



# Brand Guidelines

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April 2026

A large, leafy tree with a thick trunk stands in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The tree's branches are covered in dense green leaves, some of which are in sharp focus in the foreground. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the field and a hint of a blue sky. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Preserve.  
Protect.  
Educate.

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# 01 Our Brand

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# 01 Our Brand

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## Our Mission

In order to protect all living things, the Environmental Defenders is dedicated to the preservation and improvement of the natural environment in McHenry County. As a grassroots organization, we are committed to building sound ecological relationships between people and the natural world that supports all life.

To achieve environmental preservation and improvement, we provide the community with educational programs and volunteer action on pollution prevention, sustainable land use and energy and natural resource conservation.

We advocate policies which protect drinking water supplies and conserve land for open space and agriculture. We demonstrate

waste reduction through recycling drives and reuse centers. We encourage natural resource protection through native landscaping and stream protection programs.

In our local advocacy, the Defenders works to support and empower underserved communities through collaborative programs. Through ongoing collaboration, we aim to better connect and understand environmental concerns within the Latino community.

# 01 Our Brand

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**We envision an environment that is healthy for future generations and understand that decisions today affect everyone's tomorrow.**

## Our Vision

We understand and work to educate everyone residing in our county about the local connection to global realities and how global trends affect the well-being of humans and all species, locally. From the threats of global climate change, habitat loss and polluted watersheds to soil health and plastic reduction, it is vital that we advocate for best management practices with regard to decisions that affect our shared environment.



# 01 Our Brand

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## Our History

The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County history begins in 1969 when the Fox Valley Freeway was proposed. In response to the proposal that would pave over some of the most ecologically significant features within the Fox River watershed, a group of concerned citizens from the Barrington area formed the Defenders of the Fox to protect and improve the Fox River ecosystem and its tributaries. The Defenders of the Fox's first goal was to fight the freeway. In February 1970, a group of like-minded people from Crystal Lake and other parts of McHenry County joined the Defenders of the Fox, forming the McHenry County Chapter.

At about the same time, an ad in the Woodstock Daily Sentinel called a meeting for people interested in environmentalism. Rita and Ralph Halvorsen, Anne Carroll, Sherry Anderson, and Lou and Margaret Marchi attended and eventually formed the McHenry County Environmental Council. In September 1970, this group presented Earth-O-Rama, a program on ecology. Admission was gained by bringing some item to be recycled. Soon thereafter, the Council was asked to become a part of the McHenry County Defenders of the Fox.

In February 1971, the two groups merged together and the McHenry County Defenders was officially incorporated as a non-for-profit organization.

In 1981, after a decade of work in the community, the Defenders continued to expand and hired its first staff members and rented office space in Crystal Lake.

During the 1990's and through 2006, the Defenders operated a full-service drop-off recycling center in Woodstock. The Defenders have always been a strong advocate of recycling since the organization's inception. Their recycling efforts are a core pillar of the organization. The Defenders continue to hold monthly recycling drives throughout the county.

In 2008, the members of the McHenry County Defenders voted to change their name to the *Environmental Defenders of McHenry County* to more accurately describe the mission of the organization.

Today, the Environmental Defenders is rooted in their legacy, continuing to serve McHenry County and uplift their community.

# 01 Our Brand

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**Our members are dedicated community leaders, trusted stewards of the environment, and passionate climate advocates.**

## Our Membership

Our members are the backbone of the Environmental Defenders. Our dedicated membership has aided our mission and helped the Defenders preserve, protect, and educate McHenry County. Being a grassroots organization, our efforts are fueled by our membership. Our membership is made up of individuals and families who care deeply about the environment and the health of our local community.

Our membership prides itself on being part of a collective effort to build a cleaner, greener, and more resilient McHenry County.



## 02 Our Strategy

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# 02 Our Strategy

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## Elevator Pitch

### **Preserve. Protect. Educate.**

The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County is a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to preserving our natural areas and resources, protecting natural resources, and educating the local community and government as advocates for a healthy environment. We are membership-based and volunteer-driven, creating positive change and influencing sustainable action.

## Tone of Voice

### **Trustworthy. Hopeful. Passionate.**

With our Tone of Voice, we communicate with our community and members through trustworthiness, hopefulness and passionate. We are trustworthy with over fifty years of experience being a dependable resource in the County. We are hopeful in our mission to preserve, protect, and educate for generations to come. We are passionate in our volunteer teams and growing initiatives.

Additionally, the Defenders should always communicate that the organization is **informative** through educational outreach, **empowering** through advocacy efforts, and **authentic** through the fundamental principle to better the local environment.

# 02 Our Strategy

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## Rules of Language

### Artificial Intelligence

Language should always be rooted in authenticity and originality. AI is to be used sparingly for proof-reading and minimal editing. Volunteers and staff should always be transparent when using AI and should communicate use of AI with the Manager of Communication.

Our community and membership rely on our expertise, hyper-local knowledge, and human touch. AI should never be used to fully create a digital campaign, complete a grant application, design a social media post, or write a newsletter article.

## Our Likeness

The likeness and use of our name “Environmental Defenders of McHenry County” and our logo should always be approved by a staff member. External uses of our likeness for promotional materials, endorsements, or other content are to be transparent and communicated clearly with the Executive Director of the Environmental Defenders.

Any external use of our likeness and use of our logo must follow all brand guidelines. Please download our logo kit [here](#).

# 03 Logo

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# 03 Logo

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## Primary Logo

The primary logo is the main logo used to represent our brand. All the other logotypes are built around it. Our primary logo design requires keeping a small safe space around it to ensure it's legible. Use primary logo in places where it has plenty of room to stand out and draw attention.



## Primary Icon

The icon is to be used second to the primary logo. The icon should be utilized for small spaces where the wordmark is not legible. The icon can be used in, but is not limited to, social media avatars, apparel items, and background texture.

# 03 Logo

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## Logo Variations



# 03 Logo

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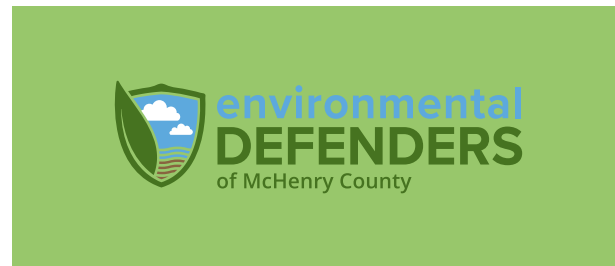


## Primary Logo Spacing

The primary logo is the main logo used to represent our brand. All the other logotypes are built around it. Our primary logo design requires keeping a small safe space around it to ensure it's legible. Use primary logo in places where it has plenty of room to stand out and draw attention.

# 03 Logo

## Logo Usage & Rules



**X** No full color logo or icon may overlap a solid color besides white



**X** The logo or icon may not be set at an angle. All uses must be level.



**X** The logo or icon may not be stretched or modified.



**X** Logo should NOT be any color other than the primary logo, black, or white.



**X** The full color logo may not overlap an image without an overlay color.



**X** The logo layout may not be switched or modified.

# 04 Typography

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# 04 Typography

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## Literata

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii  
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq  
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

### Primary Typeface

The primary typeface is Literata. It is a serif font that is easily accessible through [Google Fonts](#). Literata is a modernized traditional font that feels approachable, grounded, and authentic. This font may be used for headers, subheads, and some tertiary uses. See Layouts for more information.

### Weights

Light  
Regular  
Medium  
**SemiBold**  
**Bold**

*Light Italic*  
*Regular Italic*  
*Medium Italic*  
***SemiBold Italic***  
***Bold Italic***

# 04 Typography

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## Figtree

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii  
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq  
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

### Secondary Typeface

The secondary typeface is Figtree. It is a sans serif font that is easily accessible through [Google Fonts](#). Figtree is a contemporary font that feels friendly, clean, and balanced. This font may be used for subheads, body copy, captions, and some tertiary uses. See Layouts for more information.

### Weights

Light	<i>Light Italic</i>
Regular	<i>Regular Italic</i>
Medium	<i>Medium Italic</i>
<b>SemiBold</b>	<b><i>SemiBold Italic</i></b>
<b>Bold</b>	<b><i>Bold Italic</i></b>
<b>ExtraBold</b>	<b><i>ExtraBold Italic</i></b>

# 04 Typography

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## Usage & Hierarchy

Literata Light \_\_\_\_\_ **Headline**

Figtree Semibold \_\_\_\_\_ **Subhead 1**

Literata Medium \_\_\_\_\_ **Subhead 2**

Figtree Bold \_\_\_\_\_ **Subhead 3**

Figtree Regular \_\_\_\_\_ **Body Copy.** Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

# 05 Color

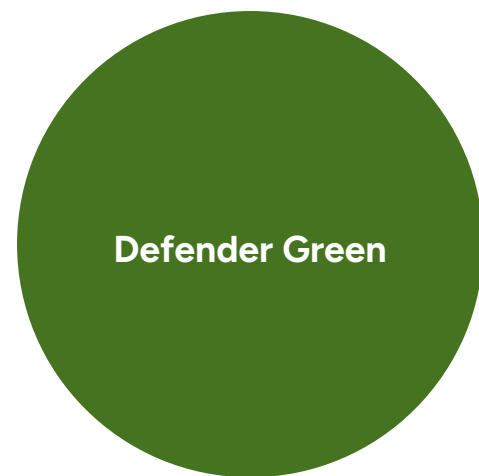
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# 05 Color

