

Quarterly Newsletter of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County

EarthConnect

Celebrating 55 Years: Grounded in our legacy, uplifting our community



See back for more information about our Recycling efforts.

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01

A Note from our Director

Thank you all so much for being with us at our Annual Meeting on March 8. It is always wonderful to see so many people who care deeply about the environment in McHenry County gathered. Your support, your time, and your commitment are what make the Defenders' work possible.

A special thank you goes to our Fundraising Action Team for all the hard work they put into organizing both our on-line and in-person auction. From reaching out to community partners for donations, to listing items on our auction platform so supporters can participate from the comfort of their homes, a tremendous amount of time and energy goes into making this event possible. The auction plays an important role in supporting the programs and work we carry out throughout the year. Thank you, Anne Basten, our Fundraising Action Team Chair, and the entire Fundraising Team, for your dedication and hard work.

We were also proud to recognize several outstanding award recipients this year:

Theta Award for Lifetime Environmental Impact

The Howenstine Family, recognized for their environmental stewardship and service to McHenry County.

It was an honor to present the Theta Award to the Howenstine family, whose commitment to the environmental community in McHenry County spans more than five decades. I'd like to take a moment to share a few additional reflections on their impact.

It was a pleasure to recognize the Howenstine family as this year's recipients of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County's Theta Award for Lifetime Environmental Impact. The Howenstine family was selected not only for their tremendous impact on the Defenders, but also for their lasting influence on the environmental community across McHenry County. Alice, Bill, Chuck, Deb, and Erick helped shape a culture of environmental stewardship that is truly unique and will remain part of McHenry County's identity for generations to come.

Bill and Alice moved to their farm in McHenry County in 1970, many know it as Pioneer Tree Farm. Over the years, the farm has become a special place in our community, bringing people together to enjoy the outdoors and connect with the natural world.

My first introduction to the Defenders was through Bill at Pioneer Tree Farm. Every year when we went to pick out my tree, I secretly hoped Bill would be the one taking the payments on the way out. He would tell me everything he could about the tree I had chosen, how it grew, what made it unique, and why it was special. Eventually Alice would gently remind him that there was a line forming behind us. But honestly, I could have listened to him talk all day.

Bill and Alice were deeply involved in the early years of the Environmental Defenders. Alice played a key role in building recycling efforts in McHenry County, helping lay the groundwork for programs that continue to serve our

community today. She even worked for the Defenders as our Recycling Coordinator. In 1979 Alice, Bill, and their son, Chuck, continued their service by serving on the Defenders Board together.

Bill's contributions to land conservation across the region were equally significant. He helped found the McHenry County Conservation District and served twice as its Board President. Today, more than 25,000 acres of open space have been preserved in McHenry County, protecting the landscapes and natural areas that make this region so special.

He also helped found the Illinois Association of Conservation Districts and served as a founding board member of what is now the Land Conservancy of McHenry County. Throughout his work, Bill was a strong advocate for protecting important natural features and strengthening environmental review in public projects.

The Howenstine family's contributions have shaped conservation, community, and environmental awareness throughout McHenry County. We are deeply grateful for their leadership and the example they've set for so many others.

Government Award

Valley Hi Nursing and Rehabilitation has shown leadership in implementing food scrap composting efforts at their facility. This forward-thinking effort has made Valley Hi a model for the community and other McHenry County facilities to follow. By keeping food waste out of landfills, the program reduces waste, creates nutrient-rich compost that can be put to good use, and plays an important role in addressing climate change. It's a practical solution that reflects a strong commitment to sustainability and responsible stewardship.

Business Award

Moss and Marrow Tattoo Studio has been a strong supporter of the Environmental Defenders and other nonprofit organizations that serve McHenry County and its residents. Through their involvement and willingness to support community efforts, they have helped promote environmental stewardship and strengthen local partnerships. The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County proudly recognizes Moss and Marrow Tattoo Studio for their commitment to the community and their continued support of organizations working to protect and enhance McHenry County.

Volunteer Award

The Recycling Action Team was a foundational pillar of the Environmental Defenders' early work, and the Recycling Action Team continues to play a vital role in expanding community recycling opportunities. The team manages three Styro-

foam recycling sheds and partners with the McHenry County Health Department to support ten community recycling drives each year. Through their commitment of more than 1,600 volunteer hours annually, the team helps divert difficult-to-recycle materials from landfills while making recycling accessible to communities across McHenry County.

