

*Quarterly Newsletter of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County*

# EARTHCONNECT



Boone Creek Conservation Area, illustration by Grace Turcich

# Table of CONTENTS

|                                              |          |                                               |           |
|----------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>01 Introduction</b> .....                 | <b>2</b> | <b>08 Positive Impacts in Education</b> ..... | <b>10</b> |
| <b>02 Supporting the Defenders</b> .....     | <b>3</b> | <b>09 Be a Steward of the Prairie</b> .....   | <b>11</b> |
| <b>03 Clearing the Kish</b> .....            | <b>4</b> | <b>10 Give Styrofoam a Second Life</b> .....  | <b>12</b> |
| <b>04 Big Fall Book Sale</b> .....           | <b>6</b> | <b>11 Practices Make Perfect</b> .....        | <b>13</b> |
| <b>05 Protecting Our Water</b> .....         | <b>6</b> | <b>12 You Can Help Monarchs</b> .....         | <b>14</b> |
| <b>06 A Composting Community</b> .....       | <b>7</b> | <b>13 A Greener Holiday Season</b> .....      | <b>15</b> |
| <b>07 Big Changes &amp; Busy Times</b> ..... | <b>8</b> |                                               |           |

## 01

# INTRODUCTION

## *A Note from our Director*

As we close out 2024, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you—our dedicated members, supporters, and volunteers — who made this year such a success for the Environmental Defenders. Your commitment and passion for protecting the environment have driven incredible achievements including unique educational opportunities for residents on local environmental issues, successful community recycling events, innovative waste reduction initiatives, and advocating for environmentally-friendly transportation options. Together, we made significant strides toward a cleaner, healthier future for our community.

The Defenders are grateful for the partnerships we’ve forged with local businesses, government agencies, and fellow organizations, all working toward a common goal of protecting and

preserving the environment in McHenry County. Your support has been instrumental in our ability to expand programs and reach new audiences.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are more excited than ever to continue this vital work. We will focus on continuing our environmental education opportunities, advocacy efforts, and launching new community engagement projects. We are confident that, with your continued support, we will achieve even greater success in the coming year.

Thank you for standing with us, and the planet, in 2024. Let’s make 2025 another year of growth, progress, and positive change!

With gratitude,  
Erin Kennedy  
*Executive Director*



# Supporting the Defenders

## *Participate in Our Annual Auction*

WRITTEN BY ANNE BASTEN

### A COMMUNITY EFFORT

The Fundraising Team is excited to announce our upcoming Annual Auction! This event is dedicated to raising funds for the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County. From **February 23, 2025 at 8:00AM to March 9, 2025 at 8:00PM**, we will host the online auction. There will also be two 50/50 raffles (one online and one in-person) and a bag raffle at the annual meeting.

To make this auction a success, we are seeking donations of items, services, or experiences to include in the auction catalog. Contributions from generous individuals, organizations and businesses are essential to help us reach our fundraising goals and create a meaningful impact.

All donors will be recognized during the event and through our promotional materials, reaching a wide audience of environmentally conscious individuals and businesses. Your support not only aids an important cause, but also highlights your commitment to sustainability and community involvement.

If you're interested in contributing, please provide us with the descriptions and/or photos of the services or consumables. Bring any non-perishable items to the Defenders' new office (114 S Jefferson, Woodstock – call 815-338-0393 first) by **February 14, 2025** or contact Anne Basten at [basten1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:basten1@sbcglobal.net) or 815-344-5647 (leave a message). We are happy to discuss other ways you can support our efforts. All donations must include your contact information (name, phone, and email), a minimum starting price, the approximate value, and an expiration date for any services offered.

All donations are greatly appreciated! It is possible that your donation will be combined with other donations or may not be used for this event. The Defenders' Fundraising Committee may determine another way for your items or skills to be used to benefit the organization.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to make a difference. Together, we can create a brighter future for our County.

### Examples of items or services that would make great auction contributions

**GIFT CERTIFICATES** restaurants, stores, or online shops

**THEMED GIFT BASKETS** dogs, cats, rainy days, or surprise us with your own unique theme

**CONSUMABLES** food, beverages, or handmade toiletries – This is our most popular category for bidders! Most of us crave a good recipe made with love!

**TICKETS FOR EVENTS OR EXPERIENCES** sports, theater, or adventure packages

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES** consulting, photography, fitness training, etc.

