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Fountain Creek Watershed

Flood Control & Greenway District



The District's work, through a collaborative effort between many organizations, focuses on protecting, preserving and enhancing our waterways for the benefit of citizens and our natural habitat throughout the region for today and future generations. We care about clean and safe waterways, water quality, and enhancing the ability to fish and recreate in our waterways for improved quality of life for all.

Fountain Creek Chronicles February 2021

You are receiving this newsletter because you expressed an interest in the Fountain Creek Watershed or Creek Week cleanup.

Why do birds flock to our watershed? Here are 3 great reasons ...

Water. Food. Shelter. All three are critical for survival. Thankfully, the Fountain Creek watershed provides a wealth of water, food and shelter for hundreds of resident and migrating bird species.

To learn about our watershed's importance to birds, we spoke with Rick Clawges, a local biologist who has worked for government and private-sector environmental entities in the Fountain Creek basin since 2007. Rick holds a Master's degree with an ornithological focus and is currently pursuing a doctorate. His research study focuses on sapsuckers, a type of woodpecker.

Rick starts by explaining that the Fountain Creek watershed is part of the Central Flyway.



The four North American flyways are the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific. Each flyway encompasses a vast swath of land offering a relatively reliable source of water, food and cover for birds on the move.

“Flyways are recognized as major routes birds use to travel between their wintering and breeding areas,” Rick says.

“Here in the Fountain Creek basin, we enjoy a number of year-round residents such as Downy Woodpecker and Black-capped Chickadee. We also see migrants passing through in spring and fall. In migration, some birds may rest and refuel for just a few days before moving on toward their destination. Other migrant birds may choose to remain and breed or winter over in the basin.”



Why is our watershed important to our feathered friends?

“It provides resources,” Rick says. “First of all, Fountain Creek and its tributaries provide an essential, reliable water resource.” Clearly, clean water impacts bird populations. However, the concept of water quality is a bit more complicated than you may realize.

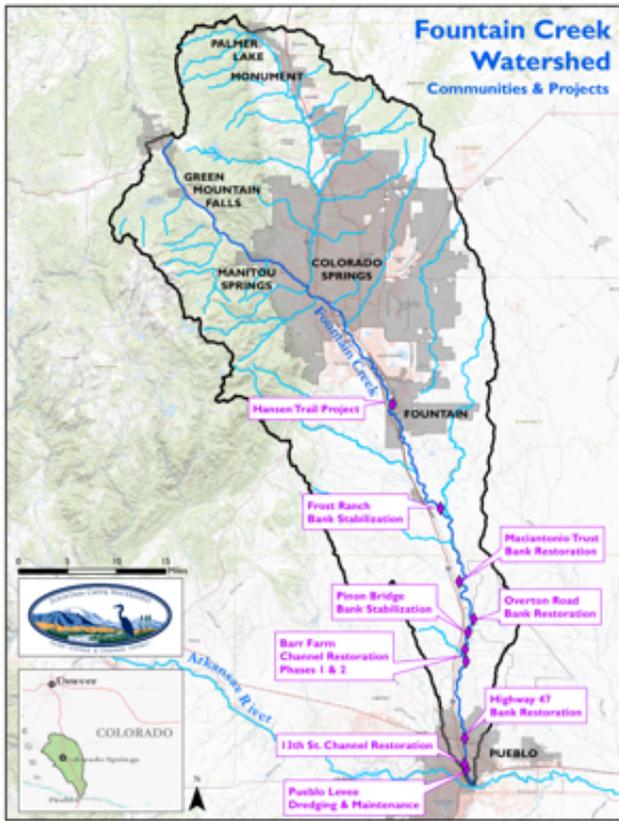


“Water quality involves *chemical* and *physical* parameters,” Rick explains. Chemical water quality may be affected by pesticides, excess nutrients, trace elements, pharmaceutical compounds and other constituents. A variety of factors impact a stream’s physical water quality. One example is the excess input of fine sedimentation, which may affect growth of aquatic plants and interfere with the life cycle of aquatic insects – both of which serve as important food sources for some birds.



Second, our watershed provides a wide variety of food resources thanks to the vegetation growing along Fountain Creek and its tributaries. “Riparian corridors are especially important in a semi-arid region like ours,” he says. “Both resident and migrating birds prefer creek systems with a natural flow regime and native vegetation like cottonwoods and willows that offer them cover, structural complexity and host insect prey.”

Rick gives this example: Creekside trees and shrubs drop leaves into the creek. This detritus provides food and shelter for the larval stage of some aquatic insects. When the insects emerge from the creek as adults, a wide variety of birds happily snap them up including flycatchers, warblers and swallows.



In addition to water and food, our watershed may literally provide shelter from the storm in a phenomenon known as *birdfallout*. “Let’s say you have birds flying from the south in the spring that encounter severe weather with high winds in our region,” Rick explains. “They may rely on our watershed as a stopover point until conditions change and it’s safe to fly again. Even in good weather conditions, birds use the riparian corridor of Fountain Creek as a stopover because of its rich resources.”

Locally, Fountain Creek Regional Park and nearby Chico Basin Ranch are well-known migrant stopover sites where you can spot a wide variety of visiting birds every spring and autumn.

