 Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival

May 16—19 Registration Opens March 23

pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org



Mural Work in Progress in the History Corner

by Victoria Dinkel, Interpretive Program Coordinator, FCNC

Staff, volunteers, and visitors of Fountain Creek were eager for the building to reopen after last summer's flood damage. As Jessica and I walked through the refinished exhibit room, we noticed something was off... the mural work in the history corner was gone! Paintings once highlighted Fountain Creek's role in the development of the region and the rich farming history that followed.



Artist Daniel Logan is bringing the history corner to life again with color and important images.

The original artist moved but I was able to contact Daniel Logan about the opportunity to repaint the area. Daniel originally moved to Colorado for the Air Force Academy but the area's natural beauty inspired him to stay. Immediately after retiring from the Air Force, he began classes at Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design and has been painting animals and landscapes ever since. We are very excited about his designs and have been enjoying seeing the progress since he began.



Daniel's work highlights the importance of apple, pumpkin, sugar beet, and cattle farming in the Fountain Valley.

Daniel will also be exhibiting his personal work this September during the 2024 Art Exhibition; an installation where each month features the work of different artists or photographers and sales support both the artist and El Paso County Nature Centers. Be sure to visit us monthly to see the updated history corner and rotating art exhibit! 🐦



Volunteer Corner

by Kelly Ann Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator

We have the best volunteers! Special shoutout to our new volunteers who joined us over the winter: **Jacki Bakker, Jennifer Lange, Frank Megorden, and Patty Nyquist-Heise.** Welcome to the team!



Frank Megorden keeps us entertained while we wait in line for the soups!

January Jubilee: On a chilly afternoon by the frozen pond, 30 volunteers and staff gathered at Fountain Creek Nature Center for a hot lunch of various soups, delicious potluck sides, and decadent desserts. It was lovely to spend low-key quality time together after such a busy holiday season!

Volunteer Recognition Dinner: Volunteers, mark your calendars for *Thursday, March 21st* from 5-7:30 p.m. at Bear Creek Nature Center.

We will provide a catered dinner for our



Eileen, Deb, Theron, and Diane catch up as Holly watches the front desk.

volunteers followed by an awards ceremony to recognize all our volunteers' achievements in 2023. Can't wait to celebrate you!

Become a Volunteer – Interested in joining our volunteer team with El Paso County Nature Centers? Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Kelly Ann Blanchard, at bcbcfvolunteers@gmail.com. 🐾

Thank you to 2023 Donors

Steward: \$1,000 - \$5,000+

Glendyne Wergland,
in Memory of Paula Megorden

Frank Megorden
in Memory of Paula Megorden

Anonymous

J&R Group

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Champion: \$500 - \$999

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in Memory of Paula Megorden

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Thank you to 2023 Donors

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in Memory of Paula Megorden
Wild Birds Unlimited
Francie and Greg Brent
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Wendy Hellerud
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in Memory of Paula Megorden
Mary Lynn Black
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Friend: \$1 - \$50

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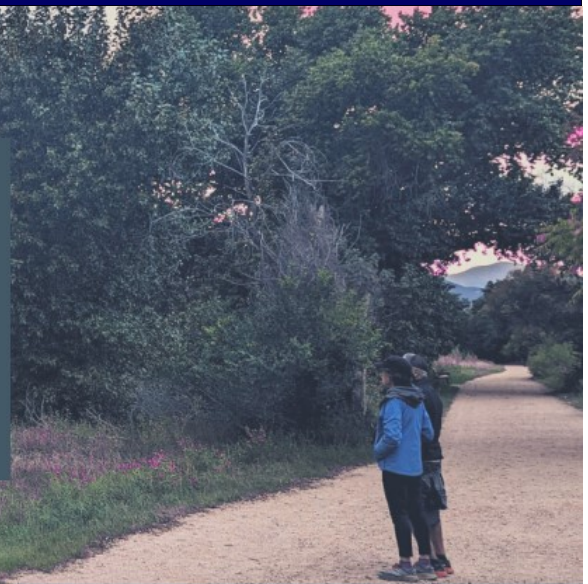
***Donate
Today!***



EL PASO COUNTY NATURE CENTERS

2023 ANNUAL SNAPSHOT

Our mission is to connect people to their natural and cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards of the parks and our environment.



