

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

Welcome

Tabitha Ayres, Executive Director

Welcome to the first issue of "Conservation In Action".

We hope that this newsletter will help us connect with our sponsors and partners, and reach a new audience of environmentally concerned individuals.

Our goal is to share our current project accomplishments and future goals with our community. We also aim to inspire others to think critically about the conservation and environmental needs of Southern Illinois, and to help us bring new and valuable projects that could benefit this wonderful area. Enjoy!



SAVE THE DATE!

2014 Steak Fry

We hope you'll join us for the 2014 Steak Fry. This Annual Event is a chance for council members, community organizers, and local friends to come together and share a meal. The event will be held **Thursday May 22nd, 2014** at The Dixon Springs Agricultural Center.

Upcoming Regional Events

May

Southern Illinois ISAM Awards
May 9th—2:00pm
Cache River Wetlands Center

[13th Annual Cache River Nature Fest](#)

May 10th — 9:00am-4:00pm
Cache River Wetlands Center

[Invasive Issues in Trees](#)

May 15—8:00am-3:00pm
Morton Arboretum
Cost: \$15.00

[Young Trekkers](#)

May 13, 20, & 27 — 4:00-5:00pm
Lincoln Memorial Picnig Grounds

[Invasive Species Education Workshop](#)

May 21—3:00pm-6:00pm
SNF Mississippi Bluff Ranger Station

Upcoming & Ongoing

[Wildflower Walks](#)

May 11th—October 12th
Throughout Southern Illinois

[Ecocamp](#)

May—June
Touch of Nature

ABOUT THE RC&D

Our History

The Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Program was established as part of the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 with the goal of assisting regional multi-county areas in conservation, water quality, wildlife habitat, and rural development. Work in each area was coordinated by a council, which operated as a sponsorship-based nonprofit led by local leaders and volunteers.

The Shawnee RC&D area was established to provide conservation efforts in the lower 16 counties of Illinois. Responsibility for the administration of this nation-wide program resided within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, which provided basic operating support for the Council including administrative staff and overhead expenses, until 2011 when federal funding for the RC&D Program was eliminated.

Today

Following the loss of federal funding, the Shawnee RC&D Council reached out to its partners and supporters to create grant-funded agreements to continue work in the RC&D area (*right*).

By reducing over-head costs, and maximizing existing company assets, Shawnee RC&D has continued to grow and thrive, at a time when many RC&D Councils have had to close entirely.

Fundraising is currently underway to create a reimbursement reserve fund, which will allow Shawnee RC&D to increase the number of grant-funded projects underway. In order to meet up-front, reimbursable, costs, the Council has set a goal of raising \$50,000 by December 2015.



Our Focus

Shawnee RC&D sponsors and promotes projects and programs that improve the quality of life and sustainable use of natural resources in the lower 16 counties of Illinois. We provide experienced leadership, technical resources, and fiscal sponsorship to partners and community organizations who share our goals.

Our projects and programs focus on enhancing agriculture, natural resources, industry & culture, outdoor recreation, environmental education, and regional economic development.

Upcoming Meetings

All meetings are held at the USDA Office, in Marion IL, unless otherwise noted.

June 3rd, 6p—Full Council Meeting

Sep 23rd, 6p—Full Council Meeting

Want to Get Involved?

Shawnee RC&D is looking for dedicated professionals and enthusiastic community members to join our Council. Meetings are held four times per year in Marion, IL. Council members are responsible for helping find new projects or conservation opportunities, networking with community and government leaders to accomplish conservation goals, representing Shawnee RC&D to the general public and informing others about the work we do. For more information about joining our council, or to submit a project or grant idea, please contact: Tabitha Ayres, Executive Director, (618) 944-1736, or email info@shawneercd.org.

