



ANHC Acquires New Natural Area in Poinsett County

The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) added the 67th natural area to its [System of Natural Areas](#). St. Francis Sunken Lands Natural Area was created through a purchased conservation easement on 80 acres of bottomland hardwood forest in Poinsett County. This natural area protects a large population of the federally endangered plant species [Pondberry](#) (*Lindera melissifolia*).

October
2009

Pondberry is a medium-sized shrub that grows in swampy depressions in lowland forests. It is a perennial, deciduous shrub growing 1 1/2 to 6 1/2 feet tall. It spreads vegetatively by rhizomes (runners that extend just below the surface and take root to produce new plants). When crushed, pondberry leaves emit a strong resemblance of sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). Bright red elliptical fruits commonly called pondberries (see photo at right) are produced during late summer; fruits mature during the fall. The loss of habitat has been and remains the most significant threat to this plant. In addition to St. Francis Sunken Lands Natural Area, ANHC protects pondberry at [Stateline Sand Ponds](#) (Clay County), [Swifton Sand Ponds](#) (Jackson County) and [Coffee Prairie](#) (Ashley County) Natural Areas.



Conservation Lands Added to Two Natural Areas

Falcon Bottoms Natural Area: Biological inventory work by the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC) identified Bayou Dorcheat, the centerpiece of [Falcon Bottoms Natural Area](#) (in photo at right), as one of the most intact and unaltered streams west of the Ouachita River in Arkansas. The natural area encompasses approximately 6 miles of the bayou flowing through Nevada, Columbia and Lafayette Counties. A new purchase of 160 acres further protects the relatively unaltered bottomlands of Bayou Dorcheat and increases the natural area to 3,210 acres.

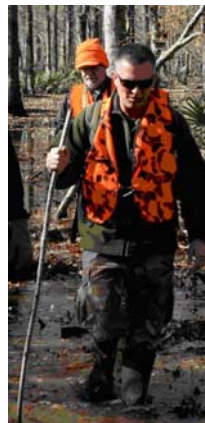


Pine City Natural Area: As the only site in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain (MAP) that hosts [Red-cockaded Woodpeckers](#) (*Picoides borealis*), the loblolly pine forests of [Pine City Natural Area](#) have been an ANHC focus area for years. The open loblolly pine woodlands and savannas required by this federally endangered bird are very rare here. The ANHC has been actively working to acquire remaining forested stands and restore former agricultural fields back to wooded conditions. A newly purchased 40-acre tract brings the natural area to 956 acres.

[Chris Colclasure](#)

Hunting Season Opens on ANHC Natural Areas

Fall is in the air, camouflage is out of storage and hunters are gearing up for trips to the woods. This year hunters can utilize over 25,000 acres at one of ANHC's 29 Natural Areas that are open to hunting. ANHC partners with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) to set hunting regulations at each of these natural areas. In order to preserve the natural communities found at ANHC's sites, hunters are asked to observe specific guidelines: motorized vehicles, horses, camping and construction of permanent deer stands are not allowed. Travel within natural areas is limited to foot traffic to minimize erosion and disturbance to sensitive habitats. AGFC officers enforce applicable hunting regulations and monitor all natural areas in the system.



By checking with the current edition of [AGFC's Hunting Guidebook](#), hunters can learn what types of hunting are allowed before heading out to bag their game. In addition, certain natural areas

have limited access and it is the hunter's responsibility to obtain permission to access adjacent private landowner's property.

To learn more about ANHC's Natural Areas, visit our website, <http://www.naturalheritage.com/> for natural area descriptions, driving directions and maps of each area.

[Jennie Kirby](#)

ANHC Staff Attend 36th Annual Natural Areas Conference



The 36th annual Natural Areas Conference took place in Vancouver, Washington in late September. Sponsored by the [Natural Areas Association](#) (NAA), the conference brings together colleagues on the leading edge of land and resource management whose work literally affects the survival of creatures large and small, and habitats local and worldwide. Participating in peer-to-peer education venues, four staff members of the commission presented insightful and thought-provoking reports of our activities in Arkansas.

