

# Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

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## The Saving Grace of the Great Outdoors

Photos and text by Joann Fricke

Little did we know a year ago the importance the great outdoors would play in our lives. Judging by the posts I see on Facebook, local trails have been busier than ever. We barely had to mow the trails at White Rock Nature Preserve over last summer due to the heavy foot traffic. Never before has our little parking lot there seen more cars, except for planned events.

And it continues to this day. Each time I am there, checking on trails or performing some kind of stewardship work, I run into another visitor. I always stop to talk, asking where they are from, how did they hear of White Rock, etc. Most are from Missouri and Illinois towns that are not far away. A Google search of "hiking trails near me" brings up White Rock for me, but then, I only live about a mile from it!

Having the local hiking trails (Stemler Cave Woods NP, Salt Lick Point L&WR, White Rock NP, Fults Hill Prairie NP and Paul Wightman Subterranean NP) has helped many retain their sense of calm in a crazy world. And, has contributed to their overall health by avoiding crowded indoor spaces and filling their lungs with clean, fresh air.

This spring has been an exceptional year for flowering trees, especially our native dogwoods, as seen along Ridgetop Trail South at White Rock, below, left. The flowers seem to have held on longer than any year in

recent memory. The Rusty blackhaw are now in bloom, as well (see photo at right). Many can be viewed along the same trail as the dogwoods.

The coming seasons promise new discoveries at all the hiking areas mentioned previously, especially since most of them have had prescribed burns conducted and/or contractor work in progress.

Let's continue what the pandemic started—get out and enjoy the great outdoors!



# Mission Timber: Love of the Outdoors and Spreading Happiness

Photos and text by Shane Kellogg, additional text by Branden Grass

I have always been drawn to the outdoors; a calling some would say. Since I was little my family took me on many adventures to National Parks, State Parks, and natural areas. That's where my love of the outdoors expanded into what it is today.

I owe my love of the outdoors to my family, especially my mother. My mother is always outdoors hiking, no matter the season or the weather. She is where I get suggestions for many of my hiking locations for my own adventures. Her love of the outdoors was definitely passed on to me.

I want my daughter to have the same love and appreciation for the outdoors as I do. Nothing puts a bigger smile on my face, as when my daughter is hiking with me and loving the adventure. She sees nature and the outdoors as a way of life that makes you happy and relaxed. These memories of us in the outdoors will always be with me and they will be with her, too.



A bird's eye view of Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve via Shane's drone.

Being in the outdoors is not just a hobby for me, it has become a way of life. Hiking and being in the outdoors is a way to charge your batteries and relieve stress from the changing times and hardships we are all facing. There is something about being out in nature that just lets you find your serenity.

I didn't always share my adventures and experiences with everyone. I never had a platform with which I felt that I could share the great outdoors. It wasn't until 2019 that I started to share my adventures with everyone through Mission Timber.

A lot of people have asked where Mission Timber came from, and I thought it was best if my friend, colleague, and Mission Timber creator, Branden Grass, explained:

"In all honesty, when I have been asked about how the idea for Mission Timber came to be, the only true answer I've ever been able to give was that I didn't find Mission Timber, Mission Timber, in a sense, found me. I was in my mid 20's questioning current life situations and I had a string of bad days which lead to the desire for change. Never did I think a new love of the Great Outdoors is what was in store for me. Yet, here I am 3 years later still traveling this path of exploration for purpose and fulfillment. Whether it's been hiking a portion of the Appalachian Trail in West Virginia, kayaking the Red Gorge cave of Kentucky, standing at "The Point" to overlook where the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers meet, walking through historical downtown Harpers Ferry, or even standing atop Rocky Mountain in Tennessee, nothing would ever make me regret the miles traveled, the people I've met and the life experiences I've had while on this journey of mine. My love of the outdoors stems from early memories of fishing with my father & tent camping with my family as a child. That sense of never growing up and recalling those memories made it that much easier to being open and willing to try new outdoor activities and challenges. Unfortunately, with the busy rush of life, as many know, we tend to lose sight of things from time to time as we grow and sometimes never find the freedom for them again. So, I would say Mission Timber is more about trying to promote a challenge to others and myself to try new things outside of our comfort zone no matter what that may be, mine just happen to be finding out what was on the other side of the timber line!" – Branden Grass





