

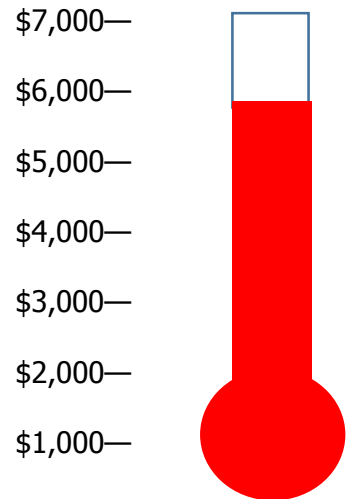
Inching Ever Closer...

In the July, 2016, issue of Bluffviews, we reported that Clifftop had, once again, been awarded an Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Stewardship Challenge Grant. We are SO grateful to those who already have contributed to this challenge, and we ask our members and supporters to help us meet – and even more than meet – the match needed by the end of this year.

As we went to press, we've had 41 cash donations totaling \$5,943, which represents 85% of our goal for this project, as can be seen in the graph, at right. To recap, the grant consists of 3 components:

- 1. Cash Donations:** \$3 for every \$1 of actual cash contributed toward stewardship work at the Wightman Nature Preserve, up to \$21,000.
- 2. Equipment:** 80% of the amount paid for stewardship equipment to be used to improve natural habitat at Wightman NP, up to a maximum of \$5,000.
- 3. Volunteer Labor:** An outright gift of \$4,000 for a minimum of 400 hours of volunteer work completed at Wightman NP within one year.

On the volunteer labor front, we may have surpassed the 400 hour minimum requirement to receive the \$4,000 outright gift by the time we go to press.



Here are some interesting facts about the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, as reported on their website: The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation was established in December 1999 as an independent foundation with a \$225 million endowment provided by Commonwealth Edison.

Their mission is to improve energy efficiency, advance the development and use of renewable energy resources, and protect natural areas and wildlife habitat in communities all across Illinois.

Over the past sixteen years, the Foundation has provided financial support for clean energy investments in Illinois through a variety of programs. To date, they have awarded over 5,000 grants providing \$258 million to Illinois nonprofit organizations, schools, municipalities and other local and state government agencies. The grants support activities in every one of Illinois' 102 counties. ICECF provided substantial support to the purchase of White Rock and provided a grant of \$1,915,050 for Clifftop's purchase of and initial restoration efforts for the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve.

THANK YOU to those who have already contributed their time and/or money toward our efforts to meet this new ICECF Challenge Grant award to Clifftop. If you would like to do the same, please complete the form on page 10 and send a check, made payable to Clifftop, to the address on the form.

Getting Your Hands Dirty: How to Be a Conservationist and a College Student

By Alex Bell

On the first day of my new job last summer, my foreman joyfully handed me a chainsaw. He told me that the machine's name was Christina and that she would be my responsibility until the end of the season. Up until that point I had never even held a chainsaw, much less operated one, but I was there to fulfill one of my childhood dreams: to work at Philmont. This fully functioning cattle ranch is the largest youth camp in the world and comprises over 214 square miles of mountainous New Mexican backcountry. It is owned by the Boy Scouts of America and is one of four high adventure camps scattered around the United States. During their stay, scouts carry everything they need to survive on their backs during a 2-3 week camping program. I went there twice as a teenager and fell in love with the snow-capped mountains, ponderosa pine forests, and seemingly endless miles of gorgeous, rocky terrain. From those two trips, I knew that I had to return, so I applied to work there the first opportunity I could.



