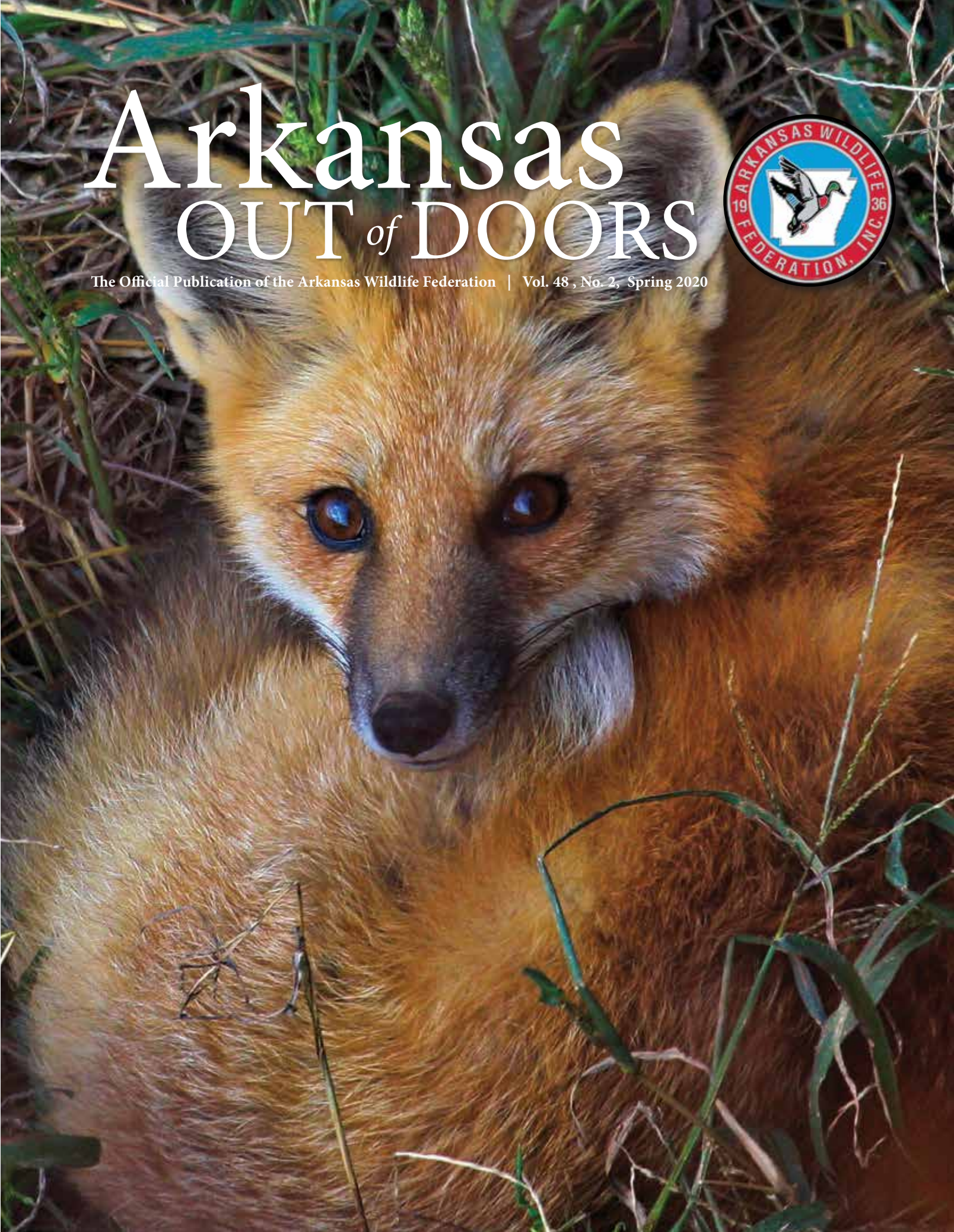


Arkansas OUT *of* DOORS

The Official Publication of the Arkansas Wildlife Federation | Vol. 48, No. 2, Spring 2020



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ARKANSAS WILDLIFE FEDERATION PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Winter...what winter? That is a question that comes up more often these days, especially in Arkansas. As of this writing, we have not seen much of winter this year. But I am ready for spring to come and along with it turkey season and tossing a line in the water. As I start thinking about spring, taking a young one fishing is always a favorite of mine. Johnny Sain has a great article on sunfish and memories of fishing with his Poppy, go check it out.

You may remember an article last fall about the bobwhite quail restoration efforts from AR Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC). Although the ANHC has accomplished a lot over the past several years, other agencies and partners are also working to bring this wily bird back from the brink. All these efforts and those of Marcus Asher, the AGFC Quail Coordinator, are paying off but there is more to do. Yes, we used to have a lot of bobwhite quail in Arkansas and I hope to see that time again. I understand at 52 years old I am in the minority of actually hunting them when I was younger with my grandfather. Please take a look at Marcus's article on this great bird and actions you can take to create more suitable habitat.

On a sad note, we have had to postpone our annual Wildlife of Arkansas youth art contest. Sharon and Bobby Hacker have done a great job for many years however the success of the program is becoming too overwhelming to manage this all-volunteer led program. The art contest will be back next year with an all new digital submission platform. I cannot thank Sharon and Bobby enough, this project is a major undertaking and they have done a fabulous job.

It's never too early to work on the annual Conservation Awards. We know there are many people across our Natural State that deserve recognition for going above and beyond to mentor youth in the outdoors, restore wildlife habitat and share conservation stories in the media. Take a look at the nomination form and consider nominating someone you know. And be sure to mark August 8th on calendar for this year's banquet in Heber Springs, AR.

