

Major Changes Ahead - Manners Moving

Rick and Mel Manner started volunteering at Bluff Spring Fen in 1990. Head steward Leon Halloran and Co-steward Doug Taron quickly realized that the Manners had a lot of enthusiasm and encouraged them to get more and more involved. Within a few years, they became co-stewards also. By the late 1990's the Manners were heavily involved in running Friends of the Fen with Leon and Doug. And they have continued to take on more and more leadership tasks as the years have gone by. Now, however, Rick has a great job opportunity. Big drawback for the Fen - the job is in Urbana, Illinois. So this means both Rick and Mel are in the middle of moving downstate as you read this newsletter. This also means that Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen is undergoing a major organizational shift.

Last year Kevin Collins became the 5th co-steward at Bluff Spring Fen. As of April 16th, Dave Hodge has now become the 6th co-steward. You may recognize his name, as he is the owner of Turning Leaf Conservation, and has worked with us at the Fen for many years. In fact, his company was the one we hired to do the cattail work in the high quality areas of the preserve.

Kevin will be taking on more workday leadership tasks, and Dave is taking on a lot of the tasks Mel and Rick did at home. His wife, Heather, is a lawyer, and is taking on the incorporation paperwork and annual filings. Their house will now become the legal office for the business. Dave is now acting as the main contact for Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen. He has assumed control of the email address bluffspringfen@gmail.com and is already getting to know the staff at the Forest Preserve District, so that he can act as our liaison. Of course, Leon and Doug are continuing as head steward and co-steward and will be helping both Dave and Kevin adjust to being co-stewards themselves. Rick and Mel will continue on as co-stewards during the transition, but will eventually reduce their involvement to occasional workdays on weekend visits from downstate.

We will miss the Manners quite a bit. They have been caring stewards of the Fen for more than 20 years. In a group as small as ours, we are all close friends, so while we are happy for Rick and wish him all the best with his new job, we are also sorry to see them go.

New Address

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen
PO Box 5161
Elgin IL 60121-5161

Same Email, Website, and Phone Number

bluffspringfen@gmail.com
www.bluffspringfen.org
847-464-4426

Fen Website Updates Coming

New Fen volunteer Michael Laudone is taking over the Fen website from Mel Manner. She has long intended to "pretty it up" in her words, but has not had the time or the knowledge how to do so. Michael has both. So look for changes to come in the following months. If you have suggestions for things you would like to see on the website, just email us at the Fen address bluffspringfen@gmail.com. We'll pass the requests on to Michael.

Fen Walks and Tours - 2011

We hold walks for the general public from May through September on the third Saturday of the month. That way you will always know when one is coming up. Each walk starts at 10:30 AM. Each walk is lead by an experienced volunteer who will share his or her knowledge of the Fen and its species. Families are more than welcome. What better way to teach children to cherish nature? The walks will last 2 to 2 ½ hours. The trails are intentionally kept as natural as possible, so boots or sturdy shoes, long pants, and bug spray are strongly recommended.

Volunteer workdays are also held on these Saturdays. You are welcome to come at 9 AM for the beginning of the workday to learn about restoration. You can then meet back at the trail head for your tour at 10:30 AM.

We are also happy to schedule tours for groups of 6 or more. We can accommodate most dates, but weekends are always easier for us, as most of our tour leaders work during the week.

For more information about walks or tours, contact Mel Manner at bluffspringfen@sbcglobal.net or 847-464-4426.

All tours start at 10:30 AM.

Orchid Walk - Sat., May 21, 2011
Highlight: Small white lady's slipper orchids
Butterfly Walk - Sat., June 18, 2011
Highlight: Baltimore checkerspots

Prairie Walk - Sat. July 16, 2011
Highlight: Yellow Coneflower, Culver's Root
Liatris Walk - Sat., August 20, 2011
Highlight: Liatris and sunflowers
Aster Walk - Sat., September 17, 2011
Highlight: Asters and goldenrods.

Spring/Summer Workday Schedule and Directions

May 7	May 21	To get to Bluff Spring Fen, take US Highway 20 to the southeast side of Elgin. At the stoplight for Shales Pkwy/Bluff City Blvd, turn south onto Bluff City Blvd. The road will turn immediately to the west. Follow it and look for the main (first) entrance of the Bluff City Cemetery on your left. Enter the cemetery, and follow the curving road to the small parking lot with the split rail fence.
June 4	June 18	
July 2	July 16	
Aug. 6	Aug. 20	
Sept. 3	Sept. 17	
Oct. 1	Oct. 15	

Our workdays are a great way to learn about the plants and restoration, while helping to protect a wonderful site. We provide the knowledge and the tools, but we need your hands to help us get all the work done. Children accompanied by an adult are welcome on all workdays.

Workdays are on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month, unless very severe weather forces us to cancel. **We begin at 9 AM. DRESS FOR THE WEATHER.** Wear durable clothes with boots or old shoes that can get dirty. Bring leather work gloves if you have them. We always have a few extra to share.

