



Dates to Remember

Check the District website or Facebook page for updates before attending in-person events, in case they are cancelled due to COVID.

Volunteer Quarterly Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Friday, January 14, 11am

Hear the latest news in educational programming, Nature Center updates, natural area restoration, Foundation projects, and more. A meal will not be served at this meeting.

RSVP by January 12 at 217-423-7708.

Acoustic Music Jam Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center,
Rodney Washburn Classroom
Sunday, February 13, 2pm

This volunteer music group has been delighting audiences for over 30 years. COVID-19 created a few hiccups and unfortunately the group has been on hiatus since then. All volunteers and individuals interested are invited to attend this meeting. We look forward to the return of this monthly volunteer activity.

Weekly Naturalist Chats

Rock Springs Nature Center,
Meet on West Lawn
First & Third Tuesdays of the month, 10am
Second & Fourth Tuesdays of the month, 2pm
Fifth Tuesday of the month, will not meet

These will be informal programs held every Tuesday on a topic of the interpreter's choosing. Staff will take turns presenting each week. No registration required. Dress for the weather. Face covering required.

Welcome New Volunteers!

Gardening - Janet Boomer, Carmen Dunn, Peggy Fear & Susan Shaw

Newsletter Labeling - Diana Olson

Trail Monitor - Christa Carr

Remembering our Volunteers & Staff

John Niederbrach (March 1947 - October 2021)

Millie Xanders (April 1930 - November 2021)

Rodney Washburn (April 1934 - October 2021)

Volunteer Fun & Learning

Ski & Snowshoe Rental Training

Rock Springs Nature Center, Activity Room
Thursday, January 6, 2-3pm

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. 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. RSVP by January 5 at 217-423-7708.



Dates to Remember (cont.)

Owl Prowls

Sand Creek Conservation Area

Saturdays, February 5 & 26, 7-8:30pm

Learn about these forest-dwelling, nocturnal predators. Discuss what makes owls special while we walk to find some. Dress for the weather. Meet at the



entrance to Sand Creek Conservation Area. \$3/ person. Register online by February 4 and 25. Min/Max: 5/30.

Maple Syrup Programs

Rock Springs Conservation Area,

Meet at Information Desk inside Nature Center

Saturday, February 19, 11am, 12pm, & 1pm

Discover how sap becomes syrup, why spring is the best time of the year to harvest sap, and how people used sap throughout history. Free.

Register online by noon on Feb 128 Min/Max: 5/30.



"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

-Dr. Jane Goodall

Volunteer Fun & Learning (cont.)

Behind the Volunteer Scenes: Archaeological Collection

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Wednesday, February 23, 2-3pm

Historic Sites Manager Brent Wielt will speak about what has been found beneath the ground at the Homestead Prairie Farm and how these objects tell us of early life in Macon County. We will view artifacts that have been found during the last few years. If you have an interest in helping with sifting for artifacts, this is a great opportunity to ask questions and see examples of what has been found so far. RSVP by February 22 at 217-423-7708.

Volunteer Herbicide Training

Rock Springs Maintenance Shop

3740 Banton Lane; Decatur, IL 62521

Saturday, February 26, 9am-10am

We invite volunteers interested in assisting with natural area restoration to attend this training. This training will qualify you to use herbicides as volunteers on Conservation District lands. According to the Illinois Pesticide Act, this certification must be renewed each calendar year. This indoor training focuses on using herbicides to control common invasive species, such as bush honeysuckle and autumn olive. Volunteers can stick around after the training and make their own herbicide applicator (kill-stick). MCCD will supply all materials. Please RSVP by February 24 with Ethan Snively at 217-853-3465 or

ESnively@MaconCountyConservation.org.

Early Spring Volunteer Hike

Rock Springs Conservation Area,

West Deck of Nature Center

Wednesday, March 23, 1-2:30pm

Head out to the Big Oak Trail to look for early spring wildflowers like hepatica, dutchman's breeches, and bloodroot. We are sure to see bryophytes, lichens, and fungi too. Meet on the west deck of the Nature Center. Please RSVP by March 22 to



Volunteer Fun & Learning (cont.)

