

Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

April, 2012

Vol. 2, No. 2

Take a Hike

by Joann Fricke

Normally, this time of year, I would just be starting to think about getting out in my flower beds to begin spring cleanup. However, this has not been a "normal" year and I have finished removing all the fallen leaves and dead plant material from my planting beds. Many overnight low temperatures have been what would be the average high for a day in March. Consequently, things have greened up much earlier than usual. When May apples pop up in March, you know temperatures have been above average. Since my spring yard cleaning is done, I have time to take a hike, which is exactly what I want to focus on in this issue of Bluffviews.

Many who live in Monroe, Randolph and St. Clair counties are unaware that the area offers several hiking trails, each unique and beautiful in its own way. Below and on the following pages you will read about Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, White Rock Nature Preserve, Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve and Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve.



May apples in March on Potato Hill photo by Joann Fricke

Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve

by Martin Kemper

Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve is owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. It is located in southwest Monroe County along Bluff Road just a mile southeast of the small village of Fults. The 400+ acre preserve is home to many unusual plants and animals found in few other locations in Illinois and has a beautiful commanding view of the American Bottoms and Missouri bluffs to the west.

Kidd Lake Marsh in the bottoms to the west often has ducks, geese, white pelicans, and a variety of wading birds which can be enjoyed from the blufftop, especially with the aid of a pair of binoculars. Hawks, vultures, and eagles are also commonly seen along the bluff edge or soaring over the bottoms.



Photo by Martin Kemper

The nature preserve has a 1.4 mile loop trail with a trailhead at a small rock parking lot just off of Bluff Road on the bluff side. The trail is quite strenuous as it requires a very steep ascent from the parking lot to the top of the bluffs over 200 feet above. Two hundred and twenty-two steps start the south trail loop. That effort gets one about ½ the distance to the “top.” From there, the trail proceeds further skyward on a dirt path. There are several interesting overviews of the bottomlands in this section. Once at the top, one enters a rare native hill prairie natural community with native grasses and wildflowers in season.

From here, the trail is quite flat as it enters the woods and slowly bends northward and eventually westward before one leaves the woods and descends through a cascade of woodland, open rocky glades with cedars and prairie habitats, arriving at the bottom in the parking lot where the journey began. The trail

can be taken in either direction, using the steps as either the first or last leg of the journey (most people prefer ascending the steps and descending on the dirt path). Estimated walking time is 30-90 minutes, depending on one’s physical abilities and curiosity. Take water. Sturdy shoes and a walking stick may be helpful. There are no developed facilities at this site except for the parking lot and stairs.

The preserve closes at dusk. All trail walkers are required to stay on the trail and not disturb the animals and plants that are found in this special place.



Photo by Martin Kemper

White Rock Nature Preserve

by Pen DauBach and Joann Fricke



Photo by Thomas Rollins, Thomas Rollins Photography

White Rock Nature Preserve is a 306-acre tract, permanently protected by formal dedication with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. This preserve is owned by two local conservation non-profit organizations – Clifftop and Heartlands Conservancy (formerly Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development).

White Rock hosts extremely rare natural habitats. The White Rock tract is located within the Hill Prairie Corridor, a 25-mile stretch of ribbons and patches of hill prairie perched on top of the Mississippi River bluffs, looming above the flood plain. The Preserve holds 7 acres of rare loess hill prairie. White Rock Nature Preserve also is a part of a large, unfragmented, upland forest, one of the largest contiguous blocks of woodlands in the state of Illinois.

Several state-listed threatened or endangered species make their home at or near White Rock, including Woolly Buckthorns, Missouri Coneflowers, Cerulean Warblers, Great Plains Rat Snakes, Eastern Timber Rattle-snakes, Flathead Snakes, Eastern Narrowmouth Toads, Common Striped Scorpions, and the increasingly rare Coachwhip Snakes.

