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UofA
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

March 2024

No. 3

Restoration volunteers remove 526 pounds of trash from Buffalo National River watershed site

Even the country's first National River can find itself the unfortunate victim of illegal dumping, especially as it winds its way through some of the most scenic areas of Arkansas.

On Feb. 22, members of the Cooperative Extension Service and the Nature Conservancy, along with local landowners and volunteers, removed 526 pounds of illegally dumped trash in the upper reaches of the Buffalo National River watershed. The site was located along Highway 21, near Smith Creek Nature Preserve.

The dumpsite was found as part of a litter audit — part of the Buffalo River Watershed Enhancement Project — conducted by the Cooperative Extension Service. Part of the project's mission is to conduct outreach throughout the watershed area and foster support for the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan, which will in turn improve water quality in the watershed.

John Pennington, extension water quality educator for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said the dumpsite audit showed that the largest percentage of trash by weight was metal, followed by tires, hazardous paper waste and plastic. E-waste, textiles and furniture, glass and wood were also found. Approximately 70 percent of the waste removed from the cleanup was recycled. Cash for the recycled metal totaled \$15, which will be put into local 4-H litter removal and recycling efforts.

“The dumpsite we cleaned up was not old or historic like some dumpsites,” Pennington said. “This dumpsite, like many other dumping sites around the state, was newer. It will be interesting to see if the dumpsite continues to be used now that it has been cleaned up. The ongoing litter audit throughout the watershed will be able to monitor the littering and dumping rate in the areas.”



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The 2023 Buffalo River litter index audit examined eight publicly accessible locations, spanning from the headwaters along Highway 21 down to the Rush access point.

“The good news is that all but one of the locations surveyed had less than a pound of trash found at each of them,” Pennington said. “The low amount of trash found at most litter audit sites is likely due to the efforts of local landowners, the National Park Service and visitors doing their part to keep the watershed healthy and clean.”

To participate in future litter audit or voluntary water quality improvement activities as part of the Buffalo River Watershed Enhancement Project, visit <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/environment-nature/water/buffalo-river-project.aspx>.

Read more [here](#). ■

THE INSIDE STORIES

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New nectarine released by Arkansas Fruit Breeding Program

Ozark Mango™, the seventh nectarine introduced by the Arkansas Fruit Breeding Program, is a yellow-fleshed and standard-acid-level nectarine tailored for growers in the Southeast or Mid-South of the United States.

Ozark Mango™ is "the nectarine that I always look forward to picking and the one that I always bring home to my family," said Margaret Worthington, director of the Fruit Breeding Program for the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, the research arm of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Ozark Mango™ is typically harvested around July 1, which is similar to Bradley and about one week before Bowden and Amore Sweet nectarines.

"Over 13 years of trials, Ozark Mango™ had an average Brix of 15 percent, indicating that it is very sweet," Worthington said. "It also has a pleasant aroma and flavor that I would describe as 'tropical' or 'mango-like'."

A ripe Ozark Mango™ measures about 3 inches in diameter with about 65 percent of its surface taking on a blushed color. When sliced open, it reveals a "beautiful yellow-orange flesh that complements its outstanding flavor," Worthington said.

Worthington noted that Ozark Mango™ is similar to other clingstone, non-melting flesh varieties and exhibits "excellent

post-harvest potential," allowing for storage between 14 to 21 days while maintaining its quality. A clingstone and non-melting nectarine means that the fruit's flesh adheres tightly to the pit and maintains its firm texture even when fully ripe, without becoming soft.



"Ozark Mango™ exhibits remarkable resilience in the face of challenging bacterial spot pressure at the Fruit Research Station," Worthington said. "It shows no cracking on the fruit and displaying tolerance to symptoms on the leaves."

The new variety is estimated to be a mid-chill nectarine appropriate for areas with 600 to 800 chill hours a year, she added.

"Ozark Mango™ is, in my opinion at least, the tastiest thing we have on this farm," she said. "It's too good not to share." ■

Message from the director

I'm sure you've all heard the old saying, "Many hands make light work." If you have worked in Extension for very long, you probably feel that saying in your bones. We would get very little done without collaboration: collaboration with colleagues across the organization, with other community organizations, with local and state government, and – of course – with our many volunteers.