If you are not a member of the AWF, please join. We need all the help we can get to continue advocating for wildlife in our great state. And if you have any interest in being on the board or volunteering for any of our projects, please email or call.

And remember to follow us on Facebook. Anita Montgomery is doing an excellent job of getting articles and pictures up on a weekly and sometimes daily basis.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

— MARGARET MEAD

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Arkansas Wildlife Federation Mission Statement

To promote conservation, responsible management and sustainable use of Arkansas' fish, wildlife, habitat, natural resources and outdoor recreational opportunities through education and advocacy.



Arkansas OUT of DOORS

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Photo courtesy of Jami Linder Photography at www.JamiLinder.com

North Arkansas Quail Focal Landscape Regional Conservation Partnership Project

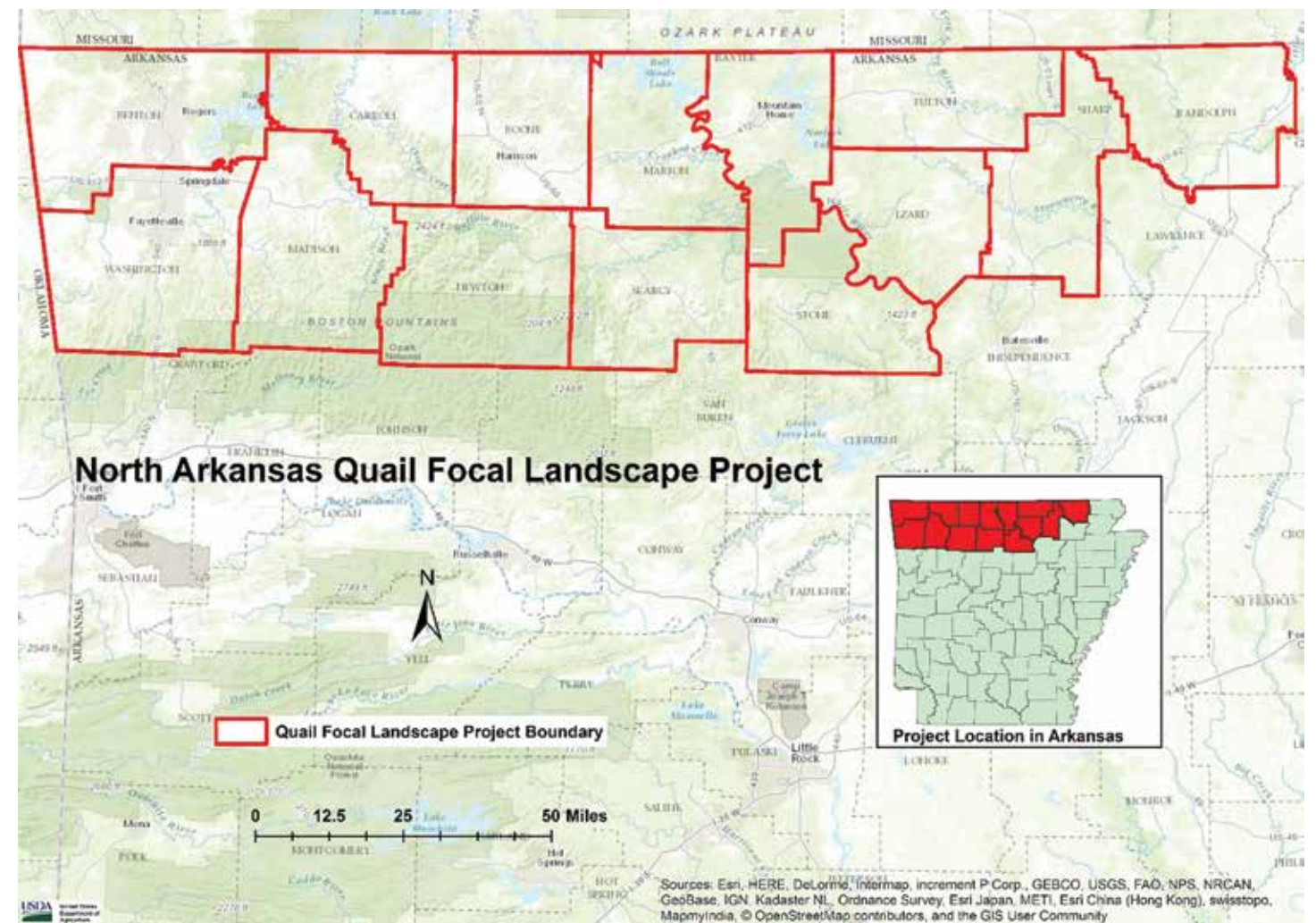
Written by Marcus Asher , AGFC Program Coordinator

Even though Northern Bobwhite (quail) have been in decline for several decades, people still light up when you mention the word “quail”. Whether it is in a coffee shop, a workshop, a nature center, or visiting one on one with a landowner, most offer up a story. Some recollect a successful hunt from years past, others talk bird dog breeds and how great it is to watch them work and hold for a point, some describe a walk from a deer stand to a person’s house that took their breath away as a covey flushed from under their feet, or there are those that yearn for nothing more than to hear the familiar “bob-white” call from atop a fence post in their back forty pasture. These stories all have a lot of passion beyond the actual words that are spoken.