White Rock Nature Preserve contains a 2-mile non-looping trail system (map shown below) through dense and healthy woodlands. The parking area for White Rock is approximately 2 miles south of original Valmeyer on Bluff Road. Harris Road, just south of the parking area, is the nearest intersection. Walk north along Bluff Road to the private roadway and then east on the this roadway until you come to the trailhead. Steadily climb Early Venture Way Trail to Madeline's Rest. Here you will be able to view the now closed entrance to what was the White Mine. Just to the right, as you face the mine opening, are interpretive signs and commemorative stones. In photos and text, the signs tell you a little about the history of the Preserve and the stones pay tribute to those that donated monetarily to Clifftop's Stewardship

Fund and in-kind to the development of White Rock's infrastructure. The White Mine Trail rises rapidly from Madeline's Rest and leads you to North Ridgetop Trail and South Ridgetop Trail, both of which terminate at hill prairie overlooks.

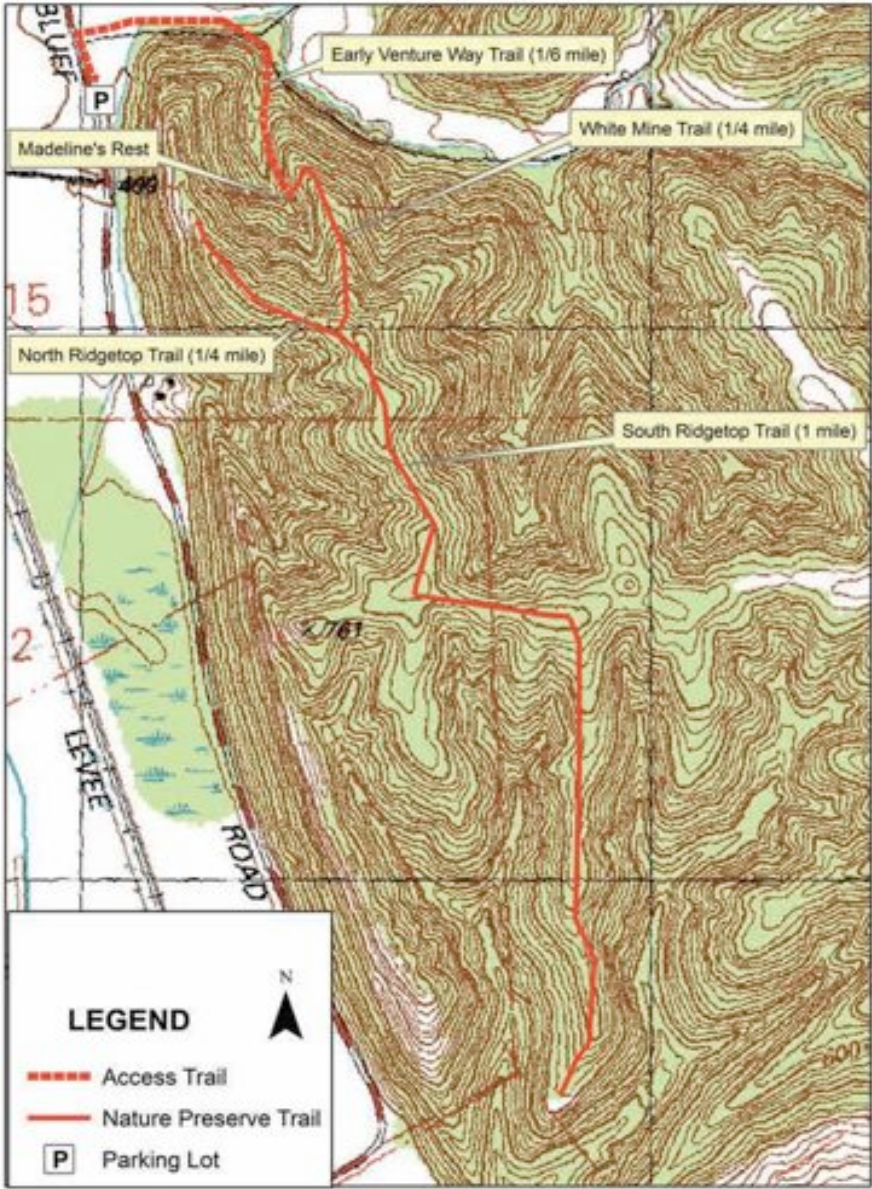


Photo by Thomas Rollins

We ask that you please stay on the trails as hazardous areas may exist on the Preserve and to prevent damage to the fragile hill prairies and glades.



