

Quarterly Newsletter of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County

EarthConnect

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



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01

A Note from our Director

The Closing of The Green Spot

MOVING FORWARD: THE FUTURE OF THE GREEN READ

Change is rarely easy, especially when it involves places and people who have been an important part of our organization and community. After careful consideration, the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County Board made the difficult decision to close the Green Spot and focus our bookstore efforts on the Green Read in Crystal Lake.

This decision was not made quickly or lightly. For nearly a year, the Board has reviewed the Green Spot's financial situation and considered options for its future. Increasing operating costs, particularly rent and utilities, along with declining revenues, made it increasingly difficult for the store to remain financially sustainable.

Closing the Green Spot also required us to re-evaluate our bookstore staffing needs. After reviewing the finances, our treasurer determined that the Green Read can reasonably sustain a manager position of 20 hours per week as we work toward financial breakeven. Unfortunately, this means a significant reduction in compensation. Because Pam and Diane have been such dedicated and valued managers, we offered the revised position to them first. Ultimately, both decided they could not accept the reduced position, and we completely understand and respect their decisions.

Pam and Diane did an amazing job developing a plan for the move, and their hard work has set the Defenders up for success. We are incredibly grateful for the years of dedication, hard work, and care they have given to both bookstores. Their contributions have made a lasting impact on the Defenders and the many customers and volunteers who have come to know them.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE GREEN READ

While closing the Green Spot marks the end of an important chapter, we are hopeful about the future of the Green Read.

Focusing our bookstore resources in one location allows us to build on the Green Read's strengths. Its updated space and increased foot traffic offer the potential to attract more customers, increase our visibility in the Crystal Lake community, and generate additional revenue to support the environmental work of the Defenders.

Moving forward, we will focus on making the Green Read an inviting and welcoming shopping destination. We look forward to working with our volunteers and a new bookstore manager to strengthen the store, build its customer base, and continue serving the community.

Most importantly, we want to recognize the tremendous role our bookstore staff and volunteers have played in making both bookstores successful. Recent feedback reinforced that one of the many things that makes our bookstores special is the welcoming atmosphere created by our staff and volunteers. That sense of welcome is something we hope to carry forward.

The Green Read is more than a bookstore, it is a place where people connect, discover something new, and support the environmental mission of the Defenders.

Closing the Green Spot is certainly bittersweet, but we are grateful for what both bookstores have meant to our organization and community, and for the people who have made them special. By bringing our bookstore efforts together at the Green Read and working toward financial sustainability, we believe we can build on that legacy while creating a stronger foundation for the future.

With the support of our volunteers, customers, and broader community, we look forward to making the Green Read a strong and sustainable part of the Defenders for years to come.

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.



Defenders Annual Potluck Picnic

Celebrating 55 Years Together

Written by Grace Turcich, Manager of Communication & Membership

CELEBRATE A MILESTONE WITH US

The Environmental Defenders invites you to the 55th Anniversary Potluck Picnic on October 3rd from 11am – 2pm at Boone Creek Conservation Area.

We look forward to celebrating this milestone with an afternoon of connection and nature with our Defenders members. This gathering is a chance for members to relax, reconnect, and celebrate everything we stand for, surrounded by the beauty of Boone Creek. We look forward to celebrating 55 years of collaborative work to protect, preserve, and educate McHenry County. All of our successes and ongoing initiatives are all made possible by our dedicated members, volunteers, supporters, and community partners. From our specialized recycling efforts to our habitat preservation work to our community compost program, the Environmental Defenders is proud to serve McHenry County and thankful to those who support us.

Moving forward, the Defenders will continue to be a positive influence in the community and advocate for a brighter future for our residents, neighbors and future generations.

Over the past 55 years, our local grassroots organization has grown to become a pivotal influence in the community and has become a pillar of positive environmentalism.

Bring a dish to share and help us celebrate this milestone together! Please be conscious of plastic foodware and excess packaging waste. Compostable foodware will be provided. Thank you!

Know someone who cares about the environment or is interested in making a difference in McHenry County? Bring them along—they might just become our newest member!



