

# Volunteer Quarterly

## January / February / March 2026



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

### Dates to Remember

#### Volunteer Quarterly Meeting

Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium  
Friday, January 16, 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 12.



#### Volunteer Recognition Dinner

Please Save the Date for the evening of Thursday, April 9, 2026.



#### Rock Springs Quilters

Rock Springs Nature Center  
Every Wednesday, 9 -11 am

#### Dulcimer Club

Rock Springs Nature Center  
Saturday, January 3 & 17, & 31, 10 am  
Saturday, February 14 & 28, 10 am  
Saturday, March 14 & 28, 10 am



#### Acoustic Jam Session

Rock Springs Nature Center  
Sunday, January 11, February 8 & March 8, 2 - 4 pm

#### Van Trip to Peoria Area for Eagle Viewing

Saturdays, January 31 & February 7, 9 am - 6 pm  
Hop in our passenger van and join us for a trip to the Peoria area to search for overwintering bald eagles. We will visit three or four locations in search of America's national symbol, with a stop for lunch along the way. \$30/person. Volunteers receive a \$15 discount for this trip. Lunch is not included in the cost. Register online by January 30 & February 6.

### 60th Anniversary Pancake Breakfast

Rock Springs Nature Center

Saturday, February 28, 8 - 11 am

Kick off our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration with a bit of nostalgia!

Staff will be serving up all-you-can-eat pancakes, sausage, orange juice, milk, and coffee. Before or after breakfast, enjoy an educational maple syrup program and tasting. Breakfast will be served between 8 and 11 am. Maple syrup programs will be held at 8:30, 9:30, and 10:30 am. \$10/person. No registration required.



### WELCOME NEW VOLUNTEERS!

**Dulcimer Club-** Jeff Jenkins, Rodney Wall

**Native Garden-** Roslyn O'Conner

**Natural Resources-** Tyler Gavin, Barry Phipps, Dianne Spaniol

**Special Events-** Izzy Rosinki

**Trail Monitors-** Debbie Niles, Randy Niles

### Volunteers in Action



Our vintage base ball team had a fantastic season! Twenty-three volunteers contributed a total of 590 hours during 2025, helping bring the early history of base ball in Illinois to life. The Rock Springs Ground Squirrels, founded by Lee Slider in 1993, are the oldest continuously running vintage base ball club in the state. This photo, taken by volunteer photographer Danny Pratt, shows club members from several teams participating in the 2025 Stephen Douglas Vintage Base Ball Tournament at Rock Springs Conservation Area.

# Volunteer Program Update

Jenny Garver, CVA - Volunteer Coordinator

Happy New Year! As we kick off 2026, I want to say a huge thank you for everything you accomplished in 2025. From January through November, **410 volunteers contributed over 9,275 hours!** Your dedication not only makes a real difference in our community but also helps us secure grants and funding to continue protecting Macon County's natural and cultural resources. Every hour you give creates a ripple effect that strengthens Macon County for years to come. If you've forgotten to submit any hours, it's not too late – they all count!

2025 was a busy and exciting year for me too! In October, I earned my **Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA)** credential, joining an international network of volunteer professionals. This process allowed me to take a deeper look into volunteer management and identify ways our program can continue to grow and improve. In November, I attended a virtual Vision Planning class and created a **Strategic Volunteer Plan** for 2026.

Our volunteer program will focus on **three big goals** this year:

- **Strengthen volunteer roles** by gathering input from volunteers and staff to update and create clear position descriptions, so everyone understands the impact of their contributions.
- **Expand natural resources impact** with new conservation and stewardship opportunities, giving our volunteer team chances to lead projects and share their skills.
- **Enhance program systems** through new technology tools and on-demand virtual training, including training for volunteers on how to use any new systems. This goal is budget-dependent and may be implemented later in the year.

These goals reflect our **commitment to community**: At the Macon County Conservation District, volunteers play a vital role in bringing our mission to life by helping care for our natural areas, share our local history, inspire youth, and welcome visitors. Together, volunteers and staff work as a team to protect and celebrate Macon County's natural and cultural resources for everyone to enjoy.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication in 2025. I can't wait to see what we accomplish together in 2026!