## Color Palette

### Primary



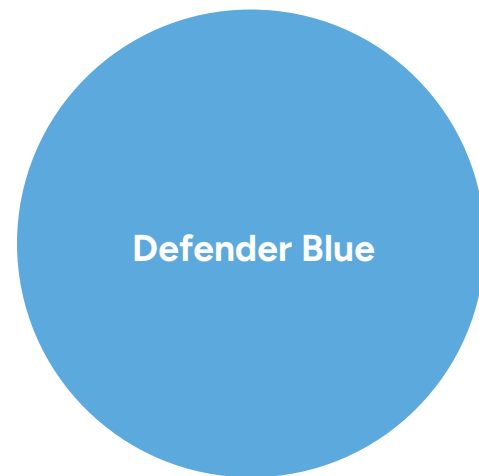
Defender Green

**HEX** #457320

**RGB** 69-115-32

**CMYK** 75-33-100-21

**PMS** 7742 C



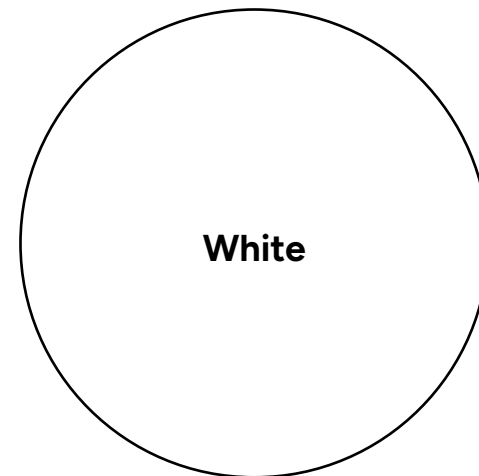
Defender Blue

**HEX** #5CA9DD

**RGB** 92-169-221

**CMYK** 60-20-0-0

**PMS** 284 C



White

**HEX** #FFFFFF

**RGB** 255-255-255

**CMYK** 0-0-0-0

**PMS** 284 C

### Secondary



Soil

**HEX** #87633E

**RGB** 135-99-62

**CMYK** 38-56-80-23

**PMS** 874 C



Sapling

**HEX** #98C76B

**RGB** 152-199-107

**CMYK** 42-2-76-0

**PMS** 577 C



Goldenrod

**HEX** #D59829

**RGB** 213-152-41

**CMYK** 16-42-100-0

**PMS** 1245 C

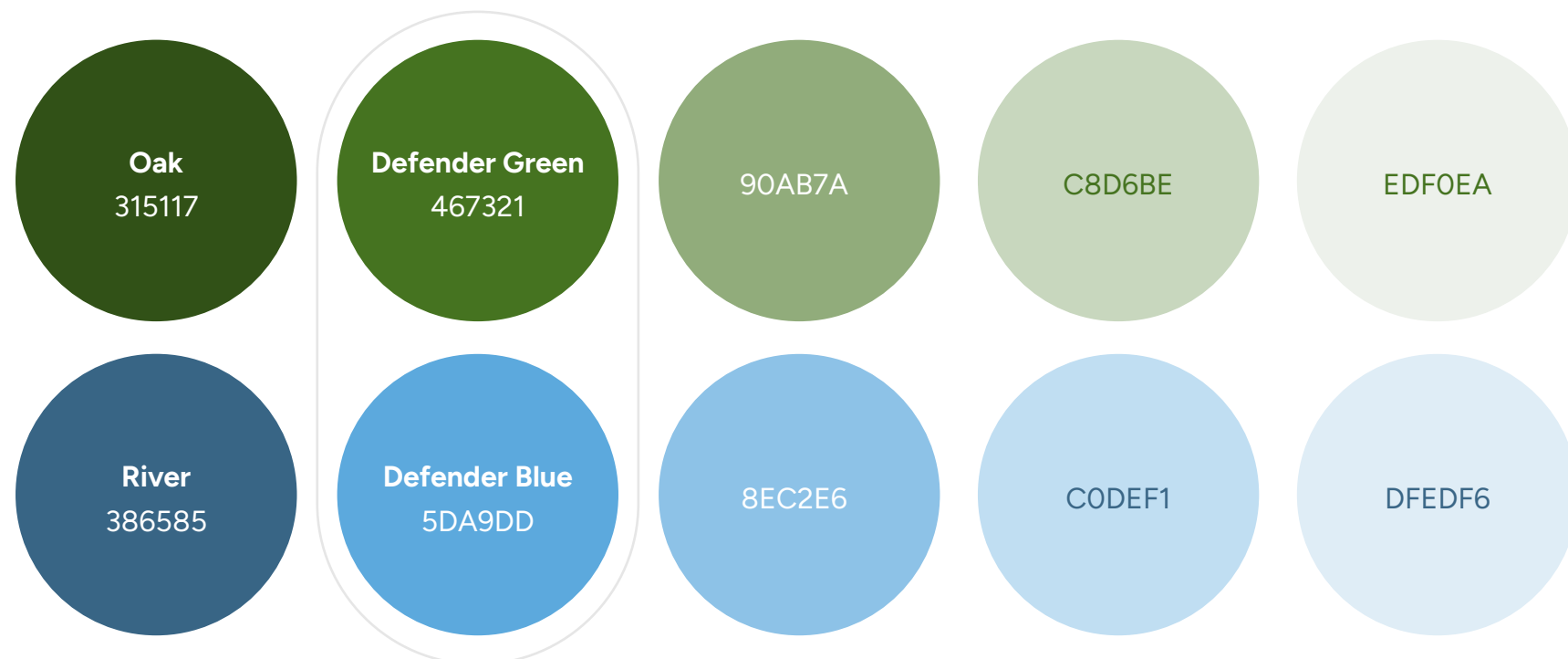
### Usage

Primary color palette should be about 70% when utilizing brand colors. Secondary colors are accent hues meant to compliment the primary colors.

# 05 Color

## Shades & Tints

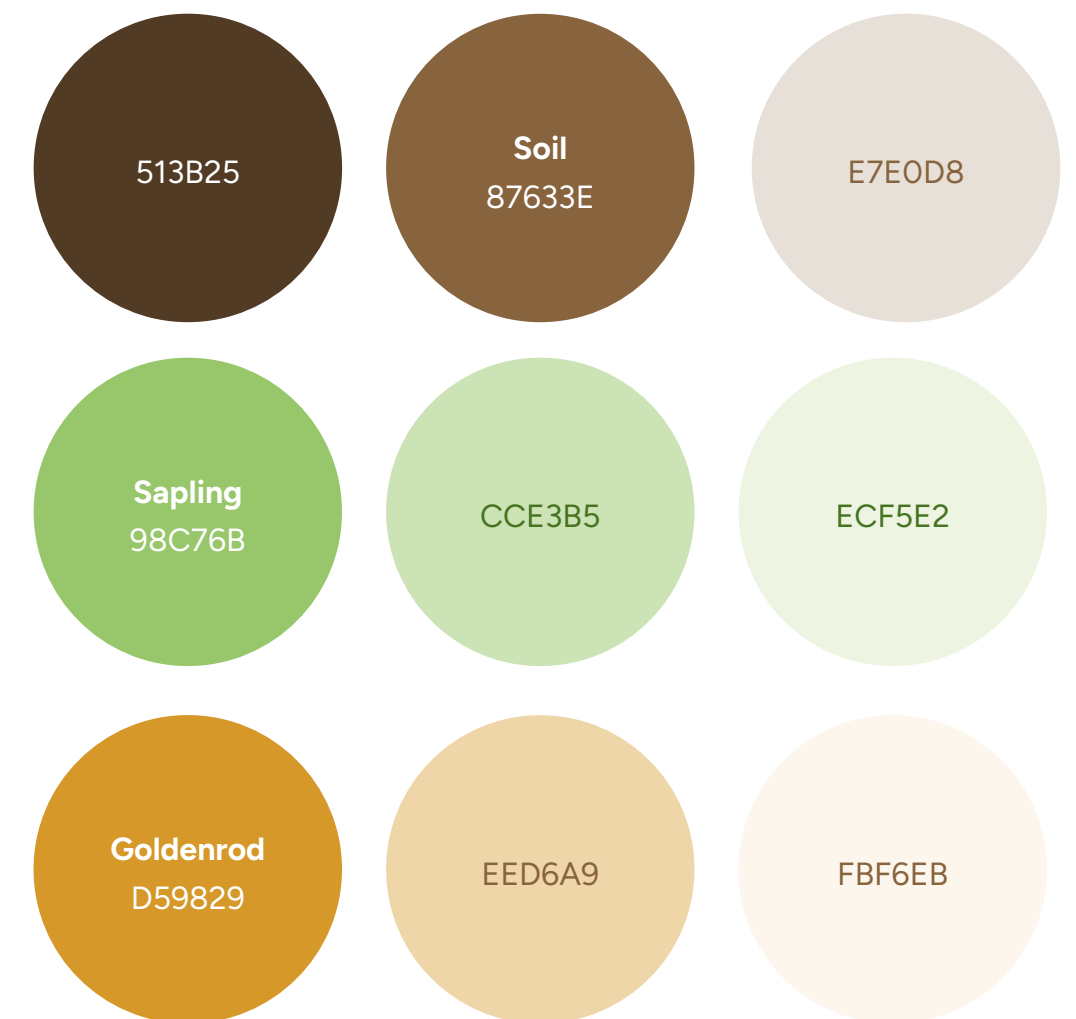
### Primary



### Usage

Preferred shades and tints of the primary and secondary color palette are included here. Shades and tints not included in brand guidelines are permissible, but should be used sparingly. Shades and tints can be used for, but not limited to, callout boxes, infographics, and background colors.

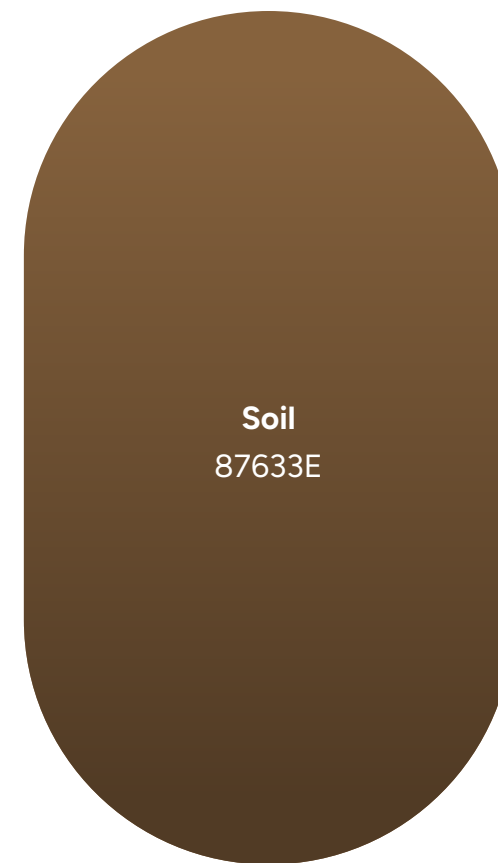
### Secondary



# 05 Color

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## Gradients



## Usage

Gradients should only be used on few occasions. Gradients should only be monochrome, using tints of the same color. Do not mix colors, i.e. green and blue. Use gradients on digital media only. Gradients can be used in, but is not limited to, backgrounds, overlays on images, illustrations, and website design.