We saw how our current citizen science effort, [Project Budburst](#), is contributing to the national effort to monitor the influence of climate on the phenology of plants, animals, and landscapes. Leaders from the national coordinating office of [USA-National Phenology Network](#) (USA-NPN), the founding organization of Project Budburst, detailed their work with researchers to develop tools and techniques to use citizen science data to support a wide range of decisions made routinely by citizens, land managers, scientists and others, including decisions related to allergies, wildfires, water, and conservation.

NAA Board of Directors President Lisa Smith of Pennsylvania observed: "Arkansas has always been a contributing partner for the association, hosting the conference in the late 1990's – and presenting the results of research and land management practices at annual conferences. . . It's so rewarding to have conservation recognized by your forward-thinking [Governor Beebe](#) in his budget, adding four new staff and recurring money (\$800,000) for land acquisition. It was certainly the talk of the conference this year, a year when many other state programs are losing staff and support. With Governor Beebe's support, the Arkansas program and its staff will continue to serve as the shining stars for other conservation programs - - state, federal, and private land trusts. We at NAA certainly appreciate Arkansas' support!"

[Karen Smith](#)

Update on the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at Pine City Natural Area

As reported in our [June E-newsletter](#) earlier this year, two groups of [Red-cockaded Woodpeckers](#) (RCWs) at [Pine City Natural Area](#) produced nestlings and successfully fledged (reared until ready for flight) young. The term "group" is used with these birds instead of "pair" because RCWs are cooperative breeders and live in small family groups typically composed of one breeding pair and one helper. The extra birds are usually sons from previous breeding seasons; daughters only rarely become helpers. The helpers assist in raising young, including incubation, brooding, and feeding. The entire family usually forages as a group, moving together from one area to another. New offspring this year include one group with two males and one female, and another group with one male and one female. I banded these birds as chicks (see photo at right) and continued to observe them throughout the summer and early fall.



The RCW is one of North America's most endangered birds. The groups at Pine City Natural Area (NA) represent the last remnants of the Mississippi Delta population, so watching them successfully rear young is always rewarding. Recent observations also provide some exciting evidence that habitat restoration at the natural area is working.

RCWs require large, open, park-like landscapes of mature southern pine that thrive in fire maintained ecosystems. This habitat is extremely rare now due to a variety of factors that eliminated and/or fragmented large blocks of contiguous habitat. Fire suppression has eliminated habitat by allowing understory and midstory hardwoods to reduce the amount of open pine habitat. One strategy to restore the forest structure to a more open pine woodland is the use of special heavy



equipment called a forest mulcher or "grinder" (see photo at right). The equipment is particularly suitable for restoration at Pine City NA because the hydrology of site keeps the ground wet for long periods. Wide tracks on the grinder cause less ground disturbance than traditional heavy equipment vehicles with tires, which helps limit the encroachment of invasive plant species and promotes native ground cover. Just as the name implies, the grinder mulches or grinds up the mid- and understory growth and returns the organic materials to the soil on the site.



Grinder work was completed on 60 acres of a large tract at Pine City NA in July that was unoccupied by RCWs. Within a week, RCW adults and offspring from this year were seen foraging in the area. I continued to monitor the birds and by September I saw evidence to support a hypothesis that one of the new male birds was actively roosting in the area. The chief indication that the bird had staked out the territory as his own was the presence of numerous sap wells around the cavity hole (see photo below). RCWs are the only woodpeckers in North America that excavate cavities exclusively in living pine trees. They repeatedly peck holes or "wells" around the cavity that exude resin and coat the tree. The birds keep the resin flowing as a defense against rat snakes and other tree-climbing predators. I confirmed my hypothesis when I observed the male leaving the cavity on two different days while conducting early morning roost checks.

It is estimated that the southeastern United States once supported over 1,600,000 RCW breeding groups. Only about one per cent or approximately 16,000 remain today, but the numbers are slowly increasing in response to habitat restoration and management programs. The positive signs at Pine City NA are an important part of the hope for future recovery of this endangered woodpecker.



[Bill Holimon](#)

Resource Management Award

[Logoly State Park](#) received the state park system's 2009 (fiscal year) Resource Management Award in a September ceremony held at the Ozark Folk Center. This small state park north of Magnolia is dedicated to environmental education and provides a tremendous service to the schools of south Arkansas and several from northern Louisiana and east Texas. [Logoly Natural Area](#) (at right) is contained within the state park and managed jointly by ANHC and Arkansas State Parks. The natural area includes various natural communities representative of south-central Arkansas, including forests of pine and hardwood, and several mineral springs with increasingly rare plant species restricted to spring environments.