Help Carry on a Holiday Tradition

Volunteer with Us and Receive a Free Christmas Tree

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

PIONEER TREE FARM

Each holiday season, Pioneer Tree Farm welcomes families to enjoy the simple pleasure of choosing and cutting their own organically grown Christmas tree. The tradition began with the Howenstine family and has continued since 1973, rooted in a love of nature, community, and old-fashioned holiday hospitality. Volunteers are needed to help carry this special legacy forward while supporting the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County.

In exchange for working a full day, each volunteer may receive a free Christmas tree and a healthy, warm lunch. Whether you enjoy greeting people, working outdoors, baking, crafting, or sharing traditional skills, there is a place for you.

OUTDOOR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- Welcome guests and help them get oriented
- Drive tractors to bring guests back and forth from tree field
- Shake and bale freshly cut trees
- Demonstrate period crafts and hands-on activities for children. (Candle dipping or wood working to make candle holders - no experience necessary)

WARMING HOUSE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The wood-stove-warmed Warming House offers guests hot cocoa, coffee, home-baked cookies and bars, and gift items made from natural materials. Volunteers are needed to help serve refreshments and welcome visitors. The farm is also seeking a few additional crafters whose nature-inspired work can be offered in the gift area, as well as bakers willing to contribute homemade cookies and bars.

No matter which role you choose, your time will help create a warm, memorable experience for visiting families, sustain a treasured Howenstine family tradition, and support the local environmental work of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County.

VOLUNTEER OR LEARN MORE

To volunteer or ask questions about the tasks, contact Anne Basten at 815-382-7741 or email basten1@sbcglobal.net. Please leave a message, and she will get back to you.

Volunteers needed:

November 27, November 28, November 29 | 8:30am – 4 pm
December 5th and December 6th | 8:30am – 4 pm

Pioneer Tree Farm: 4614 Pioneer Road, McHenry
 (off Route 31 north of Johnsburg Road)

Trees are \$100 each (cash or check only).



Summer Intern Program

Productive Summer With Interns

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

Our Water and Natural Resources Protection Action Team enjoyed a very productive summer with the Defenders' amazing interns, Hannah Peterson and Grace Petravick. Some of the team's goals that they helped us accomplish were:

- Collect another year of data measuring chloride levels in Boone Creek

- Weed the Silver Creek stream bank and weeded and planted additional plants to attract pollinators to the Defenders' pollinator garden at the McHenry County Fairgrounds in Woodstock

- Remove invasive species such as teasel, wild parsnip, and sweet clover from Triangle Prairie, O'Brien Prairie, and the Defenders' Dean Street property to improve these habitats

- Install an information sign for the public about pollinators at O'Brien Prairie

- Create handouts and buttons for children and designed a trivia game for use at the Defenders' table at the County Fair

- Share information with the public about all aspects of the Defenders' work at the County Fair

- Help weed and plant the pollinator gardens at Petersen Park with Conversacion de Conservacion

They also had an opportunity to learn from several experts in the county about various important environmental topics.

- Bird, fish, and butterfly surveys

- River samples and water resource management

- Conservation design and green infrastructure planning and conducting large environmental protection projects

We thank Hannah and Grace for all their hard work and wish them well in their studies as they advance toward careers in environmental protection!



Holiday Bake Sale

Bake Goodies for the Christmas Tree Farm

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

BAKERS WANTED

Please join us in making the holiday season sweeter while supporting our organization!

Your homemade treats will be sold during Christmas tree sales at Pioneer Tree Farm, and every dollar raised will benefit the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County. Whether you bake one batch or several, your contribution will make a difference!

WHAT Cookies, brownies, and bar cookies

WHEN by November 25th & December 4th, 2026

*November 25th is our greatest need as the first weekend is the busiest!

HOW Package ALL baked goods as follows (this makes it much easier for the volunteers working the sales – it gets crazy in the warming house!)