Mount Baldy in the distance. Photo courtesy Alex Bell

Given that I am a Zoology major specializing in Wildlife Biology, I was placed in the Forestry Work Crew under the supervision of the Philmont Conservation Department. Our team was made up of 8 people from across the country. We were tasked with seeking out and destroying problem trees in an 80 acre area surrounding a heavily trafficked campsite. The overall goal of the project was to implement forest thinning as a means to reduce water loss through transpiration, mitigate the risk of catastrophic crown fire, increase nutrient availability in the soil, decrease the risk of botanical disease, and allow light into the understory to encourage the growth of native plants. These functions would normally be accomplished by the forest if left to itself, but due to extensive clear cutting of the area in the 1900's and a subsequent regimen of fire suppression, the landscape was left an unhealthy mess. What once was a collection of grassy glades interspersed with centuries old Ponderosa Pines is now made up of

overcrowded stands of Rocky Mountain Junipers and ailing conifers. Last summer saw the implementation of Philmont's first ever Forestry crew in response to the ongoing effects of the Ponil Complex Fire, which burned about 28,000 acres of Philmont property in the summer of 2002.

Under the supervision of my foreman I learned tree identification, felling and bucking techniques, and chainsaw maintenance. Our small group of 8 workers was able to restore all 80 acres in about 3 months. This was an amazing opportunity to grow professionally and allowed me to broaden my knowledge of conservation. For this reason, I was delighted to receive the opportunity to help with a private landowner's prairie/glade restoration project this winter. In addition to my coursework, I am currently volunteering in a GIS lab digitizing wetland survey data for Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. Simply put, for those of us who want to work for the good of the environment, chances abound if you are willing to get your hands dirty.

Editor's note: Alex is from Columbia and attended one of the first Clifftop presentations I did as the newly minted Membership Chair. He is pictured, right, on top of Mount Baldy at Philmont in New Mexico this past Summer. Alex is 19, and as he mentioned, is currently studying Zoology with a Wildlife Biology specialization at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, and is minoring in Chemistry. Let's hope his article encourages other young people to get their hands dirty!



Birds of White Rock

By Carl and Pen DauBach

The White Rock complex, consisting of the 305-acre Nature Preserve and 170-acre Land & Water Reserve, provides tremendous habitats for bird life. The complex is nestled into almost 3,000 acres of relatively un-fragmented, rugged, upland forest, with steep ridgetops, deep, moist ravines, and a lovely, multi-tributary spring-fed creek system. The complex is adjacent to the Mississippi River floodplain and part and parcel of the Mississippi flyway.

Since 2011, concerted, regular birding visits to White Rock have recorded 150 species of resident and migratory avifauna at the complex. Raptors are aplenty with breeding Turkey and Black Vultures; year-round Bald Eagles and Cooper's, Red-shouldered, and Red-tailed Hawks and summer breeding Broad-winged Hawks; and migratory Osprey, Mississippi Kites, Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and, very rarely, Rough-legged Hawks. Resident Kestrels and seasonal Peregrines are present. White Rock's hill prairies offer stunning look-down vantage points for raptor viewing.

Both occasional Bobwhite and large numbers of resident Turkeys can be found. Unexpected overhead views or even sightings of birds following tractors churning up bug-bites can include transient Ring-billed, Herring and Bonaparte's Gulls (and occasional overhead geese and ducks, too). Resident Mourning and Eurasian-collared Doves coo it up with summertime Yellow- and Black-billed Cuckoos. Year-round Screech, Great Horned and Barred Owls inhabit the forests, and an occasional Barn or wintertime Short-eared Owl can be observed skimming the floodplain near the parking area. We continue to listen for visiting migrant Saw-whet Owls, but haven't yet documented their "toot-toot-toot" calls; we also haven't had the good fortune of surprising a roosting group of migratory Long-eared Owls, but know that the variety of available habitats at White Rock may yet provide a sighting.



Mourning Dove. Photo courtesy Mike Fricke



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird nectaring on jewelweed.
Photo courtesy Mike Fricke.

Common Nighthawks and Chimney Swifts are present during their breeding season and, even as populations of all "whips" continue to decline, the distinct calls of Whip-poor-wills still can be heard at White Rock. Ruby-throated Hummers are present and busy among the blooms and trees from early spring to late October. Every southern Illinois resident species of woodpecker (Redheads, Redbellies, Downies, Hairies, Flickers and Pileateds) abound as do Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers during migration and winter. Olive-sided Flycatchers herald spring with their calls for "quick-three-beers!" as they, along with Leasts, Alders and Willows migrate north. Acadian and Great Crested Flycatchers, Eastern Pewees, and Phoebe all find nesting sites at the complex along with Eastern Kingbirds. Each year, we watch as a pair of "our" Phoebe again takes up a nest site at a rock ledge near the former White Mine.

