

Volunteer Quarterly

January / February / March 2025



3939 Nearing Lane

Decatur, IL 62521

217-423-7708

MaconCountyConservation.org

Dates to Remember

Volunteer Quarterly Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

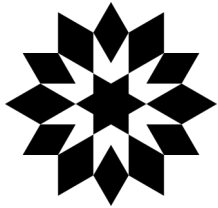
Friday, January 17, 11:30 am - 1 pm

Hear the latest news in educational programming, natural area restoration efforts, foundation projects, and more. Lunch provided. RSVP to Jenny Garver by January 13.



Volunteer Recognition Dinner

Please *Save the Date* for the evening of Wednesday, April 2, 2025.



Rock Springs Quilters

Rock Springs Nature Center

Every Wednesday, 9 - 11 am

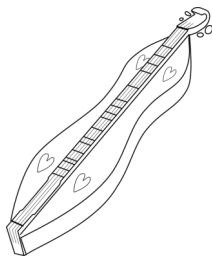
Dulcimer Club

Rock Springs Nature Center

Saturday, January 4 & 18, 10 am

Saturday, February 1 & 15, 10 am

Saturday, March 1, 15, & 29, 10 am



Acoustic Jam Session

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Sunday, January 12, February 9,

& March 9, 2 - 4 pm

Welcome New Volunteers!

Archeology- James Rauff

Special Events- Addison Olivigni and Hal Pohl

Trail monitor- Diana Hall and Saramanda Hall

The More You Know



Prescribed fire, also known as controlled burning, is an essential tool for restoring and maintaining natural habitats at the Macon County Conservation District. This technique involves intentionally setting fires under carefully monitored conditions to replicate the natural processes that support ecosystems.

Since 1978, our staff and volunteers have successfully utilized this restoration method, with the burn season starting in November and continuing through April. Prescribed fire rejuvenates prairies, savannas, and forests by reducing invasive species, recycling nutrients, and promoting the growth of native plants. Additionally, fire creates diverse habitats for wildlife by benefiting species such as the bobwhite quail and the monarch butterfly.

The long-term benefits of prescribed fire are substantial. Healthy, fire-managed ecosystems support biodiversity, improve soil quality, and enhance water filtration. These restored habitats also contribute to carbon sequestration by returning nutrients to the soil, reducing the risk of uncontrolled wildfires, and promoting the growth of fire-adapted native plant species.

By implementing prescribed fire as a restoration strategy, the Conservation District ensures the survival of native ecosystems while fostering sustainable landscapes for future generations.

Dates to Remember

Trip to Starved Rock for Eagle Viewing



Saturdays, January 18, 25, & February 1,
9 am - 6 pm

Take a trip to this popular state park to look for wintering eagles, check out the visitor's center, and visit the lock and dam museum. Bring a lunch or purchase one from the restaurant at Starved Rock. Be prepared to go outside. \$30/person. Volunteers receive a \$15 discount for this trip. Register online by January 17, 24, & 31.

Maple Syrup Programs



Rock Springs Conservation Area
Saturday, February 15, 11 am, noon, & 1 pm

Discover how sap becomes syrup, why spring is the best time of year to harvest sap, and how people used sap throughout history. Registrants will get to sample real maple syrup. \$3/person. Register online by February 14.

Volunteer Fun & Learning

Winter Birds



Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Tuesday, January 14, 2 - 3:30 pm

Many birds migrate to warmer climates in winter, but there are still plenty around during the Illinois winter. Learn about the birds of winter and the Great Backyard Bird Count. This annual count gives everyone a chance to contribute to a long-term data collection project which helps scientists learn more about changes in bird populations. Naturalist Melody Arnold will begin with an indoor presentation, then we will do a little armchair birding at the Window on Wildlife. Those who want can join Melody on a short hike into the woods to look for winter birds. RSVP to Jenny Garver by January 13.

History of the Rock Spring

Bottling Plant and Springhouse



Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Thursday, February 6, 2 - 3 pm

The Rock Spring was a Macon County landmark for generations before it became a conservation area. Unknown to many though is its history as an early tourist attraction and business that sold bottled spring water and its years as a dairy and turkey farm. RSVP to Jenny Garver by February 5.

