

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Good news and climate are strange companions these days, but here they go together: according to the NWA Land Trust, “Northwest Arkansas is rich with landscapes that foster climate resiliency. Ecosystems and habitats with these landscape characteristics are more likely to recover from extreme weather events including floods, drought and wildfire.” A climate resilient landscape contains four main aspects: geologic diversity, land form diversity, high quality habitat and connectivity. Our land is made up of interrelated systems – like a layered cake – and each one of these four aspects affects the others.

Geologic diversity means a large variety of rock formations and soils. A glance out the car window will show that Northwest Arkansas changes shape, with prairie remnants, lakes, and mountains (which are actually a plateau). The scenery looks beautiful, but it’s important, too. Geologic diversity helps ensure soil diversity, which is a welcome mat for a larger variety of plant species than would otherwise live in an area with only one type of soil.

Land form diversity is similar and builds off of geologic diversity. When the landscape is not all the same, microhabitats form and allow a greater variety of species to live within them. A mountain plays host to different plant species on wetter, colder north-facing slopes than drier, warmer south-facing slopes. Wetlands will harbor unique animals you wouldn’t find on a dry bluff. Sensitive species can take refuge and more easily adapt to changing conditions.

High quality habitat exists not only when an area provides the basics – food, shelter, water, and space for raising the next generation – but also when that habitat is a strong native ecosystem. It isn’t overrun with invasive non-native plants that block the growth of native plants and impair the health or reproduction of birds, amphibians, insects, and other animals (picture one of our local bush honeysuckle monoculture “forests”). These spaces also provide ecosystem services for humans and our economy, such as free water filtration and food.

Connected landscapes are more resilient than isolated ones. Green corridors allow humans, plants and animals to move through more natural areas instead of being surrounded by the concrete jungle all the time. This is great for our mental health and recreation, and even better if you’re a hummingbird migrating an incredible distance, or a bobcat that needs about 400 acres to hunt and reproduce. Connectivity allows high quality habitat to be linked, so that species can at least have the space they need even if it’s not all in one square chunk.

We’re lucky to live in a place that offers natural resiliency in our changing world. As long as we can protect the land, we protect ourselves and each other. For an excellent short video explaining our local climate resilient landscapes [click here](#), or read about specific geologic formations, microhabitats, species range and more at the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust’s [Climate Resilient Landscapes](#) page.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. 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.