

Update from the Preserve

September 2011

September's weather was excruciatingly hot for Labor Day weekend, followed by rain from Hurricane Irene. It was a fair test of our newly reworked Bush Mill Road, which survived without a gully. The newly repaired Gator was returned to the Preserve with a new switch for the fan. We'd had a lot of trouble with the vehicle overheating coming up the big hill out of the Lower Howard's Creek valley—just like many of our hikers!



Sixty people attended our September 10 hike. Mark Horman's Cub Scout Pack #34 from Lexington returned for a trip to the creek valley, along with several folks who made their first trip to the Preserve. As always, the kids enjoyed playing in the water at the stream crossing but some were a little nervous about walking the "swinging bridge."



We had five brave souls at our September 21 hike. I say "brave" because precipitation was forecast, and we got soaked in a heavy rain before coming out of the valley. Bill Crankshaw and new member Doug Trimble continued hiking so Bill could show Doug

parts of the Preserve he hadn't visited before. Intrepid volunteers get to have the full environmental experience when they are going through orientation. We have almost 6 miles of trails in the preserve already, and still more to investigate. Early settlers used the Lower Howard's Creek valley itself for a road, traveling to Blue Licks to make salt via the "Salt Springs Trace," as it was called then. The valley was soon crisscrossed with roads allowing access to industries along the creek from every direction. Raw materials such as corn, wheat, timber, hemp, wool and flax were hauled down the roads to numerous water-powered mills. Finished products—such as whiskey, wheat flour, corn meal, ground corn for livestock feed, hemp rope and bagging, wool and linen fabric, hats, and lumber from the sawmills—were carried out of the valley by wagon for local use or for shipment down the Kentucky River via flatboats from the mouth of Lower Howard's Creek.

Fall wildflowers at the Preserve are at their peak. Huge stands of yellow composites make up the bulk of the blooms. These include Jerusalem artichoke, wingstem, several sunflower species (*helianthus*), goldenrods (*salidagos*) and sneezeweed (*helenium*).



Autumn sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*)



Great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphylitica*)

Purple ironweed, New England asters, wild ageratum or mist flower (*Eupatorium coelestinum*) and great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphylitica*) add their purple and blue hues to the mix, while large stands of white snakeroot (*Ageratina rugosum*) and late thoroughwort (*Eupatorium serotinum*) have been quite showy. The giant puffballs were out, not quite as large as in years past, but a good indication of the great amount of rain we've had this year.

Sandy Bottoms, grant coordinator with Bluegrass PRIDE, paid an interim visit to Lower Howard's Creek mid month to discuss progress on our grant. We received an \$8,175 award from them for invasive plant removal. As soon as we get proof of insurance from our contractors, we will be ready to start. Wayne Estes, Kentucky Utilities right-of-way manager, will bring his crew in the week of October 10 to clear the KU right-of-way which is part of the project area. We still need volunteers for the last week of October to help meet our match for this project. We will be clearing an old roadway into the Preserve to allow public hiking from Hall's on the River. It's a beautiful and historic area, with an easy walk to the creek.

On September 23, the Clark County 4-H Council sponsored an all-day environmental camp for Conkwright Middle School 8th grade students at Camp Wesley Woods. As one of the presenters, I gave eight classes (180 students in all!) on the prehistory and history of Clark County, illustrated by stories and events that took place in the Lower Howard's Creek valley. I participate in this camp each year in order to encourage kids to use the Preserve for their 4-H projects. Plus, this is always a great opportunity to introduce the Preserve to young people in Clark County.

At this year's Governor's Conference on Energy and the Environment in Lexington, Lower Howard's Creek Nature & Heritage Preserve was honored with the 2011 Stewardship Award. This award is presented annually by the Kentucky Heritage Lands Conservation Fund Board to recognize outstanding management of a nature preserve. Following an introduction by First Lady Jane Beshear, Dr. William Martin, Chairman of the Board, made the award to the Clark County Fiscal Court and the Friends of Lower



Howard's Creek "for their unique efforts" managing the Preserve. A press release regarding the award is attached at the end of this blog.

M. Clare Sipple



Commonwealth of Kentucky
Energy and Environment Cabinet

Steven L. Beshear, Governor

Leonard K. Peters, Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Stewardship Award presented at the Governor's Conference on
Energy and the Environment**
Clark County shares recognition in joint effort with nonprofit, state

Frankfort, Ky. (Sept. 27, 2011) – The Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund Board honored the Clark County Fiscal Court today with its annual Stewardship Award for the Lower Howard's Creek project.

The award was presented by Kentucky First Lady Jane Beshear during today's award luncheon at the Governor's Conference on Energy and the Environment at the Lexington Convention Center.

"Clark County government, along with the nonprofit group, 'Friends of Lower Howard's Creek,' and the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, have come together to support and care for this amazing area that is extremely significant both culturally and ecologically to our state," said Mrs. Beshear.

The state dedicated Lower Howard's Creek in southwestern Clark County on Jan. 22, 2001. A tributary to the Kentucky River, Lower Howard's Creek flows through a deep, twisting gorge. Second growth forests cover the slopes and cliff tops, and a showy array of spring wildflowers grace the valley bottoms. The steep topography has left refuge for two rare plants, the federally endangered running buffalo clover (*Trifolium stoloniferum*), and water stitchwort (*Stellaria fontinalis*), listed as threatened by the state nature preserves commission.

Lower Howard's Creek valley was an industrial center for water-powered stone milling in the 18th and 19th centuries. Five of the stone buildings that remain are on the National Register of Historic Places.

State grants have financed stabilization work on the stone buildings within the valley, extensive archaeological investigation throughout the 230 acres, repair of the stone fences and the settlement-period roads, and the documentation of cultural resources. Other stewardship work includes the removal of invasive species, including Chinese yam and privet infestations. In 2009, over 150 volunteers logged over 1,700 hours of service, most of which focused on invasive species removal.