Why is our watershed popular with birders?

As an avid birder, Rick appreciates our watershed’s impressive diversity of terrain, environments and bird species.

“From Fountain Creek’s headwaters to its confluence with the Arkansas River, the diversity is incredible. Starting at the summit of Pikes Peak, water flows down through a mixture of habitats. In higher-elevation forested areas, you might observe Steller’s Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Western Tanager,” he says.





Burrowing Owl



Western Tanager



Red-breasted Nuthatch

“In pinyon-juniper woodlands and foothills scrub you may encounter Spotted Towhee and Virginia’s Warbler, among others. Lower down in the grasslands you can find various sparrows, Scaled Quail and Burrowing Owls. In riparian areas and on water bodies – marshes, ponds, and reservoirs – you might see a great variety of ducks, grebes and other water birds. You can observe a surprising number and variety of species, both residents and migrants, all in a relatively small geographic area.”



Scaled Quail



Spotted Towhee



Virginia's Warbler

Spring is around the corner - let's go birding

Did you know that many of our more colorful migrating birds such as buntings, orioles and warblers typically fly at night and rest and forage by day? That’s great news if you want to see them during spring migration!

Where to go birding:

Audubon’s **website** lists Fountain Creek Regional Park as an Important Bird Area, noting “The site provides essential wetlands habitat and resources for resident and migrant species. Observers have recorded over 250 bird species in the park.”



The Pikes Peak Trail, one of many Colorado Birding Trails, lists 28 sites in our region. The Trail’s web page offers this enticement:

“Birders will find much to occupy them: Flammulated Owls at the Experimental Forest, Mountain Plovers on high plains ranches and wintering waterbirds on Big Johnson Reservoir.”

At nearby Chico Basin Ranch, you can enjoy wide-open shortgrass prairie while scanning the sky for a variety of bird species, some rarely seen in Colorado.

Visit the ranch's **website** to learn about its birding trail, banding program and fees.



The countdown to April Stools Day

April is just around the corner, and that means it's almost April Stools Day! This great event is hosted by Bear Creek Dog Park and brings individual and community partners together to Scoop The Poop. This year's event will be Saturday, April 3, 9-11am.

"We are excited to be a partner for this fun and important event," said Dana Nordstrom, Community Outreach Coordinator for El Paso County Community Services.

"Pet waste is rampant in our communities, and it has a real impact on water quality, in addition to being stinky and unsightly. The simple everyday step of picking up that waste is critical for pet owners to take to keep our water safe and clean. This event does a great job of bringing attention to this issue, reminding pet owners and pet care-givers to make the responsible choice of scooping the poo every time, and the event is fun."



We Coloradans love our dogs. There are an estimated 150,000 dogs in El Paso County alone. Our dogs come with us on date nights, on trail runs, on picnics ... and, well, pretty much everywhere we go!

And most dog-owners wouldn't want it any other way. However, with the weather starting to warm up and the trails and parks getting busier, now is a good time to remember the "down stream" impacts of Fido's waste.

Did you know our storm drains lead directly to local waterways without the water being treated? That means virtually anything on the ground ultimately makes its way to our rivers, creeks, and streams. Dog waste can contain bacteria (E. Coli, Salmonella, and Campylobacter) or parasites (Giardiasis, Toxoplasmosis, and Trichinosis).



These contaminants can cause a variety of unpleasant symptoms in people, including: coughing, headache, fever, body aches, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, and even vision loss.



Pet waste isn't only a problem for humans – it can also threaten flora and fauna. Commercial dog food is rich in nutrients, which is great for our canine companions but disruptive to local ecosystems.

Dog waste can create an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus which can promote algae blooms in our waterways. These blooms endanger our native plants and fish (and the rest of the food chain). Being a responsible pet owner includes helping keep our recreational areas safe and sustainable. Please clean up after your pets, and encourage others to do the same!

Bear Creek Dog Park is a 25-acre fenced area located in Bear Creek Regional Park at 21st Street and Rio Grande Street. The off-leash dog park also has a two-acre small and senior dog area and an agility training area. For more information on April Stools Day, and Bear Creek Dog Park, please contact El Paso County Parks at 520-7529.

The event is sponsored by The Friends for Bear Creek Dog Park, Heuberger Subaru and El Paso County Parks.



Call for Volunteers



Do you love our creeks and waterways? Have you been interested in getting involved with watershed protection but aren't sure how?

We're looking for Steering Committee members for the 8th annual Creek Week Cleanup happening this fall, and to help with the Fountain Creek Brewshed Alliance.

There are opportunities for all ages and abilities - email our Outreach Coordinator at creekweeksoco@gmail.com.

COVID-19 Message

Please continue to maintain social distancing and use common sense when engaging in outdoor recreation. Take advantage of the healing power of nature—in your own backyard or on a walk. Just remember to follow local public health guidance and keep six feet or more from others outside your family. Wash your hands with soap and water once you return from your adventure. Getting outdoors, being in nature, and moving our bodies is good for everyone!

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

There will be opportunities to meet virtually with Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District Committees. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS - [CLICK HERE](#)



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