

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; Melissa Hutchens Treasurer; Jan Weaver, Sue Tillema, Scott Schulte, Jim Gast, Mark Hahn, Steve Ferguson, Meredith Donaldson, Board Members.

President's Message

Friends, What a month it has been. We have Spring here completely with the grass a growing and the buds a-popping. If this can't make you excited and invigorated, you are not trying hard enough! It is hard to explain the transformation that happens to me every year as we shed the winter's drab cover and bound into Spring with all of its promise and hope.

What we can always count on is change, whether it is the eons old change of the seasons or the closer, more personal changing of the passing of friends, co-workers, allies, and co-conspirators. Luckily for us this month, the passing is only on to better places and things for their future. Jan Weaver is moving out of state to be closer to family and Sarah Jones is moving on to Jefferson City to take up a new, challenging position with the Missouri State Parks.

I believe that Jan has been on the Friends of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park Board for almost 20 years. I think that she has held most all officer positions, including President and Treasurer. She used her intelligence, education and native good character to make a major difference in the success of our organization. She has steadfastly supported education of the children of our community, used her scientific acumen and expertise to protect and support the Park and her love of the Natural World to make our community a better place to live. Any success that I have had in my position on our Board has been because of her steadfast support, her direction in understanding complex issues, and her quiet correction and redirection when I needed it. She will be missed.

Sarah has been with us for 6 years as the Superintendent of the Park. She brought a broad knowledge of how to accomplish tasks in this arena from her many years at the helm of Parks in Arkansas. Sarah has been steadfast in getting things done with what she has on hand at the time. Sarah repeatedly made lemonade when given lemons. Her personality and character allowed her to attract the right kind of people to support the park, whether staff or volunteers. She instituted many important changes that allowed the use of Park Hosts and efficient use of the volunteer staff that we have had. In the short time that she had at the helm, she was able to make major improvements in trail blazing and upkeep. The members of FoRB always knew that they were supported by Sarah and that they could count on her, when they needed her assistance. Sarah will be missed here at Rock Bridge, but we know that she will continue her great work for Missouri State Parks.

Good luck to these two leaders. Thank you for your strength and guidance. See you in the Park.

Yours in Conservation,
Kevin Roberson

People Resources of the Park Roxie Campbell, Park Naturalist

What makes it neat to work here is enjoying the resources of the park. Usually, that is referring to wildlife and plants and that still applies, but, lately, I have thought about how it also applies to people.

People: Sarah Jones, who has served well as our park superintendent for the past six years, has moved on to a different position. Now, she is the

Wellness Coordinator, working to foster physical and mental well-being for all of the staff of Missouri State Parks (MSP). We are very sad to see her go, but glad that she has this opportunity and will continue to serve in MSP. Just as we need to protect and manage the park's natural resources, we also need to take care of our people resources and that's what Sarah will be doing! Speaking of people resources, we also say farewell to Jan Weaver of FoRB and we welcome new staff: Cassie Brandt who is now working in the park office and serving as the Katy Trail Coordinator. Samuel Baumer will be starting on May 12th as the Rock Bridge Maintenance Worker, and we are bringing on board four seasonal staff for maintenance, stewardship and interpretation work. Our seasonals are usually college students who only work one summer, but the time spent benefits both them and the park. Occasionally, I hear from one and learn that they have continued to work in the field. Then, there are the volunteers who put their time and energy into teaching children who come on field trips – what a noble cause! And, the kids... they are the future. We're glad that they are being allowed to have field trips again. For the second graders, they are going on their first real field trip! All are valuable people resources!

Resources: I just have to share with you some of the highlights of the month: Spring migration of birds has given us: three male rose-breasted grosbeaks and two male summer tanagers (look them up; they are colorful). Snakes: Two big black snakes, two smaller prairie kingsnakes. Bats: while sadly it was dead, it was good to document an Eastern small-footed bat. A cluster of live gray bats and a live tri-colored bat. Morels: some have been found! Wildflowers: abundant and colorful.

Superintendent's Message

Hello Friends,
Spring is here and the changes to the landscape has been a joy to watch. I have enjoyed the flowers popping up and all the green that has covered the earth. Changes in MO State Parks are happening as well. MO State Parks created a position called the Wellness Coordinator to better serve our State Park co-workers in physical and mental well-being.

I was selected for the position and started April 18th. (No worries though, you will see me around until they get a new Superintendent hired.)

This is a big change for me. I have been working in Public Land Management for over 20 years. The last 6 years has been here at Rock Bridge. Now I will be working to promote wellness with the staff that takes care of our wonderful parks throughout the state.

I have enjoyed working with the staff, volunteers, and Friends group and I will miss you all greatly. I know I am leaving this park in good hands. The passion and love all of you show and express each day is what makes this place amazing. A Big "Thank You" to all you, my "Park Family." Keep up the good work.

Happy Trails,

Sarah Jones, former Park Supt.

