



Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

60 Years of Conservation, Community, and Connection

Alysia Callison

All good stories start with an idea, and the story of the Macon County Conservation District is no different. The story of MCCD is one of commitment, drive, and belief. So, where did the idea come from? To find that answer, we must go all the way back to 1935 – 31 years before the District was formed.

In 1935, the United States Congress conducted a study of the Illinois River Basin, which includes the Sangamon River. Their goal was to learn how the region could be developed to mitigate flooding in the area. One of the study's recommendations was to build a dam on the Sangamon River, approximately three miles northeast of Decatur at the headwaters of Lake Decatur, to create a new reservoir. If built, this reservoir – the Oakley Reservoir – would have extended into Piatt County and flooded nearly 700 acres of bottomland forest in Allerton Park. As one might imagine, this was met with a great deal of pushback. The loudest opponents to the plan were farmers, as their lands would be flooded and drainage would be altered. Even after additional studies by the Army Corps of Engineers to determine the best course of action, Congress approved the Flood Control Act of 1962, committing to the Oakley Reservoir project and putting \$125,000 toward the beginning stages. It seemed that the Reservoir would proceed regardless of citizen pleas.

One of the concessions of the plan was that, once completed,



the Army Corps would give some of the developed land to a local land management agency for recreational use. The only issue was, Macon County did not have such an agency. The state inspected the area and stated that it was too small for a state park (at the time, state parks had to be at least 1000 acres). So then what?

In June 1965, the Macon County Board was approached by A. Webber Borchers, a notable Decatur resident and former member of the County Board. He asked them to establish a committee to determine the viability of a county park system, hoping that it could satisfy the requirements for the Oakley Reservoir project and ensure public access for the future. A man by the name of Norman Greenberg sat on the board at the time, and expressed interest in joining such a committee. Thus, in October of 1965, Greenberg and two other Board members – Floyd Grise and Lewis Claypool – were appointed to the committee.

As the committee explored the possibilities, more support came in January of 1966 from O.T. Banton, a member of the Decatur Audubon Society, and R. Lee Slider, the past

president of the Macon County Historical Society. The Audubon Society had been exploring the idea of a nature center for many years, but had not found a path forward. Greenberg met with Slider, Banton, and three other Audubon members – Mary Orr, Corinne Rigg, and Alice Irwin – to brainstorm options, with discussion of county park districts, forest preserve districts, and conservation districts. Following this meeting, Banton and Slider expressed support for a conservation district at the January County Board meeting.

In March, Greenberg worked to gather more support from local service clubs. Interested groups gathered and formed a steering committee, and in addition to Greenberg, Slider, and Banton, it consisted of the following:

- Donald Berg – Boy Scouts
- Elbert Bonn – Midstate Mounders Archery Club and Audubon Society
- Marguerite Bringer – Macon County Historical Society
- Lillie Calander – Association of Childhood Education
- Ruby Cook – Parent-Teacher Association
- Sam Gibbons – Izaak Walton League
- Alice Irwin and Lloyd Latendresse – Audubon Society
- William Munch – representing several veteran's groups
- Robert Stroyeck – representing a local camping group

Continued from page 1

The steering committee met weekly, and in June of 1966, Greenberg recommended that the County Board support the creation of a county conservation district.

From June to November, the steering committee gave presentations to any group that would listen, with most of the presentations given by Greenberg, Slider, and Banton. Presentations were given as often as five or six nights a week at their own expense, to groups of a dozen people to several hundred. The grassroots committee was dedicated, passionate, and determined.

To get a referendum on the November 1966 ballot, they needed to get 1% of the county's registered voters – almost 600 people – to sign a petition. In a short time, over 1,000 signatures were collected, most of them gathered by Elbert Bonn. Thus, the referendum was added to the November 1966 election ballot.

In the months leading up to the election, the committee was met with a lot of opposition. Some people were concerned about higher taxes. Some felt that the referendum should wait until the primary election in 1967. Some were worried about the effect this might have on local land.



The committee stayed steadfast, explaining to people how it would affect them minimally financially, but would reap enormous rewards recreationally and environmentally. Still, they had no way of knowing what the general consensus was, and they did not know whether their hard work would pay off.

On November 8, 1966, with a landslide margin of 25,033 to 11,574, the vote passed and the Macon County Conservation District was born. The values of the community were loud and clear: Macon County wanted to support their local natural and cultural heritage. Thank you, 1966 voters.