# 05 Color

## Usage & Color System

### Usage

Each Action Team is assigned a color based on the primary and secondary color palettes. This color-coded system will create organization and internal infrastructure for team management.

### Color System

- **Fundraising** - River
- **Outreach** - Goldenrod
- **Recycling** - Defender Blue
- **Transportation** - Sapling
- **Waste Reduction** - Soil
- **Water & Natural Resources Protection** - Defender Green



# 06 Brand Elements

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# 06 Brand Elements

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## Graphic Shapes



### Rules

This wave graphic shape is a primary brand element and should be used frequently. The shape may be altered and adjusted to fit each individual use.



### Usage

The wave graphic can be used on any branded element, print, digital, social media, etc. This graphic element is to be used as a page breaker or divide information/sections.

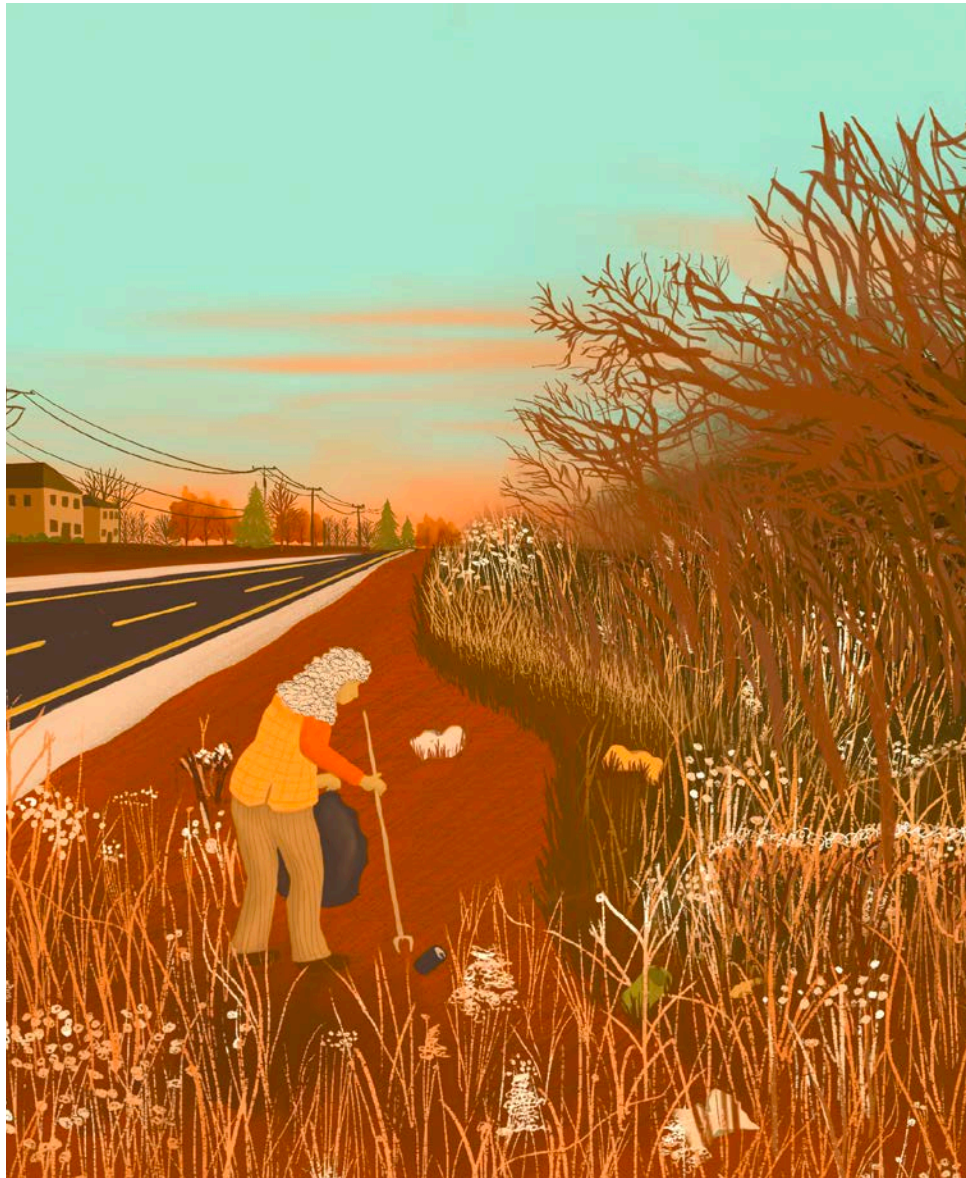


# 06 Brand Elements

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## Illustrations - Hand-drawn

Organic, colorful, textured

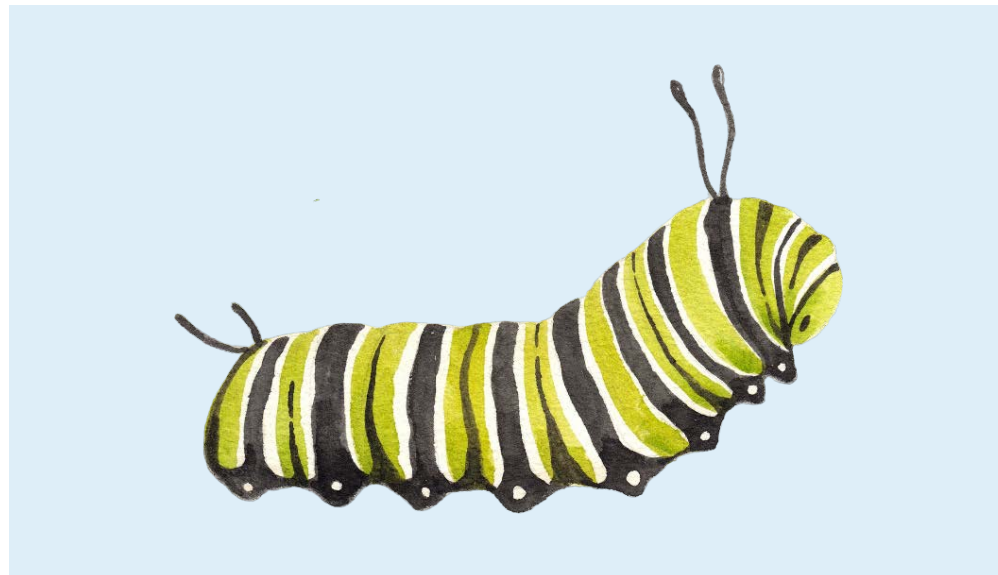


# 06 Brand Elements

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## Illustrations - Sourced

Sourced from Canva, collage, cut-out, textured



# 06 Brand Elements

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## Illustrations

### Style

Illustration styles may vary but should all feel organic, handmade, and textured.

### Rules

Illustrations can be both hand-drawn by an illustrator, or sourced from Canva. Avoid illustrations that look childish and dated. Never use an AI-generated illustration.

### Usage

The wave graphic can be used on any branded element, print, digital, social media, etc. This graphic element is to be used as a page breaker or divide information/sections.



