

# the urban naturalist

NEWS FROM BLUFF LAKE NATURE CENTER • AUTUMN 2008



BLUFF  
LAKE  
NATURE  
CENTER

*Wildlife Refuge ~ Outdoor Classroom*

9801 East Colfax Avenue  
Suite 100  
Aurora, CO 80010  
303.344.0031  
info@blufflake.org  
BluffLakeNatureCenter.org



*Photo by Heather Dirck*

*At Bluff Lake Nature Center,  
we are fostering lifelong learning  
and environmental stewardship of  
a unique urban wildlife refuge.*

inside

- » Page 3: Book Review: *The World Without Us*
- » Page 4: Autumn at Bluff Lake
- » Page 5: Volunteer Profile: Kathy and Richard Smith
- » Page 6: The Nature Conservancy Partnership

## Bluff Lake Staff:

**Glenn Fee**  
*Executive Director*

**Susan Beckett**  
*Education Director*

**Mendy Evans**  
*Development Director*

**Kristin Libberton**  
*Volunteer Program Manager*

**Antonio Muñiz-Martínez**  
*Bilingual Educator*

**Chris Story**  
*Site Manager*

**Christin Ripley**  
*Community Education Coordinator*  
*AmeriCorps\*VISTA*

## Board of Trustees:

**Dan Reimer, President**  
*Kaplan, Kirsch, and Rockwell*

**Phyllis Allen, Vice President**

**Peter Smith, Treasurer**  
*Chase Bank*

**Billy Brown, Secretary**  
*Praxis*

**Susie Crane**

**Patrick Emery**  
*Balarat Outdoor Education Center*

**Mary Seawell**  
*Sturm Family Foundation*

**Ana Soler**  
*FrontRange Earth Force*

**Jeff Tejral**  
*Aurora Utilities Department*

**Allison Trembly**

**Carl Wells**  
*Seniors Financial Services*

*On the Cover:*  
*AmeriCorps\* NCCC*  
*participate in Bluff Lake's new*  
*service learning program*



*Bluff Lake volunteer, Kay Miller, removes a Russian Olive tree in preparation for planting native willows.*

## Executive Director's Note

Bluff Lake Nature Center is blessed with many long-time visitors and supporters. Often times, I have the pleasure of interacting with these visitors out at the site and gain valuable insight through their perspectives. These supporters care deeply about Bluff Lake Nature Center and show that care in a variety of manners. Many choose to become members, supporting our science education programs and restoration efforts. Some of these supporters are nature guides or photographers, documenting Bluff Lake's changing seasons and educating fellow visitors about all the surprises that Bluff Lake holds.

Regardless of your relationship to Bluff Lake, I hope that you will find a way to become involved in our work. As the Stapleton neighborhood continues to advance in our direction, we have many new visitors who value Bluff Lake for all it has to offer. These visitors value the site for all it has to offer and the organization for all of our great educational opportunities. The increase in visitors necessitates the need for additional members and volunteers to help us accomplish our work.

As you'll see in this edition of *The Urban Naturalist*, Bluff Lake Nature Center offers an array of opportunities to become more involved. Young Osvaldo Pinedo, a resident of the Aurora neighborhood to our south, volunteers his time as a mentor for our Junior Naturalist program. Richard and Kathy Smith spend their Thursday evenings greeting visitors at our Fireside Chats. Each Wednesday morning, a group of Site Restoration Volunteers make their way around the land, removing invasive species and restoring Bluff Lake to its natural state.

The autumn season brings cooler temperatures and the return of our elementary science education program. Two restoration projects – on September 13 and October 11 – provide a great opportunity to volunteer on a one-time event and learn more about our work at Bluff Lake Nature Center.

We hope to see you soon!

*Glenn Fee, Executive Director*

# Book Review

## The World Without Us

Alan Weisman

By *Christin Ripley*

From the built environment of New York City, to the mass extinction of the passenger pigeon, Alan Weisman takes us on a journey through man-made structures and ecosystems to examine what might happen in a world where humans suddenly disappear. By interspersing interviews with detailed explanations of natural processes, *The World Without Us* allows the reader to imagine nature reclaiming a world free of human influence.

