2026 LCF Summer Newsletter



Art and Nature Entwined Program

LCF is committed to providing opportunities for individuals and communities to experience the synergy between art and nature. Toward that end, LCF sought out and received a grant from the Dale and Deborah Smith Foundation. This grant will provide the support to expand and enhance the inclusion of art focused nature experiences at our preserves into 2027. There is a reciprocal relationship underlying the two that leaves them inextricably connected. We are looking forward to bringing you programming as a part of this grant, some of which is included in the events section of this newsletter.



Luella's Lodge

Luella's Lodge is a nonprofit retreat center in Vermilion County, Illinois, dedicated to supporting families grieving the loss of a child through nature-based healing, retreat programming, and community connection. They requested ecological advice for their natural areas. LCF Executive Director, Eric Mollahan, joined them to discuss next steps for their three areas – pond health, woodland restoration and prairie establishment. Some preliminary recommendations were provided. Restoration is never a quick process; Many of our landscapes have been negatively impacted for decades, even centuries, and we won't be able to fix it overnight – but together, with some time, we can achieve anything. It was a pleasure to assist!

Did you know?

LCF has been assisting IDNR with the identification and documentation of snakes near one of our properties. Contracted by IDNR to document details about location, species and individual features, the primary focus of this job is to identify the endangered Kirtland's Water Snake throughout the area. Currently, we have identified more than 40 individual Kirtland's Water Snakes!





Caterpillar study



Jasmine Hollow, LCF's newest property, is the site of a Caterpillar Study being conducted by the Illinois Natural History Survey. In 2025, 13 species of caterpillar were observed onsite during 3 field visits. This year, the study continues and we are so excited to see what is observed this season. We will keep you updated on some of the data and let you know if we find anything special!

Water Quality Testing



LCF is helping test water quality in a series of basins in Champaign. We will be testing for phosphorous in 5 locations to determine if water quality is improving as it moves through conveyance (stormwater) systems. It's an important time to think about how individual activities can impact surrounding water quality. Runoff ultimately leads to the tributaries, rivers and lakes which define our region, recharge our aquifers and improve recreation.

Student's Consulting for Non-Profit Organizations

SCNO, a registered student organization at U of I, wrapped up their project with LCF in early May. We really appreciate their time and efforts and look forward to implementing some of their findings. It was a great experience to collaborate with the future stewards of our land.

Brady Bluebell Hike

LCF's Brady Bluebell Hike, guided by Lynn Hawkinson-Smith, in late April was a blast! We saw so many neat trees and some rare plants, but the biggest find was observed by a hike participant. This person saw an odd fungus, identified as the wrinkled peach mushroom. This mushroom is known to exist in the region but is listed as near-threatened globally. Make sure to join our events and have the opportunity to find something special!





Mettler Woods Creative Dancing

The Barbara Mettler Dancing event, led by the International Association for Creative Dance, in conjunction with the U of I dance department and Barbara Mettler Studios, was such a delightful opportunity to experience nature in a unique way. Attendees were given the opportunity of engaging nature in a spiritual way and embodying the principals that Barbara Mettler established in her approach to creative dance. If you want to learn more about Barbara Mettler, and her impacts on land conservation and creative dance, please follow the link included.
https://www.barbaramettler.org





Stewardship Saturdays

We were fortunate enough to have decent weather for our stewardship Saturday events in April, May and June. Events took place at the Bruce Hannon Levee Trail and Mouth of Jordan. On our June stewardship day, we had a fawn join us temporarily for a minute long chat and then take off into the adjacent wooded area. It was a truly unique experience – it seemed like the fawn was thanking us for the work we were doing! Garlic mustard and honeysuckle were the primary focus of our stewardship, and we got a lot done. Garlic mustard and honeysuckle are both allelopathic species, meaning they release chemical compounds into the surrounding soil to give them a competitive advantage over our native species, ultimately displacing them and reducing biodiversity. Thank you to the volunteers who joined us! The next Stewardship Saturdays are July 11th, August 8th, and September 12th. If you are interested in joining, please reach out to Eric Mollahan or sign up on our website.