The next several years were ones of excitement, growth, and change. In December of 1966, the first MCCD board was appointed. In 1967, the board hired legal counsel and began work on their first master plan. In 1968, the board hired the District's first executive director, Preston Schellbach. In 1969, the District purchased its first tract of land along the Sangamon River, which would eventually become Rock Springs. Shortly thereafter, the land that would become Friends Creek was purchased due to its location just north of the proposed Oakley Reservoir. In 1975, the federal government scrapped the Oakley Reservoir project due to



pressure from other communities and organizations, including a committee from Allerton Park. Though the impetus that sparked the initial conservation district movement was no more, the fuse had been lit, and the flame continues to burn to this day.

Today, the Macon County Conservation District is responsible for the conservation of nearly 4,000 acres of land, much of which started as farmland but was restored to beautiful native prairies, forests, and wetlands. The District also preserves several

local historic sites, from the Oglesby Mansion, to the Trobaugh-Good House, to Bethel School House. None of this would be possible without the commitment of Norman Greenberg, Lee Slider, O.T. Banton, and the rest of the steering committee. Their hard work and dedication paid off tenfold, and we can only hope to keep that spirit moving for another 60 years and beyond. Thank you to the steering committee, thank you to the voters from 1966, and thank you to YOU, dear reader, for supporting the work we do and allowing the community to reap the rewards that were merely an idea six decades ago. We hope you will join us throughout the year as we celebrate this anniversary and look forward to the journey ahead.



Briefs



Join staff at Rock Springs Nature Center for a summer packed with fun, educational activities for ages 1-15.

Five camp options will be available this summer:

Earth Adventures: Ages 6-12 hike, swim, canoe, and discover the world around them in this full-day, week-long nature camp with optional Before and After Child Care. \$150/camper each week.

Mini Camp: Ages 1-5 explore Rock Springs Conservation Area with their adult buddies in this 1 hour-long camp. \$12/child each camp.

Adventure Club: Ages 5-12 join in on Earth Adventures camp on Tuesday mornings. \$20/camper each day.

History Camp: Ages 6-12 become history explorers in this half-day camp on Wednesday mornings. \$20/camper each day.

X-treme Camp: Ages 10-15 gear up for adventurous fun. \$60/camper each day.

Online registration opens April 1. Find more information and register at MaconCCD.org.

CAMPGROUND

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area will be opening for the season on May 1 and runs through November 1. The campground welcomes RV and tent camping, and includes flush toilets, showers, and a dump station.



Daily fees are \$25 for 30 amp service, and \$30 for 50 amp service. A large, group campsite is also available for \$25 per night for up to 25 people, and \$1 per night for each additional person up to 60 people. There are also three, non-electric tent camping spots for \$20 per day. For more information, visit MaconCCD.org. All campground reservations are taken online.

The picnic pavilions at Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, and Griswold are also open for the season. Reserve a pavilion for \$35/day to host your own outdoor party or event at MaconCCD.org.

Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon the day prior at MaconCCD.org, unless otherwise noted.

WILDERNESS WALKS

Thursdays at 4pm

March 12, Friends Creek Conservation Area

April 2, Rock Springs Conservation Area

April 23, Fort Daniel Conservation Area

May 14, Griswold Conservation Area

Join a naturalist on a leisurely walk along a District trail to explore and learn a little something along the way. Dress for the weather. Free. Register online. Min/Max: 1/30.



NEW! SATURDAY STROLL

Every Saturday at 10am

Visit Rock Springs Nature Center to join a naturalist on a stroll along a trail. Come once or come every Saturday – nature is sure to show us something new each week! Dress for the weather. Free. No registration required.

NEW! SUNDAY STORYTIME

Every Sunday at 2pm

Stop by the Children's Room at Rock Springs Nature Center for stories, songs, and fun! We will read some nature stories, move our bodies, and spark some curiosity about the world around us. Free. No registration required.





Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at MaconCCD.org, unless otherwise noted.

Hours

OFFICES OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

NATURE CENTER OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

Saturday, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Sunday, April 5, Easter

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, April 3, Good Friday

Monday, May 25, Memorial Day



Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturday, May 2, 1-4pm

See what going to school was like in the early 20th century at the historic one-room schoolhouse located at Friends Creek Conservation Area. 13734 Friends Creek Park Rd., Cisco, IL. Free.

GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

Sundays, March 29, April 26, and May 31, 2-4pm

Tour the restored home of Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Encounter the lives of its family members and explore their late 1800s lifestyle. \$5/adult and \$2/child. 421 W. William Street, Decatur, IL

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Wednesdays, March 25, April 15, & May 20, 5:30pm

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am



Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Games

Join us for the national pastime: base ball! Cheer for your home team, the Rock Springs Ground Squirrels, in a game of vintage base ball played with authentic 1858 rules. To see their complete schedule, go to Facebook.com/GroundSquirrels



MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

- Karen Schneller, President
- Gussie Reed, 1st Vice President
- Kevin Chapman, 2nd Vice President
- Mark Allen, Treasurer
- Jimmy Rade, Secretary
- Jerry Culp, Executive Director
- Philip Julius, Director of Operations
- Alysia Callison, Director of Program Services
- Nicky Besser, Director of Finance & H.R.

Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708
mccd@MaconCCD.org
MaconCCD.org



Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!
MaconCCD.org



Special Events



GALLERY OF HOPE OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, April 18, 1-4pm

Visit Rock Springs Nature Center to view artwork created by local children and thoughtfully presented by Heritage Behavioral Health Center. The pieces of art support conversations around mental health. While there, decorate a cupcake, create your own artwork, and engage in other family-friendly activities. Free. No registration required.

SANGAMON RIVER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 25, 10am-12pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Help clear trash from the banks of the Sangamon River to make it a safer and more beautiful place for wildlife and people. Dress to get dirty and bring your own gloves. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or bring the whole family. Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance. Register and meet at the Rock Springs Information Shelter.



FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Saturday, April 25

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with a day of outdoor family activities. In the morning, observe bird banding, go on a naturalist-led hike, or pitch in at the Sangamon River Cleanup. Then, in the afternoon enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, a live bird show from the Illinois Raptor Center, tours of Homestead Prairie Farm, and much more. Visit tables staffed by local community organizations to learn what they are doing to protect water and wildlife. Co-sponsored by the Decatur Area Audubon Society. Canoeing \$3/person. All other activities are free. No registration required. Visit our website for a full lineup of activities and times, as well as organizations in attendance.



1,000 TREE PLANTING EVENT

Saturday, April 18, 9:00 am

To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Macon County Conservation District, the 45th anniversary of the Macon County Conservation Foundation, Arbor Day, and Earth Day, we're planting 1,000 trees that will grow into an oak savanna at our Fort Daniel Conservation Area, benefiting our community for generations.

We invite Macon County residents and surrounding communities to roll up their sleeves and be part of something truly lasting. This hands-on fundraiser is your chance to plant a tree, leave your mark, and someday return with family and friends to say, "I helped build this." Whether you come as an individual, family, group, club, business, or organization, your efforts will take root in the future of Macon County—one tree at a time.

Ready to dig in? Find full event details, pricing, sponsorship opportunities, and ways to get involved at: <https://givebutter.com/1000TreesEvent>

Macon County Conservation District
3939 Nearing Lane | Decatur, IL 62521 | 217-423-7708
MaconCCD.org

Homeschool Programs

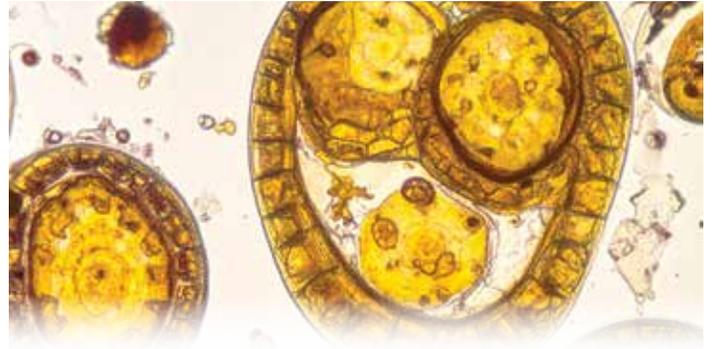
Homeschool children ages 5-15 can join a naturalist and explore nature and history topics through discussion, hands-on activities, crafts, and games. Homeschool students will spend time indoors and outdoors, investigating concepts and engaging with nature. \$15/child. Register online by date specified.



WEIRD MAMMALS

Wednesday, March 11, 10am-12pm

From opossums to pangolins, learn about some of the unusual mammals found in our community and beyond, and discover why they are the way they are. Register online by March 9.



MICROSCOPIC LIFE

Wednesday, April 8, 10am-12pm

Get out your magnifying glasses and get ready to inspect some tiny critters! We'll take a look at a variety of things through our microscope and go outside to see what we can find. Register online by April 6.



SCATTERED SEEDS

Wednesday, May 13, 10am-12pm

Learn why plants create seeds, what's inside of them, and where to find them. Register online by May 11.

Scouts

The Macon County Conservation District offers badge workshops for Scouting America, Girl Scouts, and other scouting organizations. Workshops typically last 2-3 hours and cover a variety of nature- and wilderness-related badges. Cost is \$9/scout for a two-hour workshop and \$12/scout for three hours. Contact us at 217-423-7708 to schedule a workshop for your troop.

