Fall 2026 Newsletter



2026 Friends of the Cache River Watershed Annual Meeting

Our Friends Annual meeting was well attended on August 20th with over 60 people at the event.



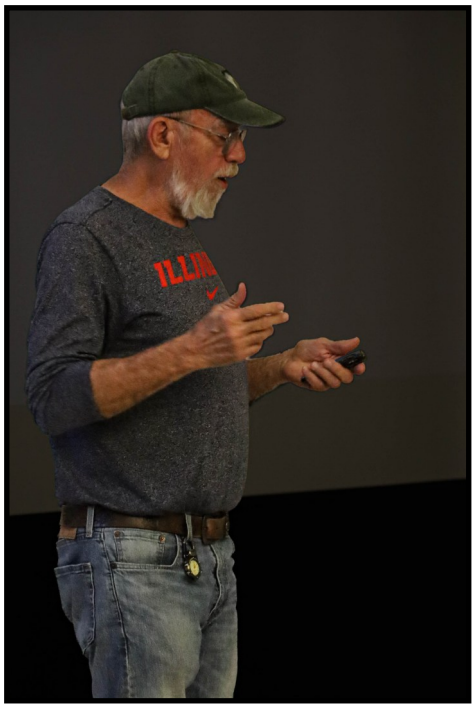
This year Glenn Poshard was asked to give some opening remarks about his work trying to pass legislation and secure funding toward the establishment of the Cache River State Natural Area, the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, and the Cache River Wetlands Joint Venture Partnership (JVP). Glenn agreed to do so without knowing that he would also be recognized for his work in protecting the Cache (see page 3.)



Friends President Tony Gerard talked about the accomplishments of the group during the past year including:

- Continued Kids to the Cache Program,
- Continued biodiversity documentation projects on iNaturalist,
- Renovated AV system at the Visitor's Center,
- Served as a Sponsor for The Wild Ones Conference,
- Helped with maintenance of the Pollinator gardens at the Visitor's Center,

- Provided Reptile and Furbearers Hands-on displays at Cache River Days and the Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center Re-opening,
- Paid for needed equipment and supplies at the Wetlands Center, and
- Supported Updating the Map of the Cache River Watershed Project.



Former Friends of the Cache President Michael Jeffords delivered a fascinating program about the *Hidden Worlds of the Cache and Beyond*. Michael's wife Susan Post writes a column in this newsletter (see page 9), enhanced by his photos.







Photos on pages 1 and 2 by Jonathan Voelz

According to Friends of the Cache member Steve Bailey (pictured above), *The meeting was great! Good speaker and a lot of good people working towards a common cause.* He was also happy with the interest shown in learning about his Bald Cypress Bonsai.

2026 Cache Champion Award Presented to Glenn Poshard

By John B. Wallace



The Cache Champion Award was created in 2018 to acknowledge those often-unsung heroes who love the Cache River Wetlands and put their passion into action as advocates for this special place.

While Glenn has had a storied career as an educator, and as a political leader including a stint as the SIU System President, a state senator, a US congressman and a nominee for governor, he was also influential in protecting some of Southern Illinois' best assets: our natural landscapes, including the Cache River Wetlands. Beginning as a state senator in the mid-to late 1980s he helped secure funding toward acquiring land for the then Illinois Department of Conservation which would eventually become part of the Cache River State Natural Area. In 1989 Glenn was elected to Congress where he worked to establish the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge and the Cache River Wetlands Joint Venture Partnership (JVP). The JVP was the first of its kind that established a partnership between state and federal agencies as well as several not-for-profit conservation organizations. Glenn not only voted for important land acquisition funding, he also introduced controversial legislation that helped establish the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

Glenn told the Friends about how he spoke to support protecting our natural Southern Illinois' resources at meetings where the majority of people in the audience were vocally against his proposals, a rare quality for elected officials these days. At the Friends meeting Glenn reminded the audience of the significance of the Cache River's designation as a *UN Ramsar Wetland of International Importance*. To quote Max Hutchison, also a Cache Champion recipient, *Glenn was helping to support the Cache when doing so wasn't very popular.* Glenn's speech was passionate and he was clearly surprised to receive the award, a well-deserved honor.