Accomplishments and Updates

From engaging art exhibits to expanding community programs, we've had a year filled with exciting developments and a strong commitment to environmental education. One of the standout features of 2023 was the introduction of a **rotating art exhibit** at Fountain Creek Nature Center. This innovative initiative aimed to merge the worlds of art and nature, providing visitors with a unique and enriching experience. The **Trailability Program** saw a notable increase in the number of volunteers, and their dedication and enthusiasm played a crucial role in ensuring that everyone, regardless of physical abilities, could enjoy the serenity of our local trails. We've also unveiled the **Visually Impaired Persons (VIP) Trail**, where visitors with visual impairments can now better interpret nature at the Bear Creek Nature Center along the trail and through interactive displays inside the center. The most exciting news of 2023 was the announcement of our upcoming nature center, **Fox Run Nature Center**. Designs for this state-of-the-art facility are currently underway, promising a space that seamlessly integrates with the surrounding environment while offering cutting-edge educational opportunities. The nature centers' journey in 2023 was marked by growth, inclusivity, and a commitment to the community. As we venture into the future, we invite you to **join us in preserving and celebrating the natural world**.

Our Impact:

- 999 Nature Center & Recreation Programs
 - 34,612 Participants
- 4,426 Volunteer Hours
 - Over \$70,000 Value
- 434 Environmental Ed. Field Trips
 - 6,862 Students Reached
- 15 Nature Camps
 - 361 Campers
- 36 Trailability Program Participants
- 22,809 Non-Program Visitor Contacts
- 4.97 Average rating out of 5.0
- Staff and Volunteers
 - 6 Full Time Staff
 - 2 Part Time Staff
 - 4 Seasonal Staff
 - 70 Volunteer Naturalists



Donate Here

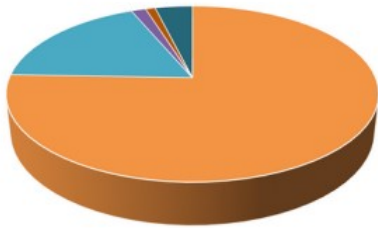


ELPASOCOUNTYNATURECENTERS.COM



Financial Report

Revenue: \$166,739



Program Fees \$136,557 Contributions \$32,614 Memberships \$2,735
Interest Income \$1,818 Refunds (\$6,985)

Expenses: \$168,357



Staffing Support \$40,000 Educational Programs \$37,656
Fox Run Nature Center \$28,075 Admin \$13,822
Volunteer Programming \$11,511 Marketing \$11,117
Registrations/Training \$9,703 Exhibits \$7,871
Equipment/Supplies \$5,393 Insurance \$2,290
Books/Subscriptions \$936



2023 TRAILABILITY PROGRAM AWARDS

~ National Assoc.
County Park &
Recreation Officials,
Universal Accessibility
~ National Assoc. of
Counties, Achievement
Award
~ Colorado Parks &
Recreation Assoc.,
Columbine Award in
Programming

Innovative New Programs

Puppet Theatre Matinee

Adult Day Camp

Painting in the Park

Fishing 101

Home is Where the Habitat Is

Nature Trivia

Bunco

Winter on the Frontier

SkeleTONS of Fun

X Marks the Spot

Kids Survival Series

Ute Knowledge

Colors of Spring

Towhee Tap Dance

Rock Out

Flower Power

Vegetable Gardening for Success

Bat-tastic

Whose Egg is it Anyway?

Mighty Muskrats

Feathered Frenzy

Go Go Grasshoppers

Lounging Lizards

Who Dung It?

Mush Ado About Mushrooms

Sneaky Snakes

Meadow Marvels

Lego Habitats

Art in Nature

Tarantulas on Parade

Let's Get Squirrely

Ooey Gooley Science



Partners in the Parks

Partners in the Parks was created fourteen years ago to provide financial support for El Paso County Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Nature Centers. Partners donate a gift of **\$5,000 annually** for three years to provide essential operating and maintenance support.

Contact Dana Nordstrom at dananordstrom@elpasoco.com to become a partner.

Partners in the Parks for Bear Creek Nature Center

Gold Hill Mesa

The Scott Lauther Foundation



Partner in the Parks for Fountain Creek Nature Center

Olson Plumbing & Heating Co.



Program Sponsors and Allies

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Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Colorado School for the Deaf & Blind

Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum

Colorado Springs Astronomical Society

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Colorado Springs Visitors Bureau

Cool Science

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Earthwise Pet Supply

Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control
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Fountain Farmers 4-H Club

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Harding Nursery

High Grade Catering

Hueberger Subaru

Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region

Jack Quinn's

Jack Quinn's Running Club

Jamie Nicholas of Mighty Mindful Kids

Kids on Bikes/ Pedal Station

KRDO

Listening Pines

Mary's Mountain Cookies

Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates

Milberger Farms, Pueblo

Mile High Bug Club

MTB with Stacy

Mile High Bug Club

Mountain Equipment Recyclers

Munchie's Diner

Native Plant Masters

New Horizon Youth & Family Services

Nothing Bundt Cakes

OCC Brewery

Olson Plumbing & Heating Co.