With this article, I encourage landowners interested in helping turn Arkansas’s quail population trend around, to become involved. Often, people’s idea of becoming involved differs from mine. Individuals that call in wanting to help will oftentimes say “put out some birds to repopulate”. Unfortunately, it is not that easy, as evidenced by failed attempts

in the 1950s and 1960s by virtually all state agencies within the range of the northern bobwhite. Domesticated birds over years of breeding have lost their sense of fear of predators and the innate understanding of proper nest placement to ensure they are hatched successfully. Domesticated quail have also been shown to not adequately incubate nests. Furthermore, if chicks are actually hatched, they are abandoned early on by the tending adult which spells disaster for the chicks. In addition to lackluster reproductive endeavors, releasing quail can have deleterious effects on a wild population of quail in two other ways. The genetic integrity of a wild population’s gene pool can be compromised due to the introduction of inferior genes. Lastly, domesticated quail, when released in and around wild birds, can be a source of disease exposure which could further hinder survival and persistence of populations.

The best way for landowners to take action is to make certain that the property you manage is suitable for quail to nest, raise broods, and provide shelter from predation



(Figure 1)

and weather. On average only 20-30% of adult quail will live past one year, thus they are highly dependent on each year’s reproductive effort and the habitat that provides adequate cover/food for successful reproduction to occur. Without adequate habitat maintained in a suitable state, quail will move off of a property or potentially perish due to increased exposure to the elements and predation.

“Suitable” is very subjective depending on what species you are discussing. In the instance of quail, suitable means having areas 50 acres in size or larger that ideally have a vegetation composition of 33% grasses, 33% forbs (broadleaf plants), and 33% shrubby cover. Already existing fields can fairly easily be treated with herbicide, prescribed burning, disking, and/or planting of native vegetation to achieve these conditions. However, if you want to make every acre on your property quail habitat, you will want to treat your woodlands as well. These conditions can be established by removing typically 50% or more of the canopy of trees using commercial harvest or pre-commercial methods (timber stand improvement) followed by implementation of regular (every 2-3 years) prescribed burning. To make a substantial difference and more than likely faster population recovery in a particular area, landowners adjacent to each other, as well as surrounding

property owners should conduct habitat work so that large landscapes (thousands of acres) of suitable habitat can be available for sustainable populations of quail to continue to exist.

There are multiple avenues of funding available to landowners to expedite habitat management on their properties, especially through the Farm Bill. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) statewide which has a wildlife and a forestry fund pool that landowners can potentially gain financial assistance to complete habitat improvement practices depending on ranking.

Another funding source available to landowners who own property in Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Fulton, Izard, Madison, Marion, Newton, Randolph, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, and Washington counties (Figure 1) is the North Arkansas Quail Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This program is designed to address wildlife habitat and water quality concerns within the coverage counties listed.

In specific, the funding will be used to improve habitat for quail, monarch butterflies, and other pollinating insects and bird species. Approved practices that landowners can apply for include: prescribed burning, conservation cover (pol-



A suitable quail habitat comprised of vegetation, grasses, forbs and cover.

linator/monarch planting scenarios only), forest stand improvement, early successional habitat development and management (disking), structures for wildlife (downed tree structures and edge feathering), forage and biomass planting (native grass planting only) to name a few. Last year, over \$200,000 in contracts were funded on landowners surrounding AGFC’s Harold Alexander/ Spring River WMA Quail Focal Area. This funding facilitates progress toward AGFC’s and the Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan’s overall goal of building landscape-scale, early successional habitat in the state.

Application deadline for this RCPP is around the middle of May, so if you are interested in improving your property for quail or any other species, contact a private lands biologist or Quail Forever biologist from the coverage maps on the next page.



(Figure 2)

Arkansas Quail Forever Farm Bill Biologists

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Find a Private Lands Biologist

These specialized biologists can provide a written wildlife management plan along with current aerial photos identifying where wildlife practices are recommended for installation. There are many state and federal agencies along with several private organizations that offer financial assistance to landowners to improve their lands for high-priority wildlife species. These programs offer incentive or easement payments, cost-share payments and other financial assistance to assist landowners in the establishment or enhancement of habitat. Private lands biologists are well versed in private lands programs and can direct landowners to appropriate programs for assistance.

STATEWIDE PRIVATE LANDS SUPERVISOR

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1125 Hwy 56, Calico Rock, AR 72519
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PRIVATE LANDS ASSISTANT SUPERVISOR

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Clint.Johnson@agfc.ar.gov



602 President Clinton Avenue, Little Rock, AR

(501) 907-0636



A HIDDEN GEM IN NORTH CENTRAL ARKANSAS

Fred Berry Conservation Education Center on Crooked Creek

THE FRED BERRY CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER (FBCEC) is centered on 421 acres and lies in a 2.75 mile “crook” of Crooked Creek just above Kelley’s access near Yellville. The vision of this facility came from local teacher, counselor and conservationist, Fred Berry. His purchase and donation of the land set the project in motion in 1999. The development of this facility was a joint project between the Arkansas Game and Fish Foundation (AGFF) and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC). Generous donations by Berry and others, provided the land, education building, pavilion and other improvements. In June of 2005, the facility was opened to the public.

Education opportunities are offered to a variety of groups and in several different ways. Teachers are provided with relevant professional development and are encouraged to bring students to the center for classes. Scouts, 4-H, and other groups may hold classes, camp out, hike, or work on conservation projects. At times the facility is also available as a meeting place for conservation and/or outdoor educa-

tion groups. Other FBCEC endeavors include native habitat restoration, hiking trails, a 3-D archery course, trap shooting range and fishing access to Crooked Creek’s Blue Ribbon smallmouth bass fishing.

FBCEC is designated as an Arkansas Watchable Wildlife site. Individuals may use the trails for exercise, wildlife watching, fishing access, or just a leisurely stroll any day between sunrise and sunset.