(Photo by John Voelz)

Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge News

New Signs



Five new refuge signs with a blue background and a prothonotary warbler have been placed at Cypress Creek NWR as well as a welcome sign at the Bellrose Observation Deck (shown at right). A new directional sign for the end of Bailey Road at Hickory Bottoms Access has been ordered.

Updated panels for brochures and contact information have been ordered for all kiosks at the boat ramps and trails. An all new kiosk structure with all new panels has been ordered for Cache Levee Boat Ramp.

Updated trail map panels at the Limekiln and Hickory Bottoms Kiosks are being planned as well.

iNaturalist Bioblitz - October 2-4, 2026

Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge is currently working on updating its species list in order to better represent the incredible diversity of this unique area. Each National Wildlife Refuge has its own species list that can be accessed on the refuge's website. These lists are useful for visitors to the refuge but are also used for planning purposes by the USFWS. As an example, diversity or number of species present may be a criterion considered when prioritizing tracts of land to purchase.

The Friends of the Cache will be hosting an iNaturalist bioblitz the weekend of October 2-4 to give a boost to the number of species on the list. To participate in the Bioblitz, upload your observations on the iNaturalist app from anywhere within the refuge. Your observations will automatically be added to the Biodiversity of Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge project.

For more information about the trails and activities at the Refuge, visit https://www.fws.gov/refuge/cypress-creek. For questions, contact Wildlife Biologist Karen Mangan at Karen_Mangan@fws.gov.

Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center

Community Event Schedule

SEPTEMBER

Sep 12: Bats of the Cache River Wetlands (1:30–2:30 p.m.) — James L. Grove and Selena K. Sasser, PhDs

Sep 13: Grandparents' Day: Amazing Metamorphosis Craft and Story Hour (1:30–2:30 p.m.) - Lena Free, IDNR

Sept 17: Shawnee College Enrollment Management Retreat Counselor's Retreat on site (8:30 a.m. through lunch) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

Sep 19: Fall Migration Mini Sit (9:00 a.m.–Noon) and Picnic (Noon–1:30 p.m.) — Kim Rohling, U of I Extension & Sydney Waters, IDNR

Sep 23: Classical Conversations Homeschool Group on Site (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — IDNR presentations

Sep 24: RREEP Meeting on Site- Movie not available to public at this time (9:00 a.m. –TBD)

Sep 25: Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

OCTOBER

Oct 1: Tick Talk: Identification and Prevention (1:30–2:30 p.m.) — Illinois Department of Public Health and IDNR, Lena Free

Oct 25: Boo at the Slough! (1:00–3:00 p.m.) — IDNR and U of I Extension

Oct 30: Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

NOVEMBER

Nov 7: Mollusk Craft and Story Hour (1:30–2:30 p.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

Nov 13: Wooly Worm Presentation & Craft (10:00–11:00 a.m.) — Anne Townsend & Erin Garrett, U of I Extension

Nov 14: Christmas Bird Count Workshop (9:00–11:00 a.m.) – Kim Rohling, U of I Extension

Nov 19: Planning for Pollinators Fall Work Day and Presentation (Time TBA) — IDNR, U of I Extension, Friends of the Cache River Watershed

Nov 20: Wild Turkeys and the Science of Sound (5:30– 6:30 p.m.) — Lucille Cheeley, SIU

No Coffee on the Cache this month due to holiday, will continue in January 2027.

DECEMBER

Dec 3: Wreath Making Workshop (1:30–3:00 p.m.) — Anne Townsend & Erin Garrett, U of I Extension

Dec 12: Craft & Story Hour (1:30– 2:30 p.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

No Coffee on the Cache this month due to holiday, will continue in January 2027.

