

SPRING 2022

Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

New Permanent Exhibit to Open

Alysia Callison

One of our goals at the Macon County Conservation District is to educate the public on the beauty of our natural world and the history that helped shape our land. We have a variety of ways we do this, such as educational programming, special events, lending resources, and passive learning through exhibits and displays at Rock Springs Nature Center.



In 2001, a fantastic exhibit was installed in the Nature Center, which taught people about prairies, forests, rivers, and how we can protect and sustain them. This exhibit taught and entertained children and families for 20 great years, but we decided it was time for a facelift – something fresh, with new information and a new concept.

In 2021 the District was awarded a \$400,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to replace the existing exhibit with a new one. An exhibit design firm, Taylor Studios, Inc., was contracted to design and install a new exhibit, and after several months of preparation, the new exhibit was installed early this year.

This exhibit will feature several elements. The first is a history wall: a wall that walks you through the way the land was used from about 550 years ago to today.

It features a life-size half-wigwam you can explore, as well as artifacts and interactive elements. You will also find updates to the existing diorama in the middle of the room, including new

interactives, new information, and updated graphics. One other new element is our Conservation Hall of Fame, a section that teaches us about some of the positive impacts conservation has had, as well as

suggestions on ways to help on an individual level.

Throughout, you will learn about what the Macon County Conservation District is, what we do, and why we do it, and hopefully gain a better understanding and appreciation of our world.

We are very excited to share this exhibit with you. To celebrate, we will be hosting a Grand Opening Open House on Sunday, March 27 at 2pm. Join us at Rock Springs Nature Center to tour the exhibit, ask questions, and enjoy refreshments. This exhibit is yours just as it is ours, and we look forward to many years of education and enjoyment within it.



Friends Creek Campground Updates

Shane Ravellette

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area has been a part of the Macon County Conservation District since the very early days. It has hosted families and guests as the District has grown and as the nature of camping has evolved for almost 50 years. Early on, camping was mostly tent camping with the occasional small RV or travel trailer. Nowadays, tent camping has taken a bit of a back seat and RVs and travel trailers have become sophisticated homes on wheels. The staff at the Conservation District have worked hard to ensure that the Friends Creek Campground has remained comfortable while offering updated amenities to guests.

Over the past few years, several projects have moved the campground forward. A handful of the pads have been extended to accommodate larger vehicles. The Comfort Station has been updated with a new epoxy poured floor and the fixtures and dividers in the restrooms and the shower stalls have been replaced. In the Picnic Loop south of the campground, the District has installed a new LED lighted pathway so guests can more safely enjoy an evening walk. Also, a new concrete basketball pad has been constructed with a high-end adjustable goal for athletes of all sizes. Finally, the District is in the process of updating the electrical grid for the campground. The last nine tent camping pads will be electrified and seventeen of the total sites will be upgraded to 50 AMP service. With the new upgrade of electrical service, the reservation system for the campground will finally enter the mobile internet age and our reservations will be made more efficient and easy to access online anytime, anywhere. The link to reserve campsites will be available through our website.

These efforts and the growing interest in RV camping hopefully means the campground will be a popular and long-lasting part of what the Macon County Conservation District has to offer.

Spring Wildflowers

Jenny Garver

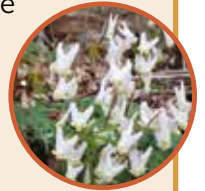
Spring is a wonderful time to look for beautiful wildflowers along the trails. Here are some flowers to look for at Rock Springs Conservation Area:

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) gets its name from the blood-like sap found within the stem. It has a brilliant white eight petal flower that grows on a stalk above an unusually shaped leaf below.

Explore the bluffs of the River Trail during March and the beginning of April to see these flowers.



Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) look like upside down white pantaloons with a yellow waistband. Check out woodland areas like the Big Oak Trail during March and April.



Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) is found along the Lookout Trail from April to June. This plant has three-lobed leaves with a flower consisting of a tall green stalk centered inside a green hooded cup. The flowers can be all green or green with dark green to purple stripes.