Jan Weaver Reflects on FoRB and the Park

My husband and I are moving to Iowa next month to be close to our grandkids. I will miss the karst and fossils of the park, its varied habitats and wildlife, and the traces of the past made by both nature and people. But there is nature in Iowa, and I will learn to love it like I have loved the park. What will be hard to replace are the relationships I have developed with the people of park.

I've served with FoRB through three superintendents, Scott Schulte, Jim Gast, and Sarah Jones, and have been so impressed with their skill in navigating the space between DNR's rules and procedures and the sometimes wild enthusiasm of board members for a particular project. Scott and Jim's joining the board after retirement has been very important for growing our relationship with DNR. Naturalist Roxie Campbell has always had an answer to all my natural history questions, and former aide Katherine Devany DiFoxfire was the first person to raise my consciousness about the history of non-white

people at the park. It changed my perspective.

In FoRB, Dottie Stoerker Peters had an almost mystical ability to pull people into the projects she cared about. I learned a lot from her. As our first nature educator, Meredith Donaldson was a creative and empathetic teacher who helped create our signature education programs and kept them funded with grants from the Missouri Parks Association and the Downtown Optimists. I'm so happy she agreed to join the board to oversee those programs, and that her replacement, Bethany Haid, is going to build on that foundation. Board member Sue Tillema has been asking the hard questions for over a decade, and keeping us realistic about what we can do with what we have. Melissa Hutchens took over from me as treasurer (a hard position to fill), willing to learn new skills in a new organization. New board members Steve Ferguson, Mark Hahn, and Mark Lee have brought administrative, technical, and people skills FoRB can really use, along with their knowledge of and attachment to the park.

I owe a special thanks to Susan Haines, who stepped up to serve as Board President in June 2009 when I had to step down. She was president when I joined and it was good to have her experienced hand getting us on track again. I also owe a great deal to Kevin Roberson, who took over as president from Susan in September of 2011. He brought a deep love of the park, a business sensibility to planning and carrying out projects, and a wry and philosophical grasp of human nature. I have very much enjoyed working with him.

It was obvious that volunteering to help in a park would help me develop a stronger relationship with nature, but what will always have meaning for me is that it helped me develop stronger relationships with others. Thanks to all of you!

Nature Detectives Update

Bethany Haid, education and outreach coordinator

Its May! The birds sing me good morning, the trees in my yard are unfurling their leaves to offer shade, and mud puddles abound. There is much to celebrate as I watch spring change into summer, but did you know there are actual national holidays to help us commemorate and celebrate nature? Here are several I find interesting... I wonder which "holidays" merit baking a cake and throwing a party?

Be Kind to Animals Week (*starts May 1st*)

Astronomy Day (*May 6th*)

Iris Day (*May 8th*)

Frog Jumping Day (*May 13th*)

Love a Tree Day (*May 16th*)

National Endangered Species Day (*May 20th*) *I recommend learning about two of Missouri's endangered species, the hellbender and the gray bat*

Learn About Composting Day (*May 29th*)

Water a Flower Day (*May 30th*)

There is so much to celebrate, including the end of the traditional school year. We know that although kids are out of school, their minds are still noticing and processing new information about their world. Rock Bridge Memorial State Park is an ideal place for children to learn, and there are several opportunities that the Friends of Rock Bridge sponsors this summer.



Program attendees begin their hike on Deer Run Trail. Overheard: "I've never even seen this part of the park. We only visit the main boardwalk area!" Photo by Meredith Donaldson. Used by permission

One such event is the Nature Detectives, a program for preschool aged learners (2-6 years old) and their caregivers. Kids explore the natural world through stories, song, and art. Adults learn and play, too! The Nature Detectives program has been a part summer education plans for nearly two decades, and it returned to in-person programming

in April. Historically, the program has been in summer months only, however, its expanded in 2022! Look for a program each month to be offered both on a weekend and during a weekday morning.



A child shows the data she collected: "Look! I marked more white and purple than any other color!" Photo by Meredith Donaldson. Used by permission.

FoRB sponsored an April Nature Detective program called WILDFLOWER WONDERS. Twenty-four children and 16 adults met at the Deer Run Trailhead to learn about the park's flowers. They sang and danced their way through learning the purpose and names of plant anatomy, demonstrated understanding of a plant's life cycle

and the biotic and abiotic factors that cause the plant to sprout and reproduce through dramatic role play, and created a diagram of Blue Phlox aka Wild Sweet William. The kids looked for wildflowers along the trail and did a simple survey of flower color...yes, even young kids who can't read can understand and participate in data collection!

Upcoming Events

Como Trail Association (COMOTA) is working on a big weekend of events the first weekend of June to celebrate National Trails Day. They are planning on having an event at Rock Bridge on Sunday, June 5th from 8:00-11:00 a.m. Details will be in the *June Bridge*

Water Festival

Saturday, July 16th, from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Devil's Icebox parking lot area. Registration not needed.