

The Bridge

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The Newsletter of the Friends of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park (FoRB)

P.O. Box 7642, Columbia MO 65205-7642 <http://www.friendsofrockbridgemsp.org/>

Friends of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park is a membership supported 501(c)(3) organized to promote understanding, appreciation, enjoyment and preservation of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park and the surrounding area.

Send your submissions to Jim Gast, editor at FriendsofRockBridge@gmail.com.

FoRB Officers: Kevin Roberson, President; Mark Lee, Secretary; Jan Weaver, Treasurer; Sue Tillema, Scott Schulte, Jim Gast, Mark Hahn, Steve Ferguson Board Members.

President's Message

Kevin Roberson

Greetings fellow FoRB Members. These are exciting times we live in. The natural world is at its peak of loveliness (maybe second to a crisp fall day); everything is nearly fully leafed out, the green is absolutely beautiful, the leaves are full and not devoured by insects, plants are all strong from plenty of rain and nice temperature. But this reminds us that there are cycles to everything. We know that the green will fade from this bright beauty to paler/more worn and tattered and eaten, they will eventually wither and die to drop to the ground. There is also a cycle to the life of the Park. We started out 50 years ago as a vision between a family to memorialize their lost daughter and the Downtown Optimists to support the local youth. This vision and much hard work lead to the fruition of the beginning of the Rock Bridge Memorial State Park. Through the years the Park grew, was taken on by the State Parks Division and has been wonderfully managed by a string of visionary, dedicated Superintendents. The natural cycle is for decline through entropy and the only way to fight entropy is to insert energy into the equation. That energy is provided by the State Park sales tax, the staff, the volunteers, the FoRB Board and members, and now the community as a whole.

To stave off decline of all kinds, we must continue to stoke excitement and caring for something that many have taken for granted. I want to thank the Board for fomenting this kind of excitement and caring and acting as the catalyst for generating the response that we have seen with the Save the Gans group formation and growth. The Board is separate and independent from the Save the Gans group, but we are aligned in working to keep entropy at bay and protect and preserve the Park. Thank you all.

Yours in Conservation,
Kevin Roberson

Naturalist News

Roxie Campbell, Park Naturalist

This spring, a conversation with someone revealed that their viewpoint of wildflowers lacked an understanding of how tied they are to their site and therefore how essential it is that their site not be disturbed. I'd like to share some analogies to help describe this. Perhaps many, like this person, think of plants as easily replaceable. All you need is to buy the plant and give it soil, water and sun, right? Wrong, at least for native wildflowers. Of course, the amount of soil, water and sun are important, but in addition, there are things like type of soil (different parent rock produces different characteristics, amount of organic matter, Ph) and relationships with certain fungi, microbes and insects, many of which we don't yet understand. Even if you were able to buy all of the native wildflowers you see in the woods in spring (some are not available), you would have to provide all of the right growing conditions in order for those plants to survive. Certainly, if you have a bare field, don't expect most native wildflowers to just move in on their own. Many simply never move beyond the sites where they have lived for hundreds of years.

To illustrate this unwillingness or inability to move from one location to another, I am using analogies to the tendency of people to move at different stages in their lives and their modes of travel.

College graduates, nothing to tie them down, eager to travel, hitch-hike, bicycle with just a pack on their back - Plant counterpart are "pioneer species" that will appear first where there is bare soil, they DO move easily (lots of seed moved by wind, animals, water) and are NOT picky about conditions, can grow anywhere. Examples - ragweed and some goldenrods.

Middle age, now tied to a certain job/career, to a certain location for spouse's job, children's school, etc. Have bought a house and acreage. Really DO

NOT want to move, but can if they have to (using a big truck and adjustment pains). Plant counterpart example is wild ginger, *Asarum canadense*, which can be purchased from some vendors. It produces some seed, but it doesn't travel far and may or may not grow where it lands.

Senior citizen with major health conditions, living in a nursing home, requires assistance to walk, it is life-threatening to not have certain medicines, VERY difficult to travel. Plant counterpart examples: Wood betony, *Pedicularis canadensis*, which grows only in acid soils of the Ozarks and Ozark borders and orange puccoon, *Lithospermum canescens*, which can be found statewide except for the SE lowlands, but very few plants exist. Within the entire 2,273 acres of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, there are only two plants found at only one location. My attempts to grow them from seed have been unsuccessful.

It's prohibited to dig up any plant from a Missouri State Park and a permit is required for seed collection. Fortunately, there are some vendors who specialize in growing native Missouri wildflowers (www.grownative.org). While it is a noble endeavor to try to grow native wildflowers, the point of this article is that the best way to protect native wildflowers is to protect the places where they grow that already have the conditions they need. Most do not travel well and have special needs. The greater those special needs (analogy #3 above) the closer to 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 is a plant's ranking on how "conservative" it is. A plant is more conservative when it has a high level of fidelity to a particular type of site and/or conditions. Of the 571 species of plants documented for Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, 27 have a coefficient of conservatism value of 7 to 10. To protect them, we must protect the places where they grow.