

## Mapping Historic Features

By Shane Ravellette

As the Macon County Conservation District closes its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we are reminded that history is all around us.

The Macon County Conservation District currently maintains four historic buildings: Homestead Prairie Farm, Bethel School House, Rock Springs Bottling Plant, and the Governor Oglesby Mansion. You can also visit the mill site at Rock Springs or the historic iron bridges at Friends Creek. Sand Creek contains remnants of the Paris-Springfield Road, and a tall glacial kame from the Ice Age dominates Griswold Conservation Area. But our history and what we can learn from it doesn't stop there.

A project to better understand our past is underway. The wooded forests and grassy prairies you see at the conservation areas are really 21<sup>st</sup> century representations of the areas' history and ecology before European arrival. Before and during European settlement the District's 3,300 acres were not abandoned. Homes, farms, and businesses once stood on these sites. Currently, we are aware of up to 50 sites that date from the early 1800s to the District's founding in 1966.

Visiting libraries, looking through online collections, and exploring documents reveal a



**An early 20<sup>th</sup> century bridge incorporated into the trail system is one example of the historic features you'll encounter at conservation areas.**

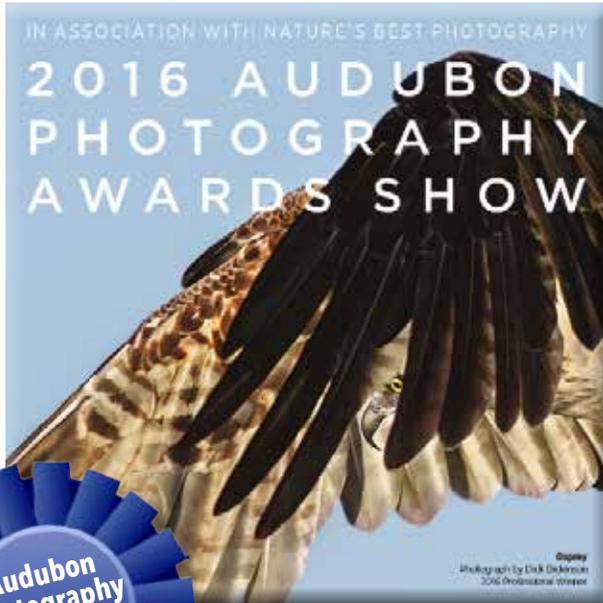
more complete picture. Current satellite photography allows us to identify old structures, hedge rows, cow paths, roads, and even differing patterns in the vegetation. By comparing these images to older versions (one of the best collections is the 1930s/1940s New Deal aerial photographs) we can trace those structures back and can see how they relate to the land. In addition, plat maps (as far back as the 1860s) and old topographic maps use icons representing buildings or other human influences.

As winter approaches, forest undergrowth will clear and staff will be able to explore these historic sites. We'll look for foundations, building materials, or odd depressions or knolls. We might even find differences

in tree growth or tree species. Old roads, farm lots, or gravel pits may begin to stand out. Combining potential sites identified on maps with physical confirmation, these historic features will be GPS cataloged.

Why take time to explore this? It directly ties to the District's mission. We are tasked with preserving the historic and cultural elements of Macon County. Although the potential for archeological work may be lacking, noting and identifying what we can now enables us to avoid disturbing sites and possibly lay ground work for future projects. The second reason is visitor and staff safety. Old houses and farms often had wells, root cellars, or other structures which still present hazards. As these features are cataloged, staff will work to identify any dangers and address them.

Try visiting the conservation areas with fresh eyes this winter. Ask yourself what may have been here before. How did those people live? What did they pass on? We may never know every answer, but the Macon County Conservation District is working hard to preserve and educate. These places are your conservation areas and the history is yours, too.



Many people think Audubon is just “for the birds” and for little old ladies in tennis shoes with binoculars. The Decatur Audubon Society intends to prove this belief to be untrue.

