

Volunteer Opportunities



Check for volunteer updates on Facebook!
Volunteers at McHenry County Conservation District



Interested in volunteering? Contact Volunteer Coordinator Denice Beck at (815) 338-6223 x1229 or Volunteers@MCCDistrict.org.



Get Outdoors and Give Back

Nov. 24 is #GreenFriday Restoration Day!

The day after Thanksgiving is a perfect time to demonstrate your appreciation for McHenry County's scenic natural areas that work hard for you all year long—managing stormwater, improving water and air quality, providing habitat for wildlife and a place for you and your family to play.

Contact the Site Steward for special instructions and meeting locations at any of the four conservation areas listed below. One of them is sure to be convenient to your neighborhood, so gather your friends and family—and make it an annual tradition!

EXNER MARSH, Lake in the Hills, 9 a.m.–Noon
Len Bannon, (847) 669-1381 or lennsandy@gmail.com

BOGER BOG, Bull Valley, 10 a.m.–Noon
Ders Anderson, (815) 451-8496

PLEASANT VALLEY, Woodstock, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
Greg Rajsy, (815) 814-5055 or quirkaceae@yahoo.com

ALDEN SEDGE MEADOW, Alden/Harvard, 1–3:30 p.m.
Judy & Jack Speer, (815) 648-1372, smallwatersNFP@yahoo.com



Volunteers Needed!

School Days and Weekends

Festival of the Sugar Maples



Don't just visit — take part in this year's Festival!

No experience is needed — new volunteers & tour leaders attend a training workshop on Sat., Feb. 24, 9 a.m. – Noon.

Contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

Learn about volunteer positions and shifts. Register for the training workshop and sign up to volunteer. Note: a background check is required for all new volunteers over age 18.

Choose your volunteer position.

Weekend Public Event Positions:

Tour leader; tree tapping demonstrator; historical station presenter; sugar house assistant; floater

School Day Field Trip Positions:

Tour leader; historical station presenter

Choose your day to volunteer.

Volunteer assistance is needed daily from March 3–15.



HABITAT RESTORATION DAYS — Scouts, Students, Families and Individuals are invited!

Drop in for all or part of a session! This is a great outdoor service opportunity for scouts and high school students, as well as individuals and families with children over age six. Dress for weather and off-trail activities. Wear sturdy shoes or boots. Bring drinking water and insect repellent. Tools and equipment are provided, but bring work gloves and safety glasses if you own them. Contact the Site Steward from the list below for meeting location, special instructions, or if you wish to bring a group of 6 or more.

	LOCATION — MAP ON INSIDE BACK COVER	MONTHLY SCHEDULE	SITE STEWARD — CALL BEFORE YOU GO!
SATURDAYS	Boger Bog, Bull Valley	Fourth Saturday, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.	Ders Anderson (815) 451-8496
	Dufield (McConnell Rd. Entrance), Woodstock	Second Saturday, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	Jeff Schumacher (815) 337-9315 or schumacher.jeff1@gmail.com
	Exner Marsh, Lake in the Hills	Third Saturday, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	Len Bannon (847) 669-1381 or lennsandy@gmail.com
SUNDAYS	Alden Sedge Meadow South, Alden/Harvard	Third Sunday, 1–3:30 p.m.	Judy and Jack Speer (815) 648-1372 or smallwatersNFP@yahoo.com
	Cotton Creek Marsh, Island Lake	First and third Sunday, 1–3 p.m.	Mike Bouska (815) 759-0731
	The Hollows, Cary	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Margie Szymanskyj, szymanskyj@earthlink.net
VARIABLE	Coral Woods, Marengo	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Bonnie Leahy (815) 923-2208, bh.leahy@att.net , Wanda Naylor (815) 923-4436, naylorsletters@msn.com
	Lake in the Hills Fen, LITH	Contact Site Steward for dates.	John Scott (847) 658-6241
	Marengo Ridge, Marengo	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Karen Lundell, (815) 245-9360, klundell2016@gmail.com
	Pleasant Valley, Woodstock	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Greg Rajsy (815) 814-5055 or quirkaceae@yahoo.com
	Pioneer Fen, Johnsburg	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Pat Sullivan-Schroyer (815) 347-9005 or psullivanschroyer@gmail.com

Get to Know Our Volunteers



The Women of Stewardship

by Denice Beck, Volunteer Coordinator

Would it surprise you to learn that seven of the District's twenty-one Volunteer Site Stewards are women? Women are making an impact in the conservation of McHenry County's open lands, but their contributions are often overlooked due to the physical nature of ecological restoration. However, restoration is not just about chainsaws, prescribed burns and herbicide application – although many women are highly capable of performing these tasks.