White-eyed, Red-eyed, Warbling, and Yellow-throated Vireos breed at the site and Blue-headed and Philadelphia Vireos pass through

during migrations. The richness of spring migrant species at White Rock has provided us with living audio comparisons – better than tapes or I-pods! – as April and May symphonies delight and teach us the fine points of easily-confused vireo songs distinguishable, according to written descriptions, only as "slower and/or thinner." American Crows, Horned Larks, Tree / Northern Rough-wing / Cliff / and Barn Swallows, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmice, and Red and White-breasted Nuthatch all are regularly observed in their appropriate seasons. Carolina and House Wrens, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Golden and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, are regulars in their seasonal or year-round presences.

Thrush and their relatives on site are impressive, with Veery, Gray-cheeked, Swainson's, Hermit, and Wood Thrush, Robins and Eastern Bluebirds recorded. Mimics, too, are present: Gray Catbirds, Mockingbirds, and Brown Thrashers. European Starlings and Cedar Waxwings can be found.

But if White Rock boasts any feathery claim to fame, the complex is simply a migratory and breeding-site magnet for neo-tropical wood warblers. Thirty species have been repeatedly observed thus far. The warbler list includes: Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Northern Parula, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Yellow-throated, Pine, Palm, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Cerulean, Black-and-White, American Redstart, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky, Mourning, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded, Canada, and Yellow-breasted Chat.



Male Eastern Bluebird. Photo courtesy Joann Fricke

and bits of thick shrubbery, make themselves known with their own very similar sounding song of "churry-churry-churry." And, along forks of the creeks, Louisiana Warblers stake out territories for nesting with their flute-like songs and tail-bobbing walks. On some mornings it seems that every other tall sycamore tree hosts a Yellow-throated Warbler singing their clear descending-note songs, while a Yellow Warbler sings its tune of self-proclaimed "sweet, sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet" from the next perch. American Redstarts sing along the creek beds and sometimes show off wing and tail patches of bright orange on males and paler yellow on females. Hiking up to the dryer hillsides brings the reward of hearing Worm-eating Warblers singing their sharp notes that remind us of Chipping Sparrows. Deep in the woods, Black-and-White Warblers whisper sing as they creep along tree trunks, but in more open areas and near glades, Blue-winged Warblers buzz their songs early in spring.



Northern Mockingbird. Photo courtesy Paul Feldker

Several of these species breed at White Rock, testament to the importance of the large and largely un-fragmented forested block of the area. Multiple pairs of the state-listed Cerulean Warbler nest at White Rock. These birds -- the male bird a tiny gem of brilliant blue on white, the female a paler almost greenish-blue -- have suffered population declines over much of their range as their specific habitat requirements of large, undisturbed blocks of mature forest have dwindled. White Rock and the lands that surround it give hope for habitat continuity and survival of this species.

A spring walk listening for breeding warblers at White Rock brings immediate results even before we leave the parking area, as Common Yellowthroats sing from field borders and the creek edge. Each spring begins with the annual memory toggling to distinguish between Cerulean and Northern Parula Warbler songs. We've spotted the curious domed nests of Ovenbirds that, indeed, look like the Dutch oven cookware that gives them their name and heard them calling ever-more insistently to "teacher, **teacher**, **TEACHER.**" Kentucky warblers, hiding in various tangles



Male Indigo Bunting. Photo courtesy Paul Feldker



Baltimore Oriole. Photo courtesy Paul Feldker

Warbler songs, however, make up only a small portion of the burgeoning of springtime at White Rock and, indeed, the sheer number of songs and singers can create an almost rapturous auditory overload.

Both Scarlet and Summer Tanagers breed at White Rock. Northern Cardinals are ever present and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting and Dickcissel are summer residents.