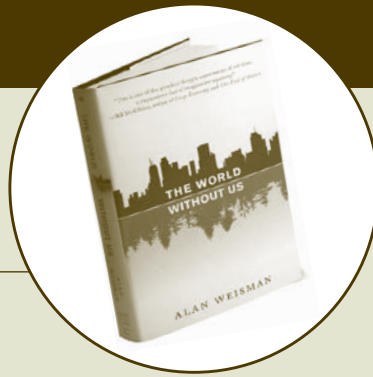
An interview that is illustrative of Weisman's approach is one with a New York City Transit maintenance crew. The crew is charged with containing the thirteen million gallons of water that flow under the city each day. Their job is to maintain the pumps so Manhattan does not flood. In a world without humans the maintenance men speculate that within two days the pumps would fail and all of Manhattan would be under water. Nature would essentially begin the process of reclaiming the vast wetlands that dominated the island prior to human settlement.

Weisman digs deeper and investigates the impact the water would have on the structure of the buildings in the city. He explores the materials that the buildings are created from and how the water would affect their structural integrity. His speculation of what would happen is fascinating in its detail, but this very detailed approach is what may risk losing the average reader.

In the section "Polymers Are Forever," Weisman discusses the various forms of man-made plastics, where they end up in the world, and their environmental impact on different ecosystems. He visits a research facility in England where grad students have been monitoring trash on beaches. The vast majority of the polymers that they find are from a tiny particle of plastic called a nurdle. Nurdles are the raw materials that all plastic materials are made up of and have astonishing effects on the ecosystem. These plastics are consumed by tiny sea creatures, such as krill and zoo-plankton, and bio-accumulate through the food chain. In a world without humans, it would take generations for the negative impacts of polymers to be reversed.

Despite his occasional focus on the doom and gloom, Alan Weisman depicts a world without humans as a world that would be able to heal from the many pressures we have applied. Much healing can even occur if we're able to curb some of our current practices. At the very least, Weisman's approach will cause the reader to re-examine their place within the world.

Bluff Lake Nature Center is an excellent example of healing that can occur. Fourteen years ago, Bluff Lake Nature Center opened as a very disturbed piece of land. Today, thanks to the work of countless volunteers, the Nature Center is in the process of healing, giving hope that this work can be accomplished on a larger scale.



## Summer Visitors: Painted Ladies on the Rabbitbrush



The Painted Lady Butterfly is the most widely distributed butterfly on Earth. Like other butterfly species, the Painted Lady can be found at Bluff Lake throughout the summer. It is especially abundant in the late summer and early fall, when our Rabbitbrush is in full bloom.

Rabbitbrush is a drought-tolerant Colorado native that is especially prominent at Bluff Lake around the pergola on top of the bluff. The late summer bloom covers the plant in yellow flowers. Adult Painted Ladies feed off the Rabbitbrush's nectar while facilitating the pollination of its flowers. They lay eggs on the Rabbitbrush and caterpillars feed on its leaves.

The wings of the Painted Lady are orange with black spots, with some brown around the base and black and white on the outside corners. Their wingspan is approximately 2 to 3 inches. On your visit to Bluff Lake this fall, look for the Painted Ladies swarming the Rabbit Brush.

## Wine & Cheese on the Bluff

Our annual Wine & Cheese on the Bluff brought together dozens of Bluff Lake members and supporters. Special thanks to The Cork House Wine Restaurant for their generous wine pours throughout the evening!



**CORK  
HOUSE**  
WINE RESTAURANT

# Autumn at Bluff Lake

## September Fireside Chats

Enjoy a campfire and marshmallow roast as you learn about the animals and ecosystems at Bluff Lake. Watch as nocturnal animals come to life while the sun sets slowly behind the mountains. In 2008, Bluff Lake is proud to partner with The Nature Conservancy and other partners to present ten Fireside Chats.

### September 11—These Boots Are Made For Walking

*Kristin Libberton,*

*Bluff Lake Education Staff*

Feet are neat! Find out how toes and feet make life possible for creatures large and small, feathered and furred.

### September 25—Prairie Dogs

*Kathy Boucher,*

*Prairie Dog Specialists*

Come learn about these interesting critters that surround Bluff Lake and hear about the efforts to preserve their habitat.