We got a good look at the importance of collaboration this month in 4-H with our annual 4-H Giving Day to support the Arkansas 4-H Foundation. 4-H Giving Day strategically coincides with St. Patrick's Day. (Clovers, green ... get it? It's brilliant!) 4-H Program Leader Debbie Nistler and her team – including especially John Thomas, 4-H Foundation managing director, and the 4-H Foundation board – put in a lot of work organizing and promoting Giving Day. By the time the event was over, \$40,000 had been collected to support our 4-H kids. That was a record mark for Giving Day. That total also included \$10,000 in matching funds

from our friends at Arkansas Farm Bureau. The point is that a lot of people pitch in to make Giving Day happen, and a lot of supporters contribute to the cause.



If many hands make light work, I guess the corollary is that few hands make heavy work. Some of the heaviest work in CES in recent years has been done by our District Directors, of which there have been three. Three DDs to manage the personnel needs of 75 counties, to mentor agents across all counties and program areas, to manage district budgets, and to provide input to program leaders and the director's office for strategic planning and management is very few hands, indeed. I am happy to say that will soon be changing. We are in the process of adding an associate district director in each district. There will still be plenty of work, but a few more hands will go a long way toward making the work a little lighter. ■

Arkansas 4-H and Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas host 2024 SeaPerch Challenge

A record number of students participated in the 2024 Arkansas SeaPerch Challenge, held March 1 at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The underwater robotics competition welcomed teams from 12 Arkansas counties and one Mississippi county to put their submersible robots to the test.

Arkansas 4-H and the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas host the annual competition, which began in 2016. Since then, the program has grown to 66 teams with 241 participating students.

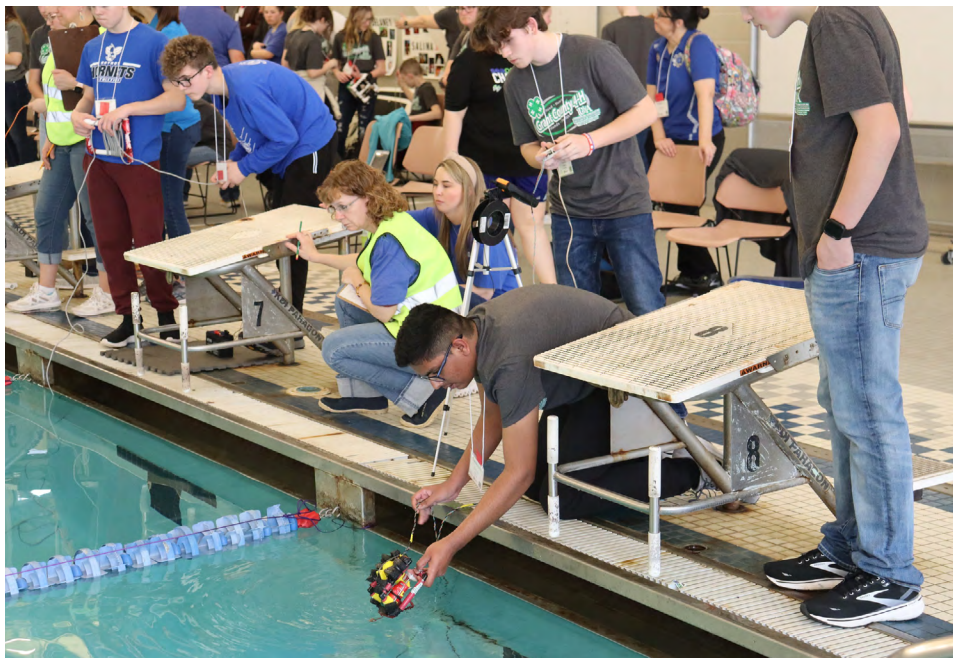
Brad McGinley, Grant County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and director of the Arkansas SeaPerch Challenge, said this growth is due in part to the exciting nature of the program.

“It’s a unique, hands-on project that I think many youth find fun and challenging,” McGinley said. “The fact that it draws on real-world scenarios makes it even more interesting for the participants.”

Rob Roedel, senior director of corporate communications for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, said the organization has also worked to increase program participation.

