

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 Water & Natural Resources Protection efforts in the County.



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01

A Note from our Director

Styrofoam Recycling Program Continues to Grow Thanks to Your Support

Dear Defenders Members and Supporters,

On behalf of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported our Styrofoam Recycling Program. Your enthusiasm, participation, and generous response to our recent fundraising efforts have helped make this program one of our most impactful community initiatives.

Since relaunching the program, we have seen tremendous demand from residents eager to recycle Styrofoam responsibly rather than send it to local landfills. This growing participation demonstrates the strong commitment our community has in protecting our environment and reducing waste.

As of June 2nd, the Algonquin Township Road District collection site is open every Tuesday and Thursday from 9am – 2pm. These hours will provide an opportunity for residents to drop off accepted Styrofoam on a regular basis.

As participation continues to increase, we are hopeful that we can further extend the hours at the Algonquin Township Road District location. Achieving that goal will depend largely on our ability to recruit and train additional volunteers who can assist with collection, sorting, and transportation activities. Volunteers are truly the backbone of this program, and their dedication allows us to provide this valuable service to the community.

The Defenders are working to establish an additional collection location within McHenry County in the near future. The demand for Styrofoam recycling has exceeded our expectations, and

adding another convenient drop-off site would help improve accessibility for residents while supporting the program's continued growth.

To make these next steps possible, we need your help. If you are interested in volunteering, whether on a regular basis or occasionally, we encourage you to join our team. Volunteers play a critical role in ensuring the program operates efficiently and continues to expand. To sign up for a volunteer shift, visit the Defenders' volunteer page at mcdef.org/volunteer, or contact our office at 815-338-0399 or envirodefmc@gmail.com to get connected with our Recycling Action Team. Even a few hours of your time can make a meaningful difference.

The success of this program is a testament to what can be accomplished when community members come together around a shared commitment to environmental stewardship. Thank you for your continued support, your financial contributions, and your willingness to help build a more sustainable future for McHenry County.

Together, we are making a difference.



Erin Kennedy,
Executive Director

Big Fall Book Sale

Our Book Sale Fundraiser is Back

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

SALE DATES

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 26TH – OCTOBER 10TH
10AM – 4PM (CLOSED SUNDAY)

VOLUNTEERS FOR THE BIG FALL BOOK SALE

The Big Fall Book Sale is coming, and we need enthusiastic volunteers to help make this community event a success. From the first day of book pickup and loading on September 20 through the final cleanup and packing of leftover books on October 14, there are many ways to lend a hand, support literacy, and help books find new homes.

HOW VOLUNTEERS CAN HELP

Volunteers are needed at every stage of the sale. On September 20, help is needed to pick up and load donated books into a rental truck so they can be transported, sorted, and prepared for shoppers. In the days that follow, volunteers will assist with organizing books, setting up sale areas, keeping tables tidy, helping customers, and making sure the sale runs smoothly.

As the sale continues, volunteers will play an important role in welcoming visitors and encouraging them to browse, buy, and spread the word. Every book purchased helps support the success of the sale and keeps good books in circulation throughout the community.

END OF SALE SUPPORT

Volunteer support is especially important at the end of the sale. On October 14, we need help to pack up remaining books so they can be donated to other organizations or sent for recycling. This final step ensures that leftover materials are handled responsibly and that books continue to benefit others whenever possible.

SHOP THE SALE AND SUPPORT THE EFFORT

Everyone is encouraged to shop our Big Fall Book Sale. Whether you are looking for fiction, nonfiction, children's books, cookbooks, mysteries, or biographies, each purchase helps make a difference. Bring a friend, come back often, and help give these books a second life.



MCSEEP

McHenry County Schools Environmental Education Program

Written by Hannah Pfaff, MCSEEP Director

NOW HIRING

It has been a busy and productive end of the 2025-2026 school year for MCSEEP, McHenry County Schools Environmental Education Program. This past spring we had a strong upswing in schools sign up for our program as well as new and rewarding partnerships! Our handy, trusted colleague Abby Winters has moved on to work with the McHenry County Conservation District as a full time environmental educator. We'll miss her dearly but are thrilled for her to be there and they are lucky to have her. We are in need of two additional educators to help inspire awareness to empower action all over the county. If you have any interest, we would love to share details please email us at mcseepdirector@gmail.com.

