

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-19.

Weekly Naturalist Chats

Rock Springs Nature Center, West Lawn,
1st & 3rd Tuesdays of April & May, 10am
2nd & 4th Tuesdays of April & May, 2pm

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



Cross Country Classics Concert

Rock Springs Conservation Area, Pavilion 2
Thursdays, April 1, May 6, & June 3, 6pm

Bluegrass Music Jam

Rock Springs Conservation Area, Pavilion 2
Sundays, April 11, May 9 & June 13, 1-4pm

Vintage Base Ball

Rock Springs Conservation Area
Beautiful Trobaugh Field

Saturday, May 1, 1-4pm
Rock Springs Ground Squirrels
vs. McLean County Prairie Chickens

Saturday, June 26, 12-3pm
Rock Springs Ground Squirrels vs. St. Charles
Explorers and St. Louis Perfectos



Welcome New Volunteers!

Bluebird Monitors - Charles Jarvis and Karen Penn
Gardeners - Baylee McLaughlin and Jean Schaffner
Trail Monitor - Adam Phelps, Teresa Starbuck,
and Lonnie Williams

Thank You Volunteers

Jenny Garver - Volunteer Coordinator

In 2020, 264 volunteers donated over 3,500 hours of time. I think that is pretty impressive if you factor in that the volunteer program was suspended for 2-1/2 months, then brought back in a limited capacity for the remaining seven months. Due to the pandemic, this year is off to a slow start: during January and February, 48 volunteers donated 126 hours. Thank you for your time, talents, and dedication!

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month. We have two appreciation events scheduled in the coming months.

#1- Volunteer Goodie Month will be in April. Drop by the Information Desk to pick up a little goodie as our token of appreciation for all that you do. Limit one goodie per volunteer.

#2- The 40th Annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner will tentatively occur on Tuesday, August 3. Traditionally this event happens every April. This year we have delayed the event until the end of summer. We have our fingers and toes crossed and hope that COVID-19 won't cancel the event again. This year we will honor 21 volunteers for their service. Awards are given for every 4 years of active service.

*“There is no ‘I’ in team,
but we sure are glad there
is ‘u’ in volunteers!”*

—Unknown

Dates to Remember (cont.)

Festival of Spring

Virtual via Facebook LIVE and
In-Person at Rock Springs Conservation Area
Saturday, April 24, 8am-4pm

Celebrate Earth Day with a day of in-person and virtual activities! Learn about bird banding on our Facebook page or register to attend in-person. At Rock Springs, families and adults can enjoy naturalist-led hikes, and children can collect take home activities from local organizations that protect water and wildlife. You may also pre-register online to attend an in-person Birds of Prey show by the Illinois Raptor Center. Free. Register online by April 23 for in-person bird banding and in-person Birds of Prey show. No registration required for other activities. See the full list of activities and times at MaconCountyConservation.org. Co-sponsored by Decatur Audubon Society.



Independence Day 1860

Rock Springs Conservation Area,
Homestead Prairie Farm
Saturday, June 26, 1-4pm

Enjoy an Independence Day celebration 1860s style. Tour Homestead Prairie Farm, watch a vintage rules base ball game, and enjoy a period music concert. Visitors are welcome to bring their own lunch basket and lawn chairs for a picnic and concert on the lawn or ball field. Free. No registration required. Admission is free.



Volunteer Fun & Learning

Spring Volunteer Hikes

Monday, April 12, 12pm at Sand Creek
Tuesday, April 20, 1pm at Rock Springs
Wednesday, April 28, 11am at Friends Creek
Thursday, May 6, 10am at Griswold
Friday, May 14, 9am at Fort Daniel

Learn a bit more about the different Conservation Areas while looking for flora and fauna. Volunteers should wear a face mask, and meet staff at the selected



Conservation Area. We will socially distance when possible. We would appreciate RSVPs, but that is not necessary. If you do register, we will watch for you and can contact you if the volunteer hike is canceled due to weather. To RSVP for one or more hikes contact Jenny Garver (217-423-7708 or JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org).



Bluebells



Spring beauties



Dutchman's breeches



Mayapple

Volunteer Opportunities

Sangamon River Clean-Up

Rock Springs Conservation Area,
Meet at Wyckles Road Canoe Launch
Saturday, April 24, 10am-12pm

Make the river a safer and more beautiful place by clearing trash from its banks. Dress to get dirty and bring your own gloves. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or with your whole family.



Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance, so we can accommodate your group. All others must pre-register online by April 23. Co-sponsored by Community Environmental Council.