» Fireside Chats are free for members, and we ask for a \$1 donation from each non-member.



» All presentations begin at 6pm.

» These programs are fun for the whole family. Children of all ages are invited, but required to bring an adult.

» For full descriptions, visit our website: [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org).

## Bluff Lake Autumn Open House

Join Bluff Lake Nature Center staff and partners for our Autumn Open House on October 26 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Bluff Lake will be joined by Greenprint Denver, FrontRange Earth Force, and Sand Creek Greenway for an afternoon of conservation-themed activities for the entire family. Bluff Lake Naturalists will lead hourly tours of the Nature Center, and HawkQuest will present a live raptor show at Noon.

## Upcoming Restoration Projects

Bluff Lake volunteers work tirelessly to improve the wildlife habitat, accessibility, and the beauty of our Nature Center. Each project will include breakfast and lunch, and provide the perfect opportunity to work alongside other individuals who are passionate about conservation in Colorado. To register for any of our projects, visit VOutdoors ([www.voutdoors.org](http://www.voutdoors.org)). For more information about our 2008 projects, or other group or individual restoration opportunities, please contact Chris Story at [cstory@blufflake.org](mailto:cstory@blufflake.org)

### 9/13—Trail Restoration

8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Volunteers: 40

Construct new trail and stabilize current trails that wind through our 123 acre site.

### 10/11—Fall Wetland Planting

8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Volunteers: 50

Plant native grasses and shrubs as part of our ongoing effort to restore our wetland area.

## Join Us for the 2nd Annual Urban Spaces, Wild Places

» **When:** Friday, October 3

» **Where:** Fuel Café in TAXI, the exciting urban campus by Zeppelin Development in River North

» **What:** BLNC honors ERO Resources Corporation for their dedication to conservation work. For more information or tickets to the event, contact Mendy Evans at 303-344-1836 or [mevans@blufflake.org](mailto:mevans@blufflake.org)



Bluff Lake Nature Center is proud to have many strong corporate partners, including AOR, Inc. a Denver-based advertising, design and interactive marketing firm. AOR has been a good friend to Bluff Lake, helping us with our Capital Campaign and donating the design and production of this newsletter. You can learn more about AOR at [www.thinkaor.com](http://www.thinkaor.com).

AOR

# Volunteer Profile

## Kathy and Richard Smith

Community is important to Bluff Lake volunteers, and Kathy and Richard Smith are no exception. Long-time Aurora residents, the Smiths give freely of their time to nature, children and the community. As Bluff Lake Ambassadors, Richard and Kathy can be found at Bluff Lake greeting visitors and assisting with presentations during Fireside Chats. They love volunteering at Bluff Lake because it “gives us a chance to be outside and it’s close – just a 10-minute drive from home.” Kathy particularly enjoys that “it is easy to spot wildlife in the city.”

Both of the Smiths have a life-long interest in connecting to the community. Both are scout leaders for their grandchildren. Richard teaches woodshop at Aurora Central High School and volunteers for the Citizens Police Alumni Association.

Kathy works as an Educational Assistant at Kenton Elementary School teaching reading and math. In fact, it was the students’ excitement after class field trips that turned Kathy on to Bluff Lake. Her face lights up when she talks about the students. After the students visit Bluff Lake, “for a week, the only things they write about are what they saw at Bluff Lake. It’s hard to calm them down.”

Richard encourages others to volunteer. He says “it improves your people skills” and connects him with other members of the community. When they are at the site, Richard says they “hear all kinds of stories from way back from people who have lived in the area for a long time.” Guests share their memories about how the habitat and structures have changed over the past 20 years.

Kathy and Richard are happy to dedicate so much time to Bluff Lake because they enjoy the programs. The Fireside Chats have attracted increasingly larger crowds, allowing the Smiths the opportunity to connect with individuals who share their love of Bluff Lake.

Bluff Lake ties together visitors from the past and the present, and volunteers like Richard and Kathy make this connection possible.



## Volunteer at BLNC!

With each passing year, Bluff Lake Nature Center enjoys an increase in visitors who recognize the nature center for its educational and conservation values. As our visitors increase, so does our need for volunteers to help maintain this special place and educate our visitors.