Mission Timber's Shane Kellogg and Branden Grass atop Tom Sauk Mountain near Ironton, MO

When I became part of Mission Timber, I wanted it to be a way to share the adventures that I had. To give everyone ideas for their next adventure--be it a lone hiker or a family outing. Everyone is looking for that outdoor experience that brings them happiness.

Shortly after joining Mission Timber I started getting messages from people all over the area not only asking for advice, but thanking me. I realized that there are so many people out there that want to go outdoors and have an experience of their own, but for reasons are not able to, be it a medical reason or physical age. I had people tell me that the pictures or videos they saw that I took or made, brought them some happiness and joy. They would tell me that when they were young that they would go to this place or that place and it brought so much joy to them, but because of a medical condition or age, they were not able to go back one last time. They would say that the pictures and videos they saw made them remember all the wonderful memories that they had there when they were young. That's when I really understood that Mission Timber was not just me sharing my own adventures, but a way to bring happiness to others by sharing the outdoors with everyone.

As part of Mission Timber, I had no idea how many doors it would open for me into conservation, restoration, and preservation. I am forever grateful for Clifftop. I have learned so much from them in the areas of conservation and protecting the great outdoors. The knowledge that I have absorbed from everyone at Clifftop and IDNR has been an incredible experience, with always more to come.

I went from just sharing my adventures in the outdoors to actually volunteering to help preserve and restore these amazing areas. Volunteering has given me such overall happiness and sense of purpose. There is something about getting your hands in the earth, from removing invasive species to making a fire break, that makes you feel like you are making a difference. Not just a difference then and now, but a difference for generations to come.



Shane volunteering at a prescribed burn at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve in November 2020.



As a former firefighter and hazmat specialist, I was trained to deal with emergencies. But in training I was never shown the positive aspects of fire in nature. I was extremely thankful to be part of several prescribed burns with Clifftop the last few years. I have learned so much in that short time of the benefits of prescribed burns. I am able to see the wonderful effects of the burns all the time in the nature preserves. Best part is I am able to show my daughter these changes in the ecology of the preserves. Mission Timber has been a way to share the most important conservation tool in the world, and that is Education. I have had numerous conversations with people about how prescribed burns are a needed life source for many environments.

Mission Timber has become a platform for me to share my adventures, allow others to explore from their own homes, a classroom for education, an idea house for making your own adventures, and a place to find your own happiness. The outdoors calls us all in, we just have to listen and see where it takes us. I hope you all find your happiness in the great outdoors.



Shane points out to his daughter how the prescribed burn at White Rock NP has affected the ecology of the forest.



A view of the prescribed burn at White Rock Nature Preserve on March 21 from Shane's drone

