

The Revitalizing Qualities of Fire

By Ethan Snively

Prescribed fire is a land management technique that has shaped the Illinois landscape for thousands of years. Native Americans became experts in using fire to enhance their survival and improve their quality of life. Fire was used to encourage berry and browse production, expose acorns, maintain open woodlands and savannas, and much more. Since 1978, the Macon County Conservation District has used prescribed fire to restore and maintain conservation areas.

Native plants in Macon County have adapted to fire and actually benefit from its presence. Fire reduces thatch in prairies and recycles nutrients back into the soil. Soil exposed by prescribed fire warms up quicker in the spring, allowing more sunlight for wildflowers, which in turn benefits pollinators and other wildlife. Fire also helps keep woody plants from encroaching on prairies.

In oak-hickory woodlands, prescribed fire is crucial for encouraging future generations

of oak trees. Fire can kill small maples and undesirable trees that outcompete oaks during the seedling and sapling stages. Oaks invest the majority of their resources below ground in their roots, while maples invest upwards, in their leaves and branches. When a fire occurs, it kills the top of both species, but the oak is able to re-sprout because it has reserves in its roots. Fire also helps thin out woodlands and provides more sunlight to the forest floor. Young Oaks need this light to be able to grow, whereas maples can start in dense shade. This light also helps herbaceous, non-woody plants (such as wildflowers) grow on the forest floor. These plants are important for native insects and wildlife.

The Conservation District conducts prescribed burns November through April. As we prepare to enter another burn season, safety is always our priority. Local fire departments are notified of each burn we conduct. Our prescribed burn crews are

trained to use fire safely and we follow a specific burn plan. This plan lays out the parameters of how the prescribed fire must be conducted. We take into account things like temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, fuel moisture, and proximity to neighboring properties and structures. With these factors, we determine how the fire and smoke will react and we burn accordingly. Each burn "unit" is surrounded by fire breaks, which are areas difficult for fire to cross. After a fire, crews perform a "mop-up," putting out any remaining flames or smoldering logs which may be hazardous.

Our restoration staff welcomes volunteers who would like to assist with prescribed fires. Once volunteers have received the proper training, they will be able to take part in prescribed burns. Contact Ethan Snively at (217) 542-7351 or at esnively@MaconCountyConservation.org to learn more about prescribed fire or help as a volunteer.

NASA Replicas on Loan for Fall Exhibit



By Alysia Callison

Our planet is full of natural wonders. To see more, all you have to do is look up! The universe is full of stars, moons, and planets.

Just 50 years ago on July 20, 1969, the United States made history when they successfully sent a shuttle and lunar module to the moon, allowing two men, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, to walk on the moon for the first time in human history.

That Apollo 11 mission has inspired generations of future astronomers, pilots, and everyday people to look to the skies and wonder what else is out there, and what other amazing feats humanity can achieve.

Re-discover this historic event and get a better look at the natural world beyond our planet by exploring the upcoming exhibit, *One Giant Leap: Mankind's Journey to the Stars*, at Rock Springs Nature Center in October and November.

A special feature of the exhibit will be scaled replicas of equipment used in the successful Apollo 11 mission to the moon, on loan straight from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. These will include models of the Saturn V Rocket, lunar lander, and more.

The exhibit will be themed around that historic moon landing, and you will also be able to learn about many other topics including famous astronauts, historic shuttle launches, recent discoveries in astronomy, and more. You will also be able to take home a souvenir sticker and brochure.

One Giant Leap: Mankind's Journey to the Stars will open October 1. The replicas from NASA will be on display from November through January 2020. Admission to the exhibit and Rock Springs Nature Center is free. Rock Springs Nature Center is open Monday-Wednesday and Friday from 8am-5pm; Thursday from 8am-8pm; Saturday from 9am-5pm; and Sunday from 1-5pm.

Paul Marien Retiring

After 41 years with the Macon County Conservation District, Paul Marien will be retiring in October. He has served the District in many capacities over the years. He began as an Assistant Forester in 1978, and is wrapping up his career by serving as the District's Executive Director for the last four years. We thank him for all of the time he has dedicated to restoring and preserving Macon County's natural and cultural resources.



MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

- Darrel Parish, President
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Contact Us

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

Briefs

DEER HERD MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Conservation District's 2019 archery deer season will run October 18 through December 12, 2019. This program manages the deer population on District sites and provides a public hunting opportunity in Macon County.



