



LEAFLET

Fontenelle Forest News | Winter 2023

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Top, left: UNO professor and researcher Jeremy White, explained how mist netting is used to capture and study bats at our Bat Education and Viewing program (August 2023); Top, right: Participants enjoyed a mock archaeological dig at our We Dig History program (September 2023); Bottom, left: Attendees competed in an archery competition at Family Adventure Day (October 2023); Bottom, right: Attendees enjoyed making slime at Scales & Tails! (October 2023).

Cover image: Frost covering the Forest (February 2023).

MEET TYLER IRVINE:

Fontenelle Forest's Executive Director

As a 110-year-old private nonprofit, we look forward to charting a new path under new leadership, guided by our long-time mission of inspiring current and future generations to care for the natural world.

Fontenelle Forest is excited to announce that Tyler Irvine has been named its new Executive Director. He joined the Forest in October 2023.

Irvine brings experience in nonprofit management, including fundraising, operations, strategic planning, budgeting, sustainability and program development – all of which make him an ideal fit for the role of executive director. But it's his love of nature and commitment to conservation that makes him an ideal fit for the Forest.

An Omaha native, Irvine has always had a love of nature, the outdoors and Fontenelle Forest. He understands the importance of urban green space and the positive impact it has on people's lives.

"The Forest was the place I found my greatest passion, experiencing nature. Now I bring my kids here, so they can be inspired," said Irvine. "It is the place I go to during all seasons of life, to celebrate good times and find solace in troubling times."

Irvine brings over 15 years of experience to the role, having served in various positions focused on nonprofit management, fundraising, grant writing and community health initiatives. He joins Fontenelle Forest following his most recent role as Director of Greater Nebraska Initiatives at The Sherwood Foundation in Omaha, and previously, Executive Director of the Panhandle Partnership in Scottsbluff, NE.

Irvine feels fortunate that his career has allowed him to do meaningful work that has positively impacted people's lives



Fontenelle Forest's Executive Director, Tyler Irvine, hiking with his son, Isaac, at Neale Woods Nature Reserve.

and is excited to bring that passion and experience to the Forest.

"I am truly grateful to have an opportunity to become a part of the team that maintains and elevates everything that Fontenelle Forest represents," said Irvine.

The board of directors, leadership team and staff are thrilled to welcome Irvine into the role of Executive Director and are eager to embark on a new chapter in Fontenelle Forest's extensive history.

"As a 110-year-old organization, we know that staying true to the mission of the Forest, while also innovating new ways to connect people to nature, is what will allow the organization to thrive," said Matt Hardebeck, President of Fontenelle Forest's Board of Directors.

"Tyler's proven leadership skills, positive standing in the community, and personal commitment to the Forest and its mission make him the right person for this role," said Hardebeck. "We are confident he will not only be a great leader, but also bring positive change to the organization, creating a new and exciting path forward."

On behalf of the Fontenelle Forest Board of Directors and staff, we appreciate the support of our members, guests and donors during this time of transition.

FIELD NOTES *From the Forest*

*Deborah Woracek,
Naturalist Educator*

These field notes are based on past observations. Due to climate change and droughts, you may notice some of these sightings on earlier dates or maybe not even see them this year!



January

After the holidays the trails may seem deserted, but the Forest is a busy place! The Great Horned Owls, foxes and coyotes are all renewing their bonds as pairs. Several species of birds are visiting for the winter, like the Dark-eyed Juncos, while species like Sharp-shinned Hawks and Bald Eagles stick around all year.



February

On warmer days, look for the scarlet cup fungus along the trails. Squirrels are busy with their young. Great Horned Owls are now sitting on eggs, which take about a month to hatch. At the end of February, you'll hear and see red male Cardinals.



March

Let the March winds carry you to the wetlands area to see if spring is waking up. Male Red-winged Blackbirds will begin to arrive. A Great Blue Heron might fly overhead as they look for fish and other aquatic prey.

Let us know what you see along our trails by emailing info@fontenelleforest.org or tagging [@FontenelleForest](https://www.instagram.com/FontenelleForest) on social media.

FEATHER OUR NEST 2023

Thank you to all who joined us at this year's Feather Our Nest event in October. The Forest welcomed 170 guests and raised over \$130,000 while celebrating a year of growth!

Attendees explored the Nature Center and interacted with staff as they experienced the direct impact of the community contributions that make Forest's mission possible.

It is only with the ongoing support of our donors, members and sponsors that we are able to maintain the Forest as a place for people to experience the outdoors, enjoy environmental education and sustain our ecological legacy for future generations .