Photo by Thomas Rollins

Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve

By Joann Fricke

Photos by Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee, unless otherwise noted

Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve is a 600+ acre site that is owned by the Village of Valmeyer. It was given approval for permanent protection by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission in February, 2005. It is located in western Monroe County near the Rock City complex off Bluff Road just north of the former Village of Valmeyer. There is a large parking area to the north of Limestone Lane which leads to Rock City.

Three hiking trails have been constructed on the Reserve. They are open every day of the year from dawn until dusk. All trails connect with one another and cover 5 miles in total. The original path, the 1.8

sea level, believed to be the highest spot in Monroe County. Continuing on Salt Lick trail, it will be all down hill from here, descending at Rock City and walking along Limestone Lane until



Photo by Joann Fricke

you see the trail again beside the road. You will end at the kiosk where you began.

Johnson Trail starts at the kiosk at the north end of the parking area. This path is flat and follows



mile **Salt Lick Trail**, begins at the kiosk at the south end of the parking area and quickly heads up the bluffs on a very steep incline. The trail loops past hill prairies and glades and through



centuries-old woodland forests. At the apex, Salt Lick Point, you will find yourself 850+ feet above

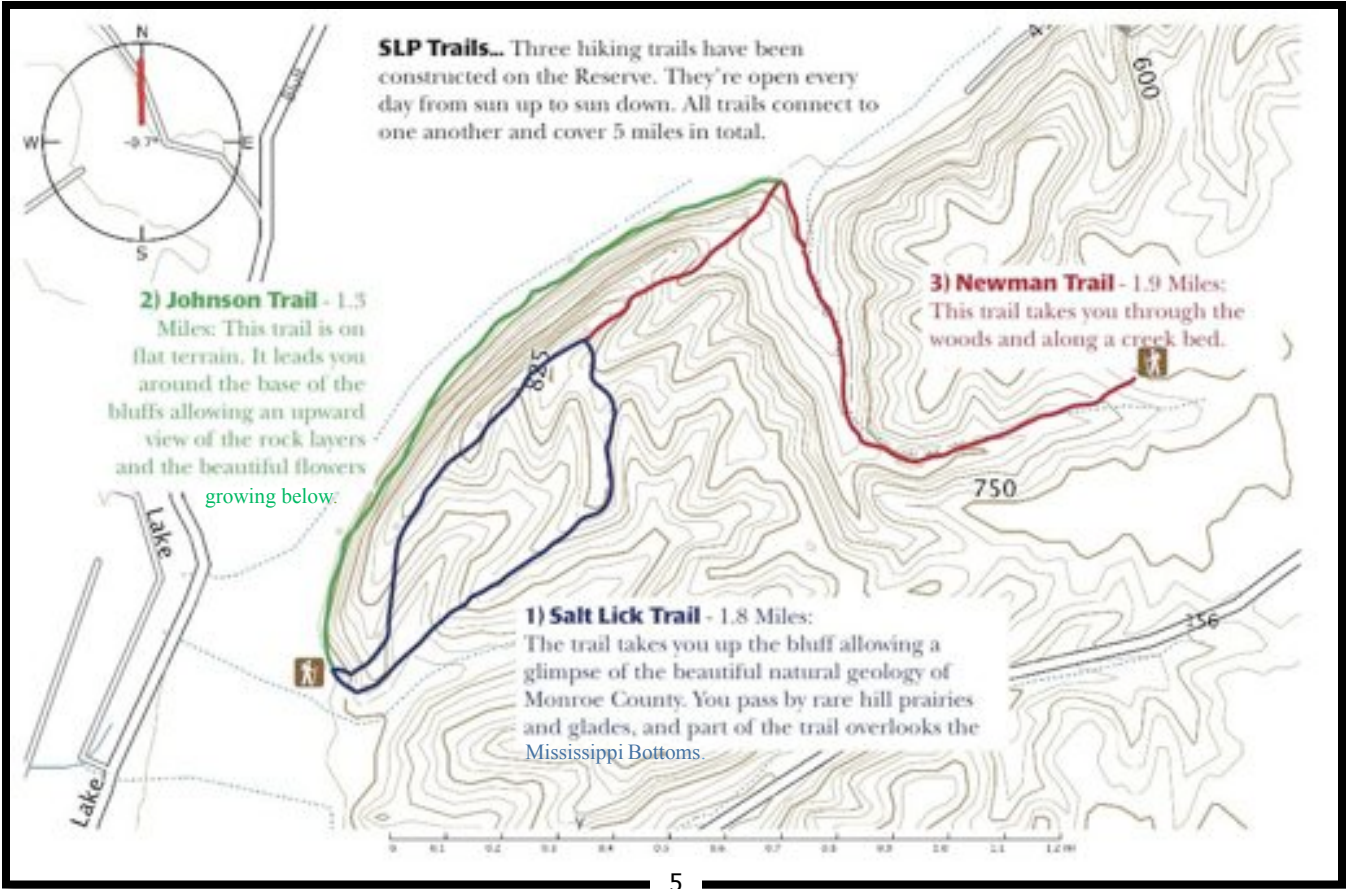
the base of the bluffs, meandering past limestone boulders the size of semi trucks. In the spring the wildflowers that grow in the talus are a spectacular sight to see. (Talus is a sloping mass of rocky fragments at the base of a cliff.) The cool air wafting down from the mine openings is a welcome relief when hiking on a hot day. Much of the trail is rocky, but parts of it can be muddy if there has been significant rain.