Homestead Prairie Farm

Rock Springs Conservation Area
Saturdays & Sundays, June
through October, 1-4pm

Share the sights, sounds, and textures of 1860 rural Illinois with visitors. For as little as an hour or two a month, after some training, you can feel the gratification of leading tours and programs at this rare pre-Civil War homestead. This volunteer opportunity is for all ages. For more information, contact Brent Wielt (217-423-7708 or BWielt@MaconCountyConservation.org).



Archaeology & Artifacts

Homestead Prairie Farm

We unearthed a rare archaeology volunteer opportunity! We are looking for help screening through dirt for artifacts from the 2018 excavation under the farmhouse. For ages 13 and up. For more information, or to sign up, contact Brent Wielt (217-423-7708 or BWielt@MaconCountyConservation.org).



Vintage Base Ball

Home Games at Rock Springs Conservation Area,
Away Games held regionally

The Rock Springs Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Club is recruiting new players for this season! Vintage base ball attracts both men and women for its slower pace, unique rules, showmanship, civility, and good sportsmanship. It's all about having fun and showing people how baseball was played in the 1860s. Games are typically held two Saturdays a month, with a few Sunday games scattered throughout the season. Volunteers must be willing to travel to away games. This volunteer opportunity is for ages 16 and up. For more information or to sign up, message the team on their Facebook Page, www.facebook.com/GroundSquirrels, or contact Jenny Garver (217-423-7708 or JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org).



Volunteer Gardener

Rock Springs
Conservation Area

Heirloom Gardening:

The Heirloom Garden at Homestead Prairie Farm plays a vital role in illustrating life in the 1860s. Macon County Master Gardeners are looking for assistance in maintaining the garden in 2021. 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 Plant Tier Garden in front of Rock Springs Nature Center. This tier garden contains native prairie and woodland species. Children and adults enjoy watching the caterpillars and butterflies that frequent the garden.

Both of these volunteer opportunities are for ages 18 and up. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver (217-423-7708 or JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org).

Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Nature Center Manager

What a year it's been! While the past 12 months haven't gone exactly to plan, Program Services has plugged along and adapted. Over the past few months, staff worked on several projects. Brock, Brent, and I developed some virtual programs, some of which are still available on the District's Facebook page. Jenny created new Mini Camp kits to reach small children and their families during the pandemic. Beth and Chuck worked on displays and animal enclosures, and Ashton has been integral to keeping the Nature Center clean and sanitized.

We recently finished a new exhibit in the North Exhibit Hall called *More than Corn: Investigating Illinois' Unique Geology*. This exhibit contains a ton of information on interesting and beautiful ecosystems, geological features throughout the state, and where to go to visit them yourself. We've also started holding weekly Naturalist Chats every Tuesday, and we'd love to see you at one.

We've also been planning for the future. On April 24 we will hold the annual Festival of Spring, though it will look different this year. Due to COVID-19, we will hold a scaled-down version of the event but will still offer fun activities like hikes, bird banding, and a Birds of Prey show from the Illinois Raptor Center. Visit the website for information.

This summer we plan to hold the Summer Concert Series again, and we are developing a Summer Camp program that complies with Illinois' COVID-19 guidelines. While things are not yet 'normal', we are working to get as close as we can. Thank you for working with us through the changing COVID-19 guidelines. We hope to have you all back very soon.

Operations Update

Shane Ravellette - Operations Manager

As we move into spring, the Operations staff will be making the final push to finish the Cattail Pond project. The western-most deck will have a small roofed area which will allow people fishing a place to move out of the sun or rain. Next to it will be an accessible canoe and kayak floating dock. The east

side deck will be more elevated above the water and is intended to serve more as a wildlife observation location.



The majority of our focus this year will be at Friends Creek. We plan to upgrade to the

campground and picnic area electrical systems. We would like to improve the lighting on the picnic loop by adding some low, downward-casting pathway lighting which will provide lighted space for evening walks, but will not impact star gazing. Also in the picnic loop area, we are in the early design stages of building a small fishing pond. At the shop, we are also looking to improve the office spaces and add some covered, exterior storage.

At the new addition to Fort Daniel, our newest prairie planting will be starting to grow. It will take at least a few years before it will mature, but we will begin to see how successful the planting was from last December.



Staff and volunteers set out to seed 24 acres recently added to Fort Daniel Conservation Area

COVID-19 Volunteer Program Spring Update

Here is the status of the volunteer program as of March 24. Opportunities and statuses may change as COVID mitigations and phases fluctuate in our area.