**Help Wanted**

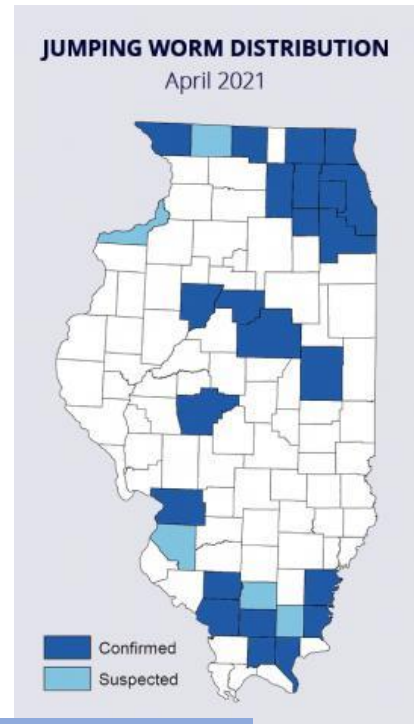
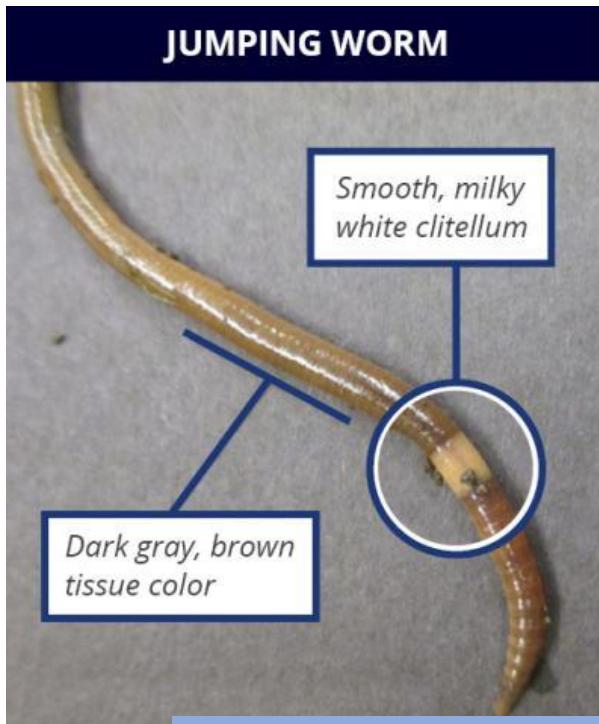
Clifftop is looking for someone to help update our website. The website is hosted locally by the Harrisonville Telephone Company. The format is Word Press. Please contact Joann at [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) if you can be of assistance.



# Jumping Worm Update

Several years ago we brought to your attention the presence in Illinois of an invasive species of worm. The Jumping Worm is native to East Asia. They are voracious consumers of organic material, which can affect soil quality. They breed quickly and eggs survive Illinois winters. These worms are also capable of reproducing without mating.

There are concerns about the effects these worms will have on forests and other natural areas as well as agricultural and landscaped areas. In 2017 there were confirmed sightings in 11 counties in Illinois. As of April 2021, that number has jumped to 23 counties, with 5 other counties suspected as having jumping worms present. If you suspect that you have a population of jumping worms, please contact U of I Extension Forester, Chris Evans, at [cwevans@Illinois.edu](mailto:cwevans@Illinois.edu) or 618-695-3383. For more information, an updated fact sheet can be found at this link: [go.illinois.edu/JumpingWorms2021](http://go.illinois.edu/JumpingWorms2021)



Images and link to fact sheet courtesy University of Illinois Extension Forestry.

## Clifftop now sole owner of White Rock lands



Clifftop and the Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development (now HeartLands Conservancy) purchased land that became White Rock Land and Water Reserve and White Rock Nature Preserve near Valmeyer in December 2010. The two NGO's crafted an agreement to seek funding for the purchase, jointly own, hold and steward the tract. Included in the agreement was a clause that if either chose to transfer their interest in the property, the other could purchase for \$1. Clifftop recently completed that purchase and is now the sole owner of both White Rock lands. Pictured, HeartLands President and CEO, Mary Vandevord, accepts a ceremonial dollar from Clifftop President, Jared Nobbé.



While public outreach events have not been held, we were able to assemble 23 volunteers for a 160 acre burn at White Rock Nature Preserve on March 21, 2021.



Burn boss, Debbie Newman, INPC, indicated by yellow arrow, gives instructions to the crew prior to ignition.



Smokey snacks



The bluffs are burning

Top four photos courtesy J. Fricke



IDNR Heritage Biologist, Phil Borsdorf, chunks up a dead tree that could potentially send sparks out of the burn and cause a spot over unit if left up in the air.



Fire along Ridgetop Trail South. Photo courtesy Shane Kellogg



Southern crew, led by IDNR District Forester, Bear Engbring, in red helmet, discusses strategy. Photo courtesy M. Fricke