Land Conservation Foundation: Fall 2026 Newsletter

What's New at LCF?

Master Gardener Presentation

LCF Executive Director Eric Mollahan will be speaking to Master Gardeners and interested members of the public in Champaign on October 27th, 2026.

The presentation will take a comprehensive look at landscaping with native species, exploring why native yardscapes are so important and how to help native plant communities become established and thrive in a yard. Often, native yardscapes begin with a lush variety of plants, but more aggressive native species and invasive species can come to dominate these small areas.

The result can be lower biodiversity and blooms concentrated in just one part of the year. This discussion will explore both the why and the how of native yardscapes, equipping attendees with practical strategies to encourage biodiversity in their own native landscapes. It should be an interesting discussion, and we hope to see you there!

Representative Deering Joins LCF



Representative Regan Deering joined LCF and the Illinois Environmental Council at the Sangamon River Corridor Reserve in late August. We discussed the importance of collaborative relationships, including the partnership that made the Sangamon River Bluff Trail possible, and how those relationships benefit communities across our region.

A brief walk provided us with a firsthand look at the high river levels we had experienced this summer, and we capped off the day with a trip to the Greenhouse Café at Allerton Park. We are so appreciative that Representative Deering made time to join us and see some of the natural landscapes that make Central Illinois so special!

Caterpillar study

In late July, LF Executive Director Eric Mollahan joined Illinois Natural History Survey staff to learn firsthand how they collect caterpillar data.

Surprisingly, much of the work takes place at twilight or after dark, using lighting that makes many species of caterpillars easier to spot! The data collection process was fascinating, and caterpillars weren't the only things we saw—or heard!

We will keep you updated on the results once everything has been tallied at the end of the year.





Water Quality Testing

Water quality testing in Champaign has continued as planned, and the August visit included sediment sampling as well.

Do you know the difference between sediment and soil? There are plenty of nuances to explore, including organic matter content, structure, and microbiology. For this sampling work, the simplest way to picture the distinction is to think of sediment beneath the water and soil on land.

Collecting multiple water samples throughout the year is especially important: consistent testing helps reveal trends in a body of water and guides management strategies intended to improve water quality.

Snake ID Update

This summer the IDNR performed surveys across the state for the state threatened Kirtland's snake and LCF was hired to help with the surveys in central Illinois. The good news is the group found several populations.

Setting aside natural areas helps ensure that populations of rare native species aren't lost for good. It also preserves our region's ecological and cultural history for generations to come.

Public Event Updates

Art and Nature Entwined Update: Poetry at the Preserve

Poetry at the Preserve was postponed from its original date of August 1st due to a major rainstorm that moved through the area. This was less than ideal, and we are so sorry if you couldn't join us because of the change.

Fortunately, the scheduled rain day was lovely, and event leader Mary Hays guided us through a relaxing and spiritual experience. After Mary and the attendees shared their pieces, we walked a short section of the trail, focusing on the small natural details that are often overlooked.

As the sun was setting and tiki torches illuminated the trail, we walked back to the gathering area to write a little about what we had observed and enjoy the golden hour.

Thank you to everyone who joined us, and a special thanks to Mary Hays for sharing her expertise and passion. It was a delightful experience!





Art and Nature Entwined Update: Plant Sketching

Thank you to all those who attended LCF's first ever Plant Sketching event. We ended up having some great weather and came across some unique species, such as Nodding Lady's Tresses Orchid and Grape Fern!

We were also fortunate enough to have a visit from renowned artist, Philip Juras. Philip has captured countless Illinois landscapes in his book ***Picturing the Prairie: A Vision of Restoration*** and we were so pleased to have him as an attendee. You can find more of his work at the website below.

https://www.philipjuras.com

A special thanks to Belinda Beccue for leading these events and sharing her knowledge with us all. We hope attendees can continue to develop their craft throughout the many natural landscapes in our region.





Ribbon Cutting at the Sangamon River Bluff Trail!