Hunting is allowed at Rock Springs, Sand Creek, Friends Creek, and Fort Daniel Conservation Areas by special permit only. Hunting is not allowed November 22-24 or December 5-8.

For more information about the program or an application, visit MaconCountyConservation.org/habitat-restoration. The deadline to submit an application is Friday, September 6.

CAMPGROUND OPEN THROUGH OCTOBER

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area is open through October. In fact, camping in the fall means enjoying cooler weather and colorful autumn leaves. The campground welcomes tent and RV camping.

- Daily fees for electric sites are \$17 for Macon County residents, \$20 for non-residents.
- Non-electric sites are \$10 for Macon County residents, \$12 for non-residents.

A large group campsite is also available, accommodating up to 60 people. While camping, you can hike any of Friends Creek's three trails, play on the playground, and discover the historic one room Bethel School. Find more information at MaconCountyConservation.org. Reserve your campsite by calling 217-423-7708.



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:

FLOWER POWER STORY TIME

Sundays, September 15, October 20, and November 17, 3-3:30pm

Join a naturalist as we read stories about nature and wildlife, then take a short hike. Learn about coneflowers in September, prairie roses in October, and goldenrod in November. Free. Register online by September 13, October 18, and November 15. Min/Max: 5/30.



CANOE THE SANGAMON

Saturdays, September 21, October 19, and November 9, 1-4pm

All equipment is provided for this leisurely exploration of the Sangamon River. One adult required per canoe.

Meeting location will be determined prior to the date, based on river conditions. \$25/canoe. Register online by September 20, October 18, and November 8. Min/Max: 5 canoes/14 canoes.



TRIP TO THE CHICAGO FIELD MUSEUM

Thursdays, October 17 and November 21, 10am-8pm

Ride along to the Windy City to visit this immersive museum and learn about natural and cultural history, from the largest dinosaur that ever lived to the smallest crawling insect. Museum admission and lunch are on your own. \$35/person covers parking and transportation. Register online by October 16 and November 20. Min/Max: 5/24.

Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at www.MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

Macon County
Conservation District



Hours

BUSINESS OFFICE 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–sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Thursday, November 28, Thanksgiving Day

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Monday, September 2, Labor Day
Monday, November 11, Veterans Day
Friday, November 29, Thanksgiving

Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturdays, September 7 & October 5, 1–4pm

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

HOMESTEAD PRAIRIE FARM

Saturdays & Sundays, June–October, 1–4pm

Discover this 1860s farmhouse and the lives of the people who lived there. Located at Rock Springs Conservation Area, 3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL. Free.



OGLESBY MANSION

September 29, October 27, & November 24, 2–4pm

Tour the restored home of Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Explore 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

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. All games will be at Beautiful Trobaugh Field at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise stated.

Sunday, September 8, 1pm

Away game vs. the St. Louis Unions at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, MO

Saturday, September 21, 10am

Douglas Cup Tournament

Saturday, October 26, 12pm

Good Will Match



Follow the team on Facebook for more games and information, or visit MaconCountyConservation.org.

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm
September 18, October 16, & November 20

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Sundays, 2pm, September 15, October 20, & November 17, Rock Springs Nature Center

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Every Wednesday, 9–11am



Connect with Us

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

MaconCountyConservation.org



Monarch Madness

Sunday, September 8, 2-4pm

Rock Springs Nature Center

Learn about monarch butterflies from naturalists, then help capture and tag live butterflies. Co-sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension Office. Free. No registration required.

PRAIRIE PEDAL

Sunday, September 29, 7am-2pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area



Ride your bicycle for habitat restoration! This bicycling fundraiser for the Macon County Conservation Foundation supports local wildlife and natural areas. Choose from the 20, 40, or 62 mile routes along quiet country roads. Includes free t-shirt, delicious chili lunch, and the option to purchase tickets to win a raffle prize after the ride. Registration is \$25/rider before September 12 and \$30/rider after. To register as a rider, sponsor, or volunteer, visit MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org or call 217-423-7708.



NATIVE SEED COLLECTING

Saturday, October 6, 9am-11am

Rock Springs Conservation Area,
Rodney T. Miller Wetland Parking Lot

Help harvest native wildflower seeds from Rock Springs to improve the quality of habitat at other sites. This light intensity work involves picking seed from stalks and walking through tall vegetation. No experience is necessary. Dress for the weather, wearing long pants, long sleeves, and sturdy work shoes. Lunch will be provided. For all ages. RSVP with Ethan Snively by October 3 at 217-542-7351 or esnively@MaconCountyConservation.org.



