

WINTER 2019

Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Managing Deer for Habitat Health & Safety

By Ethan Snively

Since 1994, the Macon County Conservation District has implemented a Deer Herd Management Program to regulate the growing number of white-tailed deer in Macon County. This program is intended to reduce the deer population to healthier levels by means of archery hunting at four of Macon County's conservation areas: Fort Daniel, Friends Creek, Rock Springs, and Sand Creek. This program runs from mid-October through mid-December and is limited to specific locations at each site.

Without populations of large predators, such as cougars and wolves, Illinois' deer populations must be managed to reduce numbers. If left unchecked, deer can easily exceed the capacity of their habitats, and cause many problems. When deer become overabundant, they over browse an area and reduce plant diversity. This alteration also encourages the growth of invasive plants such as garlic mustard, which outcompete natives such as ginger and trillium. The possible transmission of diseases between deer is another negative impact of overpopulation.



Some diseases are spread through direct contact or at contaminated feeding sites. By reducing the number of deer in an area, the risk of disease transmission decreases. Overpopulation of deer also increases the risks of deer-vehicle accidents.

Conservation District staff use multiple techniques to determine the population of deer in conservation areas. We conduct browse surveys that measure the intensity at which deer are feeding on plants in our woodlands. Surveys conducted typically show over 50% of plants in our woodlands have been browsed on by deer. That number is very high and indicates that damage to the habitat is likely occurring. Our goal is around 25%. Staff also uses deer-vehicle collision reports provided

by the Macon County Sheriff's Office to determine changes in deer populations. The higher the population, the more deer-vehicle collisions. Around 50% of deer-vehicle accidents happen within two miles of Conservation District property. By implementing the deer herd management program, we hope to reduce the number of accidents.

In order to effectively reduce deer population numbers, the Conservation District uses the Earn-a-Buck management tool. This requires a hunter to harvest an antlerless deer before taking an antlered deer. By harvesting a doe, you are potentially reducing the population by three deer the following year: the doe and two fawns. If you only harvest a buck, the herd is reduced by just one deer the next year. Not only does this serve as a management tool, but it also benefits our local hunters by acting as a deterrent to "trophy-hunters" pursuing bucks.

For more information or to take part in the Deer Herd Management Program, contact Ethan Snively at (217) 542-7351 or visit MaconCountyConservation.org.

Winter Activities

By Katherine Unruh

When the winter wind blows and days grow shorter, it's tempting to hibernate away indoors. However, don't miss out on what nature and your conservation areas have to offer! Here are some ideas for staying active and engaging with nature this season:

- **Look for tracks** – Winter snows reveal which animals are walking about in our yards and on the trails. If you need help identifying whose tracks you see, borrow one of the free Family Exploration Packs from inside Rock Springs Nature Center, or download an app on your phone.
- **Ski or Snowshoe** – Explore the conservation area trails on cross country skis or snowshoes. If you don't have your own, you can rent the equipment from Rock Springs Nature Center. Borrow skis, boots, and poles, or one pair of snowshoes for \$8 for 2 hours or \$20 for 24 hours. Equipment available first-come, first-served. Skis and snowshoes are available for rent and welcome on conservation area trails whenever 4 or more inches of snow covers the ground.
- **Sled at Griswold** – Whenever 4 or more inches of snow covers the ground, bring your sled to Griswold Conservation Area in Blue Mound, IL. You can sled down the large glacial kame, an 80' high hill.
- **Go Birding** – Not all is still and quiet in winter! Several species of birds winter here in central Illinois. Whether you step outdoors, watch bird feeders from the comfort of your home, or enjoy the view at Rock Springs Nature Center's Window on Wildlife, you'll find many birds to observe. You may also wish to help collect scientific data by participating in a citizen-science project like the Christmas Bird Count: www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count
- **Take a Hike** – Your conservation areas remain open every day of the year, free for you to enjoy, from sunrise to sunset. Plan a visit to one or more of them this winter: MaconCountyConservation.org.
- **Give a Gift** – Support natural areas and wildlife with a gift to the Macon County Conservation Foundation. Donate online at MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org.

In addition to these, check out all of the programs, van trips, music performances, and gallery artists in this newsletter. We have many activities planned for the season ahead.



