



# Crooked Creek

## Environmental Learning Center

### Late Summer E-Newsletter

## IN YOUR BACKYARD



How green it is! Summer is flying by and it seems like everything that's green is growing out of control - or is it?

In this issue, we will look at various factors that influence the natural growth of plants in our local meadows and forests.

One four-legged factor, also known as the white tailed deer, can easily wreak havoc on most any type of vegetation.

Be sure to read about an interesting study that is in

progress at the Environmental Learning Center that addresses this problem. Then take a ride to Crooked Creek Park and see for yourself the dramatic results.



### ARE YOU AN ENVIRONMENTALIST?

- Do you breathe air?
- Do you eat food and drink water?
- Do you take up space? (couch potatoes included)

If you answered 'yes' to the above, then consider yourself one. Our environment is wherever we live.

*Environmentalism* is responsible management of our resources, wherever and whatever they may be.

The ELC promotes environmental education and responsible resource stewardship for all.

### “How I Spent My Summer Vacation”

If your summer vacation plans kept you close to Porchville, there's still time to put the Environmental Learning Center on your list of places to go and things to do—then, make a day, or more of it! See inside for more park details.

Located in the Crooked Creek Lake Park, the ELC has lots of things for people of all ages to do, rain or shine. So, stop in and plan on some learning and fun!



## Make a Day Of It –and then some!

The Environmental Learning Center and the Crooked Creek Lake Park have plenty of opportunities for fun for the family, so plan to make a day, a weekend, or more of it! Here are some park pointers when planning your visit:

- The Crooked Creek Lake Park is open daily, with no admission charge for general park and hiking trail usage, from 8a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Over 46 overnight camping sites are available for \$10 per night. These sites do not have hook-ups, but water and flush toilets are on the premises. Sites are on a first come, first serve basis. The camp ground is open ‘round the clock, with 10 p.m. - 6 a.m. designated as “quiet hours.”
- Water recreation is offered at the swimming beach, open daily, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. There is a fee for parking (\$1 per person over 12, with a maximum of \$4 per vehicle). The public soft landing boat launch is free and is open daily, 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
- Six picnic pavilions can be reserved for private usage on a daily basis through the park office (724-763-3161). They can also be used on a first come, first serve basis, if not reserved. Usage of hiking trails, ball fields and playgrounds is free, as well.
- An equestrian trail is on site, but coordinated through the Fort Armstrong Horsemen’s Association. Visit [www.crookedcreekhorsepark-faha.com](http://www.crookedcreekhorsepark-faha.com) for more information.

## Blind Observations

A walk in the woods at the ELC was just the activity to fill the afternoon of two young brothers from Texas who recently visited me while on a trip to their mom’s childhood home in Armstrong County. And, the walk was just the activity to remind me of the wealth of natural beauty that is unique to our area.

What started out as a tour of the ELC, became an enlightening hour or so spent on the Discovery Trail. Using the Nature Guide written specifically for the trail, sites that might appear commonplace or insignificant became far more interesting.

Learning some of the facts about our wooded plant and animal neighbors as we hiked the trail seemed to make great sense, probably because we used our senses. From the smells of the trail beneath our feet, to the sunlit mosaics of the leafy trees,, we digested a lot of information without realizing it.

John Conor and Jackson helped me to appreciate my “backyard” in a way that I am usually too hurried to do. I also found out that there is much I assumed that I knew, but didn’t. So, if you’re new to the area or think that you’ve seen it all before, I suggest that you give the ELC a try. Stop at the center, pick up a nature guide and head down what you may come to think of, as I now do, the Re-Discovery Trail.



## Take a Hike!

Forester Dave Beale can see the forest for the trees, as well as all the other vegetation. On a recent walk, Dave gave a guided tour of an ongoing study of the effects of deer grazing on native undergrowth.

Just a hop, skip and a couple of long jumps from either the ELC facility or annex is research in the making. Two separate sites are being watched closely, month after month by the Armstrong Conservation District to document the damage done by our state

animal on all types of plant life.

Constructed by former Americorps workers assigned to the Conservation District, are two precisely measured and marked areas enclosed with a mesh-like fencing. One area is considered forest and the other meadow/semi-forest, according to Beale.

The contrast between the sides of the fence appear more evident in the forest area; however, it is apparent in both that the white-tailed deer has a

hearty appetite for almost anything green and growing.

Beale, who has an expert eye for the differences in the study areas, also cites differences noted over time. “We have a lot fewer trillium and sassafras now than ten years ago.”

Beale is documenting these observations, but we suggest that you take a hike, as well and watch this experiment grow –or not.

## From Dennis’ Desk



Once again, we didn’t find Dennis behind his desk. When we did catch up with the ELC Program Director, he was not behind a lawn mower, either. But, he did have some definite ideas about this seasonal chore.

“You don’t need a three acre yard, unless you have a soccer team,” Hawley says.

“Lawn mowers are very fuel inefficient.”

Hawley offers these alternatives:

- *Consider planting ground cover*
- *Sow wild flowers*
- *Mow trails through areas of higher growth-make it interesting*
- *If you do mow, a 100 ft. buffer around a building is adequate for keeping bugs away.*

If you are looking for ideas to go “no-mow”, Hawley says that Crooked Creek Park offers a perfect example of these variations. So, why not take a ride to Crooked Creek and the ELC? You can look for inspirational landscape ideas on park grounds and investigate the books on related subjects in the ELC annex library. Hawley is an expert resource and is happy to share his knowledge, too. But don’t look behind Dennis’ desk, because that’s one of the last places you’ll find him.

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*Promoting Environmental Education  
and Responsible Resource Stewardship*

## ELC WISH LIST

Donation of time, talent, goods and services are also appreciated. If you can spare any of the following, please contact Dennis Hawley, ELC Program Coordinator, at 724-763-6136.

Our list includes:

- Paper Towels
- Light bulbs
- Garbage bags
- Liquid soap
- Stove
- Help with current programs



The ELC is always looking for volunteers, too. If you'd like to help with current programs, or have an idea for a program you'd like to lead, call us!

## ELC FYI

- The ELC's mission is to "Promote environmental and resource conservation education in Armstrong County.
- The ELC is not supported by tax dollars, but, rather grants, user fees, donations and sponsorships.
- The ELC is affiliated with area school districts and post secondary educators, providing a big green outdoor classroom for experiential learning
- The ELC welcomes groups and offers daytime and overnight facilities for meetings.
- The ELC is a great place for individuals and families to learn while having fun in the great outdoors.

