

Get to Know Our Volunteers



Len Bannon — Exner Marsh Site Steward

by Volunteer Coordinator Bob Menard

L-R: Tim Anderson, Len Bannon

In 2012, Len offered his services to the District and upon completion of the District's training program, became the Site Steward for Exner Marsh in 2013.

Len's first focus was the removal of garlic mustard at Exner Marsh, which is now contained for the most part. His efforts to remove other invasive species continues, which includes: non-native thistle, teasel and especially the stubborn, aggressive buckthorn—his biggest focus. Len acknowledges the efforts of his regular volunteers, Tim Anderson and Bob Black, two of who have worked closely with him in ongoing restoration efforts. Although progress has been made, the removal of buckthorn continues!

"Len's commitment to clearing invasive brush has opened up some incredible views looking out over the marsh. He is extremely dedicated in his efforts to help restore Exner Marsh," stated District Ecologist Jeff Murray.

"Len lives and breathes the marsh and has dedicated a large amount of his time and life to restoring its natural integrity through brush clearing and invasive weed control," said District Ecologist Adam Rex. "He also feels it is important to work with the younger generation, engaging scout groups and high school students during workdays. Len's impact on Exner Marsh is apparent not only on the physical landscape but also by educating the public to what it is they are seeing and hearing when they visit Exner Marsh. His love and dedication of this site is very obvious."

In addition to working with scout groups and school groups, Len recalled a few teenagers who stopped by to assist

him one summer. One youth was an inspiration to Len! He became a regular who would come by 2-3 times a week, bringing along one or two of his friends whenever he came out to work. Len's wish is to have more individuals who would be interested in taking the time to come out and volunteer on a regular basis, maybe monthly, semi-monthly or even quarterly. Volunteering and taking care of Exner Marsh often becomes a family affair, and in fact recently, he hosted his own "family restoration day." During the summer months, weather dependent, Len typically spends about three days a week at Exner Marsh.

"Exner Marsh a special place to walk in the woods to get away from the hustle and bustle of life. There are several fairly short and level hiking options up to a mile or two, with prairie, woodland and water views. Lots of birds to see, especially water fowl," said Len.

Len also likes to explore other Conservation Areas in McHenry County when he is not restoring the lands of Exner Marsh, "Glacial Park is a special place with its large expanse of open land. I have especially appreciated taking tours with Research Field Station Ecologist Tom Simpson, learning about the moraines and what it was like when the glaciers created Glacial Park. We are here to make it a better place. What we have, we inherited from others," said Len.

The Conservation District is grateful for the efforts of Len and all of our volunteers and proud to work with them in the management and restoration of natural areas that are owned and managed by the district. 

Located in Lake in the Hills, Exner Marsh Conservation Area protects 220 acres of prairie and wetlands. Exner Marsh is one of just 13 of the District's 35 open sites that is fortunate to have a volunteer site steward. For the past seven years Len Bannon has dedicated countless volunteer hours of service managing, maintaining and restoring one of our treasured places of McHenry County.

Len Bannon is no stranger to serving the community. He served as a school principal for many years in and around Chicago. During his tenure as principal in Fort Atkinson, WI he volunteered to help the township transform an old farmstead into a 33-acre park with two ponds. Len eagerly assisted in his spare time removing invasive species, transforming the former agricultural land into restored prairie and helped with the restoration and expansion of an old grove of oak woodlands.

After retiring, Len and his wife returned to Northern Illinois. He started volunteering with the St Vincent DePaul Society stocking their food pantry, staffing food trucks, and visiting house bound seniors, bringing them food. He also volunteered locally with the Land Conservancy. Soon after he discovered Exner Marsh not far from where he lives, and became interested in learning more about this site. He was curious about how he might be able to volunteer to take care of this special place.