When you come to the end of the 1.3 mile Johnson Trail, you have a choice—turn around and hike 1.3 miles back to the parking lot or walk up the Newman Trail to the south to join the Salt Lick Trail. If you choose to take the Newman Trail, be sure to make a sharp right turn and head up hill or you will find yourself in the re-located Village of Valmeyer on top of the bluffs.

The **Newman Trail** begins at the kiosk near St. John United Church of Christ in new Valmeyer. Parking is



available in the church's parking lot. The entire trail is 1.9 miles long. This path rambles through the woods and along a creek bed—crossing the creek several times. When you reach the spot where Newman and Johnson Trails converge, you again have a choice—turn south (left) to continue on Newman Trail or make an about face and return to the kiosk where you began. Just remember, Newman Trail through the woods and creek is the only way back to your starting point. You do not want to end up at the parking area near Rock City because it would be a long walk back to your car.



Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve

Story and photos by Bob and Nancy Weck

Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve is an old growth forest remnant set in the sinkhole plain between Millstadt and Columbia, Illinois. The site is listed on the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory because of the quality of the 120 acre oak-hickory forest. The woods became a dedicated Illinois nature preserve in 1986 and is owned and managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Stemler Cave Woods is the largest Illinois nature preserve in St. Clair County. In addition to the wooded communities, 75 acres of restored prairie in the preserve are in various stages of secondary succession.



There are numerous sinkholes in Stemler Cave Woods that create variations in topography and microclimates. Limestone exposures can be seen at the bottom of several sinkholes. The entire site is within the heart of the Stemler Cave recharge area, though the entrance to Stemler Cave is not located in the preserve. Original survey notes from the early 1800's describe the plant community as a post oak woodland with a grassy understory. While there are still many large post oaks, the composition of the forest today includes many white, black and red oaks. Other more mesic plant species occupy the lower, moister portions of the sinkholes. An invasion of bush honeysuckle currently threatens the integrity of the preserve and visitors will likely see evidence of control efforts.

In 2006 the Homer F. Stemler Memorial Walking Trail was opened in Stemler Cave Woods. The trail



offers over 2 miles of hiking with 12 interpretive points. (See map on following page.) Hiking level is easy to moderate. Visitors are required to stay on the trail. Pets are not permitted in the preserve. Access to the preserve and parking are available on Stemler Road, 0.5 mile west of Triple Lakes Road. Contact Friends of Stemler Cave Woods at caveandwoods@gmail.com for volunteer stewardship opportunities.



