

Buffalo Bull

National Association for Interpretation
Region 5 Newsletter

Summer 2014
Volume 26, Number 3

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The National Association for Interpretation Region 5 membership consists of interpreters from state parks, county agencies, museums, zoos, park districts, recreation facilities, and many other public and private organizations from Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Manitoba, and Nunavut.

Our mission is to inspire leadership and excellence to advance heritage interpretation as a profession.

Bob's Bombinations:

Can We Go Outside and Pay A Bit?

By Bob Carter, Region 5 Director

That's what my oldest granddaughter said when she was very young and hadn't yet quite mastered pronunciation of the letter L. Like many children learning to speak, she had her troubles with things like Ls and Rs. Grapes, one of her favorite treats, were gapes, and play, her favorite pastime, was pay. Her first temper tantrum occurred when she had to come in from the back yard. My kind of kid.

I have heard people say, "You can never have too much of a good thing." As a child I would say I agreed with that philosophy, at least as far as it related to toys, penny (yes, penny) candy, and dessert-and playing outdoors. Having now outgrown all of that except for playing outdoors, and grapes, I am not inclined to agree with it so wholeheartedly. The effects of too many toys, too much candy, and too much dessert are readily apparent today, as are the effects of too little playing outdoors and not enough healthy eating.

As the summer season begins there is renewed energy in the "get kids outdoors" movement while, at the same time, there is even more attention being paid, correctly, in my humble opinion, to everyone eating healthier, getting off the couch, away from the personal technology, and into active engagement with the outdoors. As I am mostly a university academic these days, and therefore considered a formal educator, the transitions from spring to summer signal the beginning of a time of near complete freedom to get outside and, along with my family, explore the cultural and natural resources, far and wide, that are run and maintained by all the nonformal educators who don't have a summer hiatus.

I fully believe that the type of people who are reading this column, nonformal or formal, are much less likely to be spending too much time on the couch, with personal technology, or eating poorly than the general population, and they are not so tied to one season of the year for any hope of healthy activity, but when I was a full-time nonformal many years, ago I discovered one important thing one summer. I got so busy guiding others to the enjoyment and benefits of the sites I worked at that I began to forget to enjoy them myself. I suspect that a number of you might remember having had that same epiphany at some point. In the end it doesn't really matter whether or not someone has a ton of free time during a particular season. What matters is to remember to keep enjoying the things that got us all into this field. For me, that may mean not getting too wrapped up in projects that I have no time for during the rest of the year. For you, that may mean not getting too busy opening up the wonders of your site to summertime visitors.

So, what's the bottom line? Well, enjoyment of the outdoors is a good thing that I don't think you can have too much of, so, no matter what you are doing this summer, don't forget to have some gapes and go outside and pay a bit.

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Buffalo Bull is published quarterly by Region 5 of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI).

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Submission Deadlines:

Winter Issue	December 1
Spring Issue	March 1
Summer Issue	June 1
Fall Issue	September 1

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The Mother of all Naturalists: A Tribute to Kathy Heidel By Bob Gibson

In every agency there are people who have made such a large contribution during their career that they become legend. They have grown with, fought for, uplifted, and nurtured the organization like a mother would for a child. Even though their celebrity is woven into the fabric of the organization, they remain humble to the mission and the cause for which they were hired.

The legacy these people leave behind sets the standard for those who follow. When they speak, people listen. When they walk, several of us are in tow. When we ask a multitude of questions, tapping into their vast reserves of knowledge, they know just how to satisfy our curiosity and still maintain the mentor/pupil relationship. Merely answering our questions would not enable us to learn. Instead, they guide us to the answer through a planned route of discoveries so that behind every revelation is the birth of a new question. Thus, our education continues and the mentor/pupil relationship never ends.

So, we try and emulate them, but they are not interested in the imitation as a "form of flattery." They would much prefer us to develop our own knowledge and skills and add to the overall diversity of the group. After all, isn't that what nature teaches us: survival through diversity? It's our best hope to be mentored by these unique individuals, for history, fate, and even the stars may never align themselves again to create another like them. Kathy Heidel is one such person. Kathy passed away on May 17th, 2014.

