

Get to Know Our Volunteers



Chris Cogburn — *Volunteer Phenologist*

by Volunteer Coordinator Bob Menard

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Chris Cogburn has volunteered with the Conservation District’s phenology program since 2012. At that time she checked into volunteering with the District and learned that Research Field Station Ecologist Tom Simpson was starting a three-year phenology study at selected conservation areas. While she didn’t know much about wild flowers and plants at that time, she was willing to learn. She had been working at a garden and nursery center where she had expanded her knowledge of gardens, flowers and plants and was ready to learn more. The thought of volunteering outdoors within conservation areas, with other plant-loving people sound like a perfect match. Chris signed up to volunteer for both the phenology and the Plants of Concern program.

Phenology is the study of the timing of biological events and cycles in plants and animals such as flowering, leafing, hibernation, reproduction and migration. Scientists study the influence of seasonal and environmental changes and use the phenology data to evaluate the effects climate change is having on the natural world and us. These changes can be crucial to the survival of certain species.

Chris volunteers at the Lyons Prairie and Marsh Conservation Area and enjoys the variety of the site with its woodlands, marshes and wet prairies which

provide a much wider variety of plants to study and enjoy. “Phenology takes a long term commitment as a volunteer, monitoring an area over a period of time. But I enjoy collecting data which provides me with a greater sense of purpose knowing the data collected is part of a much larger study program across the area,” said Chris. “I also enjoy being independent and having the flexibility to choose my own times to monitor.”

Visitors to the Conservation District’s public sites are expected to stay on the many trails that are provided to ensure our sites are preserved and protected. As a volunteer monitor, Chris is expected to learn about the plants at her site on and off trail. She finds her walks are great stress relievers as she explores the prairie and marsh looking for a species that may have eluded her on her last visit. On occasion she finds something new and different or a wildflower she had not seen on site before. She reports her observations to District staff, and keep track of the rare sightings to observe as they thrive and ideally expand in number. She recently began mentoring another volunteer and admits she continues to enjoy her outdoor hikes with a little more purpose.

“Chris worked with the Phenology Program in 2012–2014 and again in 2018–2020 when we brought it back. She is a great volunteer who combines her technical competence with enthusiasm, dedication,

and a great sense of humor. You couldn’t ask for more in a volunteer,” said Simpson.

Chris has also participated in the District’s volunteer Seed Collection program for several fall harvests. She is one of many volunteers who collect seeds for the District in late summer and fall. Their combined collection efforts in 2019 resulted in over 1,600 lbs. of native wildflower seeds values at roughly \$100,000 in seed costs. “Christine’s cheerful personality coupled with her strong desire to learn about native plants definitely makes her a pleasure to work with in the field!” stated Plant Ecologist Laurie Ryan.

When she is not exploring Lyons Prairie and Marsh, Chris will hike The Hollows Conservation Area, another favorite site, that’s closer to home and “it’s amazing how many birds are there at dusk,” as well as Fox Bluff Conservation Area “which has a primordial feel to it” or Illinois State Beach for a great get away to walk along the beach.

Many thanks to Chris for her time well spent keeping an eye on the plants and wildflowers at Lyons Prairie and Marsh and her efforts to share her knowledge and field observations to our staff and through her efforts to mentor others.

We appreciate and thank all our many plant and wildlife volunteers who also spend time at our many sites. 

Seed Collection Volunteer Orientation

Tuesday, August 18 • 6:30–8:30 p.m. Online Zoom Workshop.

Contact JBero@MCCDistrict.org if interested in attending.

A few hours of your time spent collecting seed on District sites this fall can make a real difference in preserving and restoring native plant species to McHenry County. No experience necessary. New volunteers can attend the training session given by Plant Ecologist Laurie Ryan and seed collection seasonal employees.



Volunteer Opportunities

HABITAT RESTORATION DAYS —

Want to make a difference?

Come check out these great outdoor service opportunities! Volunteers will help tackle invasive species, learn about the plants and animals who live there and have fun. *Families are welcome (minimum age 6 years old with parental supervision). Students fulfilling requirements and groups of five or more must register at least 1 week in advance.

