



## Devastation at Fox Island

by Clara Conroy, photos by Natalie Haley and Bob Dispenza

The morning of Monday, June 13, 2022 was quite nice at Fox Island. The first day of kid’s Nature Camp was off to a good start and campers were enjoying sunny skies and not-to-hot temperatures. As the day progressed and the temperature rose, park visitors enjoyed hiking in the shady woods and spending time at the beach. A typical lovely day at the park.

And then came the evening. And the storms.

The lightning show to the north started around sundown and soon hit Fort Wayne. Long-lived, straight-line wind storms led to a significant swath of wind damage. Wind gusts of 98 mph were recorded at the nearby Fort Wayne International Airport and led to significant damage in the area. This was the strongest wind gust ever recorded at the airport.



The big old trees in the sandy dune soil never stood a chance against this derecho.

On the following morning of June 14, park staff had the daunting task of assessing the damage. Due to trees down on the park roads, no vehicles could get in or out of the front gate. The power to the park was out, which also meant no running water. Fox Island County Park was declared closed until further notice.

Maintenance workers went to work clearing the entry road and center parking lot. Trees were blown over around the nature center and into the pollinator garden in front, but luckily the building and new roof were spared. On the lake road there were over 64 trees down just to the parking lot. Uprooted trees pulled up portions of pavement, damaging the road itself.



In the following days, park staff went to check how much more damage was done. Heading west found trees down on the main trail, taking out trail markers with them, but most heartbreaking was discovering the loss of the Old Black Oak, an icon in the park.

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## Devastation at Fox Island (cont.)



Continuing on found that the devastation was worse than could ever be imagined. Natalie Haley, Park and Education Manager at Fox Island, reported that there were 400 plus trees toppled from the lake road, down around Bowman Lake and back on the west end of the upper dune trail. It took her five hours to climb through it all. The frog pond was full of trees and every intersection and most of the trail was under trees on the upper dune. Sections of the dune trail are lost due to downed trees pulling up the ground and creating potholes. Much of the upper dune trail that was all under tree canopy is now in full sun. Some trees were blown completely over while others were snapped off halfway up the trunk.

Bob Dispenza, Park and Education Manager, had this to say about the damage, "Devastation is too light a word for what happened to Fox Island County Park Monday night. Large areas are simply destroyed. Areas that used to be covered by tree canopy are now open to the sky. We will never see Fox Island like it was Monday morning again in our lifetime, maybe ever."



One of the main reasons that Fox Island was a state nature preserve was because of the outstanding black oak savannah on the old sand dunes. Many places, including our experimental prescribed burn area, lost 100% of their large black oak trees.



Upper Dune Trail west had about 30 meters of open trail. All the rest was covered by fallen trees. So heavily covered it took two hours to walk it and I lost the trail completely several times. Some trails might simply have to be abandoned, they are so heavily impacted."

At the time of this writing, it is estimated that there are at least 1050 trees that are gone in the park. Natalie Haley made this statement, "Fox Island is changed for my lifetime at least. We will not be open until we have made it safe. We are losing thousands in revenue this summer, but we must keep park visitors safe."

If you want to help with cleanup efforts, a monetary donation would be much appreciated at this time. Please send a check made out to Fox Island Alliance. Mail it to Fox Island County Park, (ATTN: Park Manager, Natalie Haley), 7324 Yohne Rd., Fort Wayne, IN. 46809. This may help alleviate the loss in revenue. Donations made in this way are also tax deductible."



# Director spotlight on Pam George

By Clara Conroy

## Short biography:

I've been an educator all of my adult life. I taught fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in Northwest Allen County Schools before becoming the Math & Science Coordinator for the system. My next adventure was serving as Principal at Perry Hill Elementary before retiring after about 30+ years.

Retirement didn't settle well with me so I tried assorted jobs at Science Central, Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, etc. until I landed a teaching position at Indiana -Purdue Fort Wayne (now PFW). That lasted until this spring when I retired from PFW after 10 years as a professor in the Education Department.

