

Making Ripples

Arkansas Homegrown Music Festival Models Sustainability

by Amanda Bancroft

A lifestyle that makes a difference or avoids unnecessary harm doesn't have to be boring or excessively challenging. "We can do the same things that we're doing now, but smarter, cleaner, and more consciously," says Hannah Withers, one of many partners involved in planning the new Arkansas Homegrown Music Festival to debut at Byrd's Adventure Center in Ozark this July 21st – 23rd. "It fills the gap left by Wakarusa, which isn't happening this year," she says.

This will be the second fully sustainable music festival in the entire country, according to Withers. Vendors are not allowed to bring single-use plastic disposables, and the purchase of a ticket comes with much more than admittance: attendees receive a canvas bag designed with the festival map to avoid printing paper, a bamboo "spork" spoon and fork combination utensil, a collectible plate, and a stainless steel pint glass. These keepsakes can be washed at health-department-approved dishwashing stations. Recycling is one key feature supported by Greensource Recycling, who plans to use custom-made bicycles to remove trash and recyclables instead of using ATVs. Even the art installations will be made with upcycled materials or fully recyclable materials that can be taken apart afterwards.

"It costs a little more money and gets a little more complicated [than an unsustainable festival] but it can be done, and I want to show people in this part of the country that it really can be done and be worth our effort," Withers says. Ozark Natural Foods will have a mini farmer's market set up to provide attendees with fresh food to grill at their campsites, some of which are lights-out at 11pm for families. Phat Tire Bike Company is leading a bike ride from Fayetteville to Byrd's, and shuttling attendees' camping gear so nobody has to haul it! Packrat Outdoor Center is offering their support, too.

For kids, there will be an ongoing recycled-materials craft area with programming by Art Feeds, and a kids' dance stage. The pathways and at least one stage will be powered by the sun with Richter Solar. The Mulberry River Society is helping supply the festival's volunteer force, and many local vendors are providing support or their handcrafted items. Beer will be available for purchase from Fossil Cove Brewing Company and Ozark Beer Company.

However, this is not an "environment-focused" event. It's just a fun music festival which happens to create less harm in the world. "We don't want it be an Earth Day type festival. We want to focus on the music, but we do want it to be sustainable," Withers explains. Leftover Salmon and the Wood Brothers are headlining the festival along with over a dozen other (mostly bluegrass) groups. Connect to the Homegrown Music Festival online at HomegrownFestival-AR.com or find them on Facebook under Arkansas Homegrown Music Festival.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid earthbag cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.