

Ripples

The Quarterly Newsletter of Friends of Sugar Creek, Inc.

Spring 2010

April 24 Spring Creek Clean-up A Success

30 volunteers participated in our first creek clean-up of the year, helping remove an estimated 300 pounds of trash. The effort represents an ongoing partnership with the City of Crawfordsville to establish and maintain the Sugar Creek Nature Park.

Items collected during the April 24 event included enough trash to fill six 50-gallon bags, a sewing machine, scrap metal, and a large couch.

That afternoon, Friends of Sugar Creek dedicated three natural history interpretive signs at the Sugar Creek Nature Park. The FSC board of directors presented the signs to Mayor Coons, marking their official dedication.



Three interpretive signs featuring information about Sugar Creek were installed at the Nature Park as part of the spring creek clean-up

The signs feature information about the wildlife found in and around Sugar Creek. A grant from the Montgomery County Community Foundation allowed FSC to hire an artist to illustrate scenes of creek life. The signs cover three topics: aquatic life, riparian habitat, and watersheds.

The Sugar Creek Nature Park officially opened with a dedication ceremony held on March 23. A parking lot, two large shelters, and a number of small learning stations have been constructed on site. Several businesses and organizations have donated time and service to the project, including Nucor, the Montgomery County Community Foundation, Indiana American Water, Vectren, CELP, the League of Women Voters, Crawfordsville School Corporation, Crawfordsville Parks & Recreation, and the Stormwater Utility.



The Nature Park features several learning stations for use by school groups

Mark Your Calendar:

- June 1 — June Board Meeting
- June 5 — Family Float Trip
- June 12 — Canoe Race
- July 6 — July Board Meeting
- July 10 — Wabash Riverfest
- July 15-22 — 4H Fair

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June 5: Family Friendly Float Trip

Friends of Sugar Creek is partnering with the NICHES Land Trust for a family friendly float trip on Saturday, June 5. We'll float from the Rock River Ridge/Sugar Creek Trail access in Crawfordsville to Jim Davis Bridge, stopping at the Bachner Nature Reserve for lunch.

Participants are welcome to bring their own watercraft or rent a canoe from Clements. We will pay for the first 15 rented canoes, so reserve your place now before the free ones are given away. Reservations can be made with Matt Williams (765-376-5213 or jodale1@gmail.com).

Our goal is to be on the water by 10 am. We ask that all participants arrive at Jim Davis by 9:30 so that you can leave your cars there and shuttle back to Crawfordsville

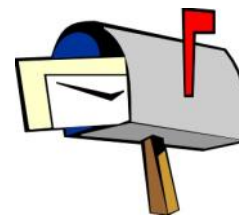
in time for the start. Clements will not help with the shuttle, so please make transportation arrangements if you bring your own boat.



proper equipment for the day (hat, sunscreen, water, snacks, etc.). We will NOT be providing lunch, so bring something to eat during the break. There is no rain date for this event--cross your fingers for good weather!

We'll give a short safety talk and paddling demo immediately before the launch. The route we are taking is approximately 8 miles long and will take 4-5 hours, depending on stops for lunch and other breaks.

All children under the age of 16 must have adult supervision. Please dress appropriately and bring



Share your favorite Sugar Creek stories, photos, and artwork with us! Send submissions to our PO Box or to: nathan@friendsofsugarcreek.org

From the Watershed Coordinator

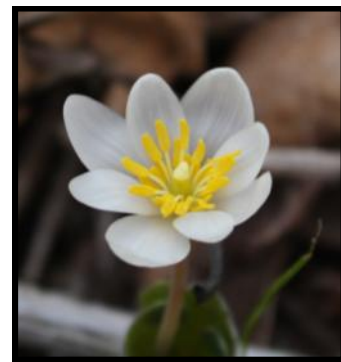
By Nathan Mullendore

Spring is here! The Sugar Creek Valley is a great place to observe the seasonal transition, with wildflowers emerging from the forest floor and migratory songbirds passing through the skies above. My April hikes were marked by seas of blue bells, bloodroots, and the occasional prairie trillium.

The Sugar Creek Nature Park is an especially good place to watch the plant progression since its proximity allows for convenient repeat visits. I encourage you to walk through the Park before the summer greens reclaim the riparian forest.

I hope you will join us on Saturday, June 5, for our annual Family Friendly Float Trip. We will cover a completely different stretch of the creek than we did last year, stopping for lunch at the Bachner Nature Reserve along the way. This is a great opportunity to introduce a friend or family member to the creek. Call or email Matt Williams to make your reservation. He can be reached at 765-376-5213 or jodale1@gmail.com.

Thank you for your continued supported of our organization. I'll see you on the Creek soon!