Other program opportunities at the Fred Berry Conservation Education Center on Crooked Creek include:

- Fishing derbies
- Hunter and Boater Education classes
- AGFC Outdoor Skills patch program
- Youth Summer Program Series for Children under 16 includes Target Tuesday, Wild Wednesday, and Fishing Friday, each day from 9:00-11:00 a.m.
 - Target Tuesday – Archery, BB guns, Hatchet Throwing, Slingshots (kids must be at least 6 years old for target sports.)
 - Wild Wednesday – a different “WILD” topic each week. Presentation is followed by a craft, game or other activity. Topics may include “Wild About” quail, antlers, hunting dogs, Crooked Creek, Arkansas furbearers, black bear, alligators
 - Fishing Friday – Fishing at FBCEC catfish pond. Use our gear and bait or bring your own.
- Annual FBCEC Youth Deer Hunt and Camp (ages 12-15) is designed for youth who are interested in learning how to deer hunt, who have not previously had the opportunity to participate in a hunt and who do not have someone to serve as a hunting teacher/mentor.

Visit the AGFC website for more information and a calendar of events. www.agfc.com/en/explore-outdoors/nature-and-education-centers/fbcec/



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2020 AWF ANNUAL CONSERVATION
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS BANQUET

Honoring Arkansas's Conservation Leaders

August 8, 2020 • Red Apple Inn, 305 Club Road, Heber Springs
5:30pm Doors Open | 6:30pm Dinner & Awards

AWF ANNUAL CONSERVATION
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2020
NOMINATION FORM

The annual AWF Conservation Achievement Awards recognizes individuals, organizations and businesses that have made significant and outstanding contributions toward the protection and wise use of Arkansas's natural resources.

The banquet will also include a silent and live auction, door prizes and great food. The auction will include an AR Game and Fish Commission Youth Elk Tag for the 2020 season, duck calls, fishing trips, lodging packages and much more.

Advanced ticket purchase is encouraged as seating is limited. Tickets can be purchased at www.arwild.org/events. For more information, contact us at info@arwild.org, 501-414-2845 or visit www.arwild.org.

HAROLD ALEXANDER CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD

The highest conservation achievement award presented by AWF is given in memory of Harold Alexander - one of the foremost authorities and experts in Arkansas on conservation activities. This award is given to a conservationist who has made significant statewide contributions to conservation and created a broader interest and public awareness in conservation. Nominees should be a conservationist, professional or volunteer, whose contribution to an environmental field has been sustained over a period of several years, has statewide or national significance, and are not necessarily related to a single issue or effort.

REX HANCOCK WILDLIFE CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD

AWF has named this special award in memory of Dr. Rex Hancock for his tireless and outstanding contributions to wildlife conservation in Arkansas in the White River and Grand Prairie region. This award is for outstanding contributions to the management, enhancement and restoration of wildlife resources in Arkansas.

DR. JOHN L. GRAY FORESTRY CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD

In June 2007, Arkansas lost a giant in the forestry field with the death of Dr. John L. Gray and AWF named this award in his memory. This award is for demonstrating outstanding leadership in the management of our state's forest resources. Fish and wildlife management and best management practices must be a major component.

WATER CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award is for outstanding contributions to the management, enhancement and restoration of fisheries resources; or for outstanding efforts toward improvement of water quality or conservation in Arkansas.

CAROL GRIFFEE CONSERVATION COMMUNICATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

In honor of Carol Griffiee for all her remarkable work as a journalist and conservationist, AWF recognizes an individual or organization that has provided outstanding media or programs that keep the general public informed of environmental issues. This may include radio, TV, social media/internet, or print – including cartoonists.

CORPORATE CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award recognizes an Arkansas business for significant efforts toward habitat restoration/stewardship and conservation education/awareness. This may include providing lands for public recreation; pollution abatement; or other efforts by a business in the conservation of Arkansas's natural resources. Efforts must be voluntary, involve employees and go above and beyond compliance with mandatory programs. This category is to honor a company, not an individual person.

CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award is for outstanding conservation achievement by a state or local organization in addressing significant natural resource management and environmental quality challenges. Nonprofit organizations, civic clubs, churches and others are eligible.

OUTDOOR MENTOR/EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award is given to an outdoor mentor or educator who shares their time, knowledge and skills to support and advise others about the great outdoors in a safe and encouraging way. Whether it is fishing, camping, hiking, bird watching, hunting, gardening or other outdoor activities, mentors and educators are key to developing new outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists.

STUDENT CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award is for a young Arkansan who has demonstrated a personal commitment to conserving the state's resources and protecting the environment and by demonstrating leadership and accomplishment in conservation. The nominee must have been enrolled in an Arkansas school (including university or college, or home-school), within the nomination time period. Youth groups qualify.

NOMINATIONS

All nominations must be received by email at info@arwild.org no later than June 15. Nominations must include a completed nomination form and documentation about the nominee. Visit www.arwild.org to download a fillable pdf.

The categories listed on the opposing page are open for nomination by the general public. Nominations must be accompanied by documentation such as news clippings, and a full biography on the nominee. Please note that AWF, along with AGFC, presents some awards at the annual banquet that are not open to public nominations. Not all categories may be awarded each year. Nominations are due June 15, 2020.

NAME OF NOMINEE: _____

AWARD: _____

NOMINEE'S ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

NOMINATED BY: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

All nominations must be mailed to AWF by June 15, 2020 to be considered. AWF, P.O. Box 56380, Little Rock, AR 72215, 501-414-2845. Or, scan this form and email to: info@arwild.org



ANCRC makes Arkansas conservation projects possible

Every year, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC), a division of Arkansas Heritage (AH), receives a large portion of its funding from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) Trust Fund. The ANHC uses these grant funds for research, stewardship, and acquisitions.

Arkansas Act 729 of 1987 established the ANCRC to manage and supervise a grants and trust fund for the acquisition, management, and stewardship of state-owned properties acquired or used for ANCRC approved purposes. ANCRC grants are funded through two increases in the state's real estate transfer tax: the original in 1987, and an additional increase in 1993.