Volunteer Herbicide Training



Rock Springs Maintenance Shop
3740 Banton Lane; Decatur, IL 62521
Saturday, February 8, 9am - 10am

Are you interested in helping restore natural areas? Join us for herbicide training to become certified to use herbicides as a volunteer on Conservation District lands. This annual certification, required by the Illinois Pesticide Act, focuses on the safe and effective use of herbicides to control invasive species like bush honeysuckle and autumn olive. After the indoor training, volunteers are welcome to stay and create their own herbicide applicator ("kill-stick") using materials provided by the Macon County Conservation District. Please RSVP by February 5 to Mitch Lovgren to reserve your spot.

Volunteer Field Trip



Please meet at the Information Desk
Thursday, March 6, 9 am - 3 pm

Join us for a volunteer field trip to Monticello and Mahomet! We will visit the beautiful Allerton Mansion, where we'll take a guided tour. The mansion does not have an elevator, so participants should be comfortable with walking up and down stairs during our visit. After our tour, we will enjoy lunch at a restaurant along our route. Following lunch, we'll visit the Museum of the Grand Prairie. If the weather permits, we will take some time to explore the lovely grounds at both locations. Lunch is on your own. Space is limited, so be sure to RSVP to Jenny Garver by February 19.

Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Director of Program Services

Fall was a whirlwind, and staff are ready to take a bit of a breather as we move into winter. While this time of year is quiet from a program standpoint, it is busy with planning, prepping, and thinking about next year. Staff are currently busy finalizing their budget proposals for the next fiscal year, as well as thinking about summer camps, spring field trips, and more.



The construction at the Nature Center is ongoing, and the contractors have been making great progress. If you visit us soon, you will notice that concrete work is underway in the outdoor portion, and the indoor portion has made the lower level of the building completely unrecognizable. The Collections Room will be moved downstairs in a few short weeks, and then work will begin upstairs in the current Collections Room location, which will make way for new offices for Nicky, Joy, and I. It is certainly a lot of change, but it is positive change that will open the door to new opportunities here at Rock Springs.

Looking ahead at winter programs, we hope to see you on one of this winter's eagle trips to Starved Rock, or at an upcoming craft program. Don't forget that as a volunteer, you are entitled to discounted programming! Be sure to subscribe to the quarterly Prairie Islander

newsletter so you don't miss any of our upcoming events by visiting our website and scrolling to the bottom of the main page.



Thank you for all of the important work that you do!

Volunteer Holiday Party

Macon County Conservation District sends a heartfelt thank you to everyone who joined us for the Volunteer Holiday Party. With 111 attendees, we collected 126 canned goods and non-perishable items, along with \$21.50 in donations for Northeast Community Fund. Your generosity and kindness are deeply appreciated.

Volunteers from every corner of our community came together, including quilters, musicians, greeters, master gardeners, prairie heritage volunteers, restoration volunteers, trustees, library attendants, volunteer naturalists, trail monitors, and more. Surrounded by great food and even better company, the event reminded us of the incredible blessings we share here at the Conservation District.

Thank you for your generosity and for all that you do. We hope you had a wonderful holiday season, and we're excited to see you at our next Volunteer Quarterly Meeting on January 17!

Remembering Our Volunteers

David Staff

(Feb 1961 - Nov 2024)- photographer

Wilma Thompson

(Mar 1937 - Dec 2024)- desk greeter

Charlesetta Webster

(Mar 1948 - Nov 2024)- nest box monitor

Thank You Volunteers

Jenny Garver - Volunteer Coordinator

Happy New Year! As we enter this new year, I want to take a moment to thank you for everything you accomplished last year. From January through November, 385 volunteers contributed over 9,300 hours. These impressive numbers not only reflect your dedication but also enhance our ability to secure grants and funding for our conservation efforts. Reporting your volunteer hours truly makes a difference; if you've forgotten to submit some, it's not too late!




On September 9, we began adding the Nature Center's library book collection to an online catalog system. I am fortunate to have two amazing volunteers assisting me with this project. As of December 18, we have recorded 819 books into the system, and we hope to complete the project by spring. Once finished, the online catalog will be accessible through the Macon County Conservation District's website, allowing people to view the available titles in our library before visiting the Nature Center. We will continue to check out books using the traditional paper card system.

In 2024, I started emailing out a monthly volunteer update that includes a recap of information from the volunteer newsletter and highlights upcoming volunteer needs. If you haven't received it, please let me know so we can update your email address. This winter, I will be reviewing and updating the volunteer handbook. My goal is to create a version that can be shared

electronically, helping reduce the number of paper copies printed.

Thank you for your hard work and commitment in 2024. We are excited to see what we can accomplish together in 2025!