My April hikes were marked by **bloodroots**, seas of blue bells, and the occasional prairie trillium

2009: A Year in Review

2009 was a banner year for the Friends of Sugar Creek. We want to thank all of our members, sponsors and partners for their efforts to accomplish the following:

- 4 Sugar Creek clean-ups that removed more than 2,000 total pounds of trash
- Dedication of the Bachner Nature Reserve and Sugar Creek Public Fishing Area
- 200 volunteers organized to plant 5,400 trees at the BNR
- Successful Family Friendly Float Trip (43 Participants)
- Development of the Sugar Creek Nature Park, including construction of two large shelters
- Outreach booths at 5 community events
- Presentations to Wabash College and the League of Women Voters
- Co-sponsorship of the Sugar Creek Public Listening Sessions
- Evan Watson FSC Benefit Concert
- Sugar Creek advocacy, including letters to IDEM and state representatives



FSC conducted 4 Sugar Creek clean-ups in 2009, removing more than 2,000 pounds of trash

“Sugar Creek gave me the gifts of patience, grace, and serenity. I hope I can give a little something back.”

Read more from singer-songwriter Evan Watson on page 5

Darter Dispatch



Major Logjam Near Jackson Bridge

• Canoeists looking to float to or beyond the Jackson Covered Bridge should be prepared to portage around several logjams in the last bend before the bridge. Sugar Creek deviated from its traditional path last year, shifting its entire flow to a new, narrower channel. This change has caused several trees to fall into and above the water, completely spanning the creek in several places. Look for notices at the access sites upstream and for warning flags along the banks before the logjam. Jackson Covered Bridge is downstream from Turkey Run State Park, marking the second to last crossing before Sugar Creek joins the Wabash River.

FSC at Wabash Riverfest

• The Friends of Sugar Creek will have a booth at this year's Wabash Riverfest, which will be hold on Saturday, July 10, at Tapawingo Park in West Lafayette. The event starts at 10 AM and features a 5k run/walk, opening parade, canoe races, and booths from a number of water-related organizations. We invite you to visit with us and take advantage of the many opportunities for fun and education. Bring the kids! More information is available at <http://www.wabashriverfest.com>.



Crawfordsville Stormwater Dept. Looks for Illegal Drainage Pipes

With the exception of ambitious school kids, few people ever make their way to the small ditches and streams that drain the greater Crawfordsville area. Their remoteness makes these areas, such as Dry Branch Creek, prime for adventure—and prone to abuse.

While rerouting a drainage pipe or septic finger directly into a ditch may seem like a convenient solution to a home or business owners, doing so threatens water and habitat quality in our community. Crawfordsville's illicit discharge ordinance explicitly forbids most of this activity but has rarely been enforced.

This task is one of many assigned to the city's new stormwater utility department. The six-dollar monthly stormwater fee paid by city residents will allow Gary Weliver, the head of Crawfordsville's stormwater utility, to locate and identify all outfalls found within the city limits. Any waterway two feet or wider is subject to inspection, with special attention given to pipes measuring twelve inches or greater in diameter.

These efforts are required by the federally mandated Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System program (MS4). Nationwide, cities of a certain size are required to meet six Minimum Control

Measures related to water quality or face fines reaching \$10,000 a day for non-compliance. "Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination" is one of those measures.

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Starting in April, Weliver will don waders and navigate dozens of miles of Crawfordsville streams. Each pipe he encounters will be entered into a GPS database and tracked to its source if needed. Weliver will keep an eye—and nose—out for any signs of trouble, such as oil slicks, foamy discharge, or chemical odor. This process will also help identify previously unreported breakdowns in the city water system.

The timing is perfect for the project. Spring conditions mean water will be flowing through the pipes and streams. The absence of leaves on



plants and trees will facilitate identification and tracking of drainage systems.

Weliver has one additional condition in mind: the threat of a state audit. Crawfordsville's fledgling program was given its initial review in 2009 and will face harsher evaluations in the future.

The illicit discharge elimination system has the potential to significantly improve water quality in Sugar Creek. As Chris Kaufman, an environmental consultant hired by the city, says, "We're not just sending out bills and collecting money because we want to. We have things to do."

Water Words: Dissolved Oxygen

DO is the amount of oxygen dissolved in water. This water component is critical to the survival of aquatic life—low DO levels can kill organisms or force them to relocate. The ability of water to hold oxygen in solution is inversely proportional to the temperature of the water, with cold water holding more oxygen. DO also increases when air and water mix in rapids and riffles.

Sugar Creek Canoe Race to Run June 12

Paddlers looking for an opportunity to test their mettle on local waters will get their chance on June 12 during the annual Sugar Creek Canoe Race.