The first ANCRC grant was awarded in 1989. Each year since, a committee of 11 voting members hears proposals from state entities and awards grants for projects that protect and maintain state-owned natural areas, historic sites, and outdoor recreation. Eighty percent of the funds collected go to ANCRC Trust Fund grants. Of the remaining 20 percent, 10 percent are earmarked for Arkansas Parks and Tourism and 10 percent for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) and Main Street Arkansas program. To be eligible for trust fund grants, applicants must be agencies of the state of Arkansas that receive general revenue

funding and are authorized by law to acquire, manage, operate, or maintain state-owned lands or historical sites.

ANHC multiplies the impact of ANCRC funding by using these funds as state match to bring in federal grant dollars, making an even bigger impact across the state for conservation. For the ANHC, ANCRC funds are used on natural areas to conduct research that guides protection and management, to restore and manage habitat, to increase public access, to develop new natural areas, and to add land to existing sites. In the past seven years, ANCRC funding has led to the conservation of over 13,700 acres at 17 different natural areas. Funds were used to leverage an additional \$7.1 million in federal and private grant funding over the same time period.

The ANHC requests ANCRC funds annually for fieldwork and research that identify key areas to focus protection efforts and land acquisitions within those focal areas. The ANHC focal areas include those sites around the state identified by the ANHC research team through conservation planning efforts within the ANHC and with input from partners, which target the most rare species and the threatened and least represented natural communities within the state. Funding requests are also made for land management activities to support the System of Natural Areas, including

prescribed fire, ecological restoration, equipment, supplies, signs, grounds maintenance, access improvements, and small contracts for local caretakers and part-time land stewards. In addition, the ANHC requests funds for field inventories for current information on rare species and habitats, data purchases from other researchers and entities on the locations of rare species, status assessments for up-to-date information on which species and habitats are most in need of conservation help, field equipment, and supplies. Collectively this research guides conservation of Arkansas's biodiversity by identifying ecologically important areas and setting priorities for their protection and the species that inhabit them.

In recent years, the ANHC used ANCRC funds to acquire acreage to add to or develop new natural areas. For example, in western Arkansas ANCRC funds were used to add 82 acres of high quality tallgrass prairie to H.E. Flanagan Prairie Natural Area. Between Flanagan Prairie Natural Area and nearby Cherokee Prairie Natural Area, the ANHC now protects and manages over 1,100 acres of this extremely rare habitat within this focal area of the state. Many of the prior acquisitions at these two natural areas were completed with ANCRC funds. This conservation corridor supports a number of declining species like the bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) which benefit from native grassland protection and management. At Searles Prairie Natural Area, funds from the city of Rogers, the Walton Family Foundation, natural gas proceeds, and individual donors were combined with ANCRC funds to add a small remnant of tallgrass prairie, protecting it from development pressures. East of El Dorado, in Union County, the ANHC utilized ANCRC funding along with a \$100,000 grant from the National Wild Turkey Federation to develop Huttig Pine Flatwoods Natural Area, which protects open pine flatwoods habitat. This habitat supports a number of rare species such as the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*Dryobates borealis*,



RCW). Just west of Little Rock, the ANHC partnered with The Nature Conservancy to create Rattlesnake Ridge Natural Area. ANCRC funds were used as a 50 percent match, along with monies from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, to purchase a conservation easement there. All of these and other sites acquired by the ANHC with ANCRC funds protect important natural values and provide additional opportunities for public outdoor recreation.

ANCRC funds have successfully assisted ANHC research to better guide habitat management. For example, a fire history study at Devil's Knob-Devil's Backbone Natural Area was conducted using ANCRC funds. The study is trying to reconstruct historical fire occurrence from 1670 to 2018 and the data collected will allow scientists and land managers to make informed decisions on the ecological restoration and management of the natural area, as well as similar sites across the Ozarks. In turn, this benefits many rare species dependent on a more open woodland structure and a richer herbaceous (non-woody plants) layer.

Continued on page 15...

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Sunfish

Story & photo by Johnny Carrol Sain

MEMORIES OF SUNBURST COLORS

that put most tropical fish to shame still spring to my mind whenever I hear the word sunfish. And while they're a blast on the fly rod or ultralight, they don't trigger the dump of adrenaline that a bass does. This is more an indictment of my calloused system than the fish, but it is what it is. The sunfish plucking tiny poppers from the scummed surface of a local farm pond elicit a deliberate reaction from me.

It wasn't always like this.

There was a time, decades ago, that an orange-bellied bull bluegill would usher in the shakes. A twitching cork float animated by an unseen force and then pulled under was the greatest thrill of my young life. I recall the leathery hands of mom's dad, my Poppy, holding the dorsal fin flat as my chubby fingers traced around the copper sides and midnight blue gill flap before we threw the fish into a potato sack or strung it up on a nylon cord.

I remember Poppy calling some of the disk-shaped fish, what I would later learn are the *Lepomis* genus — the bluegills, redears, longears, pumpkinseeds and green sunfish — either “perch” or “sunfish.” There are not now and have never been real perch in any Arkansas creek or farm pond around my home region, but “perch” was the generic name he gave to any fish in the sunfish family that was not a bass. Poppy didn't know that his perch really were part of the sunfish family and that bass were part of that family as well. Sunfish was a name he reserved for only the most vivid of perches.

Back from the pond, Poppy would fill a five-gallon bucket with chilly well water and my job was to empty the potato sack or stringer into that bucket while



Bluegill and green sunfish hybrid.

he gathered a bowl, a knife and a towel. The late morning sun reflecting off of glistening scales and a clean knife as Poppy scraped and sliced was mesmerizing. And then there was the meal.

