

Volunteer Quarterly

October/November/December 2024



3939 Nearing Lane

Decatur, IL 62521

217-423-7708

MaconCountyConservation.org

Dates to Remember

Volunteer Quarterly Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Tuesday, October 29, 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 October 23.

Volunteer Holiday Party

St Paul's Lutheran Church

Tuesday, December 10, 12 pm

Celebrate the holidays with us. Holiday Party invitations with more information will be mailed in late October. Until then, save the date!



Rock Springs Quilters

Rock Springs Nature Center

Every Wednesday, 9 - 11 am

Dulcimer Club

Rock Springs Nature Center

Saturday, October 12 & 26, 10 am

Saturday, November 9 & 23, 10 am

Saturday, December 7 & 21, 10 am



Acoustic Jam Session

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Sunday, October 13, November 10,

& December 8, 2 - 4 pm

The More You Know

Brent Wielt- Historic Sites Manager



Rock Springs got its name from the Rock Spring, a spring literally under an outcrop of rock. It is on a hillside on the south bank of the Sangamon River. Located near the Wyckles Road bridge, it is close to the southwestern corner of Rock Springs Conservation Area. It was a popular spot for fishing, picnics, and excursions by local residents for many years before being purchased by the Macon County Conservation District. The spring still flows, but it is enclosed by the springhouse, a stone and concrete structure. Next to it stands the larger concrete bottling plant where spring water was put into bottles and sold locally before World War One. You can take the River Trail to the site, but due to the steep riverbank on which the building sits, it may be difficult for everyone to see all sides of the structure. It would be a great hike destination this fall to see the leaves turn colors.

Would you like to learn more? Please join us for a free history program to learn about the spring, springhouse, bottling plant, and the former Rock Spring Farm. It will be held on Sunday, November 3 at 2 pm inside the Rock Springs Nature Center. Several rarely seen historic photographs will be featured in the program.

Thank You Volunteers

Jenny Garver - Volunteer Coordinator

Thank you for your valuable contribution! From January to August, 349 volunteers have collectively dedicated over 6,640 hours. Notable groups that have been actively involved in the past few months include volunteers for the summer camp and vintage baseball. If you haven't submitted your hours yet, you still have time to do so. You can submit your hours by mail, drop them off at the Nature Center, or email them to Jenny Garver.

Our Volunteers Are Amazing!

Looking ahead, the Rock Springs Nature Center Library collection will be transitioning to an online card catalog system over the next four to six months. Once completed, the online card catalog will be accessible through the Macon County Conservation District's website. A big thank you to the volunteers who are assisting with this library project. In the upcoming months, I will also be updating the Volunteer Handbook. The newest edition of the handbook is expected to be released sometime this spring and will be available in both paper and digital formats.

Do you have any ideas for future volunteer events focused on fun and learning? Please feel free to share your ideas with Jenny Garver. We are excited to hear about the nature and history subjects you would like to explore.

Remembering Our Volunteers

Pauline Conyer (Jan 1938 – June 2024)- desk

Mary Nelson (Sept 1924 – July 2024)- desk

Imogene Shepherd (Feb 1931 – Sept 2024)

- dulcimer club

Wanda Stickles (Aug 1929 – Aug 2024)- quilter

Volunteer Fun & Learning

Fall Volunteer Hikes

Tuesday, October 1, 10 am- Fort Daniel

Monday, October 7, 1 pm- Rock Springs

Thursday, October 17, 11 am- Griswold

Saturday, October 26, 2 pm- Friends Creek

Wednesday, October 30, 12 pm- Sand Creek



Join us at each location for an educational walk to stretch your legs and learn something new. Dress for the weather. Please RSVP to Jenny Garver at least one day in advance to receive any weather and location change updates.

Geology of Macon County Tour

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Wednesday, November 6, 9 am -1 pm

We will explore the land beneath our feet with Naturalist Melody Arnold. First, learn the story of the glaciers in Illinois with an introductory presentation. Then travel the back roads to look for clues that the glaciers



were really here. Dress for short periods outside as we visit geologically interesting areas. Snacks will be provided. RSVP to Jenny Garver by November 4.



Behind the Scenes at the Nature Center

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Thursday, December 19, 1 -3 pm

Join us to have a look behind the scenes at Rock Springs Nature Center. We will explore the building, meet some animals, learn some history, and more. RSVP to Jenny Garver by December 17.

