

Dates to Remember

Volunteer Quarterly Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Thursday, January 11, 11:30am



Hear the latest news in educational programming, natural area restoration efforts, foundation projects, and more. Lunch provided. RSVP by January 8.



Dulcimer Club

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Saturday, January 6 & 20, 10am-12pm
Saturday, February 3 & 17, 10am-12pm
Saturday, March 3, 17, & 30, 10am-12pm

Nature Exploration in the Digital Age: Merlin and eBird

Saturday, January 13, 2pm

The 21st century has ushered in many technological advancements, and the field of nature exploration is no exception! Discover two popular apps for bird identification – Merlin and eBird – then go outside and put them to the test. \$3/person. Register online by January 12. Min/Max: 5/30.



Trip to Starved Rock for Eagle Viewing

Saturdays, January 20, 27, & February 3, 9am-4pm

Take a trip to this popular state park to look for wintering eagles, check out the visitor's center, and visit the lock and dam museum. Bring a lunch or purchase one from the restaurant at Starved Rock. Be prepared to go outside. \$30/person. Volunteers receive a \$15 discount for this trip. Register online by January 19, 26, & February 2. Min/Max: 5/10.



Volunteer Recognition Dinner

SAVE THE DATE- April 2, 2024

Program Services Update

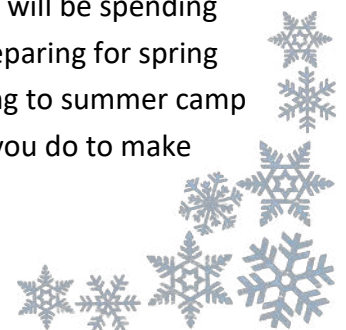
Alysia Callison - Director of Program Services

Happy December! I can't believe the holidays are already here. As I scramble to finish my Christmas shopping, I am reminded of everything I am grateful for. One of those things is you: our incredible volunteer base. We truly could not have had such a great 2023 without you! I can't wait to see what 2024 has in store for us.

As you may have heard, we recently added a live stream camera on our Window on Wildlife, thanks to a cooperative project with the Decatur Area Audubon Society. We are still working out some kinks, but if you'd like to check it out, visit <https://bit.ly/46nMFXj> Our hope is that this will be a way for people to experience some of the joy of our wildlife-viewing window, even if they aren't able to come see it in person.

Other ongoing projects for us include updating our Educator's Guide and our website. Our website is in need of some TLC and our Educator's Guide (the document that lists all of our educational opportunities and programs) was last updated in 2018. We are eager to complete these projects and have some more up-to-date and easy to navigate public resources.

As the winter continues, we will be spending much time planning and preparing for spring and summer, from budgeting to summer camp planning. Thank you for all you do to make our work possible.



Volunteer Fun & Learning



From Followers to Fans: Let's Talk Social Media

*Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Wednesday, January 17, 1-2pm*

Have you heard staff use words like “analytics”, “video content”, “demographics”, “followers”, or “audience reach” when talking about social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok? Join our Marketing Specialist, Ashton Nunn, as we talk a bit about what these platforms are, how we use them here, and how you too can use them to help spread the word about the Macon County Conservation District! RSVP by January 16.

Volunteer Herbicide Training

*Rock Springs Maintenance Shop
3740 Banton Lane; Decatur, IL 62521
Saturday, February 17, 9am-10am*

We invite volunteers interested in assisting with natural area restoration to attend this training. Training will qualify you to use herbicides as volunteers on Conservation District lands. According to the Illinois Pesticide Act, this certification must be renewed each calendar year. This indoor training focuses on using herbicides to control common invasive species, such as bush honeysuckle and autumn olive. Volunteers can stick around after the training and make their own herbicide applicator (kill-stick). MCCD will supply all materials. Please RSVP by February 24 with Ethan Snively.



Hidden Plants

*Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Thursday, February 22, 1-2pm*

What do you know about lichens, moss, mushrooms, and algae? Join Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver, to learn about these often overlooked and fascinating “plants.” RSVP by February 21.

Working with Children on the Spectrum

*Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Tuesday, March 5, 1-2pm*

This learning session will include basic information on autism and how to work with children on the spectrum. Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver, will share her knowledge and personal experience as a parent with a child on the spectrum to help bridge the gap to ensure a fun nature experience for all. RSVP by March 4.



Conducting Prescribed Fires

*Rock Springs Maintenance Shop
3740 Banton Lane; Decatur, IL 62521
Saturday, March 9, 8am-12pm*

Makeup date: Saturday, March 16, 8am-12pm

This workshop is designed for people who want to learn more about prescribed fire or volunteer to help conduct prescribed fires with the Conservation District. The first hour will be spent inside discussing why and how we use prescribed fire in Central Illinois as a management tool. We will discuss fire weather, fire behavior, burn plans, and burn techniques. The following three hours will be spent outside discussing safety equipment, PPE, ignition devices, hand tools, smoke management, etc. If weather permits we will conduct a small prescribed burn where participants will be able to take part in each role of a burn crew. Participants must be able to hike on uneven terrain and not be bothered by smoke. Participants must wear leather boots, cotton/denim pants (blue jeans), cotton shirt, and non-synthetic hat. MCCD has burn clothes that can be loaned out. Please RSVP by March 7 with Ethan Snively.

