

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 Highlight	2
Volunteer Corner	3
Recreation Roundup	3
Summer Seasonals!	4
Fountain Creek's New Native Garden	5
Bear Creek Sightings	5
New Recreation Specialist!	6
Andy's Poetry Corner	6
Fountain Creek Happenings	7
Rick's Cartoon	8
Summer Program Highlights	8



Spring Break Camp *by Victoria Dinkel, Interpretive Program Specialist, Fountain Creek Nature Center*

As students were trying to survive the remainder of the school year, 20 campers joined us at Fountain Creek Nature Center for a week of learning how to survive outside! Along with the classic camp activities of morning songs, Magic Woods time, lunch throughout the park, games, and crafts, campers learned new skills and information to help during outdoor survival situations.

We practiced reading a compass and taking bearings, built emergency shelters in the woods, tested different water collection techniques, tried setting various small game traps, and practiced creating sparks with flint and steel. The Red Flag Warning prevented campers from starting their own fires but lent itself to the lesson of the day, fire safety. Campers also played 'Snack or Poison,' a game where they had to distinguish between edible plants and toxic ones. We finished camp by learning the Leave No Trace principles and how to manage animal interactions out in nature. That afternoon, campers were able to meet Animal Ambassador Ferdy, the bullsnake.

After reviewing the evaluations for the week, campers left happy with a variety of new skills under their belts, and guardians were grateful for the screen-free days and real-world applications of this camp. 🐦



Campers practiced various techniques for building wild shelters.



Campers practice making a figure-four trap that could catch small game.



Great weather this spring break meant time with water and mud in the sun!



Mr. Andy teaches the campers fire-building techniques and safety.

EXECUTIVE BOARD *Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers*

President

Risë Foster-Bruder

Vice President

Jane Zook

Secretary

Holly Niewinski

Treasurer

Ellen Polyard

At Large members

Eileen Somers

Judy Felder

Diane French

STAFF

Division Manager

Theresa Odello

Rec. Program Specialist

Emily Holmes

BCNC Supervisor

Mary Jo Lewis

Interp. Program Specialist

Kylee Taylor

Interpreter

Adrian Douglass

FCNC Supervisor

Jessica Miller

Interp. Program Specialist

Victoria Dinkel

Interpreter

Andy Talley

Volunteer Coordinator

Kelly Ann Blanchard

Bear Creek Nature Center

245 Bear Creek Road
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

by Kelly Ann Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator

Our volunteers are golden! That's the message we wanted every volunteer to walk away with at this year's Volunteer Recognition Dinner and Awards Night.

On March 31st, we hosted over 70 volunteers and guests at Bear Creek Nature Center for a night of music, food, fun, and gratitude. Peppergrass

Band serenaded the crowd over a catered Italian-style feast, followed by an awards ceremony to recognize our volunteers' achievements in 2025.

Volunteers contributed 4,679 hours last year – a value of \$155,764! So it's no wonder we had so many individuals to recognize and celebrate. Any volunteer with more than 40 volunteer hours earned a special pin to add to their collection – a monarch butterfly!



*Greg & Francie Brent are
BCNC's Prom King & Queen!*

Creek Prom King and Queen as well as Fountain Creek's Deep Dive Docent.

Our final and biggest award was the Exemplary Volunteer Award given to Bobbie Lewis, a 20-year volunteer with the nature centers who serves the public with a smile and welcomes all who walk in our doors.

We can't thank our volunteers enough for all they do for us every day. They are truly the heart of our nature centers! 🐦



Volunteers, staff, and special guests!



*Bobbie Lewis is our 2025
Exemplary Volunteer!*



*Peg Lewandowski has
immersed herself into FCNC
- earning a silly award,
Deep Dive Docent*



Volunteer Corner *by Kelly Ann Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator*

Our nature centers are blooming with new volunteers! Shoutout to our newest additions: **Aya Lewis, Michael Thompson, Steve Salyer, Katie Sheahan, Lindsey Magnuson, Theresa Morris, Karen Berchtold, and Kurt Lani.** Welcome to the team! **Training:** Learning is fun! We offer **free training courses** to volunteers throughout the year. Whether you want to learn more about native species, nature interpretation, how to keep children engaged, or just spend time with fellow volunteers, we have something for everyone! This spring, we hosted a dozen volunteers for a Leave No Trace after-hours party. We learned the principles of LNT, participated in fun activities, and earned official LNT certifications online.



Volunteers complete their Leave No Trace training at a party.