For any questions about the above events, please contact Sydney Waters:

Sydney.Waters@illinois.gov

618-657-2064 (office), 618-713-1163 (cell)

Henry N. Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center

8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, IL 62923

Open everyday, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Facebook page: Cache River State Natural Area

Who Am I? (Answer on page 14)

You might mistake me for a mantis, but that's only because our armament is so similar. We both catch small Insects with a sudden lunge and grab. But look at these wings! They are better for flying than mantis wings (but not really by much). Also, I'm mostly active at night, while mantis are mostly active during the day. Plus, I bet you've never seen a mantis with eyes as cool as mine! Do you know me? *(Photo by Tony Gerard)*



Native Americans of the Cache River Watershed & Southernmost Illinois Part 2 of 10

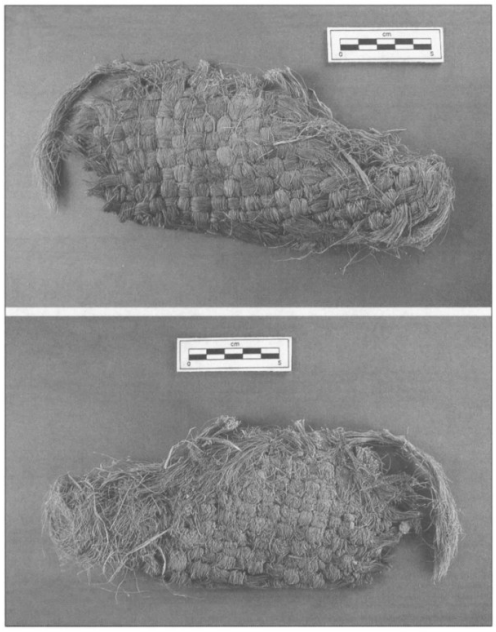


Figure 1. Two views of the Kerr Canyon Textile.

Woven from the Prairie: A 4,500-Year-Old Textile from Southern Illinois by Mark Denzer

When most people see rattlesnake master growing in a prairie restoration, they notice its stiff, sword-like leaves and distinctive white flower heads. Few realize this native plant once provided one of the most important textile fibers available to Indigenous peoples of the Midwest.

In the 1970s, Southern Illinois University wildlife biologist Jack Nawrot made an unexpected discovery while studying eastern woodrats, often called packrats, in the Shawnee Hills. Deep inside a woodrat midden hidden beneath a sandstone rock shelter in Kerr Canyon, he recovered a fragment of woven textile unlike anything previously found in Illinois.

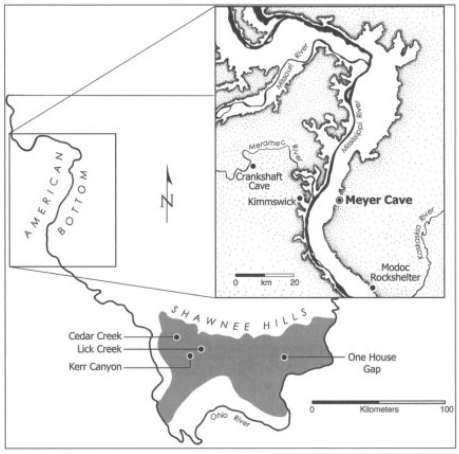


Figure 3. Location of Kerr Canyon and other woodrat sites.

The artifact remained largely forgotten until archaeologists rediscovered and analyzed it decades later. Radiocarbon dating revealed the textile was approximately 4,500 years old, placing it in the Middle Archaic Period. Today, it represents the oldest known non-carbonized textile ever recovered in Illinois.

Analysis showed the fibers were made from rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), a native prairie plant that still grows throughout southern Illinois and the Cache River watershed. The textile's weave resembles ancient footwear and textiles recovered from caves and rock shelters in neighboring states. Although researchers initially suspected it may have been part of a slipper or sandal, its exact purpose remains uncertain.