## Tidbits of Information

- **Holiday Closures:** Rock Springs Nature Center will be closed December 24, December 25, and January 1.
- **2026 Pocket Calendars:** Our 2026 pocket calendars are now available! Stop by the Nature Center to pick one up.
- **New Volunteer Lanyards:** Starting January 5, blue volunteer lanyards will be available. Please contact Jenny Garver in advance to arrange a pick-up time before visiting the Nature Center.
- **Volunteer Discount Reminder:** Active volunteers enjoy a 50% discount on off-site public trips priced at \$25 or less and a \$15 discount for trips priced at \$30 and over. Don't forget to take advantage of your volunteer discount!
- **Volunteer Holiday Party Recap:** Thank you to everyone who attended the Volunteer Holiday Party. With 120 guests, we collected 210 food items in donations for the Northeast Community Fund.
- **Staff Update:** We are excited to welcome Riley Berner as our new Natural Resources Technician.
- **Staff Office Lines:** A quick reminder that staff phone numbers beginning with 217-542-\*\*\*\* are direct office lines and cannot receive text messages. Please call to stay connected.



## Volunteer Fun & Learning

### Decatur's Lincoln Statues

#### Virtual Presentation

Tuesday, January 27, 2 – 3 pm

Decatur played a meaningful role in Abraham Lincoln's life, and our city proudly honors that history through its Lincoln statues. Join us to learn the stories behind these sculptures, their artists, and the deep connections they represent. This presentation will be led by Historic Sites Manager Brent Wielt. RSVP to Jenny Garver by 9 am on January 26. The meeting link will be emailed to registered attendees.



### Volunteer Herbicide Training

#### Rock Springs Maintenance Shop

3740 Banton Lane, Decatur, IL 62521

Saturday, February 7, 9am – 10:30am

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. This optional portion of the class may take an additional 60 minutes. RSVP by February 5 to Mitch Lovgren to reserve your spot.



### A Brief History of Nest Box Trails

#### Rock Springs Nature Center, Auditorium

Friday, February 6, 1 – 2 pm

Have you ever wondered why nest box trails are used, and who first started this important conservation practice? Understanding the origins and reasoning behind nest box trails provides valuable insight into their significance for wildlife preservation. Join Melody Arnold, coordinator of the nest box trails at the Macon County Conservation District, for an explanation of how and why this conservation method became widely adopted. After the presentation we will go out to look at one of the boxes. RSVP by February 4.



### Nest Box Monitor Training

#### Rock Springs Nature Center

Friday, March 13 or Saturday, March 14

10 – 11:30 am

Be part of a long-standing citizen science project at Rock Springs Nature Center! Join naturalist Melody Arnold for our annual Nest Box Monitor Training and learn how to monitor nest boxes for the upcoming season. Volunteers can choose which day works best to attend. Once trained, volunteers can be assigned to one of five conservation area trails or serve as a fill-in when others are on vacation. Collected data is reported to Cornell University, supporting real-world research on local bird populations. Volunteers ages 18 and up are welcome. RSVP to Jenny Garver by March 11.



### Spring Wildflower Identification

#### Virtual Presentation

Friday, March 20, 1 – 2 pm

Welcome the first day of spring by learning how to spot and identify beautiful wildflowers found right here in our local conservation areas, led by Volunteer Coordinator Jenny Garver. This virtual presentation is perfect for nature lovers of all experience levels. RSVP to Jenny by March 18. The meeting link will be emailed to registered attendees.



## Program Services Update

Alysia Callison - Director of Program Services

Program Services staff spent the month of November finishing out the fall field trip season and preparing for the future. We led programs for groups from Shiloh CUSD, Our Lady of Lourdes, and the Social Emotional Learning Academy, among others. Brent and Nick (our Historic Sites Manager and Historic Sites Intern, respectively) held our annual Candlelight Tour at Homestead Prairie Farm, with 68 people in attendance (the second highest attendance for this event in several years). Though November is usually a quieter month for programming, we still kept busy and delivered many engaging and educational programs for our community and beyond.