“The Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas have worked to spread the great learning opportunities that SeaPerch provides to the youth of Arkansas,” Roedel said. “Our team is actively working with schools and 4-H groups to provide assistance in purchasing kits and sponsoring the program.”

Participants used more than three dozen parts to design and build their remotely operated vehicles, or ROVs, including pieces of pool noodles, electrical tape, 12-volt motors, PVC pipe and 3D-printed parts. Teams then steered their ROVs through an underwater obstacle course and mission course, which was designed to mimic deep-sea exploration.



The Grant County Aquanauts watch as their teammate Priyam Laxmi puts their ROV back into the water to complete the mission course at the 2024 SeaPerch Challenge. The annual underwater robotics competition is hosted by Arkansas 4-H and the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas.

The overall winning junior, senior, open and wildcard teams will compete at the International SeaPerch Challenge May 31-June 1 at the University of Maryland.

Winning Senior Team:

Deep Water Vanguard from Grant County: Gavin McGinley, Gracie McGinley and Callen Shaw

Winning Junior Team:

The Wet Willies from Grant County: Jaxson Andrews, Luke Douthit, Ryleigh Kimbrell and Miley McGinley

Winning Open Team:

Aquanauts from Grant County: Garrett Key, Priyam Laxmi and Eli Watson

Winning Wildcard Team:

Submarine Crew from Madison County: Elijah Franklin and Jayden Griffin

Read more [here](#). ■

April Birthdays

Yvonne Mizell - April 1

Linda King - April 1

Annette Coor - April 1

Saundra Blocker - April 1

Kenneth Williams - April 2

Nancy Winterbauer Olofson - April 3

Susan Sanders - April 4

Janice Wadkins - April 5

Easter Tucker - April 5

Ione Daniel - April 6

Ann Gray - April 8

Stan Chapman - April 9

Louise Walker - April 10

John Payne - April 11

Rich Maples - April 12

Diane Clement - April 16

Mary Ruth Miner Fallin - April 17

Rebecca Reynolds - April 19

Janet Carson - April 19

Tommie Wyatt - April 22

Phil Tacker Jr. - April 22

Claude Bonner - April 25

Mary Poling - April 26

Diane Jones - April 29

Janis Reginelli - April 29

Cooperative Extension Service launches new University Center website

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Center for Rural Resilience and Workforce Development has launched a [new website](#) detailing the resources and services offered through its newest program designed to support economic and workforce development across Arkansas.

In November 2023, the U.S. Economic Development Administration, or EDA, awarded a \$650,000, five-year grant to the Cooperative Extension Service's department of Community, Professional and Economic Development to establish and [operate a University Center](#). Rather than a physical location, the EDA University Center program is a resource serving the state's economic development ecosystem, with a particular focus on rural marginalized communities, including Hispanic and Marshallese communities.

The Center's new website outlines information about the program and its services, including training and technical assistance, applied research and annual research findings reports. The website also features an interactive map of Arkansas's eight EDA-funded development districts, which serve all 75 counties.



The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Center for Rural Resilience and Workforce Development has a new website with information about the resources and services it offers, including training and technical assistance, applied research and an interactive Development District map.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

“The Development Districts offer incredible services to their communities, such as grant writing, planning and economic development projects, and we want to make sure anyone in their community can find their district and connect with them,” said Brandon L. Mathews, extension program manager for the University Center.

Mathews said that Heartland Forward, one of the strategic partners of the University Center, led the creation of the Development District map.

“The interactive map is just one of many visualizations we hope to build with the center,” said Rodrigo Ramirez-Perez, research analyst for Heartland Forward. “Our goal is to make data accessible and usable throughout the project, while also uplifting the Development Districts and the incredible work they do for the state.”

Over the next five years, more information and resources will be added to the University Center website. Those resources include Labor Market Observatories, which will be dashboards that provide important data on workforce metrics for each of the eight districts.

Mathews said the center will also offer a newsletter that highlights funding opportunities, EDA activities and updates, community and economic development district events, workshops and tools for workforce development. Those interested can sign up for this resource at the [FACT Sheet Newsletter Sign-up](#).

To learn more about the Center for Rural Resilience and Workforce Development, contact Hunter Goodman at hgoodman@uada.edu or Mathews at bmathews@uada.edu. ■