We held a ribbon cutting for the newly opened Sangamon River Bluff Trail, which connects LF's Sangamon River Corridor Reserve to Allerton Park. Thank you to everyone who joined us to celebrate this "connector" trail!

This 4.5-mile hike features scenic riverside views that are uncommon in this region and offers a glimpse of what Illinois looked like hundreds of years ago. If you haven't explored it yet, we hope you'll have a chance to experience the trail soon-and take plenty of great photos along the way.

Stewardship Saturdays

We have seen a lot of progress in the areas we have worked on recently! Oak and paw-paw seedlings have begun to establish, and the native vegetation is noticeably more diverse. These changes show how opening the canopy can encourage biodiversity when paired with consistent management.

This progress would not be possible without the ongoing support of LCF volunteers, whose work is making a noticeable difference in the landscape.

The next Stewardship Saturdays are October 10th, November 14th, and December 12th. If you are interested in joining us, please reach out to Eric Mollahan or sign up on our website.

Flora Fanatics

We continue to learn so much on our Plant ID hikes! At Mettler Woods, we found swamp dodder, or Cuscuta gronovii, a native parasitic plant that many say looks like orange spaghetti. This species, now observed at all six LCF sites, offers a fascinating example of how plants can help keep one another in balance.

While swamp dodder has been observed parasitizing many species, it most often helps control the growth of aggressive natives, such as Canada wood nettle, which can outcompete other native species and reduce overall biodiversity.

Swamp dodder thrives where its host plants dominate an area. By drawing resources from these vigorous plants, it can give other native species a chance to establish and compete for sunlight and nutrients.

Take a look at the photos. Notice how joe-pye weed has begun to establish where swamp dodder is present—nature is truly amazing!





Trail Clean Up Day at Mouth of Jordan

Thanks to all the volunteers who answered our call for a last-minute trail clean-up at Mouth of Jordan!

The significant rainfall we received recently caused water levels to rise dramatically. As the water receded, it left large piles of woody debris and some large logs across our trails, making the trail system nearly impassable.

With the help of these volunteers, the trails were cleared and ready to be enjoyed once again by anyone looking to immerse themselves in a truly unique and special place.

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: 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.

Stewardship Saturdays – Stewardship workday every 2nd Saturday

Event: Stewardship Saturdays

When: October 10th, November 14th, and December 12th, from 10:00 A.M. to 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 a difference for local habitats and ecosystems, please join us for Stewardship Saturdays! This monthly event takes place on the second Saturday of each month. It is rewarding to see how our combined efforts improve the 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 upcoming workdays.

Flora Fanatics – Plant Identification Hikes Every 3rd Saturday

Event: Flora Fanatics

When: October 17th and November 21st, from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

Where: TBD - Sign Up for Email Notifications

What: Join us for a nature walk and plant identification.

Leader: Eric Mollahan

Join us for a Flora Fanatics hike! These monthly walks usually take place on the third Saturday of each month at various LCF properties, with a focus on plant identification. If you have ever wondered about the interesting plants you see along the trail, this is the event for you. In addition to identifying plants, we will discuss the management strategies used at each site to increase biodiversity and work toward a healthier ecosystem. Please reach out to Eric Mollahan to receive email notifications about upcoming hikes.

Event: Spooky Walk at Mettler Woods

When: 7:00 P.M. October 20th

Where: Mettler Woods (must approach from North)

Take a spooky walk through LCF's Mettler Woods, and bring a bag for collecting treats! Costumes encouraged! For all ages. Registration: Register by October 20 on the Vespasian Warner Public Library website. https://www.vwarner.org/event-details/spooky-walk-at-mettler-woods-everyone?fbclid=IwY2xjawUe

---

Event: Halloween at the Levee Trail

When: TBD – Follow us on Facebook or see our website for updates

Where: Sangamon River Corridor Reserve

Come out and enjoy the Bruce Hannon levee trail – make some crafts and enjoys some snacks. You may even catch a glimpse of BIGFOOT on the trail!

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.