The exhibit “Audubon - Not Just for the Birds” will be on display in the North Wing Exhibit Hall of Rock Springs Nature Center from January 23, 2017 through April 30, 2017. The display will feature John J. Audubon prints, mounted bird specimens, information on how and why the National and State Audubon Societies formed, what the Decatur Chapter is all about, as well as tips on birding, selecting binoculars, and more.

As a special part of this exhibit, award-winning nature photos from the National Audubon Society will be on display from February 25 through March 15. The twelve photos were selected from over 7,000 entries submitted from all 50 states and Canada. They include photos from professional, amateur, and youth photographers. These beautiful photographs portray a variety of birds and geographic locations. Half of the bird species captured in these photos are identified as threatened or endangered by climate change in Audubon’s *Birds and Climate Change Report*.

**AWARD-WINNING  
Audubon  
Photography  
Exhibit**

By Melody Arnold

Two special events will coincide with this exhibit. An open house hosted by the Decatur Audubon Society will be held on Sunday, February 26 from 2pm to 4pm. Walk among some of the world’s greatest bird photography, learn about one of the world’s most important conservation organizations, and discover Decatur Audubon. Preceding the open house, everyone is invited to attend an Audubon meeting for a free Bird Study on “Backyard Bird Photography” by local nature photographer, Virginia Kickle on Sunday, February 19 at 2pm.

Admission to the exhibit and open house is free. You can view the exhibit during Rock Springs Nature Center’s open hours: Monday-Wednesday, 8am-5pm; Thursday, 8am-8pm; Friday, 8am-5pm; Saturday, 9am-5pm; and Sunday, 12-5pm.





## Briefs

### SKI AND SNOWSHOE RENTAL

Enhance your own outdoor adventure by exploring the conservation area trails on cross country skis or snowshoes this winter. 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 for use on any conservation area trail when 4 or more inches of snow covers the ground.



### ROCK SPRING NATURE CENTER UPDATES

As you may have noticed, updates are moving forward at Rock Springs Nature Center. The Children's Awareness Room was refreshed this summer with improved habitats for the live animals and a new corner where children can dress up like a pioneer. In addition, the Collections Room and Orientation Room swapped places. The change puts the Collections Room in a more central location and provides groups easier access to utilize the Orientation Room. We've also improved signage for Rock Springs Nature Center and added windows to the auditorium.



Historic Site Manager, Brent and Historic Sites Intern, Emily, moving the collections room.



New signage in front of Rock Springs Nature Center.

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

There are many volunteer opportunities available through the Macon County Conservation District all year round. Here's one unique position that might be right for you:

Help visitors explore a winter wonderland on skis or snowshoes. Ski and Snowshoe Rental Volunteers help fit visitors with equipment, provide basic instruction for first-time users, and help answer questions. Training will be provided Thursday, January 5 from 1-2pm or the first day you volunteer. Added Bonus: Every day you assist with ski rentals, you earn 2 hours of free ski or snowshoe rental time for yourself. This volunteer opportunity is for ages 18 and up.



For more information or to sign up, contact Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver at [jgarver@maconcountyconservation.org](mailto:jgarver@maconcountyconservation.org) or 217-423-7708. To explore additional volunteer opportunities, visit [maconcountyconservation.org](http://maconcountyconservation.org).

# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.  
Register online at [www.maconcountyconservation.org](http://www.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

Saturdays, 9am – 5pm

Sunday, 1 – 5pm

### TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

## Holidays & Closings

### OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Saturday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Sunday, December 25, Christmas Day

Sunday, January 1, New Year's Day

### OFFICES CLOSED/NATURE CENTER OPEN

Friday, December 23, Christmas Eve (Observed)

Monday, December 26, Christmas Day (Observed)

Monday, January 2, New Year's Day (Observed)