One of the major functions of our Annual Meeting is for membership to vote on new board members. I want to thank the Environmental Defenders Board for their leadership, guidance, and continued commitment to our mission. I would especially like to recognize Ashley Lange, Rico Rotta, and former Board President Kim Hankins. Thank you for everything you have done to support the Defenders. It has been a pleasure working with you, and you will certainly be missed.

At the same time, we are excited to welcome our two newly elected board members, Lorena Jaimes-Rivera and Stephanie Tesmer. I look forward to working with both of you as we continue advancing the Defenders' mission.

Most of all, I am grateful to everyone who attended or participated in our Annual Meeting activities and continues to support the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County. Your ongoing commitment to protecting our environment and strengthening our community is what makes this work possible.

On behalf of the Defenders staff and Board, we are truly grateful you are part of this community.

With appreciation



Erin Kennedy,
Executive Director

Use-It-Again Garage Sale

Give Your Gently Used Items a Second Life

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

SPRING CLEANING

Are you looking for a way to clear out clutter while making a difference in the community?

Donate your gently used items to our Use It Again Sale!

USE-IT-AGAIN GARAGE SALE

Algonquin Township Road District
Building 6B (community garage)
3702 US-14, Crystal Lake

DONATIONS ACCEPTED

Sunday, May 31, 2026 from 2 – 4 pm
M-W, June 1 – June 3 from 10 am – 3 pm

SALE DATES

June 4 – June 6 from 9 am – 4 pm
June 11 – June 13 from 9 am – 4 pm

VOLUNTEER WITH US

Looking for a hands-on way to support our mission? Volunteer with us. Sign up online at mcdef.org/volunteer or scan the QR code.

- Accepting and sorting donations
- Organizing and pricing items for sale
- Assisting on sale days



Scan to Sign Up
to Volunteer at
the Use-It-Again
Garage Sale



ACCEPTABLE DONATIONS

We gladly accept items that are clean, in good condition, and ready for a new home. Our best-selling items include:

- Garden tools and supplies
- Hand tools and hardware
- Housewares and kitchen items
- Small working appliances
- Children's toys
- Un-upholstered furniture in good condition

NOT ACCEPTABLE DONATIONS

To ensure safety & quality, we cannot accept:

- Computers, TVs, and other related electronics (printers, modems, etc.)
- Children's car seats or cribs
- Large appliances (washers, dryers, refrigerators, etc.)
- Upholstered furniture (chairs, mattresses, etc.)
- Clothing and shoes (can be put in bins up front)
- Stuffed animals
- Broken, unclean, non-working, or hazardous items

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR SALE DAYS

Your donations support our community through our sales events. Be sure to stop by and find a great deal while supporting a great cause!

BMP: Talks & Tours

Water & Natural Resources Protection

Written by Nancy Schietzelt, Water and Natural Resources Protection Team Member

Each year, the Environmental Defenders, in collaboration with the McHenry County Department of Planning and Development, host a series of educational events focused on Best Management Practices (BMPs) relevant to various aspects of our community. These talks and tours are designed to inform and engage residents, property managers, and community leaders, helping them adopt practices that support sustainability and resilience.

The BMP season began with a Zoom presentation by Dennis Dreher, Steward of Boloria Meadows. On March 20th, Dennis repeated his popular “Natural Areas Management for HOAs” talk and tour from last summer, providing valuable information to a wider audience of HOA members and stakeholders. This virtual event allowed more people to benefit from his expertise in managing natural areas within homeowner associations. It can be viewed on Defenders YouTube channel: youtube.com/@environmentaldefendersmchenry

UPCOMING BMP EVENTS

On April 17th, Scott Brix, one of the original co-founders of the Food Shed Co-op, will present “The Food System We Built – and the One We Need.” His talk will explore how local food movements and community-owned cooperatives can contribute to creating a more resilient and sustainable food system. After the presentation, a tour of the Food Shed Co-op will highlight BMPs in action at the facility.

Continuing the series on June 26th, Sarah Voska, Sales Manager at Bluestem Ecological Services, will discuss “Natural Landscaping for Commercial Properties.” Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in a walk around the Woodstock Library, where natural landscaping was installed last year, to observe BMPs implemented in that setting.

In the fall, Karen Clementi from the Fox Metro Water Reclamation District and Anne George, Wastewater Treatment Superintendent for the City of Woodstock, will present on “Wastewater Treatment Plants’ Sustainability

Efforts.” This session will address how wastewater treatment facilities are adopting sustainable practices to protect local water resources.

