

# 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.friendsofrocbbridgemsp.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).

**The next board meeting is Tuesday, April 11, 2023 at 6:00 PM at the Park Office.**

FoRB Officers: Kevin Roberson, President; Mark Lee, Secretary; Melissa Hutchens Treasurer;

Sue Tillema, Scott Schulte, Jim Gast, Steve Ferguson, Meredith Donaldson, Robin Rotman, Board Members.

## President's Column

Dear Friends,

I am back from travels and some illness to once again resume my duties. I thank Jim for filling in for me in my absence. It is good to have people that you can count on when you need them.

I love this time of year. Spring is actually here, and you can't miss it when you are outside. The cardinals are going great guns and the bluebirds are setting up residency in at least a few of the houses here on the place. The hazelnuts have finished blooming, and the fruit trees' buds are swelling. Unlike previous years, we have had plenty of rain and this bodes well for our native forbs and their flowers. I hope the frost doesn't get the fruit trees this year. My sister heard a gobbler serenading a barred owl at sunset last night, it was quite a spectacle.

Much good going on in the Park and near it in April. We are hosting the Rock Bridge Renew on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April this year and expect to have a great crowd helping with the roadway trash pickup and invasive plant removal. Please come if you can. We meet at Devil's Icebox parking lot at 9:00 AM and will follow up with pizza and fellowship between tree-huggers at 12:30 PM. I hope to see you there.

I hope you are able to get out and enjoy the Park. I hope to see you there.

Yours in Conservation,  
Kevin Roberson

## Rock Bridge Renew (RBR)

Each year, Columbia promotes the April COMO Renew. In conjunction with COMO Renew, the Friends of Rock Bridge (FoRB) Board and

membership is sponsoring the **Rock Bridge Renew** event again this year. It will be on Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, from 9:00AM until 1:00PM. You do not need to register for RBR, just show up at the Devil's Icebox parking lot. Activities this year include Invasive Species Control, litter removal along Highway 163 and Rock Quarry Road through the park and maybe some other tasks. You decide where you want to help on the morning of the event.

Be sure to dress for the weather, bring leather gloves (some gloves will be available, wear sturdy shoes and bring water.

After the event the Friends of Rock Bridge Board will have a **Pizza Party** as a "Thank-you."

## Superintendent's News

### Ben Nagy, Park Superintendent

Park staff have been busy preparing for a busy "on-season." I put those words in quotes since we have been having such mild winters lately that we never seem to slow down. Still, we are getting ready to un-winterize our flush toilets in the park and along the Katy Trail by April 15<sup>th</sup>. Mowing season will soon be upon us and our fleet of mowers are all freshly tuned and sharpened. I'm sure that Roxie will have more on this topic, but we have had three successful prescribed burns in the past month. One of them was helping out at nearby Graham Cave State Park and two of them were accomplished on the same day in the park's Grasslands area. I have to give a big shout out to Roxie who was the Burn Boss at all of those. Things went very smoothly and I'm amazed at weather forecasters ability to predict the timing of wind speed and direction and at Roxie's ability to plan our burns around these forecasts. The Grasslands will look a little bit charred for a while but these burns are

great for the native plants and they can also help in suppressing invasive species.



*Fire is medicine for the prairie plants, knocking back little trees. Photo by Roxie Campbell. Used by permission.*

Speaking of fires, on March 30<sup>th</sup>, we were informed of a fire in the woods near Devil's Icebox. Maintenance worker Brian and I both responded as quickly as we could and the Boone County firefighters already had things mostly under control by the time that we got there. The fire burned less than an acre of land and was mostly extinguished by 9:00 PM. Brian and I went back the next morning and felled a burning snag and put water on any remaining "smokers." We were concerned with the high winds that we were expecting that it might not stay contained. We don't really have any idea what could have started it, but it was right on top of an unauthorized trail near White Connector 5, so I think that it's safe to say that there was a human component to the ignition. Our smokers from our recent Grasslands burn had all been put out and were probably a half mile or further away. I owe a big thank you to Boone County Fire, Brian and our handi-host Richard who all worked hard to fix this problem ASAP.

We are all really looking forward to the Rock Bridge Renew event on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. I will be so happy to have these roadsides cleaned up. Nothing like seeing a bunch of trash on the side of the road within a beautiful state park to ruin your day! We are also looking forward to starting our school programs back up and there have been a few in the month of March already. We are so extremely grateful for everything that our

staff and volunteers do. We could not do it without you!

## **Naturalist's News** **Roxie Campbell, Park Naturalist**



*Burn crew members tend the backfire of the prescribed fire in the Grassland Trail area on March 29<sup>th</sup>. Photo by Roxie Campbell. Used by permission.*

It's been a rough year for finding good burn weather, but finally at the end of the burn season, we were able to accomplish some prescribed fire medicine for some park acreage. We had an unusual day on March 29<sup>th</sup>. The wind started off coming out of the West which worked well for burning off the Grassland West unit (62 acres). Then, just as forecasted, it turned and came out of the East which enabled us to burn the Grassland East unit (46 acres). We need an easterly component to the wind for that unit to keep smoke off of Highway 163. The ranger reported that we succeeded in keeping smoke off the road. While the day was long (two units in one day), the crew was happy with how everything went. Because of lack of fire for a few years, tree sprouts such as shingle oak have had the chance to grow and infringe upon the prairie grasses and wildflowers, so it really was good medicine for the prairie to get a fire. The fire doesn't kill the little trees but does damage the thin bark on young trees and forces them to sprout again from the roots. If the trees became large, they would take up all of the sunlight which would harm the prairie plants. In Missouri's history, fire played a very important role in maintaining prairie in the northern and western parts of the state. Historical records show a two-mile wide and 25 mile long prairie in Boone

County, the southern end of which was within a mile of the park. We also know that there was not a distinct line between prairie and woodland, rather a mosaic meandering of the two together depending upon terrain and moisture.

On March 14<sup>th</sup>, Ben and I also went to Graham Cave State Park and helped burn off their 16 acre prairie. Across the park system, a lot of prairie units have been burned this year, but few woodland units. Woodlands need several days without rain in order to dry out enough. There have also been a lot of days that were too windy for doing burns.

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