

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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Bear Creek's 50th Bear-thday Party!

by Mary Jo Lewis, Bear Creek Nature Center Supervisor

2026 marks the 50-year Anniversary of Bear Creek Nature Center and the Bear-thday Party on August 22 brought the community together to celebrate the past, present, and future of Bear Creek.

Over 700 people attended to enjoy a variety of activities offered by nature center staff and volunteers. Living History Hikes took people on a journey to meet characters that have shaped the history of Bear Creek. A wood branding station paid homage to the Spring Hike, Bear Creek Nature Center's signature event for many years.



Bear Creek Nature Center's Mary Jo and Kylee cut the ribbon, opening the new exhibit, with help from Commissioner Bill Wysong.



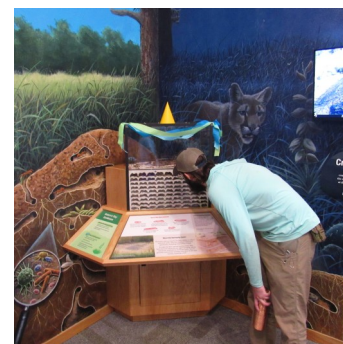
Guests could burn the party's brand on a wood cookie!

A Bear Creek history video created by El Paso County's Communication Team played throughout the day and a history display gave everyone a chance to travel through almost 200 years of history using artifacts, pictures, and articles.

While these activities focused on the past, a ribbon-cutting for

Bear Creek's newest exhibit, *Life in the Shadows*, looked to the future. This new exhibit, which focuses on not-often-seen inhabitants of the foothills and includes a live harvester ant colony, will hopefully inspire community members for years to come.

Collaboration and partnership has played a crucial role in the longevity and success of BCNC, so it was fitting that the party included offerings from partner organizations like Pikes Peak Beekeeping Association, Pikes Peak State College Zookeeping Technology Department, El Paso County 4H Rabbit Project, Bear Creek Garden Association, and Colorado Springs Astronomical Society. *Continued on page 3*



BCNC's Harvester Ant colony is fascinating!

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Volunteer Highlight *by Kelly Ann Blanchard*

“K^{elly} Ann, you’ve lost your mind - you included Judy’s name twice on the volunteer roster!” While I don’t dispute losing my mind, I did not repeat anyone’s name on the roster. In fact, we have two different volunteers by the name of Judy F. and they happen to be right next to each other on the roster! To avoid any confusion, allow me to officially introduce our two phenomenal Judy Fs: Judy Feland and Judy Felder.



Judy FELAND educates at Bear Creek by Candlelight.



Judy FELAND releasing a freshly banded bird.



Judy FELDER helps at the Bear Run.

You can find Judy Feland pretty much anywhere – hawking art at special events, holding down the front desk, and leading field trips. Five years ago, Judy chose to volunteer with us to connect to her community and provide environmental education for all ages. Originally from Arkansas, Judy Feland has a background in massage therapy and substitute teaching plus a vast repertoire of prior volunteer experience. Her favorite events have been the Honey Harvest Festival at Bear Creek and Monarch Magic at Fountain Creek. She enjoys seeing the Spotted Towhee because it looks like a robin dressed up for Halloween! She also loves pointing out the coyote above the door at Bear Creek to children because it reminds her of her dog: half German Shepherd and half coyote.

Judy Felder, the self-described “shortest Judy,” joined us in 2024 and hit the ground running! You can find her at the front desk at both nature centers, special events, summer camp, and as an at-large member of our Friends board. Originally from Oklahoma, Judy Felder had a successful banking career before moving to Colorado. Her favorite event is Bear Creek by Candlelight because her granddaughters insist on hand-delivering their letters



Judy FELDER helps Adrian spruce up BCNC ahead of a special event.



Bear Creek Nature Center Summer Seasonal

by Adrian Douglass

Kamryn Sundling was raised in The Springs. She went to Pikes Peak State College for Zoo Keeping Technology, which required her to complete two internships. She found us at Bear Creek Nature Center & saw an opportunity to work on skills such as interpretation, childhood education, and of course, puppet shows. She graduated with her associate's degree in fall of 2025. In a competitive list of candidates, she was chosen to be this year's Seasonal at Bear Creek & will be here from June through November. Kamryn brings a wealth of knowledge, animal husbandry skills, and an eye for detail that supports the Nature Center wonderfully. What her future holds is still unknown; a career at Cheyenne Mountain Zoo working with her favorite animal (tigers), working at an animal sanctuary, or continuing with her now close friends in El Paso County Parks. Kamryn has infinite compassion for animals, fights for the preservation & protection of wild spaces, and deeply believes that animal welfare can bring people together. 🐾



Kamryn has a wealth of experience at BCNC now, and is a creative program designer!