# 06 Brand Elements

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## Iconography



Fundraising



Outreach



Recycling



Bookstores



Transportation



Waste Reduction



Water & Natural  
Resources Protection

## Usage

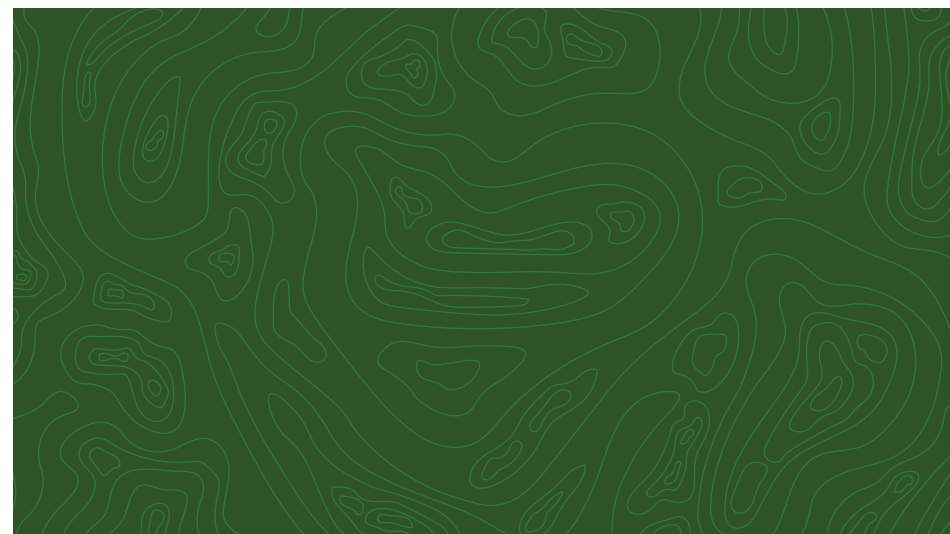
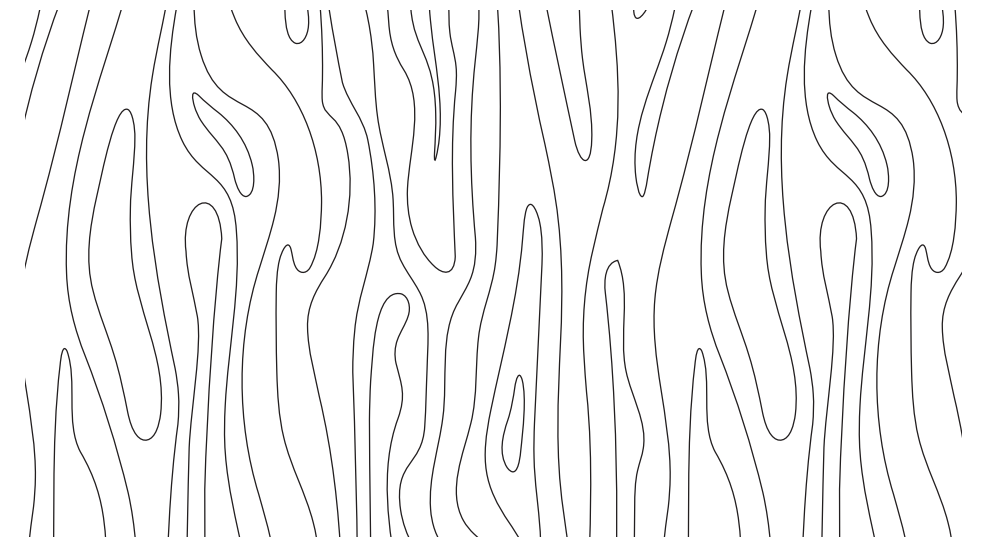
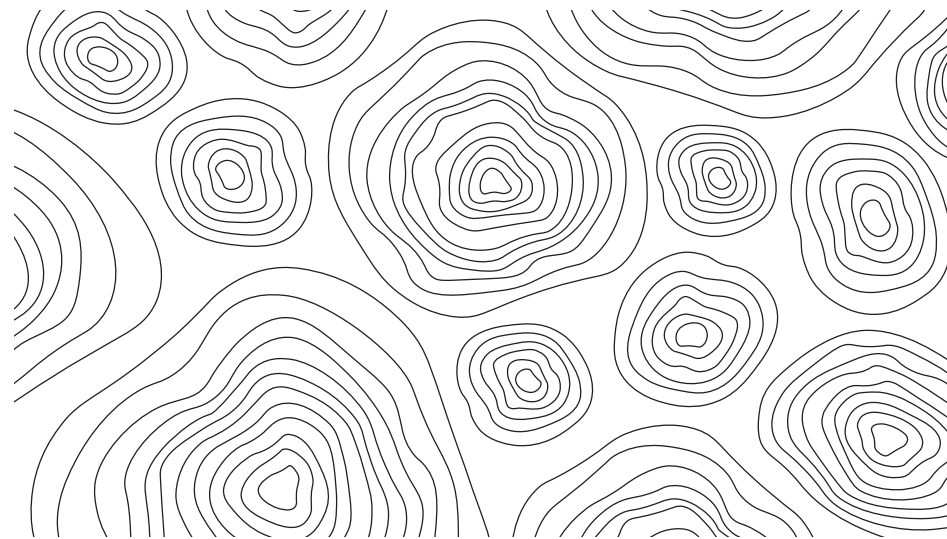
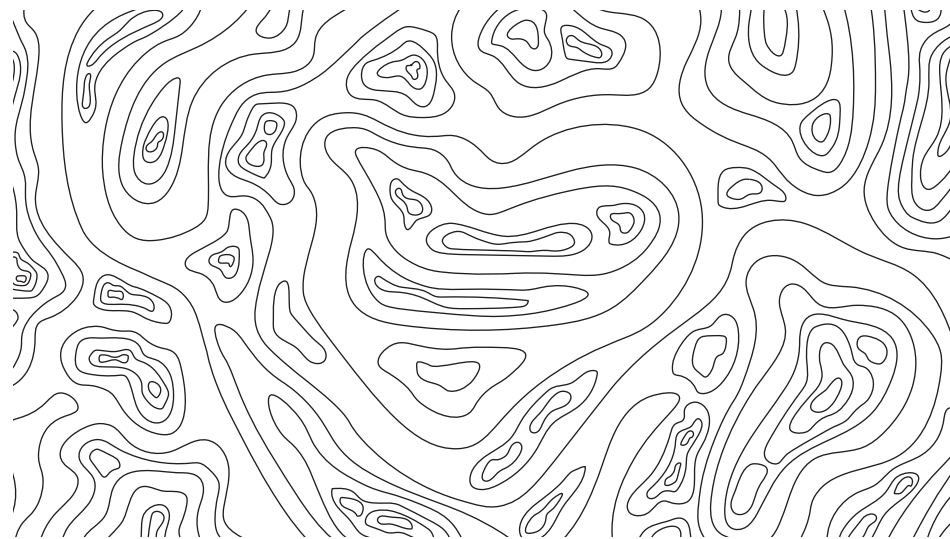
Icons should be used as an identification system for Action Teams and Bookstores. Icons can be used for print materials, like an evergreen brochure, and for digital use, like on the website.

# 06 Brand Elements

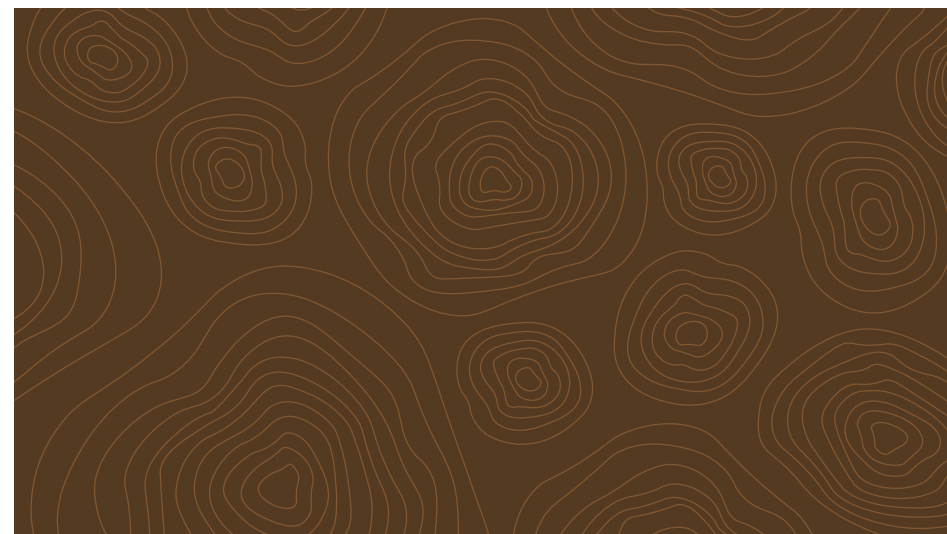
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## Textures & Patterns

Organic, nature-inspired, abstract



Topographic



Wood Grain



Water

# 07 Photography

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# 07 Photography

## Defender Photography

People-focused, activity-centered, & clear subject

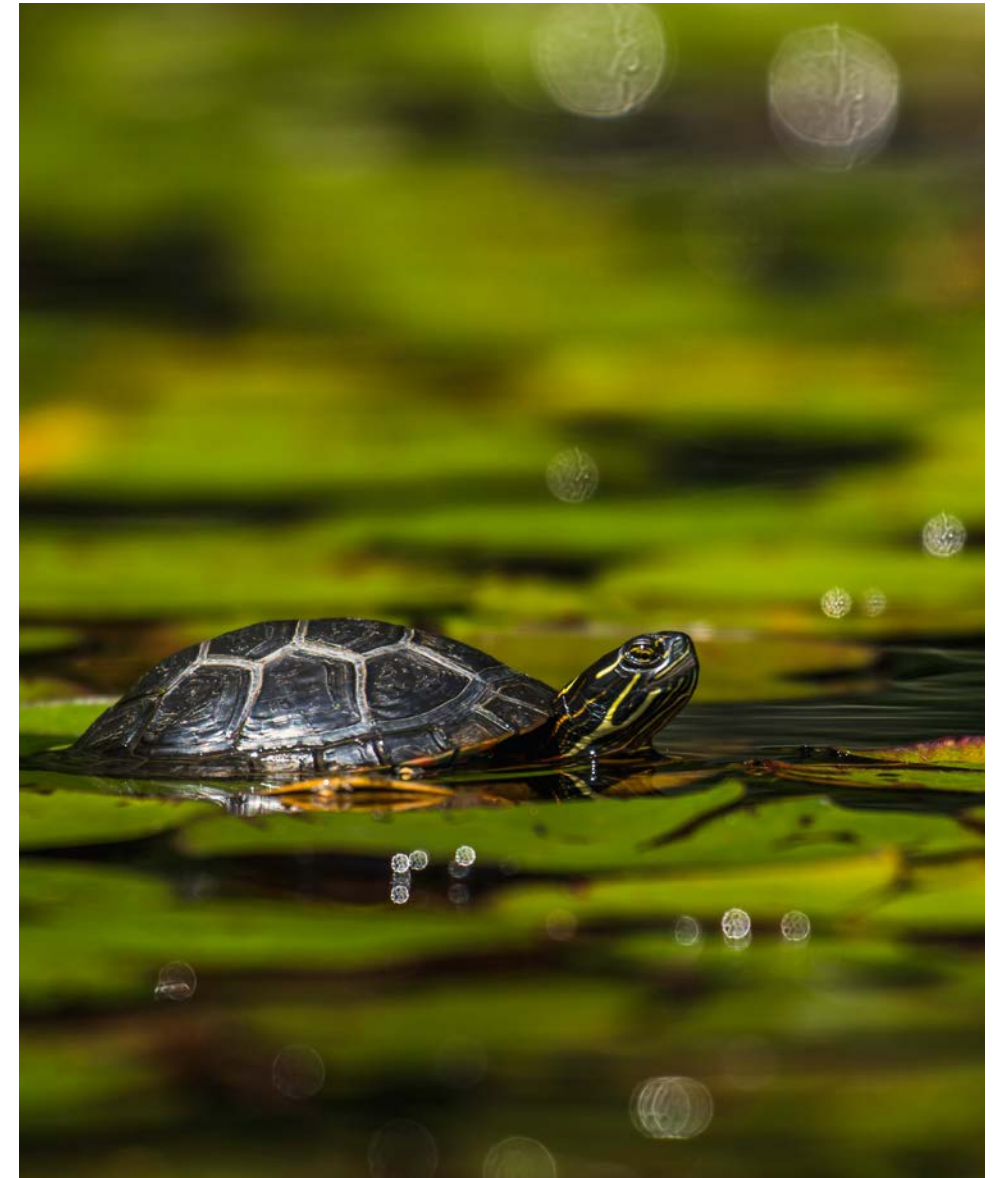


# 07 Photography

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## Stock Photography

Tones of green & blue, nature/wildlife-focused, all species must be native or non-invasive



# 07 Photography

## Best Practices & Usage

### Best Practices

Defender photography should be high-quality and ideally taken with a camera.

