



FALL 2025

# Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## Living on the Edge: Part 2

### The Importance of the Edge Between Habitats: A Crucial Ecological Transition

Jerry Culp

This article is a continuation from the Spring edition of the *Prairie Islander*; you can find Part 1 on our website under Information > News & Media.

#### 3. Facilitating Ecological Interactions

The ecological interactions between species are often heightened at habitat edges. These interactions can include pollination, seed dispersal, and the movement of animals between habitats. For example, some birds and insects that live in woodlands may use prairie edges to forage for different types of food, such as seeds or insects that thrive in more open environments. Similarly, mammals like deer or foxes may travel between the forest and open fields to find food and shelter. These movements across the edge contribute to genetic exchange and increase the resilience of populations.

Moreover, plants that live at the edge often benefit from cross-pollination between species that are found in both habitats. The presence of pollinators like bees and butterflies may be more frequent at these transitions, as they are attracted to the variety of plant species present at the edge.

#### 4. Buffer Zones and Resilience to Change

Edges often act as buffers against environmental stressors, helping to protect interior ecosystems from extreme events like fires, storms, or droughts. For example, the edge of a forest may be less prone to fire because the moisture from the woodland creates a natural barrier that prevents flames from reaching the interior. Similarly, the vegetative cover at the edge of a wetland can act as a natural filter, reducing the impact of floods and protecting the integrity of the ecosystem.

In the face of climate change, species may shift their ranges

in response to changing temperatures and weather patterns. Ecotones are often areas where species can migrate to find new habitats that offer suitable conditions. For instance, as temperatures rise, certain

plant or animal species may move into higher elevations or latitudes, and these edges offer a crucial pathway for their movement. In this way, edges help ecosystems adapt to changing

environmental conditions, ensuring resilience in the face of global change.

This article is a three-part series which will be concluded in the winter edition of the *Prairie Islander*.







## Exploring Nature with Your Senses

Ashton Dukeman

Sometimes the best way to connect with nature isn't through facts and field guides—it's by slowing down and tuning in. Whether you're walking a wooded trail, sitting beside a prairie, or pausing near a wetland, nature has a way of speaking to all five senses.

On your next visit to one of our five Conservation Areas, try taking a sensory hike. You don't need any gear or even a destination. Just pick a trail, take a deep breath, be present in the moment, and let your senses guide you.

**Look around**—but not just at eye level. What colors are hiding at your feet? What patterns do you see in the bark of a tree, the movement of a bird, or the way light filters through the leaves?

**Listen closely.** Can you hear layers of sound? A chorus of frogs? The wing beats of a bird taking flight? The crunch of fall leaves under your feet? The wind brushing across grasses and through the trees? What's loud? What's subtle? What's rhythmic?

**Breathe deeply.** What can you smell? Fresh-cut grass? Warm pine needles? Earthy soil after a rain? You might notice different scents as you move through sun and shade or across habitats.

**Reach out.** Touch the textures of nature (safely and respectfully, of course, and remember to leave it where you found it). Is the moss soft? The bark rough? How does the breeze feel on your skin? Can you feel the temperature shift as you walk into the woods?

**And finally—taste,** the sense we usually leave out (for good reason!). We don't encourage tasting things in nature unless you're absolutely sure they're safe. But you can ask yourself: What smells or sights trigger a memory of flavor? Does the sharp scent of cedar remind you of something spicy? Have some fun imagining what things in nature would taste like—if they were safe to eat. What flavor would a cattail have? What about puffball mushrooms or tree bark? The sillier, the better!

A sensory walk is not only a great way to slow down from the fast-paced stresses of life, but is a great way to reconnect with nature—and with yourself. No matter which Conservation Area you visit, you'll find plenty of moments waiting to be experienced.





## Briefs .....

### FALL HUNTING AND FISHING PROGRAMS AT THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

With fall comes the hunting and fishing season. Our Deer Herd Management and Upland Game programs will be opening soon, as well as the opening of the fall trout fishing season. The Deer Herd Management hunting areas are located at Rock Springs, Sand Creek, Friends Creek, and Fort Daniel Conservation Areas by special permit only. We also have two disabled hunting blinds available, one at Rock Springs and one at Sand Creek.

