



Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

An Oak in Time

Darryl Coates

As a wildlife professional for a number of years, I have come to appreciate the enormity and the greatness of big oaks that can be found in the forests and savannas throughout Illinois. Many of these giants have been standing silently witnessing the changes in seasons, crop rotations, and man’s technology. Harvesting sunlight for energy their entire lives, the bigger and older oaks have consumed tons of carbon dioxide and drank pools of water while living as solar collectors on a grand landscape scale. This year the spring canopy of one such oak did not produce leaves the size of mice ears. The tree, a white oak (*Quercus alba*), likely grew for more than 150 years in Friends Creek Township, standing along Friends Creek Ditch, which feeds into Friends Creek. It kept its place just north of Duroc Road.



White oak, Friends Creek Campground

The tree watched the wooden bridges being replaced with iron ones in 1905. I want to believe that as a sapling, the oak might have watched a lanky, bearded lawyer in a stovepipe hat ride the circuit by horse from Decatur to Monticello.

I look at the oak, the tree that literally framed our history, in several ways: it provides habitat, it cleans the air, it’s a crop to be harvested at the end of its life, and it can be the subject for a plein-air piece of art. For some people it can be seen as a commodity.

It has aesthetic value. The tree I know, this one in the park that we had to take down, had lived its course. Some oaks live longer, but this white oak died for whatever reason – disease or old age; I don’t know. But I do know it will have a second purpose: it will be used as firewood. This wonderful woodland sentinel is going to release its energy and continue contributing in beautiful ways. Used as firewood, it might heat someone’s coffee or be the flame for a first-time camper’s ‘s’more. It might be burned in the Friends Creek workshop, heating the building for the staff as they work

during the cold winter months maintaining equipment and managing the park, preparing it for another season of picnics, hikes, and camping. There is a certain

sadness in felling such a majestic behemoth with bark, but knowing it’s going to be recycled and repurposed brings its existence into circle. It lived to serve the animals and understory that resided in its shadow and to replenish the oxygen in the air blowing through its leaves. This once-living anchor has now been pulled up to continue to

serve as a resource for seasons to come. And I have looked at every big oak in this manner.



New life in the form of art: a woodcarving



White oak being removed



Educational Opportunities

Have you or your children always wanted to see a frog up close, hold a dragonfly in your hand, hear the different calls of native owls, or visit an 1860s farm house? These are all things you can do with the Macon County Conservation District, right in your own backyard.

One of our goals is to reach as many members of our community as possible and educate them about the many natural and cultural wonders to be found in our county. We can do this in a variety of ways:

- We can do a program at your school, senior center, community center, and more
- You can schedule a program at one of our sites throughout the county, including Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, Sand Creek, and Griswold
- You can borrow a learning trunk filled with books, activities, posters, and other educational materials to support your curriculum or objectives in the classroom, for your scout group, or at home
- You can borrow a fishing pole or hike pack to support your exploration at Rock Springs

If you are a teacher, activity director, homeschool parent, scout leader, after-school program coordinator, daycare leader, or anyone in the community with a love of nature and history, we want to connect with you! To schedule a program or learn more about what we offer, call Alysia at 217-423-7708 or visit our website at MaconCountyConservation.org.

Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Register online before the last full weekday prior to the program. Programs held at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise noted:

YOGA IN THE PINES

Saturday, September 17, 6pm

Sunday, October 16, 5:15pm

Saturday, November 5, 9am

Join yoga instructor Michelle Huttes for an intermediate level, slow vinyasa yoga flow in the Pine Forest. Enjoy yoga as the sun sets in the September and October sessions, or in the morning right before our Forest Bathing program for the November session. Please bring your own yoga mat. Free. Register online by September 16, October 14, and November 4. Min/Max: 1/30.



CANOE BIG CREEK

Saturdays, September 24 and October 8, 12-2pm

All equipment is provided for this leisurely exploration of a local waterway. At least one adult required per canoe. Meet at Cannon Park on S. Baltimore Ave. \$25/canoe. Register online by September 23 and October 7. Min/Max: 4/13 canoes.





Briefs

Volunteer Opportunity

Do you enjoy nature and working with kids? Volunteer naturalists are an essential part of our educational team throughout the year. Our volunteer naturalists lead guided nature walks and assist with outdoor educational activities such as fishing and canoeing. A typical educational walk occurs at a leisurely pace and lasts approximately one hour covering less than ½-mile in distance. We provide you with training, a packet of information for educational topics, and the opportunity to observe another experienced hike leader in action. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up and requires a background check.



If you would like to learn more about becoming a Volunteer Naturalist, join us on October 20 from 2-3:30pm to participate in our Hike Leader Training. For more information or to sign up, contact Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver at JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org or 217-423-7708. Explore additional volunteer opportunities on our website.