GET OUTSIDE... was her mantra. There is no substitute for the real thing... NONE! No matter how good our technology becomes or deep our knowledge, she encouraged us to go out and see it, question it, or discover it. And then the most important piece of all...sharing it! She never wanted to be an administrator although she had been offered the opportunity. Trading the world of natural wonderment for one of budgets and politics just wouldn't get the job done. Even with supervisors, managers, and administrators, she engineered ways to pull us back into the wonderful world of interpretation, knowing full well that this awakening is as natural as the grand plan of life. She made us fruitful in our endeavors and helped us keep the focus on why we do it... preservation of the resource.

What more can we say about our esteemed colleague, friend, and teacher? We say these two simple words, **thank-you**. Thank-you for the years you have dedicated to the park district. Thank-you for your insight in seeing what we had to offer and encouraging us to develop it. Thank you for the fortitude in protecting our natural resources. And most of all thank you, Kathy, for being you, because there is no one like you.

Biographical Notes: An exceptional birder and bird bander, Kathy was one of the Midwest's first female interpretive naturalists and served as the Senior Interpretive Naturalist at Three Rivers Park District's Lowry Nature Center from 1968 through 2003. Her programs were a delightful blend of natural and cultural history, infused with her own genius in nature-inspired art, poems and prose. Memorial donations are welcomed by Kathy's family and Three Rivers Parks and can be sent to: Kathy Heidel Memorial Fund-LNC, Three Rivers Park District, 3000 Xenium Lane N., Plymouth MN 55441, in continued support of Kathy's efforts to educate people about the wonders and preservation of our natural resources.

A Celebration of Kathy's Life gathering for friends, colleagues, and family will be held on Wednesday, June 25, 2014, at Lowry Nature Center, 6 p.m. Contact jmoriarty@threeriversparkdistrict.org for more information about this event.

Submitted by Bob Gibson, Sr. Manager of Outdoor Education - Nature Centers, Three Rivers Park District.

Photos from Three Rivers Park District archive files.



2015 Regional Workshop Update

Cultivating Creativity
March 18-22, 2015
Ames, Iowa

Plans are well underway for the 2015 Regional Workshop! A few tantalizing details to get you excited:

Keynote: David Williamson

David Williamson is an Iowa artist who definitely uses his creativity in his artwork. He doesn't use a pencil or paint, preferring worn-out or used pieces of metal that have been gathered from Iowa rivers. However, his newest piece of artwork is even bigger than prior pieces. Join us to find out what it is.



Off-Site Sessions

The offsite committee has come up with an impressive list of sessions to choose from. Art lovers, birders, photographers, history buffs, and outdoor enthusiasts alike will all find something for them on the Friday of the workshop. Some of our destinations will include the High Trestle Trail Bridge over the Des Moines River, Ledges State Park, the studio of Keynote Speaker David Williamson, the Iowa State University campus, pioneer cemeteries, the historic Salsbury House and much, much more.

Concurrent Sessions

Be on the lookout for the Call for Presenters, coming soon!

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2014 Region 5 Award Recipients

By Jeff Boland

This year's Region 5 Award Recipients:

Master Frontline Interpreter: Tina Harding

Outstanding New Interpreter: Heather Horstman

Excellence in Interpretive Support: Diane Carson

Excellence in Interpretive Support: Friends of Jackson County Conservation

Awards were presented at the Award Banquet on April 5 at the Regional Workshop in Rockford, Illinois.

Thank you to all that participated in the award nomination process. Is someone you know missing from the list? There is always next year...

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2014 Minigrant Recipients Announced

By Debra Nowak

NAI Region V is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2014 Minigrants Program. Of the 7 grants applications received, 3 were funded based on ranking criteria used by the Minigrants Committee. A total of \$1122 was granted. Recipients are:

Lewis & Clark Fort Mandan Foundation, Washburn, ND to support the creation of two heirloom seed gardens at the North Dakota Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center. The gardens will represent traditional American Indian farming and pioneer farming for which North Dakotans like Oscar H. Will and A.F. Yeager bred crops, often using Indian crops as sources. Many of these varieties are now endangered.

Meeting of the Rivers Foundation, Alton, IL to support a summer camp at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Participants will be introduced to archaeological terms, skills, and concepts while engaging in hands-on interactive activities that will ignite their natural curiosities. Activities include paddling to mock archaeological sites to excavate and collect artifacts, working alongside experienced archaeologists during daily digs, and encountering the amazing interactions among people, animals, and the natural surroundings.

Ushers Ferry Historic Village, Cedar Rapids, IA to support the replacement of historic foodways equipment that was damaged or destroyed by severe floods. The replacement coffee mill and butter churns will be used in living history foodways program, workshops, and children's day camp programs.