Paninos

Papa Murphy's Pizza, Fountain, CO

Patsy's Candy

Peaceful Warriors Yoga

Pet Pantry

Phantom Canyon Brewing Company

Pikes Peak Library District

Pikes Peak Beekeepers Association

Pikes Peak State College Wild Things

Pikes Peak Jazz & Swing Society

Pikes Peak State College

Poor Richards

Ranchlands – Chico Basin Ranch

R.M. Dinosaur Resource Center

Rocky Mountain Kite Association

Scott Lauther Foundation

Sovereignty Wines

Space Foundation

Sugarplum Cake Shoppe

Summer Lajoie of Listening Pines

Sunbelt Rentals

Theatre Across Borders

Texas Roadhouse

The Caffeinated Cow

The Cupcake Dr.

The Pet Gal

The Independence Center

The J & R Group

These Girls Got Beef

University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Wild Birds Unlimited

Wimberger's Old World Bakery

YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region

Thank You!

Recreation Services Updates

by Ryan Dorough, Recreation Program Planner

With the holidays over and the new year starting to bloom, things are starting to speed up again in the County. The beginning of the year is an amazing time to pick up a new hobby, and the nature centers have been a great place to do so! Fishing, indoor gardening, & bunco are just a few of the things that have been offered this year so far. Did you miss this season's Bunco night? Don't worry! Bunco nights occur each season and switch between Fountain and Bear Creek Nature Centers. The next bunco night will be at Fountain Creek Nature Center on April 19th. With spring approaching, Paint Mines Interpretive Park and Rainbow Falls Historic Site will also be coming alive with activity as the first spring programs are rolled out. On March 9th you'll get a chance to photograph Rainbow Falls during winter with our partner 3 Peaks Photography as we take two groups up to the falls for a photography workshop. Interpreters at Paint Mines will start their season in April and will kick off the hiking season with a wildflower walk on May 31st. Don't let the end of winter and beginning of spring slip by. Catch you next time with more updates from recreation services! 🐾



Bunco nights are a blast!



Building a Natural Haven: The Ongoing Endeavor of Fox Run Nature Center!

by Theresa Odello, Recreation & Cultural Services Manager

The ambitious project of building a nature center is continuing, with the goal of creating a local space where the community can connect with nature and foster a sense of environmental stewardship. The project's website, www.tdg-fmc.com, details the latest developments including a conceptual design, and serves as a central hub for information.



The community's input is crucial in shaping the Fox Run Nature Center into a space that reflects the needs and desires of its residents. To continue the outreach, public meetings are being scheduled. The next meeting is March 14 from 6 - 8pm at Pikes Peak Brewing Company. More details can be found on the website.

The excitement surrounding the Fox Run Nature Center continues to grow as the project unfolds. The prospect of having a dedicated

space for the community to engage with nature, participate in educational programs, and enjoy outdoor activities has captured the imagination of many. While progress is being made, this project relies on community support to reach its full potential. Every contribution, no matter what size, plays a crucial role in bringing the nature center to life and ensuring its sustainability for future generations.

The journey to build the Fox Run Nature Center is a collective effort that involves the entire community. With regular updates on the website, opportunities for public input, and the excitement building around the project, the nature center is well on its way to becoming a cherished space for El Paso County residents. By contributing through donations or active participation, community members can play a vital role in making the Fox Run Nature Center a thriving and sustainable haven for nature enthusiasts of all ages. 🌿



Nature Camper Profile

by Victoria Dinkel, Interpretive Program Coordinator, Fountain Creek Nature Center

Name: RJ Barreras
Age & Grade: 9yo, 3rd grade
Years in Nature Camp: 2 (4 camps)

RJ brings a compassionate heart to camp that both staff and fellow campers have come to value. Whether helping us clean up after an activity or offering a hand to another camper after taking a tumble, RJ radiates kindness. He received his 'No Child Left Inside' medallion after attending his fourth camp with us this past summer, and shared facts about turtles with his partner as a Camp Ambassador at Happy Trails. Turtles happen to be the animal that RJ would love to swap places with for a day so he could enjoy swimming with fish friends and laying in the sun.



RJ crafted this cabin, complete with an outhouse!