Dates to Remember

Fall Harvest Festival

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Saturday, October 12, 1- 4 pm

Celebrate fall at Rock Springs Nature Center with fall-themed activities including archery, canoeing, pumpkin painting, wagon rides, tours at Homestead Prairie Farm, and more. Archery and canoeing are \$3 per person, pumpkin painting is \$5 per person, and all other events are free. The Macon County Conservation Foundation will also have a concession stand with snacks for purchase. No registration required.



Candlelight Tour

Rock Springs Conservation Area,

Homestead Prairie Farm

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

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. Free. No registration required.

Christmas Tea

Oglesby Mansion, 421 W William St, Decatur

Sunday, December 1, 1 - 4 pm

Stop by the Governor Oglesby Mansion to enjoy a traditional Christmas afternoon tea. Experience this historic Victorian home all decked out for the holidays. Refreshments will be served. A \$5 donation per adult and \$2 per child is requested. No reservations necessary.

Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Director of Program Services

What a busy summer! With five summer camps and dozens of library programs, Program Services staff had no shortage of things to do this summer. We are grateful for such a busy, prosperous summer and look forward to a bit of a breather as we head into the fall.

Upcoming special events include Fall Harvest Festival, a new Treat Trail event, and Candlelight Tour. Many of these events can only happen with help from our wonderful volunteers, so please reach out to Jenny if you have an interest in helping!

One big change within our department that will also affect you, is that we are switching to a primarily digital District newsletter. The *Prairie Islander*, the District's quarterly publication, has been hitting mailboxes for decades and is a great source of information on upcoming events and goings-on at the District. However, as prices inflate and our readership grows, the cost to mail the newsletter has become substantial. Additionally, as a Conservation District, we feel we can reduce our carbon footprint a bit by using less paper to mail a physical copy and switching instead to a paperless version. Don't fret, though – you can still get a paper copy if that's your preference! We will have a limited number of paper copies available at the Nature Center for anyone who would like to pick one up. We appreciate your understanding as we begin this transition.

As always, thank you so much for all that you do for the District. We are lucky to have such a dedicated volunteer base!



Tidbits of Information

- **Nature Center Closures:** Rock Springs Nature Center will be closed on Thanksgiving (November 28), Christmas Eve (December 24), and Christmas Day (December 25). Enjoy your holidays!
- **Volunteer Hats:** A huge thank you to volunteer Felicity Hunt for designing new volunteer hats. A limited number of baseball hats have been ordered - one hat per volunteer while supplies last.



- **Staff Office Lines:** Please note that staff phone numbers starting with 217-542-**** are direct office lines. These are old-fashioned phones that still have cords. Please do not send a text to these phone numbers; we will not receive your message.
- **Food Allergy & Intolerance Questionnaire:** If you have a food allergy or intolerance that you would like us to take into consideration for volunteer events that include food, please take a few moments to fill out this optional questionnaire: <https://forms.gle/cgo1cMS7VRKgotKD7> The Macon County Conservation District cannot guarantee that certain foods will be avoided, but we can try to accommodate allergies and intolerances within reason. You are always welcome to bring along your own meal or snacks, if you feel more comfortable doing so.
- **Facebook Group:** 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



- **Carolyn Mason Scholarship Fund & Master Naturalist Training:** This fund was created in memory of Carolyn Mason and her enthusiasm and love for preserving natural areas. She volunteered at the Macon County Conservation District and selflessly shared her knowledge and time as the steward at the Leiby Hall Conservation Area, working to eradicate exotic plants so the native species had a chance to thrive. This scholarship fund, founded in 2015, provides an opportunity for individuals to share in Carolyn's endeavor to preserve the natural areas and give native species a chance to thrive. The scholarship fund is open to any Macon County Conservation District Staff or Volunteer to enroll in the Master Naturalist Program held by the University of Illinois Extension Office for Macon, Piatt, and DeWitt counties. Three Scholarships are awarded each session, providing \$100 toward the enrollment fee and is awarded upon completion of the program. Interested individuals should complete a scholarship form and submit it to the Administration Offices at Rock Springs Nature Center before registering for classes. The Master Naturalist classes will begin January 7, 2025, and run for 12 weeks on Tuesday nights, 6-9 pm with three Saturday field trips. The fee is \$150. If interested in enrolling in the class, please contact Stephanie Hale by calling 217-877-6042 or by email at



Welcome New Volunteers!