(2 cookies of 2" diameter or greater – 3 cookies if they are smaller, 2 small brownies or 2 bar cookies). All must be sealed in clear or colored plastic (for sanitary and display reasons). Do NOT put on paper plates or ceramic ware. The zip locking type sandwich

or snack bags work great! All must be packaged/sealed at home and should be labeled with the type either with a slip of paper inside or you can even write, right on the package with a "Sharpie" felt tip pen. Please put your name and phone number on the box or bag they are brought in along with how many packages of each type. This will help with inventory management and the health department.

You can take the cookies to the Green Read in Downtown Crystal Lake or the Defenders' office (114 S Jefferson in Woodstock – call 815.338.0393 to make sure someone is there), the Monday-Wednesday before Thanksgiving or during the following week. Both locations are open between 10am – 3pm. All items are picked up by a fundraising team member and delivered to the Pioneer Tree Farm the next morning. Thank you in advance for your baking creations!

If you have any questions at all, want to be removed from this list, or want to volunteer to work at the tree farm, please call Anne Basten 815-382-7741 or email basten1@sbcglobal.net, and leave a message.

Calling Local Crafters!

Share your creativity

Written by Anne Basten, Fundraising Action Team Chair

SHARE YOUR NATURE-INSPIRED CREATIONS

We are looking for a small number of crafters to help increase the variety of items available for sale at the farm. This is a limited opportunity for makers whose work complements the natural, festive setting of a Christmas tree farm.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

- Handcrafted items made entirely—or primarily—from natural materials or materials found in nature
- Distinctive products that broaden the farm's current holiday selection
- A compact, attractive display requiring approximately 3' x 3' of space or less
- Tree decorations are encouraged

SALES ARRANGEMENT

A small percentage of each sale will support the farm, and another percentage will benefit the Defenders. The remaining proceeds will go back to the seller. Specific percentages and participation details will be provided directly to interested crafters.

For details, call Anne Basten at 815-382-7741 and leave a message.



Support the Environmental Defenders

Qualified Charitable Distribution

Written by Carl Edstrom, Board Member & Treasurer

As a grassroots organization, the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County has always relied on our members to support our mission – members who offer hours upon hours of donated time, pay annual membership dues, donate items to be sold in our bookstores and fundraisers, and generously give financial donations “above and beyond” their membership. Everything our members have done, and continue to do, is greatly appreciated, and we thank you for your loyal support! We would not exist today without members like you.

Over the past several years, to further build our financial strength, we have continued applying for grants to add income so we can fund more initiatives, pay our staff, and help cover the cost of rent and utilities for our bookstores and office spaces. In addition, several long-time members of the Environmental Defenders have introduced us to a new funding source by generously making donations through IRA charitable rollovers, also called “qualified charitable distributions” (QCD). What is a qualified charitable distribution, why might you consider it, and what are the benefits?

Once you reach age 73, or if you turned 70½ in 2019 or before, you may be required to withdraw a certain amount of money from your tax-deferred retirement account each year – a required minimum distribution (RMD).

Since RMDs are taxed by the IRS as ordinary income, these normal withdrawals count toward your total taxable income for the year. They can effectively push you into a higher tax bracket and possibly increase the taxes you pay for Social Security or Medicare. A qualified charitable distribution – which is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian to a qualified charity (and the Environmental Defenders qualifies!) – can be counted toward satisfying your required minimum distributions for the year. And, since the amount donated is excluded from your taxable income, it actually makes it possible to benefit a charity of your choice while saving you money!

There are certain rules that must be met, and it's best to consult with a tax advisor and/or your retirement fund administrator to determine exactly when you need to take RMDs and if a QCD is appropriate for your particular situation. Carl Edstrom, our Treasurer, can also provide direction on where to find more information. Please reach out to us at envirodefmc@gmail.com if you would like more information from our Treasurer.

If you qualify (or will soon), we hope you'll consider this tax-free option to help us continue to defend the environment in McHenry County!

BMP: Talk and Tour

Sustainability in Wastewater Treatment in McHenry County

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



Friday Best Management Practices Talks and Tours*

The final Best Management Practices (BMP) Talk and Tour of 2026 will highlight sustainability measures that wastewater treatment facilities can undertake. Fox Metro Water Reclamation District Director Karen Clementi will describe the many sustainability measures underway at the district, which serves the Aurora region and is the largest wastewater plant on the Fox River. Woodstock Wastewater Treatment Superintendent Anne

George will speak on how the city reuses its treated wastewater. Following the talk, attendees will have the opportunity to visit the Woodstock South Wastewater Treatment Plant to view its water reuse infrastructure.

