

Making Ripples

Brooks Hummel Nature Preserve Something to Be Thankful For

by Amanda Bancroft

I'll be adding one more item of gratitude to my Thanksgiving list this year. The City of Fayetteville contains one of the best-kept secrets (besides Mt. Kessler) for hiking within city limits. Brooks Hummel Nature Preserve is a retreat from the cement into the serene peace of non-human mystery, where you might see a fox kit pouncing on an insect in the spring or a buck drinking from a stream during the fall. There are no gravel or paved trails, and one feels like they were stepping down into a large bowl of autumn soup full of leaves instead of alphabet noodles. Located behind Ozark Natural Foods in the Evelyn Hills Shopping Center, the trailhead borders the AppleSeeds, Inc., Teaching Farm. The foot path proceeds downhill, crossing a bit of a stream and following its banks along 13.75 acres of "Wow, I had no idea this existed!"

Brooks Hummel was acquired in 1997 and is overseen by the Fayetteville Parks & Recreation Department. Volunteers from the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association, Ozark Natural Foods, AppleSeeds, Inc., NWA Master Naturalists, and Boy Scout Troop 142 have cleared debris and invasive non-native plants such as Japanese honeysuckle and privet shrubs. With chainsaws, loppers, and sometimes just plain muscle, these volunteer workers seek to protect our ecological heritage by creating space for native plants to grow unobstructed by invasives. The plants, in turn, support native pollinators and wildlife that make the Ozarks unique.

Tom Dureka of the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Center has been organizing volunteer days at Brooks Hummel, with the most recent being November 9th. "FNHA is the main non-profit organization with a lasting interest in maintaining the preserve's ecological qualities," Tom says. Even though it's relatively small, "it seems bigger because of the First United Presbyterian Church and other private landowners who have parcels adjacent to it."

Ozark Natural Foods has supplied volunteers with hot beverages and snacks. Lisa Garrett of ONF is overseeing the effort to involve more employees and owners in the Brooks Hummel project, hoping that people will come out and help or just enjoy lunch in a more natural setting. "The volunteers are great to come help us out," Lisa says. "We've been involved for two years now through FNHA. Tom took us on a little hike out there. It's amazing it's in the middle of town!"

Brooks Hummel is open to the public and a real treat for those who like the peace of nature without having to drive miles out of town. Check it out before grocery shopping for the Thanksgiving meal. If we find ourselves needing to walk off some turkey, or simply want to escape the relatives during the break, the preserve will be there for us – as long as we take care of it.

Ripples is an emerging online educational center inspired by a holistic approach to making a difference. Follow our journey to live sustainably and make ripples with our lifestyle at: www.RipplesBlog.org.