### Usage

Defender photography should primarily be used in newsletters, eNews, website, and promotional/marketing material.

Defender photography should be used over stock photography where possible.



# 07 Photography

## Best Practices & Usage

### Best Practices

Stock photography must be sourced from free platforms such as [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) and [Pexels.com](https://pexels.com).

Never use AI-generated photography. AI-assisted expansion of photos and removal of background is allowed.

### Usage

Stock photography should be primarily used for the annual report, event invitations, and website.



# 08 Digital Media

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# 08 Digital Media

## Website

The homepage features a navigation bar with links for ABOUT, JOIN US, GET INVOLVED, EVENTS, BOOKSTORES, and RESOURCES. The main banner shows a field of tall grass with the text "Preserve. Protect. Educate. Defending our environment and ecosystems for 55 years." and a "JOIN US" button. Below the banner, a paragraph states: "In order to protect all living things, the Environmental Defenders is dedicated to the preservation and improvement of the natural environment in McHenry County. As a grass roots organization, we are committed to building sound ecological relationships between people and the natural world that supports all life." At the bottom, there is an "ENVIRONMENTAL BLOG" section titled "Latest News And Articles" featuring a featured article for "Winter 2026 EarthConnect" with a "READ FULL ARTICLE" button.

The "Action Teams" page has a green header with the title "Action Teams". The main text reads: "The work of the Environmental Defenders is successful thanks to the passion and dedication to environmental stewardship of our many volunteers. You can become a member of this vital work that recognizes the important link between a healthier environment and human commitment to the causes that protect and preserve our corner of the planet." Below this, it says: "Feel free to visit any of our Action Teams at their regular meetings and see what works best for you! However you choose to be involved, know that we can't bring lasting change without you!" There are two main sections: "Outreach" with a photo of people at a table and a "LEARN MORE" button, and "Fundraising" with a photo of a "BOOK SALE" and a "LEARN MORE" button.

The "Waste Reduction Action Team" page features a header with the title "Waste Reduction Action Team" over a photo of hands holding a piece of compost. Below the header is a photo of two women at a table with a green tablecloth and a sign that says "Compost Food Scraps Here!". The text "Join the Waste Reduction Action Team" is followed by a description: "The Waste Reduction Action Team focuses on efforts to decrease food waste, increase access to at-home and community composting, and reduce single-use plastic in McHenry County." It lists "Action Team Co-Chairs: Cecilia Carman & Michelle Muryn" with an email address. The "Team Meeting" is "3rd Thursday of the Month at Duke's Alehouse". "Examples of our Work" include: "Conduct School Food Waste Audits", "Implement a new community compost drop-off site", "Bring Community Fridges to the area", "Hold Food Waste Reduction Seminars at local libraries", "Advocate and Collaborate with Illinois Food Scrap and Composting Coalition and Wasted Food Action Alliance on statewide campaigns". At the bottom, there is a section for "Our Community Fridge" with a photo of a "MINI FOOD PANTRY" sign.

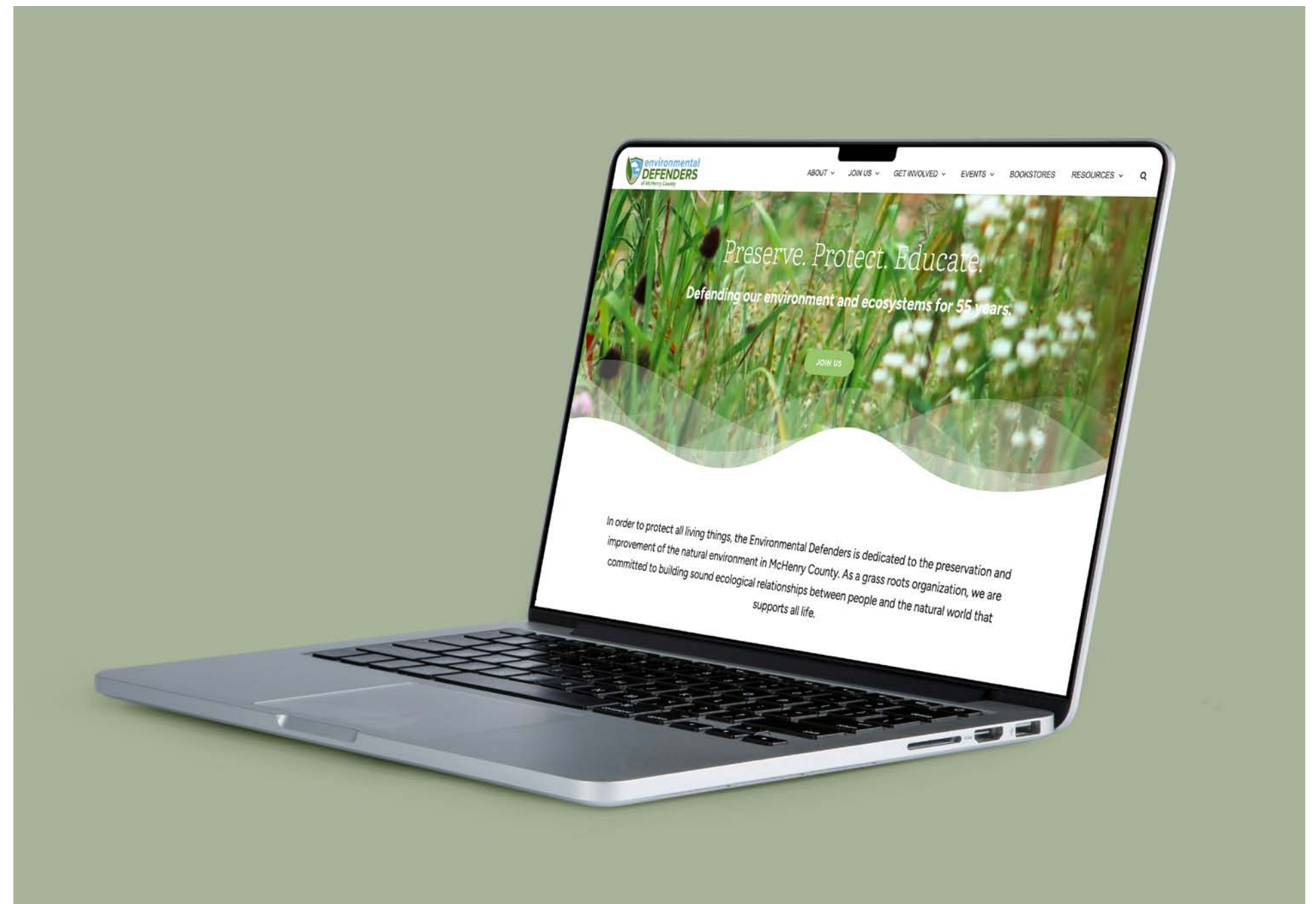
# 08 Digital Media

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## Website


### Best Practices

Website content should be center-aligned for smaller groups of text and left-aligned for larger groups of text. Images are to be square with a 1:1 ratio. Buttons are to be pill-shaped with a solid color or outline. Call-to-actions are to be clear and concise.



# 08 Digital Media

## Email Campaigns



**environmental DEFENDERS**  
of McHenry County

Don't forget to renew your membership!



**What does it mean to be an Environmental Defender of McHenry County?**

**Protect Local Environment** - By rejoining our mission, you help preserve, improve and protect our natural areas in McHenry County.

**Community Engagement** - You can take part in volunteer activities like habitat restoration, roadside & river cleanups, watershed protection, and recycling drives.

**Policy Advocacy** - The organization advocates for environmental policies around clean water, land conservation, and sustainable land use.

**Educational Programs** - Members aid in educational initiatives on pollution prevention, energy conservation, and natural resource protection.


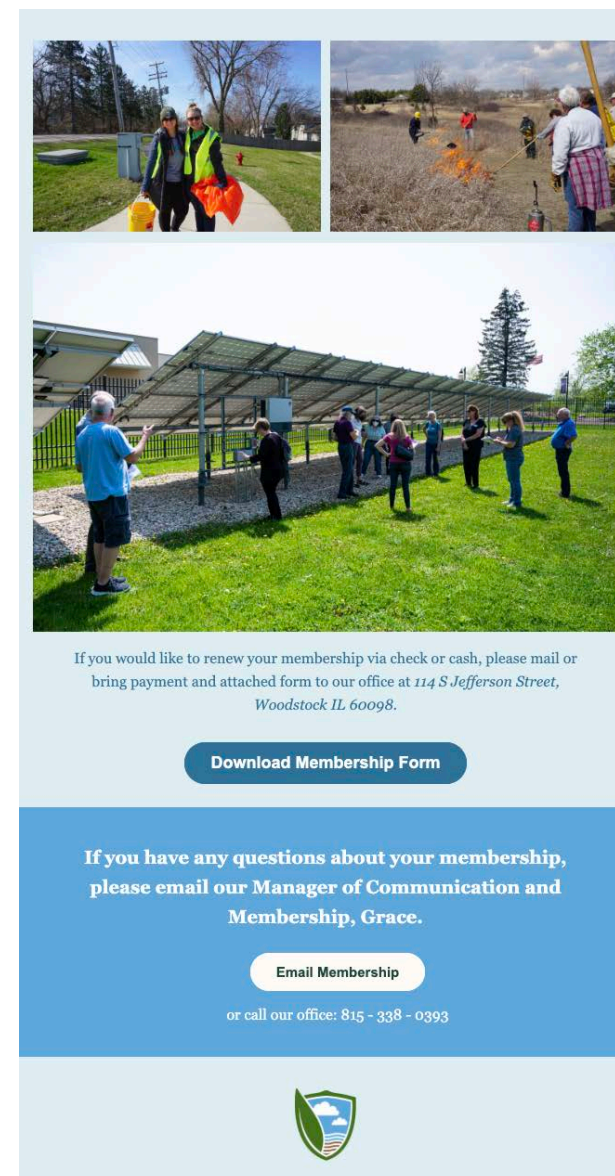
**Waste Reduction Impact** - Members support recycling drives to reduce waste and encourage sustainable practices locally.