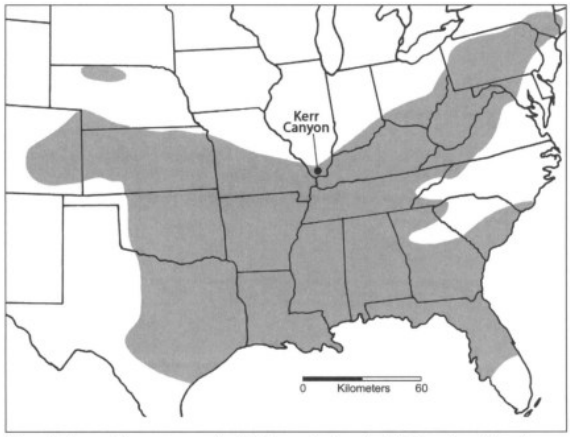
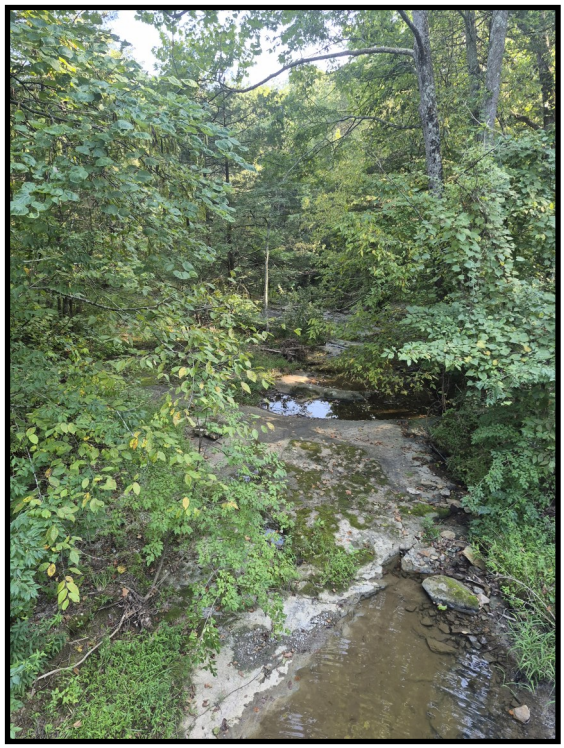


Figure 2. Range of the eastern woodrat (Neotoma floridana) and the location of Kerr Canyon (adapted from Hoffmeister 1989:Map 8.41).

Perhaps equally remarkable is how the artifact survived. It was preserved within a woodrat midden, where generations of packrats collected

and stored vegetation and other materials in the dry shelter environment. Without these industrious rodents, the textile may never have survived long enough to be discovered.



The Kerr Canyon (private land) Textile reminds us that the native plants of our prairies were far more than beautiful wildflowers. For thousands of years they supplied food, medicine, shelter materials, cordage, baskets, and clothing. Long before modern fabrics, Indigenous peoples understood how to harvest rattlesnake master leaves, process their strong fibers, and weave them into durable everyday items.

Today, rattlesnake master remains an important component of prairie restorations throughout the Cache River region. As we work to conserve native landscapes, we are also preserving living connections to the people who called southern Illinois home thousands of years.

Besides being a useful plant for native peoples, **Rattlesnake Master (***Eryngium yuccifolium)* is an important pollinator plant. The flowering heads attract many kinds of insects, including long-tongued bees, short-tongued bees, wasps, flies, butterflies, skippers, moths, beetles, and plant bugs. These insects usually seek nectar, although some of the bees may collect pollen for their brood nests. The caterpillars of the rare Rattlesnake Master Borer Moth bore into the stems and feed on the pith. The coarse foliage and prickly balls of flowers are not popular as a source of food with mammalian herbivores, although they may nibble off the ends of the leaves. *Information taken from Illinoiswildflowers.info. (Photo by William Parmley)*



From my 3x5 Notebook by Susan Post - August 2026



Michael and I spent a few days in the Cache prior to the Friends of the Cache Annual meeting. While my goal was seeking diminutive butterflies, it was the larger-than-life giants of the insect world that made the trip. We usually stay at the Natural History Survey's field station and daily walk the gravel road to the Michael W. Wolff Memorial Wetlands. We had just come back from our morning foray when I happened to glance at the roofline of the house. There was a dark, winged insect with pink highlights resting there, of course out of reach. I knew it belonged to the insect order Neuroptera, net-winged insects, but was it a Fishfly or an Antlion? Thanks to a tall spouse, we caught it and could examine it closely. This was the Pleasing Picture-winged Antlion, *Glenurus gratus*, an insect found in the southeastern U.S. This was a new species for us.