Volunteer Activities Allowed

Outdoor Individualized volunteer opportunities

Bluebird Monitors, Photography, and Trail Monitors

Outdoor large group volunteer opportunities

Cross Country Classics and Music Jam

Outdoor social distancing modified opportunities

Archaeology, Gardening, Homestead Prairie Farm, Natural Resources, Volunteer Naturalists

Limited Indoor volunteer opportunities

Nature Center Greeter

Volunteer Activities Suspended

Bethel School, Dulcimer Club, Newsletter Labeling, Quilters, and Summer Camp Volunteers

Don't Forget

- Only volunteer if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Continue to practice social distancing of at least 6 feet from people outside of your family unit.
- Wear a mask when maintaining 6 feet is not possible, when inside the Nature Center, and when interacting with the public.



Volunteers in Action: Volunteer gardeners prepare the native tier gardens around Rock Springs Nature Center for spring plants in March.

Note from the Director

Richie Wolf - Executive Director

I hope this newsletter finds you well. It has been a memorable start to the year. We received two large snow events, and cold temperatures allowed for cross country ski rentals. Operations was kept quite busy removing snow to keep the sidewalks and roads safe for visitors. Program Services did a great job of creating virtual programs and curbside pick-up activity bags. The Administration team continued their excellent customer service with an influx of camping reservations. As we enter the spring season, we look towards warm weather, more in-person programming, and catching up with you. Thank you so much for your service!

Stay Digitally Connected

Visit our website:

MaconCountyConservation.org

Like Us on Facebook:

[@MaconCountyConservationDistrict](https://www.facebook.com/MaconCountyConservationDistrict)

Follow Us on Twitter:

[@MCCD_217](https://twitter.com/MCCD_217)

Join the Volunteer Facebook Group:
"MCCD Volunteers"

Remembering Our Volunteers

Jim Baldwin (1955 – December 2020)
Lee Blair (February 1938 – December 2020)
Steve Coogan (November 1948 – February 2021)

Volunteer Spotlight: Marilyn Oftedal

Brock Rowland - Senior Program Naturalist

Gardener Marilyn Oftedal has been volunteering for the District since spring 2010. Wanting to give back to her community, Marilyn volunteers for many wonderful organizations and programs, including driving for Meals on Wheels, the Babes program run by Dove, the storybook prison program, and offers her assistance to her church. Talk about busy! Volunteering isn't the only hobby she's interested in though. She also likes to spend time cooking, sewing, traveling, and gardening at home.



Growing up on a farm in Northern Illinois, Marilyn has always been fond of nature. After she became a Master Gardener, she knew the Homestead Prairie Farm garden was calling her name. Rock Springs plays a special part in her history as it is one of her favorite places to be. From the tranquility of the pine forest to walking along the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail, she always finds something remarkable when she's surrounded by the wonders of nature.

Her favorite volunteer story: "It has to be last spring when everything shut down due to COVID-19. No one was able to work in the garden for such a long time, but late in the spring we finally got the go-ahead to start working in the garden again! Although it was a late start we masked-up, distanced ourselves, and started getting to work. Some of the weeds were as tall as I was!" Marilyn exclaimed. "Some hikers came past us very excited to see what was happening and commented on how happy they were to know there would be a garden again. There are always visitors and new people to meet. Feeling like I can bring a smile to someone's face and make their day just a little bit better is what volunteering is all about for me."

Thank you, Marilyn, for all of the hard work you do. Without great people like you who volunteer in our community, our District wouldn't be the same.

Tidbits of Information

- Dates are set for the Fall 2021 Master Naturalist Classes. If you are interested in becoming a Master Naturalist, please contact the U of I Extension Office at 217-877-6042. Classes will be Tuesday nights from 6-9pm starting September 7, with some Saturday field trips. Course fee is \$150.
- Stop by the Nature Center if you need a 2021 pocket calendar or volunteer t-shirt (adult sizes).
- The District was awarded a Carolyn Mason Master Naturalist Scholarship to help fund District volunteers and/or staff entering the University of Illinois' Extension Master Naturalist Program. The scholarship awards \$100 to three individuals upon completion of the 11 week program. Contact the District at 217-423-7708 if you're interested in applying for the scholarship.
- We would like to welcome Daniel Mendoza. He started as the new Natural Resources Intern in March.



"Volunteers are paid in six figures . . . S-M-I-L-E-S."

—Gayla LeMaire