The goal of the Deer Herd Management Program is to reduce the deer populations on District sites and to provide public hunting opportunities to Macon County. Participants must harvest an antlerless deer first before taking any antlered deer.

The Upland Game Hunting Program takes place at Friends Creek Conservation Area's Upland Game Management Area and hunters must submit an application for the one-day hunts. The Friends Creek Conservation Area Upland Game Hunting area was partially funded with revenue generated through the sale of the Illinois Pheasant Stamp and developed with the cooperation of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

More information about both of these District hunting programs and their run dates can be

found on our website at [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org) under the "Conservation" menu.

Rock Springs Conservation Area will have trout stocked in the Cattail Pond for the fall fishing season. Trout are prohibited from being taken before the start of the season, and the season runs until the trout are fished out. There is a daily limit of five fish for the trout season.

An inland trout fishing stamp is required along with a valid state of Illinois fishing license. The stamps are available for purchase from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) by going online at <https://dnr.illinois.gov>, to one of the IDNR offices located in Springfield, Rock Island, Bartlett, and Benton, or at many sporting goods stores and bait shops.

More information about the trout season dates will be posted on our Facebook page and website once it becomes available.



# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.  
Register online at [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org) by noon, 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

Thursday, November 27, Thanksgiving Day

### OFFICES CLOSED

Monday, September 1, Labor Day

Tuesday, November 11, Veteran's Day

Friday, November 28, Thanksgiving

Macon County  
Conservation District



## Open Houses

### BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturdays, September 6 & October 4, 1-4pm

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

### HOMESTEAD PRAIRIE FARM

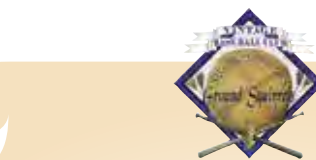
Saturdays & Sundays, June-October, 1-4pm

Discover this 1860s farmhouse and the lives of the people who lived there. Located at Rock Springs Conservation Area, 3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL. Free.

### GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

September 28, October 26, & November 30, 2-4pm

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



## 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. All games will be at Beautiful Trobaugh Field at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise stated.

Saturday, September 27

Home Game –  
Douglas Cup Tournament

Saturday, October 25

Goodwill Match, location TBD

Follow the team on Facebook for additional games and more information or visit [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org).



## MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Karen Schneller, President

Gussie Reed, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

Mark Allen, Treasurer

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](mailto:mccd@MaconCCD.org)  
[MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org)

## Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!  
[MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org)





# Special Events



## INDOOR-OUTDOOR CLASSROOM GRAND OPENING

Friday, September 12, 5-7:30pm

Stop by Rock Springs Nature Center to check out our brand-new indoor-outdoor classroom. This multi-functional learning and event space was completed thanks to a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and has many features that support the programs, education, and events we do at Rock Springs. Light refreshments will be served. Free. No registration required.



## PRAIRIE PEDAL

Sunday, September 28, 6:30am-2pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Support local wildlife and natural areas by riding your bicycle in this fundraiser event for the Macon County Conservation Foundation. Choose from a 20, 40, or 62-mile route along quiet country roads. Your registration includes a giveaway item, well stocked rest stops along the routes, and food at the finish line. Registration is \$35/rider before August 31, and \$40/rider beginning September 1. Learn more and choose how you want to register at [MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org](http://MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org).

## FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL

Saturday, October 11, 1-4pm

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 pumpkin, and all other events are free. The Macon County Conservation Foundation will also have a concession stand with snacks for purchase. No registration required.



## TREAT TRAIL

Saturday, October 18, 6-8:30pm

Explore Rock Springs after dark for a spooky stroll along the treat trail! Put on your costume and bring your treat bag to visit a series of treat stops along the bike trail and through the pine forest. Each stop will also have an interactive activity to take part in. When you're through, stop inside the Nature Center for warm apple cider and cookies. \$5 per treat-collector, \$2 per accompanying guest. Register online by October 15. Min/Max: 5/300.