April through August is when we concentrate on weed control. We do hand pulling, cutting and controlled herbiciding (by licensed volunteers) of aggressive and invasive species. We also sometimes have seed collecting to do from a few summer species of native plants. Late August through mid-November, is when we do the bulk of seed collecting. At the end of the workdays, we usually go to lunch at a nearby McDonald's.

For more Fen workday information, call Fri at 847-464-4426.

Trout Park Nature Preserve holds similar workdays on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays, to alternate with ours. Trout Park is in the north end of Elgin one block west of Route 25 and one block south of I-90, behind the ballfield. For more info, call site steward Sue Bohne at 847-697-4929.

Fen Bits

Meet Dave Hodge

Our newest co-steward is Dave Hodge (see Major Changes story, front page). Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen first met Dave back in 1999 when he was working as a land steward for The Nature Conservancy of Illinois. One of his assigned sites was Bluff Spring Fen. We all quickly became friends.

Later on, he started his own restoration company, Turning Leaf Conservation, and we started hiring him as one of our contractors for projects too large for the volunteers to handle. (The other company we have often hired is Witness Tree Native Landscapes.) Through his work at the Fen, he has learned many of our habitats, and where the highest quality areas are versus the more degraded areas. As he continues with us now as a co-steward, he will learn more about the individual plant species in those different habitats.

Dave has a thorough background in restoration and understands not only what to do in restoration, but the theories behind what we do. He also has a solid knowledge of both native and non-native plants. The biggest addition he brings to the Fen is his extensive knowledge of herbicides and which can be used safely to remove non-natives, while not harming the nearby natives. He has taught classes on this subject at multiple conferences, including Wild Things in February this year.

For those of you who come to Cookie Day each year, he is also the maker of the Cookie Day Texas chili, a skill we all appreciate.

Welcome, Dave!

New Bridge at the Fen

For those of you who like to enter the Fen at the east trailhead instead of the main west trailhead, you will be happy to see that we have replaced that bridge. It had started to sag rather alarmingly. It is now a very solid bridge, but much taller than we had really intended! Not to worry, we are building steps to go on both sides to make it much easier to get on and off of. Those will be in place in time for our first wildflower walk on May 21st.

Thanks to the Fen volunteers who spent a morning putting in the bridge.

Spring Coming Too Early?

Some news reports last year and this year, talked about the worry that warm weather in early spring means that plants might come up too early for the insects that rely on them. This would be devastating for both of them, as the insects need the plants for food, and the plants need the insects for pollinating. While this is something that could happen with dramatic shifts in climate, we are not seeing that drastic of changes at the Fen. Some plants did bloom a few weeks earlier last spring, and somewhat earlier this spring, but not so much earlier that the insects did not emerge in time to still do their thing.

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen Donation Slip

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen (FBSF) is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Donations will go towards restoration supplies, matching funds for charitable grants for restoration, public outreach materials, and contracts with professional restoration companies for invasive species projects. For more information, contact Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen at bluffspringfen@gmail.com or 847-464-4426.

Please fill out this form and send it and a check made out to "**Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen**" to: Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen, PO Box 5161, Elgin IL 60121-5161.

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Elgin's Green Expo 2011

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen will once again have a display booth at this year's Elgin's Green Expo. The event is on Saturday May 7th, from 9 am to 4 pm, inside the Centre of Elgin at 100 Symphony Way. Parking is on the street or in the Centre of Elgin public parking garage on Symphony Way.

There are well over 100 vendors and display booths covering a large variety of topics dealing with green technology and the environment. We're donating a free guided tour of the Fen to the huge gift basket that is being raffled off, so make sure to enter. The Expo was wildly popular last year, and promises to be even bigger this year. If you have some free time on Saturday, make sure to stop by. You won't regret it.

Elgin Climate Change Organization (ECCO) is once again partnering with the Elgin Heritage Commission and Elgin's Sustainability Master Planning Committees to produce this event.

Looking for Spring Wildflowers?

Come to our spring wildflower walk on May 21st. We are hoping some of the small white lady's slipper orchids will be in bloom, but they bloom for a very short time, so we can't guarantee it. What we can guarantee are hoary puccoons. Their bright orange-yellow flowers will definitely be out. We'll also find other spring bloomers along the way.

Can't come to our walk? Our sister site, Trout Park Nature Preserve, just west of Rt. 25 on Trout Park Blvd., has a fantastic show each spring of woodland and fen spring ephemeral wildflowers. These species put on their best show now before the trees leaf out fully and shade the ground. You can see trout lily, red trillium, bloodroot, may apple, marsh marigold, bellwort, Dutchman's britches and many others.

Trout Park is also a designated Illinois Nature Preserve, just like Bluff Spring Fen, so please observe the same rules. Stay on the marked trails, don't pluck any blooms, no matter how tempting, and please leave your dogs at home. They are not allowed on nature preserves on or off leash. These rules seem overly harsh to some, but they help us protect our flowers and the animals that rely on them to survive.

The Fenship Newsletter

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Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen

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