Volunteers in Action



A native seed collection day was held on October 7 at Rock Springs Conservation Area. Ten volunteers collected a variety of native prairie seed to use for future restoration projects.



In November, volunteers, Dr. Horn's Millikin class, and staff planted about 500 native plant plugs at the Wi-Fi shaped garden along Brozio Lane.



Volunteers joined us for a bush honeysuckle workday at Rock Springs Conservation Area on November 4. There was a great crew of nine volunteers that focused their attention to areas near the Cattail Pond and Homestead Prairie Farm.

Thank You Volunteers

Jenny Garver - Volunteer Coordinator

Wow! Another year has gone by. I want to take a moment to say thank you for all that you do. During the months of January through November, 382 volunteers donated over 9,222 hours. It is amazing to think that these numbers can be used when we apply for grants and other forms of funding to support conservation efforts. Turning in your volunteer hours truly does make an impact and a difference. If you forgot to turn in some hours, it is not too late to turn them in.

Would you consider giving a volunteer testimonial? The Conservation District would like to add testimonials from current volunteers to our website, social media, and brochures. If you'd be willing to share your experience and write 3-5 sentences to be published, we'd love to hear from you! Ideas that you can ponder: Why do you like to volunteer? What is your favorite part of volunteering? Why is the Conservation District a part of your volunteer journey? Please visit <https://bit.ly/47ZPL5M> to share your words. Please note: Only first names will be shared for volunteer testimonials.

I appreciate everyone that has taken the time to update their information. 69% of our active volunteers are up-to-date with their emergency contact information. Hooray! I have been seeing a lot of changes in phone numbers during this process, so I am very thankful to be working on this project. In case you are wondering, the emergency contact database is separate from the main volunteer database, which means emergency contacts will be not contacted unless truly needed. If you would like me to check to see when your information was last updated or if you need an update form, please contact me.

Volunteer Opportunities

Undecorate the Halls

Rock Springs Nature Center
Wednesday, January 3, 10-11am



It's time to take the holiday decorations down. Help us to undecorate the Nature Center and store our supplies away for another season. To sign up contact Jenny Garver by January 2.

Brainstorming Sessions

Do you like to brainstorm and share ideas? We are putting together a few volunteer committees in the upcoming months to brainstorm ideas for volunteer recognition events, volunteer fun and learning opportunities, volunteer recruitment, and more. Brainstorming sessions will be open to active volunteers of the Conservation District. Contact Jenny Garver if you would like to be on the contact list for a future session.



Cross Country Ski Rental

Rock Springs Nature Center

When we have 4 or more inches of snow on the ground, the public can rent cross country skis from Rock Springs Nature Center. We are looking for volunteers that would like to be placed on our volunteer call list to assist staff with ski rental. We can train you the day you volunteer. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up contact Jenny Garver.



Heirloom Gardener

Rock Springs Conservation Area

The Homestead Prairie Farm heirloom garden plays a vital role in illustrating everyday life in the 1860s. Macon County Master Gardeners are looking for assistance in maintaining the garden during the 2024 season. Produce harvested from the garden is donated to various local food pantries. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up contact Jenny Garver.



Native Plant Gardener

Rock Springs Conservation Area



Macon County Master Naturalists are looking for assistance in maintaining the native tier garden in the front of Rock Springs Nature Center. The tier gardens feature prairie and woodland species that attract a variety of insect life for all to enjoy. This opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information or to sign up contact Jenny Garver.

Nature Center Greeter

Rock Springs Nature Center



Greeters are an essential part of the Nature Center team. Volunteers greet the public, answer simple questions, and assist staff members with projects. Training is provided. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up contact Jenny Garver.



Vintage Base Ball Player

Macon County Conservation District

The Rock Springs Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Club is recruiting players for the upcoming season! In vintage base ball, winning is secondary. It's about friendship, having fun, and showing people how base ball was played in the 1860s. You don't even have to be an amazing player to join the team, you only need to enjoy the game. This opportunity is for guys and gals ages 16 and up. Players must be willing to travel to away games. Games are typically held two Saturdays a month, with a few Sunday games scattered throughout the season which runs March through October. If you have an interest in playing with our vintage base ball club, please visit the Ground Squirrels Facebook Page www.facebook.com/GroundSquirrels and message the team or contact Jenny Garver.

Welcome New Volunteers!

