

## Dates to Remember

### Volunteer Recognition Dinner

Richland Community College, Salon I & II  
Tuesday, April 2

Join us for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner. Registration starts at 5:30 and a buffet dinner will start at 6pm. RSVP to Jenny Garver by March 20.



### Rock Springs Quilters

Rock Springs Nature Center  
Every Wednesday, 9-11am

### Dulcimer Club

Rock Springs Nature Center  
Saturday, April 13 & 27, 10am-12pm  
Saturday, May 11 & 25, 10am-12pm  
Saturday, June 8 & 22, 10am-12pm



### Acoustic Jam Session

Rock Springs Nature Center  
Sunday, May 12, 2-4pm  
Sunday, June 9, 2-4pm

### Independence Day

Rock Springs Conservation Area,  
Homestead Prairie Farm  
Saturday, June 29, 6-8pm



Enjoy an Independence Day celebration 1860s style! To beat the heat, we will be hosting the event during the evening hours. Tour Homestead Prairie Farm, see the heirloom vegetable and herb gardens, play with vintage toys and games, and at 6:30pm, enjoy a performance from the Rock Springs Dulcimer Club. Visitors are invited to bring lawn chairs. In case of rain, the concert will be moved inside Rock Springs Nature Center. Free. No registration required.

## Thank You Volunteers

Jenny Garver - Volunteer Coordinator

Did you know that April is Volunteer Appreciation Month? We have two appreciation events scheduled during April.

#1- The 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner will be on April 2. This year we have 31 volunteers that will be honored for their service. Awards are given for every 4 years of active service.

#2- Volunteer Goodie Day will be on April 27 during the Festival of Spring. Drop by the Information Desk during the Festival of Spring to pick up a little goodie as our token of appreciation for all that you do. Limit one goodie per volunteer.

In 2023, 405 volunteers donated over 10,600 hours of time. Wow! The year 2024 is off to a good start; during the months of January and February, 93 volunteers have turned over 875 hours. Thank you for being part of the Macon County Conservation District volunteer family!



## Welcome New Volunteers!

**Natural Resources**— Jim Spaniol

**Nature Center Greeter**- Nancy Dunn

**Nest Box Monitor**- Jackie Bullard, Joshua Hollinshead, Suzanne Jarvis

**Trail Monitor**- Shelly Anderson, Valorie Budke, Mori Hodel, Shannon Seal

## Dates to Remember

### Festival of Spring

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Saturday, April 27

Bird Banding, 8-10am

Sangamon River Clean-up, 10am-12pm

Festival of Spring, 12-4pm

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with a day of outdoor family activities. In the morning, see a live bird banding demonstration lead by the Illinois Raptor Center. Then we invite you to stick around to help clean up litter along the Sangamon River. In the afternoon, enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, a scavenger hunt, a live bird show from the Illinois Raptor Center, tours of Homestead Prairie Farm, and learn what other organizations are doing in our community to protect water and wildlife. Co-sponsored by Decatur Audubon Society. Canoeing \$3/person. All other activities are fee. No registration required. Visit our website for more information.



### Rock Springs Ramble

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Saturday, May 18, 8am

The Macon County Conservation

Foundation will be hosting their fourth annual Rock Springs Ramble this spring. This race features a 5K, a 1-mile Fun Run/Walk, and a Kid's Fun Run. It will begin and end at the main parking lot at the Rock Springs Conservation Area and utilize portions of the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. Registration is \$35/runner and \$10/child for the Kid's Fun Run. In addition to being a great opportunity to exercise and explore nature, participants will receive plenty of swag, including top finisher prizes. During the post-race lunch party, Door 4 Brewing Co. will be back again serving drinks, including mimosas. All event proceeds will benefit Macon County's natural areas and wildlife. You can register or donate at [RunSignup.com/RockSpringsRamble](https://RunSignup.com/RockSpringsRamble)



## Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Director of Program Services

Though it has been cold and field trips aren't quite in season, Program Services staff have still been very busy. Over the past few months, we have spent time completely redesigning our Educator's Guide, which is a resource that educators, scout leaders, and other event coordinators use to book educational programs with us. We're proud of the new Guide and have already seen requests come in for some of the new programs within it. If you'd like to take a look, visit <https://bit.ly/3vMXjug>.

Staff has also been busy making maps and working on updating some of our site brochures, namely the Fort Daniel and Friends Creek brochures. There have been a lot of trail changes and some land acquisitions, so it was time for an update. Look for those new brochures in the coming weeks.