## CANDLELIGHT TOUR

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

Homestead Prairie Farm-Rock Springs Conservation Area

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.



# 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.



## LIFE UNDERGROUND

Wednesday, September 10, 10am-12pm

Uncover the hidden world moving and thriving below our feet. Participants will explore the life of underground animals through activities and outdoor exploration. Register online by September 8.



## BENEFICIAL BATS

Wednesday, October 8, 6-8pm

Meet at Bethel Schoolhouse at  
Friends Creek Conservation Area

13734 Friends Creek Park Road Cisco, IL 61830

Learn what makes bats so fascinating, determine myth from reality, and go on a walk to search for some. Register online by October 6.



## WILD WEATHER

Wednesday, November 12, 10am-12pm

Discover some of the many weather types we encounter in Illinois and learn about the effects of climate change. Participants will explore weather and climate through activities and outdoor exploration. Register online by November 10.

# Scouts

The Macon County Conservation District offers badge workshops for scout groups. 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. Visit our website or contact us for more information.

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 at [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## Music

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

### DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

September 13 & 27

October 11 & 25

November 8 & 22

### ACOUSTIC MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 2-4pm

September 14, October 12,

November 9



## Art

### NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Curt Knapp

September & October

Photographer Curt Knapp captures the essence of nature with portraits and landscapes featuring majestic eagles, stealthy mountain lions, and noble wolves, among other captivating subjects.



Dave Castor

November & December

Photographer Dave Castor presents a stunning collection of images that explore the interplay of light, texture, and landscape. His work invites viewers to see the natural world through a new and thoughtful lens.

### SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Ed Shaw

September & October

Explore breathtaking views through the lens of photographer Ed Shaw, whose work highlights the beauty and solitude of wilderness areas and sweeping natural landscapes.

Earth Adventures Summer Camp

November & December

Celebrate the creativity of our Earth Adventures campers! This colorful collection features weather-inspired art created during summer camp, showcasing the imagination and environmental awareness of our youngest artists.

## Meetings

### MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm

September 17, October 15, & November 19

### DECATUR AREA AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Area Audubon on Facebook.

### ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am



*Interested in  
renting the new  
Indoor-Outdoor  
space for your  
next event?*

Give us a call us at  
217-423-7708 to set  
up a tour and get  
more information  
on the rental  
packages and  
pricing!

Available to rent after the September  
12 Grand Opening. (see insert)

Macon County  
Conservation District



# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.  
Register online at [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## September

### DIP AND SCOOP DAY

Sunday, September 7, 2pm

Grab an aquatic dip net and see what you can find in the pond! A naturalist will be on hand to help identify and explain what we find. Free. No registration required.



### CANOE OR KAYAK BIG CREEK

Saturday, September 13, 10am-12pm

All equipment is provided for this leisurely exploration of a local waterway. At least one adult required per canoe/kayak. Meet at Cannon Park on S. Baltimore Ave. \$25/boat. Register online by September 19. Min/Max: 4/10 boats.

### STAR PARTY

Saturday, September 20, 7-9pm

Join our naturalists for a celebration of all things space! Be some of the first guests to step into our brand new StarLab Planetarium, look at the sky through a telescope, make a space craft, and roast some s'mores over the fire. \$5/person. Register online by September 11. Min/Max: 5/60.



### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: MARCHING ANTS

Sunday, September 21, 2pm

Prepare to get dirty as we learn about the life of these tiny creatures and go outside to search for some. \$2/child. Register online by September 19. Min/Max: 5/20.

### VAN TRIP TO SNAKE ROAD

Tuesday, September 30, 7am-7pm

Head south to Shawnee National Forest to discover a unique spot nestled in the Larue Pine Hills. 'Snake Road', as it's called, is a forest road that hosts a migration of snakes, turtles, and amphibians in the spring and fall. Join our naturalist and see what you can find. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes, and plan for a walk. Lunch is on your own; we will stop at a restaurant nearby. \$35/person covers transportation. Register online by September 29. Min/Max: 5/10.