Connect with Us



Find out how you can make a difference
217-423-7708
MaconCountyConservation.org

Briefs

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Did you know that over 30,000 people visited Rock Springs Nature Center in the last year? Wow! Volunteers play a crucial role in greeting those visitors. If you are looking for a way to give back during winter, consider becoming a nature center greeter inside Rock Springs Nature Center. These volunteers greet visitors, and answer questions. Volunteer shifts are 3-4 hours in length. All training is provided. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up.

For more information or to sign up, contact Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver at jgarver@MaconCountyConservation.org or 217-423-7708. Explore additional volunteer opportunities at MaconCountyConservation.org.



BIKE TRAIL CLOSED, PONDS IN PROGRESS

Thanks to assistance from grants, there are two improvement projects in progress this winter at Rock Springs Conservation Area. The Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail is having work done on its three bridges spanning the Sangamon River and Stevens Creek. The Bike Trail will remain closed through winter for this construction.

Work on the Cattail Ponds at Rock Springs Conservation Area is also moving forward. The ponds have been joined together and deepened, to improve the habitat for fish. We will allow them to start re-filling with water through spring. In summer 2020, construction should take place for the two handicap accessible fishing docks, a canoe launch, and pathways.

MEET THE NEW DIRECTOR

In October, the Macon County Conservation District Board of Trustees announced Richie Wolf as the new Executive Director. "Richie Wolf has the experience and ability to lead the Macon County Conservation District," said Board President, Darrel Parish. "The District can expect continued excellence under his direction."

Richie was hired by the Macon County Conservation District in 2013 as Nature Center Manager. "I am so honored to be able to continue the great history and legacy of the Macon County Conservation District in promoting the conservation of natural and cultural resources," said Richie Wolf, "I look forward to many years of service leading this outstanding Agency and staff."



Richie will be the Conservation District's fifth Executive Director since its creation in 1966. He follows Paul Marien, who retired October 2019 after 41 years with the District.

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.

PAJAMA PARTY

Monday, December 30, 9:30-10:30am

Tuesday, December 31, 9:30-10:30am

Learn what animals do during the cold months. Join the fun by wearing your favorite pajamas, which keep us warm just like an animal's fur! Register online by noon the day before camp.



MAJESTIC EAGLES

Wednesday, January 15, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, January 16, 9:30-10:30am

Imagine soaring high in the sky like an eagle! We'll explore how they live, what they eat, and where they sleep. Register online by noon the day before camp.

SLEEPY GROUNDHOGS

Tuesday, February 11, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, February 12, 9:30-10:30am

Discover why these furry rodents have their own holiday. We will feel their fur and practice being a groundhog. Register online by noon the day before camp.

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

OFFICES OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

NATURE CENTER OPEN

Monday-Wednesday, Friday, 8am-5pm

Thursday, 8am-8pm

Saturday, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Tuesday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 25, Christmas Day

Wednesday, January 1, New Year's Day

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Monday, January 20, MLK Day

Monday, February 17, Presidents' Day

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Darrel Parish, President

David White, Vice President

Doug Johnson, Secretary

Karen Schneller, Treasurer

Nina Bendsen, Second Vice-President

Richie Wolf, Executive Director

Shane Ravellette, Operations Manager

Alysia Callison, Nature Center Manager

Pam Smith, Finance & H.R. Manager

Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708

mccd@maconcountyconservation.org

MaconCountyConservation.org

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm

December 18, January 15, & February 19

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Sundays at Rock Springs Nature Center

December 15 at 4pm

January 19 at 2pm

February 16 at 2pm

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Rock Springs Nature Center

Every Wednesday, 9-11am



Special Events

CHRISTMAS TEA

Sunday, December 8, 1-4pm

Stop by the Governor Oglesby Mansion to enjoy a traditional Christmas afternoon tea. Experience this historic Victorian home all decked out for the holidays. Refreshments will be served. \$2/person. No reservations necessary. Located at 421 W. William Street in Decatur, IL.