Now more than ever before, local volunteerism can have global impacts. Conservation and preservation of our wild places ensures that wildlife has a home. Education about wildlife connects people to the place. Volunteers make the connection possible.

So, why volunteer? There’s so much to gain from volunteering at Bluff Lake Nature Center. Our Stewardship volunteers learn valuable skills in habitat restoration and in leading volunteer groups. Our Volunteer Naturalists realize the value of educating our young citizens. Bluff Lake Ambassadors greet visitors on the weekends and evenings and share their own perspectives on the nature center.

Bluff Lake also has numerous opportunities to volunteer in our office and through our seasonal projects. Bluff Lake has room for individuals, families and teams as part of our volunteer corps. We’d love to count you!

For more information about volunteer opportunities, visit us at [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org) or, better yet, come see us in person!

## Thank you!

Bluff Lake Nature Center would not be able to provide any of our services without support from the community. So it is with much enthusiasm that we thank the many agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals that made donations last year.

### Corporate & Foundation Donors:

- AOR, Inc.
- Charles R. Jelm Charitable Foundation
- Charles T. Beaird Foundation
- Crestmoor Park Garden Club
- Denver Active 20/30 Children's Foundation
- The Denver Foundation
- Department of Aviation, City of Denver
- FirstBank
- Forest City
- GP Xpress
- Gardener Family Foundation
- Gary-Williams Energy Corporation
- The Haddon Foundation
- Harvard Communities
- Johnson & Wales University
- Kenneth King Foundation
- Lauren Townsend Memorial Wildlife Fund of The Denver Foundation
- McStain Neighborhoods
- REI
- Rollie R. Kelley Family Foundation
- SCFD: Denver, Adams & Arapahoe
- South High School EPYCS
- XCel Energy Foundation

### Conservators:

- Phyllis & Vance Allen
- Sally Allen
- Dr. Neiel Baronberg
- Linda Boone
- Susie Crane & Gary Prado
- Tom & Lucy Creighton
- William Eichelberger
- Sam & Nancy Gary
- Tom Gougeon
- Rhonda Grant
- Fran & Carol Haas
- Tom & Caroline Hoyt
- Catherine Jarvis & John Burris
- Ann Lederer & Robert Hickler
- Barry & Donna Levene
- Pat McClearn
- Jackie & Steve Norris
- Dan Reimer & Wendy Berhman
- Mary Seawell & Lee Ferguson
- Craig Sommers
- Carl & Allie Wells



## The Nature Conservancy Partnership

Our friends at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are widely recognized as one of the most successful conservation organizations in the world. In Colorado, TNC has identified the protection of grasslands, wetlands, and riparian corridors as a priority, closely matching the ecosystems we protect at Bluff Lake Nature Center. The Conservancy has protected more than 600,000 acres of critical habitat throughout the state.

Bluff Lake Nature Center, in response to The Nature Conservancy of Colorado's wish to have an urban presence in Denver, has entered into an exciting new partnership with the organization. Although we manage a small piece of land in comparison to The Nature Conservancy sites, our urban location brings a large, and growing, number of visitors. The partnership allows two like-minded organizations to share resources in order to connect the people of Colorado with nature and enhance their understanding of the natural world.

The Nature Conservancy State Director, Charles Bedford, sees the relationship as one that will benefit the work of each organization. "Our sites in Colorado, while critical to habitat protection, don't necessarily see the number of visitors that Bluff Lake has with their urban location. We see this as a natural extension of our work with increased opportunities for people to experience nature first-hand."

What does this mean to Bluff Lake Nature Center members and supporters? For our regular Fireside Chat visitors, The Nature Conservancy staff has led two excellent discussions this summer. Bluff Lake Nature Center staff has visited Carpenter Ranch in Steamboat Springs to learn about restoration efforts on that site. Our staff came away refreshed, with new ideas on programs and insight into different land management techniques. Look for additional joint TNC/ Bluff Lake programs in the coming year.

