

Grant for Bike Trail Improvements

By Shane Ravellette



Opening the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail in 1996 was a major step in making Decatur and Macon County a connected, bike friendly community. Together with the Decatur Park District, we are proud to contribute to nearly 10 miles of bike trails in our community.

Unfortunately, nature and time take their toll on bike trails as they traverse our rich prairies, woodlands, and floodplains. The Sangamon River and Stevens Creek are serious and powerful waterways. The bridges crossing these waters have borne numerous floods and the ever changing movement of the stream beds. It's our responsibility to make sure those bridges continue to serve and connect our community for years to come.

The bridges are still safe and without a doubt they do their job admirably, but the armoring riprap rocks at their bases has subtly migrated, approaches have settled, and the board decking system needs an overhaul. In 2017, Conservation District staff applied for a Federal Recreational Trails Program grant managed

by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to assist with these upgrades. We're excited to announce that the project was approved last year. The \$226,000 project will receive 80% funding from the grant and the remaining 20% will be covered by the Conservation District.

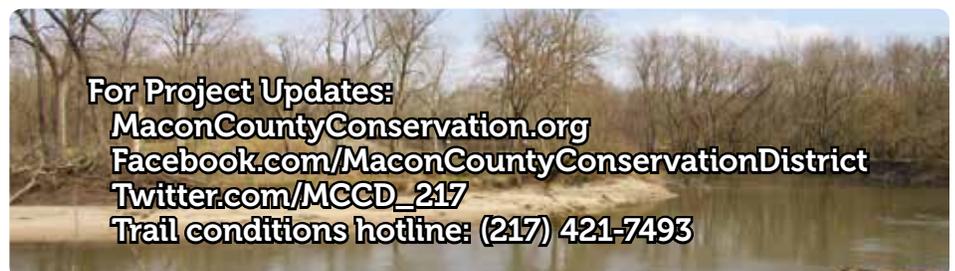
In the coming months, you will witness Conservation District staff hard at work re-opening the original construction lanes. They will be cutting back brush and burning the debris. We will take great care to minimize any impacts to nature and guests.

In the summer and early fall, if the rains and sun cooperate, we plan to begin construction in earnest. Heavy equipment will bring in materials, and regrade and reshape the bridge abutments and approaches. And a new bridge decking system will be installed. If all goes well, the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail will have steady foundations, and smooth bridge approaches and crossings for

cyclists, walkers, and nature lovers for years to come.

As with any construction project of this scale, there will be some disruption to bike trail usage, and we ask for your patience. Although timelines are not settled, we have a rough plan in place. In the clearing and preparation phase, any closures will be short and temporary: hopefully not lasting more than a few minutes. Once heavy construction begins, the Bike Trail will be closed to the public, but we will work to keep that closure as short as possible.

We intend to keep you informed during the project. For your safety, please heed all Bike Trail closures. Watch for posted signs and flyers, and be sure to check our website, Facebook, or Twitter for updates. If you have questions or concerns, feel free to contact us or stop by the business offices in the lower level of Rock Springs Nature Center. This project is part of our continuing efforts to serve you and our community for years to come.



For Project Updates:
MaconCountyConservation.org
Facebook.com/MaconCountyConservationDistrict
Twitter.com/MCCD_217
 Trail conditions hotline: (217) 421-7493



Homestead Prairie Farm Gardens & Gardeners

By Brent Wielt

When you visit Homestead Prairie Farm this spring, take a moment to enjoy the variety of plants, flowers, and trees just steps from the front door of the farmhouse. Peonies, lilacs, roses, herbs, and heirloom vegetables abound but not without hard work from our many volunteers.

The vegetable garden is a project of the Master Gardener program through the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service. For over a decade these volunteers have worked with Conservation District staff to



provide an example of the bounty that might have grown in a Central Illinois kitchen garden of the past. Starting with heirloom seeds, many hours of planting, weeding, watering, and more, results in a luxuriant garden that shows our visitors a bit of what life was like in the mid-1800s. From vegetables you

might not always find in your grocery store to the more common ones, we know the vegetable garden is just one attraction at the farm among many. It might just be the one that sparks an interest in a visitor of any age and leads them to think about our past.

Beyond education, the produce from the garden is donated to Macon County food charities in hopes of improving the present day lives of local families. We are proud that this history lesson also helps people today.