Sparrows and their allies also are at home at White Rock. Eastern Towhee are present yearlong. A Western cousin species is a near second claim to fame for White Rock. Last year, an accidental Green-tailed Towhee overwintered on neighboring property near White Rock. Yearlong resident, migratory, or seasonal sparrows include: American Tree, Chipping, Field, Fox, Song, Lincoln's, Swamp, White-throated, White-crowned, and Dark-eyed Junco. A pair of Clay-colored sparrows

has been observed once.

Icterids observed include: Red-wing Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird and Baltimore and Orchard Orioles. Purple and House Finch, Pine Siskin and American Goldfinch are on site; and of course, there are old world House Sparrows.

We maintain bird observation inventories for White Rock and Wightman Nature Preserve. Bio-diversity survey data is an important tool for stewardship management decision making and bolstering grant applications. We encourage your "citizen science" help in adding your observations to the database. Currently, White Rock bird inventory data can be found on www.e-bird.org. Click on "Explore Data," then "Illinois," then "Monroe." White Rock is listed as a county "Hot Spot." We will post Wightman bird data to the web site when the Nature Preserve is opened for passive pubic recreation.

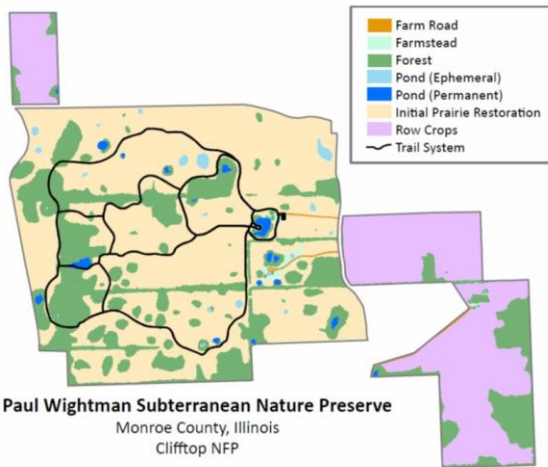


Monarch on coneflower. Photo courtesy Pen DauBach

On September 23, the Illinois Environmental Council announced the opportunity to obtain a monarch license plate decal which will help fund the planting of milkweed roadside habitat in Illinois. State Senator Melinda Bush and State Representative Elizabeth "Lisa" Hernandez championed HB6182, which created a license plate decal to support planting Monarch Roadside Habitat. Before the program can take effect, 2000 people must sign up for the plates. You'll need to download and print an application, write a check for \$10, and send the package in to the Secretary of State's office to get on the list. Follow the easy instructions at ilenviro.org/monarch

Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve (PWSNP) Update

As eager as we are to get the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve opened for public passive recreation and see it, like White Rock, Fults, and Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserves and Salt Lick Point Land & Water Reserve, become a natural destination for area residents and visitors, waiting is worthwhile.



Clifftop NFP has been awarded a major grant to support construction of visitor facilities and accessible trails at the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve in Monroe County. We wrote the grant proposal in February 2015, but had to patiently wait to learn that we have been awarded a Recreational Trails Program grant of nearly \$185,000 that will cover 80% of the entire \$230,000 infrastructure costs. The Recreational Trails Program grant is administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Department of Transportation, and is funded through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration. The grant program was established in 1991, and is funded through the Federal Highway Trust Fund using motor fuel excise tax money from non-highway recreational fuel use (snowmobiles, ATVs, dirt bikes & off-highway trucks). The grant program is based on a "user

-pay / user-benefit" system that shares benefits with all users of recreational trails. In Illinois, Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grants have funded many projects, including hiking, snowmobile, bike and equestrian trails. To the best of our knowledge, RTP funds were used only once before in Monroe County, with a \$10,000 grant to IDNR in 1973 to build the staircase at Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve and this award to Clifftop is the first time a nonprofit organization will use RTP funding in Southwestern Illinois.

While we waited during the past 18 months, we've mowed our trail areas to sculpt in just the right visitor experiences and views of our oak-hickory / prairie savannah restoration. Clifftop volunteers put in trails through wooded areas, with plenty of chopping, cutting and sweat. As time allowed, volunteers also cleared bush honeysuckle along the future woodland trail areas.

