

# The Bridge

Volume 34 Number 7 July 2021

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](mailto: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. How time flies and how much difference a month can make. As you all by now know, the developer for the Canton Estates has withdrawn his application for annexation into the city with an R-1 zoning and a dense (for the area) preliminary plat proposal. We will need to stay vigilant on this issue, at least until we get the city to develop a Southeast Sensitive Area Development Plan. Maybe the developer, Rob Hill, will let us know his plan(s) and work with us to develop this new way of protecting these sensitive areas and especially the Gans Creek Wild Area and Gans Creek.

I have been out of Missouri for 2 weeks and have just returned back last night. In my travels, it was clear that the weather patterns are changing/have changed...maybe irreversibly. The drought is raging west of the Continental Divide in Colorado and New Mexico, while the plains of Eastern New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma are a verdant freshness that is not often seen without draining of the Oglala aquifer.

I am reminded that there are things that are outside of my control, as an individual, but as a member of a concerned group, we can make a difference. This is true of climate change and it is true of development next to a near-sacred area, the Gans Creek Wild Area. Let us keep striving to be a part of something that is bigger than we are as individuals. Let us make a difference. Join me in pledging to make a difference in how we live and what we leave for our families and future communities.

**Introduction to Invasive Plants Tuesday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, from 5:30 to 6:45 PM at the Gilbert picnic shelter.**

Learn how to identify and how to treat bush honeysuckle and winter creeper. Call 573-449-7402 to reserve your space.

## Naturalist News

Roxie Campbell, Park Naturalist

**Flooding** – At Rock Bridge Memorial State Park on June 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> when 6 inches of rain was received, the major streams went out-of-their-banks and covered bottomland woodlands for a few hours and then continued to be bank-full for a day or so. This does tend to happen every few years and has some natural/beneficial effects such as depositing silt on bottomlands and moving logs. More unusual was that water from Gans Creek flowed in the ditch on the east side of Hwy. 163 so strongly that it flowed about 350 meters, over a pull-off spot and into Clear Creek! Rock Quarry Road was flooded and closed. We closed Connor's Cave while the water was high and rushing, but trails remained open and relatively undamaged. On the other hand, The Katy Trail suffered flooding from the Missouri River in places, a mud slide near the I-70 bridge and numerous wash-outs and down trees. Staff are working to re-open those areas.

**Ornate Box Turtle** – On June 24<sup>th</sup>, Erika Burns, our park ranger found an ornate box turtle with an eye injury, apparently caused by a car, in the Gans Creek Trailhead parking lot. We've given her a safe place to recover and she seems to be improving. There are ways to know a box turtle is female (male has red eye color, bottom shell is slightly concave and the first toe of the hind foot is enlarged and inward-facing), but the sure way is to see her lay eggs! She laid five oblong leathery eggs of about 1.5" in length! We estimate the age of this turtle (based on growth lines on one scute/section of the shell) at 15+ years. Author C. Kenneth Dodd Jr. says that the majority of box turtles live 50 years or less, but some live 60 or more years. To distinguish ornate box turtles from the more common three-toed box turtles: ornates always have a dark base color with bright yellow markings and do not have a raised ridge on the center of the top shell that three-toed turtles always have. In

comparison, ornate box turtles spend more time in grassland/brushy areas and eat more insects than three-toed box turtles. This turtle was probably moving from the grasslands of the High Ridge area to find the perfect spot to lay her eggs (perhaps near the banks of Gans Creek). She would have dug a shallow hole in sand/loose soil, laid the eggs, covered them and let the sun incubate them for 50-90 days. Please be watchful and protective of turtles; many are crossing roads this time of year.

**Big Oaks** - We came across what I believe to be the largest swamp white oak tree in the park. I will have to go back and measure it, but an estimate is 3' diameter, 80' tall and 60' spread, however, it is still much smaller than the state's champion. It is located along a small stream near the western edge of the Grassland. It is alive and well. Another tree, also member of the white oak group, fell in the Karst area along the connector trail. Park maintenance worker, Lane Beverlin, cut a cross section that is in the park office and a 5' long section of trunk that we intend to make into a bench. A quick count of the rings puts it at around 225 years old!

**Bird Sighting** - In late May and early June, several Columbia Audubon Society members and others enjoyed seeing a Bewick's Wren in the maintenance building area. This was an unusual occurrence as Bewick Wrens are an uncommon summer resident in the Ozarks and Ozark border (where we are). Their numbers have gone down, in part, because they prefer abandoned farm equipment, sheds and open, brushy edges of woods and there is less of these habitats in Missouri than there were a few decades ago. It's good to know that even our maintenance area is serving as wildlife habitat!

**Black Bear Sighting** – Conservation agent, Adam Doerhoff, reports that there was a confirmed sighting of a black bear in the area of the park in mid-June; however, there have not been sightings since then, so it has probably moved on.

**Informational Meeting about Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, Tuesday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, starting at 7:00PM at the Gilbert Picnic Shelter**

Covers park news and management. Give your suggestions in-person or by calling 573-449-7402.