



Friends of Oil Creek State Park~ Summer 20221

Park Manager's Report



Timothy Rudisille
Photographer

As we head into the tail end of summer, I would like to give a midyear report on what has been going on in the park. It has been another busy year. We started the season with one maintenance worker which made for some challenging times. I am however happy to report that we have a full staff at this time, and I would like to introduce them : Casey Shultz is our new Maintenance Supervisor, Tom Lindsay – Maintenance Repairman 2, Coby Shires and Tyler Ferricks - Semi-Skilled Laborers and Evan Snyders - Ranger Trainee. Super Happy to have our positions filled with such great workers. Everyone brings something different to the table, and we are working hard to catch up on our to do list.

As far as what we have been up to... Customer service has remained our top priority, which means lots

of mowing, cleaning, clearing of the bike trail, and splitting firewood. When we are not doing that, we have been busy clearing and mowing the ski trails, brushing back the bike trail, re-staining buildings, improving Wildcat Hollow trails and much more. Ivy (Environmental Education Specialist), has been busy with programming now that Covid restrictions have loosened up (hope they stay that way). She was also busy designing and planting Phase 1 of our new flower garden at the park office. If you haven't seen it, she along with the Friends Group, Members of FLEX, and the Venango County Garden Club did a terrific job! Phase 2 should be completed next year. Michele Winger (Administrative Assistant) is busy as always and continues to do a fantastic job for not only Oil Creek but M.K. Goddard as well. Rounding out the rest of the Staff is Andrew Cozad – SSL, who is currently serving our country overseas. We look for to having him back next year. And, Lisa Wishart, Lisa is our Ranger one. I think of her as our Swiss Army knife. She can be found in the office taking reservations and greeting the public, clearing trails, replacing signs, weed trimming, assisting with education, and much more.

As a Manager of such a great park and great staff, I am truly blessed. One of the coolest things about working in a state park are all the great people you meet and work with. Inevitably, staff will leave to pursue bigger and better things. This is encouraged and expected. You can become close with those you work with which makes it all that harder when they leave. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for all the new hires and those that have moved on over the past year. We are truly a team and I am grateful to have such a good one.

Happy Trails,
Dave Hallman



Timothy Rudisille
Photographer



Ivy Kuberry Environmental Education Specialist

Garden Update

A big thanks goes out to Venango Future Leaders and Entrepreneurs eXchange (FLEX) for all their garden help

Have you stopped by the park lately? If not, we invite you to come check out the finished product of the Oil Creek garden project: phase one.

You may have noticed that the office garden and the planter beds below some of our park signage had been a bit neglected recently. Weeds had taken over almost completely, and they just weren't looking the best.

Now if you visit the park you'll see that the larger half of the office garden is completely made-over. The planter box by the office sign and the other planter by the southern entrance to the park are also replanted, and all with native PA plants! We worked with the Master Gardeners of Venango County to come up with a planting plan that would help to feed and shelter a variety of pollinators throughout the year, while giving the park office a face lift. You can find beardtongue, butterfly weed, yarrow, coreopsis, black eye susans, purple Echinacea, bee balm, blazing star, asters, and even blueberry bushes growing through a bed of freshly laid mulch.

There are a variety of reasons why we chose native plants for this project. Native plants are those that evolved in this area and are specifically adapted to survival here. This means that they tend to need less watering when planted in the right location, and they do a better job at feeding and providing for our native wildlife. Also, because they are native we don't have to worry about them escaping the garden and spreading through the park. Non-native plants can sometimes escape cultivation and become a huge conservation problem, outcompeting native plants in the wild. The plants we chose can already be found in the wilds of PA, though some may be more elusive than others.



Garden....