We're in the final fundraising push to meet our match requirements for the RTP grant and are gratified that we now have nearly 90% of all funds needed for this major infrastructure project.

As our lead article notes, we have also received a second Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF) Stewardship Challenge grant. Our first ICECF Challenge Grant –successfully met and even over-matched by Clifftop members and supporters -- was awarded for work at White Rock Nature Preserve. This second Challenge covers work to be done at the PWSNP. This funding is largely dedicated to enhancing our oak-hickory / savannah prairie restoration efforts with the purchase and planting of native trees and shrubs along forest edge areas. Our thinking, backed up by conservation efforts and experiences elsewhere, is that native trees and shrubs will better nourish wildlife and, even, compete with and help prevent the establishment and spread of non-native invasive plants.

Right now, of course, our edge areas are choked with bush and Japanese honeysuckle. We're working with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Private Lands Program for a cost-share program that will enable us to supplement our volunteers' efforts and "get-gone" with the invasives so that we can replace them with wildlife-friendly native good stuff.

So, while we've waited and, in fact, have to continue to wait a bit longer before breaking ground for public engagement infrastructure at PWSNP, we're productively planning and working for an ever-improving restored habitat that helps wildlife and people thrive.



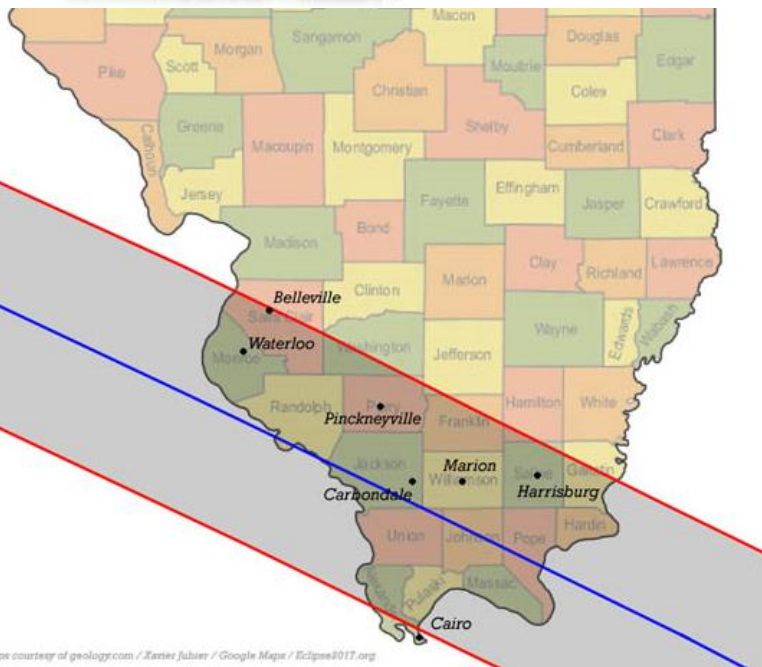
Example of the mowed trail areas. Photo courtesy Joann Fricke

Upcoming events...

Saturday, October 29, 2016, Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve--Monroe County YMCA Illinois Ozarks 10K Bluff Trail Run, start time 9:30 a.m. Challenge yourself to an exhilarating run up the bluffs, twice! Enjoy the beautiful Autumn scenery as you traverse parts of all three trails at the reserve. For more information or to register, please visit: <http://www.active.com/valmeyer-il/running/trail-run-races/monroe-county-ymca-illinois-ozarks-10k-bluff-trail-run-2016?int>



Saturday, November 5, 2016, Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve, 2200 Stemler Road, Millstadt, IL—Friends of Stemler Cave Woods Honeysuckle Work Day, 10 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Help the Friends clear invasive bush honeysuckle from the northwest part of the main hiking trail. Park at the trail head and hike to the "Fire and the Landscape" interpretive sign or meet at the Weck's home (2016 Stemler Road, Columbia IL 62236) and hike in with a group. Bring work glove and dress for the weather. Water and snacks provided. Volunteers will be asked to sign an IDNR waiver and volunteer job description form, available at the event.