Looking past November, staff will spend a lot of their upcoming time preparing the budget for the next fiscal year, which begins April 1. Though that is still several months away, we have to do a lot of research and planning to prepare a responsible budget to carry us through the next year. We have also been busy cleaning, sorting, and organizing downstairs. Our large storage room in the basement, which we refer to as the CORE, has been collecting resources and supplies for 30 years and was overdue for a cleanout. We spent a couple of weeks removing things we no longer needed and are now in the process of sorting through boxes of program materials to see what needs replaced and refreshed. So while we may not have very many programs in the winter (although we DO still have some!), we will still be busy preparing for the next busy season, which will start in late March or early April.

Thank you for all that you've done for the District this past year. Whether you engaged with the public at a special event or at the front desk, monitored a trail, assisted with a summer camp, helped us remove honeysuckle, or one of the myriad other important roles our volunteers serve, we are grateful for you. Have a fantastic holiday season and come visit us at the Nature Center!

## The More You Know

Did you know that the Macon County Conservation District is guided by a group of dedicated volunteers called the **Board of Trustees**? This special team helps make sure our conservation areas, trails, and programs stay true to the District's mission of protecting nature, providing outdoor spaces for everyone to enjoy, and planning for the future.

Our Board is made up of **five community members** who volunteer their time and expertise. They set policies, approve budgets, and make important decisions about land conservation, education programs, and facilities. Trustees also work closely with the District's Administration Team and Executive Director to make sure resources are used wisely and fairly.

Just like you, the Trustees give their time because they care deeply about our community and natural spaces. They bring big-picture thinking, community voices, and a shared love of nature to every meeting.

So next time you visit a conservation area, take a hike, or enjoy a program, remember our Board of Trustees helps make those moments possible! A heartfelt thank you to our Trustees for their ongoing leadership, guidance, and service. Your commitment helps keep the Macon County Conservation District strong, sustainable, and inspiring for generations to come.

## Volunteer Opportunities

### Undecorate the Halls

*Rock Springs Nature Center*

*Monday, January 5, 10 – 11 am*



Help us wrap up the holiday season at Rock Springs Nature Center. Volunteers are invited to join us as we carefully take down decorations and pack them away for next year. This short and satisfying project is a great way to lend a hand, enjoy some time together, and help us prepare for the months ahead. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by January 2.

# Remembering Our Volunteers & Staff

Marge Evans (Oct 1929 – Dec 2025)- Master Gardener  
Ed Paine (Oct 1924 – Dec 2025)- Staff



## Volunteer Opportunities

### 60th Anniversary Pancake Breakfast

*Rock Springs Nature Center*

*Saturday, February 28, 6:30 – 11:30 am*

Help us kick off Rock Springs Nature Center's 60th Anniversary with a warm and welcoming Pancake Breakfast celebration. Volunteers ages 16 and up are invited to be part of the fun by greeting guests, helping in the kitchen, serving breakfast, or bussing tables. This is a wonderful way to be part of a milestone event while supporting a beloved community tradition. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver by February 25.



### Native Plant Gardener

*Rock Springs Conservation Area*

If you love native plants and supporting pollinators, this is the opportunity for you. Macon County Master Naturalists are looking for dedicated volunteers to help care for the beautiful, tiered native garden at Rock Springs Nature Center. This year, we're expanding the project to include the gardens on the west side of the Nature Center, offering even more space to nurture prairie and woodland species that attract a wide variety of insects and pollinators. Learn more about this growing project and how to get involved at the **Annual Native Garden Meeting** on **January 22, 2026**, from **10 am – 12 pm** in the Nature Center Auditorium. Volunteers ages 18 and up are invited to join this rewarding effort to promote biodiversity and protect native ecosystems. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.