Keep an Eye Out for Invasive Plants this Spring!

by Chris Evans

Springtime provides a great opportunity to find and report several invasive species. Since many of our native trees and shrubs have not yet started to leaf out, invasive species with either early leaf growth or early flowering can be easily found. Here in Illinois, we have two websites where people can both view invasive species distribution maps and contribute new reports. In the Chicago region, the New Invaders Watch Program tracks invasive species that are moving in to that region. Reports of the target species can be entered at www.newinvaders.org. The Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS, www.eddmaps.org) developed by the University of Georgia, covers the entire state and all invasive plant species. Adding your observations can help us have a more accurate picture of the distribution of invasive species and will aid in planning, prioritizing and controlling species. Here are species that are particularly

visible in early spring:

Lesser Celandine
(*Ficaria verna* or
Ranunculus ficaria)

This small spring
ephemeral forb is being
found in bottomland



woods in northern Illinois and can impact our native wildflowers. The showy yellow flowers often lead people into thinking this is a desirable native species, but don't let its looks fool you, it is a serious invader that we do not yet have a clear idea of where it is invading in Illinois. This is a species that we definitely want more information on any infestations you know



about.
Garlic
Mustard
(*Alliaria
petiolata*)
This is no
new invader!

Garlic mustard is widespread throughout Illinois. If you do not yet have it on your land, then you need to make every effort to keep it that way! Scouting your woods in the early spring is the best way to find infestations.

Stop the Spread!

by Karla Gage (RTRCWMA) and
Jennifer Behnken (SIUC Urban Forestry)

Shawnee RC&D, in partnership with 8 other community organizations, has applied for funding through the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund for a project aimed at stopping the spread of the Callery (Bradford) Pear.



This popular ornamental species has been found escaping into the wild here, in Southern Illinois, and elsewhere in the U.S. Its lack of a central trunk and brittle wood characteristics lead to splitting and tree destruction, creating safety risks in a municipal setting and an undesirable appearance. The need for aggressive pruning combined with Callery Pear's short life span indicates increased frequency in tree replacement and potential strain on city tree management budgets.

The Stop the Spread Program will provide a positive solution to the problem by helping with the identification of locally-available native species which consumers, landscapers, and city planners may select as alternatives.

Fire at Trail of Tears

Text and photos by Tracy Fidler

ALTO PASS, Ill. — After a 70 year hiatus, fire has returned to Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Trail of Tears State Forest. To date, a little more than 700 acres have been burned, thanks to help from the Southern Illinois University Fire Dawgs, a student organization with prescribed fire expertise.

"These burns kick off an initiative to restore a healthier, more resilient forest. Wildlife should find this a better forest to call home," said IDNR forester David Allen, who is helping the state develop a new habitat management plan for Trail of Tears.

As part of efforts to create a wildlife habitat management plan for the forest, IDNR staff members met with numerous individuals, including those in the science community. Through discussions and reviews of research, it became clear that — given the challenges faced at this specific site — it was unclear what combination and timing of forest actions would have the best, most immediate effects.

Research shows oak and hickory dominance on the ridges and mid to upper slopes is being lost. It is predicted the conversion to a forest dominated by shade tolerant species could be complete by 2050.

"Oaks provide food to birds and mammals. Take away the oaks, and you have less wildlife," said Charles Ruffner, who teaches forestry at Southern Illinois University and leads the Fire Dawgs. "Much of the life in this forest has adapted, over thousands upon thousands of years, to having oaks here. If we lose these oak trees, then it could have a ripple effect to all the life that live here. Better management, on the other hand, should translate into more wildlife, such as turkeys, bats, and rattlesnakes."

Because the forest's conversion from oak-hickory to shade tolerant species is well underway, the demonstration project was designed to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, charting the best path forward for restoring the forest's diverse forest communities.

At the 925-acre demonstration project, management actions will be monitored so that effectiveness can be evaluated objectively. Often called "adaptive management," this approach allows land managers the opportunity to learn how best to restore natural communities and improve its management. Southern Illinois University – Carbondale and the Illinois Natural History Survey will support initial monitoring efforts.

Trail of Tears State Forest, located in western Union County, spans more than 5,000 acres. Its oak forests, woodlands and hill prairies are home to the state-threatened timber rattlesnake and rice rat, and, possibly the federally-endangered Indiana bat. In all, the forest is home to 23 species of conservation concern, a designation that indicates their populations are small and/or declining.