Southern Illinois is in the path of the first total eclipse of the sun to be viewed from the United States since the 1970s! On Monday, August 21, 2017, parts of southern Illinois will experience the total eclipse and interest in this rare event is already growing. Monroe County is in the extended optimal viewing band across southern Illinois. Clifftop is planning an eclipse viewing event at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature preserve from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm on August 21. Attendance will be limited to 200. Check our website and future newsletters for further details and important safe-viewing tips. And please save this important date! We have arranged for Washington University planetary scientists to be at our event to help explain the eclipse and enhance our viewing with their solar telescopes. We also will have safety viewing eyeglasses for all attendees to use.

For out-of-towners or those traveling further into Southern Illinois, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) announced that campsite reservations are now available at southern Illinois State Parks and the World Shooting and

Recreational Complex for visitors making plans to view the total solar eclipse. Reservations can be made for dates within the window of August 14-27, 2017. More than 1,600 campsites are available to be reserved in advance on a first-come, first-served basis. IDNR sites normally can be reserved no more than six months in advance. The new reservation window has been created for portions of southern Illinois. To reserve a campsite, visit www.ReserveAmerica.com.

To view a map of IDNR camping areas within the solar eclipse path, click on this link: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/recreation/Pages/PathwParksClickable.html> Clicking on a site dot will bring up information about camping and recreational opportunities at each site.

SAVE THE DATE to join Clifftop and Washington University solar specialists for eclipse watching at our Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve!!!! MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 2017, 11:00 A.M. TO 3:00 P.M.

SEMO students study aquatic entomology at PWSNP

Photos and captions courtesy Pen DauBach



Ready to go on the first day of collecting, September 10, SEMO students & faculty for Aquatic Entomology.



Rebecca Bryant and Alyssa Trewatha take a look at a pond sample.



University administrator Allen Gathman works with Hansani Pathmakumara for an in-the-field analysis of a pond sample.



Brooke Grubb, Tristan Farrell, and Zackery Kuehn finish up a long day of sampling and specimen collecting.



At left, Diane Wood discusses sample identification clues with Abigail Hancock and Alyssa Trewatha.

The results of this study will be presented at a seminar from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 7, 2017, at the Monroe County Annex.

Members' Day October 15, 2016 Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve

Photos courtesy Mike Fricke



One of our landowner neighbors and member, Earl Reichert, has just perused the snack tables.



Therese & Wayne Johanning, board member Susan Rick (partially hidden), Allen Nobbe, Carol Reichert, board executive director, Carl DauBach (partially hidden) and Bill Suess.



Bill & Linda Suess admire the prairie plantings on the wagon ride.



Members of the Wightman family, relatives of Father Paul, for whom the Preserve is named.



Board member Bob Weck and board vice president, Steve Gonzalez (partially hidden), with new members Mona & Doug Delgado.



Earl, Mona, Doug and Steve listen as Carl describes plans for the future public engagement area.



Illinois Clean Energy
community foundation

Yes, I want to help Clifftop with the
Community Stewardship Challenge Grant Project!

Enclosed, please find my donation in the amount of \$_____*. I understand that for every **one dollar** that Clifftop raises for stewardship at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation will contribute **three dollars** in matching funds, up to **\$21,000**. ICECF will also contribute 80% of the amount paid for stewardship equipment to be used to improve natural habitat at PWSNP, up to a maximum of **\$5,000**. In addition, for a minimum of **400 hours** of stewardship documented at PWSNP, ICECF will donate **\$4,000**.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

_____ Sorry, I can't help financially, but I am willing to volunteer for stewardship work. Please contact me.

Send your check payable to Clifftop to:
P. O. Box 131
Maeystown, IL 62256

Please note in the memo line of your check
that this is a donation for the stewardship
challenge grant. THANK YOU!!!

* Clifftop is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization,
incorporated in Illinois. Donations in support of
Clifftop's activities are tax deductible to the extent
allowed by law.