Below are a few of our favorite photos from Feather Our Nest. If you weren't able to attend this year's event, we hope you will consider joining us in 2024!



Guests met educational raptor ambassadors, like George the Screech Owl and chatted with our Raptor Care Specialist, Ell Kinsey.



Fontenelle Forest's Education and Land Stewardship teams connected with guests about environmental education and conservation volunteer opportunities.



Attendees bid on unique experiences and mission-related silent auction items during the event, with the proceeds providing additional donations to the Forest.



A raptor docent talk was among several of the elevated experiences guests enjoyed at Feather Our Nest, along with a history docent talk and guided boardwalk strolls.



Honorary Chairs, Chris and Sherese Morrow, spoke about what Fontenelle Forest means to their family and the local community.

Missed Feather Our Nest? You can still support Fontenelle Forest in 2023!

If you were not able to attend Feather Our Nest, you can still invest in Fontenelle Forest's legacy through our annual year-end giving campaign! Read on to learn how your gift will support the Forest.

INVESTING IN OUR NATURAL LEGACY

Emily Prauner, Director of Donor & Visitor Services

Fontenelle Forest is a vibrant community space that sustains our ecological legacy, inspires curiosity and connects us with ourselves, each other and the natural world.

As one of Nebraska's oldest conservation organizations and among the nation's largest nature centers, our nonprofit organization has a rich history, providing over 110 years of environmental stewardship.

We activate our mission — to provide a place where people can experience and enjoy the quiet wild of nature and to inspire current and future generations to care for the natural world — through conservation, education and outdoor recreation. By way of this multi-pronged approach, Fontenelle Forest rehabilitates the land and works to increase biodiversity, encourages learning about habitats and ecosystems, and increases access to natural spaces in the community.

Fontenelle Forest's longevity and the work we do is only possible because of our members, visitors, donors and community partners like you, who invest in and uplift our mission, vision and values.



We value the people who work here.

It is critical to provide our staff with competitive, livable wages, quality benefits and ongoing professional development to keep them at the top of their respective fields. Your support allows us to invest in our staff, so they can focus on land conservation, creating engaging education programs, and providing a positive guest and member experience.



We value creating a space that is welcoming, clean, safe and comfortable.

Budgeting for necessary facility repairs and upgrades ensures we can provide you with high-quality accommodations. It is important that we curate an experience that is as safe, welcoming and as enjoyable as possible while you are with us.



We value being stewards of this land.

Only 0.01% of oak savanna remains in the world. We have an organizational obligation to take the very best care of this precious and beautiful resource. Your support allows us to make sure that we are managing invasive species, reconstructing prairies and rebuilding the necessary habitat for bur oaks to not only survive, but thrive.



We value your learning experience.

Maintaining an effective participant-to-instructor ratio and providing more personal and individualized learning experiences is crucial to learning outcomes. Your support helps to create up-to-date program materials, replace equipment, expand our accessibility options and maintain our network of trails.

Thank you for choosing Fontenelle Forest as a place to invest your time, energy and resources. It is our great privilege and joy to work with — and for you — to deliver an exceptional experience for generations to come!



YOUR GIFT IS A VITAL THREAD IN SUPPORT OF OUR MISSION.



Special thank you to Tom Boggs, Fontenelle Forest and Photo Club member for sharing this beautiful image, which illustrates that every thread in a web is vital to its success.

Fontenelle Forest is like a web — only as successful as its threads of support. As a community-funded nonprofit organization, our work is strengthened by the generosity of our donors, members and volunteers.

From restoring threatened ecosystems like oak savanna to educating current and future generations, donations make our work in conservation, education and recreation possible.

Land stewardship is at the core of what we do. Our team of dedicated staff and volunteers work diligently to restore and sustain our ecological legacy for future generations of wildlife and humankind. This includes protecting and stewarding 2,100 acres of oak savanna, which is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world, as well as maintaining the 24 miles of trails at both Neale Woods Nature Reserve and Fontenelle Forest.

Education is also a key focus of Forest operations. Our highly-trained teacher naturalist and raptor educators create unique and engaging curriculum for more than 7,000 students through our school programs, as well as thousands more community members who take advantage of our public programs annually. We feed and care for the 23 non-releasable raptors that live in Fontenelle Forest's Raptor Woodland Refuge and educate the public about native reptiles and amphibians.

This work is only possible through the support of our annual members, visitors, program participants and donor community.

Your generosity is a vital thread in the success of our mission! Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of a gift today.

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT. GIVE TODAY.

Gifts of all sizes will have twice the impact due to the generosity of the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation, which will match all donations up to \$50,000.