Details about each upcoming program and any additional events will be shared in our weekly eNews. Please watch updates to stay informed about opportunities to learn and participate. You can also sign up to receive notices of future BMP Talks & Tours at tinyurl.com/BMPTourSignup.



Dixie Creek in July 2025



Boloria Meadows in June 2025

The Green Bookstores

The Green Read and The Green Spot

Written by Pam Johnson & Diane Greenman, Bookstore Managers

SPRINGTIME AT THE BOOKSTORES

After all the holiday hustle and bustle, there is still a lot going on behind the scenes, starting with a pizza party for all our wonderful volunteers in January. Many of them have been volunteering at the stores for years! Many thanks to each and every one; they truly make the bookstores the special places that they are.



Volunteer Pizza Party

For the month of February, The Green Read brought back our very popular "Blind Date with a Book" sale. Select books are wrapped in white paper with fun, mysterious teaser descriptions. Also, The Green Read participated in the Downtown Crystal Lake "Have a Heart" food drive, collecting items for our local food pantry in order to support families and uplift our community.

In March, the Green Spot received a large donation of DVDs. The store sells about 1,000 DVDs every year, and our stock had been dwindling since we moved to our new location in the Woodstock Mall.

Spring will keep the bookstores busy with upcoming events for Earth Day and Pedalpalooza. The Green Read partners with Pedalpalooza, Saturday, May 30th, so find our table in Downtown Crystal Lake. With the school year ending soon, we hope to see more families and children stopping in to grab books for summer reading.

In June, we are excited to work on a collaborative project between The Green Read, Abalabix Books, and the Crystal Lake Public Library. The goals of this project are to promote literacy and to encourage community members to visit all three locations and learn about what each location has to offer. More information to come!

With the United States celebrating 250 years this July, we are planning to bring in some America-themed puzzles and hopefully some special activities or events.

We have so much to look forward to at The Green Read and The Green Spot. Stop by and shop our revolving collection of new arrivals, dozens of genres, and unique puzzles.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram to stay updated on our events and special offers. Our monthly newsletter is another great way to learn about our sales and events. Sign up to receive it at either store or by emailing thegreenreadbookstore@gmail.com.

Facebook: The Green Read | The Green Spot Used Books and More
Instagram: @thegreenbookstores



The Green Read in Downtown Crystal Lake

Celebrate with Compost

Composting in our Community

Written by Cecilia Carman, Waste Reduction Action Team Co-Chair

The first week in May is International Compost Awareness Week. As Defenders, we know the importance of composting and how it is so crucial for soil health. To help educate our residents, we're giving it away for free. On May 2, come get your free compost for your garden. There will be two sites to choose from, as we are collaborating with the University of Illinois Extension office.