We had another great year of Minigrant applications and were impressed by the quality of projects going on throughout Region V. Minigrant committee members are Kathy Dummer, Becca Franzen, Tracey Koenig, Debra Nowak (chair), and Carly Swatek. 2015 Minigrant applications will be available in January 2015 and all NAI Region V members are encouraged to apply.

Check out the [NAI Region V website](#) for the project posters from the 2013 grant cycle!

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Radical Rant: Tell Them We Don't Teach Fiction

By Karen I. Shragg

The child closed his ears with his hands and shook his head. He was only in fourth grade but already told by his parents not to listen to the evils of science, especially when the word "fossil" or "evolution" escaped the lips of the naturalist. He has been taught that the earth is only 6 thousand years old and his parents had cautioned him not to allow teachers to challenge their literal interpretation of the bible.

This rant is not a debate about faith verses science. I realize that many find ways to have faith and honor scientific discoveries at the same time. This is about sticking to scientific discoveries in spite of the challenges of fundamentalists who insist in louder and louder voices that we teach science in THEIR way.

It's 2014. We have telescopes exploring the far reaches of the solar system. We can now figure out the age of the universe and calculate how high the seas will rise due to the carbon we have dumped into the atmosphere. But lo and behold, carbon 14 dating, sophisticated labs, and astronomical discoveries cannot penetrate the bubble where fundamentalists prefer to live. Metaphors are lost on people who take the Bible at its word. They are getting bolder with their requests. They want to be sure that science teachers and naturalists know that they are not buying our version of how the earth came about or its future. Many fundamentalists are outspoken and want us to bend to their definition. They hope we will bow to the rules of political correctness in this situation. They want us to change our ways because they are 'offended.' They want to control our language. "Don't sound so sure that fossils are ancient or the earth is billions of years old," I have been told on occasion. Some institutions bow to their wishes by banning key vocabulary words. "Evolution" is banned by some science-based learning places and spinelessly substituted with words like "adaptation," in an effort to placate those who wish to dominate public discourse with their rigid world view.

Yes, we live in a litigious society. Yes, we are a collection of many worldviews. But we, who are grounded in science, cannot give equal weight to fact and fiction or let it dominate our policy decisions. That may be a bigger challenge that we think. Representative John Shimkus of Illinois is the chairman of a subcommittee that oversees issues related to climate change and he is a climate change denier. His dominant story is a biblical one and he is sacrificing our future because of it. At a 2009 hearing, Shimkus said not to worry about the planet because the biblical signs have not properly aligned. He then went on to quote the Bible and say that only God gets to decide when life on earth ends. According to this powerful man, mere mortals do not have the power to affect climate.

We respectfully and forcefully need to say that we do not teach fiction. Science and faith should be two separate things, but when they get conflated we must proudly teach what has been proven over and over again. IT should NEVER be okay to capitulate, otherwise our students just may hang on to distorted ideas and end up in Congress.

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Summer Bites

By Fran McReynolds

This year in northern Wisconsin, as in much of our region, we eagerly anticipated spring after an exceptionally long and bitterly cold winter. We had snow on the ground from November until May. Record-breaking snow and the coldest average temperatures on record. Spring was slow in coming, but finally, the snow is gone, ice is off the lakes, trees are leafed out, and wildflowers are blooming in the woods. For a few short months, it is absolutely gorgeous here. This summer paradise is our reward for surviving a tough winter in the Northwoods.

But wait, before you hop into your car to head up here to kayak or camp or hike or fish, know this: we have mosquitoes. Dense clouds of mosquitoes, flying around in broad daylight, in town, even. Each mosquito is intent on getting to that one patch of unprotected skin. If you venture outdoors, a head net, gloves, and protective clothing are a must, if you want to stay sane. Mosquitoes will cling to your clothing and hitch a ride indoors to attack you when you are asleep. If you stay inside, thousands of mosquitoes congregate on and around your window screens looking for the tiniest opening, their high-pitched whine audible from across the room. For most of us up here, the volume of mosquitoes is the worst we've ever seen or heard, and our combined experience tops 500 years.

In addition to the annoying whine, the brief sting of a bite, and resulting itch, mosquito bites can have serious consequences. A National Public Radio Radiolab podcast, "Kill Them All" (March 24, 2014) stated that "[mosquitoes] have killed more people than cancer, war, or heart disease." The podcast went on to say that over a million people a year are killed by mosquito-borne diseases and another 500 million become ill.