Monday, January 16, MLK Day

Monday, February 20, Presidents' Day

### MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Darrel Parish, President

Lucy Murphy, Vice President

Norman Jensen, Secretary

Anne Elliott, Treasurer

Doug Johnson, Second Vice-President

Paul Marien, Executive Director

Shane Ravellette, Operations Manager

Richie Wolf, Nature Center Manager

Jeff Tish, Program Services Manager

Pam Smith, Finance & H.R. Manager

## Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708  
[mccd@maconcountyconservation.org](mailto:mccd@maconcountyconservation.org)  
[www.maconcountyconservation.org](http://www.maconcountyconservation.org)

## Meetings

### MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesdays of each month, 5:30pm

December 21, January 18, February 15

### DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETING

Sundays

December 18, 4pm

January 15 and February 19, 2pm



## Special Events

### CHRISTMAS TEA

Sunday, December 11, 2-4pm

Stop by the elegant Governor Oglesby Mansion to enjoy a traditional Christmas afternoon tea! Cookies, tea, and punch will be served. Experience this historic Victorian home decorated in its best décor for the holidays. No reservations necessary. The Governor Oglesby Mansion is located at 421 W. William Street in Decatur, IL.

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## Music

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

### DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

December 3 & 17

January 14 & 28

February 11 & 25

### BLUEGRASS MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 1-4pm

December 11, January 8, February 12

### SHAPE NOTE SINGING

Sunday, February 26, 2-4pm

## Art

### NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Barn Colony Artists

November-December

Discover portraits of nature scenes, flowers, and wildlife captured and created by talented artists in our community.

Decatur Camera Club

January-February

Enjoy the beauty of flowers, animals, and scenic views of Central Illinois with this gorgeous photographic display by the Decatur Camera Club.

### SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Dave Castor

November-December

Enjoy nature photos of insects, plants, and birds by one of our dedicated volunteer photographers.

Decatur Audubon Photographers

January-February

Complementing the exhibit "Audubon - Not Just for the Birds," members of the Decatur Audubon Society will display photographs of birds taken in Central Illinois and across the country.

## Mini Camps

Children ages 1-5 will 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. Fee \$10. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.

### JINGLE BELLS MINI CAMP

Wednesday, December 28,  
9:30-10:30am, ages 1-5  
with adult buddy

Thursday, December 29,  
9:30-10:30am, ages 3-5  
with adult buddy

Explore winter mittens and snow through hands-on activities and songs. Dress for a short excursion outside. Register online by 12/27.



### PRANCING DEER MINI CAMP

Tuesday, January 17,  
9:30-10:30am,  
ages 1-5 with adult buddy

Wednesday, January 18,  
9:30-10:30am, ages 3-5  
with adult buddy

Get a close up look at deer fur and antlers as we learn about Illinois' largest plant eater. We will venture outside in search of deer tracks. Dress for the weather.  
Register online by 1/16.



### GOODNIGHT OPOSSUM MINI CAMP

Wednesday, February 15,  
9:30-10:30am,  
ages 1-5 with adult buddy

Thursday, February 16,  
9:30-10:30am, ages 3-5  
with adult buddy

Play a fun opossum game as well as use your senses to discover native Virginia Opossums that live and play in our wooded areas. Register online by 2/14.



# Happenings

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## December

### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: MAMMALS IN WINTER

Sunday, December 18, 2pm

Learn to howl like a wolf, feel the warmth of thick fur, and discover how amazing adaptations allow mammals to survive outside! For ages 3-5 with an adult buddy. Free. Register online by December 16. Min/Max: 5/25.

### WINTER BREAK CAMP

Monday-Friday, December 26-30, 9am-4pm

Break up boring winter days with a week of camp. We'll make crafts, play games, and spend time participating in outdoor activities. Bring a sack lunch. Two healthy snacks provided each day. Dress for hiking and the weather. Ages 6-12. \$120/child. Register online by December 23. Additional care is available for \$10/child from 7-9am and \$10/child from 4-6pm. Min/Max: 5/25.



### WEBELOS PIN: INTO THE WILD

Tuesday, December 27, 1-3pm

Earn your pin during this workshop by learning about bird flyways, poisonous plants, and exploring the nature center. Be prepared to go outside. \$9/scout. Register online by December 26. Min/Max: 5/25.