Upcoming volunteer-only training opportunities include Flora Fauna Fridays (nature hikes at multiple locations on Fridays during the summer) and Interpretation 101 and Engagement Strategies in the fall.

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



Recreation Roundup *by Emily Holmes, Recreation Program Specialist*

Recreation Services has had an exciting start to the season! Four interpretive rangers are now supporting Paint Mines Interpretive Park and Rainbow Falls Historic Site every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. They have already made 2,871 visitor contacts; sharing information, answering questions, and helping visitors enjoy these



Folks of all ages have been introduced to Archery this spring.

special places safely and responsibly.

Archery has also been a spring highlight at Bear Creek Regional Park. Through Free Archery Day and the start of summer Archery Camp, more than 100 participants have received instruction in safety, form, and shooting technique. It has been wonderful to see so many new and returning archers build skills, confidence, and enthusiasm on the range. 🐾

Editor's Note: Somewhere here there is a "Home, home on the archery range" joke.



Paint Mines Interpreter spotted a Pronghorn mom with triplets!



Summer Staff at the Nature Centers

by Andy Talley, Victoria Dinkel, and Adrian Douglass

Welcome back **Keegan Calnan**, our 2026 seasonal Interpretive Program Coordinator. Keegan is not a new face here at Fountain Creek Nature Center. He worked during the summer of 2024 as our Nature Camp Assistant, returned during the summer of 2025, and has continued to work with us as a volunteer ever since.

As a volunteer, Keegan has served on committees for the annual Bear Run at Bear Creek and the Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival. He has helped write grant applications for our new Terrain Hopper at Fox Run Regional Park. He has also volunteered at big events like Family Fun Day, Bear Creek by Candlelight, Jack-o-Lantern Trail, and Winter Fun at Fox Run. One year he volunteered at the desk on his birthday just because he likes it here.

All the staff at Fountain Creek are glad that Keegan likes it here because we like having him here. We are all thrilled to get him back on staff and look forward to another great summer working with him. 🐦



After completing two internships with us, **Emily Parrish** is back this summer as our Recreation Assistant! During her internships, she enjoyed teaching children more about nature, sharing her interests with others, and being outside so often. She is especially excited to be here for nature camps this summer.



Emily graduated in May with her Zoo Keeping Technology degree from Pikes Peak State College. Before graduating, she held a work study position and was responsible for the care of a lungfish, a variety of arthropods, and several amphibians. Beyond animal husbandry and environmental education, Emily is an amazing artist. She creates in her free time, helps decorate my office window to



prevent bird strikes, updates the blackboard in our exhibit room, and serves as our go-to person whenever we need a doodle on the whiteboard in the program room. We're happy to have Emily back and look forward to her continued growth this summer! 🐦

Returning to work at Bear Creek Nature Center for a fourth year in a row is our recreation assistant, **Silas**. He has been returning to this position every summer between going to college in California, from which he has just graduated! That means he is finally in Colorado Springs to stay. He is hoping to become a teacher, and working at Bear Creek's summer camps has given him invaluable experience as an educator. He is applying to get his teaching degree at UCCS starting in the fall, and is hoping to get a job teaching at the same time. In his free time, he loves drawing, theater, and taking his dogs on very long hikes. He is very happy to be back at Bear Creek, and hopes you all come and visit! 🐾





New Native Garden at Fountain Creek

by Andy Talley, Interpretive Program Coordinator, Fountain Creek Nature Center

Fountain Creek Nature Center has a new pollinator and bird friendly native garden. On May 9th, a team of 10 volunteers from our Fountain Creek Restoration Crew planted about 140 flowers and shrubs in the nature center's new landscaping. This garden was made possible through a generous grant by the Broadmoor Garden Club. All the plants selected for this project had to meet very specific criteria. They needed to be native to the Colorado front range, beneficial to our local birds and pollinators,



Yarrow, Penstemon, Serviceberry and more!
Drip irrigation below rock mulch is keeping the plants look and grow their best.



The FCNC Restoration Crew worked hard all morning to get our new plant babies in the ground and happy!

and have low water needs. The fact that they are also beautiful is just an added blessing for the human visitors at the site.

We would like to give a big Thank You to the Broadmoor Garden Club, our own Restoration Crew, and Parks Operations. Your generosity and hard work have created a garden that will be a lasting resource for wildlife and human visitors for years to come. 🐦



Bear Creek Sightings—Green is Great!

by Kylee Taylor, Interpretive Program Specialist, Bear Creek Nature Center

It's easy to fall into the "green blur" when you're out and about. We at the nature centers often reference the green blur when working with young children. It's the tendency to group together all the greenery you see as one organism, rather than looking closely at each individual plant.