## October

### VAN TRIP TO MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Tuesday, October 7, 9am-6pm

Venture to St. Louis to explore the Missouri Botanical Garden. Experience the Climaltron geodesic dome greenhouse, Japanese garden, Arid House, and more. \$20/person. Lunch and admission are on your own. Register online by October 6. Min/Max: 4/10.



### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FALL COLORS

Sunday, October 19, 2pm

Discover the colors of fall as we do a craft, read a story, and go outside in search of fall hues. \$2/child. Register online by October 17. Min/Max: 5/20.

### BIGFOOT HIKE

Friday, October 24 OR Saturday, October 25, 7-9pm

Learn about our most famous cryptid and the history of local sightings and recorded sounds, then take a hike to try and find the "big guy" ourselves. We will also learn about the other nocturnal creatures of the forest and then wrap it all up with hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows around the fire. \$5/person. Register online by October 23. Min/Max: 5/30.



## November

### NIGHT HIKE

Saturday, November 1, 8pm

How do our other senses compensate when our eyesight is limited? Find out through fun, sensory activities on a night hike along the Rock Springs - Fairview Bike Trail. \$5/person. Register online by October 31. Min/Max: 5/30.



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Register online at [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## VISIT THE SITES TOUR

Tuesday, November 4, 12-4pm

Join a naturalist at Rock Springs Nature Center, then hop in our van as we visit some of the other District sites throughout the county. \$10/person. Register online by November 3. Min/Max: 5/20.



## THE MESKWAKI SIEGE OF 1730 IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS

Saturday, November 15, 2pm

In 1700s Illinois, the French colonial empire allied with some Native Americans while it fought others including the Meskwaki people (once commonly known as the Fox tribe). In the summer of 1730, the Meskwaki fled French forces, but were encircled near the headwaters of the Sangamon River. Guest speaker Bill Kemp, Librarian of the McLean County History Museum, will explore the little-known story of the 20-day siege and its tragic outcome. Free. No registration required.

## PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: SILLY SPIDERS

Sunday, November 16, 2pm

Learn about our misunderstood spider friends through a story, craft, and outdoor exploration. \$2/child. Register online by November 14. Min/Max: 5/20.



## TALKING TURKEY

Saturday, November 22, 10am

Learn about the bird that almost became our national symbol. We will discuss the natural history of turkeys, their conservation saga in the state of Illinois, and what makes them unique. Free. Register online by November 21. Min/Max: 5/30.

## Mini Camps

Children ages 1-5 explore nature with an adult buddy through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. These camps are a great stepping stone for little ones to spend time with other children with the comfort of a loved one nearby. \$8/child. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.

### WOOLLY WORMS

Tuesday, September 2, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, September 4, 9:30-10:30am

Learn about those fuzzy worms crossing the road and find out where they're going.



### BUSHY SQUIRRELS

Tuesday, September 16, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, September 18, 9:30-10:30am

Discover why squirrels always seem so busy and find out what they're hiding.

### RUBY RED LADYBUGS

Tuesday, October 7, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, October 9, 9:30-10:30am

Go on a search for these crimson beetles, learn about their lives, and see how many spots you can count.



### FUZZY BATS

Tuesday, October 21, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, October 23, 9:30-10:30am

Explore the lives of nature's only flying mammal and learn what it means to be nocturnal.

### COLORFUL LEAVES

Tuesday, November 4, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, November 6, 9:30-10:30am

Take a walk to look for leaves and see how many different colors you can find.



### FUNKY TURKEYS

Tuesday, November 18, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, November 20, 9:30-10:30am

Learn about wild turkeys and the curious lives they lead.

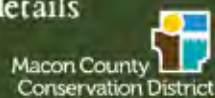


# BIGFOOT HIKE



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24 OR  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 7-9PM

See inside for more details



2025

# FALL

## HARVEST FESTIVAL

Activities run from 1pm - 4pm

**SATURDAY**  **OCTOBER 11**

See inside for  
more details

3939 Hearing Lane, Decatur, IL 62521 | 217.423.7706 | [MaconCCD.org](http://MaconCCD.org)



Macon County  
Conservation District

# TREAT TRAIL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18 | 6:30-8:30PM

SEE INSIDE FOR MORE DETAILS