We might feel quite justified in killing off mosquitoes all together, given this magnitude of public health risk. Annihilate the 3000 species of mosquitoes-what good are they anyway? Radiolab producers posed the query of whether humans would be justified in causing an intentional extinction of mosquitoes to scientists and naturalists. The dialog on both sides of the question is worth reading about or listening to ([here](#) and [here](#)).

Whether mosquitoes are a problem in your area or not, consider this: as an accomplished interpreter armed with good techniques and reliable information, you are invaluable. You have the tools you need to help audiences understand some of the consequences of our actions towards mosquitoes, or any other "annoying" or "worthless" resource.

Despite the annoyances of biting insects, if you want to find me this summer in my free time, I'll be outside, garbed in my bug shirt, gaiters, gloves, and a head net, working in my garden, kayaking, or tiptoeing through the bog looking for the twayblade orchids, which are pollinated by those nasty pests, mosquitoes.

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An Educator's Viewpoint: From City and Country

By Kate Gunsolus

Growing up in rural Wisconsin I wouldn't exactly say that I have been exposed to a rich diversity of humanity. I graduated with a class of about 250 people, and I think that there were possibly six people of color. I grew up in a small town, and though my family didn't have much money, the town did. I reaped many of the benefits; I had great school teachers, a new school to learn in, and always new textbooks. Though some neighborhoods were nicer than others, I never knew poverty. I didn't know anyone who lacked enough food to eat at meal time. After leaving high school I attended college in central Wisconsin, graduating with a degree in Environmental Education and Interpretation, but the culture in college was much the same as my hometown.

I really loved my first job after college, working for the National Park Service. I loved meeting people from all over the country and sharing my passion for the natural world. But I couldn't help feeling that I was missing something. Most of the people that I was talking to already loved the outdoors. I soon realized that many of the people who would travel from far and wide to visit a National Park were already somewhat familiar with nature, or at least felt that these special places were theirs to enjoy. They knew that they had access to these wonderful treasures.

A very special volunteer opportunity that came my way in July of 2013 changed things a bit for me. A foundation in Detroit was working in cooperation with the National Park Service to bring inner city kids to Michigan's Upper Peninsula for a week of camping and sight-seeing. To be honest, I was very apprehensive about becoming involved with this project. I imagined the kids to be full of behavioral problems, that they would be unengaged and that they would most likely not be appreciative of their new experiences out in nature. I could not have been more incredibly wrong. For me, this program provided one of the most gratifying experiences imaginable. The kids wanted to do everything, to see everything, to experience everything. They couldn't believe that this place was theirs, and I spent a day convincing them that it was, and helping them enjoy everything in it. Once the Park Service season was over, I decided that I wanted more. That's how I found my way to Dayton, Ohio.

Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm is one of those beautifully strange, yet familiar places. Located in southwestern Ohio, it's a place of peace that on the surface looks and feels only slightly different from the small town that I grew up in. I've always reveled in new places, exploring and seeing things I've never seen before. I was elated to come to Ohio and find that this is a place with great reaching Sycamores... and plentiful Buckeyes! I'd never seen a Buckeye tree before Aullwood. In traversing no more than ten feet of trail on my first nature walk with our lead Naturalist, Tom Hisson, I saw five.

Conversely, not all new experiences are so beautiful. Before Dayton I had never seen or experienced poverty. When walking in the woods, a buckeye isn't especially noticeable. I can walk past it and not see it immediately, but the reality of the poverty in this Midwestern rustbelt town is much more apparent to the eye. The loss of industry here has made for a place starker in contrast to what I've known. I was aware that poverty was here, just as I was aware that there would be birds and trees of different kinds in Dayton. I truly didn't know how poverty would look, or how it would send such strong ripples through the core of my being.

When informed that I would be judging the Science Fair at Edison PreK-Elementary School, I wasn't especially worried. I unexpectedly became worried about it as we drove closer to the school, passing by boarded up and burned out buildings. Payday Loan places had opened and then closed, with boards nailed over the windows. This progressed into rows of homes that were either boarded up or in adverse condition. I realized that people still lived in these rundown houses, and sometimes people squatted in them. These homes lined the potholed streets, without a single grocery store in sight... just a couple of fast food joints and a gas station with bars on their windows. I witnessed some old man dancing on the corner with a boom box on his shoulder, wearing nothing but a raggedy light jacket on a brisk winter morning. I didn't consider myself prejudiced, but it was hard for me to get out of the car when we arrived at the school. Right across the street, there were still more boarded up homes. I had grown up believing that places of poverty were places of crime and violence. I had never seen them before, so I had no way of confirming my beliefs.