Green invites us to slow down and observe closely.

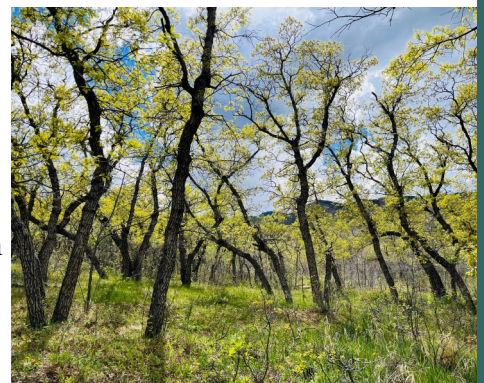


I dare you to look at a Nylon Hedgehog Cactus and not say "Awww!"

But green is not just a color or an invitation. Human eyes see a range of colors and green sits right in the middle of our color range. So, our eyes (and brains) don't need to adjust to process green light. This reduces eye strain and promotes physiological rest.

Green reduces stress and anxiety.

Having green plants, a green wall, or even a green screen in hospital rooms has even been shown to decrease healing time! If a hospital room window faces greenery, the patient there is more likely to heal faster than a patient whose window faces no greenery. Green represents growth, life, and renewal and actually follows through with those descriptors! **Green is healing.** 🐾



Kylee refers to this grouping of oaks as "Acorn Village"



Our New Recreation Program Supervisor!

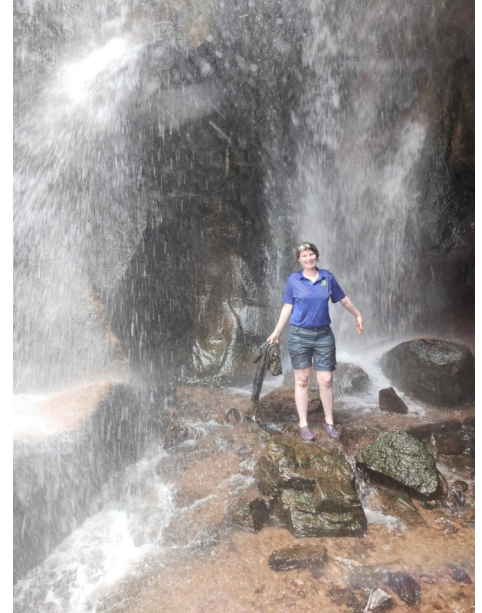
by Theresa Odello, Recreation & Cultural Services Manager

We are excited to welcome Emily Holmes as the Parks Department's new Recreation Program Supervisor.

Emily brings more than a decade of experience in outdoor recreation, youth development, conservation programming, and organizational leadership. Prior to joining El Paso County, she served as a Regional Manager with Mile High Youth Corps, where she oversaw large-scale conservation and youth programs, managed budgets and contracts, and supervised teams of staff and participants across multiple project sites. Emily also has extensive experience developing and delivering outdoor education programs through her work with Girl Scouts of Colorado and in a variety of camp and recreation leadership roles. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Services Administration with a concentration in Outdoor Education.

In her new role, Emily will oversee the daily operations of recreation programs, support program staff, coordinate with community partners, and help ensure high-quality recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. She will also oversee staffing operations at Rainbow Falls and Paint Mines Interpretive Park and coordinate Gate Attendant staffing during the El Paso County Fair. Emily's passion for connecting people to meaningful outdoor experiences aligns closely with our commitment to providing exceptional programs, stewarding natural resources, and creating welcoming opportunities for the community to enjoy the outdoors.

Please join us in welcoming Emily to the team. 🐾

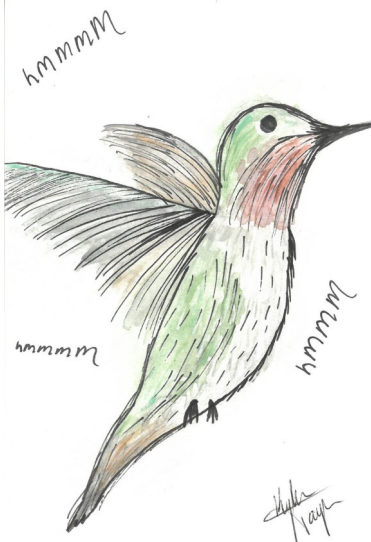


Emily takes an inaugural walk through Rainbow Falls.