### Cross Country Ski Rental

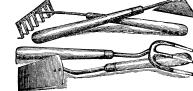
*Rock Springs Nature Center*



Turn snowy days into meaningful moments by helping visitors enjoy winter at Rock Springs Nature Center. When we receive 4 or more inches of snow, our ski and snowshoe rentals open to the public and we rely on volunteers to help make it all run smoothly. Volunteers assist staff with fitting equipment, answering basic questions, and keeping the rental area organized. No experience is needed, and training is provided the day you volunteer. Volunteers ages 18 and up are welcome to join our on-call list. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.

### Heirloom Gardener

*Homestead Prairie Farm*



Step back in time and help bring history to life at the heirloom garden at Homestead Prairie Farm, where historic plant varieties offer a glimpse into everyday life of the 1860s. Our Master Gardeners are seeking enthusiastic volunteers to assist with garden maintenance throughout the 2026 season. Your work will do more than preserve the past—it will directly support our community. During the 2025 season alone, 160.5 pounds of fresh produce were donated back into our community. Volunteers ages 18 and up are invited to be part of this meaningful and rewarding project. For more information or to sign up, contact Jenny Garver.



### Planting Workdays

*Various Conservation Areas*

Get your hands in the soil and help grow the habitats of tomorrow! We're building a list of volunteers for pop-up planting workdays, which will be scheduled as the growing season begins and plants arrive. Volunteers will help plant trees and herbaceous native plant plugs, contributing to habitat improvement and expansion across our conservation areas. These spontaneous workdays are a fun way to get outdoors, learn about native plants, and support local natural resources. Volunteers should come dressed for the weather, wear sturdy shoes, and be ready to work on uneven or soft ground. To join the volunteer list or learn more, contact Jenny Garver.

# Volunteer Opportunities



## Seed Scattering Workdays

### Various Conservation Areas

Winter is the perfect time for a little prairie magic. We're building a list of volunteers for pop-up seed scattering workdays that will be scheduled as weather and site conditions allow. These spontaneous workdays are a fun way to get outdoors, help plant the prairies of tomorrow, and explore conservation areas like Fort Daniel Conservation Area. Volunteers should come dressed for the weather, wear sturdy shoes, and be comfortable walking on uneven or frozen ground. To join the contact list or learn more, reach out to Jenny Garver.



## Operations Update

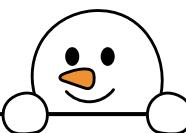
Phil Julius - Director of Operations

With the mild fall weather, Operations staff were able to complete several important projects. At Sand Creek, they treated bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, and other invasive plants with herbicide in late summer. This fall, staff widened the main trail by mowing back 50 to 70 feet in several areas, removing invasives and preparing the site for future prescribed burns to manage regrowth. At Rock Springs, forestry mowing created fire breaks on acres that have not burned in many years, helping reduce invasive plant spread and improve habitat management. These efforts support long-term ecosystem health and make future fire management more effective.

With winter approaching, staff completed the fall water shut-off process at all locations to prevent frozen pipes. They have also been taking care of fallen leaves and performing a final mowing of turf areas. Equipment has been transitioned from mowing to snow removal, and firewood has been cut and split for the wood-heated Friends Creek shop. Winter equipment maintenance began once the first snow arrived, ensuring everything is ready for the season ahead.

The contractor has been making good progress at Fort Daniel. At the Pothole Prairie Restoration, several wetlands have been excavated and are being shaped, and the contractor has been awarded the prairie seed contract, with planting scheduled as soon as excavation is complete. At Fort Daniel's Woodbine Farm, a new parking lot has been paved, accommodating 20 cars and providing access to the upcoming trail system, and the lane to the farm was also paved to improve access and simplify maintenance. Staff are finalizing the restroom and pavilion contract, with construction expected to begin next spring near the new parking lot. These projects will enhance visitor access and support the long-term success of Fort Daniel's restoration and recreational efforts.

Nearing Lane has recently been resurfaced, replacing asphalt that was nearly 30 years old. This road serves thousands of visitors traveling to Rock Springs Nature Center, the trail system, and Homestead Prairie Farm. The new surface will improve safety and access and should serve our community well for many years to come.



## To RSVP or Contact Staff in This Issue



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