PARTNERING WITH THE SMITHSONIAN

One of the exciting adventures in the last few months has been partnering with the Smithsonian Science Education Center to pilot their Water! Guide. This was a project Abby brought us in on and we were honored at the opportunity to collaborate. Working closely with Smithsonian team members, we implemented activities across county classrooms as well as after-school clubs focusing on water needs, health, accessibility, management and socioeconomic impact. Everything from pond water testing kits and biodiversity counts to oral histories.



GAINING MOMENTUM

Another rewarding project to be a part of this spring was working with Ringwood School Primary Center on installing and competing in a NexTrex Recycling Challenge! Trex is an outdoor furniture company that uses post consumer plastic film to build sustainable products. Ringwood Primary's principal took the lead at the school and within two months they had collected hundreds of pounds of plastic waste, diverting it from the landfills. It was impressive! They were entered into a drawing to win a new outdoor bench for their garden, we will know soon!

We are immensely grateful for a very generous donation from Nancy and Randy Schietzelt. Their funding assistance allowed us to reach underserved communities and boost our program! We are excited to be partnering with the Algonquin Area Public Library to present summer programming. As mentioned we are looking to build our team for the upcoming school year so please reach out if you have any interest and please share with anyone in the community you think would be interested! We will be working diligently to keep this momentum going in the fall! We are also excited to announce we have scheduled a Groundwater Festival for this September at the Soil and Water Conservation Area!



Ongoing Waste Reduction Initiatives

Tackling Food Waste and Food Insecurity in the Community

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

COMPOST GIVEAWAY SUCCESS

The Waste Reduction Team has jumped into summer with enthusiasm and momentum! We kicked off the season with our first-ever Compost Giveaway, held in partnership with the University of Illinois Extension Office. The event was a tremendous success, with more than 250 participants attending both locations. Community members were incredibly appreciative, and the event provided a wonderful opportunity to connect with residents and share the mission of the Defenders.



Compost Giveaway at Nunda Township in Crystal Lake



Compost Giveaway at Kishwaukee Brewing in Woodstock

COMMUNITY FRIDGE PROGRAM

Our summer outreach continues at Crystal Lake Pride Fest, where we will provide composting services and educate attendees about our waste reduction efforts, including our growing Community Fridge Program. We were also fortunate to connect with local faith leaders who invited us to attend their monthly meeting. This presents an exciting opportunity to build new partnerships and expand support for the community fridge initiative.

The Community Fridge Program currently operates at three locations: the Nippersink Library, East River Library, and First Congregational Church of Crystal Lake. The library fridges continue to thrive and have become valuable resources for community members. While the fridge at First Congregational Church is receiving donations, patron usage has been slower. We need your help spreading the word! If you know individuals experiencing food insecurity or have connections with social service agencies, please share information about this program. Our goal is simple: no food should go to waste in McHenry County.

RESCUING FOOD SCRAPS

Another exciting development is the launch of a small-scale food rescue program. Through this effort, New Directions Sober Living is receiving surplus food from Duke's Alehouse. While Duke's could compost these leftovers, redirecting edible food to those who can benefit from it is an even better solution. We hope to expand this program in the future. If you know of a restaurant interested in participating, we'd love to hear from them.

And speaking of summer, the warmer temperatures mean composting activity is in full swing. Our Woodstock food scrap drop-off site has already collected more than 10,000 pounds of food waste with just 25 participants. Imagine the impact if the program were available citywide! Expanding access remains one of our long-term goals, and we continue to work toward partnerships that will make composting available to more residents.

In the meantime, we're excited to announce plans for two additional food scrap drop-off sites in Fox River Grove and Richmond. Like Woodstock, all three locations will offer memberships for just \$5 per month. We will share opening dates and additional details soon.