### WEBELOS PIN: INTO THE WOODS

Thursday, December 29, 1-3pm

For this pin, Webelos learn the basics of trees, visit the nature center, and plant a seed to care for. \$9/scout. Register online by December 28. Min/Max: 5/25.



## January

### BIRD FEEDING BASICS

Saturday, January 7, 10am

Start the year off right by helping our feathered friends. Learn which birds stay in Illinois over the winter and what and how to feed them. First five families that register get a free nest box! Free. Register online by January 6. Min/Max: 5/25.



### FEED THE ANIMALS

Sunday, January 15, 2pm

Get a behind the scenes look at how we care for our reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Learn how the animals assist in educational programming. Free. Register online by January 13. Min/Max: 5/25.

### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: OWLS

Sunday, January 22, 2pm

Do you want to be an owl expert? We'll see our mounted specimens and learn how to tell raptors apart from other birds. Note: no live owls. For ages 3-5 with an adult buddy. Free. Register online by January 20. Min/Max: 5/25.

### CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

Saturday, February 4, 2pm

Discover what animals have rebounded from near extinction. We'll hear the recovery stories of eagles, beavers, and otters. We will even get to see real seeds from the rare American chestnut tree. Free.



Register online by February 3. Min/Max: 5/25

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## February

### EAGLE VIEWING IN GRAFTON

Saturday, February 11, 8am-4pm

Join a naturalist on this van trip to Pere Marquette State Park where you can view Bald Eagles along the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. We will enjoy a delicious lunch at the lodge and then tour the Melvin Price Lock and Dam. Dress for the weather. \$20/person fee includes transportation. Register online by February 10. Min/Max: 5/12.



### DECATUR'S LINCOLN STATUES

Sunday, February 19, 2pm

Decatur was a part of Abraham Lincoln's life in several ways. Learn about the statues in Decatur that honor Lincoln. Find out the stories behind the statues and their sculptors. Free. Register online by February 17. Min/Max: 5/50.



### Connect with Us

Find out how you can make a difference  
217-423-7708  
[www.maconcountyconservation.org](http://www.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:

#### SNAKE AND TURTLE SHOW

Sunday, December 4, or Saturday, January 21, 2pm

Learn about these fascinating reptiles at Rock Springs Nature Center. We will discuss what makes them special and important in nature. We will then look at and touch some live animals. \$2/person. Register online by December 2 and January 20. Min/Max: 5/50.



#### CONSERVATION AREAS IN WINTER

Saturday, December 10, or Sunday, February 5 from 2-4pm

On this trip, staff drive you to some of the Conservation District owned sites that you may not be aware of. We will look for wildlife, discover the beauty of nature, and hear what natural area restoration work is underway. Trip departs from Rock Springs Nature Center. For all ages. Free. Register online by December 9 and February 3. Space is limited. Min/Max: 5/12.

#### EAGLE VIEWING AT STARVED ROCK

Sunday, January 29 or Saturday, February 25, 8am-4pm

Join us on a trip to this popular state park to watch eagles on the Illinois River. We'll also visit the Lock and Dam Museum. Bring a lunch or purchase one from the Starved Rock restaurant. Be prepared to spend time outside. For all ages. \$20/person. Register online by January 27 and February 24. Min/Max: 5/12.



Macon County  
Conservation District

3939 Nearing Lane  
Decatur, IL 62521

Return Service Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Decatur, IL 62521  
PERMIT NO. 232



# Cross Country Ski & Snowshoe Rental

Rent Skis and Snowshoes from Rock Springs Nature Center for your own outdoor adventure. Includes skis, boots, and poles, or one pair of snowshoes:

\$8 for 2 hours	\$20 for 24 hours
(\$2 each additional hour)	(\$5 each additional hour)

**Rock Springs Nature Center**  
3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL





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



The Prairie Islander is a free quarterly publication. Call or email for additional copies. "Go Green" by reading it online at [www.maconcountyconservation.org](http://www.maconcountyconservation.org).