Andy's Spring Poetry Corner

Poems by Andy Talley and illustrations by Kylie Taylor.



House Wren

Little bitty bird

Fills the woods with joyful noise
House wren's great big song

Why Hummingbirds Hum

Singing for a Hummingbird
Is really quite absurd
They would love to sing songs
But they get them all wrong
Cause they can't remember the words





Fountain Creek Happenings

by Keegan Calnan, Seasonal Interpretive Program Coordinator, FCNC

As spring pops up around us, so do many of the animals who hibernate for the winter, including our state amphibian, the Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*). Tiger Salamanders receive their name from the black “stripes” all across their body. Possessing a remarkable ability to live in just about any habitat as long as there is at least seasonal standing water means you can find them from the prairie all the way up to alpine lakes. This hardiness makes them the only herp (reptiles and amphibians) that can be found in every county of Colorado. As part of the group known as “mole salamanders” terrestrial adults spend most of their time underground. If you’re asking yourself where you can find one, look for them in moist areas around your home, maybe under a log, buried in the dirt, or in window wells where they often fall into. As always, if you find one please do not touch it as they absorb chemicals through their skin and are very sensitive. Despite the fearsome name these amphibians are opportunistic predators which will attempt to consume anything they think will fit into their mouths, which mostly means various insects, slugs, and earthworms.



Fountain Creek Nature Center's ambassador salamander, Georgess, She was gifted to us by Nature Campers who saved her from being fishing bait!

Photos by Risë Foster-Bruder. 🐸

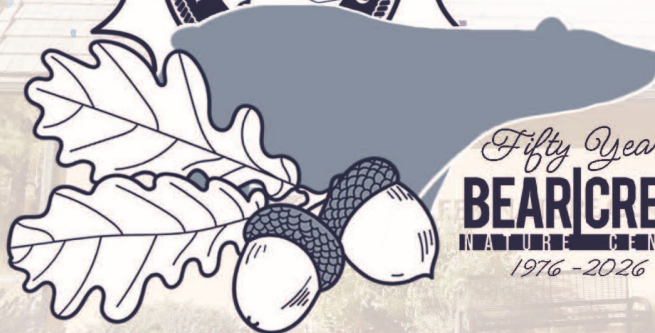
JOIN US FOR A

Bear-thday

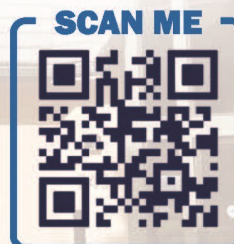
PARTY

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22 | 10 AM - 2 PM

BEAR CREEK NATURE CENTER | 245 BEAR CREEK ROAD | 80906



Fifty Years
BEAR CREEK
NATURE CENTER
1976 - 2026



ELPASOCO.COM/BCNC50

**FREE
EVENT**

HELP US CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF
BEAR CREEK NATURE CENTER



*Partners in the Parks
for EPC Nature Centers*



Summer Recreation Highlights

El Paso County Kite Festival at Falcon Regional Park

June 20

10:00am-2:00pm

Archery Camp

at Bear Creek Regional Park

July 7-9 and July 21-23

9:00am-12:00pm

Guided Hikes

at Paint Mines Interpretive Park

June 27, July 25, August 15,
September 12, and September 26

10:00am-11:30am

Rick's Cartoon



**"I'm so glad your
birthing went so smoothly!"**

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

Summer Nature Program Highlights



**Beginner's Introduction to Plein Air- Summer
Greens in Soft Pastels with Lisa Faherty Art**
Saturday, June 27, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

**Summer Aspen Beginner Bonsai Course with
Hardy Bonsai**

Saturday, July 18, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

**The Buzz on Bumblebees of the Front Range with
the Xerces Society**

Saturday, July 25, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

**Active Adult Series: America 250/Colorado 150:
Seeing History in Place**

Saturday, August 8, 10:00-11:30am

Bear Creek Nature Center 50th Anniversary Party

Bear-thday Party: Over the Foothills

Saturday, August 22, 10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m.

Colorado Nature Embroidery with PPLD
Saturday, June 13, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

The Secret Life of a Dead Tree

Saturday, June 20, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Firefly Night Hike & Celebration

Thursday, July 2 ~ Friday, July 18 ~ Saturday, July 19
8:00 - 9:30 p.m.

Intro to Wildlife Tracking

Saturday, July 18, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Moth Night with Mile High Bug Club

Saturday, July 25, 8:30 - 12:00 a.m.

Freaky Flora

Saturday, August 15, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com