Volunteer Quarterly

October / November / December 2026

Macon County Conservation District

3939 Nearing Lane
Decatur, IL 62521
217-423-7708
MaconCCD.org

Dates to Remember

Volunteer Quarterly Meeting



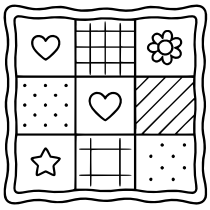
Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Thursday, October 29, 11:30 am – 1 pm
Hear the latest news in educational programming, natural area restoration efforts, and more. Lunch provided. RSVP to Jenny Garver by October 17.



Volunteer Holiday Party

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Thursday, December 10, 12 pm
Celebrate the holidays with us. Holiday Party invitations with more information will be mailed in early November. 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 10 & 24, 10 am
Saturday, November 7 & 21, 10 am
Saturday, December 5 & 19, 10 am

Acoustic Jam Session



Rock Springs Nature Center
Sunday, October 11, November 8, & December 13, 2 – 4 pm

Candlelight Tour



Rock Springs Conservation Area, Homestead Prairie Farm
Saturday, November 14, 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 6, 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.

Welcome New Volunteers!

Camps- Rob Eytchison
Historic Sites Tour Guide- Krista Livingston
Native Garden Crew- Diane Dobbs, Cairo Williamson
Nature Center Greeter- Jenn Bell, Mary Gensler, Belinda Mays, Alex McCrady, Onyx Senczysen
Seed Collection Crew- Krista Hoppe, Shaylee Owen
Trail Monitor- Mike Miller
Quilter- Sue Byers



Volunteers in Action: On September 5, nineteen volunteers joined us for a seed collection day at Fort Daniel Conservation Area. Together, we collected seeds from approximately seven different species of native prairie plants. The seeds will be cleaned this winter and used in future prairie restoration projects. Thank you to everyone who came out to help!

Volunteer Program Update

Jenny Garver, CVA - Volunteer Coordinator

Thank you for your contribution! From January to August, 453 volunteers have dedicated over 7,000 hours of service. Opportunities that have been more active in the past few months include summer camps, concession stand, and vintage base ball. We are so thankful for the volunteers who help with these seasonal opportunities. If you haven't submitted your hours yet, you still have time to do so. You may send them by mail, drop them off at the Nature Center, or email them to Jenny Garver.

Now that the busyness of summer has settled down, I'm returning to the volunteer position description project we started earlier this year. Think of a position description as a simple roadmap. It lets volunteers know what they'll be doing, what is expected of them, and who they can go to for help. Position descriptions also help us share volunteer opportunities so potential volunteers can learn more about a role and find one that is a good fit for them.

It has been a rewarding year, with volunteers taking on many different projects throughout our Conservation Areas. Highlights include Hal P. building a new wooden garden gate at the Homestead Prairie Farm garden, Jim S. removing invasive species along Price Street near the Rock Springs–Scovill West bike trail extension, and John W. mapping and photographing memorial bench locations throughout our Conservation Areas. We are grateful for the time and care our volunteers bring to these projects!



No matter how you choose to help, thank you for being an important part of our volunteer team. Your time, talents, and dedication make a difference!

Volunteer Fun & Learning

Fall Volunteer Hikes

Friday, October 2, 2 pm- Friends Creek
Wednesday, October 7, 12 pm- Rock Springs
Thursday, October 15, 11 am- Sand Creek
Monday, October 19, 10 am- Griswold
Tuesday, October 27, 1 pm- Fort Daniel
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.

Nest Box Monitoring Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center, Washburn Classroom
Saturday, October 24, 2 – 4 pm
or Sunday, October 25, 2 – 4 pm
Nest Box Monitors are invited to attend either session to share successes and challenges from the past nesting season and discuss needs and plans for the year ahead. Anyone interested in learning more about nest box monitoring is also welcome to join us! Please RSVP to Jenny Garver by October 22.





Why We Count

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Friday, November 20, 2 pm
Bird counts are among the oldest community science projects, beginning with the first Christmas Bird Count in 1900. This program, led by Naturalist Melody Arnold, explores the history of bird counts and the many ways bird populations are monitored by amateur naturalists. As our environment—and the environment birds depend on—continues to change, these efforts are increasingly important. The program will also highlight several environmental changes that have been documented through long-term bird monitoring. Please RSVP to Jenny Garver by November 18.

Volunteer Fun & Learning

Historic Sites of MCCD

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium
Tuesday, December 15, 2 – 3 pm
Brent Wielt, Historic Sites Manager, will shine a light on several historic locations owned by the Conservation District, including the Homestead Prairie Farm, Rock Springs Bottling Plant, Paris-Springfield Road, Historic Woodbine Farm, Bethel School, and Governor Oglesby Mansion, as well as some lesser-known historic tidbits. Please RSVP to Jenny Garver by December 11.