Donate now with the sustainable options below:

In person: At the Nature Center | Phone: 402-731-3140

Online: FontenelleForest.org/Support

or, Scan the QR Code

HOW YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Joy Cotton, Grants Writer and Community Giving Coordinator

Memberships, daily admission and donations make everything we do at Fontenelle Forest possible. In this season of giving, we want to reflect on how financial gifts support our mission to provide a place where people can experience and enjoy nature. Our Land Stewardship and Education Departments both play an integral role in making the Forest a place with a purpose. Read below to learn how your support impacts the Forest:



Land Stewardship

As a conservation-focused nonprofit organization, Fontenelle Forest prioritizes active habitat restoration efforts to address the impact of human activity and increase the biodiversity of our properties.

Our dedicated team of land stewardship staff and network of volunteers work diligently to restore the dwindling oak savannas that once dominated this ecologically unique area between the Missouri River floodplain to the east and the tallgrass prairie to the west. Devastatingly, less than 0.01% of 30 million acres remain globally. We are at the precipice of a critical turning point to restore

this endangered ecosystem before it is lost forever. Through mowing, thinning, erosion control, invasive species control, prescribed burning and sowing of prairie seeds, we are reconstructing prairies and rebuilding the necessary habitat for bur oaks to thrive.

In addition to this important restoration work, the Forest's land and facility teams also maintain our vast network of trails and ensure all properties are safe. When strolling the boardwalk, hiking on the 24 miles of trails or eating lunch on Dennis Plaza, know that your admission, membership and donation make these experiences possible.



Education

Fontenelle Forest provides green space where individuals learn to critically observe their natural surroundings and responsibly engage with nature and its inhabitants. Outdoor spaces are a crucial learning environment for people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and interests.

From Mudpies for preschoolers to Seniors Understanding Nature (SUN), Fontenelle Forest is committed to providing educational programs for all ages. The Forest's naturalist educators facilitate classroom field trips and day camps, as well as public programs available to individuals and families.

We also offer raptor-specific educational programs, which include demonstrations, presentations on raptor species, raptor-themed games and tours of the Raptor Woodland Refuge.

All of Fontenelle Forest's education programs strengthen our mission to inspire current and future generations to care for the natural world. These programs would not be possible without the regular participation and contributions from our dedicated community of members, donors and partners – thank you for uplifting this important work!

NEW FOR 2024:

Membership and Daily Admission Pricing

In addition to philanthropy, Fontenelle Forest relies on membership, admission and program-based revenue streams to fulfill our mission. After careful consideration, to ensure we are valuing ourselves appropriately, we made the decision to raise membership, admission and program fees beginning January 1, 2024 (see a full list of pricing below).

This will be the first time since 2018 that we have raised membership and admission prices. These increases align with our values, rising expenses and our work to enhance the guest experience.

Our goal is to help the Forest maintain a sustainable business model by more closely reflecting our true expenses, as well as the value a Fontenelle Forest experience provides. We are seeing increases in the cost and delivery of materials, insurance, utilities, credit card processing and competitive industry wages.

Although a membership to the Forest will cost a little bit more, we truly believe that our pricing remains competitive with our peers. We are hopeful that our members and guests recognize that Fontenelle Forest provides unique experiences with each visit to the Nature Center, hike on the trails or educational program attended. You can view a full list of benefits on the next page.

Membership, daily admission and program registration continue to help maintain over 2,100 acres of urban green space just minutes from downtown Omaha, a vital community resource.

We appreciate your understanding and ongoing support of the Forest and our mission. If you have questions or concerns, please email me, Emily Prauner, Director of Donor and Visitor Services, at eprauner@fontenelleforest.org.

With sincere gratitude,

Emily Prauner and Fontenelle Forest Staff

WE VALUE OUR MEMBERS AND ALL YOU DO TO SUPPORT THE FOREST

We value our members greatly and know that it is only with your ongoing support that the Forest can continue to thrive. For this reason, we made the decision to communicate the upcoming price increase early and provide members with the opportunity to renew your membership now at the current rates.

Memberships can be renewed at any time and an additional 12 months will be added to your current membership. Additionally, if you are a non-member who has been considering purchasing a membership, now is a great time to join.

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY AND SAVE.

To purchase or renew a membership, visit FontenelleForest.org/Memberships or scan the QR code.