GEMINID METEOR SHOWER

Friday, December 13, 9-11pm

Friends Creek Conservation Area

Bring your lawn chair to Friends Creek Conservation Area to view the strongest meteor shower of the year. These meteors originate near the constellation Gemini and are usually bright and colorful. We will have hot chocolate and marshmallows available for making s'mores. Wear warm clothing and bring a lawn chair and blanket if you like. Free. Register online by December 12. Min/Max: 5/50.

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
December 14
January 11 & 25
February 8 & 22



BLUEGRASS MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 1-4pm
December 8, January 12, & February 9

CROSS COUNTRY CLASSICS

Thursdays, 6-7:30pm
December 5, January 2, & February 6

SHAPE-NOTE SINGING

Sunday, February 23, 2-4pm

Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

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.

Decatur Camera Club
January & February

Enjoy a wide variety of photography, including scenes of trees, birds, landscapes, and more from talented local photographers.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

David Castor
November & December

View photographs of white-tailed deer, great blue herons, and plants through the lens of photographer David Castor.

Melody Arnold
January & February

Experience the beauty of nature through the eyes of local photographer and outdoor education specialist Melody Arnold.

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:

OWL PROWLs

Saturdays, January 4* & February 22, 8-9:30pm
Griswold Conservation Area

Join us to learn about these forest-dwelling nocturnal predators. We will discuss what makes them special, then take a hike to find some. Dress for the weather. Meet at the pavilion at Griswold Conservation Area.

\$2/person. Register online by January 3 and February 21. Min/Max: 5/30. *Led by Richie Wolf.



EAGLE VIEWING TRIP TO STARVED ROCK

Saturdays, January 18, 25, & February 1, 9am-4pm

Take a trip to this popular state park to look for wintering eagles, check out the visitor's center, and even visit the lock and dam museum. Bring a lunch or purchase one from the restaurant at Starved Rock. Be prepared to go outside.

\$25/person. Register online by January 17, 24, and 31. Min/Max: 5/24.

MAPLE SYRUP PROGRAMS

Saturday, February 15, 11am, 12pm, & 1pm

Discover how sap becomes syrup, why late winter is the best time of year to harvest sap, and how people used sap throughout history. Registrants will get to sample real maple syrup. Free. Register online by February 14. Min/Max: 5/35.



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.

December

SEASON'S CHANGES HIKE

Sunday, December 8, 2pm

Discover the changes that are happening outside as wildlife prepares for winter. Each registered family will receive a free bluebird house to take home and put up next spring. Free. Register online by December 6. Min/Max: 5/30.

MAMMALS OF ILLINOIS

Saturday, December 14, 11am

What is a mammal? Examine the pelts, tracks, and skulls of Illinois mammals to piece together what their lives are like. Free. Register online by December 13. Min/Max: 5/30.

SNAKE AND TURTLE SHOW

Sunday, December 15, 2pm

Meet, feel, and learn about our education animals and their ways of life. We have several species to show you! \$2/person. Register online by December 13. Min/Max: 5/30.



TRIP TO THE LARGEST TREE IN ILLINOIS

Tuesday, December 17, 9am-6pm

Venture to Ogle County in northern Illinois to see the state's largest tree. We'll also visit the Jarrett Prairie Center and hike on a dolomite hill prairie. We'll stop at a local diner for lunch. Dress for the weather and for a one mile hike. \$25/person. Register online by December 16. Min/Max: 5/24.

ARMCHAIR BIRDING

Saturday, December 21, 10am

Enjoy some peace and calm before the holidays by watching the birds from the comfort of our indoor Window on Wildlife. A naturalist will tell you how and what to feed wintering birds, and help you identify the species that you see. Free. Register online by December 20. Min/Max: 5/20.

DISCOVERING DINOSAURS

Sunday, December 22, 2pm

How many dinosaur fossils have been found in Illinois? Learn all about these reptilian creatures and see how you size up to them. Free. Register online by December 20. Min/Max: 5/30.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FEED THE BIRDS

Saturday, December 28, 2pm

Young children are invited to learn about our over-wintering birds, take a hike, and then make a peanut butter or Crisco pinecone bird feeder to hang outside for the birds. Free.



Register online by December 27. Min/Max: 5/30.

LET'S ROCK

Sunday, December 29, 2pm

Dig up the difference between rocks, minerals, and fossils! We'll explore the roles they play in everyday life and see a wide variety of real specimens. Free. Register online by December 27. Min/Max: 5/30.