The Waste Reduction Team wishes everyone a wonderful summer filled with outdoor gatherings and time spent enjoying our beautiful community. Remember to compost your food scraps, and whenever possible, donate unopened food to a community fridge near you. Helping the environment can be as simple as placing food in a fridge where it can help feed a neighbor.



Ten Years of the Illinois Monarch Project

Protecting our Local Pollinators

Written by Cindy Skrukruud, Water & Natural Resources Protection Action Team Chair

THE PROJECT

The Illinois Monarch Project was established in 2016 as a voluntary collaborative effort to improve conservation for the monarch butterfly across agriculture, rights-of-way, urban, and natural landscapes in Illinois. The Illinois Monarch Action Plan was published in 2020 with a goal to add 150 million new milkweed stems across Illinois landscapes by 2038 (as measured from 2014). This June, the Illinois Monarch Project 10-Year Progress Report was published. It finds that Illinois has added an estimated 108 million milkweed stems over the 10-year period, over two-thirds toward its 2038 goal. The Progress Report also found that 132 local governments have taken the Mayors Monarch Pledge during this time period. This is great news, but the momentum must continue into the next decade and beyond.



The eastern Monarch Butterfly population that overwinters in central Mexico remains well below the 15-acres goal that scientists deem necessary for long-term population viability. Habitat loss throughout North America, climate change, and herbicide use all continue to pose challenges for this most famous butterfly migrant. Read more in a May 2026 Outdoor

Illinois Journal article - A Decade for the Monarch Butterfly: How Illinois has rallied to restore a species in flight. The full report can be found online at illinoismonarchproject.org.

LOCAL ACTION

Here in McHenry County, we can report on two data points that indicate that support for monarchs and other pollinators is not waning. First, the Monarch Mania Family Fun Fair continues to draw hundreds of attendees each August to Crystal Lake Main Beach Pavilion. Held every year since 2015 (except in 2020 during the pandemic), the 11th annual fair will be held on Sunday, August 16 from 12:30-4pm. Fifteen Hackmatack Monarch Coalition partners will engage both children and adults in learning what they can do to help monarch butterflies.

Second, since the Defenders Water & Natural Resources Protection Action Team launched its effort in 2021 to encourage McHenry County units of government to join the Mayors'

Monarch Pledge, our county has responded with enthusiasm. We are pleased to report that 19 units of government have taken the 2026 pledge. That represents over a third of ALL pledges from Illinois. Thank you to Village of Algonquin, Coral Township, City of Crystal Lake, Crystal Lake Park District, City of Harvard, Village of Hebron, Village of Island Lake, Village of Johnsburg, Village of Lake in the Hills, Village of Lakemoor, City of Marengo, Village of Oakwood Hills, Village of Port Barrington, Village of Richmond, Village of Spring Grove, Village of Trout Valley, Village of Union, Village of Wonder Lake and City of Woodstock.



2025 Monarch Mania Fair



Monarch education at the McHenry County Fair

Summer Picnic & Hike

Celebrate Pollinators with the Water & Natural Resources Protection Team

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

The Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team invites you to a picnic and hike at the Defenders' Dean Street property! Many of our members have never been to the site consisting of 8 acres situated between MCCD's Kishwaukee Headwaters park to the South and the McHenry County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) property to the north. So, we hope you can join us for a picnic and walk from 4 – 7pm on Sunday, September 13th!

Please use the parking lot at 2222 Dean Street on the south edge of Woodstock by the SWCD building where we'll enjoy our picnic. We'll have a hot grill ready to cook hotdogs, veggie dogs and brats with buns and condiments. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. Don't forget your reusable dinnerware. Water will be provided.

Following our picnic, we'll head out for a hike through our property led by Cindy Skrukrud, Chair of our action team, as she shares the history of the site. Jacob Karkowski, another team member, will explain the restoration work at the site that we've

completed over the years as well as the work that is continuing. We'll have additional members along who will point out all the insects, birds, and flowers. You can download the iNaturalist app on your phone to identify on your own, as well.