Site stewards collaborate with the District's ecologists to carry out a site maintenance plan that enables them to achieve the goal of restoring

ecological health to an area of their chosen site. They must demonstrate competency in a wide range of topics from plant identification, ecology, and the natural history of their site, to record keeping, equipment maintenance, proper field techniques and safety practices. In addition at habitat restoration days, stewards represent the Conservation District and provide a vital link between the District and the individuals, families, students and scouts who attend an opportunity to get outdoors, learn about the natural world, and make a positive impact on the environment.

Conservation is an ongoing process, and continued community awareness and involvement is needed to protect our wildlife, woodlands, wide open spaces and sense of wonder. All of our site stewards – whether they be men or women – emphasize the importance of engaging and inspiring the next generation of conservationists. Female stewards act as role models to support and encourage young women and girls to explore careers and foster lifelong interests in science, conservation, sustainable living practices, and environmental advocacy. Many volunteers grew up exploring and playing outdoors. This is where they formed strong connections to the land, and why they understand the importance of providing young people with the same opportunities.

Site Steward Judy Speer recalled how her journey began, "As a child, the plants and critters of my tiny backyard led me to explore the local forest preserves, finding wondrous remnants of native ecosystems that awakened my inner naturalist." Site Steward Pat Sullivan-Schroyer agrees, "Always involve children, because it is for them and all those who come after that we do this." If their words inspire you to make a difference, our site stewards invite you to join them at their next habitat restoration day.



Margie Szymanskyj, Site Steward — The Hollows, Cary

(Co-steward Dick Tyk)

"Like many people my age, I grew up playing outdoors where I developed a love of nature that continued into adulthood. When I had my own gardens and woods, I wanted to learn how to best care for the trees, plants and other critters. When I heard about the District's Stewardship Program, I

thought this would be a great way to learn about plants and trees, and make new friends. I feel strongly about giving back to one's community through volunteer service, whether it's delivering meals, helping in a pet shelter, being a Big Sister or Brother – or whacking down buckthorn! In my case, there is no better feeling than removing invasive non-native plant species and watching the native birds and flowers return to the prairie. For the past 10 years, I have hosted restoration workdays at The Hollows with the help of volunteers, especially co-steward, Dick Tyk. Have you seen the campground lately? It looks awesome! We're very proud of our efforts, and invite you to come and get involved!"

Margie is obsessed with native plants and land restoration. Through stewardship training that included workshops offered through the Ecological Restoration Certificate Program, she learned the practices and philosophy of ecological restoration and put theory into practice at home and at The Hollows. She also volunteers with the Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee – a non-profit that promotes the use of native plants in the landscape. *Margie leads restoration on Sundays during warm weather months. For information, email her at Szymanskyj@earthlink.net.*

Karen Lundell, Site Steward — Marengo Ridge, Marengo

(Co-stewards: Dale Shriver,
Kevin Kucharski)

"Though I am originally from New York, my sense of place has become the glacial topography of the Chicago Wilderness region. It is here where my inner child becomes alive and full of excitement while doing ecological restoration in rescuing little oak saplings, and especially the adolescent ones as they remind me that evolving and persevering is what helps us grow."

Karen is a Park Ranger for Kenosha County Parks. She gained experience, confidence and work skills by volunteering and working as a seasonal employee at the District, where she led seed collection forays, worked as an assistant ranger, and led the Youth Conservation Corps Crew at the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge partnership lands. Respected as a passionate and outspoken advocate for environmental causes, Lundell received the 2016 "Everyday Superhero Award" from Small Waters Education for cultivating the conservation community and culture. *Join Karen at a restoration day, email KLundell2016@gmail.com.*



**Anne Basten, Site Steward—
Bystricky Prairie,
Woodstock**

"I started on my volunteer stewardship adventure when, after 10 years, I had not yet landed a job in my chosen field of environmental science (zoology & botany). It was a way for me to implement my educational knowledge and skills close to home, while also becoming immersed in the local habitat. Over the past 20 years, I have witnessed many changes as a result of my stewardship—from increased grassland bird populations to new species of plants. I am still in awe every time I go out into the field at what marvelous adaptations nature accomplishes."