Bluff Lake is about to impart on an important Capital Campaign to build a science education center on our site. The Nature Conservancy will assist with interpretive signage, linking their sites around the state with the various ecosystems at Bluff Lake. In turn, local staff from The Nature Conservancy will utilize Bluff Lake's conservation library and conference room to continue their critical work. As Bluff Lake's role in the Denver community continues to grow, we look forward to a flourishing partnership.

The Nature Conservancy   
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

## Oswaldo Pinedo: Bluff Lake Enthusiast and Volunteer Junior Naturalist

Without a permanent education center at Bluff Lake, we have some difficulty in connecting with our regular users. While we know that our school programs are positively affecting students' behavior, we rarely get the satisfaction of seeing them return to Bluff Lake with their families.

However, this summer the education staff had the pleasure of getting to know one of Bluff Lake's regular visitors on an entirely different level. Oswaldo Pinedo was one of our first Junior Naturalist scholarship recipients and came to Bug Camp in June.

It was clear from the first day that Oswaldo was no ordinary camper. He knew more than most about Bluff Lake and the wildlife that live there and showed a great desire to share his knowledge with other campers. He helped us so much in the first week that we invited him back to volunteer for the second week of camp. He couldn't have been more excited about returning as a helper. "My favorite part about Bug Camp was helping kids and getting to explore different parts of Bluff Lake."

Oswaldo lives only a mile away from the refuge and found Bluff Lake when he started following a path through his neighborhood with his dad. "I've been coming to Bluff Lake for six years. I respect this place. I've been to Bluff Lake four times with my school. I never want to miss the field trips. When I was seven years old I saw a coyote. I didn't even know what a coyote was then. From that day on I felt like animals were a part of our lives and I wanted to be part of their lives."

Oswaldo is a natural teacher who loves to share his passion of the outdoors with children and adults alike. We were very fortunate to get to know him better and have his help with Junior Naturalist Camp. We hope to see Oswaldo and many of our young neighbors for years to come.



*"I've been coming to Bluff Lake for six years. I respect this place. I've been to Bluff Lake four times with my school. I never want to miss the field trips."*

## Launching Service Learning at Bluff Lake

Driven by the ideals of service learning, Bluff Lake Nature Center is embarking on new programming to provide interactive opportunities for middle and high school students. Christin Ripley, Bluff Lake's AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, has developed the program through partnerships with FrontRange Earth Force, local schools, and youth corps.

As this program expands, we plan to connect with local schools and the nearby Aurora and Stapleton communities. The ultimate goal is to utilize Bluff Lake Nature Center as a laboratory of sorts, where youth will perform service work and research that links directly to their classroom learning and sustainability in their own community. In the fall, Bluff Lake and FrontRange Earth Force will expand our work through a new partnership with the Denver School of Science and Technology and schools in the Aurora community.

During July, a group of 100 AmeriCorps NCCC Junior members came to Bluff Lake to pilot the new service learning program. The group learned about storm water and the function of wetlands while performing a service project directly related to the topic. During their four hours at Bluff Lake, NCCC members heard from water experts from the community, learned about storm drain connectivity, and then picked up trash and recyclables from our storm water outfall.

In initiating this new service learning program, we plan to provide another outlet for science education in local schools and link student learning to concrete results in their community.

*Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Visit [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org) to learn more.*





NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
DENVER, CO  
PERMIT NO. 5286

9801 East Colfax Avenue  
Suite 100  
Aurora, CO 80010



# Nurture Your Natural Neighbors:

## Become a member of Bluff Lake Nature Center

### Member Benefits:

- » Free Fireside Chats
- » Members-only events
- » Discounted Junior Naturalist camps with priority registration
- » The satisfaction of supporting the largest private open space in Denver.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- Please contact me with information about volunteering.
- Please send my membership gift.
- Don't send a gift. I prefer to take the full tax deduction.

### Bluff Lake Membership Levels

Member	Individual	Family
<i>Heron</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50
<i>Deer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125
<i>Coyote</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250
<i>Eagle</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500
<b>Conservator</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> \$500	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000
<b>Other</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> \$	_____	

### » Please return completed form and check to:

Bluff Lake Nature Center • Attn: Mendy Evans  
9801 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 100 • Aurora, CO 80010

» To make an online donation, visit [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org)

For more information about membership and membership levels, visit [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org)