We ate our perch whole with the skin on and the tail fin intact. The tail fin was my favorite part of the fish. And, no matter how many fish I ate, I saved the tail fins for last. It was a greasy, salty desert, a taste and texture that I've heard described as the best potato chip in the world. If memory serves, though, the description is wrong. I have not tasted anything — and I've scraped the bottom on many a bag of chips — that came close to tasting like fried perch tail.

I haven't eaten many sunfish in the years since. As a product of the catch-and-release generation of anglers, I rarely eat any fish I catch. And in skipping out on this once vital component

“I rarely eat any fish I catch. And in skipping out on this once vital component of fishing, the reason we started fishing, I've missed out on experiences and emotions from an array of perspectives — the nostalgic, the primal and, last but not least, the delectable.”

of fishing, the reason we started fishing, I've missed out on experiences and emotions from an array of perspectives — the nostalgic, the primal and, last but not least, the delectable.

But that will be changing and soon.

The bluegill and a scrappy hybrid of bluegill and green sunfish have been my teachers on the fly rod much like Poppy's perch were teachers of the angling world as a whole when I held my first cane pole. Often willing and always feisty, the little sunfishes are there to show me what a bite looks and feels like, and when I should set the hook. Savors also, they offer action when it seems that every bass in the water has lockjaw. And just the other day I decided that dinner would be added to their list of titles.

Nine palm-sized bluegill could not resist the fly kicking up spurts of muddy pond bottom through their nests, and nine bluegill rode home in the cooler. I sharpened the knife and reached into a wriggling mass of spiny dorsal fins to pull a glistening male bluegill from the water. His dark and prominent gill flap absorbed the muted rays filtering through an overcast sky but hints of peach and rose reflected from his breast. Luminescent teal highlighted his chin. I think he would qualify as a sunfish for Poppy.

...cont. from page 13

The ANHC's large, annual habitat management projects for the entire System of Natural Areas benefit from ANCRC monies. During fiscal year 2019, invasive plant removal at Devil's Eyebrow, Foushee Cave, and Cave Springs Cave natural areas were accomplished with the help of ANCRC funds, which provided match for a State Wildlife Grant (SWG) and karst conservation SWG. At Devil's Eyebrow and Middle Fork Barrens natural areas, ANCRC awards are being used to restore open woodland and glades. At Downs Prairie and Railroad prairie natural areas, ANCRC funds are continuing to be used for intensive invasive plant species removal, which will help restore native natural community functions at both sites. Prescription burns at Devil's Eyebrow, Middle Fork Barrens, and Warren Prairie natural areas were funded by ANCRC grants and matched by SWG, a National Wild Turkey Federation Super Fund grant, and a habitat restoration grants program benefiting northern bobwhite (quail). In addition, ANCRC grant monies were used for parking area and access road improvements at Big Creek Natural Area, as well as parking area improvements at Cherokee Prairie and H.E. Flanagan Prairie natural areas.

The grant funds are important, but the projects that they have funded have also given the ANHC the opportunity to work with many different private conservation groups, other government organizations, volunteers, and contractors. In a sense, the ANCRC funds will continue to benefit the ANHC for years to come due to the strong relationships that the grant projects have forged. In fact, there are so many that to list them all would take up more space than appropriate here, but some of those partnerships include the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, The Nature Conservancy in

Arkansas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wild Turkey Federation, Arkansas Forestry Commission, U.S. Forest Service, Ducks Unlimited, Arkansas Master Naturalists, and Arkansas State Parks.

The benefits of ANCRC grant funding are all around us. Those who spend time outdoors in Arkansas are already reaping the benefits of this valued program. Restoration efforts funded by the ANCRC provide needed habitat for plants and animals of conservation concern, but also for many other species. For example, the efforts that benefit the RCW also benefit quail, butterflies, deer, songbirds, and wild turkey. In turn, the correct land management techniques are the key to habitat restoration. Prescribed burns, invasive species removal, and grounds maintenance are some of the land management practices that help restore and maintain vital habitat.

Public access and outdoor recreation also benefit from ANCRC funds. Using minimally invasive methods, the ANHC has been able to add parking lots that allow visitors to enjoy natural areas without causing large disturbances to our sensitive natural communities. In some places, adjacent properties have been purchased that provide better access for those wishing to hunt on natural area lands or paddle in our waterways. Hiking and birdwatching activities have also benefited from the improved parking and access, as well as from maintenance to new and existing hiking trails.

ANCRC funding makes a large impact on the ANHC's ability to guide and complete conservation success stories while also providing increased outdoor recreation opportunities. From research projects to land acquisitions to land management practices, the result of ANCRC funding can be seen throughout our beautiful state.

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Composting 101:

Or how to keep your stuff out of the dump and save money too!

Written by Steve Filipek, AWF Board Secretary and Region 4 Director (SW AR)

This class, CP 101 or Composting 101, is for all of those people who want to reduce some of their garbage from filling up another landfill but haven't taken the step over the edge yet. This is NOT for those who have a PhD in composting (Piled high and Deeper) and who could easily teach me much about this earthy subject. This does not take a lot of money or gear to get started but is only a basic way to get you working to converting food that either is marginal now after it leaves the table or was only a shell of itself to begin with. These include but are not limited to eggshells, week old (or more) vegetables still in your fridge, tea and coffee grounds, fruit old enough that even tiny Drosophila (fruit flies) sink in it not to mention human hands, ends of onions, watermelon rinds, you get the idea.