To continue that goal we are looking for volunteer gardeners, from beginners to experts, willing to help plant, harvest, water, weed, and more. If interested, contact Brent at 217-423-7708 or by email at bwielt@maconcountyconservation.org.

Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times. Register online before the last full weekday prior to the program. Programs held at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise noted:

VAN TRIP TO MILLIKIN'S REQUARTH OBSERVATORY

Thursdays, March 21 and April 25, 8-10pm

Macon County is lucky to have a state-of-the-art observatory right in our own backyard at Millikin University. Meet at Rock Springs Nature Center to learn about what's visible in the night sky, then hop in our van as we attend a Public Observation Night at Millikin's Requarth Observatory. Free. Register online by March 20 and April 24. Min/Max: 5/12.

CANOE THE SANGAMON

Saturdays, March 30 and May 11, 10am-1pm

Paddle a canoe down the Sangamon River. All equipment provided. Bring a drink and clothes that could get wet. Must have at least one adult in each canoe. Registered participants will be contacted with a meeting location based on river conditions. \$25/canoe. Register online by March 29 and May 10. Min/Max: 3 canoes/8 canoes.



WILDFLOWER HIKES

Sundays, April 7 and May 12, 2-4pm

Venture into the forests and prairies with volunteer Jerry Sievers. We will search for as many species of these beautiful spring delights as we can, including Virginia bluebells, spring beauties, and more. Wear your hiking boots. Free. Register online by April 5 and May 10. Min/Max: 5/30.

Briefs

SUMMER CAMPS

Enjoying fresh air, exploring nature, and learning about the world around us are hallmarks of summer camps at Rock Springs Conservation Area. You and your children or grandchildren are invited to join us for a summer of fun and learning. This year's camp season runs from June 3 to August 9. During those weeks, you'll find many activities to choose from:



- **Mini Camp:** Ages 1-5 explore Rock Springs Conservation Area with their adult buddies in these hour-long camps. \$6/child each camp.
- **Earth Adventures:** Ages 6-12 hike, swim, canoe, and discover the world around them in this full-day, week-long nature camp with optional Before and After Child Care. \$120/camper each week.
- **Adventure Club:** Ages 5-12 join in on Earth Adventures nature camp on Tuesday mornings. \$12/camper each day.
- **X-treme Camp:** Ages 10-15 pack up for exciting daytrips, including horseback riding. \$60/camper.

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

CAMPGROUND AND PAVILIONS OPENING

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area opens for the season on May 1. The campground welcomes RV and tent camping. It includes flush toilets, showers, and a dump station.

Daily fees for electric sites:

- \$17 for county residents • \$20 for non-residents

Daily fees for non-electric sites:

- \$10 for county residents • \$12 for non-residents

For more information, visit MaconCountyConservation.org. Reserve your campsite by calling 217-423-7708.

The pavilions at Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, and Griswold will also open for the season May 1. Reserve a pavilion for \$35/day to host your own outdoor event at MaconCountyConservation.org.



Nature through Art Exhibit

Nature is ever-changing. There's always something new to see, especially when viewed through the eyes of another person. A special exhibit, *Nature through Art*, is on display in Rock Springs Nature Center now through May. Experience landscapes and native species of wildlife through the eyes of local artists in a variety of media. The winners of the children's Wildlife Art Contest will also be on display. Rock Springs Nature Center and all exhibits are free.

Special Events

SANGAMON RIVER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 27, 10am-12pm

Make the river a safer and more beautiful place for wildlife and people as you help clear trash from the banks of the Sangamon River. Dress to get dirty. Bring your own gloves if you can, as supplies are limited. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or with the



whole family. Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance. Co-sponsored by the Community Environmental Council. Register between 9:30am and 10am at the Rock Springs Information Shelter.

FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Saturday, April 27, 12-4pm

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with an afternoon of outdoor family activities. Enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, crafts, pony rides, and learn what other organizations are doing in our community to protect water and wildlife. Co-sponsored by Decatur Audubon Society. Canoeing and pony rides \$2/person. All other activities are free. No registration required.

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.