This year's event will take place the same weekend as Crawfordsville's Strawberry Festival, a combination that will hopefully bring additional competitors for the event.

Only one race will be held this year: a 12-mile jaunt from the Rock River Trailhead to Deers Mill Covered Bridge. United States Canoe Association racers and casual recreationalists alike can float during this time slot. The race will start at 1:30 PM with registration ending at 1:00.

Paddlers can bring their own craft or rent a canoe from Clements. The Crawfordsville Parks & Recreation Department will help with a shuttle.

Race officials have final say on classes in which boats will run. All boats must carry one life jacket per person and one whistle per boat. All youth will wear life jackets. If water conditions so warrant, all adults will also wear life jackets. All participants must sign an insurance waiver and all youth must have a parent consent form signed.

The registration fee is \$20 for adults and \$5 for youth 17 and under. Bob Stwalley is organizing the race. He can be reached at 765-362-3875 with questions or registration information.

USCA divisions included are: C-1 men; C-2 men; C-2 mixed; C-2 women; C-2 aluminum; K1 Downriver men; K-1 Downriver women; K-1 Open men; K-1 Open women; K-1 Sea Kayak men; K-1 Sea Kayak women.



This year's Sugar Creek Canoe Race will take place on Saturday, June 12

Central Indiana Land Trust Adds Easements in Sugar Creek Watershed

The Central Indiana Land Trust (CILTI) has added two conservation easements in the Sugar Creek watershed. These agreements will permanently protect ecologically important headwater areas of the creek.

BRUSH CREEK CONSERVATION EASEMENT

The Brush Creek Easement is comprised of 107 acres in Boone County near Thorntown. Jane Taylor, the owner, “has always wanted her land to become a nature sanctuary,” says the land trust. CILTI will help retire the property’s farm fields, returning them to native forest.

LOUGH RIDGE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

The Lough Ridge Easement, owned by Bill and Lynn Herrick, covers 123 acres of working forest in Parke County. It is named after a pioneer cemetery on the property that dates back to 1845. The land is

located between Shades and Turkey Run and includes part of the Keller Branch, a tributary to Sugar Creek. An American badger, which is an endangered species in Indiana, has been sighted on the property.

The Central Indiana Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that seeks to permanently protect land through outright purchase or by conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that prevents development by restricting certain types of land use. Properties with easements are retained in private ownership and usually not open to the public.

In addition to these easements, CILTI manages the Mossy Point Nature Preserve, a 191-acre old growth forest located on 3/4 of a mile of Sugar Creek frontage in Parke County.



Central Indiana Land Trust

The Lough Ridge Conservation Easement permanently protects 123 acres of forest along a Sugar Creek tributary in Parke County



Donating to Friends of Sugar Creek is easy! Simply click on the “Donate” button located on our website (www.friendsofsugarcreek.org). FSC is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible.

Creek Happenings

LOCAL GROUPS JOIN FORCES FOR CONSERVATION

For the second straight summer, Friends of Sugar Creek joined forces with other conservation-minded organizations to share tent space at the 2009 Montgomery County 4H Fair. The other groups included Pheasants Forever, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Purdue Extension.

Friends of Sugar Creek used the opportunity to talk with area residents about Sugar Creek and related environmental concerns. We also raffled off a canoe. See below for this year’s lucky winner!



Linden’s Brice Murphy won the FSC canoe raffle at the 2009 Montgomery County 4H Fair. Congratulations Brice!

RIVER OTTERS MAKE SUGAR CREEK RETURN

By most accounts, river otters have been absent from the Sugar Creek area for more than 50 years. A trapper’s recent capture of a live otter in a Montgomery County ditch likely indicates that they have made a return to the area.



© photoXpress

“I would definitely say there is a small population (of river otters) along Sugar Creek somewhere. It is also possible that people have seen them and not reported them. It’s not required (to report a sighting),” says Indiana Conservation Officer Blaine Gillan.

The last Montgomery County otter was seen in 1940. Overtrapping led to their listing as a state endangered species. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources has attempted to revive the population through a 1990 reintroduction into the wild.

If you spot a river otter, please contact the Department of Natural Resources by calling the district office at 765-447-9582. The DNR is tracking reports of dead and live animals.

To Report Illegal Dumping or a Pollution Incident
Call 317-233-7745 (24 hours)
 Call the Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s 24-hour emergency response hotline immediately. Have detailed information ready, including time, date, and location. A small delay could reduce the chances of containing the hazard and make it difficult to trace. After notifying the response team, call Zach Cain, President of Friends of Sugar Creek, at 765-366-6682.