For me there was no better place to destroy old prejudices and pre-conceived thoughts than the science fair at Edison. This certainly was not the type of science fair that I grew up with in my home town. The students' parents hadn't done the projects for them, buying lots of materials and then turning around to pretend that this was the kid's idea. These kids had picked projects with the support of their teacher, used materials that they had gathered themselves, and spent a month under the mentorship of Aullwood staff doing science projects that were very much their own. They wanted nothing more than to show off the experiments, and answer my questions about the scientific methods used. The students absolutely beamed with pride, whether they had cloned a cabbage or just made cupcakes. Regardless of what was made, it was plain to see that they were engaged in science and were excited to take ownership of their work. They created something when many of them came from families that probably had little. I don't mean to trivialize poverty. Nobody should be hungry, not know where they will be staying next month, or have to endure the struggles of day to day living in reduced circumstances. What I do know is that these kids are just as smart and deserving of a chance to prosper as any kid anywhere.

In the coming months I will get to work with these same students again, bringing them out to this place of Buckeyes and Sycamores that for some may be just as strange as their neighborhood was to me. I want to make them feel welcome, as welcome as I felt when I showed up at their school to judge science fair

projects. I only hope that when they do come, that I will be able to make them feel as if this place of bountiful nature and learning is theirs. Because the fact is that it's just as much theirs as it is mine.

--

Kate Gunsolus is an Intern at Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm in Dayton, Ohio.

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OF ART and AMBIGUITY

By Karen I. Shragg

As naturalists we are desperate to get the REAL story out about the natural world. You know the drill: bats eat bugs they don't eat people, coyotes are an apex predator, spiders and their webs are a key part of nature, etc, etc. Ambiguity is not our friend. We want to be crystal clear when it comes to nature. Our narrative is one of peer-reviewed science and is not subject to interpretation. We don't want people to guess which birds are protected and which ones aren't. We need them to know.

As an overpopulation activist I also want to give out crystal clear messages. I want people to know that we gain 9,000 people per hour net gain on this finite planet of ours. I don't want any fuzzy math or guessing games. However, when I was approached by an artist/curator to participate in an art show with overpopulation as a theme I jumped at it. It was a chance to use our right brains to approach this challenging issue. We certainly haven't set the world on fire with articles and lectures. The name of the show was called "Fruitful and Multiplying, the Overpopulation Show" and is now moving to a gallery at the downtown Minneapolis Public Library for the summer months.

I had two pieces in the show under the auspices of the NGO World Population Balance. One was a metronome with the meter set at 144 beats per minute. It's a jaw dropping moment when people realize what it means. One new earth passenger with every click, net gain, is an overwhelming fact that is absorbed through the senses. The other one had three parts: a stuffed Canadian goose, a white tail deer buck mount, and a mirror. The saying on the wall nearby asked, "What happens when there are too many of these?" I wanted to show that we all are subject to the laws of carrying capacity.

I thought I was crystal clear in my messaging but as I saw some confused onlookers, I realized I had entered the art world in full force. What I learned from the experience is that the art world reaches an entirely new audience. I found myself speaking as an artist in front of art lovers about an issue they knew little about. I was no longer preaching to the choir, if there is such a thing on this issue. I entered a new world and was still able to use my skills of interpretation to convey a message few get to hear. The most thrilling part was getting to wear a ribbon that said I was an artist at the opening. I was excited to be included with such talented people with amazing skills. I am still not very comfortable with ambiguity when it comes to interpreting the natural world and how we are bulldozing it with our numbers, but I was glad for be given a chance to try being subtle.

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The Earth Counts

by Karen I. Shragg

The Earth counts
But she can't count this high
and never this fast
She lost track just before we hit 2 billion
one earth second ago
now the evidence of her
arithmetic failure is revealed in
every exploded pipeline and subways packed
with people always scrambling for more.
heavy traffic and poverty
find only false shoulders to blame
Getting her back on track
has to be a numbers game
if we are brave enough
to listen to the way she whines
with each additional passenger
in colors of lost dreams
and vanishing species who never knew
that our knock-out punch was powered
by the 5 billion who appeared just one
Lifetime ago
she is begging us with every melting glacier
to please start counting backwards
and find the grace
in small.

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