The event takes place from 1 – 3 pm on Friday, Sept. 25 in Conference Rooms A and B of the McHenry County Administration Building, 667 Ware Road, Woodstock. The event is free, and people can attend either in person or virtually. The registration form can be found at tinyurl.com/BMPTourSignup.

This is the fifth year of the Talk and Tour series, co-hosted by the McHenry County Planning and Development Department and the Environmental Defenders. Videos and resources from all presentations can be found at tinyurl.com/FridayBMPTours. A variety of topics are covered, including natural landscaping, clean energy, (road) Salt Smart practices, Dark Sky initiatives and more.

Citizens Climate Lobby

CCL Lobbys Congress for Climate & Clean Energy

Written by Pat Dieckhoff, Co-Group Leader of the McHenry Co. Chapter of CCL

The CCL Summer Conference and Lobby Day in D.C. was held on July 27-28, with around 850 CCLers in attendance from all 50 states! It's Citizens' Climate Lobby volunteers and staff's favorite week of the year!

At the conference on July 27, they had a busy day of lobby preparations and programming, including hearing from keynote speaker, Jigar Shah, former Director of the U.S. Department of Energy Loan Programs Office and one of the most influential voices in clean energy finance and deployment. He spoke about clean energy progress and his perspective on permitting reform opportunities. 94% of everything we added to the grid last year was clean energy! The recording of Jigar's complete presentation is available on CCL YouTube channel along with opening remarks by CCL Executive Director, Ricky Bradley and Building a BRIDGE to Capitol Hill to help attendees build skills for lobby meetings by Brett Cease, CCL's VP of Field Operations.



CCL's work offers a reminder that thousands of ordinary citizens—and our lawmakers—can bridge political divides, find common ground, and work together to solve one of our greatest shared challenges: climate change.

The previous information was excerpted from postings by: Brett Cease, CCL VP of Field Operations and Flannery Winchester, CCL Vice President of Marketing and Communications.

The McHenry Co. Chapter of CCL invites Environmental Defenders to check out the additional actions they can take to continue to support climate and clean energy progress by signing up for CCL today! Citizens' Climate Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy organization focused on national policies to address climate change. Learn more at: <https://citizensclimatelobby.org>

You are also welcome to attend our chapter meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 2pm at Ridgefield Crystal Lake Presbyterian Church, 8505 Church St., Ridgefield, IL. If you have any questions, please contact us.

Co-Group Leaders of the McHenry Co. Chapter of CCL

Pat Dieckhoff | tpdieckhoff@ameritech.net | 815.245.5658

Karen Dombrowski | kdrecycle@gmail.com | 815.404.7050

Beth Holland | baholland4@gmail.com | 815.656.1698

July 28, CCLers held more than 400 meetings with congressional offices on Capitol Hill focused on bipartisan permitting reform to unlock America's clean energy potential plus climate-friendly forestry policy, and funding for the U.S. Forest Service.

The messages CCLers brought in their meetings were reinforced by calls from CCL volunteers and supporters back home (including the McHenry Co. chapter), who made 2,247 calls to offices on the first day of the conference alone! The online tool identifies your Member of Congress based on your address and provides a simple, short script to follow. These calls helped to boost the impact of this year's citizen lobbyists, pictured above at the Library of Congress.

"My biggest surprise on lobby day is how close rather than apart many of our values are," shared New Jersey volunteer Karen D'Orazio. "It provides me with hope that we can bridge our differences and work together as a nation to reduce our carbon footprint and protect our children and our children's children"

MCSEEP

McHenry County Schools Environmental Education Program

Written by Hannah Pfaff, MCSEEP Director

PREPARING FOR A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

As the school year ramps up, we are ready for a great fall at MCSEEP. Our summer was restful while continuously working to inspire our youth to understand and appreciate the workings of nature and how it impacts our lives in every way. We had the delight of working with past Defenders award-winning intern Izzy Gregory. She continuously impressed us with her lesson planning, knowledge and positive attitude.