Salamander pond at Stemler Cave Woods



Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve



Guest Views...

By Cindy Nicolls

My first memory of hiking in the bluffs above Valmeyer stems from 40 or so years ago. My uncle convinced my grandmother, my sister and me to accompany him on an expedition and, a few hours later as the sun was sinking, informed us we were lost. He knew a "quick" way down, scooting down a steep hill and opted to take that avenue. It wasn't until we were once again pointed in the right direction that he informed us that what we had slid down was a compacted manure pile for the mushroom farm. He is a jokester, and to this day, I don't know what truly composed that hillside.

Thanks to the hard work of many volunteers, Salt Lick Point today has trails to suit a variety of landscape views and degrees of difficulty. Heading up from the kiosk in the parking lot on the Salt Lick Trail takes you up a rather steep single track trail that offers blufftop vistas. When you reach the point where the trails converge, you can take the gentle descent of the Rock City side back to the parking lot or head downhill along the somewhat more steep Newman Trail where you'll find the Scenic Outlook. This outcropping is truly breathtaking and commands gentle treading.

Once you reach the bottom land where the Newman Trail joins the Johnson Trail, your travels can take you further east to the transplanted Village of Valmeyer. This portion of the journey has a completely different look. You will be crossing a creek bed several times while traipsing through territory similar to a canyon or a ravine. My dog and I saw a beautiful fox running up the hillside here just last week.

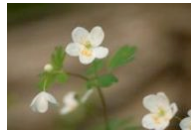


The most gentle section of trail is the Johnson Trail. It is for the most part flat and runs along the base of the bluff from the parking lot to the Newman Trail. There are many large boulders strewn about, ponds teeming with waterlife, and now this area is bursting with color from the wildflowers.

From the blufftop trails, I look down to where my grandparents' homestead was and think back to so many exciting times swimming in their lake, seeing who can row the fastest in a fishing boat and just enjoying being outside. I am sure this land is where my love and respect of Mother Nature were planted and continue to thrive. Thank you to all of the volunteers whose time, sweat and hard work help others to appreciate the sanctity of our earth.



Reminder of upcoming events...



Saturday, April 7, Salt Lick Point Spring Wildflower Walk, 9 a.m. to noon. Reservations not required.

Saturday, April 21, Birding the Bottomlands. Go birding with experts in the morning, attend a birding festival in the afternoon. For more information visit www.midmiss.org and click on the bird icon in the middle of the page.



Saturday, April 28, Herps Program and White Rock Herps Hunt. Hugh Gilbert will conduct a herps seminar at the Monroe County Annex from 10 a.m. to noon. Then, from 1:30 until 4 p.m., Hugh will lead a "Herps Hunt" field trip at White Rock Nature Preserve. Call (618)458-4674 or email clifftop@htc.net for reservations by April 26.

Volunteer of the Year Awards

Story and photos by Pen DauBach

Clifftop IS voluntary! Everything the organization does is done by volunteers. Each year the Board recognizes an individual who has made extra, above-board contributions of labor.

The very first Volunteer of the Year award was to Larry Scace for his work on prescribed burns, brush clearing and restoration efforts at hill prairies and glades, clearing and controlling invasive plant species, and assisting with all facets of Clifftop's land stewardship efforts. Larry was awarded his personalized wildlands fire helmet for volunteering during 2009.

Paul Feldker became Clifftop's 2010 Volunteer of the Year, and was presented with a personalized fire-safety helmet. Paul participated in 8 prescribed burns, numerous hill prairie restoration and honeysuckle control days, as well as assisting with Clifftop's ongoing natural history surveys and Christmas and Spring bird counts. Paul also contributes numerous photographs to the organization. Helping celebrate Paul's achievements are, left to right: Karlene Feldker (along with Bailey the every-helpful dog), Philip Moss, Ralph Buettner, Paul, Carl DauBach, Kay Courtney and Tish Turner, and Mike Fricke (seated).