Conducting Prescribed Fires

Rock Springs Maintenance Shop
3740 Banton Lane; Decatur, IL 62521
Saturday, March 12, 8am-12pm
Makeup date: Saturday, March 19, 8am-12pm

This workshop is designed for people who want to learn more about prescribed fire or volunteer to help conduct prescribed fires with the Conservation District. The first hour will be spent inside discussing why and how we use prescribed fire in Central Illinois as a management tool. We will discuss fire weather, fire behavior, burn plans, and burn techniques. The following three hours will be spent outside discussing safety equipment, PPE, ignition devices, hand tools, smoke management, etc. If weather permits we will conduct a small prescribed burn where participants will be able to take part in each role of a burn crew. Participants must be able to hike on uneven terrain and not be bothered by smoke. Participants must wear leather boots, cotton/denim pants (blue jeans), cotton shirt, and non-synthetic hat. MCCD has burn clothes that can be loaned out. Please RSVP by March 10 with Ethan Snively at 217-853-3465 or ESnively@MaconCountyConservation.org.

Volunteer Opportunities

Homestead Prairie Farm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Share the sights, sounds, and textures of 1860 rural Illinois with others. For as little as an hour or two per month, after some training you will feel the gratification of leading tours and programs through this rare pre-Civil War homestead. This volunteer opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver at JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org or 217-423-7708.



Volunteer Opportunities (cont.)

Vintage Base Ball

Macon County Conservation District

The Rock Springs Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Club is recruiting new players for the upcoming season! In vintage base ball, winning is secondary. It's about friendship, having fun, and showing people how base ball was played in the 1860s. You don't even have to be an amazing player to join the team, you only need to enjoy the game. This volunteer opportunity is for guys and gals ages 16 and up. Volunteers must be willing to travel to away games. Games are typically held two Saturdays a month, with a few Sunday games scattered throughout the season. If you have an interest in volunteering with our vintage base ball club, please visit the Ground Squirrels Facebook Page www.facebook.com/GroundSquirrels and message the team or contact Jenny Garver at JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org or 217-423-7708.



Volunteer Gardener

Rock Springs
Conservation Area

Heirloom Gardening:

The Homestead Prairie Farm Heirloom Garden plays a vital role in illustrating life in the 1860s. Macon County Master Gardeners are looking for assistance in maintaining the garden during the 2022 season. Produce harvested from the garden is donated to local food pantries.

Native Plant Gardening: Macon County Master Naturalists are looking for assistance in maintaining the native tier garden in the front of the Nature Center. The tier gardens feature prairie and woodland species that attract a variety of insect life for all to enjoy.

These volunteer opportunities are for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver at 217-423-7708 or JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org

New Staff Spotlight

Susie Ryan, Marketing Specialist



Greetings! Some of you may know me from my time here as a weekend naturalist, before I stepped into the role as the new Marketing Specialist. I am beyond excited and cannot wait to put my talents and ideas to work for the District and discover what exciting opportunities lie ahead!

I began volunteering as the back-up gardener for the native garden at the Nature Center during the summer of 2019 at which point I learned about the weekend naturalist opportunity. Each time I came to work at the Nature Center I felt like I just belonged because I got to come to work for an organization I love, supporting a mission I can get behind 100%, and learn from and collaborate with people who have the same passions as me! I don't call that work at all; that's what I call having fun!

In addition to my botany and biology courses, I graduated in 2010 with a BA in Communication from the University of Illinois, Springfield. Prior to my junior and senior years there, I attended Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield, IL, where I graduated with an Associate of Arts in 2008. I have worked professionally for both Lincoln Land Community College and Ameren Illinois.

In my spare time, I like to sew, weave, read, rock hound, kayak, hike, swim and I am always down for a fun board game or game of cards! I love to travel and spend time laughing with family and friends. Over the years I have volunteered with several organizations including Macon County Conservation District, Christian, Sangamon and Macon County Animal Controls, Meals on Wheels, St. Joseph's Home in Springfield, and I also conduct a MOON Route (Monitoring of Owls and Nightjars) for the Illinois Natural History Survey. I am also a Toastmaster and founded the first Toastmasters club at Ameren.

I look forward to coming to work every day for the MCCD and I invite you to stop by and introduce yourself. I look forward to meeting you!

Volunteer Program Update

Jenny Garver- Volunteer Coordinator

I want to take a moment to say thank you for all that you do. We are still wading through the lingering effects of the pandemic, yet we continue to move forward and make a difference in our community. During the months of January through November, 394 volunteers donated over 6,290 hours. It is amazing to think that these numbers are used when we apply grants and other forms of funding to support conservation efforts. Turning in your volunteer hours truly does make an impact and a difference. If you forgot to turn in some hours, it is not too late to turn them in (JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org or Volunteer Coordinator, Macon County Conservation District, 3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL 62521).