## When did you start helping at the park?

My love affair with Fox Island Park began while I was teaching science to all the sixth graders at Hometown. I decided to try an overnight campout with them when Pat Bolman was still the naturalist at the park. I was hooked (and so were the kids).

I later met Kate Ferguson, a Fox Island Alliance Board member who later served for several years as president, during a park hike. She asked if I might be interested in joining the Fox Island Alliance Board. This had to be in the late 1980's. I've been serving ever since. As with any board involvement, you are lured into filling various positions. I have been secretary, vice president and treasurer for numerous years. I was, however, always able to avoid being president!

I also have had the privilege of being a trail guide for various school groups who come to Fox Island to get a hands-on emergence into nature's beauty and complexity. Each year, even I learn something new. This year, before our derecho storm hit, I experienced the slime mold on the grapevines along one of the trails for the first time.



*Pam George pictured in center.  
Photo courtesy of KPC news.*

## IMN:

When Kate Ferguson established an Indiana Master Naturalist Chapter in Allen County in 2005, she asked if I would be an assistant. I agreed and have been involved with that program ever since. Jeff Ormiston and I took over for Kate in 2014 and have coordinated this popular program ever since.

The Indiana Master Naturalist Program is an educational/volunteer program developed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to provide citizens with hands-on opportunities to learn about our state's natural features and resources. Each participant is required to attend at least 8 of the 14 sessions provided through the Allen County program. They must then then pass a quiz for those sessions and accumulate 24 hours of volunteer work before obtaining an Indiana Master Naturalist Certification and pin.

The Allen County IMN Program has been supported by Allen County Parks and Fox Island Alliance since its initial inception.

The 2022 session of the Allen County Chapter of the Indiana Master Naturalists graduated 31 naturalists. Eighteen instructors with varying degrees of environmental expertise including PFW professors and several FIA Board members, continue to make this such an enticing endeavor for the area's nature lovers. And there is currently a waiting list for the 2023 season! *(continued on page 3)*

## A view from the bird station: Nature Camp

by Cynthia Powers, photo by Sarah Maloy



A shining example of what can be accomplished with ideas and teamwork! I'm writing from the point of view of the Bird Station as we were asked to help by leading a bird hike each day.

Monday went well for our group of fourth and fifth graders. We had several interesting birds at the Vera Building, including several hummingbirds. The many taxidermy specimens aided our discussion of beaks and feet. Tim had created a magnetic poster showing a bird skeleton the kids could label. We then hiked out by the lake and observed bluebirds, a phoebe and woodpeckers. All was well!

That evening the derecho hit! Many trees were down at Fox Island, and the park was closed! So we had no camp for Tuesday and Wednesday.

Camp was held on Thursday and Friday at Eagle Marsh! Binoculars had been inspected, and Tim brought enough over for each child to use. We set up in the shade for our discussion of bones and feathers, and a short talk about hummingbirds. Clara Conroy led us on a hike to find some actual birds. This was very successful as we got good looks at tree swallows feeding their babies in a tree hole, a whole family of mute swans, many red-winged blackbirds and turkey vultures. Marsh wrens sang incessantly from the cattails. By that time, the bird crew (Tim, Ed and Cynthia Powers, and Clara) had improved the Eagle Marsh version of Nature Camp---but camp was over for this year! I heard some say they hadn't been to Eagle Marsh before, so maybe LRWP will be rewarded for their generosity in hosting Nature Camp on such short notice.

## Director spotlight on Pam George (cont.)

*(continued from page 3)*

### **Fox Island Park..... What Makes It So Special?**

Maybe its because I spent my younger years living on a farm where you could explore nature throughout the seasons, or maybe its my sense of connecting with the past. All I know is there is such a sense of escaping into another world where life seems simpler and more predictable as you walk along the trails at Fox Island. But you never know for sure what you'll experience on any given day.