Please dress for buggy weather and bring insect repellent, as there will surely be mosquitoes. In order for our team to plan, please RSVP to Nancy Schietzelt at buroak92@gmail.com by Friday, September 11th. We hope to see you there!



Savannah Sparrow

McHenry County Fair

Visit us at the County Fair

Written by Pat Lawlor, Water & Natural Resources Protection Action Team Member

Join us at the McHenry County Fair this year August 4th – 9th at the McHenry County Fairgrounds in Woodstock at 11900 Country Club Rd. Tickets are available with a presale discount. <https://mchenrycountyfair.com/tickets/>

The Environmental Defenders of McHenry County along with other local environmental groups will be there to share ongoing projects, upcoming events, and impactful efforts.

We're looking for volunteers to help us at our booth and handout community resources. If you're interested, scan the QR code to sign up!



Scan to Sign Up for County Fair Volunteering with the Environmental Defenders



Summer Intern Program

Welcome our Summer 2026 Interns

Written by Hannah Peterson and Grace Petravick, Summer Interns

HANNAH PETERSON

B.S. IN EARTH, SOCIETY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Hello, my name is Hannah Peterson and I am one of the Defenders interns for Summer 2026. I grew up in Grayslake and I am currently a student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign studying Earth, Society and Environmental Sustainability. In the fall I will begin my final year as an undergrad student and begin my search for a career! In my free time I enjoy spending time with friends and family, hiking, trying new things, seeing new movies and thrifting.

During high school I took an environmental science class that really sky-rocketed my interest in our planet and pushed me to pursue a higher education in this topic. While at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, I had the amazing opportunity to study abroad in Costa Rica, one of the most sustainable countries in the world. This trip really allowed me to see how communities that understand sustainability can create initiatives on local levels to help with managing waste, strengthening local food systems, and supporting eco-tourism. This also fueled my interest in working with the Defenders! I am super excited to learn more about how an organization like, Environmental Defenders of McHenry County, is making a difference on a local level and inspiring new sustainable efforts on a bigger scale. In such a short time, I have already learned action steps that I can take, as well as the people around me, to care for our community. I look forward to building my knowledge and hope to learn more about how I can educate my community on sustainable practices this summer!



GRACE PETRAVICK

B.S. ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT

Hello, my name is Grace Petravick, and I am one of the Defenders interns for Summer 2026! I grew up in McHenry County and currently live in Huntley. I am an upcoming junior at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, where I am pursuing a B.S. in Environmental Science and Management with a minor in Business. My future career interest is in environmental consulting.

At Michigan State, I work at the on-campus Recycling Center and Surplus Store. As a Student Recycling Assistant, I help sort recyclable materials at a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). We collect and process cardboard, paper, and various types of metals and plastics. I am also involved in the Sustainable Spartans Club and the Women in STEM Club.

I have been passionate about sustainability and the environment for as long as I can remember. I find great purpose in working toward protecting the natural world and reducing the negative impacts of human activity. It is something I believe is incredibly important for the future of our planet. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with friends, reading, watercolor painting, crafting, walking outdoors, and listening to music.

I am very excited to work with the Defenders and continue learning about conservation. I look forward to the opportunities this internship will provide and am eager to make a positive impact within my local community while learning more about the environmental issues affecting our area.



Water Sustainability

Managing our Water Supplies

Written by Scott Kuykendall, McHenry County Water Resources Specialist

Water is necessary for all life on the planet. Because water is vital for life, it is also the primary driver of economic opportunity for communities. Although our water is obviously important, rarely is water taken into consideration when making land use decisions that can directly impact the sustainability of this finite resource.