Macon County
Conservation District

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

Sunday, April 21, Easter

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, April 19, Good Friday

Monday, May 27, Memorial Day

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm

March 20, April 24, & May 15

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Saturday, March 16, 2pm at Decatur Public Library

Sunday, April 29, 2pm at Rock Springs Nature Center

Saturday, May 18, 8am at Rock Springs Pavilion

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Norman Jensen, President

Doug Johnson, Secretary

David White, Treasurer

Karen Schneller, Second Vice-President

Paul Marien, Executive Director

Shane Ravellette, Operations Manager

Richie Wolf, Nature Center Manager

Pam Smith, Finance & H.R. Manager

Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708

mccd@maconcountyconservation.org

www.MaconCountyConservation.org



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.

Saturday, May 11, 1pm

Bloomington, IL – Away game against McLean County Prairie Chickens at the McLean County PONY Baseball League Fields



Saturday, May 25, 12pm

Decatur, IL – Home game against the St. Louis Unions and Lafayette Square Cyclones at Beautiful Trobaugh Field in Rock Springs Conservation Area

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

Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturday May 4, 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.

OGLESBY MANSION

Sundays, March 31, April 28, and May 26, 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.

Happenings

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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

March 9 & 23

April 6 & 20

May 4 & 18

BLUEGRASS MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 1-4pm

March 10, April 14, & May 12

CROSS COUNTRY CLASSICS

Thursdays, 6-7:30pm

March 7, April 4, & May 2

SHAPE-NOTE SINGING

Sunday, May 26, 2-4pm



Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Katherine Unruh

March & April

Explore drawings and paintings of animals and natural landscapes.

Alan and Chris Perry

May & June

Enjoy scenic photos of a variety of nature subjects including wildlife, flowers, and landscapes.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Fred Delcomyn

March & April

See wildlife and nature through the lens of photographer Fred Delcomyn.

Kattina Williams

May & June

View photography of wildlife, flowers, and exotic birds.



Connect with Us

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



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.

RIVER ANIMALS

Tuesday, March 12, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, March 13, 9:30-10:30am

Learn about the otters and herons that call the Sangamon River their home through touch, sound, and sight. Register online by noon the day before camp.

PUFFY CLOUDS

Wednesday, March 26, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, March 27, 9:30-10:30am

Drift into the science behind clouds and discover how to make your own cloud. Register online by noon the day before camp.



SPRING FLOWERS

Wednesday, April 3, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, April 4, 9:30-10:30am

Pop-up to see the Earth welcome spring and create a flower collage to take home. Register online by noon the day before camp.

BUZZING BEES

Tuesday, April 16, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, April 17, 9:30-10:30am

Discover why busy bees are nature's helpers through hands-on-activities and fragrant smells. Register online by noon the day before camp.



Scout Workshops

SEE SPRING SCOUT BADGE
WORKSHOPS AT

MaconCountyConservation.org/scout-workshops

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.

March

DOG HIKE

Saturday, March 9, 2pm

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Bring your dog to learn about hiking safely with your pet and share hiking tips with other dog owners. Then we'll explore beautiful wooded trails with our furry friends. Dogs must be leashed and friendly around other dogs and people. Free. Register online by March 8. Min/Max: 5/20.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: DISCOVERING DINOS

Saturday, March 16, 2pm

How many dinosaur fossils have been found in Illinois? Learn the answer to that question and many more as you discover prehistoric creatures, do a dinosaur craft, and see how you size up to some of the largest animals to ever walk the Earth. Free. Register online by March 15. Min/Max: 5/30.

TRIP TO ILLINOIS' LARGEST TREE

Sunday, March 17, 10am-7pm

Join a naturalist and visit this state record tree on St. Patrick's Day. We will visit the Jarrett Prairie Center in Byron, IL and walk on a dolomite hill prairie. There is a 15 minute hike to the tree. We will stop for a quick bite to eat along the way. \$30/person covers transportation. Register online by March 15. Min/Max: 5/12.



FIRST DAY OF SPRING HIKE

Wednesday, March 20, 4pm

Immerse yourself in this exploration of spring. We'll look for birds, amphibians, buds, and more. Bring the kids after school. Free. Register online by March 19. Min/Max: 5/30.

ICE AGE ANIMALS

Saturday, March 23, 2pm

Learn about mammoths, saber-toothed cats, and dire wolves. We'll play some survival games. Great for the whole family. Free. Register online by March 22. Min/Max: 5/30.