But why did we decide to only fix up half of the office garden bed? Well, there are a few reasons. First, this was a huge project. The planning, preparation, procurement, and planting processes take a good amount of time, and we didn't want to get overwhelmed. Also, we are hoping to take some time to see which plants do best up by the office. The area gets plenty of sun, and can be fairly dry during certain parts of the year. Even plants that are described as loving those conditions can sometimes find survival difficult. If we see that some of our plants are struggling, we will refrain from planting them in the other side of the office bed. Finally, we recently had contractors in laying lines for fiber optic cable (yes, we hopefully will have high-speed internet soon!) The cable had to be laid below ground in the other half of the garden bed. We didn't want to plant beautiful plants and have them ripped out!

The second phase of the garden project will likely take place in 2023. As of now, we plan for phase two to include the other half of the office bed and the small garden area by the water pump near the Petroleum Centre bike trail parking lot.

I personally plan on using the newly planted office garden as a teaching tool for park programming. We provide a number of Wild Edibles and Medicines programs throughout the year, and many of the plants we chose for this project have medicinal qualities or have edible parts. We also plan to offer a natural dyes program soon, and some of our natives are great for that as well! Pollinator programs will benefit greatly from these new garden beds, since they provide many host and nectar plants. Butterflyweed is actually a form of milkweed, so the Monarchs should be pleased. to weed and pull roots in the bed before planting. It was a lot of work, and a very hot day! Also, I'd like to thank the Venango County Master Gardeners, especially Marie Veon, who came up with the plans and helped out immensely with the procurement and planting process. Finally, thank you to everyone in the Friends of Oil Creek State Park for funding this project. Your constant support for this park really is what keeps us going.

Come out and visit if you'd like a mini tour! As long as I'm in the office, I'd be happy to show you around.



OC100 will be held this year on October 16, 2021. All three races are full -100k, 50k, and 100 miles, although there is a wait list for all three at: runrace.net/oc100. An exciting addition to the regular runner tracking system is the addition of *RaceJoy*. This is an app which can be loaded onto a smart phone, and participants and their supporters will be able to follow the runners in real time.

Anyone interested in volunteering at the aid stations can contact Katie Gilbert at katiegilbert8815@gmail.com

The following article was written by Tambra Sabatini who is a veteran OC100 runner. The picture were taken by Mike Henderson.



Running in the Park After Dark

“I would rather run for hours outside in the dark than for a few minutes on the treadmill. Don’t fear the darkness, embrace it. A whole new world is waiting for you. Go out there and get it.” -Author Unknown

Oil Creek State Park becomes a truly magical place one night each year. The majority of people who participate in the Oil Creek 100 Trail Runs either as a runner, volunteer, or spectator only ever experience the hustle and bustle of the daylight portions of the races. The 100K and 100-mile races provide an entirely different experience once darkness cloaks the valley.

Not surprisingly, a whole new world awakens in the Park after dark! A world of creatures seldom seen during the daytime can be heard and encountered. Since the darkness can be incredibly lonely and intimidating, I can assure you that the night sounds heard by an exhausted runner often escalate into gigantic proportions! The Park has a fabulous diversity of wildlife, and for someone who is aware of the creatures living in the Park, it doesn’t take much to become extra jumpy when incredibly tired from a day that began at either 5:00 am for the 100-milers or 6:00 am for the 100K runners.

One year, not long after dark during one of my 100K races, I was working my way along the trail and began to hear a couple of coyotes yelping as they were apparently chasing a deer up out of the valley. It was obvious that the dogs were going to intersect with me on the trail at the speed they seemed to be coming up the hill – I was not too thrilled with the idea of an encounter and began to slow my pace (I’m pretty slow anyways!) so that I could avoid the encounter. That maneuver worked, and I heard them cross the trail about a quarter of a mile ahead of me. Soon after that I crossed over Pioneer Road and all of a sudden this “thing” flashed in front of my eyes as my headlamp dimly revealed a flying squirrel that nearly landed on my head, but instead landed right beside my head as it attached itself to the side of a tree to look me in the eyes! I must admit to a little yelp as I was totally freaked for a quick moment trying to figure out just what it was that was attacking me from the darkness! The coyotes had set me a bit more on edge than usual and this little squirrel was almost enough to stop my heart out there that night!