The first step in sustainably managing water supplies is to understand where one's water comes from. All drinking water in McHenry County comes from three main types of groundwater aquifer that consist of porous sub-surface soils or rock capable of storing and releasing water:

Shallow Sand and Gravel – Wells typically between 50' to 300' (private & municipal wells)

Shallow Bedrock (Limestone) – Wells typically between 150' to 300' (mostly private wells)

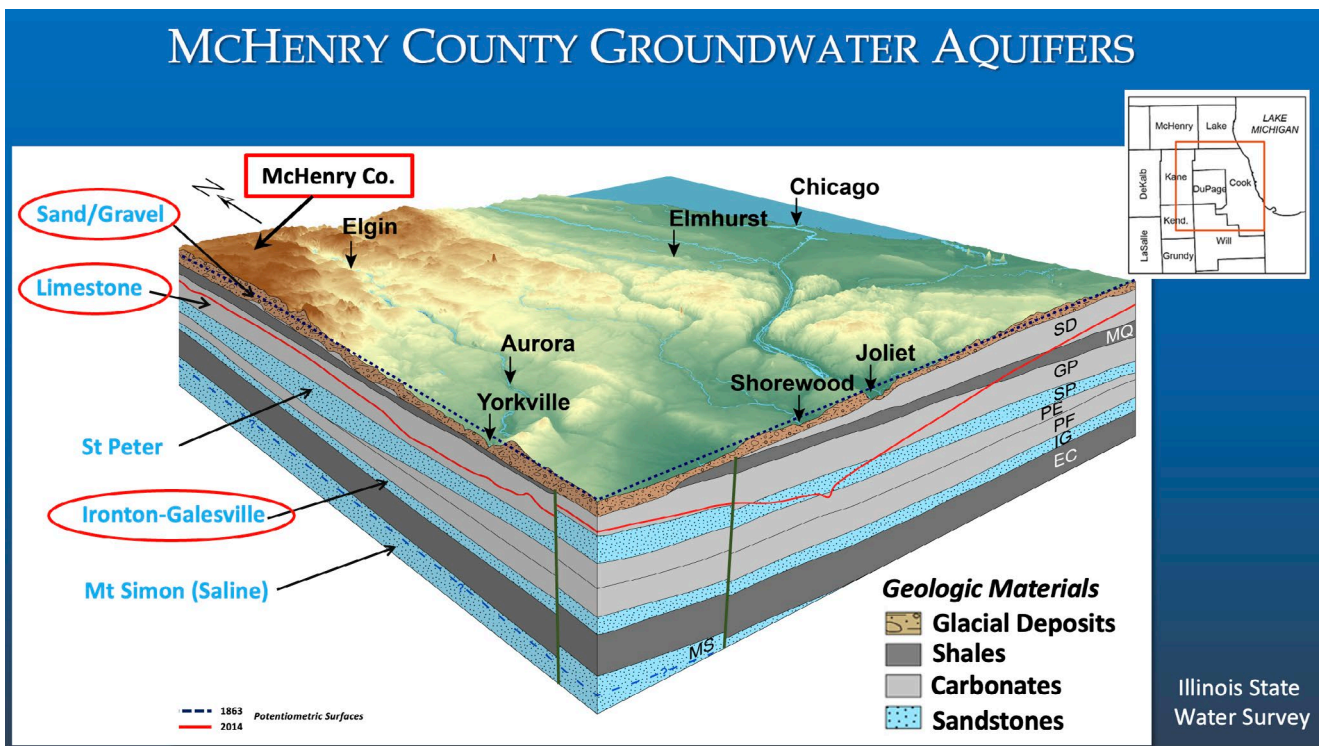
Deep Bedrock (Sandstone) – Wells typically 1,000' to 1,500' (some municipalities)

In McHenry County, shallow aquifers provide water to tens of thousands of private wells and most of our municipalities get all or part of their water from the shallow sand and gravel aquifers. The great thing about the shallow groundwater aquifers is that they are replenished locally by rainfall or snowmelt that soaks

into the ground. These aquifers can be a perfectly renewable resource so long as we don't pave over too much of the landscape, contaminate the aquifers, or withdraw groundwater faster than it naturally recharges. We can think of these aquifers as a checking account where the funds will be available when we don't withdraw funds faster than they are deposited.