Believe it or not, planning is well underway for summer activities! We have been hard at work planning another fun summer for our camp kids, and information about this year's camps can be found on our website, with registration opening on April 1. We have also received word that the Decatur Public School District will be offering some grants to their students again, so if you know a child that might like to attend one of our summer camps, we'd love to have them!

Other things in the works include planning the Festival of Spring, finalizing the lineup for this year's Summer Concert Series, booking lots of programs at local libraries for their summer reading programs, prepping for the spring field trip season, and much more. You may have also heard about our upcoming indoor-outdoor classroom project, which we are very excited to get started on.

Thanks for all that you do, and we hope to see you at an upcoming program or event!

# Volunteer Fun & Learning

## Spring Volunteer Hikes

Thursday, April 4, 10am- Rock Springs

Sunday, April 7, 1:30pm- Fort Daniel

Friday, April 19, 11am- Griswold

Wednesday, April 24, 1pm- Friends Creek

Tuesday, April 30, 2pm- Sand Creek

Volunteers are invited to join us to learn a bit more about the different Conservation Areas while looking for flora and fauna. Meet us at the selected Conservation Area. RSVPs to Jenny Garver are appreciated, but not necessary. If you do register, we will watch for you and contact you if the volunteer hike is canceled due to weather.



## Farming in the 1800s at Homestead Prairie Farm

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Sunday, April 7, 2pm

Join Historic Sites Manager Brent Wielt to learn about what kind of animals and crops were raised at Homestead Prairie Farm in the 1800s. Was it a typical Macon County or Illinois farm for its era? Learn how it changed over time and what sources we used to discover its early history. Free. No registration required.



## Volunteer Owl Prowl

Rock Springs Conservation Area,  
West Lawn Near Flagpoles

Friday, May 3, 7:30-8:30pm

Join Program Specialist Brock Rowland on a leisurely walk along the bike trail to learn about owls and listen to the sounds of the night. Dress for the weather. RSVP to Jenny Garver by May 2.



## Summer Camp Volunteer Training



Rock Springs Nature Center, Greenberg Auditorium

Friday, May 31, 1-2:30pm

Helping with summer camps is a very rewarding experience. We offer opportunities to assist camp counselors with children ages 5-15. Volunteers help with activities, games, hikes, field trips, and more. RSVP to Jenny Garver by May 29.

## Rock Art for Volunteers

Rock Springs Nature Center

Friday, June 14, 9-11am

We are going to have a bit of fun and create works of art using rocks and items found in nature. RSVP by Jenny Garver by June 7.



# Volunteer Opportunities



## Volunteer Librarian

Rock Springs Nature Center

Volunteers assist with checking out and reshelving books as well as maintaining our library collection. Our library is a great resource for educational programming and is open to the public seven days a week. Morning and afternoon shifts are available. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.

## Archaeology & Artifacts

Homestead Prairie Farm

We are looking for volunteers to help sift through dirt for artifacts from the 2018 excavation under the farmhouse. This opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Brent Wielt.



# Volunteer Opportunities

## Sangamon River Clean-up

Rock Springs Conservation Area,  
Meet at Information Shelter  
Saturday, April 27, 10am–12pm



Help clear trash from the banks of the Sangamon River to make it a safer and more beautiful place for wildlife and people. Dress to get dirty and bring your own gloves. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or bring the whole family. Co-sponsored by the Community Environmental Council. No registration required.

## Festival of Spring

Rock Springs Conservation Area  
Saturday, April 27, 12-4pm

Volunteers are wanted to help in a variety of areas during the annual Festival of Spring. Volunteer stations include: canoe rodeo, activity stations, prize table, photography, farmhouse tours, and more! This volunteer opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by April 19.



## Rock Springs Ramble

Rock Springs Conservation Area  
Saturday, May 18, 6-11am

The Macon County Conservation Foundation is hosting a fundraising event featuring a 5K run, a 1-mile Fun Run/Walk, and a Kid's Fun Run. Volunteer opportunities include registration, assisting with the children's race, assisting with the 5K race, food service, photography, and more. This volunteer opportunity is for ages 16 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by May 13.



## Independence Day 1860

Rock Springs Conservation Area,  
Homestead Prairie Farm  
Saturday, June 29, 6-8 pm

Volunteers are needed to help celebrate our nation's birthday 1860s style. We are looking for volunteers to lead tours and assist with activities. This opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information, contact Brent Wielt by June 16.