**ARTWORK OR HANDCRAFTED GOODS** jewelry, pottery, carving or wearable creations

# Clearing the Kish

*14 Miles in 5 Years*

WRITTEN BY PAT LAWLOR

Let's all give ourselves a round of applause. We did it! We cleared all 14 miles of the Kishwaukee River in McHenry County in 5 years with 100 volunteers plucked from 1,800 fans on Facebook. An amazing achievement!

## THE PREPARATION

The City of Marengo gave Paddle the Kish in Marengo permission to establish a trail through 35 acres of their land to connect the Woodbine Lane turnaround to the Kish. The Union Lions gave us permission and funding to establish a launch at Siems Park which is a more suitable site than their current launch. Carrie helped set up a website, a Facebook Page and a logo. We were off!

## THE PROCESS

Ders, Ed, Howard and Bob followed deer trails through the woods to establish the path to the river. On July 27, 2019 our first work day

consisted of piling up mattresses, plywood, concrete blocks, etc. due to fly dumping on the Woodbine property. Josh's winch on his 4x4 came in handy to snake out the trees as chainsaw volunteers cut a path. Greg brought a chipper to rid ourselves of all the cut trees and have chips to spread along our path. That day saw our largest group, 15 hard-working volunteers in the middle of the pandemic getting the job done. Joe and Ray have kept the grass low at all the launch sites and bridges for easier access for our paddlers. Mike arranged for the pile of trees to be removed from the parking lot.

At Siems Park, Gary and Kep designed an ingenious, stable and durable ramp for paddlers to preserve the river bank. George used his amazing chainsaw skills with giant trees, and even had a trail cam for us to view rule-breakers. John and Charlie videoed our efforts, both how





to navigate the Woodbine trail as well as general chainsawing while standing in the river. We had the support of a professional outfitter, Matt, from Genoa. With over 200 separate volunteer days, there was not one injury among all those tricky trees and logs lying in or across the Kish. Kudos to each of the chainsawers for studying the situation and thinking safety first.

### THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

Although most volunteers came from Marengo, Harvard, Union, Sycamore, and Woodstock, we also had Greg and Sheila from Roscoe, Jeff from Janesville, Zack from Oak Park, Kathleen from Madison, Mike and Dixie who are travelers, Linda from Kaneville and Howard from Pine River, WI. Andy and Brandon from Boone County were so impressed with our operation that

they used our name and logo to promote Kish clearing in their own county. We are grateful for our working couples Alana & Jim, Chrissy & Casey and Brad & Kay. We also had some parent/child partners in Greg & Josh, Gary & Kevin, and Melinda, Maria & Dylan.

The Stars of our operation are Ray and Gary. They both spent countless hours with chainsaws in hand, sometimes alone, sometimes in a team. Gary always urged, "When is the next work day?" and Ray just went out to do what needed doing. Howard spent 4 days paddling and camping on the Kish in the spring of 2024 from Hemmingsen Rd in Union into the Rock River.

We thank each of these 100 volunteers for their hard work and dedication in providing paddlers with an enjoyable and usable Kish.





# Big Fall Book Sale

## *A Second Chance for Thousands of Books*

WRITTEN BY ANNE BASTEN

### BOOKS WITH NEW LIFE

How long does it take to unload 500+ boxes of books from a 26-foot truck? Actually, not very long when you have this great group of volunteers to do the job! All the books in these boxes were diligently arranged on tables by our volunteers for our Big Fall Book Sale. The recurring fall event was held at the Algonquin Township Road District Garage under the direction of our Fundraising Action Team.

The result of all this hard work was about \$5,000 earned for the Defenders, plus thousands of books were given a second chance. Now these books can be enjoyed by readers rather than being recycled or going to the landfill. So here's a big thank you to everyone who helped with the sale!



# Protecting Our Water

## *A Glance at the McHenry County Watershed Roundtable*

WRITTEN BY NANCY SCHIETZELT

Members from all of the watershed groups in the county, as well as affiliated groups that work to protect our underground and surface waters, recently gathered as the McHenry County Watershed Roundtable. This group, which is organized by our Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team, meets three times a year to share updates from their work and ideas for future collaborations.

# A Composting Community

## *Our Community Effort*

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY LANGE

### TESTING THE WATER

In the spring issue of EarthConnect, our unstoppable co-chair of Waste Reduction, Cecilia Carman, published an article announcing that our team had initiated talks with Waste Not to begin a composting program with farmer's markets. After much discussion and many hours of work, we are thrilled to share that our collection launched in August at Woodstock's Saturday market diverted nearly 1,000 pounds of organic waste from our landfills! This compost collection is important because there is a scarcity of landfill space, and organic matter in landfills creates methane. Methane is a greenhouse gas 28 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>. It is imperative that we take simple actions, like composting, to help this issue.

