

Bluffviews

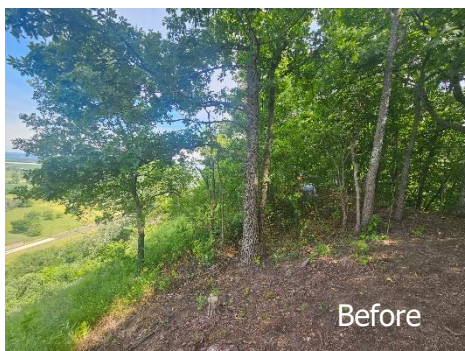
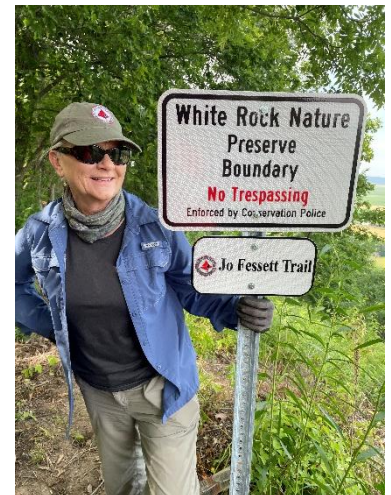
a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

July 2026

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Many Hands Make Light Work

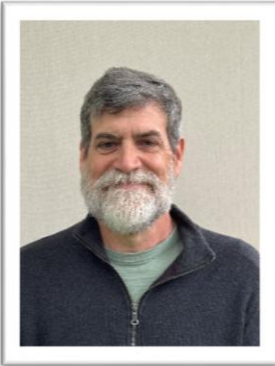
The first of what will be many workdays on Illinois Audubon Society Prairie, our first priority in the process of restoring glades and hill prairies on the new property, was held on June 5 with Cliffhangers (Clifftop volunteers) and IAS staff participating. The title here may be a bit misleading as much of the work wasn't all that light. Watch for information on future workdays. If you aren't signed up as a volunteer and would like to be, please email cliffmbr@htc.net. Enjoy these photos from the workday. Photo credits to Andy Martin, Debbie Newman, Jeff Couch, Bob Weck and Joann Fricke.



By working together, as you can see, much was accomplished in a very short time.

Beginning with this issue, we thought our members and supporters would like to get to know our board a little better. First up is our president, Bob Weck...

Meet the Board: Bob Weck



Bob Weck joined the Clifftop board of directors in 2015. He is a steward of the Storment Hauss Nature Preserve, served as vice president for several years, and took over the role of Clifftop president in 2025. Bob is a biologist who retired from Southwestern Illinois College in 2024. He has written several biology themed articles for the Bluffviews newsletter and has conducted outreach events focusing on frogs and owls.

Bob's conservation interests came into focus in 2004 when he and his wife, Nancy, became the owners of Stemler Cave Nature Preserve near Columbia. Together they began to organize stewardship events in the IDNR-owned Stemler Cave Woods and worked to educate neighbors about the importance of groundwater protection. In 2009, Bob started conducting research into cave dwelling invertebrates, particularly snails and amphipods. (See photo below.)



Photo credit Dawn Blum



Photo credit Derik Holtmann

Outside of Clifftop, Bob has volunteered as an educator for the Illinois Master Naturalist program, served as a judge for the regional Science Olympiad and worked as a natural heritage volunteer with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Bob has given several presentations about caves and cave biology to local and regional groups, published peer reviewed scientific articles on cave biology, and is active with the Illinois Speleological Survey, where he currently serves as president.

Q and A with Bob:

Interviewed by board member Jeff Couch, Bob discusses the future of Clifftop, how you can help, plans for the White Rock expansion project and his most rewarding experiences as a Clifftop volunteer.

How and when did you get involved with Clifftop NFP?

In late 2014 I was invited to join the Clifftop board of directors, and attended my first board meeting in January 2015. The board felt that, as a biologist, I could contribute to the Clifftop mission. I also am a landowner at the northern edge of the blufflands/hill prairie corridor that is the primary focus of Clifftop.

What are some of your most rewarding experiences as a Clifftop member?

As a longtime teacher, I have really enjoyed conducting outreach programs and giving presentations to share the Clifftop story. The most rewarding experience to date was probably the Member's Day event in

October 2022 where we held the grand opening ceremony for the Storment Hauss Nature Preserve. Clifftop director Jim Hill and I worked hard on developing the signage, trail system and interpretive material for the Storment Hauss preserve.

What happens next for the White Rock Nature Preserve expansion project, after the fundraising campaign is complete?

Although the current fundraising campaign will end, the White Rock expansion project will be just beginning. Clifftop directors and volunteers will be putting the site conservation management plan into action (which will focus heavily on hill prairie and glade restoration) and working to secure grants to fund our ongoing stewardship efforts.