2024 MEMBERSHIP & DAILY ADMISSION RATES: EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2024

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Individual Membership: \$55 Sales tax included. One adult | Two Individuals Membership: \$70 Sales tax included. Two adults living in the same household | Household Membership: \$80 Sales tax included. Two adults living in the same household plus children or grandchildren (under age 18) |
| Fontenelle Forest Adult Admission: \$15 + sales tax | Fontenelle Forest Senior Admission: \$13 + sales tax (ages 62+) | Fontenelle Forest Child Admission: \$9 + sales tax *(ages 2-17) |
| Neale Woods Nature Reserve Adult Admission: \$7 | Neale Woods Nature Reserve Senior Admission: \$6 (ages 62+) | Neale Woods Nature Reserve Child Admission: \$5 *(ages 2-17) |

**Children 2 and under are free.*

DISCOVER THE FOREST:

The Benefits of Membership

If Fontenelle Forest staff are the hands and volunteers the heart, then members are the soul of our organization. We truly cannot do the work we do to actively steward the land, provide environmental education opportunities and create outdoor recreation experiences without our annual advocates. Our members help keep the legacy of Fontenelle Forest alive. A membership to Fontenelle Forest not only directly supports our nonprofit mission-focused work, it also provides you with countless adventures and plenty of benefits!

To our sustaining members — thank you for your ongoing renewal, creating lasting memories and sharing your love of the Forest with new generations of nature lovers. To our new and future members — learn about all of the amazing benefits a Fontenelle Forest membership provides (listed below).

TRAIL ACCESS

Year-round access to over 2,100 acres of land and 24 miles of trails in the extraordinary Loess Hills at Fontenelle Forest and Neale Woods Nature Reserve.

FONTENELLE FOREST

Hike 1,500 acres and 17 miles of trails at Fontenelle Forest in Bellevue, just 10 minutes south of downtown Omaha.

NEALE WOODS NATURE RESERVE

Explore 560 acres and seven miles of trails at Neale Woods in Omaha, just 10 minutes north of downtown Omaha.

ACCESSIBLE BOARDWALKS

Two accessible boardwalks provide individuals of all ages and abilities the opportunity to observe wildlife, the changing seasons and views of the Missouri River.

FLORA & FAUNA

Experience diverse ecosystems from deciduous forest to oak savanna, prairie and wetlands on our trails. The Forest is a premier Audubon-designated birding location with over 246 recorded species.

ACORN ACRES (REOPENING IN 2024)

A one-acre natural playscape in the Forest that provides children with a unique opportunity to explore the outdoors through unstructured play.

RECIPROCAL MEMBERSHIPS

Discounts are available at up to 120 nature centers nationwide through the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) Reciprocal Program. Learn more at www.natctr.org/membership/reciprocal-program

HABITAT HOLLOW

An indoor, nature-based play area where young explorers can make nature discoveries, enjoy interactive activities and crafts and meet our animal ambassadors.

RAPTOR WOODLAND REFUGE

This canopy-level exhibit provides visitors with the opportunity to observe non-releasable educational birds of prey and learn about raptor conservation.

BARIGHT GALLERY

Located in the Fontenelle Forest Nature Center, the gallery features exhibits about nature and the rich history of Fontenelle Forest.

DISCOUNTS ON PROGRAMS, EVENTS & DAY CAMPS

Free or discounted programs and events for children, adults and seniors, as well as discounts on children's day camps (including spring, summer, winter and camps).

DISCOUNTED GUEST ADMISSION

Every time you visit, two of your non-member guests get half-price admission to the Forest.

DISCOUNT AT GIFT SHOP & TREERUSH

Members receive a 10% discount at the Fontenelle Forest gift shop. Members also get 10% off TreeRush Adventures and KidsRush (separate admission required).

LIBRARY PASS PROGRAM: EQUITABLE ACCESS FOR ALL

At the Forest, we believe the benefits of nature should be available to all, which is why we are proud to offer the Library Pass Program, which provides the opportunity for all individuals to access the Forest at no cost.

For more info about this program and a full list of participating library branches, visit our website at FontenelleForest.org/membership-drives-and-discounts or scan the QR code.



Winter Wonderland



DECEMBER 9 - JANUARY 2

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily

Bring the whole family to Fontenelle Forest's annual Winter Wonderland event! All month long, enjoy festive decorations in the Nature Center Great Hall. Then bundle up and stroll the lighted Riverview Boardwalk, while taking in beautiful views of the Forest.

Free for members or with daily admission for non-members.

Opening Weekend Special Activities: Saturday & Sunday, December 9 & 10 Only

Extended Hours: 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. daily

ALL DAY, BOTH DAYS:

* Holiday Decorations * Lighted Boardwalk * Ornament Decorating * Complimentary Hot Cocoa *

SATURDAY: DECEMBER 9

- * Santa: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- * Holiday with the Raptors: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- * Habitat Building: 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

SUNDAY: DECEMBER 10

- * Santa: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- * Holiday with the Raptors: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
- * Holiday Boardwalk Caroling: 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.