Bear Creek's 50th Bear-thday Party! *Continued from front cover*

The natural beauty of Bear Creek was on display *inside* the building with the plein air art show and sale. Over 30 artists created artworks depicting Bear Creek Nature Center and Park. These works were for sale at the event, giving people a chance to take something beautiful home while supporting the nature center through the sales.



Commissioner Wysong learns about the sun with CSASTRO.

What would a party be without snacks? Picnic Basket/Buffalo Gals offered up free nacho platters and Bear Creek volunteers served Bear-thday cake. El Paso County Commissioner Wysong attended on behalf of El Paso County Commissioners. He supported the event throughout the day, welcoming everyone, participating in a history

hike, and sharing remarks that demonstrated County Leadership's commitment to the nature centers and the community we serve. The Bear-thday clearly demonstrated the resilience of Bear Creek's past, the impact of our present, and the brightness of our future. Thank you to all that came, and to all that have been part of the journey over these many years! 🐾



Plein air artists turned the Bear Den into a gallery.



Some guests enjoyed a Living History walk along the trails. Here, Todd Marts and "Roller Bear" play themselves!

Nature Camp Memories



"My kids had a marvelous time. This is one our favorite camps. Please offer more!"

- Parent



"My child learned a lot and made new friends."

- Parent

"[I learned] That bees see the world different than we do, they can see ultra-violet light."

- Camper



"Well run, cost effective, great activity for children's health, mind, and body. "

- Parent



"Dedicated, fabulous staff! Fun and educational programming, with lots of outdoor time and hands-on (screen free) activities. I love that there is always time set aside for the 'Magic Woods'."

- Parent



Nature Camp Memories



"The flow of the day and balance of learning with fun – they don't even realize how much they learn!"

- Parent



"The staff is so professional and organized. I think they truly are educators in ways that you don't find at other camps."

- Parent

"[What makes BCNC camp special?] Counselors clearly love the center, camp, and the kids!"

- Parent



"I learned how important the ecosystem is and to take care of it."

- Camper



Recreation Round-Up *by Emily Holmes*

Recreation Services kept the summer season soaring with successful programs and special events across the County. The Falcon Regional Park Kite Festival welcomed 576 participants for a colorful day of outdoor fun, while Archery Camp served 65 participants with hands-on instruction in safety, form, and shooting technique.

Interpretive rangers also continued supporting visitors at Paint Mines Interpretive Park and Rainbow Falls Historic Site. At both locations, Recreation Services has logged a little over 5,500 visitor interactions year to date (a total of over 11,000) providing information, answering questions, and encouraging safe, responsible exploration of these treasured sites.



Allen loves immersing visitors at Rainbow Falls!



Interpretive Hikes at the Paint Mines are a great way to learn.

Recreation Services also played an important behind-the-scenes role at the County Fair by managing the entrance gates. Twelve seasonal gate attendants were hired and collectively provided nearly 700 hours of service, helping admissions run smoothly and ensuring fairgoers received a welcoming start to their visit.

From kites and archery to interpretation and fair operations, it has been a busy and rewarding summer filled with memorable experiences for residents and visitors alike. 🐦

Volunteer Corner *by Kelly Ann Blanchard*

Three cheers for new volunteers! Shoutout to our newest additions: **Matthew Long** and **Andreas Hess**. Welcome to the team!

Flora Fauna Friday: A group of volunteers gathered on a Friday morning in June to walk the trails together and observe the local flora and fauna at Bear Creek Nature Center. We learned new things and enjoyed each other's company at the same time!



Kelly Ann points out an Indian Paintbrush while volunteers look from the trail.



Volunteers discovered ponderosas, cottonwoods, oaks, and a multitude of summer wildflowers and singing songbirds.

Training: Learning is fun! We offer *free* training courses to volunteers throughout the year.

Coming up this fall: Engagement Strategies (how to keep kids interested!), Youth Mental Health First Aid, Exhibit Room Exploration, and Interpretation 101.

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. 🐾



Fountain Creek Happenings *by Victoria Dinkel*

The Animal Ambassador team at FCNC has grown from 3 to 4. In addition to Ferdy the bullsnake, Keya the ornate box turtle, and Dora the chaco golden-knee tarantula, we now have Georgeous the western tiger salamander!