RSVP Your RSVP helps us to plan appropriate activities, have enough equipment available, and alert you in case of cancellations due to weather. Due to COVID, workdays have a maximum of 10 participants until further notice. Please RSVP directly to the workday leader or sign up online here: MCCD.me/RestorationRSVP.

What Do You Need? All activities are outdoors and off trail. Come prepared for the weather and outdoor work. Wear close-toed shoes, long pants, and long-sleeves. Bring drinking water, work gloves, and insect repellent. Due to COVID, it is recommended to bring hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes for any tools used.

Sign-in & Waiver All volunteers need to sign in at workdays, since the sign-in sheet includes a waiver. Volunteers under the age of 18 must have a parent or guardian sign a waiver before the start of the workday.

Workday Leader, Contact Info & Parking Contact information for volunteer Site Stewards and parking instructions are below. Some site stewards are happy to work with you individually or schedule a small group workday by request.



Get Outdoors and Give Back Nov. 27 is #GreenFriday Restoration Day!

Contact the Site Steward of one of these 5 sites for special social distancing instructions and meeting spot.

No experience necessary. Dress for outdoors and bring your own work gloves. Families welcome!*

- 9 a.m.–Noon @ **Exner Marsh**, Lake in the Hills
 - 9 a.m.–1 p.m. @ **High Point**, Harvard
 - 10 a.m.–1 p.m. @ **Pleasant Valley**, Woodstock
 - 1–3:30 p.m. @ **Alden Sedge Meadow**, Harvard
 - 3–5 p.m. @ **Coral Woods**, Marengo
- (See contact information below)

All large groups or corporate workday requests should be sent to the volunteer coordinator at jbero@mccdDistrict.org.

	LOCATION — MAP ON INSIDE BACK COVER	MONTHLY SCHEDULE	SITE STEWARD — CALL BEFORE YOU GO!
SATURDAYS	Alden Sedge Meadow South, Alden/Harvard Parking: 15820 IL Route 173, Harvard	9/19, 10/17, 11/21; 1–3:30 p.m.	Jack & Judy Speer, smallwatersNFP@yahoo.com or (815) 648-1372
	Dufield (McConnell Rd. Entrance), Woodstock Parking: 11418 McConnell Road, Woodstock	9/12, 10/10, 11/14; 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	Jeff Schumacher, schumacher.jeff1@gmail.com or (815) 337-9315
	Exner Marsh, Lake in the Hills Parking: 4450 Barharbor, Lake in the Hills	9/19, 10/17, 11/21; 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	Len Bannon, lennsandy@gmail.com or (847) 669-1381
VARIABLE	Cotton Creek Marsh, Island Lake Parking: Lot behind St. John Lutheran Church 405 W State Rd #176, Island Lake	Sundays: 9/6, 9/20, 10/4, 10/18, 11/1, 11/15; 1–3 p.m.	Mike Bouska, MikeBouska@att.net or (815) 759-0731
	Coral Woods, Marengo Parking: Varies — contact steward	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Bonnie Leahy, bh.leahy@att.net or (815) 923-2208
	High Point, Harvard Parking: Varies — contact steward	Tuesdays, 9/8, 10/13, 11/10; 9 a.m.–1 p.m.	Orrin Bangert & Randy Stowe, glaggan@yahoo.com or (815) 943-6333
	Marengo Ridge, Marengo Parking: Varies — contact steward	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Kevin Kucharski, kucharski.kevin@outlook.com or (815) 715-3231;
	Pioneer Fen, Johnsborg Parking: 4300–4598 Red Tail Ct., Johnsborg	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Pat Sullivan-Schroyer, psullivanschroyer@gmail.com or (815) 675-9004
	Pleasant Valley, Woodstock Parking: Varies — contact steward	Monday, 9/7; 10 a.m.–1 p.m.	Greg Rajska, quirkaceae@yahoo.com or (815) 814-5055
	Stickney Run, McHenry Parking: Varies — contact steward	Sn 9/20, T 9/29, Sn 10/18, St 11/14; 9am–12 pm	Pete Jackson, beepjackson@comcast.net or (224) 612-1803
	The Hollows, Cary Parking: Varies — contact steward	Contact Site Steward for dates. (Spring, Summer and Fall only)	Margie Szymanskyj; szymanskyj@earthlink.net