This antlion is large with a 3.5-to-4-inch wingspan. Its flight is flimsy and fluttery. While to me the pale pink accent on its wings was a standout feature, it is really the insect's larvae which are unique. This is woodland antlion. The larvae of this antlion do not dig funnel-shaped traps that you see at the base of sandstone bluffs in Southern Illinois. Instead, they live inside dry tree hollows where the larvae hide in the debris that accumulate in these hollows—sawdust, wood particles and animal droppings. The larvae lie in wait and chase their prey—ants, grubs and termites—that also share this microhabitat. Finding the larvae is difficult to impossible, so seeing this unique adult insect was one of the highlights of our entomological foray into the "wilds" of the Cache. *(Photo by Michael Jeffords)*

Invaders! Red-Eared Sliders by Tony Gerard

In this installment of Invaders! I thought we might turn things around and look at a local species that has become invasive worldwide.

Several years ago I got to explore Hong Kong with my wife Berna and my buddy Steve Karsen. We spent the days herping (looking for reptiles and amphibians) and had great luck. Once we spotted at turtle on the far side of a lake lined by steep hillsides. I'd really hoped it was a Reeve's turtle, a Hong Kong native species. I took us quite a while to trek around to be close enough for me to get a long-range picture with my camera. It turned out to be a Red-Eared Slider! It was the only wild turtle I saw in Hong Kong.

Red-ears were also the only turtle I saw in the Bahamas, the Philippines, Australia and Portugal. In Taiwan I saw native turtles, but also Red-ears.



Red-eared sliders are native to the central Mississippi valley of the US. They get their name from a wide red stripe on the side of their head, right about where the ear would be (if they had external ears). This red stripe is not always present, and it may darken with age. As you go further south and along the gulf this same species looks somewhat different and lacks the red stripe. Here they are referred to there as Yellow-Bellied Sliders. Both turtles fall under the species *Trachemys scripta*, the Pond Slider.

If you are as old as me you can remember when tiny, green turtles were sold, not just in pet stores, but even in toy stores. In the US salmonella scares in the 1960s put an end to this massive trade in baby turtles in the US, but not necessarily in other countries. Throughout the 20th century Red-Eared Sliders were the most popular pet turtle worldwide. They may still be. Turtles are not really great animals for pets. Most need special requirements to live a long, healthy life, but Red-ears are remarkably tough. They can often live a long time under less than ideal conditions.



Released and escaped pets have established Red-Ear populations worldwide. Within the US, Red-ears have established breeding populations in twelve states outside their native range.

Here in the Cache (where they belong) Red-ears are certainly our most visible and probably most common, turtle species. They often bask in large numbers on floating logs and such on warm days.



Female Red-ears are typically larger than males, and males have another distinctive feature. The male's front claws are about twice as long as the female's. He uses this as an enticement in courting a female. First, the male will position himself directly in front of the female, extend his front legs and rapidly shake his front feet. If she doesn't swim away, he may proceed to gently stroke the sides of her face and neck with his long nails. This may lead to some gentle love nips to the side of her face and neck…which may then lead to other things.

When I was a boy, my kinfolk made a habit of shooting every turtle in their ponds. They believed they ate the fish. Red-ears are omnivores, feeding on aquatic insects, crustaceans and a variety of aquatic plants. Plant material probably makes up at least half of the adult's diet. While they will eat sick or dying fish or scavenge dead ones, Red-ears are not fast or maneuverable enough to catch a healthy fish, A red-ear population has no discernable effect on fish in a farm pond.

Worldwide some native turtle species have shown declines, or been replaced entirely, by the more adaptable Red-ears. I've often been very disparaging of Red-ears when recounting my turtle experiences in other countries. If he's around when I'm telling such tales, my buddy Greg Geller (a turtle biologist) always says the same thing: *Don't be so hard on Red-ears, Tony. They are the species that will continue turtles through this current mass extinction.* I think he's probably right.



A Red-ear basking on the ice of Mermet lake on a warmish winter afternoon.

(Photos by Tony Gerard)

Critters of the Cache – Wooly Bear Caterpillars- Nature's Weathermen? by Tony Gerard

Soon it will be that time of year again, when pretty burnt orange-and-black caterpillars are commonly seen on a determined journey to somewhere, heading out across the country roads and suburban sidewalks. The common name for these little guys is *Wooly Bear* Caterpillar.



Bright contrasting colors in nature often mean one of three things: 1) I'm venomous, 2) I'm toxic to eat or 3) I'm not venomous or toxic, but I want you to think I am. Wooly Bears, and all their close moth kin, go with option 2. They apparently taste terrible.