Flora Fanatics





The May and June Flora Fanatics plant ID hikes were a pleasure to lead. We saw plenty of unique species and discussed how to manage some problematic species commonly found in the region. Though water levels were high at the Bruce Hannon Levee Trail, there were plenty of areas to explore. The high water levels also presented an opportunity to discuss the importance of protecting wetlands and floodplains, which mitigate flooding, filter water and provide habitat for wildlife.

Upcoming Events!!!

Please save the date for upcoming events this Summer, we hope to see you there! In case of inclement weather, updates will be posted on the LCF Facebook Page. Unless specified otherwise in the postings below, please contact Eric at ericmollahan@landconservationfoundation.org to sign up for these events.

Event: Dragonfly Hike

When: Saturday, July 11th from 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Rain Day: Saturday July 18th from 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Where: Mouth of Jordan – 7193-7281 E 1450 North Road, Fairmount, IL 61858

What: Come join us and learn about, and identify, the different species of dragonflies that the Mouth of Jordan supports.

Leader: Doug Mills

Dragonflies are incredibly important to our local ecosystem. Did you know that Dragonflies begin their life in water before emerging and shedding an exoskeleton. Ultimately, wings emerge and they take flight. Dragonflies hunt mosquitos in both their aquatic stage and their terrestrial stage with an extremely high success rate – even more reason to make sure we provide them an opportunity to thrive! At Mouth of Jordan, we have habitat that is conducive to harboring an array of native dragonflies. If you want to learn a little more about the majestic creatures, please join us for a hike led by Master Naturalist Doug Mills on July 11th.

Event: Art and Nature Entwined - LCF Photo Competition

When: June 2026 to June 2027

Where: Any publicly accessible LCF site!

What: The rules, and rewards, for this event are included on the next page.

Leader: You!

Land Conservation Foundation 2026-2027 Photo Competition!

This year, LCF is unveiling a new photo competition! The rules are simple:

1.) You can use any device which captures photos (i.e. phones or digital cameras).

2.) Photos must be taken on LCF properties (see LCF website for publicly accessible sites) beginning in 2026.

3.) Submit your photo by emailing submission to Eric Mollahan at ericmollahan@landconservationfoundation.org. You are also encouraged to post your photos online and tag LCF social media accounts!