Violets (*Viola* spp.) are amazing hidden jewels that were chosen by school children in 1901 to be the State Flower. You can spot purple and yellow variations along the Discovery Trail in April and May. Look for their heart shaped leaves.



Other spring flowers that can be seen include: bluebells, hepatica, phlox, spiderwort, spring beauty, trillium, and trout lily.

Make sure to check out trails at all of our Conservation Areas, for every area has its own unique community of plants to see and enjoy. Remember to leave flowers where they are found so others can enjoy their beauty.

Briefs

YOUTH ART CONTEST AND EXHIBIT

Calling all young artists! Macon County children are invited to participate in a county-wide art contest with the opportunity to have their art displayed for the public to view. Students are encouraged to create an original work of art in the medium of their choice (excluding photography) depicting native Illinois wildlife in their natural habitat. Creativity is highly encouraged.



A 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prize winner will be chosen from four different age groups, and winners will have their artwork displayed in an exhibit at Rock Springs Nature Center from May through August. First place winners will also receive a \$25 Blick gift card.

Submissions are due by Monday, April 11th and may be delivered or mailed to Rock Springs Nature Center. See our website for more details.

2022 SUMMER CAMPS

Join staff at Rock Springs Nature Center for a summer packed with fun, educational activities for ages 1-15.

Four camp options will be available this summer:

- **Earth Adventures (ages 6-12):** Swim, hike, canoe, and discover the world in a full-day, week-long camp with optional Before and After Childcare. This year's theme is 'Symbols of our State'. \$125/camper each week. Optional Before and After Care are each \$15/camper per week.
- **Adventure Club (ages 5-12):** Children join in on Earth Adventures activities on Tuesday mornings from 9am to noon. \$12/child.
- **Mini Camp (ages 1-5):** Young children explore Rock Springs Conservation Area with an adult buddy in these hour-long camps. \$6/child.
- **Extreme Camp (ages 10-15):** Older campers seeking more adventure go on exciting daytrips, including caving, horseback riding, and canoeing. \$60/child.

Online registration opens April 1. Find more information and register at MaconCountyConservation.org.

SPRING PRESCRIBED FIRE SEASON

Spring prescribed fire season is just around the corner for the Macon County Conservation District. Fire is used as a management tool to restore and maintain our Conservation Areas. Our native plants are adapted to fire and benefit from its presence. With safety as our top priority, our prescribed burn crews are trained to use fire safely and follow specific burn plans.

Please contact Ethan Snively at (217) 853-3465 or at esnively@MaconCountyConservation.org for more info on prescribed fire or volunteer restoration opportunities.



Take Your Pick

Below, you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Register online by dates listed. Programs held at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise noted.

CANOE BIG CREEK

Saturdays, April 30 and May 28, 1-3pm

All equipment provided. One adult required per canoe. Meet at Cannon Park on S. Baltimore Ave. Bring a drink and clothes that may get wet. \$20/canoe. Register online by April 29 and May 27. Min/Max: 4/13 canoes.



WILDFLOWER HIKES

Sundays, April 24 and May 29, 2pm or Thursday, May 19, 11am

Venture into the forests and prairies with a naturalist as we search for Virginia bluebells, spring beauties, and more. Hiking boots recommended. Free. Register online by April 22, May 18, and May 27. Min/Max: 5/30.

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

Sunday, April 17, Easter

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, April 15, Good Friday

Monday, May 30, Memorial Day

Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturday, May 7, 1-4pm

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

GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

Sundays, March 27, April 24, and May 29, 2-4pm

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



Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Games

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. To see their complete schedule, go to [Facebook.com/GroundSquirrels](https://www.facebook.com/GroundSquirrels)

Saturday, March 19, 12pm

Swansea, IL – Away game
Goodwill Match against the
Belleville Stags at the Belleville/
Swansea Moose Lodge 1221



Saturday, April 30, 12pm

St. Louis, MO – Away game
against the St. Louis Unions at the St. Louis Arch

Saturday, May 7, 11am

Decatur, IL – Home game against the McLean
County Prairie Chickens and the Lafayette Square
Cyclones at Beautiful Troubaugh Field at Rock
Springs Conservation Area

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm

March 16, April 20, & May 18

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook.