We hosted three immersive programs at the Algonquin Area Public Library District, at their Harnish Street location. Working with the library's early childhood team we curated unique soil and compost activities as well as sustainability tips for preteens and a "young scientist" discovery center. The grounds at the library were begging to be explored and we found caterpillars, moths, frogs, ants, and more.

Our longtime educator and contributor Gigi Carlson hosted a breakout room at the Regional Office of Education's Summer Conference. With furs and skulls in hand she represented our program for teachers interested in learning more about what we have to offer. We built some strong connections and look forward to getting back into some schools we had lost coordinators with. Leslie Krebs, another longtime MCSEEP educator, did some traveling this summer with other environmental education organizations so we are happy to have her back in the classrooms here in McHenry County!

GROUNDWATER FESTIVAL

We are excitedly planning our 2026 Groundwater Festival alongside Scott Kuykendall, McHenry County's Water Resource Specialist and Bill Donato, former MCSEEP director and Woodstock

High School science teacher. In fact as you read this the event will hopefully (weather permitting) have taken place. It is one of the most rewarding and impactful days of the year for us. 120 students from nearby middle schools take a field trip to the Soil and Water Conservation District site near the Kishwaukee River Headwaters and dive into stations packed with field professionals, soil boring rigs, water testing, service projects and activities.



Students learning about flood plains at Groundwater Festival

WELCOME OUR NEW EDUCATORS

Last but certainly not least we have found two new educators to join the team!! Please welcome Jessica Beverly and Mills Guanci. Both have worked with the Defenders in the past in various roles and we couldn't be more excited about our dynamic team for this year!



Our Team

DEFENDERS' STAFF

Erin Kennedy
Executive Director

Grace Turcich
Manager of Communication & Membership

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

DEFENDERS' OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

Bev Dow President

Kim Compton First Vice President

Kathy Slover Second Vice President

Carl Edstrom Treasurer

Elly Salazar Secretary

Zak Dolezal

Lorena Jaimes Rivera

Ken Santowski

Stephanie Tesmer

ABOUT EARTHCONNECT NEWSLETTER

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815-338-0393 | www.mcdef.org

Calendar

Fall Events of 2026

SEPTEMBER

**SAT 19 | County-wide Recycling Drive with
Department of Health**
9am – 12pm at McHenry County Administration Building

SAT 22 | Native Plant Bingo
6pm – 8pm at Cary Ale House. Tickets required to play.

FRI 25 | BMP: Talk & Tour
1pm – 3pm at Conference Rooms A & B
McHenry County Administration Building

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

OCTOBER

SAT 3 | Defenders Annual Potluck Picnic
11am – 2pm at Boone Creek Conservation Area

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

TUE 20 | Repair Fair
3pm – 8pm at McHenry County College

SAT 24 | Defenders Brand Launch
4pm – 7pm at Kishwaukee Brewing Co

NOVEMBER

FRI 27 - SUN 29 | Christmas Tree Farm
8:30am - 4pm

DECEMBER

SAT 5 & SUN 6 | Christmas Tree Farm
8:30am - 4pm

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

In Memory of Judy Thornton



Ted Thornton, a long-time member of the Environmental Defenders and devoted advocate of conservation in McHenry County has graciously donated a generous gift in memory of his beloved wife, Judy Thornton. With the passing of Judy in 2020, we remember her and honor her legacy as a passionate environmentalist who supported the Defenders mission for 48 years. As a dedicated Defender and volunteer for decades, Judy often volunteered throughout the County including Earth Day, McHenry County Fair, recycling drives, book sales and many other events to educate the public and promote the Defenders' stewardship. We are so grateful to receive this gift in her name. Thank you, Ted.



Open MON – SAT | 10am – 4pm
CLOSED SUNDAY
779-220-4945
61 N. Williams St, Crystal Lake IL

CLOSING SEPTEMBER 19



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