COMPOST PICK-UP

Saturday, May 2nd

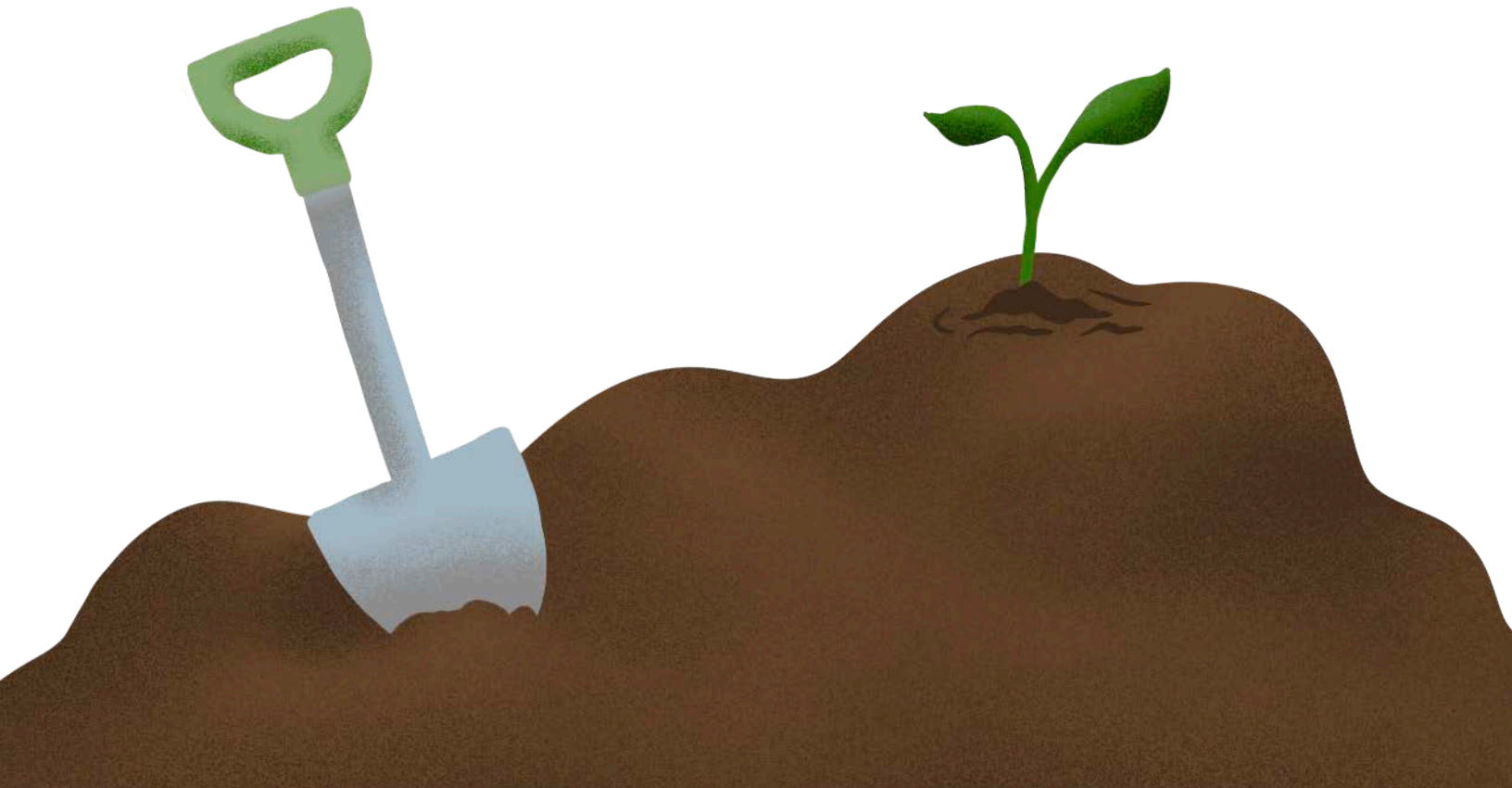
10am-2pm or until supplies last

Kishwaukee Brewing Co & Nunda Township Office

The Waste Reduction Action Team and U of I will be hosting the two compost pick-up locations. The Defenders will be at the Kishwaukee Brewery Company

parking lot, and U of I will be located at the Nunda Township office. We are hoping residents will not only get a free product but also use this as a learning opportunity as well. Both sites will have an "Ask the Master Gardener" booth with resources for residents. The Nunda site will be hosting tours of their garden and community compost site. At Kishwaukee Brewery, we will be promoting the Defenders' community compost drop-off program and educating residents about the municipality services.

Our goal is to excite our residents for spring, promote community composting, and teach easy ways to make a difference in our community. Composting is a way to reduce your carbon footprint without much effort. Spread the word about our event as we want the pile gone by the end of the day.



Pollinator Week with the Defenders

Celebrate Pollinators with the Water & Natural Resources Protection Team

Written by Nancy Schietzelt, Water & Natural Resources Protection Team Member

We are excited to invite you to our Pollinator Week kickoff event, Celebrating Books Connecting Children to Nature, taking place on Monday, June 22nd from 4-5PM at the Cary Area Public Library.

FEATURED PRESENTATION

We are delighted to announce that Martha Meyer, Children's Librarian from the Evanston Library, will be presenting about *The Blueberry Awards*. This presentation will provide a wonderful opportunity to learn from an expert about the importance of connecting children with nature.

THE BLUEBERRY AWARDS

The Blueberry Awards honor children's literature that encourages young readers to develop a connection with nature and inspires action to protect the planet. The Blueberry List features books mainly for children ages

3-10 and is comprised of one Blueberry Award Winner, thirty Blueberry Honor Books, and four Blueberry Changemaker books. The Changemaker books are recognized for their outstanding achievement in motivating children to take action on climate issues. The Evanston Public Library established the Blueberry Award in 2021 to celebrate outstanding nature books that promote climate stewardship among kids.