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am

Connect with Us

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

MaconCountyConservation.org



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.

Music

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

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

March 5 & 19

April 2, 16 & 30

May 14 & 28

BLUEGRASS MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 2-4pm

April 10 & May 8



Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Katherine Unruh

March & April

Encounter animals and wild landscapes captured in the form of paintings and drawings by this local artist.

Celestino Ruffini

May & June

Artist Celestino Ruffini uses many mediums to capture the beauty of nature, including coal, paint, pen, and wood.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Jane Koenig

March & April

View the beauty of nature just outside your backdoor as captured by local photographer Jane P. Koenig.

Curt Knapp

May & June

Photographer Curt Knapp presents incredible images of nature, including eagles, wolves, and sunsets.

Mini Camps

Children ages 1 through 5 will explore nature with an adult companion through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. We will offer both in-person and take home options; please note your preference when you register online. In-person camps meet on the west lawn at Rock Springs Nature Center. Pre-packaged kits contain activities, games, and crafts exploring each camp theme. Kits will need to be picked up from Rock Springs Nature Center during the time frame specified in registration. Each kit includes materials for one participant. Kits and in-person camps are \$6 each. Online registration required. Maximum of 15 kits available for each theme. In-person Min/Max: 4/10.

VIBRANT WOODPECKERS

Tuesday, March 29, 9:30-10:30am OR

Take Home Kit (Pick-Up March 1 through March 31)

Find out why woodpeckers like to tap on trees and what they eat as we learn about the many kinds of local woodpeckers. Register online by noon March 28.



HOPPING FROGS AND TOADS

Wednesday, April 27, 9:30-10:30am OR

Take Home Kit (Pick-Up April 1 through April 30)

Hop into the world of frogs and toads through some fun activities and games. Register online by noon April 26.

Scouts

BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY

Thursday, April 14, 5:30-7:30pm

On this Journey, Girl Scouts will learn how to protect the environment and why it's important, tour the EcoCenter, and work together on a conservation-themed project. Thanks to a generous donation by a local Girl Scout Troop, there is no fee to register for this program. Register online by April 13. Min/Max: 5/25.

GET MOVING!

Thursday, May 12, 5:30-7:30pm

This Journey is all about energy! Girl Scouts will learn about different types of energy in nature and at home, take a hike, and complete a poster challenging others to conserve energy. \$9/scout. Register online by May 11. Min/Max: 5/25.

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.

NOTE: Programs may be canceled or adapted due to COVID restrictions. Check the event on our website before attending. Face coverings required. Please stay home if you are feeling unwell.

March

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD: REMEMBERING ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Decatur Public Library

Saturday, March 12, 2pm

After President Lincoln's death, many adults who knew him well were interviewed or wrote about him. Almost lost were children's memories of meeting Lincoln, retold only as family stories or sometimes recorded by a hometown newspaper. Guest speaker and Lincoln historian Kim Bauer has compiled these memories, often ignored by other scholars, into a presentation that shows a largely unknown side of Lincoln's life. This program is co-sponsored by the Friends of Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park. Free. No registration required.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: ICE COLD

Sunday, March 20, 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 March 18. Min/Max: 5/20.

SEASON'S CHANGES HIKE

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Saturday, March 26, 2pm

Explore nature on a guided hike as we move from winter into spring. Look for signs of change and learn what plants and animals are doing to prepare for the new season. Free. Register online by March 25. Min/Max: 5/30.



ECOCENTER GRAND OPENING

Sunday, March 27, 2pm

Join District staff as we unveil our brand new permanent exhibit, the EcoCenter. This exhibit was made possible thanks to a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and features interactive elements and information about who we are, what we do, and why we do it. Refreshments will be served. Free. No registration required.