Runners often encounter slow-waddling porcupines at night which are easily jumped right over or side-step around. Raccoons, deer, and rabbits are the other most common encounters at night. Many runners wear headphones and listen to music or podcasts at night to block out the sounds of the night and more or less pretend that nothing else is out there. I like to hear and know what is around me, but imaginations can easily run wild! The Park also has quite an abundance of bobcats, bear, fishers, and many other smaller creatures that are often encountered day or night.

A great addition to the Gerard Trail was the addition of thousands of night tacks that light up every so many trees when flashed by a head lamp. Between the trail markers and the night tacks, it is incredibly comforting to know the way forward at all times – especially when super groggy, cold and tired beyond belief as the night grows later and longer and Aid Stations seem further and further apart.



Nighttime at the Aid Stations becomes a entirely new experience also in comparison to the hustle and bustle of the crowds rushing through with all the runners from each of the races including the 50K. Volunteers are hustling to meet the fast demands and needs of hundreds of runners that fly through during the daytime.



One of the most welcome sounds in the entire valley to any runner in any of the races is the *chug chug chug bang* ringing through the hilltops. As runners close in on Drake Well Park and begin to hear the welcoming rhythm of the hit and miss engine, the sound beats its way into a runner's heart beckoning the runner to either the final few miles of the 50K or calling in to be heard again (and even again) for the 100K and 100-mile races.

A similar sound – that of a generator – powering Christmas lights to welcome the runners into the solitude of Aid Station #1 is heard from the hilltop as a runner works back down into Wolfkiel. It is amazing how sound carries in the valley! Every time a runner hears the welcoming sound of a generator or sees the lights strung around all of the Aid Stations, the steps get a little bit lighter, the heaviness of the all-consuming grind of one foot in front of the other gives way to expectation. The runners know that at each and every Aid Station there will be cheerful and welcoming (and hard-working) volunteers waiting to cheer each and every runner into the light for food, warmth, drink, and an encouraging word to keep pressing forward.

It isn't always an easy thing to do to take those steps back out away from the cheery lights and push into the darkness for many miles once again. These are the hours that really try the runner's soul. Did their training line up for the grueling hours of the dark and lonely grind? Are the blisters overwhelming? Knees, IT Bands, sometimes bloody shins from falls; muddy, wet, cold, and often shivering – it is northwest PA in October, after all! Snow, sleet, cold rain, thunderstorms, along with gorgeous weather can all be experienced in the very same weekend!

The Park provides an incredible experience after dark no matter whether a person enters the valley as a runner or just someone out to enjoy the trails. Be prepared to be surprised with new awareness and even new emotions but expect to find great joy in the experience.

“Only those willing to walk (RUN) through the dark night will be able to see the beauty of the moon and the brilliance of the stars.” -Archbishop Socrates Villegas

Tambra Sabatini



Over-The-Hill Gang

Heavy rain and high winds have made for a challenging late spring and summer for the Over the Hill Gang. It seemed like we received at least weekly reports of trees blocking trails. Hikers and runners have kept us well informed and we have been able to keep the trails open.



We have repaired washouts where needed and have improved some ditching to divert runoff. The Gang has covered the entire trail system twice and some trail sections multiple times as needed. Regular maintenance, including trimming back branches and foliage and battling multiflora was done weekly. Weed control (with weed eaters) has not been as extensive as in prior years due to time required to manage storm damage but we have tried to address areas most in need.



This Fall the Gang plans on improving some boardwalks

and bridges. We intend to work on sections that need bumpers repaired and trails widened due to rain damage.

Despite the challenges brought on by severe weather, all trails remain open and continue to see a high volume of use.

Enjoy the trails and the special beauty of our Park.

Denny Pattison
For the Over the Hill Gang.





The Return of the Biathlon

It was with excitement that the Oil Creek Summer Biathlon returned on August 14, 2021 after not being able to hold the event in 2020 due to Covid. This year was special as it was the 15th Oil Creek Summer Biathlon and the Pennsylvania Biathlon Club's 25th anniversary. We had a record number of entries at 106.