Volunteer Opportunities

Invasive Species Workday



Rock Springs Conservation Area, Homestead Prairie Farm
Friday, October 9, 3 – 5 pm
Help us improve the area around Homestead Prairie Farm by removing invasive bush honeysuckle and other problem species! Volunteers will work alongside natural resources staff to cut shrubs, helping improve the appearance of the area while creating more space for native plants to thrive. Be prepared to walk over uneven terrain and get a little dirty. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes. Tools and gloves will be provided. Interested in becoming a Volunteer Steward and helping lead future workdays at District sites? This workday is a great opportunity to learn more about natural resource stewardship and see what is involved in leading these types of projects. Additional training and opportunities to work alongside and observe Natural Resources staff will be available for those interested in becoming a Volunteer Steward. Contact Mitch Lovgren by October 6 to RSVP.

Native Garden Workdays



Rock Springs Conservation Area
Thursday, October 22, 9 am
November, TBA
It's time to tidy up the garden for the end of the season. Volunteers are encouraged to bring their own tools, including work gloves, a bucket, and hand pruners. Please RSVP to Jenny Garver or Melody Arnold (melody2a@hotmail.com) at least one day in advance so we know who to expect.

Volunteer Opportunities

Treat Trail



Rock Springs Conservation Area
Friday, October 16, 5 – 8 pm
Saturday, October 17, 5 – 8 pm
Join us for the third annual Treat Trail! We're looking for friendly volunteers to help make this family-favorite event a success. Opportunities include greeting visitors in the parking lot, assisting at the check-in or snack stations, helping guide visitors along the trail, and handing out treats at the treat stations. Feel free to wear your Halloween costume! This outdoor opportunity may involve walking after dark on uneven ground. To sign up, please contact Jenny Garver by October 9.

Candlelight Tour



Rock Springs Conservation Area, Homestead Prairie Farm
Saturday, November 14, 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 6.

Volunteer Librarian



Rock Springs Nature Center
Love books and enjoy helping others discover something new? Come be a Volunteer Librarian and help our Nature Center library thrive! Volunteers check books in and out, keep the shelves neat and organized, and help visitors find just the right resource. Our collection includes books about nature, wildlife, history, and the great outdoors, with something for curious minds of all ages. Morning and afternoon shifts are available, making it easy to find a time that works with your schedule. No library experience is needed, just a love of books and helping people! Volunteers must be 18 or older. To learn more or sign up, contact Jenny Garver.

Volunteer Opportunities



Holiday Decorating Party

Rock Springs Nature Center
Tuesday, December 1, 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 24.



Native Seed Cleaning

Rock Springs Maintenance Shop
Volunteers are needed to help clean and prepare native seeds for future restoration projects. This indoor volunteer opportunity is a great fit for anyone interested in native plants and restoration, or for those who enjoy helping behind the scenes. No experience is necessary and is for ages 18 and up. We'll provide the instructions and guidance you need. To learn more or sign up for a time slot, contact Mitch Lovgren.



Pop-Up Natural Resources Workdays

Various Conservation Areas
Want to help with natural resources projects in the coming months? Join our Pop-Up Natural Resources Workday interest list! Throughout the year, we'll contact volunteers on the list when opportunities arise, including invasive species removal and native seed spreading. Workdays may take place at different Conservation Areas and will be scheduled based on project needs and weather conditions. These hands-on opportunities are a great way to spend time outdoors while helping improve habitat, remove invasive plants, and restore native landscapes. No experience is necessary, and tools and gloves will be provided. To learn more or join the interest list, contact Jenny Garver.

Operations Update

Phil Julius - Director of Operations



Operations staff have had a busy summer, keeping up with all mother nature has provided us. With all the storms and rainfall, trails have had to be closed (and later opened), cleaned off, graded, trees removed, and other debris that has fallen cleared. Turf mowing has been non-stop this growing season. With all the rain, the flora and fauna have flourished this year. This has been one of the best growing seasons in many years.

The pothole prairie restoration at Fort Daniel is almost complete. Excavation of the wetlands is finished, the new trail has been seeded, and the prairie seeding will be completed later this fall. The pavilion and restrooms have been constructed and are ready for use. The grand opening at historic Woodbine Farm was held September 18, 2026. This site is officially open now for public use. Check the District's website for more details.

The Friends Creek pavilion and picnic road have been oiled and chipped. The campground road was done last year. These roads should be in good shape for several years.