Photo by Larry Holder



Macon County Conservation District

3939 Nearing Lane | Decatur, IL 62521 | 217-423-7708

MaconCountyConservation.org

Special Events

HE SAID BEER, SHE SAID WINE

Friday, October 18, 6pm

Decatur Club, 158. W Prairie Ave.

Support the Governor Oglesby Mansion and indulge in a delicious meal during this annual dinner fundraiser. Enjoy four gourmet courses with both a beer and wine accompaniment for each course. Charlie McGorray and Carissa Harris will be the returning beer and wine experts, and JC Fultz will serve as Master of Ceremonies. Tickets are \$75/person or \$85/person after October 4. For more information or to purchase tickets, contact Barb Hipple at 217-330-2056. The final RSVP date is October 11.



FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL

Sunday, October 27, 1 - 4pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Celebrate fall with fall-themed activities including archery, a straw maze, wagon rides, homestead tours, live animals, temporary tattoos, and more. \$2/person for archery. All other events are free. No registration required.



Candlelight Tour

Saturday, November 9, 6:30-8:30pm

Homestead Prairie Farm at
Rock Springs Conservation Area

Electricity and modern conveniences were not always at our fingertips. Glimpse what an evening in the 1860s was like at Homestead Prairie Farm, lit by candlelight and lamplight, as guides in period clothing walk you through the home. Refreshments will be served. Free. No registration required.

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.
Register online at www.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

September 7 & 21

October 5 & 19

November 2 & 16

BLUEGRASS MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 1-4pm

September 8, October 13, November 10

CROSS COUNTRY CLASSICS

Thursdays, 6-7:30pm

September 5, October 3, November 7

SHAPE-NOTE SINGING

Sunday, November 24, 2pm

Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Curt Knapp

September & October

Photographer Curt Knapp will display beautiful pictures of nature, including bears, eagles, flowers, and sunsets.

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.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Barb Stobaugh

September & October

Enjoy nature photography, including flowers and wildlife.

David Castor

November & December

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

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.

POND ANIMALS

Wednesday, September 11, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, September 12, 9:30-10:30am

Plunge into the world of pond life and take a field trip to the Bike Trail Pond to look for fish, turtles, and algae. Register online by noon the day before camp.

WIGGLY WORMS

Tuesday, September 24, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, September 25, 9:30-10:30am

Meet and hold live wiggly worms as we dig into who lives beneath our feet. Register online by noon the day before camp.

CAMPING FUN

Wednesday, October 9, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, October 10, 9:30-10:30am

Explore a tent, catch pretend fish with magnets, and use your senses to discover the fun of camping. Register online by noon the day before camp.

AMAZING ROCKS

Tuesday, October 22, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, October 23, 9:30-10:30am

Uncover treasures beneath our feet as we paint with rocks, sort rocks, and magnify them. Register online by noon the day before camp.

HOOTING OWLS

Wednesday, November 6, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, November 7, 9:30-10:30am

Discover the world of owls and owlets through our senses and movement. Register online by noon the day before camp.

GLOWING MOON

Tuesday, November 19, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, November 20, 9:30-10:30am

Shine light onto the secrets of the moon and animals who venture out at night. 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 www.MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

September

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAM: SKELETONS

Wednesday, September 11, 3pm

Homeschoolers are invited to join a naturalist as we learn about skeletons, which animals have them, and why. Then take a short hike to look for some vertebrates. Free. Register online by September 10. Min/Max: 5/30.

THE PRAIRIE: THEN AND NOW

Saturday, September 14, 2pm

Homestead Prairie Farm Stage

The first pioneers to Illinois prairies beheld a wild landscape full of tall grasses and abundant flowers. Guest speak Dan Guillory, a poet and local history author, will share his view of the past and contemporary life with portraits of those that called the prairie home. Discover through his poetry a new way to look at not only the mundane of rural Illinois, but how the prairie shapes the passage of time, our identities, and our lives. Free. No registration required.

FULL MOON HIKE

Saturday, September 14, 8-10pm

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Meet at Fort Daniel Conservation Area to look at the full moon and walk through the forest, illuminated only by the moon itself. \$2/person. Register online by September 13. Min/Max: 5/30.