## Summer Camp Volunteers

Rock Springs Conservation Area  
Monday, June 3 – Friday, August 2

Volunteers assist trained camp counselors leading hikes, helping with crafts, and more! This volunteer activity is for ages 13 and up. For more information contact Jenny Garver by May 28.



## Tidbits of Information

- We are so thankful to have received a grant earlier this year from the Heart of Illinois Community Foundation that allowed us to diversify our library collection of African American subject books and books by black authors. The new book collection debuted in the Nature Center library in early February. The reference library is located inside the Rock Springs Nature Center and is open during normal Nature Center hours, including the weekends. Thank you to all of our volunteer librarians and staff who helped with various aspects of this project.
- Rock Springs Nature Center will be closed for the Easter holiday on Sunday, March 31.
- We provide nametags to volunteers that work with the public. If you need a nametag or a replacement contact Jenny Garver.
- Have you joined the MCCD Volunteers Facebook group? It is a great way to get up-to-date information, reminders about upcoming volunteer events, and behind the scenes photos. Join the group today!  
[www.facebook.com/groups/MaconCountyConservationDistrictVolunteers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/MaconCountyConservationDistrictVolunteers)



## Volunteers in Action



Did you know that four times a year, volunteers assist staff with labeling the Prairie Islander Newsletter? In late February, 11 volunteers helped us label and sort over 4,300 newsletters. Wow! Thank you, volunteers!

## The More You Know

In 2018, the western section of Rock Springs Conservation Area was registered as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve. The reserve consists of approximately 420 acres of upland and bottomland forest along the Sangamon River corridor. Staff nominated the area because it contained continuous acres of bottomland forest habitat, which supports breeding populations of area sensitive birds. Research conducted during the nomination process identified 72 nesting bird species and 369 plant species within the nomination area. Most notable, fifteen identified bird species were sensitive to forest fragmentation and thirteen bird species were listed as Species in Greatest Need of Conservation as defined by the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.



So, why was it important to dedicate part of Rock Springs Conservation Area as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve? The benefits of the land being within the Illinois Land and Water Reserve adds an extra layer of protection from development from outside sources. Land and Water Reserves are listed on the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, which allows us to receive additional help and resources from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. In addition, the reserve supports the mission of the Macon County Conservation District, allowing us to protect and conserve natural resources for future generations.

## Remembering Our Volunteers & Staff

Jim Frydenger (Feb 1941 - Jan 2024)- Staff  
Russ Howe (Sept 1957 – Jan 2024)- Dulcimer Club

# Operations Update

*Phil Julius - Director of Operations*

Snow plowing and salt spreading have kept Operations staff busy, as we have had several snow and ice storm events over the winter. Staff have done a great job keeping roads, parking lots, and sidewalks clear for patrons to access our Nature Center and natural areas.

With some of the warmer and drier weather we have had, prescribed fire has been possible. Operations staff have burned around 450 acres so far. This is about a third of our acreage goal for prescribed burning this spring. It is nice to get a jump-start on the burning season and get some acres knocked out before the tight window of opportunity closes.

Staff have also been busy working in the prairie off of Rock Springs Road and Dipper Lane doing forestry mowing, tree cutting, stump grinding, and burning brush. A large hedgerow was removed a few years ago at this location and the restoration effort continues moving north.

Restoration work is also being done at Sand Creek. You can see this restoration work at the main trailhead and walking to the east. Forestry mowing, tree cutting, and piling have been done and continue. What once was a wall of bush honeysuckle and hedge trees is now open so you can see the native trees. I'm sure with the introduction of sunlight there will be many forbs that come up this spring and will be visible from the trail.

Spring is right around the corner. That's all from Operations.



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## To RSVP or Contact Staff In This Issue

Rock Springs Nature Center: 217-423-7708

Alysia Callison: [ACallison@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:ACallison@MaconCountyConservation.org) ; 217-542-5538

Jenny Garver: [JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org) ; 217-542-5536

Phil Julius: [PJulius@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:PJulius@MaconCountyConservation.org) ; 217-542-5528

Brock Rowland: [BRowland@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:BRowland@MaconCountyConservation.org) ; 217-542-5540

Brent Wielt: [BWielt@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:BWielt@MaconCountyConservation.org) ; 217-542-5525



Volunteers are welcome to call the direct office lines listed above. Please note, direct office lines are not cell phones and cannot accept text messaging. If you are calling to cancel a sign up for a volunteer opportunity, call Rock Springs Nature Center at 217-423-7708.