Anne actively promotes conservation and sustainable living practices through her work and volunteering. She is the Executive Administrative Assistant at the Conservation District and extremely involved volunteer for the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County. She is also organizer of the steering committee for Green Drinks McHenry County.

Bystricky Prairie is not open to the public. Email Anne for information at ABasten@MCCDistrict.org.



**Judy Speer, Site Steward—
Alden Sedge Meadow South, Alden**
(Co-steward Jack Speer)

"I decided to volunteer as a site steward because I fell in love with an ecosystem. The first time I walked in an oak savanna, I felt like I had come home. The dappled sunlight on the waving grasses, the ancient oaks with so many stories to tell, the birds singing in the tall branches, all welcomed me as a member of their family. When I learned the oak savanna was globally endangered, I decided, along with my husband, Jack, to do my part to save it from extinction. Restoring the oak savanna at Alden Sedge Meadow has been an amazing journey of discovery, and it's exciting to share it with the volunteers who come to help."

Judy practices and teaches permaculture design, ecological restoration and deep ecology. Judy and her husband, Jack, founded Small Waters Education, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting mutually beneficial relationships between humans and the rest of the natural world. They were recipients of the 2008 Chicago Wilderness Habitat Project Grassroots Conservation Leadership Award. *Alden Sedge Meadow is not open to the public, but volunteers can participate in habitat restoration days the third Sunday of each month. For information, email smallwatersNFP@yahoo.com.*



**Pat Sullivan-Schroyer, Site Steward—
Pioneer Fen, Johnsburg**

"I love being outdoors! When I began volunteering at restoration workdays, other stewards inspired and emboldened me to make a difference. I chose to become a site steward at Pioneer Fen in order to protect a population of shooting stars, which are beautiful spring wildflowers that are native to McHenry County. Now, in addition to leading volunteer restoration efforts at this special place, I reap the reward of seeing people of all ages coming to help and getting excited about making a difference. Come out and join in the exercise and friendships, and learn about our county's natural areas!"

Pat represents the second generation of women stewards at Pioneer Fen, following in the footsteps of Alice and Bill Howenstine who were site stewards after generously donating the original 20 acres and two conservation easements. Pat hopes that a third generation will someday take over for her. (Perhaps someone like Paige King, who volunteered while at Johnsburg High School. Now in college, Paige is working on a degree in Wildlife Biology.)

Pat also volunteers with the District's Phenology Project and Seed Collection Program. She is President of The Wildflower Propagation and Preservation Committee, which gives her even more opportunities to spread the word about native plants. Pioneer Fen is not open to public, but volunteers are welcome at restoration days. *Contact Pat at psullivanschroyer@gmail.com.*

**Wanda Naylor—
Coral Woods,
Marengo**

...our newest Steward-in-Training!

"I have loved the conservation areas since we moved to the area 25 years ago. When the opportunity arose to be a steward for Coral Woods came up, I was thrilled! Preserving and improving the quality of the prairie and woodlands was and is my goal. Volunteering as Bonnie Leahy's co-steward has been a great learning experience. Even though this is only my first year, I feel I have gained so much knowledge from listening to and talking with the other stewards and professionals."



Bonnie Leahy, Site Steward—Coral Woods, Marengo

"My primary goal is to help restore and preserve the health of the woodland floor of Coral Woods by removing garlic mustard, honeysuckle and other invasive species. In return, the woodland floor responds so beautifully with its abundance of native flowers. It is so important to share this with children and young adults by encouraging them to participate in restoration at Coral and to revisit over time the areas where they have volunteered. It is my hope that witnessing the rewards and results of their efforts will encourage their enthusiasm for future stewardship in conservation."

Bonnie and her husband, Jim have been involved with the District since she joined the former citizen advisory, Site Development Committee in 1987. Bonnie also served two terms on the McHenry County Conservation District Board of Trustees from 2003–2014. *To schedule a garlic mustard pull for your group, email [bonnie at bh.leahy@att.net](mailto:bonnie@bh.leahy@att.net).*