Looking ahead to 2022, we have some volunteer opportunities that need a little extra TLC. It is incredible that we have 28 different ways that volunteers can help out the Conservation District. Unfortunately, the pandemic has hit some areas harder than others. My goal for this coming year is to find more volunteers to help with historical interpretation at the Homestead Prairie Farm, more volunteers interested in playing vintage base ball, and more volunteer musicians participating in the Acoustic Music Jam. Together as a group I hope that you can encourage friends and acquaintances that might be a great fit for these opportunities to join our volunteer team. Together we can help make our volunteer program stronger than it was before COVID-19 entered the picture.

The greatest volunteer need at the moment is historical interpretation at the Homestead Prairie Farm. Volunteers with this opportunity teach children and the public about life in the 1860s. Most children cannot even imagine what life would be like without electricity and technology. During a typical one hour program at the farm, we utilize 2-3 volunteers to teach about the farmhouse, woodshop, farm yard, and the heirloom garden. Children move around from volunteer station to station during field trips. We provide training and period clothing to wear for this volunteer activity.

Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Nature Center Manager

Winter is upon us and cold weather is setting in, a sign that a quieter season is here for the Program Services department. Though programming slows during the winter, there is still plenty to keep us busy.

Jenny has been hard at work developing this winter's Mini Camp Kits, a fun take-home activity geared towards kids aged 1-5. These kits are a great option for those of you with young children in your lives! We have also resumed our weekly Naturalist Chats, which are free, informal programs held on most Tuesdays about a wide variety of topics. We would love to see you at one.

We were pleased to offer the annual Fall Harvest Festival again this year. Thanks to your help, we were able to pull off a successful event with roughly 500 people in attendance. We simply could not do events that size without you!

Work has begun on the new permanent exhibit in the Nature Center. This exhibit will feature a history wall detailing the use of the land we manage today, information about what the District is and why we do what we do, a section about conservation success stories, and even a stewardship area where people can learn how to help conservation efforts at home. This exhibit is possible thanks to a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and will hopefully be ready for a grand opening in early spring. We cannot wait to see the final product!

As the year draws to a close, we look back on the challenges we faced and the things that we are grateful for after a difficult year. We are thankful for the hard work and dedication of you – our volunteers – and look forward to a brighter, happier New Year.