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: HOW TO HELP AND COEXIST

Sunday, March 24, 2pm

Spring is the time of year when animals are emerging from hibernation and returning from migration, babies are being born, and critters are exploring our properties. In this informative program, a naturalist will discuss how to help injured and 'abandoned' wildlife, how to handle nuisance wildlife, and how to share your space peacefully with the natural world. Free. Register online by March 22. Min/Max: 5/50.

FROG MUSIC

Saturday, March 30, 2pm

What kind of sounds do frogs make? Listen to native frog and toad songs, learn about their lives, and meet real amphibians. Free. Register online by March 29. Min/Max: 5/30.



SPRING FOREST HIKE

Sunday, March 31, 3pm

Friends Creek Conservation Area

Bring the family to Friends Creek Conservation Area to hike through the forest and experience early spring in all its glory. Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes. Free. Register online by March 29. Min/Max: 5/30.

April

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: UNLOVABLES

Saturday, April 6, 10am

Discover the truth behind animals that are often misunderstood or not considered particularly "cute" or "cuddly", and the important roles they play in the ecosystem. Free. Register online by April 5. Min/Max: 5/30.

BOATER SAFETY CLASS

Tuesday and Thursday, April 16 and 18, 5-9pm

This 8-hour Illinois Department of Natural Resources class covers boating laws, boating terms, and safety requirements. Must attend both class days and pass a written test in order to receive your certificate. Free. Register online by April 15. 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.

VAN TRIP TO SPRINGFIELD'S HISTORIC HOMES

Tuesday, April 30, 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. Register online by April 29. Min/Max: 5/12.

May

TRIP TO CITY MUSEUM

Saturday, May 4, 10am-6pm

Let us drive you down to St. Louis to tour this unique museum. See amazing art, architectural gems, and explore artificial caves. \$25/person covers transportation and parking. Lunch and admission are on your own. Register online by May 3. Min/Max: 5/12.

THEY CALLED PRESIDENT LINCOLN A 'WHAT'?

Sunday, May 5, 2pm

Today's political landscape is fraught with disrespect and uncivility previously unknown in American history. Or is it? Join former Illinois' Lincoln Curator and noted Lincoln expert Kim Bauer as he examines a time in America where political discourse was thrown out the window. Mr. Bauer will discuss the many ways that Abraham Lincoln was personally attacked by both individuals and organizations during his time leading up to and including his Presidency. Free. No registration required.

MUSHROOMS, FUNGI, AND MORE: MYCOLOGY 101

Saturday, May 11, 10am-12pm

Discover the fascinating world of fungus during this talk presented by Dr. Andrew Miller, a mycologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Learn about Illinois' native fungi, which mushrooms are poisonous and which are not, and then go on a short hike to look for fungi. Free. No registration required.



FROG MUSIC HIKE

Saturday, May 18, 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 17. Min/Max: 5/30.

TRIP TO THE THOMAS REES MEMORIAL CARILLON AND LINCOLN MEMORIAL GARDEN

Sunday, May 19, 10am-4pm

Join us as we visit one of the world's largest and finest bell towers and woodland and prairie garden in our state's capital city. There is also a Nature Center to explore at the garden. We will stop for lunch along the way. Wear your walking shoes. \$25/person covers transportation. Register online by May 17. Min/Max: 5/12.

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND NIGHT HIKE

Saturday, May 25, 8-10pm

Friends Creek Conservation Area

Explore Friends Creek Conservation Area in the dark and use your senses to find the way through the woods. Discover what makes your eyes, ears, and nose work at night. Wear sturdy shoes. \$2/person. Register online by May 24. Min/Max: 5/30.



SPRING CRAFT FOR ADULTS

Sunday, May 26, 2pm

Learn how to attract bees to your flower garden by creating a one-of-a-kind bee bath. All craft supplies are provided. Free. Register online by May 24. Min/Max: 5/20.

WALLEYE FISHING TRIP TO LAKE ERIE

Sunday - Tuesday, June 23-25

Join staff on a trip to the Great Lakes to fish for walleye on a charter boat. Price includes two day charter, fishing equipment, transportation, and lodging. Meals and license not included. Meet at the Information Desk in Rock Springs Nature Center. For all ages. \$465/person. Register online by June 14. Min/Max: 5/11.

Return Service Requested



Nature through Art

Experience nature through
the eyes of local artists

On display through May
See page 3

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.