### A BROADENING SUCCESS

If you're like me, you may already have your own compost contraption in your backyard (kudos) but we know that there's a gap in our efforts when we come across those pesky items labeled "Compostable in an Industrial Facility". Enter Waste Not, a company offering residential curbside and commercial composting services. This means Waste Not is able to take these items and bridge that gap for us. You may recall our team's Race to Reduce Waste, launched in 2022, which promoted food establishments with sustainable practices. With that launch, we convinced twelve McHenry County businesses to enroll in composting through Waste Not and push for the substitution of compostable take-

out products in place of Styrofoam and plastic. It's wonderful to come full circle and offer a resource to consumers for responsible disposal of these same products!

### CONTINUING TO GROW

Thanks to Waste Not, EDMC volunteers, our gracious hosts at Blue Lotus, and the conscientious residents who have helped make this program a success in our community. It has been an honor to see our hard work flower with public interest and see residents truly excited to have this resource offered to them. The service is continuing outside of the summer farmer's market and we now have a permanent year-round food scrap drop-off location nearby with a monthly fee of less than \$5!

If you want to be part of this program and do everything you can to decrease your greenhouse gases, sign up below using the QR code - the planet will thank you!



SCAN TO SIGN UP FOR  
THE COMPOST PROGRAM





# Big Changes & Busy Times

## *The "Green" Bookstores*

WRITTEN BY PAM JOHNSON & DIANE GREENMAN

Fall is one of the busiest times of year for The Green Read and The Green Spot, and this year was busier than ever before! The biggest project of the season...year...maybe ever!

### THE MOVE

This fall, the Green Spot moved across the hall to the Defenders former office space. We cleared out the books and unneeded furniture in the Clearance Corner while creating a space plan for the new store. The Green Spot closed during the last week of September to move the books and bookcases into the new space and prepare for our reopening. The Green Spot reopened on October 1st, and we started accepting donations again on November 1st. If you haven't been in

yet to see the new and improved, bigger and better than ever Green Spot, stop by and say hi! After Green Spot reopened and the Big Fall Book Sale ended, a hallway sale was set up outside our front doors for the rest of October. At the end of October, we had a ribbon cutting ceremony with the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce accompanied with a Grand Reopening.

### SPECIAL EVENTS & THE HOLIDAY SEASON

In September, the Johnny Appleseed Festival in Downtown Crystal Lake was bigger than ever. The Green Read welcomed many new and returning customers during the festival. Hundreds of trick-or-treaters visited The Green Read for the Halloween Handout.



Green Spot ribbon cutting ceremony in October



Traditionally, Thanksgiving weekend is our busiest days of the year with the community supporting local businesses on Black Friday and Small Business Saturday. In addition to books, puzzles, painted rocks, bookmarks, and stationery, this year we added a line of locally made, reading-themed jewelry to both stores.

During the holiday season, The Green Spot is in the middle of participated in the “Legend of the Pickle” holiday ornament scavenger hunt in Woodstock and a “Holiday Hoedown” theme Ladies Night Out.

The Green Read enjoyed a special visit from Santa during the holiday season. Santa read a holiday book to hard-of-hearing children with the help of an American Sign Language interpreter. The store also participated in Luminary Nights in Crystal Lake during the holidays, a limited time when downtown businesses stay open late for holiday shopping. Several of The Green Read volunteers decorated a Defenders/bookstores tree in Depot Park’s Christmas Tree Lane.

## THANK YOU

None of this would be possible without our team of dedicated volunteers. They are truly the heart of both stores. All their efforts including greeting customers, sorting donations, erasing prices, peeling off stickers, shelving new arrivals, tidying up shelves, and sweeping out leaves (just to name a few of the many things they do!) are what make the stores look so wonderful and inviting. Thank you all so much for all your hard work, and a special thank you to everyone who helped with The Green Spot move!

So please stop by this winter and come visit us. Bring a hot beverage (covered please) and browse to your heart’s content...you’re bound to find a must-read book on our shelves. Or spend some time putting together the puzzle on the table. Let your child choose a book and read it together. We can’t think of a better way to spend a cold winter day. See you soon!



The “new” Green Spot featuring our collaborative puzzle table



The Green Read windows decorated for the Johnny Appleseed Festival

# Positive Impacts in Education

## *Updates with our Program*

WRITTEN BY PAM DUNCAN KING

### A NEW ADDITION

Please join us in welcoming Abby Winters, our newest Environmental Educator to the MCSEEP (McHenry County Schools Environmental Education Program) family. Abby brings a wealth of experience from her time with the National Parks Service and the U.S. Forestry Service, as well as locally with the McHenry County Conservation District to her role.