It's nice to have a garden to use the composting end product in like I do but I guess you could bag it, give it away or sell it but I don't have any idea about permits needed for that line of thinking. Let's get started and ASSUME you either have a garden or a friend or family member has one that you're gonna help. Unless you have a ginormous family, one can get started with a two quart or larger covered ICC (Inside Composting Container) and one or more OCCs (Outside Composting Container). My ICC is a Sterilite plastic box with an easy closing top. My OCCs are a little different but that has been a part of my evolution as a basic composter. I started out with one 35-gallon ex-garbage plastic can. Initially I used to "spike" this container with a few layers of soil from my acidic Ouachita Mountain ecoregion ground in between layers of vegetable skins, old bleached out broccoli trees, apple rinds, beans that had seen a better day, etc. wondering how all this vegetable matter would turn into soil... no way without some help. Well, I don't do that anymore for several reasons but mainly because with enough mixing of all the ingredients with a shovel, it does in fact turn into highly useable soil with extra nutrients. (Figure 1)

And oh, by the way, before I got into composting in a medium way, I used to buy soil at Wal-Mart and Atwoods for



Figure 2

anywhere from \$6.99 to \$14.99 a bag depending on how rich the top soil was in the bag or how much fertilizer that had been added to it. For years now I don't do that, saving a considerable amount of green bills over the years. Getting back to the basics though, instead of throwing all that vegetable matter into the refuse can or container near or in your kitchen, you now put it into the ICC on your counter and transport it to the OCCs at the end of the day, adding some walking exercise to your day as well so it's a win-win all the way around.

So, you've added all kinds of vegetable matter and fruit shells and whatever to your outside container. Note Bene, which I learned in high school Latin class meant "note well", that I have not included any meat or dairy products, waste or what have you. Even liquid derived from these meat or dairy products is not allowed in my compost containers. Oh, and word to the wise, the large and hard seeds of avocados take a long time to break down so I add them to my

"With the older composted material ready to "do its thing"...I can add a significant amount of new soil to my garden to rejuvenate the "old and tired" soil I've been gardening with from last year."

list of uh uhs. I personally add to that list of not to be added: large nutshells like walnuts, lemons and limes due to their acidic nature (remember I live in the Ouachitas which already has acidic soils), and large corn husks unless I really break them up into smaller pieces. Even whole artichoke leaves/petals unless I break or cut them up into smaller pieces. In fact, breaking what you can into smaller pieces is a good rule to follow with everything. It's what we learned in PH 101, Physics with some B103 Biology; breaking and cutting things up, like crushing an eggshell rather than leaving both halves whole

increases the area that is susceptible to bacterial breakdown as well as making the calcium in the eggshells more available to the plants, fruits and vegetables. A larger surface area becomes more open to decomposition and utilization in the OCCs as well as in the garden. I will occasionally



Figure 1

add some cut grass to my OCC, but not leaves due to their acidic nature and the fact that I have plenty of other plant material to use.

I know I'm rambling but that's how it comes out of the ol' grey matter. For those of you that live in areas of the state with acidic soils, you can ameliorate that by adding lime to your garden in the winter and I add some to my compost containers as well. I say containers because as I have wore out my garbage containers, I have accumulated more OCCs for me to add refuse from the house to and the longer you can leave compostable material in your containers, the more broken down and available to your vegetables in your garden it becomes....up to a point. So, class, I now have a 1.5-year-old OCC, a 1-year old OCC, a six-month-old OCC, all working as we sleep, to put out very nutritious soil to your garden in the spring time. You have to have a shovel handy to mix these OCCs which is another reason I have several containers "cooking" with microbial action rather than just one. I want them to become only about half or so full so when I'm turning them over with a shovel, I can mix the top new stuff with the bottom older stuff.

Well shoot, why don't I move up to Composting 102 and not have a more modern way of turning the entire OCC?! Well, I have evolved to that point, thank you, and as the picture shows, I have the primitive old plastic somewhat sedentary along side that \$49.99 RCC, Revolving Composting Container. (Figure 2) It worked great for about 2 years and

then it started to not work so well but I still use it and even in the end, I will probably have to mix the contents with a shovel as well, hah.

Anyway, my co-editor says I'm taking up too much magazine room so let's finish this class, shall we? With the older composted material ready to "do its thing", I not only have now pounds and pounds of organically fertilized soil to not only add to the hole I will dig to plant tomato plants, pepper plants, and corn (some call it maize) as well as other neat vegetables like squash, green beans, okra, etc., but I can add a significant amount of new soil to my garden to rejuvenate the "old and tired" soil I've been gardening with from last year.

Hallelujah, we're not driving to the store to buy store-bought soil, we're not adding a bunch more biomass to already overrun solid waste dumps, we've gotten some extra exercise and we have some of the best organic soil to add to our garden. Hot Dog, we have conserved the fertility of our land, grown bigger vegetables, lessened our carbon footprint and saved some money to boot. All in time to plan our garden for this upcoming season. Before I dismiss this class, thanks to the internet, there are tons of literature out there about composting that is easily obtained via your computer, phone, or if need be, at the library. Class dismissed.



ARKANSAS WILDLIFE News-of-Note



700 acre wildlife corridor protected

Just as roads and bridges link people to towns and cities, wildlife corridors link habitats for plants and animals across a landscape. As urban growth continues in Northwest Arkansas, habitats are becoming increasingly fragmented by roads, neighborhoods, and shopping centers. Working with the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, Christina Moore and Paul Green purchased a 700 acre property along I-49 and placed it into a conservation easement, protecting the land in perpetuity. The property provides a crucial link between Ozark National Forest to the east and west, nearly linking to Devil's Den State Park to the west. To learn more about this project, visit www.nwalandtrust.org.