**Grassroots Legacy** - As a grassroots organization, we are a collective influence that brings about positive change and shapes local environmental action.

**Generational Vision** - As a member, you are part of the solution that promotes a more sustainable and healthier environment for future generations.

[Renew Now!](#)

Membership Renewal Email



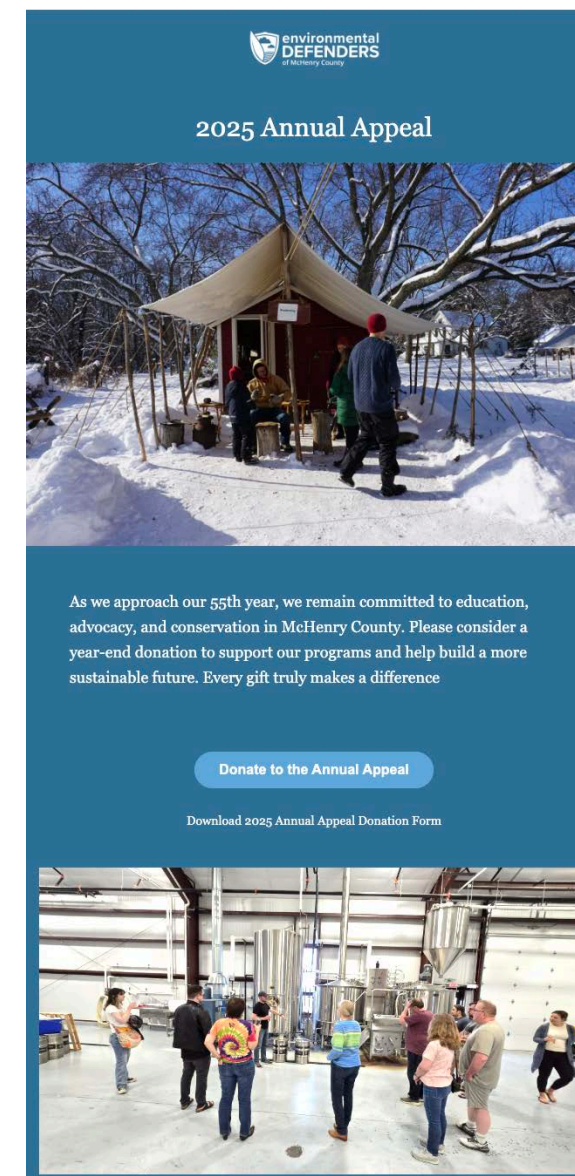

If you would like to renew your membership via check or cash, please mail or bring payment and attached form to our office at *114 S Jefferson Street, Woodstock IL 60098.*

[Download Membership Form](#)

**If you have any questions about your membership, please email our Manager of Communication and Membership, Grace.**


[Email Membership](#)

or call our office: 815 - 338 - 0393



**environmental DEFENDERS**  
of McHenry County


2025 Annual Appeal




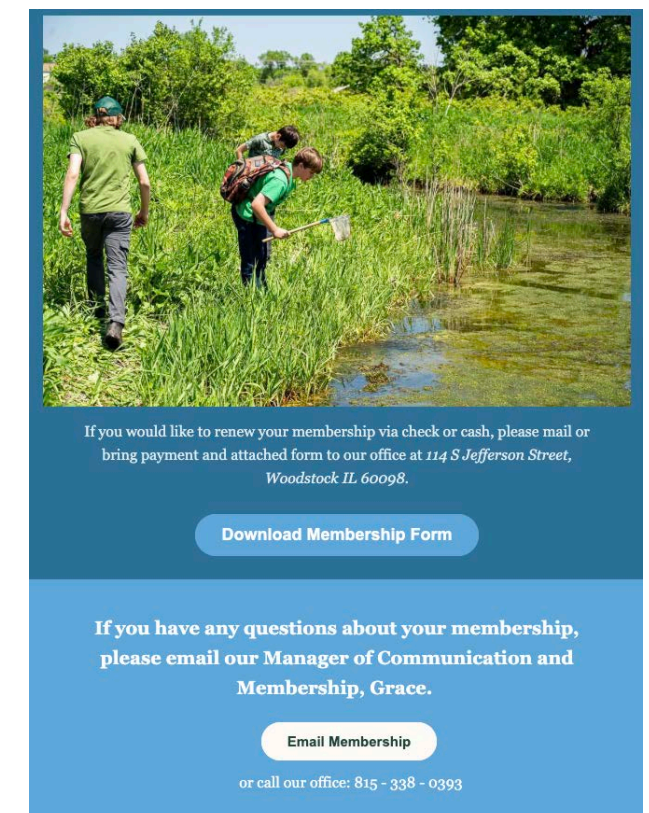
As we approach our 55th year, we remain committed to education, advocacy, and conservation in McHenry County. Please consider a year-end donation to support our programs and help build a more sustainable future. Every gift truly makes a difference.

[Donate to the Annual Appeal](#)

[Download 2025 Annual Appeal Donation Form](#)



Annual Appeal Email



If you would like to renew your membership via check or cash, please mail or bring payment and attached form to our office at *114 S Jefferson Street, Woodstock IL 60098.*

[Download Membership Form](#)

**If you have any questions about your membership, please email our Manager of Communication and Membership, Grace.**

[Email Membership](#)

or call our office: 815 - 338 - 0393

# 08 Digital Media

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## Social Media

### Imagery

Social media content should be photo based or collage style. This style of imagery on social media platforms is grounded in grassroots nature of the organization. Brand fonts (Literata and Figtree) are the primary fonts for titles and subheads. 80% of content should have blue or green

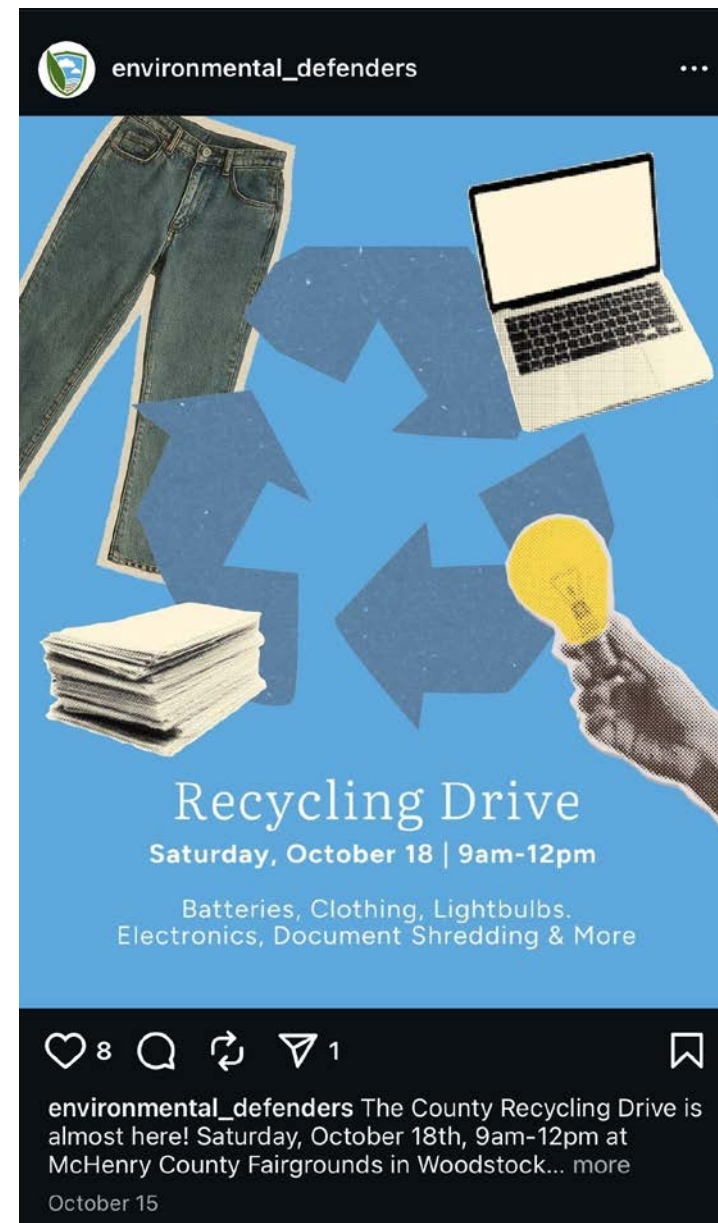
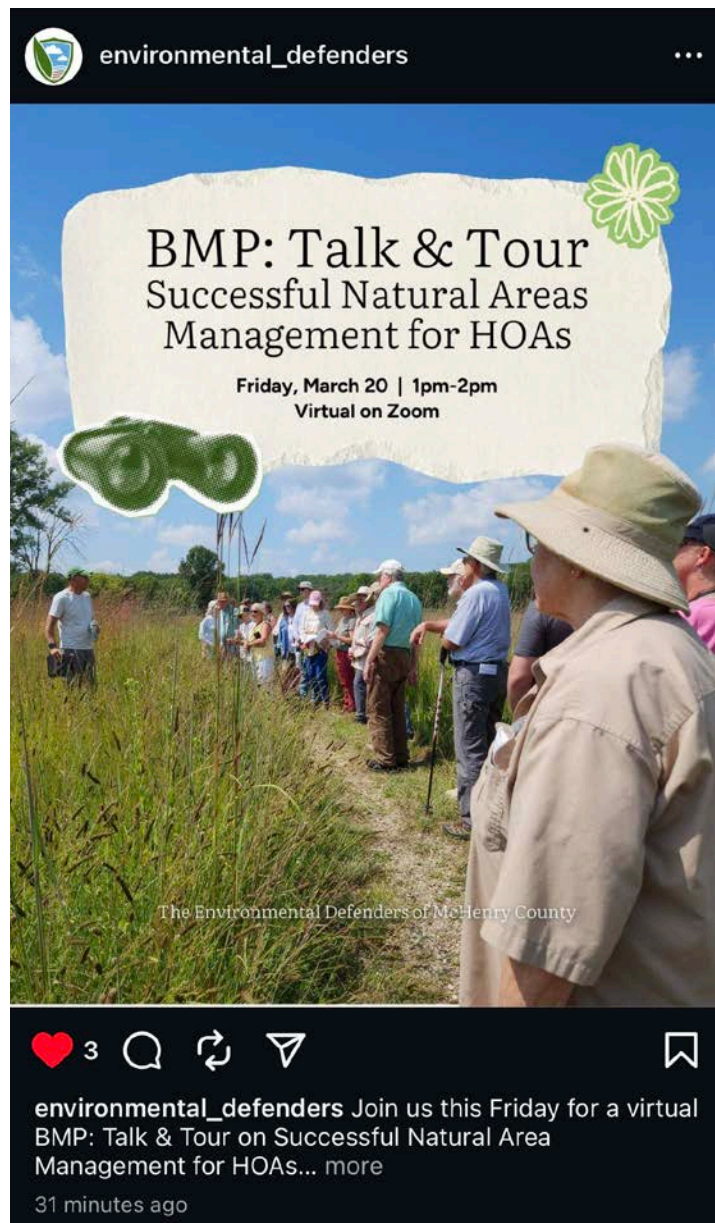
tones to maintain brand image. Collage style content should have a handmade, craft and approachable aesthetic. Photos are an exception to the 80% color rule. All photos must be of an event, volunteer(s), or location/activity supported by the Defenders (i.e. Green Drinks, Pioneer Christmas Tree Farm, MCC Green Living Expo).