The deep sandstone aquifer is primarily used by municipalities because its depth significantly increases the cost to install and operate wells. While this aquifer has been a tremendous source of water throughout Northern Illinois over the past century, the water is being pumped out about twice the rate it is being replenished. The water we withdraw from this aquifer originates in Wisconsin and it can take a thousand years or more for precipitation to percolate into the sandstone and migrate. Therefore, the deep bedrock aquifer is not currently sustainable. The deep bedrock aquifer can be thought of as a trust fund with vast but finite resources.

To learn more about how these resources can be managed sustainably, join us at the 2026 McHenry County Water Forum. This catered free event will be held from 5:30 – 8pm on September 16th at McHenry County College.



A Successful Community Garage Sale

The 2026 Use-It-Again Garage Sale

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

THANK YOU

We extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Use-It-Again Garage Sale such a wonderful success. From the generous donors who brought in quality items to the many buyers who came to shop, your support made a real difference.

The sale featured many popular items, with tools, garden, and housewares proving to be especially strong sellers. Thanks to the high quality of the donations and careful, appropriate pricing, the sale brought in more money than in most years with over \$5,000. That success reflects the care and generosity of our community.

We are especially grateful to the volunteers who gave their time, energy, and good judgment to every part of the sale. From receiving and sorting donations to pricing, setting up displays, helping shoppers, friendly attitudes, and cleaning up afterward, their hard work made the event run smoothly and successfully.

The Use-It-Again Garage Sale is about more than finding new homes for useful items. It is also a reminder of what can happen when people work together for a shared purpose. Thank you to all who donated, shopped, volunteered, and encouraged others to take part. Your support helped make this year's sale one to remember.



Volunteers preparing for the Garage Sale opening

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

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Kim Compton First Vice President

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ABOUT EARTHCONNECT NEWSLETTER

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Calendar

Summer Events of 2026

JULY

FRI 10 | First Fridays Concerts with MCCD
7 – 8:30pm at Lost Valley Visitor Center,
Glacial Park Conservation Area

AUGUST

TUES 4 - SUN 9 | McHenry County Fair
10am – 8pm at McHenry County Fairgrounds in Woodstock

FRI 7 | First Fridays Concerts with MCCD
7 – 8:30pm at Lost Valley Visitor Center,
Glacial Park Conservation Area

SUN 16 | Monarch Mania Fair
12:30 – 4pm at Crystal Lake Main Beach

SEPTEMBER

FRI 4 | First Fridays Concerts with MCCD
7 – 8:30pm at Lost Valley Visitor Center,
Glacial Park Conservation Area

SUN 13 | WNRP Picnic
4pm – 7pm at Soil and Water Conservation District
2222 Dean Street, Woodstock

WED 16 | McHenry County Water Forum
5:30pm – 8pm at McHenry County College

SAT 26 - OCT 10 | Big Fall Book Sale
10am – 4pm at Algonquin Township Road District

RECURRING EVENTS

STYROFOAM RECYCLING PROGRAM

Tuesday and Thursday | 9am – 2pm
Algonquin Township Road District, 3702 US-14, Crystal Lake

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

BMP's: Talk & Tour

(Best Management Practices)

BMP: Talk & Tour

Friday, September 25, 1 – 3pm

Sustainability Measures at Wastewater Treatment Facilities

McHenry County Administration
Bldg, Conference Rooms A & B,
667 Ware Rd, Woodstock

Karen Clementi, Director, Fox Metro Water Reclamation District will present on the many sustainability measures underway at Fox Metro WRD, the largest wastewater plant on the Fox River, serving the Aurora region.

Anne George, Wastewater Treatment Superintendent, City of Woodstock will speak on water reuse.

After the talk, attendees will have the opportunity to visit the Woodstock South Wastewater Treatment Plant and its wastewater reuse infrastructure.



Learn More

Want to learn more
about our BMP: Talk
& Tour Program?
Scan the QR code.

Visit: <https://tinyurl.com/FridayBMPTours>



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.

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