New Fall Wellness Series

This fall, we invite you to deepen your connection to the natural world as we explore a new outdoor wellness series featuring yoga, nature journaling, and forest bathing.

In addition to improving strength and flexibility, yoga allows the mind and body to calm down, resulting in less stress, less anxiety, and improved mood and focus, some of the same benefits experienced by spending time in nature.

Forest bathing can also provide numerous benefits such as lowering blood pressure and cortisol levels, and boosting mood naturally. Forest bathing allows one to slowly explore nature, often using all five senses.

Nature journaling helps one connect to nature by focusing more closely on the natural world. Nature journaling may be done by sketching, taking field notes, or even writing a poem. Participants slow down to tune in with nature, which in turn provides some of the previously mentioned benefits.

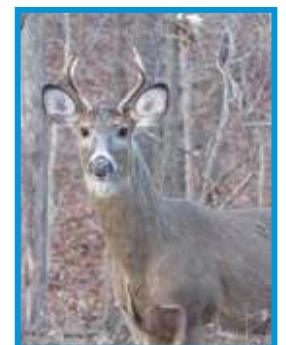
Be sure not to miss these new offerings! See details throughout this issue of the Prairie Islander.

Deer Archery Hunting

The Conservation District's 2022 Deer Herd Management Program will run from October 21 through December 15, 2022. Hunting is allowed at Rock Springs, Sand Creek, Friends Creek, and Fort Daniel Conservation Areas by special permit only.

The goal is to reduce deer population numbers on District sites and provide public hunting opportunities in Macon County. Participants must harvest an antlerless deer before taking an antlered deer.

New for 2022, any child under the age of 18 will be allowed to hunt in the program during their parent or guardian's hunting period. The child and parent/guardian must remain within eyesight of each other while hunting. The child will be required to purchase a MCCD Hunting Permit. All other rules apply.



For more information about the program, please contact Ethan Snively at 217-853-3465 or visit MaconCountyConservation.org/habitat-restoration. The deadline to submit an application is Friday, September 9.

Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

Hours

Macon County Conservation District



OFFICES OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

NATURE CENTER OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

Saturday, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Thursday, November 24, Thanksgiving Day

OFFICES CLOSED

Monday, September 5, Labor Day

Friday, November 11, Veteran's Day

Friday, November 25, Thanksgiving

Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturdays, September 3, and October 1, 1-4pm

See what going to school was like in the early 20th century at this historic one-room schoolhouse located at Friends Creek Conservation Area. 13734 Friends Creek Park Rd., Cisco, IL. Free.

HOMESTEAD PRAIRIE FARM

Saturdays & Sundays, June-October, 1-4pm

Discover this 1860s farmhouse and the lives of the people who lived there. Located at Rock Springs Conservation Area, 3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL. Free.

GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

September 25, October 30, & November 27, 2-4pm

Tour the restored home of Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Explore the lives of its family members and their late 1800s lifestyle. \$2/person. Members are free. 421 W. William Street, Decatur, IL.



Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball

Join us for the national pastime: base ball! Cheer for your home team, the Rock Springs Ground Squirrels, in a game of vintage base ball played with authentic 1858 rules. All games will be at Beautiful Trobaugh Field at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise stated.

Saturday, September 24, 11am

Home game against the Summit Station Signalmen

September 30-October 2, Evening Games

Away games at the Field of Dreams in Dyersville, IA



Follow the team on Facebook for additional games and more information or visit MaconCountyConservation.org

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm
September 21, October 19, & November 16

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am



Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!
MaconCountyConservation.org



Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.
Register online at MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

Music

The following programs are free and open to the public at Rock Springs Nature Center.

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm
September 3 & 17
October 1, 15, & 29
November 12 & 26



ACOUSTIC MUSIC JAM

Auditorium
Sundays, 2-4pm
September 11, October 9, November 13

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Cheryl Walker
September & October

Discover the splendors of nature through Cheryl Walker's eyes as she shares landscapes using different artistic mediums.

Barn Colony Artists
November & December

Discover works in watercolor, pastels, oil, and mixed media depicting subjects from nature to portraits by talented artists in our community.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Crystal Smith
September & October

See how photographer Crystal Smith uses her love of photography and animals to capture wildlife living their wild lives.

DECATUR CAMERA CLUB PHOTO CONTEST

November & December

View the winning entries for the Decatur Camera Club's My Macon County Photo Contest. For more information or to enter, visit www.TheDecaturCameraClub.org.

Mini Camps

Children ages 1-5 explore nature with an adult buddy through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. These camps are a great stepping stone for little ones to spend time with other children with the comfort of a loved one nearby. \$6/child. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.