Friends Creek staff have been busy breaking old concrete from a farm cleanup project. This broken concrete will be used to armor the Stevens Creek bank at Rock Springs along the bike path. This project will happen in early fall. It consists of three one-hundred-foot spans of rip rap (broken concrete) to armor the creek bank. This will reduce the erosion of the creek bank and protect the bike path from washing away during flood events.

Work is underway for making the trail connection between the Rock Springs bike path and Scovill Park West cart path. Brush removal is complete, culverts have been installed and grading is nearly complete. The trail will be ready for paving soon. This will be a great addition to the trail system. We appreciate the cooperation between MCCD and the Decatur Park District.

Tidbits of Information

- **Holiday Closures:** Rock Springs Nature Center will be closed on November 26, December 24, & December 25. Enjoy your holidays!
- **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 the memory of Carolyn Mason and her enthusiasm and love for preserving natural areas. She volunteered at the Macon County Conservation District and unselfishly 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 $100.00 toward the enrollment fee and is awarded upon completion of the program. Interested individuals should complete a scholarship form and submit it to Nicky Besser at Rock Springs Nature Center before registering for classes. The Master Naturalist classes will begin Tuesday, January 12, 2027, 6 - 9 pm, and run for 12 Tuesday evenings with 3 half-day Saturday field trips. If interested in enrolling in the class, please contact Stephanie Hale by calling 217-877-6042 or by email at smhale@illinois.edu.

Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Director of Program Services

As summer winds down, the Program Services department has been spending time reflecting on a busy quarter and thinking about fall. Summer camps wrapped up at the end of July and kept staff very busy. In case you forgot, the District offers five different camps for kids of all ages, and they remain popular! We are grateful that our community trusts us to educate and engage with their children.

During the summer, we also visited a lot of regional libraries to present educational programming as part of their Summer Reading Programs. All in, we presented about 57 programs at over two dozen different libraries in June and July.

In August, we said goodbye to most of our seasonal staff, including camp counselors and interns. One intern, our Historic Sites Intern, Bailey Mitchell, will still be with us through November. Be sure to chat with her while she's here!



As we move into September, field trips and fall programs are on the top of the priority list. Teachers have started to reach out to schedule visits to our sites, and planning is well underway for some big special events. Coming very soon down the pipeline is Treat Trail. It is our third year offering this event and this year, we're doing it two nights in a row! Mark your calendars for October 16 & 17 – we will need some volunteer help, but we'd love to see you and your family attend the event, too!

Be sure to check out the District's Prairie Islander newsletter and keep an eye on our Facebook page, as we have plenty of other fun things planned this fall!

The More You Know



As we look back over the last 60 years, we can see a long history of youth and teen volunteerism at the Conservation District. While they do not make up a large portion of our program, we currently have 4 youth and 18 teens who have given their time to the District in 2026.

Youth 12 and under volunteer alongside an adult family member, while teens ages 13 to 17 can participate in activities where staff are present. We also welcome school-aged groups and their leaders to volunteer with us.



Looking through the District's scrapbooks, youth and teen volunteerism appears as early as 1970, when MacArthur High School students cleaned up garbage around the original Nature Center and planted trees for Earth Day. In the 1980s, a local 4-H group volunteered regularly at the Homestead Prairie Farm. In 2002, a mother volunteered one season at the Homestead Prairie Farm with her infant daughter, who was rocked in the cradle during tours. Teen volunteers have also been part of our summer camp programs since the mid-1980s.

We have watched young volunteers thrive. Some have become staff members, some have continued as adult volunteers, and others have encouraged their families to volunteer. Former teen volunteers have also used their experience at the District when applying for scholarships and jobs. Two recent summer staff members were former teen volunteers who received college scholarships after requesting letters of support highlighting their work with our volunteer team. How amazing is that?



Youth volunteerism can grow a lifelong love for nature, conservation, history, and giving back. It also gives parents and grandparents an opportunity to create meaningful memories with the children they love.

We are so very thankful for the amazing team of youth and teen volunteers who help at the District.

To RSVP or Contact Staff in This Issue

Rock Springs Nature Center: 217-423-7708
Nicky Besser: NBesser@MaconCCD.org; 217-542-5529
Alysia Callison: ACallison@MaconCCD.org; 217-542-5538
Jenny Garver: JGarver@MaconCCD.org; 217-542-5536
Phil Julius: PJulius@MaconCCD.org; 217-542-5528
Mitch Lovgren: MLovgren@MaconCCD.org; 217-519-9926
Brent Wielt: BWielt@MaconCCD.org; 217-542-5525