Sometimes she hides, sometimes she stalks you!
Photo by Risë Foster-Bruder



Her exhibit may be new, but she technically made her debut in the summer of 2025 during ‘Scutes, Scales, and Pollywog Tails’ camp. ‘George’ was brought in for show-and-tell by one of our camp families during a day centered around tiger salamanders. After this debut, the family asked if they could donate ‘George’ to the nature center; they also have a cat named Waffles at home and they were worried that the salamander might become Waffles’ snack.

Georgeous might greet you at the front door!

We excitedly added her to the team and have spent the last year upgrading her enclosure, commissioning a custom stand from El Paso County Facilities for the exhibit room, and creating informational pages to help visitors learn more about her and her species. During this time, staff and interns from Pikes Peak State College have helped us learn that ‘George’ is female. Instead of renaming her completely, we added the ‘-ous’ and now her name reflects her upbringing and her gorgeous skin pattern. Visit us to see if you can find Georgeous soaking in her pool, lunging at the glass for a tasty treat, or burrowed in the moist substate of her tank. 🐸



Bear Creek Sightings *by Kamryn Sundling*

There were plenty of sightings along Bear Creek this summer, but none as exciting as our hummingbird nest and new bear friend. We have had reoccurring visits from a very well-fed bear in the past couple of weeks, no doubt lured by the cool stream, the



Hummingbird nests are made of plant fibers, spider silk, and lichen, creating a stretchy, camouflaged home for growing.

shade from this summer heat, and probably the enticing smells of a hiker’s lunch.

However, I have a sneaking suspicion he was stopping by to check on the preparations for the Bear-thday party.

We also had the pleasure of hosting a hummingbird nest along Songbird Trail. First spotted by one of our campers, it was soon a sought-after attraction by other guests as well. We enjoyed watching the birds grow and eventually leave the nest to join the rest of the world. As always, we have enjoyed the daily visits from the squirrels and chickadees, but I am excited to see what passes through in the coming season. 🐾



A bear along Bear Creek near Bear Creek Nature Center - what a surprise! (sarcasm)



*Partners in the Parks
for EPC Nature Centers*



Fall Recreation Highlights

Rick's Cartoon

Guided Hikes

at Paint Mines Interpretive Park

September 12 and September 26
10:00am-11:30am

Outdoor Accessibility Day

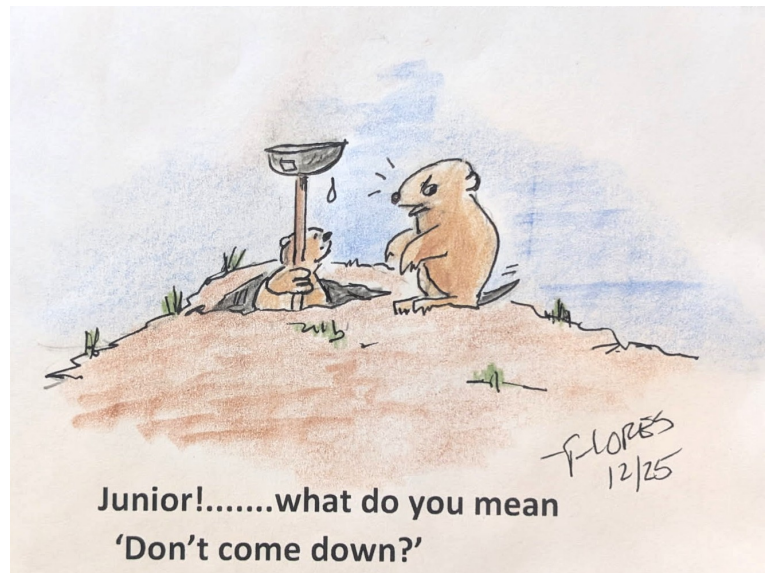
at Bear Creek Regional Park

September 26 - 10:00am-2:00pm

Creek Week Restoration Crew Cleanup

at Rainbow Falls Historic Site

September 27 - Time TBD



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

Fall Nature Program Highlights



Living History Walk

Saturday, September 19, 1:30 ~ 1:45 ~ 2:00 ~ 2:15

Rematriation Film Screening with Trees, Water, People and the Montezuma Land Conservancy

Tuesday, September 22, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

Oak-tober Celebration

Saturday, October 10, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Boo! at Bear Creek

Friday, October 16, various times 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Teens' Night Out- Colorado Cryptids

Friday, October 30, 5:00 - 9:00 p.m.



Fall Bird Count

Saturday, September 12, 7:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Creek Week Kickoff

Saturday, September 26, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Pumpkin Carving Party

Saturday, October 24, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Jack-o-Lantern Trail

Saturday, October 24, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Creepy Colorado History

Thursday, October 29, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Holiday Craft & Artisan Fair

Saturday, November 21, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com