**ABBY WINTERS**

*New Environmental Educator*

### EXPANDING OUR PROGRAM

This past fall, MCSEEP focused on scheduling schools for the 2024-25 school year. As of November 2024, we have brought our environmental education program to The Goddard School, Martin Elementary School, Landmark Elementary School, Crosby Elementary School, Northwood Middle School, Montini Catholic School, Ringwood School Primary Center, Grant Intermediate School and Harvard Headstart. We are delighted to visit many more schools scheduled for January through April. In addition, we have visited Husmann Elementary School and Riverwood School to help with their environmental clubs.



Students study rocks and discuss the differences between them at the Goddard School



Students learn about healthy soil and composting for growing good food at Riverwood Elementary School



# Be a Steward of the Prairie

*Help Us Nurture the Triangle Prairie*

WRITTEN BY NANCY SCHIETZELT



Triangle Prairie at the corner of Hwy 14 and Lake Avenue in Woodstock

## IN NEED OF STEWARDS

Even though we're in the midst of winter now, those of us on the Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team are thinking ahead to springtime when we will once again need to be out volunteering in the four prairies that we care for.

Along with Summer interns, our team has been removing invasive species, spreading seeds, and planting new species at Triangle Prairie. We also burn the prairie about every three years. Therefore, it looks beautiful and lush throughout the warm seasons!

We would love to have some extra help to keep it looking that way. We hope to find someone interested in becoming the Steward for this site. This would involve setting dates for 2-hour restoration workdays several times a year, obtaining volunteers through Defenders' weekly eNews, and leading those efforts with the help of our Action Team. If you would be interested in becoming the steward for this beautiful prairie, please call Erin at the office at 815-338-0393 or email her at [defendersdirector@gmail.com](mailto:defendersdirector@gmail.com).





# Give Styrofoam a Second Life

## Help Us Recycle

WRITTEN BY BARB DAY

### CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Recycling Team's Styrofoam Recovery Program needs volunteers at our site at the Algonquin Township Highway Department in Crystal Lake to sort and bag Styrofoam. The site is open Monday through Friday, 7AM to 3PM. If those times don't work for you, we can make arrangements for you to be there at other times. Most folks volunteer for about one or two hours weekly. Once trained on how to separate "good" Styrofoam from stuff we can't use, which

only takes one session, it's up to you when you volunteer. We ask that you contact our Team Chair, Barb Day at [barbjday1934@gmail.com](mailto:barbjday1934@gmail.com), and let her know your volunteering details.

Our volunteer drivers, another group in need of more volunteers, take the items to Chicago Logistic Service in West Dundee. At this site, the Styrofoam is pushed through a densifier to form 2x4 logs, which are then sold to recyclers who will turn them into hard plastic.



Drop-off Location for Styrofoam Recycling



Densifier to transform Styrofoam into 2x4 logs



# Practices Make Perfect

## *BMP Talk and Tour 2024 Yearly Wrap Up*

WRITTEN BY NANCY SCHIETZELT & CINDY SKRUKRUD

### A GROWING INTEREST

We were so pleased with the high interest shown by so many county residents in becoming Winter Chloride Watchers! This last BMP (Best Management Practices) Talk and Tour of 2024 had 80 in attendance and on Zoom taking the training led by The Conservation Foundation to measure chloride levels in our surface waters throughout the county. There are now 22 new citizen scientists in McHenry County collecting water samples this winter. View their data at <https://app.waterrangers.ca/groups/national-great-rivers-winter-chloride-watch>.

These opportunities to learn about best management practices are a collaboration between our Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team and McHenry County Planning and Development. The term 'Best Management Practices', or BMPs, was coined

as a way to describe state-of-the-art practices implemented to protect and maintain the integrity of nature resources and promote conservation of land, water and energy.

Other 2024 talks focused on solar farms in McHenry County, smart infrastructure management and the value of trees for our communities.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Plans are already under way for more Talks and Tours in 2025. Topics include stream restoration, conservation-minded homeowner associations, soil erosion and sediment control at development sites, and non-toxic pavement sealants. We would love to see you in 2025. Sign up for upcoming BMP Talk and Tour meetings by scanning the QR code below.