Some of RJ's favorite things include fort building in Magic Woods, gardening, camping, reading, and making crafts. He made this craft (left) last summer and aspires to live in the woods in a cabin like this one day. In the future he hopes to either become a camp director so he can share the wonders of nature, or a famous wildlife rehabilitator. When asked what others

should know about camp RJ responded, "Nature Camp helps you understand your place on the earth and how we should all care for nature and its inhabitants. We all depend on each other." 🐢



RJ interprets turtles and their shells at the Happy Tails Fundraiser event.



Left: RJ feels the scales of a garter snake.
Right: RJ collect burdock leaves during free creative time in Magic Woods.

TEEN VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Build leadership skills, spend days outside, and help connect kids to nature by helping us with Summer Nature Camps!

Volunteer opportunities continue year-round.

Applications, interviews, and training required.

Fountain Creek Nature Center

Jessica Miller, Supervisor
jessicamiller@elpasoco.com

Bear Creek Natrue Center

Mary Jo Lewis, Supervisor
maryjolewis@elpasoco.com

Apply by May 8, 2024



Rick's Cartoon



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



Fountain Creek Happenings

by Andy Talley, Interpreter, Fountain Creek Nature Center

Usually when we think of aquatic birds, we think of waterfowl like ducks and geese. Songbirds are generally associated with fields and forests. On a winter hike in Fountain Creek Regional Park, you may get an opportunity to observe an interesting little bird breaking these molds.

Meet the American Dipper, North America's only truly aquatic songbird. It is plump, gray, and drab in appearance but exhibits fascinating behaviors and has a lively, burbling, variable song. Living in the western United States and Rocky Mountains, its habitat is fast moving, cold mountain streams. It feeds mainly on aquatic insects and can be seen not only dipping along the edges or from rocks and logs in the middle of the stream, but it can also dive, swim, and even walk along the bottom of a white-water stream.



Left: The American Dipper surveys the waters from a rock, often bending its legs to bob, or dip, its whole body up and down as if dancing. Center: The dipper looks underwater for invertebrates. Right: Success! The dipper has caught a snack. Photos on Fountain Creek by J. Miller.

So why is winter the best time to see it at Fountain Creek? Most of the year it is found higher in the mountains along swift moving alpine streams. During the winter, sometimes these streams can become frozen over, so it simply moves to lower elevations where it can still find open, moving water. 🐾



Bear Creek Sightings

by Brenda McCreight, Interpreter, Bear Creek Nature Center

Writing the next installment of "As the Bear Creek Flows" puppet shows, I suddenly hear a cry of "Coyote, Coyote!". All of us run to the source, Kylee, in her office. We stare, fascinated as the furry gray and brown coyote lopez by her office window towards the creek. We've heard reports of unhealthy, mangy coyotes being in the neighborhood, but "our" coyote has full, thick fur and a healthy look about him, which makes us happy. Another morning, on my way into work, a coyote (I think the same one) scurries across the road. I admire him for a moment or two as he disappears into the woods. As I make the turn into the Nature Center, I sense a presence next to my car. The coyote came back – right next to me! I stop and let him hurry back across the road to safety. Although coyotes are mostly nocturnal, our friend has been showing up regularly during the day to stop us in our tracks with wonder and awe of the beauty of Nature. 🐾



A coyote scampers past Bear Creek Nature Center's windows.

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

Spring Program Highlights



Pikes Peak Beekeepers Association Beekeeping School Sat. & Sun., Mar. 16 & 17, 8:30a.m.-3:45p.m.

Nighttime EGG-stravaganza at Fox Run RP
Friday, March 29, 7:45, 8:00, 8:15, & 8:30 p.m.

Eco Art and Meditation
Thursdays, April 4, 11, 18, and 25, 12:00-2:00 p.m.

Family Wildlife Detectives
Saturday, April 20, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Storytelling Night Hike and Star Party at HRRP
Friday, May 3, 7:30 ~ 7:45 ~ 8:00



Adult Mindfulness Series
Saturdays, March 2 & 9, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Communication in Nature
Saturday, March 23. 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Spring Break Camp: Arts in the Park
Mon. - Fri., March 25-29. 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Mapping our Place
Saturday, April 20. 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Family Fun Day
Saturday, May 4, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Spring Recreation Highlights

Rainbow Falls Photography Workshops
Saturday, March 9, 9:30am & 12:30pm

Bunco at Fountain Creek Nature Center
Saturday, April 19, 5:00pm

Frost Fest at Bear Creek Regional Park
Saturday, May 11, 12:00-4:00pm

Free Archery Day at Bear Creek Regional Park
Saturday, May 25-Multiple times slots.

Wildflower Walk at the Paint Mines
Friday, May 31, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com