Philip Moss is the recipient of Clifftop's Volunteer of the Year award for 2011. He's pictured here sporting his award, the highly coveted Clifftop red wildland fire helmet. Moss, a professional geologist and karst and cave expert, donated 143 hours to Clifftop operations in 2011, performing karst surveys, supervising aspects of and working on the habitat transformation of the former White Mine, helping with prairie restorations, and conducting prescribed burns.



Larry



Paul (center)



Philip



Watch for...

Next issue of
Bluffviews:
Member Challenge



Clifftop
Revised and updated
website goes live
mid-April
www.clifftopalliance.org

Wildflower Hike at
White Rock
Saturday, June 2
Info forthcoming



Gator Purchase

By Pen DauBach



Clifftop has purchased a John Deere Gator UTV to help with stewardship work at White Rock Nature Preserve and do conservation work in the blufflands corridor. The purchase was made possible through a gracious community service discount for non-profit organizations from John Deere-William Nobbe Company, money from the Grand Victoria Foundation, Clifftop membership support, and a generous grant from an anonymous charitable foundation. Pictured is Clifftop's Board of Directors, from left to right: Charles Frederick, Dennis Jacobsen, Carl DauBach, Ralph Buettner, Steve Gonzalez, Joann Fricke, Pen DauBach, Jared Nobbe, and George Obernagel. Board member Tom Rollins, not pictured, was the photographer.



Support Your Local Conservation Group

By Joann Fricke



We appreciate every single one of our members, whether you became a member by contributing to the White Rock Stewardship Fund or by filling out our membership form and paying your dues. But did you know there are other ways of supporting Clifftop?

If you would be so inclined, we gladly accept additional donations any time. If you have attended any of our programs you might have noticed our "donation jar". Some of our speakers travel a fair distance to give their presentations. Consequently, we offer them a stipend for their appearance. Your donations at these programs help s-t-r-e-t-c-h our budget.

Some employers offer matching gifts when their employees join or contribute to a non-profit organization. Please include your employer's matching gifts form when joining or making a contribution to Clifftop.

Clifftop is a participant in the Schnucks eScrip program. If you don't already have one, pick up an eScrip card at your local Schnucks and register on line or by calling the toll free number provided. Clifftop's Group ID is 500022680. Enter this number if searching by Group ID or enter Clifftop to search by Group Name, then follow the instructions to register. Clifftop earns various percentages of what you spend monthly at Schnucks. This monthly electronic deposit into Clifftop's bank account could really add up if more people participated. Just make sure to show your eScrip card before the checker finishes scanning your items.

If you are an internet shopper, eScrip offers an Online Shopping Mall that includes many popular sites including Amazon, Office Max, Cabela's and many, many more. Each order placed at a participating site earns a percentage of the value of your order for Clifftop. Please contact Joann Fricke at cliffmbr@htc.net for help registering with eScrip.





Clifftop and Program Funding

By Carl DauBach



Clifftop was founded in January 2006, but didn't establish a formal membership program until January 2011. In a few weeks we will send our membership an Annual Report for our last fiscal year, which ran from 1 March 2011 to 29 February 2012. Clifftop's fiscal year was determined by the IRS when we were approved as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in September 2009. In preparation for the annual report, we thought you might be interested in how we have conducted and funded various programs over the last six years.

From the start Clifftop's Board of Directors saw the importance of public outreach and information-education programs aimed at bluffland protection and stewardship. They determined that such programs should be funded by grants and donations. Since 2006, Clifftop has hosted or co-hosted 26 workshops, seminars and field trips, and 2 festivals, all done with state and foundation grants of nearly \$24,000, supplemented by an additional \$2500 in donations from private persons.

Over the years, we have assembled a modest amount of equipment for use by CLIFFhangers in their stewardship efforts on private and public lands. Most of this equipment is prescribed burn gear – protective flame-retardant NOMEX suits and hand tools – but some equipment, like Clifftop's two-way radios, do double duty, pressed into service for communications during prescribed burns and during major public events, such as festivals, or the YMCA-sponsored trail runs at Salt Lick Point.