Their journey is probably to seek a safe place to spend the winter, because they overwinter as a larva. They actually have the ability to freeze almost solid. Only the center of their cells stays unfrozen. This ability has allowed them to extend their range far north, even up into the arctic regions. The next spring they metamorphose into their adult form, the Isabella Moth.



A bit of folklore is probably their greatest claim to fame. Their color pattern supposedly predicts the weather. As a kid I was taught that the black color represented bad winter weather, while the orange part represented mild weather. By that interpretation almost every winter would start out harsh, have a longer mild time, then end up with harsh weather again. But that is not the way everyone reads the Wooly Bears! Other folks said it was the length of the central orange band that predicted the weather. A very wide orange





band predicted a mild winter, a narrow orange band predicted a harsher winter. Reading caterpillars in this manner two entomologists from the American Museum of Natural History in New York City collected 15 woolly bears in 1948 and, as a lark, predicted a mild winter based on band width averages. The prediction made it onto front page of the New York Herald Tribune! And it proved correct! Caterpillar weather prediction gained national attention. For the next seven years, the paper's readers demanded annual weather predictions based on caterpillars.

Can Wooly bears actually predict winter weather? No. Some fall day just take note of the variation among various Wooly Bears- they don't agree.

A last note on caterpillar weather prediction. Almost every year I have someone say to me, *It's gonna be a really bad winter. I saw a caterpillar and it was solid black!.* They have the wrong caterpillar! In our area this guy is most likely the larva of the Giant Leopard Moth. This caterpillar is larger that the Wooly Bear with the same bristly hairy covering, but black in color. Both caterpillars curl defensively when threatened. When the giant Leopard moth caterpillar does so, its bright red skin may show between the bristles. *(Photos by Tony Gerard)*





Answer to Who Am I? (from page 6)



I'm a Mantidfly!

There are actually several of my cousins that also live in the Cache watershed, although the majority of my family lives in the tropics. Locally some are green; one even tries to convince everyone he's a wasp! He looks like it too. Look for us around lights at night, or if you really want to increase your chances of meeting one of us, put out a blacklight.

(Photos by Tony Gerard)



The Good Guys - Native Plants by Anne Parmley

Field or Pasture Thistle (*Cirsium discolor*) is visited by many bees, butterflies, moths, flies, and the ruby-throated hummingbird for nectar. It is a host plant for the painted lady butterfly and several moths. Other insect feeders include long-horned bees, beetles, aphids, grasshoppers, and others.



What I find fascinating is that the American Goldfinch times its nesting period to when the native thistle has produced seeds. It uses the thistledown to line its nest and feeds regurgitated seeds to its young.

This native plant can be distinguished from the non-native *Cirsium vulgare* (Bull Thistle) by the white undersides of its leaves.

(References: Illinoiswildflowers.info and Audubon.org) *(Photo by William Parmley)*

Friends of the Cache River Watershed Board Members:

Tony Gerard, President	Lori Armstrong, Treasurer/Friends Store
Sharon Voelz, Secretary	Shawn Gossman, Webmaster
Anne Parmley, Membership/Newsletter	Tammy Horn, Pollinator Gardens
Jonathan Voelz	John Wallace

All Board Members can be reached at friendsofthecacheriver@gmail.com.



Become a Friend of the Cache by using the form below or by going to our website: friendsofthecache.org and clicking on *Join*. As a Friend of the Cache, you'll receive our newsletter, invitations to members-only events, such as the popular annual Moonlight Paddle, a 10-percent discount on all Friends Store items at the Wetlands Center, volunteer opportunities, etc. Follow us on Facebook at Friends of the Cache River Watershed.

The Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center is open every day through the fall season, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., phone 618-657-2064, 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, Illinois 62923, 2 miles North of State Route 169; 9 miles South of State Route 146. See their Facebook page at Cache River State Natural Area.

Become a Friend of the Cache River Watershed

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To remain budget and environmentally friendly, most communications are by e-mail.

☐ Check here if you need to receive information by U. S. Mail.

All contributions are tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to Friends of the Cache River Watershed and mail to 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, IL 62923.