### Language

Titles are to be clear and concise. Promotion of events should always include date, time, and location. Language used should be collective through uses of “we”, “us”, and “our community”. Language should maintain the brand Tone of Voice and appeal to our membership.

# 08 Digital Media

## Social Media



# 08 Digital Media

## Presentations

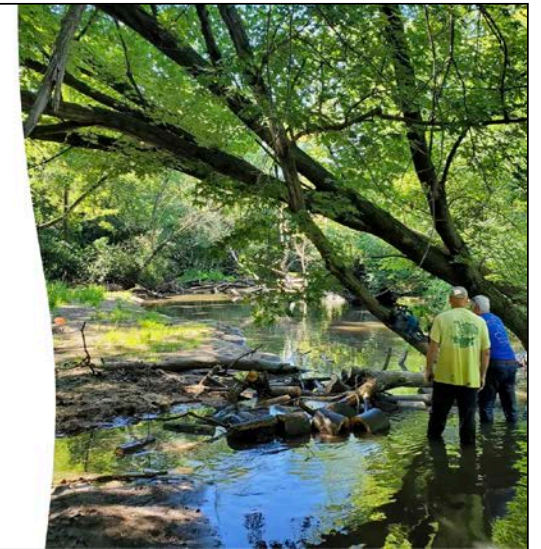
Clean, simple, imagery-focused



### Paddle the Kish

Our team also published an annual map and list of access and exit points in early 2025. The goal of this map is to help paddlers get in and out of the Kish since most of our launches are not well established.

We hosted two public paddles in conjunction with the McHenry County Historical Society. There was a strong turnout with 18 paddlers attending each event.




Recycling - Styrofoam Shed

# 08 Digital Media

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## Digital Ads

**Sponsored**

 **Environmental Defenders of McHenry County**  
mcdef.org

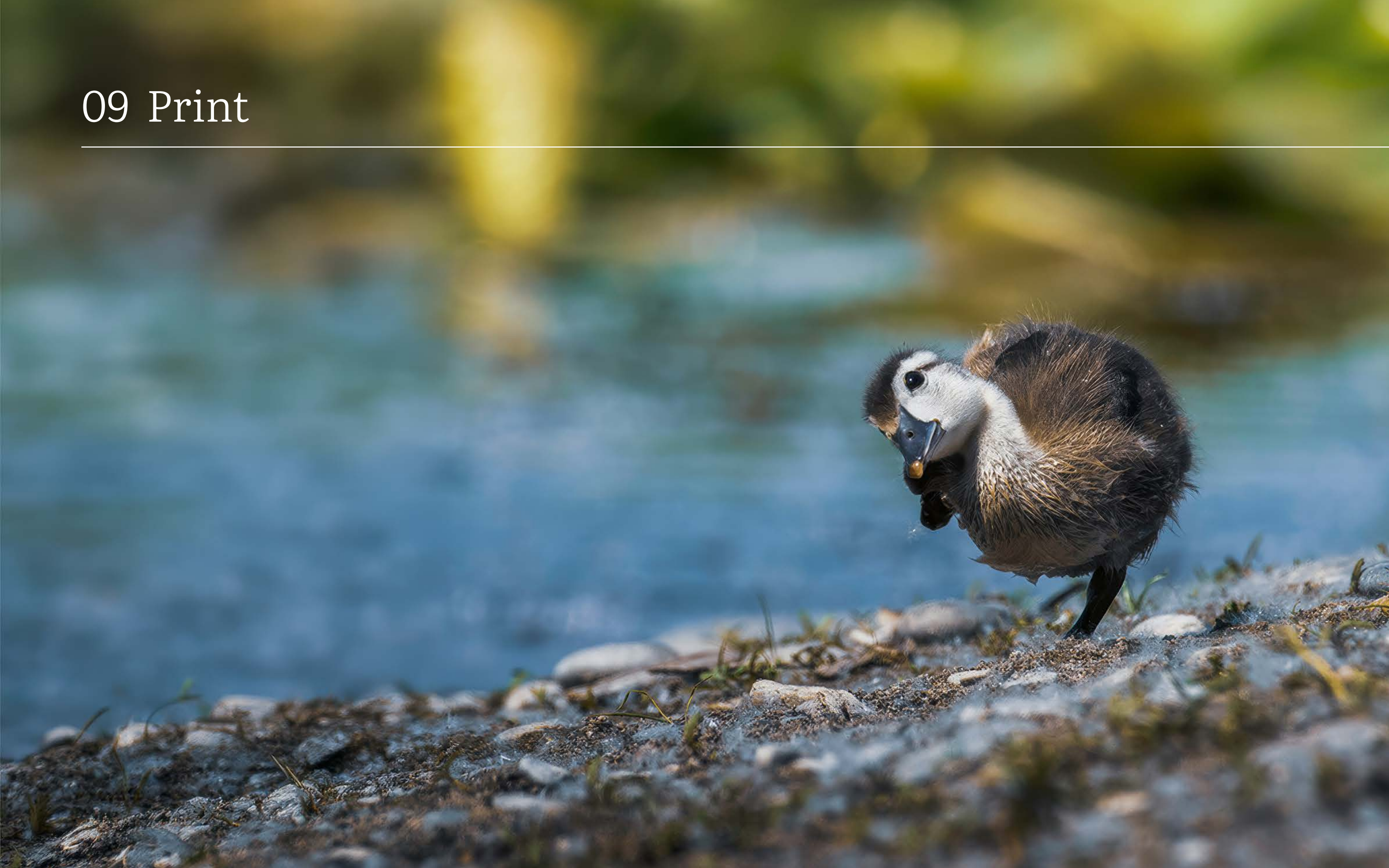
**Advocate for a Better Tomorrow - Become a Defender!**

Become a member to help fund our county-wide environmental programs and initiatives. Help preserve our County for future generations. Become a member today.

Preview of Google Ad promoting Membership

09 Print

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# 09 Print

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## Posters & Flyers

### Imagery

Posters and flyers should be photo based or collage style. This style of imagery on social media platforms is grounded in grassroots nature of the organization. Brand fonts (Literata and Figtree) are the primary fonts for titles and subheads. 80% of content should have blue or green tones

to maintain brand image. Collage style content should have a handmade, craft and approachable aesthetic. Photos are an exception to the 80% color rule. All photos must be of an event, volunteer(s), or location/activity supported by the Defenders (i.e. Green Drinks, Pioneer Christmas Tree Farm, MCC Green Living Expo).


### Language

Titles are to be the highest in hierarchy. Promotion of events should always include date, time, and location. Language used should be collective through uses of “we”, “us”, and “our community”. Language should maintain the brand Tone of Voice and appeal to our membership.

# 09 Print

## Posters & Flyers


The 2025 Annual  
**Big Fall Book Sale**



**MEMBERS ONLY  
EARLY ACCESS**  
Friday, SEPT 19<sup>th</sup>  
6-8PM

Not a member yet? Become a member online at [mcdef.org](http://mcdef.org)  
Cash, Check & Card Accepted

Algonquin Township Road District  
Building 6B Garage  
3702 US Hwy 14, Crystal Lake




As of November 15, 2025

## The Styrofoam Recycling Program is suspended.

Starting 11/15/2025, the Styrofoam Recycling Program will stop collecting Styrofoam and other materials like packing peanuts. Unfortunately, our trusted recycling partner can no longer take Styrofoam from our drop-off sites. We deeply apologize for any inconvenience. The Defenders are working on resources to help limit use of Styrofoam.

