

Spring is almost here; don't miss it

Amy Martin, a folk singer from Missoula, Mont. recently released a new album, *Ask the Planet*, where she and the Missoula Coyote Choir begin with "Get Out" repeated five times in chorus. The song continues with this phrase for about a minute then climaxes at the end with, "Side." For a very simple song, it conveys a very important message. We spend way too much time inside and we would all be better off to "Get Outside!"

As the weather warms and it becomes more comfortable to be outside, people look for places to venture. Since we live in region replete with corn and soy fields, it may appear that there aren't many places to play/relax/frolic/commune in/with nature (use whatever combo works for you). However, when one looks into it, there are many places nearby to visit. Galesburg has several parks, all within reasonable walking distance. And while it is very true that some of the largest and most diverse areas are on the north side (which tends to be where higher income families are located), most areas are but a bike or bus ride away; Lake Storey is bus-accessible only during the summer.

Yet, to really get into some nature, you have to visit a more remote area with a large enough size that more complex relationships between organisms can develop and take root. Though there aren't any state parks in Knox County, there are a few amazing ones within a few hours drive. The Apple River Canyon State Park near Galena is a captivating place to visit as is Starved Rock, just off I-80 near Utica. Yet, if you aren't up for a long drive, let me share with you a relatively new natural area, only seven miles from the heart of Galesburg.

Blackthorn Hill, a 110 acre nature preserve located northwest of downtown, opened to the public in 2005. Since then, the group that manages it, Western Illinois Nature Group (WING), has been actively promoting outdoor programs there as well as making major improvements to the property. (I've been a board member of WING, formerly Piper Hills, since 2002.) Three years ago, a three acre hilltop prairie was planted (with seeds from the Department of Natural Resources). On April 11th, it will be burned for the first time. Two years ago, under the amazing leadership of Ed Smith, a magnificent latrine was added to the property. Last year, a sizeable picnic shelter was added in a recreational area, near the latrine. This year, WING volunteers will be erecting three cabins for youth campers. One of the primary motivations of WING is to enhance educational opportunities for youth through camping, so these cabins will be particularly valuable. Additionally, WING continues to work on securing well-maintained trails for hikers and natural habitat for wildlife.

Blackthorn Hill is a beautiful property and it is getting



Angella Moorehouse (IL DNR) gives wildflower tour of Blackthorn Hill.



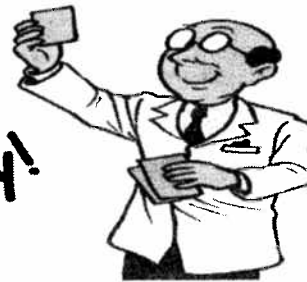
Youth participate in archery lesson at Blackthorn Hill.

better every day, thanks to the dedicated work of many volunteers and the amazing restorative power of nature. Hiking on Blackthorn Hill is free and available to the public. The picnic shelter can be reserved for a small fee and outdoor camping is also available to supervised youth groups for a small fee as well.

For more information about Blackthorn Hill (and WING), including directions and the 2009 program calendar, visit its website: www.blackthornhill.org, or call, Lora at 343-4321. Also, please feel free to come to WING's annual meeting this Sunday (see ad). In any case, have a great spring, Out-Side!

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sometimes you just
need geeky friends!**

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Spring is Here!

Visit **Blackthorn Hill**
Nature Preserve
(for a hike or birdwatching)

Attend Western IL Nature Group's
Annual Meeting

*Find out about the prairie
& the wildlife,
& see how YOU can help!*
(refreshments served)

Sunday, March 15, 2-4 PM

Carl Sandburg College
Building B lobby



For more information,
visit: www.blackthornhill.org

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