The weather ended up being perfect as the temperature and humidity dropped after a huge thunder storm Friday night. The trails were a bit slippery adding to the challenge of running and shooting. There were 84 Biathletes who successfully completed the race including 51 men and 33 women. Our oldest Biathlete was 81 and our youngest was 12. Folks came from Virginia, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and Ohio as well as PA to compete in the largest summer biathlon in the country.

Every Biathlete that finished the race received a commemorative Medal honoring the 25th Anniversary of the PA Biathlon Club. Overall Men and Women and Masters received handmade stoneware mugs by John Sims, potter and race director. The overall Men were Ethan Quezada, Patrick Maloney, and Chris Boem. The Women were Isabella Ongley, Ann Sick, and Tracey Taylor. Our Master winners were Sean Hensley and Traci Hanna. Clean shooting medals went to Ellie Coyer, Dan Prichard and Ann Sick. Full

race results can be found on pabiathlon.com or the Friend's website.

Any spectator to the Biathlon will find a scene of much comradery, friendship, and sportsmanship. It all starts with the singing of our National Anthem led by Keith Siverling and Gale Boocks. Biathletes are encouraging each other, joking, and having a great time while also being competitive. Much cheering goes on from the sidelines especially when someone shoots well or needs a boost while running penalty laps.

You can't find any more dedicated volunteers anywhere. We are so thankful to have a bunch from the Ikes (Oil City Rifle Team), Cranberry Cross Country, Friends of Oil Creek volunteers, set up crew, and many others helping out. It takes a whole village to run a successful biathlon!

Next year, if you want to participate in this fun and unique event, get your registration in early to secure your spot. Also, if you would like

to volunteer to help out, let us know and I'm sure we can find something for you to do. At the very least, come on out and see what it's all about.

Run fast, shoot straight, and go home happy!



President's Report

HELP WANTED

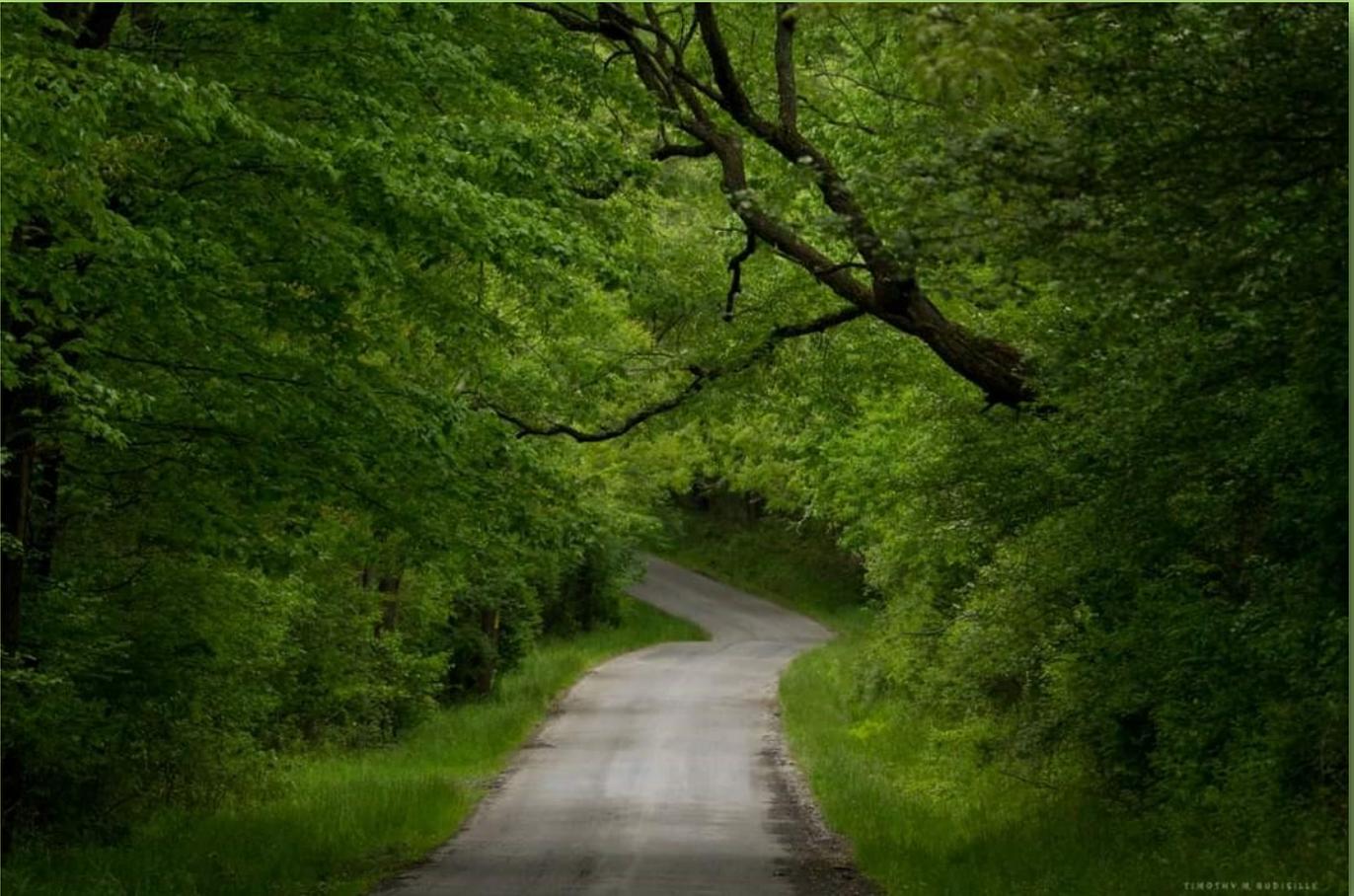
You've probably seen "Help Wanted" signs around a lot of places. Well, the Friends of Oil Creek are also putting out a "Help Wanted" message. We are currently in need of an active Board Member to fill a 3 year term and come November we may be looking for Board Members for a 2 or 3 year term.