Clifftop recently added a major piece of equipment for stewardship work (please see the related story on page 10): a John Deere Gator UTV. This purchase was funded through a variety of sources. The William Nobbe – John Deere Company gave a generous community service discount on the vehicle, and also applied a significant portion of the 7-months rental costs of the vehicle to the purchase price. The Grand Victoria Foundation covered more than four months of rental costs, providing time for Clifftop Board Members to seek additional funds to complete the purchase. When a generous donor stepped forward with a gift of \$5,000, the varied sources of funds were combined: the discount, applied rental, and major gift, along with \$2,500 from Clifftop's operating funds allowed the organization to complete our first major equipment purchase. Leveraging funding and combining resources makes Clifftop's work possible, and is a primary method we have used to benefit conservation efforts made by private landowners in our area.

We have worked hard to organize and facilitate bringing state and federal conservation program dollars to private landowners in the bluff corridor to help them tackle invasive species, restore prairies and glades, and improve forest management. Since 2008, local bluff landowners have directly contracted with USDA/NRCS or IDNR for nearly \$1 million in conservation cost-share incentive program dollars. In 2010, we became a land-owning land trust, partnering with Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development (now Heartlands Conservancy), to purchase and co-own White Rock Nature Preserve and White Rock Land and Water Reserve. Clifftop did the acquisition grant writing and the SWIRC&D served as fiscal agent. The organizations received \$1.4 million in federal and foundation grant money to make the purchase and undertake infrastructure improvements at the preserve.

The purchase of White Rock brought long-term management and maintenance responsibilities. Clifftop's Board decided to establish a restricted stewardship fund, dedicated to out-year requirements at White Rock and other potential land holdings. In 2011, we launched our first-ever local fundraising campaign. We raised more than \$21,000 locally, and, with the addition of a grant from Grand Victoria Foundation, we are proud to report that the Stewardship Fund stands at more than \$61,000.

Clifftop and Program Funding continued from page 11

We have been fortunate and very successful at raising non-local grant money for substantial efforts like the acquisition of White Rock. We have been equally fortunate in attracting generous local donations and support.

That balance is very important. These funds are a strong expression of your support for local land stewardship and natural areas protection and preservation. Your donations also are proof that Clifftop continues to earn its standing as a public charity and nonprofit organization. IRS rules require that a portion of a charitable nonprofit's revenue come from public sources. Clifftop's membership base and local annual donations are a major component of our public funding requirement.

Your financial support also fulfills another important need: keeping Clifftop in business and able to meet our annual general operating expenses. Your donations and membership dues pay for our bare-bones modest annual operating costs. These expenses include general administrative costs such as postage, printing, website hosting, and tax preparation; program expenses, such as those related to land acquisition, or membership promotion; and, our single-biggest annual expense, insurance. Clifftop's Board carefully reviews expenses and works to ensure that the business-side of the organization is run in a prudent, cost-effective, and sound fiscal fashion.

On behalf of the entire board, I thank you kindred-spirit members, who believe in preserving and protecting our bluff lands for future generations of people and wildlife.



Join Clifftop

Members receive:

~~Email newsletters

~~Annual Report

~~Invitations to special events and work days

~~Invitations to join committees and work with the Clifftop Board of Directors

~~**The satisfaction of preserving and protecting our natural areas and natural heritage.**

Dues:

\$25.00 annually, individuals

\$35.00 annually, families

\$50.00 annually, supporting

\$100.00 annually, sustaining

\$500.00 life membership

Send completed form and check
payable to Clifftop to:

Clifftop

P.O. Box 131

Maeystown, IL 62256

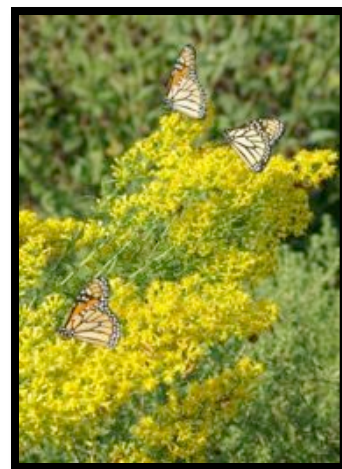


Photo by Pen DauBach

Name(s) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Membership dues of \$_____ are enclosed; additional donation of \$_____

_____ I would like to volunteer with Clifftop; please contact me.