CHIPPING SQUIRRELS

Wednesday, September 7, 9:30-10:30am
Thursday, September 8, 9:30-10:30am

Glimpse acrobatic squirrels and learn about their habitat through song, fur, footprints, and a playful game.



QUACKING DUCKS

Tuesday, September 20, 9:30-10:30am
Wednesday, September 21, 9:30-10:30am

Dive into the watery world of ducks through roleplay, stories, and outdoor exploration.

PLAYFUL OTTERS

Wednesday, October 5, 9:30-10:30am
Thursday, October 6, 9:30-10:30am

Learn about these playful aquatic mammals that live along the Sangamon River.



NIGHT ANIMALS

Tuesday, October 18, 9:30-10:30am
Wednesday, October 19, 9:30-10:30am

Discover bats, raccoons, and opossums through hands-on activities and play.

PINE TREES

Wednesday, November 2, 9:30-10:30am
Thursday, November 3, 9:30-10:30am

Explore the plants and animals of our pine forest in this fun adventure.



SHINING STARS

Tuesday, November 15, 9:30-10:30am
Wednesday, November 16, 9:30-10:30am

Dabble in the colors and designs of the night sky canvas above our heads.

Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

September

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PALEONTOLOGY AND DINOSAUR HUNTING

Saturday, September 10, 2pm

Paleontology is the science of studying the past through fossils. Among the most exciting parts of this field is the pursuit of dinosaur fossils. Learn how hunting for dinosaurs combines the location, preparation, and collection of these fragile pieces of the distant past. Guest speaker Don Chamberlain is a retired Decatur teacher and professional photographer. Free. No registration required.



FULL MOON HIKE

Sand Creek Conservation Area
Saturday, September 10, 8pm

Meet at Sand Creek Conservation Area to look at the full moon and walk through the forest, illuminated by only the moon itself. \$3/person. Register online by September 9. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FURRY FRIENDS

Sunday, September 18, 2pm

Learn what a mammal is and which ones live in Illinois. We will make a fuzzy craft and head outside to see if we can spot any furbearers. Free. Register online by September 16. Min/Max: 5/20.



October

ARCHAEOLOGY OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, October 2, 1-4pm

Due to a construction project, dirt was removed from under the farmhouse at Homestead Prairie Farm where it was undisturbed for over 100 years. The dirt came from areas that were once part of the yard but as the house grew, it was built over and protected. Stop by Homestead Prairie Farm to see what artifacts we have found by sifting so far this year. Free. No registration required.



NATURE JOURNALING

Sunday, October 9, 2-4pm

Nature journaling incorporates art and observation to inspire creativity, imagination, and a greater understanding of the natural world. Join a naturalist to learn journaling techniques and how to document your findings, then head outside to put those skills to work. Nature journaling can benefit everyone regardless of age or artistic ability. We will supply a small journal and pencil to get you started, but if you have preferred coloring utensils (colored pencils, crayons, watercolor, etc.) please bring those with you. We will be going outside, so plan accordingly. \$10/person. Register online by October 7. Min/Max: 5/20.



Scouts

The Macon County Conservation District offers badge workshops for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other scouting organizations. Workshops typically last 2-3 hours and cover a variety of nature- and wilderness-related badges. Cost is \$9/scout for a two-hour workshop and \$12/scout for three hours. Visit our website or contact us for more information.



Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.
Register online at MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

GUIDED FOREST WALK

Fort Daniel Conservation Area
Saturday, October 16, 10am

Join a naturalist for a leisurely walk through the forest. We will watch for signs of the changing season and learn about them, including fall colors, falling leaves, and animals preparing for winter. \$3/person. Register online by October 15. Min/Max: 5/30.



CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

Griswold Conservation Area
Saturday, October 29, 7-9pm

The forest comes alive at night! Visit Griswold Conservation Area to meet one of our nocturnal education animals, take a night hike to engage the senses and look for nocturnal wildlife, and enjoy a hot dog or veggie dog and s'mores over the fire. \$5/person. Register online by October 27. Min/Max: 5/30.



November

FOREST BATHING

Saturday, November 5, 10am

Forest bathing is a meditative experience that encourages you to slow down and reconnect with the environment around you. We will use our senses to explore nature, and move slowly while we observe and reflect. \$3/person. Register online by November 4. Min/Max: 5/20.



HARVEST WREATH CRAFT

Saturday, November 19, 2pm

Adults are invited to create an autumn-themed wreath to hang in your home and welcome the season with a splash of fall color. All supplies provided. \$10/person. Register online by November 16. Min/Max: 5/20.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FALL COLOR

Sunday, November 20, 2pm

Why do the leaves change color in the fall? Learn about the changing seasons, venture outside to find some colorful leaves, and make a craft with what you found. Free.

Register online by November 18. Min/Max: 5/20.



MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

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Contact Us

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