**All Environmental Defenders Styrofoam drop-off sites will halt collection including:**

- Algonquin Township Road District in Crystal Lake
- City of Woodstock Public Works
- Village of Algonquin Public Works Facility



Bring what you can, take what you need

## Community Fridge

Nippersink Library in Richmond  
*Visit [mcdef.org](http://mcdef.org) for new locations*



Join our Waste Reduction efforts and join our Community Fridge Program. Drop off perishable items for others to take home. Our program is free to all!

- Sealed packaged foods
- Unopened pasteurized milk, yogurt & juice
- Fresh eggs (with a use-by date)
- Condiments/Sauces (salad dressing, salsa, hot sauce, ketchup, mustard)
- Cured meats (sealed, with a use-by date)
- Fresh Vegetables & Fruit
- Baked goods & Bread
- Cheeses

**Waste Reduction Action Team**  
[wastereductionCL@gmail.com](mailto:wastereductionCL@gmail.com)



Connect with our Waste Reduction Action Team & view newly added fridge locations

Do you want to be more involved in the community? Join the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County!



Become a member at [mcdef.org](http://mcdef.org)

- Free educational seminars for groups or organizations
- Community Fridge Program
- Drop-off Compost Program (food scraps + industrial compostables)
- Reducing food waste
- At-home composting education
- School lunch waste audits
- Restaurant waste consultation
- Single-use alternative consultation
- Partnership opportunities

# 09 Print

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## Posters & Flyers

**Eyebrow** - Necessary descriptor \_\_\_\_\_  
secondary to Title.

**Title** - Highest Hierarchy in Literata \_\_\_\_\_  
Light, Left Aligned (may be centered).  
Please refer to [Typography](#) section.

**Details** - Date, Time, Location, & any \_\_\_\_\_  
necessary details (i.e. "Members Only  
Event or Card Accepted")

**Graphic/Illustration** - Please refer \_\_\_\_\_  
to [Illustrations](#) section.

**Logo** - Center-Aligned at \_\_\_\_\_  
top or bottom of poster.



# 09 Print

## Annual Report



# 09 Print

## Fact Sheets

### Best Practices

Fact Sheets should always include sources with links when applicable. Be sure to link the hyperlinks when exporting the PDF.

Fact Sheets are to include a brief overview or summary and a quick-fact section. Other information may be laid out in a editorial format.



**Water & Natural Resource Protection**

Action Team

**Toxic Pavement Sealants** *Protecting your family and our waterways*

Coal tar sealants and other pavement sealants, which are liquid sealers applied to asphalt, contain high levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) that pollute our waterways and threaten our health. You can help by pledging to not use these products on your property and by supporting efforts to eliminate the sale and use of toxic pavement products in your community. This will help prevent dust from coal tar, a known human carcinogen, from being tracked into our homes and off driveways and playgrounds where children play. It will also protect organisms in our waterways from runoff of particles of sealant that introduce high levels of dangerous PAHs.

**38x** higher risk of cancer from long-term exposure to coal-tar-sealed pavement

**42-94%** of coal tar-based sealants are main source of toxic pollution in local watersheds

**30%** more PAHs from coal tar-based sealant than water from unsealed lot

**Why Ban Coal Tar Sealants**

**Sealants containing High Levels of PAHs are a Threat to Human Health.**

- PAH compounds are known to be toxic, mutagenic and carcinogenic. Exposure, especially early in childhood, has been linked to an increased risk of lung, skin, bladder, and respiratory cancers.
- According to a study by Baylor University and the U.S. Geological Survey, someone living next to coal-tar-sealed pavement has a risk of cancer that is 38 times higher than if they lived next to unsealed pavement.<sup>1</sup>
- A 2016 American Medical Association policy calls for legislation either to ban the use of pavement sealcoats containing PAHs or to mandate the use of sealcoat products with minimal PAH.<sup>2</sup>

**PAHs in Coal Tar Are Toxic to Aquatic Species**

- PAHs can cause severe biological defects and damage the health of aquatic organisms.
- Recent studies show coal tar-based sealants are the main source (42-94%) of toxic PAH pollution in Milwaukee's streams, and in Great Lakes basin watersheds.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Water running off a parking lot coated with coal tar-based sealcoat had 30 times more PAHs than water from an unsealed lot.<sup>5</sup>

**Coal Tar Sealant Phase-Out in U.S.**

**USA communities representing over 47 million people have passed bans on coal tar sealants to protect their citizens.**

- These include the states of Washington, Minnesota, Maine, New York, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and numerous towns in the U.S.
- Illinois communities with bans include Evanston, Port Barrington, South Barrington, North Barrington, Vernon Hills, Third Lake, Winnetka, Highland Park, Wilmette, Deerfield, Glenview, Mt Prospect, Northbrook, Riverwoods, Tower Lakes, Lockport, Rolling Meadows, Warrenville and Cook County.
- The Illinois Coal Tar Sealant Disclosure Act<sup>6</sup> went into effect on Jan. 1, 2023. It requires public schools, daycares and state agencies to notify parents and employees if a high PAH sealant will be used. The Act also requires these agencies to request bids for low PAH sealants. Find the Illinois Department of Public Health Environmental Health Guidance Factsheet under Resources.

**Damage from Coal Tar Sealants & Other High PAH Sealants Cost Taxpayers Money**

PAH-contaminated sediment causes increased costs and problems associated with stormwater management. In 2019 seven Twin City suburbs sued coal tar producers for ignoring the environmental risk of their product, saying it could cost their communities billions to rid their stormwater ponds of this pollutant.<sup>9</sup>

**Effective Alternatives Are Already in Place**

- PAH levels in the alternative asphalt-based sealants are 1,000 times lower than in coal tar sealant.
- Home Depot and Lowe's no longer sell coal tar sealants but sell asphalt-based and latex-based sealant alternatives.



Routes of PAH contamination of homes and waterways

**PAHs in Urban Sources**

All Concentrations in mg/k

<b>Fresh Asphalt</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<b>Weathered Asphalt</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Fresh Motor Oil</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Brake Particles</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Road Dust</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Asphalt Based Sealcoat</b>	<b>~50</b>
<b>Tire Particles</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Diesel Engine</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Gasoline Engine</b>	<b>370</b>
<b>Used Motor Oil</b>	<b>440</b>
<b>Coal-tar Based Sealcoat</b>	<b>~70,000</b>

Source: United States Geological Survey (USGS)

**What You Can Do**

- Be sure to tell your sealing company that you do not want them to use sealant containing coal tar. Ask for the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) to identify any high PAH-containing ingredients in products before purchasing.
- Educate yourself with the terminology and language. High PAH-containing products are ones that contain >0.1% (1000 ppm) polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) by weight. These may contain the following noxious chemicals: coal tar, coal tar pitch volatiles, RT-12, refined tar, steam-cracked petroleum residues, petroleum resin, heavy pyrolysis oil, steam-cracked asphalt, pyrolysis fuel oil, heavy fuel oil, ethylene tar, ethylene cracker residue, or a variation of those substances assigned the chemical abstracts service (CAS) numbers 65996-92-1, 65996-93-2, 65996-89-6, 8007-45-2, 64742-90-1, or 69013-21-4. (7)
- Consult the list in footnote 8 of approved PAH products with total PAHs <0.1% (1000 ppm) to ensure your product is safe according to the Department of Energy & Environment. (8) If your sealant applicator is using a high PAH containing product, or a sealant retailer is selling a high PAH containing product, urge them to get it tested.
- Report potential violations of the Sealcoat Disclosure Law by contacting the Illinois Department of Health at 217-782-5830.

**Resources**

**USGS Science on Coal-Tar-Based Sealcoat and Environmental and Human Health** by Dr. Barbara Mahler, Hydrologist  
Video presentation: <http://www.viddler.com/v/b63b7a27>

**USGS 2016 Factsheet** <http://bit.ly/1YHftkU>

**Barrington Area Council of Governments Resolution**  
Signed by six villages and two townships in 2016. This resolution contains a good guide to the products of concern.  
<http://bit.ly/2C5UEKG>

**Illinois Department of Public Health Environmental Health Fact Sheet-Compliance With the Coal Tar Sealant Disclosure Act: Guidance for Public Schools and Licensed Day Care Facilities**  
<https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dph/resources/to-pics-services/environmental-health-protection/toxicology/eh-factsheet-coaltarsealant-header.pdf>

**Visualizing PAH Values in Pavement Sealants**  
<https://youtu.be/AejXAgJh6ek>

**2021 Tom Ennis of CoalTarFreeAmerica's Presentation to North Branch Chicago Watershed Workgroup**  
<https://coaltarfreeusa.com/2021/09/new-video-the-perils-of-pave-ment-preservation/>

**Coal Tar Sealant Phase-Out in Canada**

In February 2025, Canada updated the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to prohibit the manufacture and import of sealants containing coal tars and PAH levels higher than 1000 ppm by Oct. 1 2025 and the sale of the regulated products by Dec. 31, 2025.<sup>9</sup>

Please reach out to the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County's Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team if you have any questions about this factsheet.  
Call 815-338-0393 or email [envirodefmc@gmail.com](mailto:envirodefmc@gmail.com) and ask to be put in touch with our team.

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/20045621>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oma-assn.org/oma-urges-legislation-ban-dangerous-coal-tar-sealcoats>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usgs.gov/news/coal-tar-sealant-a-major-source-pah-contamination-milwaukee-streams>

<sup>4</sup> <https://setac.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/etc.4727>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/files/3.asp?ActID=4181&ChapterID=35>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.twincities.com/2019/01/02/minnesota-cities-sue-makers-of-banned-driveway-sealant-alleging-1-billion-pond-problem/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection/toxicology/coal-tar-sealant-guidance.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.site-lab.com/2022-JUNE10-CERTIFIED-SEALCOAT-LIST.pdf> <sup>9</sup> <https://gazette.gc.ca/p-pr/p2/2025/2025-03-12/html/sar-dors36-eng.html>



Water & Natural Resource Protection Action Team

REV 11/25

# Thank you

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## Contact Us

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