Operations Department Update

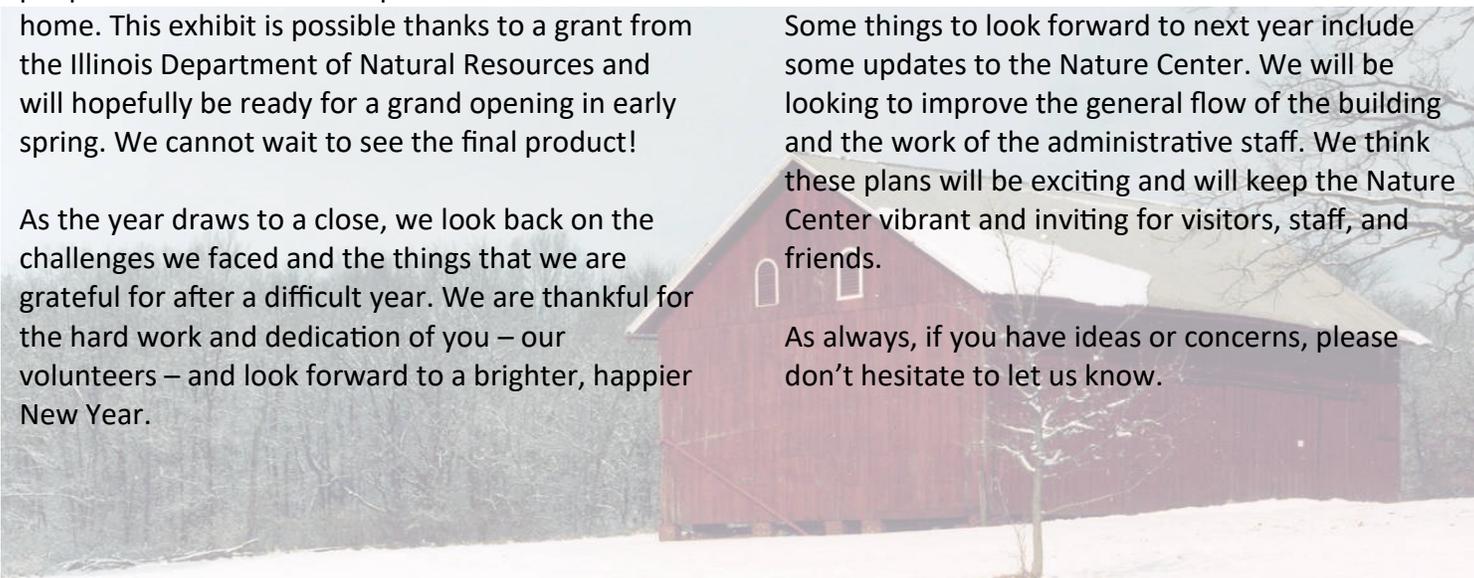
Shane Ravellette - Operations Manager

2021 was a busy year in Operations. Our two major projects have been at Friends Creek. The first project is actually a two part-project wherein we installed new electrical service and lighting in the Picnic Loop. The second part of that project will be the installation and upgrade of electrical service in the campground. We will upgrade about one-third of the sites to 50 amp service and we will finally electrify all the remaining sites. The other major project has been the addition of new office space to the Friends Creek Shop. This shop was the first shop in the District and was in need of more accommodating offices, restrooms, and a breakroom. The shell of the new addition is up and we will be working on the interior in the coming months.

On the Natural Resource side of things, we completed a restoration in the Homestead Prairie at Rock Springs. We removed exotic and invasive trees and shrubs in a waterway on the south side of the prairie. At Sand Creek, we constructed a new mid-sized wetland. Once it fills and we complete the plantings around the edge, it should be a good location for wildlife habitat. Speaking of planting, soon we will be planting almost 50 acres of restored prairie at Sand Creek and Fort Daniel.

Some things to look forward to next year include some updates to the Nature Center. We will be looking to improve the general flow of the building and the work of the administrative staff. We think these plans will be exciting and will keep the Nature Center vibrant and inviting for visitors, staff, and friends.

As always, if you have ideas or concerns, please don't hesitate to let us know.



Winter at the Sand Creek barn

Winter Outdoor Safety

Mitch Ward- Natural Resources Technician

I always like to refer to myself as an “Outside Dog” because I would rather be outdoors doing things regardless of the season or weather. By following some simple guidelines, your winter outdoor experience can be safe and enjoyable.

- Wear multiple layers of clothing, hat, gloves, scarf and boots that are insulated. Water-resistant clothing items are recommended.
- Know the early signs of hypothermia: shivering, exhaustion and fumbling hands.
- Avoid over-exertion. Your blood pressure will increase when exercising or working in cold temperatures which can stress your cardiac system.
- Expect surfaces to be slick in freezing temperatures. A lot of falls happen as people exit their cars or walk out of a building and are caught off guard.
- Prepare your car for winter. It could be your safe haven if things don’t go as planned. Keep your tank at least ½ full, keep extra outer clothes, blanket, snacks and water, and a fully-charged cell phone to go with other safety equipment stored in your car.

Enjoy the outdoors this winter as each season has its own beauty to show us. Be safe by watching for changing and extreme conditions. Always know your own limitations!

Stay Digitally Connected

Visit our website:
MaconCountyConservation.org

Follow Us on Twitter:
[@MCCD_217](https://twitter.com/MCCD_217)

Like Us on Facebook:
[@MaconCountyConservationDistrict](https://www.facebook.com/MaconCountyConservationDistrict)

Join the Volunteer Facebook Group:
[“MCCD Volunteers”](https://www.facebook.com/MCCDVolunteers)

Tidbits of Information

- We are happy to announce that Ashton Nunn was selected as the new Animal Care Naturalist. She started at Rock Springs as the Nature Center Custodian. Congratulations, Ashton!
- Farwell and best wishes Katherine Unruh (Marketing Specialist) and Chuck Hirst (Part-time Naturalist). Katherine has taken a position as the Director of the Hieronymus Mueller Museum and Chuck is enjoying retirement.
- 2022 Volunteer Pocket Calendars have arrived! Drop by the Nature Center to pick-up your calendar.
- Did you enjoy the front cover of the volunteer holiday card? Thank you to Ashton Nunn for creating the artwork for it!
- Have you joined the MCCD Volunteers Facebook group? It is a great way to get up-to-date information, reminders about upcoming volunteer events, and behind the scenes photos. Join the group today!
www.facebook.com/groups/MaconCountyConservationDistrictVolunteers