January

WINTER TREE IDENTIFICATION HIKE

Sunday, January 5, 2pm

Uncover the secrets to identifying trees in the middle of winter on a guided hike through the forest. Dress for the weather. Free. Register online by January 3. Min/Max: 5/25.

FULL MOON VIEWING

Friday, January 10, 7pm

See the full moon 50x larger through our telescope, then take a short hike to view the forest illuminated by our only natural satellite. Dress for the weather. Free. Register online by January 9. Min/Max: 5/30.

STORY TIME – WINTER LORE

Saturday, January 11, 10-10:30am

Old Man Winter has made his way back to central Illinois! Join a naturalist as we read Native American stories about winter. Free. Register online by January 10. Min/Max: 5/30.

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.

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAM: BIRDS OF PREY

Wednesday, January 15, 2pm

Homeschoolers are invited to join a naturalist as we learn the difference between hawks, owls, eagles, and other raptors. No live birds will be present, but we will have several mounted specimens and artifacts to view. Free. Register online by January 14. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: ICE COLD

Sunday, January 19, 2pm

How does cold weather affect the natural world? Take a short hike outside to discover a winter wonderland, then head inside to learn about freezing temperatures, do a craft, and paint with ice. Free. Register online by January 17. Min/Max: 5/30.

PERE MARQUETTE STATE PARK EAGLE TRIP

Tuesday, January 21, 9am-4pm

Visit this state park and venture through river bluffs and woods to get an up-close look at wintering bald eagles along the Mississippi River and lower Illinois River. Bring a lunch or purchase one from the Pere Marquette lodge restaurant. Be prepared to go outside. \$25/person. Register online by January 20. Min/Max: 5/24.

NATIVE AMERICAN GAMES AND LIFESTYLES

Sunday, January 26, 2pm

What was life like for the Native Americans who inhabited Illinois over 200 years ago? Learn about their culture, lifestyle, and experience the skill-building games they played. Free. Register online by January 24. Min/Max: 5/30.

February

HANDS-ON HISTORY: NEWSPAPERS IN THE 1800s

Sunday, February 2, 2pm

Newspapers of the 1800s were different from today's newspapers in many ways. Explore what a typical Central Illinois newspaper was like before the Civil War. We will examine its layout, content, and more by studying examples from the era and learn about the antebellum newspaper industry. Free. No registration required.

PREDATORS OF THE PRAIRIE

Saturday, February 8, 1pm

Join a naturalist to learn about the different natural predators that might be found in our prairies, then journey outside and try to find some! Dress for the weather. Free. Register online by February 7. Min/Max: 5/30.

TRIP TO CAHOKIA MOUNDS

Wednesday, February 12, 12-7pm

Explore one of the greatest ancient civilizations in North America. We will stop for a quick bite to eat along the way. Museum admission is free but donations are accepted. \$25/person. Register online by February 11. Min/Max: 5/24.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: WILD WOODPECKERS

Sunday, February 16, 2pm

How many different kinds of woodpeckers can be found in Illinois? Learn this and more about our native woodpeckers, then make a woodpecker craft to take home. Free. Register online by February 14. Min/Max: 5/30.

TRIP TO DICKSON MOUNDS AND EMIQUON PRESERVE

Wednesday, February 26, 11am-6pm

Travel with us to Lewistown, IL for a natural and cultural history road trip. Experience immersive Native American exhibits at Dickson Mounds, then visit Emiquon Preserve, a restored wetland habitat that provides cover for migrating birds. Admission is free but donations are accepted. Bring a lunch or purchase one at a restaurant along the way. \$25/person. Register online by February 25. Min/Max: 5/24.

LEAP DAY NATURE WALK

Saturday, February 29, 10am

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Take a hike through a quiet winter woodland as we observe an event that only happens once every four years: Leap Day! Dress for the weather and wear appropriate shoes. Free. Register online by February 28. Min/Max: 5/30.





Return Service Requested



Maple Syrup Programs

Saturday, Feb 15

Hourly at 11am, 12pm, & 1pm
at Rock Springs Nature Center
3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL

Free. More information inside.



For updated trail conditions, call 217-421-7493.