Park staff, especially interpreter Ray Erickson, have been involved in a significant plant documentation project. Over the past two years Ray has identified 813 plant species, 610 of which are new county records. This tells us that the forest of Logoly State Park is an amazing place rich in biodiversity. This research gives us much better understanding of the resource we manage, and has led to new and better programs for the thousands of visitors who come to Logoly State Park and discover the riches found in protected natural areas.

[Jay S. Miller](#), CIP, CIT
Administrator of Program Services
Arkansas State Parks

Happy Halloween

Some people only think of bats when they're hanging decorations at Halloween, and consider them dangerous vermin — an opinion based entirely on myths and misconceptions. Bats are not flying mice, they do not want to fly into your hair, and only three out of almost a thousand species worldwide drink blood.

There are many superstitions that involve the bat. It is believed that if a bat flies around a house three



times, flies into a window, or flies into a house then someone in that household will die soon. It is also terribly bad luck for the newly married couple if a bat shows up at the wedding. If a bat flies straight up and then back down, then the witching hour has arrived. It was also thought that bats were actually witches who had disguised themselves for their own protection.



There are also cultures that believe that the bat is a symbol of good luck. Citizens in Poland and China believe the bat to be a symbol of happiness and a long life. The Aborigines of Australia believe the bat to be very powerful. They will not kill a bat because they believe this act will considerably shorten the person's life.

Enjoyed a margarita lately? Thank a bat. Bats pollinate the agave plant that tequila is made from, as well as the avocados in that accompanying guacamole. Closer to home, you can also thank bats for fewer mosquito bites: A single bat eats hundreds of flying insects per hour.

Arkansas is home to three species of endangered bats and they are currently the most endangered group of mammals in our state. Bats are particularly vulnerable because of their unique biology. Unlike most mammals their size, they reproduce slowly — most species have only one young per year. And because they live in such large groups, it's easy to wipe out thousands in a single act. Bats are also suffering from a mysterious new disease called [White-nose Syndrome](#) that has spread through the Northeast in the past two years, nearly wiping out affected colonies.

On the bright side, bats' habit of living in large groups means that one act of conservation can make a huge difference, as in the ANHC natural areas that protect bats, such as [Garrett Hollow Natural Area](#), [Cave Springs Cave Natural Area](#), [Slippery Hollow Natural Area](#), and [Hell Creek Natural Area](#).



Education is also an important tool for bat conservation. Our education staff conducts programs and workshops each year highlighting the unique adaptations of bats and their role in Arkansas's environment.

[Jane Jones-Schulz](#)

Habitat: Imagine That! Science-Art Contest for Children in Grades 2-4

From a tiny insect to a huge blue whale, all animals have a place they call home. Their home -- called a habitat -- provides them with the food, water and shelter they need to survive.



An art contest for grades 2-4 challenges young scientists and artists to become wildlife investigators by exploring habitats, small and large, in their backyard or around the world, and then draw a picture showing what they learned. Artwork might focus on one animal or many, from an area as small as a single habitat or large as a biome.

"Habitat: Imagine That!" is the 14th annual art contest held by the [Institute for Global Environmental Strategies](#) (IGES) in Arlington, Va. The contest supports national education standards for grades K-4.

The first-, second- and third-place artists will receive \$100, \$75 and \$50 Visa gift cards, respectively, framed color certificates, and their artwork will be showcased on IGES's Web site. For all entrants, certificates of participation will be available online as PDF files for teachers or parents to download and print.

Entries are due Oct. 26, 2009.

For more information, including detailed contest instructions, information for teachers and parents, a list of educational resources, and to view artwork of past winners, please visit: www.strategies.org/artcontest

[Jane Jones-Schulz](#)

Upcoming Events

November 3, 2009 - Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission meeting
The ANHC will meet Tuesday, November 3, 2009, at 4 p.m. at the Best Western Eureka Springs Inn located at 101 E. Van Buren Street in Eureka Springs.

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