Macon County Conservation District
3939 Nearing Lane | Decatur, IL 62521 | 217-423-7708
MaconCCD.org





Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at MaconCCD.org, unless otherwise noted.

Music

The following programs are free and open to the public at Rock Springs Nature Center.

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm
March 14 & 28
April 11 & 25
May 9 & 23



ACOUSTIC JAM SESSION

Sundays, March 8, April 12, and May 10, 2-4pm

Art

GALLERY OF HOPE

March & April

North and South Galleries and Exhibit Hall

View over 200 pieces of artwork created by local children in partnership with Heritage Behavioral Health Center.

NORTH GALLERY

Danny Pratt

May & June

Enjoy wildlife and landscape photography from local photographer Danny Pratt.

SOUTH GALLERY

Melody Arnold

May & June

Experience the beauty of nature with local photographer and outdoor education specialist Melody Arnold.



Mini Camps

Children ages 1 through 5 will explore nature with an adult companion through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. These camps are a great stepping stone for little ones to spend time with other children and have the comfort of a loved one nearby. \$12/child. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.

BRILLIANT BISON

Tuesday, March 3 &
Thursday, March 5,
9:30-10:30am

Learn about the incredible prairie giant that used to call Illinois home.



MAGICAL SEEDS

Tuesday, March 17 &
Thursday, March 19,
9:30-10:30am

Discover what kind of magic a seed holds, then get your hands dirty and plant one yourself.



BEAUTIFUL BLUEBIRDS

Tuesday, March 31 &
Thursday, April 2,
9:30-10:30am

Find out why the pretty Eastern bluebird is a sign of spring and see what they're up to in the spring and summer.



VIBRANT RAINBOWS

Tuesday, April 14 &
Thursday, April 16,
9:30-10:30am

Explore the colors of the rainbow and find out why we seem to only see them before or after rain.





Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at MaconCCD.org, unless otherwise noted.

March

WORM MOON

Tuesday, March 3, 7pm

Join a naturalist to learn about the 'worm' moon, do a craft, and listen to a story. Then, go outside to view the full moon through our telescope. \$3/person. Register online by March 2. Min/Max: 4/20.



WOMEN'S HIKE

Sunday, March 8, 2-4pm

Celebrate International Women's Day at Rock Springs Conservation Area on a hike on the Big Oak Trail. Bring a water bottle and dress for the weather as we spend some time connecting with other nature-minded women. Free. Register online by March 6. Min/Max: 3/15.

MR. SHOAFF: LINCOLN'S RELATIVE AND DECATUR'S MOST COLORFUL NEWSPAPER MAN

Saturday, March 14, 2pm

One of the best-known newspaper editors in Civil War era Illinois spent most of his career in Decatur, but today is largely unknown. Related by marriage to Abraham Lincoln, this colorful and controversial character both made the news and reported on it. Historian and author Dr. Robert Sampson explores how and why James Shoaff and his newspapers always brought readers back for more. Co-sponsored by the Friends of Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park. Free. No registration required.

60th ANNIVERSARY TRIVIA NIGHT

Saturday, March 21, 6pm

Gather your friends and join Nature Center staff for a fun night of trivia! There will be six rounds of 10 questions, in categories including local flora and fauna, local history, and more. The winning team will get a trophy and a prize! Tables of 8 are available for \$80 each. Light snacks will be available, and you are welcome to bring your own food. All proceeds support educational programming at the Macon County Conservation District. Register online by March 18.

VAN TRIP TO ALTON, IL

Thursday, March 26, 8am – 6pm

Hop in our van and head south to visit two unique spots in the Alton area. First, we will visit the Lewis and Clark State Historic Site to learn about the expedition's time spent at Camp River Dubois. Then, we will venture to the National Great Rivers Museum to explore the impact the Mississippi River has had on our history and tour the lock and dam. We will stop for lunch along the way (lunch is not included). \$45/person. Register online by March 24. Min/Max: 5/10.

April

EGG HUNT

Saturday, April 4, 10-11:30am

From tiny, bright blue eggs to expertly camouflaged speckled eggs, birds lay a variety of different types of eggs. Learn about some of our local birds and the eggs they lay, then go on a walk to hunt for hidden eggs! There will be a special prize for the person who finds the Golden Egg. Don't forget to bring your basket! Free. Register online by April 2. Min/Max: 3/40.



VAN TRIP TO HAVANA, IL

Tuesday, April 14, 9am-6pm

Join us on a trip to the Havana area to visit two interesting sites! First, we will stop at the Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery to tour this hatchery operated by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Then, we will visit Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge to explore and do some bird watching. Be prepared to walk and spend time outdoors. We will stop for lunch along the way (lunch is not included). \$45/person. Register online by April 10. Min/Max: 5/10.



Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at MaconCCD.org, unless otherwise noted.

NEW MOON NIGHT HIKE

Saturday, April 18, 9pm

Put your night vision to the test on a guided walk down the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. With no lights or moonlight to guide us, how will our senses adapt? Register to find out! \$5/person. Register online by April 17. Min/Max: 4/20.

WILDFLOWER HIKE

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Sunday, April 19, 2pm

Spring is the best time of year to spot early woodland flowers, and Fort Daniel Conservation Area is full of them! Meet at the Fort Daniel pavilion. If the bluebells are blooming, we'll be in for a real treat. Free. Register online by April 17. Min/Max: 4/20.

May

CANOE RODEO

Saturday, May 2, 10am-12pm

Hop in a canoe and try your luck on a mini obstacle course in the Bike Trail Pond! All equipment provided. A naturalist will be on-hand to give a paddling lesson and provide instructions. May the best boat win! \$15/boat. Register online by May 1. Min/Max: 4/10 boats.



NATURE PICTURE FRAMES

Sunday, May 3, 2pm

Make your own nature picture frame to give to someone special or keep for yourself. We will first go outside to collect natural materials to decorate our frame, then go inside to construct it. \$5/person. Register online by May 1. Min/Max: 4/30.

60th ANNIVERSARY CONSERVATION AREA WALK

Saturday, May 9, 12-4pm

Take a self-guided tour of our five Conservation Areas! At each site, a staff member will be available with information about the site and an activity. Learn what makes Macon County's greenspaces special and see what 60 years of conservation has done – right in our own backyards. \$5/person. Register online by May 8.



VAN TRIP TO THE MORTON ARBORETUM

Tuesday, May 12, 9am-7pm

Journey to Lisle, IL to visit the Morton Arboretum, which features a variety of different gardens, exhibits, a visitor's center, a gift shop, and the Schulenberg Prairie – one of the largest restored tallgrass prairies in the Chicagoland area. Pack a lunch or grab one at the restaurant on site. \$45/person. Admission and lunch are on your own. Register online by May 11. Min/Max: 5/10.

A HISTORY OF BICYCLING IN ILLINOIS

Saturday, May 16, 2pm

From fun to fitness and even women's rights, bicycles had a big impact on daily life in Illinois. Author and guest speaker Christopher Sweet's new book rediscovers the people, companies, and events that made our state synonymous with the bicycle. Professor Sweet is a librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University. Free. No registration required.

SPRING AWAKENING HIKE

Sunday, May 17, 2pm

See what's blooming and changing now that the temps are warmer and the sun is hanging around longer. We will hope to see a variety of spring wildflowers, including spring beauties, trillium, bluebells, and more. \$3/person. Register online by May 15. Min/Max: 3/20.

SURVIVAL SKILLS WORKSHOP

Friends Creek Group Camp

Saturday, May 23, 10am-12pm

Go head-to-head and see if you have what it takes to survive in the outdoors. Teams will try their hand at building a shelter, following a map, starting a fire, and more. \$10/person. Register online by May 22. Min/Max: 6/30.



60th Anniversary Trivia Night

Saturday, March 21 6:00PM at the Rock Springs Nature Center
3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL 62521 **\$80 for a table of 8**

Gather your friends and join Nature Center staff for a fun night of trivia! There will be six rounds of 10 questions, in categories including local flora and fauna, local history, and more. The winning team will get a trophy and a prize! Light snacks will be available, and you are welcome to bring your own food.

For registration and more information: MaconCCD.org
All proceeds support educational programming at the Macon County Conservation District.



GATHER TOGETHER

<p>#1 Parties</p> <p>Gather family and friends for memorable parties in our spacious rooms</p>	<p>#2 Weddings</p> <p>Celebrate your special day with loved ones surrounded by nature</p>	<p>#3 Business</p> <p>Bring your staff together for your next training, retreat, or planning meeting</p>
---	--	---


MaconCCD.org
Rentals@MaconCCD.org
[3939 Nearing Lane](https://www.google.com/maps/place/3939+Nearing+Lane)


HISTORIC WOODBINE FARM
• Est. 1862 •

Save the Date!

Wine in the Wild

Saturday, June 13, 2026

Cheers to 45 Years!

A Fundraiser by the Macon County Conservation Foundation

MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org 217.423.7708

Historic Woodbine Farm
7206 Sefton Road, Dalton City, IL 61925

MACON COUNTY
conservation
FOUNDATION