Phosphorous Runoff Threatens Water Quality

From the Indiana Wildlife Federation:

Phosphorus is a naturally-occurring nutrient used by plants. Though plants need phosphorus to grow, they only need a small amount. Most Indiana lawns have more than enough of the nutrient for healthy growth. A simple soil test will analyze the conditions in your yard.

During rain events, excess phosphorus runs off into local streams, waterways, and rivers. Once in the water, this nutrient can promote algal blooms—undesirable surpluses of algae growth—making habitats unsustainable for many organisms.

Blooms cause water quality to decline by blocking sunlight, reducing dissolved oxygen levels, and disrupting food chains. Without proper living conditions, fewer species ultimately survive.

You can help address these problems by using a phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer.

Doing so will help conserve local habitats, support biodiversity, and improve Indiana's water quality.



Phosphorous runoff caused by excessive application can lead to algal blooms like this one documented on Sugar Creek last summer

A 2010 summer research committee will explore options for a phosphorous fertilizer ban in Indiana. The move would most likely allow exemptions for newly-seeded lawns and farmers. Similar statutes have been successfully passed in Minnesota and Wisconsin, as well as in northern Indiana's Steuben County.

For more information about phosphorous fertilizers, visit www.indianawildlife.org. The Indiana Wildlife Federation is also collecting individual pledges to go phosphorous free.

**Make the
pledge today!**
IndianaWildlife.org



Sugar Creek: A Songwriter's Perspective

By Evan Watson

I've tried to write a song about Sugar Creek many times. It always starts out the same way: "Take me down to Sugar Creek (yada yada yada) where the water's sweet... It's where I want to be." I never knew why I couldn't finish it until now. The song doesn't work because of the line "where the water's sweet." I could never truthfully describe the Sugar Creek water as

sweet. Sour, warm, clay-colored, stagnant, murky, rocky, but sweet? Probably not.

Sugar Creek is hardy and resilient; it's full of crawdads and crinoids, northern water snakes and smallmouth bass. Let's face it: "Sugar Creek" sounds like it could be adjacent to Gum Drop Mountain on the Candyland board. I couldn't sleep at night knowing that I wrote a song that facilitated that kind of imagery. It deserves a more appropriate lyric.

But maybe it's inappropriate to speak of Sugar Creek in static terms. Sugar Creek is still alive, right? Its momentum is always forward, its course ever-



The author, holding a smallmouth bass caught in Sugar Creek

changing. No free-moving waterway should be frozen by the Polaroid of nostalgia.

This is illustrated by the uniform disappointment that comes with the beginning of every fishing season. Without fail, I slosh downstream about

100 yards from the Yountsville Bridge armed with a fly rod, expecting to fish the deep pocket or fast channel of the past year only to find that the landscape has completely changed. Aesthetically, it seems the same, but under a fishermen's microscope it couldn't be more different. That's what brings me back to that creek. Its movement, its heart beat, and the smallmouth bass that fight like mako sharks.



Jim Amidon

Watson, a blues musician based in New York City, played a benefit concert for Friends of Sugar Creek in December

I have grown alongside the creek; from a Hose Elementary student collecting fossils on its banks, to a fisherman fighting the strength of its stubborn inhabitants, to a Clements Canoes employee facilitating its passage for many others, and finally a singer/songwriter returning to pay my respects. It's in my blood. Sugar Creek gave me the gifts of patience, grace, and serenity. I hope I can give a little something back.

Editor's note: Watson gave back—in a big way—by performing a benefit concert for Friends of Sugar Creek last December. His efforts helped raise nearly \$1,000.

Friends of Sugar Creek

PO Box 291
Crawfordsville, IN
47933

Return Service Requested



Phone: 765-366-6682
E-mail: info@friendsofsugarcreek.org

Friends of Sugar Creek, Inc. (FSC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit grassroots environmental organization located in west-central Indiana. FSC was founded by a group of concerned citizens in 1987 after a fish kill along Sugar Creek was disregarded by local and state government officials. Since that time the mission of FSC has been to protect, restore, and promote appreciation of Sugar Creek and its watershed.

Board of Directors

Executive Members:

- Zach Cain — President
- Gus Nyberg — Vice President
- Doug Calisch — Treasurer
- Marc Hudson — Secretary

At-Large Members:

- Jim Suren
- Matt Williams
- Paul Vasquez

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“He was a totem of something wild and forgotten, a relic of an untamed past I thought was gone forever. It made me think anew about the long-settled landscape I call home. If this could live here, what else might?”

—Tom Springer, author of *Looking for Hickories, the Forgotten Wildness of the Rural Midwest*



Barry Brown spotted this mature bald eagle near the Jim Davis bridge during a canoe trip last summer.