Proposed cuts to Land and Water Conservation Fund

In February, the president's budget proposal took aim at some of America's most successful and important programs that invest in wildlife conservation. In addition to steep budget cuts to the Interior Department (16% cut) and Environmental Protection Agency (26% cut), the proposed budget would cut the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) by nearly 97%. LWCF is America's most successful and effective tool for keeping nature and wildlife within reach for millions of Americans. Period. The LWCF uses fees from



Photo by Paul Green at Blackburn Creek



Photo by Paul Green

offshore oil and gas revenues — at no cost to taxpayers — to invest in local parks, trails, public lands and outdoor spaces. Since its inception, the program has provided more than \$18 billion to support wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation areas in every county in the nation. Congress permanently reauthorized the program in early 2019 and the president and congress need to keep their promise to fund this vital program. Contact your congressmen to urge them to keep this promise!

Conservation education grants for Arkansas schools

Each year the AGFC fines poachers and other people violating hunting and fishing laws. These fines are placed into a conservation education grant fund managed by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission Division of Rural Services. For 2020, 164 schools, school districts, and conservation districts in 70 counties were awarded with a total of \$444,230 in grants to promote wildlife education and improve school conservation programs. These grants fund projects such as starting archery, fishing and competitive shooting sports programs; purchasing educational materials, lab supplies and funding field trips to AGFC nature centers; and creating and enhancing outdoor classrooms at schools. Visit www.ArkansasEDC.com/Rural-Services for more information on the grants, including a complete list of award recipients and program narratives.

Wildlife of Arkansas art contest postponed

The Wildlife of Arkansas Student Art Contest hosted by the AWF and Creative Ideas has been an amazing program, inspiring students to connect to nature by creating unique pieces of art. Unfortunately, the success of this program (approximately 1,300 pieces of art submitted in 2019) has outgrown our capacity to keep up with the many logistical aspects of this all volunteer led program. Thus, AWF and Creative Ideas had to postpone the 2020 art contest. Instructions for the next event will be sent out in the fall of 2020, with the actual artwork submission deadline being early 2021. This will provide us time to create a digital submission process for all artwork allowing for a more accessible and manageable program for students and volunteers. We are incredibly grateful for the thousands of teachers and parents across Arkansas that have supported this program and encouraged students to learn about their Natural State.

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Ideas for getting your daily Green Hour

Are you and your kids getting a Green Hour each day? In this technology age, kids and adults alike spend more and more time indoors staring at electronic devices than ever before. We have all seen the news reports and read the articles that spending time outdoors can boost memory, increase concentration, fight depression, lower blood pressure, reduce stress and has many other mental and physical health benefits. As a busy parent, the challenge often comes down to one simple question: what opportunities can I provide my kids on short notice that won't cost a lot of time and money to do or prepare? To help, we have provided a list of outdoor activity ideas and information to create your own nature adventure backpack.

To start you out, here is a list of 25 ideas for you and your kids to do outside. Or create your own list of your most favorite outdoor activities.

- 1. Read a book on the lawn or under a tree
- 2. Have a picnic
- 3. Make a bird feeder and set up a bird bath
- 4. Look for shapes in the clouds
- 5. Do a scavenger hunt
- 6. Play "I Spy"
- 7. Look at the moon, stars and night sky
- 8. Bury or hide treasure and make a map
- 9. Look for animal tracks or scat
- 10. Make an outdoor collage and start a nature notebook
- 11. Close your eyes, touch things and guess what they are
- 12. Plant a butterfly garden
- 13. Make leaf prints
- 14. Dig in the dirt for worms and look under rocks
- 15. Photograph outdoor scenes and animals
- 16. Go on a backyard campout
- 17. Look at spider webs
- 18. Lie in the grass and look up through the leaves of a tree
- 19. Plant a tree and measure its growth
- 20. Look at tree bark with a magnifying glass
- 21. See how many kinds of plants you can find
- 22. See how many insects you can find and watch
- 23. Look at tree buds or bird nests
- 24. Listen to sounds and look for what makes them
- 25. Watch the sunrise or sunset

Create an explorer pack which includes all the materials you need for a Green Hour adventure. Here is a sample list of supplies:

- **Backpack** – any ol' day pack will work and doesn't have to be a new one because hopefully it is going to get dirty soon with all the outdoor exploring it is going on.
- **A nature journal** – a simple journal filled with blank pages for kids to create sketches and record their observations.



- **Writing tools** – colored pencils are great as they can be used for writing and drawing (and don't forget the pencil sharpeners).
- **Small set of binoculars** – inexpensive but durable binoculars can be easily found online for less than \$15 and kids love using them.
- **Magnifying glass** – for studying the bugs and critters the kids find. Again, a quick search online will result in options starting around \$6.
- **Bird, plant, animal track field guides** – many kids are fascinated with identifying the critters they find outside. And after finding them in the field guide, they can record them in their nature journal.
- **Activity book** – there are a lot of places to find nature activities online. National Wildlife Federation offers free downloadable "Nature Notebook" pages each month. You can print these out to create your child's very own "Nature Notebook" full of activities. Go to www.rangerrick.org/magazines/ranger-rik/classroom-resources/nature-notebook/.
- **Camera or smart phone** – You will need something to take all those cool pictures! And there are a lot of nature ID and citizen science apps such as iNaturalist, Insect Identifier, PlantNet, and Merlin Bird ID.
- **Other ideas to consider:**
 - Wooden 6" Ruler
 - Safari Cards
 - Butterfly net
 - Water Bottle
 - Pedometer
 - Compass
 - Whistle
 - Mini flashlight
 - Bandana
 - Animal stickers
 - Basic first aid kit

For more resources and information about connecting kids and nature, visit www.nwf.org/Kids-and-Family/Connecting-Kids-and-Nature.

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