Archeology- Betty Mahnke, Jim Rauff

Dulcimer Club- Charles Davis

Master Gardener- Abby Wilson

Trail Monitor- Tristian Blakenship, Paul Hadfield, Annette Russo, Greg Tucker, Debbie Slayton-Czerwinski

Volunteer Opportunities



Archaeology & Artifacts

Homestead Prairie Farm

We are looking for volunteers to help screen through dirt for artifacts from an excavation under the farmhouse. This opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Brent Wielt.

Nature Center Greeter

Rock Springs Nature Center

Greeters are an essential part of the Nature Center team. Volunteers greet the public, answer simple questions, and assist staff members with projects. Training is provided. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.



Fall Harvest Festival

Rock Springs Conservation Area
Saturday, October 12, 1 - 4 pm

Volunteers are needed to help in a variety of areas during this annual event. Volunteer opportunities include archery, canoeing, games, crafts, Homestead Prairie Farm tours, pumpkin painting, photography, and more. This opportunity is for ages 13 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by October 7.



Treat Trail

Rock Springs Conservation Area
Saturday, October 19, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

New this year! We are looking for volunteers to help with greeting, check-in, snacks, and treat stations. This opportunity is for ages 16 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by October 14.



Native Garden Workday

Rock Springs Conservation Area
Thursday, October 24, 9 - 10 am

Macon County Master Naturalists are looking for assistance maintaining the native tier garden in front of the Nature Center. Volunteers are asked to bring along their own tools: work gloves, hand trowel, shovel, bucket, and hand pruners. The tiered garden features native prairie and woodland species that attract a variety of insect life for all to enjoy. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. RSVP to either Jenny Garver or head gardener Linda (lindasuehendricks@gmail.com) by October 23 so we know who to expect.



Candlelight Tour

Rock Springs Conservation Area,
Homestead Prairie Farm
Saturday, November 9, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Help bring Homestead Prairie Farm to life during this fun evening event. We could use volunteers for an hour or two to set out and pick up lanterns, greet visitors in the parking lot, and tend the campfire along with giving tours in the farmhouse. Volunteers will need to dress for the weather as most will be outside most of the evening. Several opportunities do not require any history knowledge. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Brent Wielt by November 13.



Holiday Decorating

Rock Springs Nature Center
Tuesday, December 3, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm

We are looking for some jolly elves to help decorate the Nature Center for the holidays. Volunteers will assist in decorating a holiday tree, wreaths, and the area around the Information Desk. Lunch and laughter will be provided. This opportunity is for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by November 26.



Operations Update

Phil Julius - Director of Operations

The Operations department has been very busy keeping up with ground maintenance, herbicide treatment of invasives, farm site cleanup, and milling wood for a timber frame pavilion. Turf mowing has been an endless battle this growing season with all the rain we have had this summer. The Operations staff have done a great job keeping all facilities looking nice for summer activities and events at all locations.

Invasive plants are always something of concern. The Natural Resource crew and other staff have spent many hours using herbicide to reduce and eliminate many of the invasive plants at several locations. Some of these species include sericea lespedeza, teasel, crown vetch, autumn olive, and bush honeysuckle. Natural Resources and Operations staff have worked hard for about six weeks on cleaning up a farm site on the north end of Friends Creek. They removed some old buildings and dug up a mountain of concrete. We hope to find a way to get the concrete ground up so we can reuse the material to maintain roads and parking lots. The cleanup is nearing completion and restoration work can begin to return native plants to this location.

Finally, several staff have been involved with milling, measuring, cutting, drilling, boring, and chiseling beams and posts for a new timber frame pavilion. This has also been a project that has taken several weeks and has several to go.

Staff are hopeful to get the pavilion erected this fall at the group campsite at Friends Creek.



Currently there is no structure at the group camp, and this will be a huge benefit to this site. We anticipate group camp use to increase drastically. I want to mention that all the beams and posts came from trees harvested on District property.

That's all from Operations. Have a great fall.

Volunteers in Action



Master Gardeners take care of the Homestead Prairie Farm heirloom garden and provide educational opportunities during many special events through the year. This photo was captured during Independence Day 1860 on June 29.

To RSVP or Contact Staff In This Issue

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