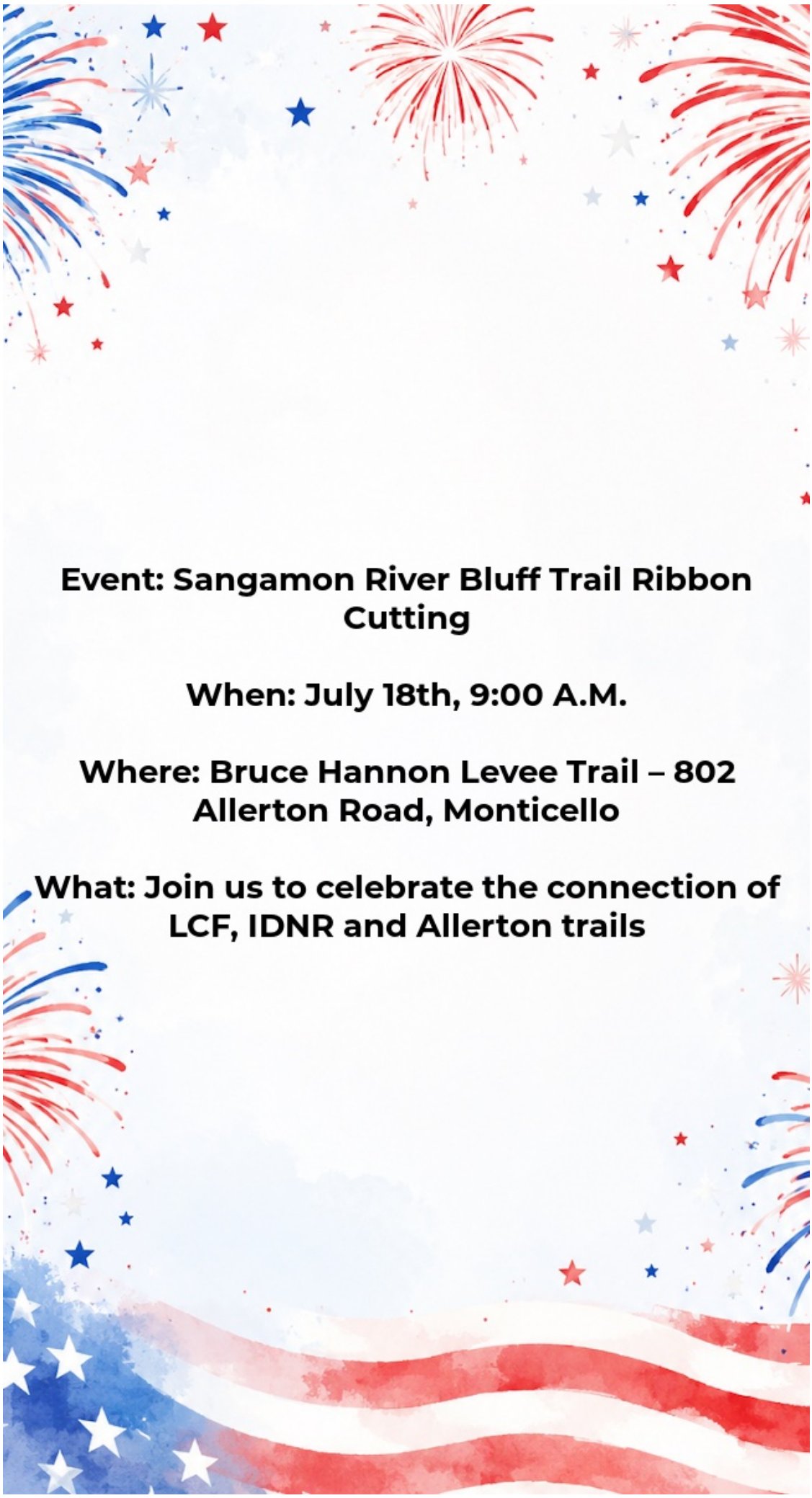
4.) You may enter two photos per category.

5.) Final submittals are due by May 30th, 2027.

6.) You may not digitally enhance (edit) the photographs except for cropping, except for in the "Creative" category.

Any photo will do. There are five categories for submittal: Landscape photos, Plants, Fungi, and Animals – anything from insects, birds, frogs, fish, mammals, & Creative, which could include any artistic editing that you desire. Please indicate which category your submission is for. A committee coordinated by LCF will vote on the best photos for each category, with the winners receiving an LCF hat and shirt!

Photos submitted to LCF may be utilized for future marketing purposes.


Event: Sangamon River Bluff Trail Ribbon Cutting
When: July 18th, 9:00 A.M.
Where: Bruce Hannon Levee Trail – 802 Allerton Road, Monticello
What: Join us to celebrate the connection of LCF, IDNR and Allerton trails

Come out and join us for the unveiling of the fully maintained connection of the Sangamon River Bluff Trail. This event highlights a collaboration between LCF, the City of Monticello, IDNR, the Nature Preserves Commission and Allerton. The ribbon cutting will be in the parking lot, at the location of the new sign and attendees are encouraged to hike what they are comfortable with. LCF's Bruce Hannon Levee Trail is about 2 miles and the entire length of the Sangamon River Bluff Trail, which ends on Allerton Property, is approximately 4.5 miles. Please bring your own water and snacks if desired. This hike offers scenic views of the Sangamon River not common in the region. It is a moderately challenging hike with a rustic feel – some obstacles remain if they do not prevent access to the trail. If you are interested in attending, please reach out to Eric Mollahan.