Board members are needed to help make vital decisions concerning events, programs, projects, expenditures, budget, etc. Board members need to commit to attending meetings on the first Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM except January and July. We meet in person, usually outside at the park, when possible and we have also had zoom meetings. Meetings typically last about an hour at most. Many Board members are also volunteers but this is not a requirement.

Our Board is a dedicated and fun group to work with. Some of us have been on the Board for a very long time and we welcome new ideas! If you love Oil Creek and have the time and the desire to become more involved and think you might be interested in becoming a Board Member please contact us at friendsocsp.org or come out to a meeting and check us out. Our mission statement is listed in this newsletter and on our website. We work to support the park in many ways.

Think about answering our "Help Wanted" message. Sorry there isn't any monetary bonus, but doing something good for the park is the only bonus that counts!

Happy Trails,



Timothy Rudisille
Photographer

Membership

The Friends of Oil Creek would like to thank all the members who renewed their membership and to thank the many new members.

Your membership helps maintain existing projects in Oil Creek State Park. Your contributions also help maintain new initiatives in the Park. Your membership also helps to maintain the Gerard hiking trail, the bike trail, and the ski trails. In addition, these resources fund the “Over the Hill Gang”.

If you haven't renewed your membership or would like to become a member, follow the link to become a friend of Oil Creek State Park: www.friendsocsp.org. The membership prices: single \$10, family \$25, and corporate/business/group \$100. You can also become a Friends member or renew your membership by contacting the FOCSP in one of the ways listed below:

- Write the Friends of Oil Creek
PO Box# 1273 Oil City, Pa 16301
- E-Mail– oilcreekfriends@gmail.com
- Website– www.friendsocsp.org
- Call Park Office—814 676-5915



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The Friends of Oil Creek State Park is a Chapter of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation



Friends of Oil Creek Mission Statement

The Friends of Oil Creek State Park support the Park's mission to preserve, protect, and interpret our natural environment while providing recreational and educational opportunities for residents and visitors to the region.