Nature Center Greeter- Lauren Edwards

Newsletter Labeling- Ed York

Prairie Heritage Volunteers- Marge & Steve Dukeman

Special Events- Dinah Dukeman & Darren Nunn

Tidbits of Information

- Rock Springs Offices will be closed December 22, 2023 through January 1, 2024. Rock Springs Nature Center will be open with a staff member or two on duty, except on December 24, December 25, and January 1 when the Nature Center is closed. There may be a delayed response to phone messages and emails during this time period.
- Acoustic Music Jam is taking a break for the winter. The volunteer group plans to restart in the spring with the new name Acoustic Jam Session. More information will be in the next volunteer newsletter.
- Don't forget the Prairie Islander newsletter can be delivered straight to your email inbox. Sign up at MaconCountyConservation.org. If you no longer wish to receive a paper copy of the Prairie Islander newsletter, send an email to mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org.
- 2024 Volunteer Pocket Calendars have arrived! Drop by the Nature Center to pick-up your calendar.
- Volunteers at the Homestead Prairie Farm Garden harvested 184 pounds of produce during the 2023 growing season. Produce was donated back to the Decatur community. Thank you volunteers for this amazing contribution that mixes education with giving back to those in need.



The More You Know

Did you know that the Macon County Conservation District has an area designated as a nature preserve? Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve is located near Oakley, IL. The preserve and buffer zone encompasses 101.55 acres along Lake Decatur. The original section of the nature preserve belonged to a pioneer family that owned the land for more than 50 years. This section of land was never grazed or logged. Fun fact: Bois du Sangamon is French for “woods of the Sangamon.” Bois du Sangamon was dedicated as a Nature Preserve in September 1980 by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

So, what is a nature preserve? Nature preserves are private and public lands that have rare plants, animals, or other unique natural features. They are permanently protected by state law and protect over 20% of endangered plants and animals in Illinois. Nature preserves provide unique opportunities for public enjoyment, critical scientific study, and education. If you would like to see an example of scientific study at the site, visit <https://bit.ly/47ZFjeA>. The research paper published in the journal *Erigena* can be found on page 55-58 of the pdf.

Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve is an area that will never be developed. It is accessible by special permit or by visiting with a staff member. The Conservation District occasionally hosts natural area restoration workdays at the site to control invasive species. Every few years volunteers have an opportunity to visit the area with staff during the annual Visit the Sites Tour. We last toured Bois du Sangamon in 2022.

The Conservation District was grateful to have the opportunity to add 47.85 acres of land this year to the buffer zone at Bois du Sangamon. Future plans for the newly acquired land include adding a small parking area, trails, and a shelter. We are excited to see what the future holds for this pocket of land.

Operations Update

Phil Julius - Director of Operations

The Operations Department has been very busy finishing up projects and preparing for the winter months. Up at Friends Creek, the campground has been shut down for the season and prepared for winter. This was a very successful year, as we had a record year of attendees and income at the campground. This winter, three new camp sites will be put in specifically for tent camping. Several requests for this type of campsite were expressed this camping season. These new sites will be a nice addition and give camp users added opportunity.

Snow will soon be flying in the air. The maintenance crews have been transitioning equipment from mowing to snow removal in preparation of winter weather. It's hard to believe another year is about to pass, and with that comes budget season. Planning for next year's maintenance needs and new projects is crucial to keep the day to day operations running smooth. We are always looking ahead and anticipating our next step.

Happy Holidays from MCCD Operations.



Volunteer Holiday Party

Macon County Conservation District extends a big thank you to everyone who attended the volunteer holiday party. Ninety-seven attendees donated 141 canned goods and non-perishable items plus \$20 to the Northeast Community Fund. Volunteers from many areas came, including quilters, newsletter labelers, musicians, greeters, master gardeners, prairie heritage volunteers, restoration volunteers, trustees, library attendants, volunteer naturalists, trail monitors, and more. With great food and good company the party reminded us again of our blessings here at the Conservation District. Thank you for all of your generosity. We hope you enjoyed happy holidays and we look forward to seeing you at our next Volunteer Quarterly Meeting on January 11!



Remembering Our Volunteers

Craig Culp (Aug 1958 – Dec 2023)- Foundation
Marcel Parker (Dec 1956 – Oct 2023)- Oglesby
Pat Penhallegon (Feb 1950 - Oct 2023)- Oglesby
Delores Tuggle (Jul 1931 - Sep 2023)- Newsletter
Steve Willoughby (May 1947 – Nov 2023)- Musician

To RSVP or Contact Staff In This Issue

Rock Springs Nature Center: 217-423-7708

Alysia Callison: ACallison@MaconCountyConservation.org ; 217-542-5538

Jenny Garver: JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org ; 217-542-5536

Phil Julius: PJulius@MaconCountyConservation.org ; 217-542-5528

Ashton Nunn: ANunn@MaconCountyConservation.org ; 217-542-5537

Ethan Snively: ESnively@MaconCountyConservation.org ; 217-853-3465

Brent Wielt: BWielt@MaconCountyConservation.org ; 217-542-5525



Volunteers are welcome to call the direct office lines listed above (542 phone numbers). 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.