Tidbits of Information

- **Holiday Closures:** The Rock Springs Offices will be closed from December 24 to January 1. However, the Rock Springs Nature Center will remain open during this time, with at least one staff member on duty, except on the following dates when it will be closed: December 24, December 25, and January 1. Please note that there may be a delay in responses to phone messages and emails during this period.
 - **Staff Office Lines:** Please be aware that staff phone numbers beginning with 217-542-**** are direct office lines. These are traditional corded phones. Please do not send text messages to these phone numbers, as we will not receive them. Thank you!
 - **Pocket Calendars:** Pocket calendars for 2025 are now available! Visit the Nature Center to pick up your calendar.
 - **Volunteer Discount:** Don't forget your volunteer discount! Active volunteers receive a 50% discount for off-site public trips priced at \$25 or less and a \$15 discount for trips priced above \$25.
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- **Volunteer Hats:** The newly designed volunteer hats arrived in October. Volunteers can receive one hat while supplies last. Please contact Jenny Garver to arrange a pick-up time in advance of arriving to the Nature Center.

Volunteer Opportunities

Undecorate the Halls

Rock Springs Nature Center
Friday, January 3, 10 - 11 am



The holiday season has come to an end, and we need your help to pack it away! Join us at the Nature Center as we carefully take down the festive decorations and store them for next year. This is a great way to lend a hand and help us prepare for the seasons ahead. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by January 2.



Heirloom Gardener

Homestead Prairie Farm

Step back in time and help bring history to life! The heirloom garden at Homestead Prairie Farm grows historic plant varieties, offering a fascinating glimpse into everyday life in the 1860s. Master Gardeners are looking for passionate volunteers to assist with garden maintenance throughout the 2025 season. Your efforts won't just preserve history—they'll also support our community! During the 2024 season, an incredible **320.5 pounds** of produce was donated to Good Samaritan, Northeast Community Fund, God's Shelter of Love, and Salvation Army. Wow! Volunteers ages 18 and up are welcome to join this meaningful project. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.

Cross Country Ski Rental



Rock Springs Nature Center

Do you love winter fun and enjoy helping others? When there's 4+ inches of snow on the ground, the public can rent cross-country skis and snowshoes from Rock Springs Nature Center. We're looking for enthusiastic volunteers to join our call list and assist staff with rental equipment during these snowy days. No experience? No problem! We'll provide training on the day you volunteer. Volunteers ages 18 and up are welcome. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.

Native Plant Gardener

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Are you passionate about native plants and supporting pollinators? Macon County Master Naturalists are seeking volunteers to help maintain the beautiful, tiered garden at Rock Springs Nature Center. This garden showcases prairie and woodland species that attract a vibrant array of insect life, creating a stunning and educational space for everyone to enjoy. Join us for the **Annual Native Garden Meeting on January 23, 2025**, from **10:00–11:30 am** in the Nature Center Auditorium to learn more about this exciting project and how you can get involved. Volunteers ages 18 and up are welcome to join this rewarding effort to nurture native plants and promote biodiversity. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.



Operations Update

Phil Julius - Director of Operations

The Operations crew assembled and put the finishing touches on the timber frame pavilion they have been working on all summer at Friends Creek Conservation Area. The pavilion is at the group camp site. This project was completed by the District's own staff and with timber harvested from District trees. The Operations crew did a great job with the Friends Creek staff leading the way. If you get the opportunity to get up to Friends Creek, take a few minutes to check out the new pavilion. Also, if you run into any Operations staff let them know that they did a great job on this structure.



The Natural Resource department received a new skid steer with a forestry mower attachment. They took it straight off the delivery trailer and into the field to do forestry mowing. They are working on portions of Rock Springs mowing down bush honeysuckle and autumn

olive. The Sand Creek crew has also been forestry mowing on the edges of a new restoration site on the south side of Sand Creek.

Operations staff also took advantage of the warmer fall temperatures which allowed the bush honeysuckle to keep its leaves as most other plants went dormant. This allowed staff to use mist blowers to spray the honeysuckle with herbicide. This allows us to kill the bush honeysuckle but not the other plants around it. Yet another tool staff can use in the fight against invasives.

That's all for now from Operations. Keep warm this winter.

Volunteers in Action



In October, several volunteers participated in the Fall Hike Series. We had a wonderful time exploring our conservation areas. Our last hike took place at Sand Creek Conservation Area, where we had the chance to see the new stepping stones at Walnut Ford. It made for a great photo op!

To RSVP or Contact Staff In This Issue

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