MORE POLLINATOR EVENTS June 22-28, 2026

This event will launch a week filled with additional activities designed to celebrate pollinators. Check eNews for updates and information about more educational opportunities throughout Pollinator Week. You can also check tinyurl.com/PollinatorWk for events happening throughout the McHenry County region.

Help us Restore and Preserve

Come Help Restore the Kishwaukee River Headwaters This Year

Written by Cindy Skrukud, Water & Natural Resources Protection Chair

The Defenders' Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team (WNRPAT) has secured a \$5,000 Environmental Stewardship grant from Nicor Gas that will fund restoration work on the 16 acres that the Defenders and McHenry-Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) own at the 166.5-acre Kishwaukee Headwaters Complex. This complex is located in the City of Woodstock on the east side of Dean Street, south of IL Route 14. It contains the headwaters of the high quality Kishwaukee River.

Much of the work controlling invasive species including purple loosestrife, reed canary grass, phragmites, wild parsnip and brush resprouts will be done by Red Buffalo Nursery, a firm which specializes in natural area restoration and has been working on the properties for a number of years.

Both the Defenders and the SWCD will also be holding volunteer stewardship events throughout 2026. Planned workdays will include the control of wild parsnip and sweet clover on Defenders land and removal of invasive woody species on SWCD land. If you are interested in helping out, scan the QR code below. The WNRPAT will email you when workdays are scheduled. Let's all pitch in to continue to restore this beloved natural area!



Scan to Sign Up
for Restoration Workdays at
Kishwaukee Headwaters

The Environmental Voter Project 2026

Encouraging Environmentalists to Vote

Written by Beth Holland, McHenry County Chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby member

The Environmental Voter Project (EVP) was founded in 2015 by Nathaniel Stinnett, experienced in political campaigns. He had learned from politicians' polls that few voters listed the environment or climate change as their top concern; it was often about their fifth. He also found a big problem – bad news for climate change – few environmentalists voted. In 2014, 44% of registered Americans voted, but only 21% of environmentalists voted. That left 15.8 million environmentalists with no say in the election and no "I Voted" sticker. With alarm about climate change and poor voter turnout, Stinnett created a solution.

The goal of EVP is to build the power of the environmental electorate. "...to flood the electorate with so many environmental voters that politicians will have no choice but to appeal to environmental voters and our priorities." EVP's method is to:

1. **Identify states with large populations of non-voting environmentalists**
2. **Invest in voter research to find non-voting environmentalists**
3. **Use every election as a behavioral intervention opportunity**

This method focuses on changing voting habits, not changing people's opinions on the climate. The challenge is to motivate them to vote in every election from the local school board to POTUS. Then they're considered "super-voters" and are ready to leave the project.

The Environmental Voter Project is carefully planned. The first step is identifying non-voting registered voters. Did you know once you're registered to vote, whether you do or don't vote is public information? However if you vote, who you voted for is private.

EVP's second step, investing in detailed voter research, involves data analytics and predictive modeling to determine which non-voting registered voters are likely to be very concerned about the environment/climate change.

The third step is to communicate with the identified people. Currently there are 6,000 volunteers who canvas, call, text, and postcard. The messages used are statistically

proven to prompt voter turnout, and no candidate is ever mentioned. But the work isn't finished.

A randomized, controlled study is done after each election to determine the method's effectiveness. The control ensures that EVP claims only the increase in turnout due to their own efforts, not others' influence. Improvements are made. During EVP's nine years, 289 studies have measured its outcomes. Staff and contributions of money and time are indispensable; ("Respected" is how EVP describes them). The increase in turnout for each dollar and each hour is calculated. Regular recaps provide volunteers with the result of their work. Results are used to follow-up new voters until they vote consistently, and to plan where future financial support and volunteers' time will be best used.

EVP has grown since its founding. In 2016, EVP started in six states; in 2026 EVP is active in 21 states. Since 2015, EVP has urged voters in 2,273 elections. EVP has 23 reports on voter turnout. 12 reports focus on research like "Gray is the New Green" and "How Much Do People Lie About Voting?". Presentations, panels, and training total 219. Increased voting is significant: of the 12.8 million environmentalist non-voters contacted, 2.2 million vote in nearly every election. After nine years that may not seem much, but they matter in close contests.

Opportunities to improve continue. In the 2024 presidential election, 11.2 million registered voters who prioritized climate change did not vote. Climate-concerned voters need to contribute by always voting and making sure friends and family know why voting is so important for climate change.