Once the recently acquired 965 acres become part of White Rock Nature Preserve, what access will Clifftop members and the public have to the property? Are there plans for new hiking trails and other features?

The best way for folks to access the new property will be to volunteer for one of our upcoming workdays. The Clifftop board will develop a master plan for site use, which should include new trails. There are many factors to consider when developing a new trail, including the steep terrain, visitor safety, and navigating around sensitive areas within the preserve. If Clifftop members have ideas for features they would like to see incorporated into any new trails, or suggestions for how to make the White Rock trail system a better user experience, please email clifftopnfp@gmail.com.

How can Clifftop members support all three of the organization’s nature preserves: Paul Wightman, White Rock and Storment Hauss?

Become a “Cliffhanger”, a member of our volunteer network. Visit one of the Clifftop preserves and go for a hike. Share your experiences with family and friends and encourage them to become a Clifftop member.

As Clifftop marks its 20th anniversary, how do you envision the future of the all-volunteer organization and its role in protecting the natural wonders of the Mississippi blufflands?

Considering our success so far, many people are surprised to learn that Clifftop is really an all-volunteer group. Going forward, we will need to reach new audiences and recruit a new generation of nature lovers to become members and participate in our ongoing volunteer stewardship efforts.

Upcoming events...

History Hike at White Rock, Saturday, September 19, 2026, 10:00 am until noon. White Rock NP, 6438 Bluff Road, Valmeyer, IL. Please join us for this interesting and informative hike led by Alleen Betzenhauser, Clifftop board member and Illinois State Archaeologist, during Illinois Archaeology Awareness Month. Information offered will include a history of the White Rock property and surrounding areas with a focus on pre-colonial Native American settlement and land use and cultural resource conservation. Geared toward adults and teens, please note that part of the hike will be on steep terrain. Long pants and closed-toe shoes are advised. There is no fee for this field trip, but donations to Clifftop are welcome. Attendance is limited to 20 participants. Call or email Joann to reserve your spot. 618-340-1772 cliffmbr@htc.net



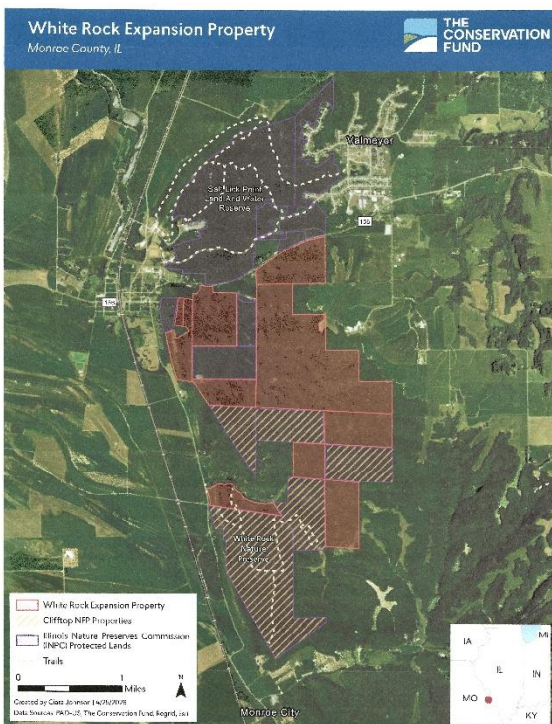
Vulture Prairie at White Rock
Photo credit Shane Kellogg



Members' Day 2026, date and time to be determined, Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fufts, IL.

Refreshments will be served at the pavilion and site stewards from each of our nature preserves will give brief presentations on what has happened over the past year, what's new, and future plans and challenges. Watch your inboxes for a formal invitation in the near future.

Chainsaw Technique & Safety Workshop, Saturday, November 7, 2026, 9:00 am until 3:30 pm. White Rock NP, 6438 Bluff Road, Valmeyer, IL. University of Illinois Extension foresters will lead this workshop focused on the safe use of chainsaws and the techniques used for thinning nuisance trees and eliminating invasive species. Attendees will be instructed on safe practices, chainsaw safety features, personal protective equipment, and safe felling techniques to cut down woody species. We will also demonstrate maintenance and sharpening techniques. We will have equipment for participants to use, but if participants wish, they may bring their own chainsaw and personal protective equipment (goggles, ear protection and chainsaw chaps). Leather boots that come above the ankle are required. Attendance is limited to 12 participants. As an added bonus, Women owning Woodlands (WoW) has negotiated spots for 12 additional observers. Call or email Joann to reserve your spot. 618-340-1772 cliffmbr@htc.net



Nurture nature during our campaign to raise funds to help with the stewardship of the new property. Our goal is to raise \$200,000 and we are halfway there. As most of you know, this will be an ongoing challenge to rid 965 acres of invasive species. All donations are greatly appreciated. Funds are accepted through both Venmo and PayPal platforms. However, checks can be sent to Clifftop, P. O. Box 131, Maestown, IL 62244.



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