April

ILLINOIS ARCHAEOLOGY

Sunday, April 3, 2pm

What is archaeology? How does an excavation work and what do archaeologists do with what they find? Learn about archaeology in Illinois through discussion and a hands-on excavation component. We may spend some time outside depending on the weather. Free. Register online by April 1. Min/Max: 5/30.

May

PAINT WITH ME: PINE FOREST WATERCOLOR

Saturday, May 14, 11am

Create your very own watercolor landscape of the pine forest as you join a naturalist for a step-by-step tutorial. This program is best suited for beginner adults interested in learning to paint with watercolors. Free. Register online by May 11. Min/Max: 5/12.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: SPRING FLOWERS

Sunday, May 15, 2pm

Why do we start to see flowers in the spring? Learn about the changing seasons, paint a paper plate flower, and go outside to see what's blooming. Free. Register online by May 13. Min/Max: 5/20.

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.

NIGHTTIME FROG QUEST

Saturday, May 21, 9-11pm

Test your frog-finding abilities by searching for as many species of frogs as you can discover! Bring your flashlights as we scope out water habitats for eye shine. We'll also try to catch some with nets and by hand. \$3/person or \$10/family. Register online by May 20. Min/Max: 5/30.

BIOBLITZ! PLANTS OF ROCK SPRINGS NATURE CENTER

Sunday, May 22, 2-4pm

Bring a smartphone and join a naturalist as we attempt to identify as many plant species as possible! This citizen science program is a fun way for people of all skill levels to identify and learn about local flora. Use of the iNaturalist phone app is required and will be explained at the beginning of the program. Free. Register online by May 20. Min/Max: 5/30.

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Karen Schneller, President

Nina Bendsen, Vice President

Jim Beckhart, Secretary

David Castor, Treasurer

Mark Allen, Second Vice President

Jerry Culp, Executive Director

Shane Ravellette, Operations Manager

Alysia Callison, Nature Center Manager

Pam Smith, Finance & H.R. Manager

Susie Ryan, Marketing Specialist

Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708
mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org
MaconCountyConservation.org

Special Events

ROCK SPRINGS RAMBLE 5K RUN/WALK

Saturday, April 9, 8am

The Macon County Conservation Foundation will host their second annual Rock Springs Ramble this year. This race features a 5K, a Kid's Fun Run, and a one-mile Nature Walk. It will begin and end at the main parking lot at Rock Springs Conservation Area and utilize portions of the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. Registration is \$30/adult and \$5/child. In addition to being a great opportunity to exercise and explore nature, participants will receive plenty of swag, including top finisher prizes. All proceeds will benefit Macon County's natural areas and wildlife. Register at RunSignup.com/RockSpringsRamble



SANGAMON RIVER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 23, 10am-12pm

Wyckles Road Canoe Launch
Rock Springs Conservation Area

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. Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance. Co-sponsored by the Community Environmental Council. Free. No registration required. Meet at the Rock Springs Canoe Launch on Wyckles Road.



FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Saturday, April 23, 12-4pm

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with an afternoon of outdoor family activities. Enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, a scavenger hunt, a live bird show from the Illinois Raptor Center, take home an activity kit, 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 free. No registration required. Visit our website for more information.

Macon County
Conservation District
3939 Nearing Lane
Decatur, IL 62521



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*Festival of Spring
& River Cleanup*

April 23

River Cleanup: 10am - 12pm
Festival of Spring: 12pm - 4pm

River Cleanup	Canoeing (\$3/person)
Native Garden & Homestead Prairie	Wagon Rides
Farm Tours	Scavenger Hunt

Join us as we welcome Spring!
Free & Open to the public

Rock Springs Conservation Area, 3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL 62521

For trail conditions, visit MaconCountyConservation.org.



The Prairie Islander is a free quarterly publication. Call or email for additional copies. "Go Green" by reading it online at MaconCountyConservation.org.

Macon County
Conservation District