Sources

Environmental Voter Project website, 2025

Nathaniel Stinnett, Monthly National Meeting Guest Speaker. Citizens' Climate Lobby. July 9, 2022.

"These climate advocates don't care about your carbon footprint. They care about whether you vote." Claire Elise Thompson. Looking Forward, Grist, July 5, 2023.

Thank you for Your Generosity

The 2026 Annual Auction

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

Dear donors, bidders, and auction and raffle all-stars,

From all of us at the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County, thank you for showing up, showing off your bidding skills, and showing real love for our local environment. Whether you donated an item, placed a bid, bought raffle tickets, volunteered your time, or simply cheered us on—you helped make this fundraiser a success.

Because of you, the proceeds from the auction and raffles will strengthen our General Fund—supporting the day-to-day work that keeps our programs moving: advocacy, education, habitat protection, and the behind-the-scenes essentials that help us respond when McHenry County's land, water, and wildlife need a voice.

We loved seeing the friendly competition (and a few “I absolutely don't need this, but I absolutely must win it” moments). Most of all, we loved being reminded what a generous, spirited community we have. Next up for us is our annual Use-It-Again Garage Sale with another opportunity to do it again.

Thank you for investing in clean water, healthy habitats, and a better future right here at home. Your support truly makes a difference—and we're so grateful to have you standing with us.

With heartfelt thanks,

The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County
Board, Staff, and Fundraising Action Team



Bag Raffle at 2026 Annual Meeting

Our Team

DEFENDERS' STAFF

Erin Kennedy
Executive Director

Grace Turcich
Manager of Communication & Membership

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 & BOARD MEMBERS

Bev Dow President

Kim Compton First Vice President

Carl Edstrom Treasurer

Elly Salazar Secretary

Zak Dolezal

Lorena Jaimes Rivera

Ken Santowski

Kathy Slover

Stephanie Tesmer

ABOUT EARTHCONNECT NEWSLETTER

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815-338-0393 | www.mcdef.org

Calendar

Spring Events of 2026

APR

**FRI 17 | BMP: Talk & Tour - The Food System We Built
and the One We Need**

1 – 3pm at Soil & Water Conservation District (Dean Street)

WED 22 | Earth Day Mending

5:30 – 7pm at Food Shed Co-op

THUR 30 | Defenders Earth Month Hike & Gather

5:30 - 8pm at South Dufield Pond & Kishwaukee Brewing Co

MAY

SAT 2 | Compost Giveaway

10am – 2pm at Nunda Township & Kishwaukee Brewing Co

SAT 9 | Styrofoam Kick-off Event

9am – 12pm at Algonquin Township Road District

SAT 30 | Pedalpalooza

10am – 4pm in Crystal Lake

JUNE

THUR 4 – SAT 6 | Use-It-Again Garage Sale

THUR 11 – SAT 13 | Use-It-Again Garage Sale

9am – 4pm at Algonquin Township Road District

MON 22 | Pollinator Week: Celebrating Books

Connecting Children to Nature

4pm – 5pm at the Cary Area Public Library

**FRI 26 | BMP: Talk & Tour - Natural Landscaping for
Commercial Properties**

1pm – 3pm at Woodstock Public Library

RECURRING EVENTS

GREEN DRINKS First Wednesday of Every Month

5PM – 7PM | Duke's Alehouse & Kitchen

In-Person and on Zoom. Presentation begins at 5:45pm

STERNE'S FEN RESTORATION WORK DAY

Fourth Sunday of Every Month

9am – 11am | 5617 Hillside Dr, Crystal Lake

ACTION TEAM MEETINGS

Monthly | Visit mcdef.org for more information

Our Styrofoam Recycling Program is returning!

KICK OFF EVENT
SATURDAY MAY 9, 2026
9am – 12pm

Algonquin Township Road District
3702 US-14, Crystal Lake

We're back but we need your help!

WE'RE
FUNDRAISING
\$7,500

We're fundraising \$7,500 to keep our Styrofoam Recycling Program available to our community. Your donations directly fund and manage the collection, processing, and recycling of Styrofoam. Our program keeps material out of landfills and waterways, and we can't do this without you! Donate today to make a lasting impact.



Donate to the Styrofoam Recycling Program

More information coming soon.
mcdef.org/styrofoam



Open MON – SAT | 10am – 4pm
CLOSED SUNDAY
815-527-7122
110 S. Johnson Street,
Woodstock IL



Open MON – SAT | 10am – 4pm
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.

Follow us on our Socials



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