Attendees at our October meeting



SCAN TO JOIN  
THE EMAIL LIST

# You Can Help Monarchs

## *Local Support for the Monarch Populations*

WRITTEN BY CINDY SKRUKRUD

With the Dec. 10, 2024 proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the beloved monarch butterfly officially as a Threatened Species, now - *more than ever* - is a time for everyone to do their part to help monarchs. Here's one way you can help:

**In early 2025, get your town to enroll in the Mayors' Monarch Pledge.** McHenry County is already an Illinois leader in the effort by towns and other local units of government to help the monarch butterfly and other pollinators. In 2024, 20 have signed on, **representing 40% of signers from Illinois.**

**2024 signers:** Algonquin, Bull Valley, Coral Township, Crystal Lake, Crystal Lake Park District, Harvard, Hebron, Holiday Hills, Huntley, Johnsburg, Lakemoor, Marengo, McCullom Lake, Oakwood Hills, Port Barrington, Nunda Township, Trout Valley, Union, Wonder Lake, and Woodstock.

We are so proud of the commitment of these communities and look forward to them renewing their pledge in 2025! **Our committee's goal is to increase the number of signers from McHenry County in 2025.** Pledges for 2025 are accepted from Dec. 1, 2024 to Mar. 31, 2025. If you'd like to help get your town to sign on for the first time, call the Defenders' office at 815-338-0393 and leave a message with your contact info for the Defenders' Mayors' Monarch Pledge Committee. Committee volunteers will get back to you on how you can help.



ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
GRACE TURCICH



# A Greener Holiday Season

## *Success at the Pioneer Tree Farm*

WRITTEN BY ANNE BASTEN

Thank you to the sixteen bakers who created marvelous cookies and treats which brought in about \$1,000 with hardly any leftovers! Thank you to the 75 Defender members, friends and neighbors who volunteered to work with the new and returning visitors at Pioneer Tree Farm, creating a positive and laid-back old-fashioned Christmas tradition of choosing and cutting their own organic Christmas Tree. We don't

have a final count on trees, but more than 700 trees found new homes with happy families along with several hundred hand dipped candles. Another big "thank you" to everyone who participated in our end of the year fundraisers!

If you would like to be added to one of these fundraisers as a volunteer, please contact Anne Basten by email [basten1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:basten1@sbcglobal.net) or the Defender's office at 815-338-0393.

## Save the Date



November 1, 2025

### Green Living Expo 2025

REGISTRATION BEGINS IN APRIL

## Our Team

### DEFENDERS' STAFF

**Erin Kennedy** *Executive Director*

**Grace Turcich** *Communication Specialist*

**Pam Johnson** *Manager at The Green Read and the Green Spot*

**Diane Greenman** *Assistant Manager at The Green Read and The Green Spot*

### DEFENDERS' OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

**Kim Hankins** *President*

**Carl Edstrom** *Treasurer*

**Bev Dow** *Secretary*

**Zak Dolezal**

**Rico Rotta**

**Ken Santowski**

**Ashley Lange**

**Kim Compton**

**Mollie Dunn**

# CALENDAR

## Winter Events of 2025

### FEBRUARY

#### SAT 1 | The Great Seed Event

10AM – 2PM at McHenry County College

#### TUES 11 | Defenders' Winter Get Together

5:30PM – 8PM

#### SAT 22 | WPPC's Annual Natural Landscaping Seminar

8AM – 4PM at McHenry County College

### APRIL

#### SAT 12 | Gardenfest

8AM – 4PM at McHenry County College

#### SAT 19 | Earth Day

11AM – 3PM at Prairieview Education Center

#### SUN 27 | Defenders' Annual Meeting

### RECURRING EVENTS

#### GREEN DRINKS

*First Wednesday of Every Month*

5PM – 7PM at Duke's Alehouse & Kitchen

In-Person and virtually on Zoom

Socializing begins at 5PM, Presentation begins at 6PM

#### STERNE'S FEN RESTORATION WORK DAY

*Fourth Sunday of Every Month*

9AM – 11AM

5617 Hillside Dr, Crystal Lake

#### Environmental Defenders of McHenry County

114 S Jefferson St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098



Open Monday – Saturday 10am – 4pm

CLOSED SUNDAY

815-527-7122

110 S. Johnson Street, Woodstock IL



Open Monday – Saturday 10am – 5pm

CLOSED SUNDAY

779-220-4945

61 N. Williams St, Crystal Lake, IL



One of the easiest ways to donate to The Environmental Defenders is by contributing to EarthShare in your workplace charity campaign. Talk with your employer or contact the Environmental Defenders at 815-338-0393.

### ABOUT EARTHCONNECT NEWSLETTER

Published Quarterly by The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County LOC, ISSN# 1938-9795

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