### **What do you hope for the future?**

Of course, my greatest hope is that the magic remains for all of us as Fox Island is rebuilt and replenished. There will be new stories to tell the little ones who come to visit. Species of plants may emerge after years of dormancy that will need to be identified and added to our journal notes. Nature seems to thrive on challenges. I guess we can all learn from nature.

## Nature Camp 2022—Success and Survival

by Sarah Maloy, photos by Sarah Maloy

The idea of Nature Camp began last fall with my vision to offer our community the opportunity for elementary aged children to connect to nature by allowing them to experience it outdoors and personally as they explored, learned and became environmental stewards. That idea led to numerous conversations, a proposal before the Fox Island Alliance Board of Directors and eventually evolved into our camp week with huge success!

Nature Camp hosted 70 registered campers and 21 Volunteers, joining us as an Indiana Master Naturalist and/or specialist in their field.

This event was planned for June 13th -17th from 9:30a - 11:30a. Our week began at Fox Island County Park and welcomed campers, grades K-5, to five unique stations. Each station hosted a different theme and allowed campers to explore a different aspect of nature, while having fun and learning about different fields of science. Grade groups rotated to a new station each day and included bats, birds, butterflies, geology and pond life.



Day one concluded with great applaud to all involved! We were ready for day two, but nature had other plans for us. Campers and volunteers alike were impacted by a major weather event that had taken place overnight. Our region had experienced a derecho. Fox Island County Park has suffered significant damage and loss. The park was closed and management could not allow Nature Camp to continue at their location. I wasn't, however, ready to give up on camp - or the children we were inspiring and positively impacting. I, personally, met several campers that had not hiked before or didn't know that we had sand dunes within our county. I knew every station had a similar story of new adventure for campers - we were fulfilling the very mission of Nature Camp. Our campers were learning and growing in their interest of the natural world.

So, with the intention to find an alternative location that could support our efforts in a safe and appropriate manner, I reached out to the Preserves and Program Manager at Little River Wetlands Project. This collaboration led to the transition of Nature Camp to Eagle Marsh where they graciously allowed us to host our event Thursday and Friday.



Our Nature Camp survived and flourished! Each station hosted the same hands-on activities and exciting hikes as intended. Campers ended their week, certificate in hand, with a new connection to nature. My sincerest thanks to the LRWP Wetland Educator and Preserves & Program Manager for their hospitality. And, a heartfelt thank you to each and every volunteer that supported this event. This camp literally could not have survived without you!

## 2022 Annual Meeting of Members for the Fox Island Alliance

by Liz Hincks

This year's Annual Meeting was hosted on a sunny Sunday afternoon, May 1st, at the Fox Island County Park. At the beginning of the meeting, participants were joined by several members of the Darrell Will family. We gathered together by the beautiful white pine tree, which was planted in honor of Darrell Will, former Vice President. A tree dedication ceremony was led by Terri Habig, Board President. After the ceremony, members chatted with each other while they munched on a variety of Cookie Cottage cookies, ice cream bars and drinks. Dr. Scott Bergeson of Purdue University Fort Wayne shared discoveries and updates to the bat research conducted at Fox Island, partially sponsored by FIA. The business meeting followed. Per the by-laws, reports and updates from the year were presented to members. Clara Conroy and Tim Ormiston received the Volunteer of the Year award. All of the members on the ballot were elected to the Board. After the meeting, with no more business to be completed (and no more cookies left to be eaten!) the 2022 Annual Meeting of Members of the Fox Island Alliance was adjourned.



## Fox Island Alliance

**Ed Powers**  
**12206 W. Yoder Road**  
**Roanoke, IN 46783**

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Terri Habig, President  
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Fox Tale Editor:

Lisa Esquivel Long

The **Fox Island Alliance** is a volunteer not-for-profit organization. Its purposes are to help preserve the natural features of Fox Island County Park, to assist its orderly development as a nature preserve, to raise funds to facilitate its development, to promote Fox Island's use as an educational center, and to coordinate volunteer efforts.

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