



Volunteer Spotlight: Bill Cummings

What is your role with The Nature Conservancy and how did you get started? I volunteer with prescribed burning, sign making, and monitoring at Cedar Bluffs. I retired a couple of years ago and offered at that time to help as needed.

Can you share about your background and your relationship to Indiana's natural areas? My family and I have camped and hiked at the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, some of Indiana's state parks, and several national parks since the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s we teamed with the Red-tail Conservancy of eastern Indiana to buy ~100 acres of mixed-use land near the reservoir in Delaware County that the local water company was selling with intent to keep the surrounding watershed as clean as possible. We signed a conservation easement on our half and converted the formerly tilled 20 acres into prairie, the remainder being woods and wetlands. I keep bees there and every year harvest a nice light wildflower honey. We are currently converting some invasives-dominated acreage into oak savanna and this year began collecting wildflower seeds for Project Wingspan.

What drew you to volunteering with TNC specifically? I had enjoyed bridge designing and building, trail maintenance, invasives work, and the observation of wildlife for many years and thought some of those skills might be useful to TNC. Also, Denny McGrath, a former state director of TNC in Indiana, is a long-time friend and former neighbor here in Indianapolis, so I've kept an admiring eye on TNC for quite a while.

Have you had a particularly memorable moment or significant experience while volunteering with TNC? Peter Bauson, Esmé Barniskis, my son Joe, and I were taking an exploratory hike through Cedar Bluffs, and we decided that a fallen tree needed to be removed from the trail. As often happens, the chainsaw bar got pinched when the cut allowed the log to settle. Despite lots of driving wedges, heaving, and grunting, the bar was firmly stuck, and this large log was too heavy to roll or slide. We hit upon the idea of using a car jack to lift the log from beneath at the cut plane. That opened the slice enough to liberate the saw, and there was much rejoicing! Even though I designed jet engines for a career, I have a soft spot in my heart for Fred Flintstone engineering.

How do you see volunteerism fitting into your overall life at this time? I'm spending a lot of my retirement time volunteering, mostly outdoors. Just as I did in my working years, I'm building a network of people with similar interests, and it's great to meet people so enthused about nature and its well being.

When you aren't volunteering, what do you like to do for fun?

I've taken up windsurfing in the last four years, an exhilarating way to spend time with friends on the water. I run a pickup game of soccer in Indianapolis that began with a few friends from the Indy Symphony 20 years ago and is now frequented by a load of youngsters who enjoy a good game (and allow a couple of old goats like me to run around with them). I quite enjoy music, too, so I sing in the choir at our church. I ride my bicycle to as many of these things as I can to keep in shape and enjoy the scenery and personal interactions on the trails and streets.

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