Stewardship Saturdays - Stewardship workday every 2nd Saturday

Event: Stewardship Saturdays

When: July 11th 9:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

August 8th, September 12th 10:00 A. M. 12:00 P.M.

Where: TBD - Sign Up for Email Notifications

What: Help improve our natural areas!
Leader: Eric Mollahan

If you want to make an impact on local habitat and ecosystems, please join us for our stewardship Saturdays. This is a monthly event taking place on the second Saturday of each month. It is rewarding to see how the cumulative effort can help improve our landscape over the seasons and we hope you will be a part of it. Please reach out to Eric Mollahan to receive email notifications about these events moving forward.

Flora Fanatics - Plant Identification Hikes Every 3rd Saturday

Event: Flora Fanatics

When: July 25th (4th Saturday), August 15th, September 19th 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

Where: TBD - Sign Up for Email Notifications

What: Join us for a nature walk and Plant ID

Leader: Eric Mollahan


Join us for our Flora Fanatics hike! This monthly hike, usually on the 3rd Saturday of each month, located at various LCF properties and focused primarily on plant identification. If you have ever wondered what interesting plants you may be seeing trailside, this is the event for you. In addition to general plant ID, we will discuss the nuances of management strategies onsite to increase biodiversity and work towards a healthier ecosystem. Please reach out to Eric Mollahan to receive email notifications about these events moving forward.

Event: Art and Nature Entwined - Poetry at the Preserve

When: Saturday, August 1st from 6:30 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.

Rain Day: Sunday, August 2nd from 6:30 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.

Where: Sangamon River Corridor

What: Come to listen, share and experience nature through the written and spoken word.

Leader: Mary Hays

Please join us for the first of LCF's Art and Nature Entwined events. This event, led by Mary Hays, will start with nature focused poetry. Attendees are invited to share meaningful poems or short pieces of literature of their choosing with the group if desired. This will take place in the woods – please make sure to dress and prepare accordingly. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own foldable chairs. After wrapping up our spoken word portion of the event, we will embark on a short hike and have an opportunity to write down our experiences while enjoying the surrounding landscape. Notebooks and writing utensils will be provided to attendees.

Event: Art and Nature Entwined - Plant Sketching

When: September 5th 9:00 A.M. -12:00 P.M. and 6th 2:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M. &

September 12th 9:00 A.M. -12:00 P.M. and 13th 2:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Rain Day: September 19th 9:00 A.M. -12:00 P.M. and 20th 2:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Where: Jasmine Hollow

What: Learn plant sketching techniques and take home your own masterpiece!

Cost: $20

Leader: Belinda Beccue

Sign up for a plant sketching class led by local artist and educator Belinda Beccue. You will have the opportunity to learn techniques that capture details which bring your sketches to life. This is an opportunity to bring home your own work of art, that you create, influenced by our unique Central Illinois habitat. There are ten spots each day, totaling only 40 open spots to join. Make sure to reach out to Eric Mollahan and reserve your preferred day and time now – it's only $20 to attend & all supplies are included!

PRAIRIE STATE CONSERVATION COALITION

A Collective Voice for Land Conservation In Illinois

Have you ever heard of the Prairie State Conservation Coalition? LCF is a proud member of PSCC, our statewide association of private and public land conservation organizations.

For twenty years, PSCC has been growing the collective voice for land conservation in Illinois and providing a central place for more than 40 conservation land trusts and other organizations who save, protect and steward natural areas in Illinois. PSCC holds statewide and regional conferences, professional development trainings, and provides support to executive directors and opportunities for professional networking.

To learn more about PSCC, visit www.prairiestateconservation.org.