All activities are free for Fontenelle Forest members or with daily admission for non-members. No registration required.

For full details about activities, visit our event webpage:
FontenelleForest.org/WinterWonderland or scan the QR code.



FEATURED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

New for 2024! Be sure to check our website calendar for a full list of new programs and events happening in 2024!



Raptor Bird-day | Jan 6

Each January we recognize that our birds of prey all turn another year older! Celebrate, learn about and meet our raptors up close.



Pathways Through Nature | Feb 24

Journey into a deeper appreciation of nature! Embrace your inner naturalist as we learn about animals in love and create Valentine cards.



Winter Wellness | Jan 7 & Feb 18

Don't miss this opportunity to prioritize your well-being and embark on a journey towards a healthier, happier you this winter.



Equinox Celebration | March 16

Celebrate the spring equinox with a seasonal craft, a short hike, a bonfire with s'mores and learn about this astrological phenomenon.



Free For Members: Habitat Hikes

Explore Nebraska's prairies, wetlands and forests at Fontenelle Forest's Habitat Hikes!

Join our naturalist educators on a guided hike through different habitats and learn about each of these unique ecosystems.

Habitat Hikes will be held monthly, as we visit different locations and discover habitat changes each season.

Learn more & register at FontenelleForest.org/Habitat-Hikes

ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPDATES



December 4 - 7 All Forest Trails Closed

Fontenelle Forest will be conducting our annual managed deer hunt. All Fontenelle Forest trails will be closed. The trails at Neale Woods Nature Reserve will remain open.



December 9-10 Winter Wonderland Opening Weekend

Bring the whole family for a holiday weekend celebration at Fontenelle Forest. Stroll the lighted boardwalk or get crafty at Holiday Habitat Building! Free for members or with daily admission for non-members.



Dec. 9 - Jan. 2 Winter Wonderland

Each year during the month of December, we transform our Great Hall into a Winter Wonderland for all to enjoy! Free for members or with daily admission for non-members.

See our full calendar of events and register online at FontenelleForest.org/Calendar



Fontenelle Forest

1111 Bellevue Blvd. North
Bellevue, NE 68005

<<Addressee>>
<<Contact addressee>>
<<Address>>
<<City>>, <<State>> <<Postal code>>

FROM THE ARCHIVES:

A.A. Tyler's Vision for the Forest

Catherine Kuper, Volunteer Archivist

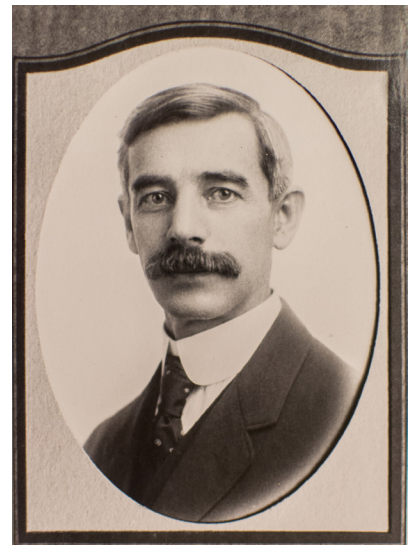
Over 100 years ago the vision for Fontenelle Forest originated with Dr. Ansel Augustus Tyler, a Bellevue College Professor of Science.

Dr. Tyler frequently led hikes through Mormon Hollow and saw the need to conserve the land we now know as Fontenelle Forest along the Missouri River.

He attended a meeting initiated by President Teddy Roosevelt called the National Conservation Congress. As a result of that gathering, he realized he could lead a group of civic-minded people in forming an organization to finance and back such a project.

The organization called "Child's Point Forest Association" was incorporated in February 1913 and by 1920, the organization was able to purchase the first 350+ acres. The land was named Fontenelle Nature Association.

Dr. Tyler cared deeply about both conservation and education. In an address to the Nebraska State Development Congress he stated that it "becomes us to conserve and handle intelligently the forest we have. It would be a place where recreation of the most elevating sort might be sought. The native birds would be protected, and native mammals would be preserved."



A.A. Tyler, Bellevue University Science Professor.

These ideas have been the impetus for continuing Fontenelle Forest's mission for the last century and into the next.

Information for this article was taken from a letter from Dr. Tyler's son, Rayen W. Tyler, to the director of Fontenelle Forest, after he had visited the Forest in 1979.