FROM FLEECE AND FIBER TO YARN: SPINNING WHEELS DEMONSTRATION

Saturday, September 21, 1-4pm

Homestead Prairie Farm
at Rock Springs Conservation Area

See historic and modern spinning wheels in action with Cecelia Hicks and Valerie Gaddis. They will spin exotic fibers of camel, alpaca, and angora using a modern spinning wheel, and spin wool fleece into yarn using a restored antique spinning wheel. All ages are welcome to explore the different types of fiber, try using a drop spindle, and practice carding wool. Free. No registration required.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FALL CRAFT

Sunday, September 22, 2pm

Young children are invited to make a fun, nature-themed fall craft to take home and display. All supplies provided. Free. Register online by September 20. Min/Max: 5/30.



TRIP TO SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

Tuesday, September 24, 10am-6pm

This world-renowned art museum displays over 34,000 pieces of art spanning 5,000 years of history and culture, with a goal of preserving 'a legacy of artistic achievement' for the world. Museum admission is free. Lunch is on your own. \$25/person covers parking and transportation. Register online by September 23. Min/Max: 5/24.

TRIP TO THE GREAT PUMPKIN PATCH

Saturday, September 28, 11am-4pm

Travel with staff to Arthur, IL to visit The Great Pumpkin Patch. Enjoy some time outdoors, as you explore a corn maze, see farm animals, try pumpkin ice cream, or find the perfect pumpkin to take home. Admission and lunch are on your own. \$10/person covers transportation. Register online by September 27. Min/Max: 5/24.

October

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: HISTORY ON THE PRAIRIE

Saturday, October 5, 1pm

Bethel School, Friends Creek Conservation Area

Learn about the plants that Native Americans and early settlers relied on for food, and explore Bethel School to experience what going to school was like for children in the early 1900s. Free. Register online by October 4. Min/Max: 5/30.



Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at www.MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

ARCHAEOLOGY OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, October 6, 1-4pm
Homestead Prairie Farm

Due to restoration work on the Trobaugh-Good House in 2018, some dirt was removed from under the home. Learn a little about archaeology and help staff and volunteers sift through this dirt that has laid undisturbed for over 100 years. Free. No registration required.



TRIP TO SPRINGFIELD'S HISTORIC HOMES

Tuesday, October 8, 9am-5pm

Explore three different historic Springfield residences and learn the history behind them. We will stop at the Governor's Mansion, the Dana-Thomas House, and the Lincoln Home National Historic Site. \$15/person covers transportation and parking. Admission to all sites is free. Register online by October 7. Min/Max: 5/24.

SEASONS CHANGES HIKE

Saturday, October 12, 2pm

Take a naturalist-guided hike through a variety of habitats and discover all of the ways that nature changes in the fall. Dress for a hike. Free. Register online by October 11. Min/Max: 5/25.



November

FALL PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Saturday, November 2, 1-4pm

Learn how to photograph the changing fall colors and scenery at Rock Springs with the Decatur Camera Club. Bring your camera and tripod if you have one. Free. Register online by November 1. Min/Max: 5/25.



'FALL BACK' DAYLIGHT SAVINGS HIKE

Sunday, November 3, 2pm
Sand Creek Conservation Area

With an extra hour added to your weekend, spend some time in nature. Treat yourself and your family to a relaxing, naturalist-guided hike through Sand Creek Conservation Area.

Free. Register online by November 1. Min/Max: 5/25.



SOUNDS OF THE PRAIRIE

Saturday, November 16, 2pm

Learn about sound by listening to and identifying sounds in a prairie habitat. Discover how sound is made, how you hear, and how to make your own sounds using unusual instruments. Be prepared for a short hike. Free. Register online by November 15. Min/Max: 5/25.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: TALKING TURKEYS

Saturday, November 30, 10am

If a turkey could talk, what would it say? Learn about the life of a wild turkey and make a turkey craft to take home. Free. Register online by November 29. Min/Max: 5/30.



Scouts

WEBELOS: INTO THE WOODS

Thursday, September 19, 6-8pm

Webelos Scouts will learn how to identify trees, plants, and discover how fire effects the forest. \$9/person. Register online by September 18. Min/Max: 5/25.

WEBELOS: INTO THE WILD

Thursday, October 24, 6-8pm

Tour the EcoCenter, learn about migration, and identify dangerous plants and animals. \$9/person. Register online by October 23. Min/Max: 5/25.

Macon County
Conservation District
3939 Nearing Lane
Decatur, IL 62521



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Candlelight Tour
at Homestead Prairie Farm

Saturday, Nov 9, 6:30-8:30pm
Free. More information inside.

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

Photo by David Staff

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

Macon County
Conservation District



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