The Volunteer Stewardship Program, which includes land stewards and citizen scientist monitors, was created to assist in the ecological restoration of McHenry County Conservation District's natural areas. The intent is to build and foster long-term relationships that serve and benefit public lands, native plants and wildlife of McHenry County. Site Stewards help to implement the management goals of the District by working closely with staff Ecologists. New Stewards participate in a training and certification program, which provides volunteers with an understanding of ecological restoration and safety practices. After completion of their training program, including a minimum of 24 hours of fieldwork, these volunteer will have a working knowledge of plant identification and restoration techniques of land management. Stewards also have the option of obtaining certifications for herbicide application, chainsaw operation, prescribed burns and CPR/First Aid.

Interested in volunteering? Contact Volunteer Coordinator Bob Menard at (815) 338-6223 x1201 or Volunteers@MCCDistrict.org.

Upcoming Orientation/Training Sessions

Phenology Plant Monitor Orientation

Saturday, February 15, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.
 Lost Valley Visitor Center, Savanna Room,
 Glacial Park, Ringwood
 Fee: Free Code: [6496](#)



If you like to watch our natural areas come alive in the spring and summer, consider joining our phenology program. Volunteers visit the site of their choice every other week to record which plants are blooming from May through September. This data will be used for an on-going research study with Research Field Station Ecologist Tom Simpson.

A moderate knowledge of plant ID is necessary, but even more important is an enthusiasm for getting out in the field on a regular basis and willingness to learn. Multiple sites available throughout the county. Please contact Tom Simpson at tsimpson@MCCDistrict.org or (815) 482-3256 if you have any questions.

Chicago Wilderness Prescribed Burn Crew Training

Saturday, March 14, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
 Lost Valley Visitor Center, Savanna Room,
 Glacial Park, Ringwood
 Fee: \$35* Code: [6497](#)

*Free for Registered District Volunteers
 (Contact jbero@MCCDistrict.org for discount code.)

Each fall and spring, volunteers join prescribed burn crews led by District staff. Though prescribed burning only happens a few days per season, it remains one of the most effective tools for restoration, and volunteer involvement allows us to cover larger areas. Volunteers are required to complete the Chicago Wilderness Burn Crew Member Training Course, which we will provide for free for McHenry County Conservation District registered volunteers.

Bring a sack lunch and water. Wear clothing made of natural fibers (ex. cotton, jeans) and comfortable boots. If weather allows, we will do a field exercise. Protective equipment will be provided. Contact Jackie Bero at jbero@MCCDistrict.org or (815) 219-1549 if you have any questions.



College Burn Crew

March 23–28
 Lost Valley Visitor Center, Glacial Park, Ringwood
 Fee: \$100* Code:

*\$75 for Registered District Volunteers
 (Contact jbero@MCCDistrict.org for discount code.)

College students and emerging professionals are invited for a week-long immersive prescribed burn experience coinciding with the *Week of Restoration*. Camping and firewood will be available at Glacial Park. Breakfasts and lunches will be provided for the week, plus a catered dinner on Friday. Participants will get a free t-shirt. *Limited to 30 participants.* Contact Jackie Bero at jbero@MCCDistrict.org for details.

Week of Restoration – Drop-in Series: March 23–28

The Week of Restoration is free series of drop-in programs at Glacial Park that include presentations and hikes led by Research Field Station Ecologist Tom Simpson and a few guest speakers. There will also be restoration workdays at various locations throughout the county each day of the week. **Members of the general public are welcome to attend.**

Contact Jackie Bero at jbero@MCCDistrict.org or (815) 219-1549 for more information.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
23	24	25	26	27	28
8–9:30 a.m. Burn Equipment & Strategies	8–9:30 a.m. Hike: Fire on the Landscape	8–9:30 a.m. Fire Weather Forecast in Planning	8–9:30 a.m. Hike: Prescribed Fire in Restoration		9:30 a.m.–12 p.m. Restoration Workday
12–3:00 p.m. Restoration Workday	12–3:00 p.m. Restoration Workday	12–3:00 p.m. Restoration Workday	12–3:00 p.m. Restoration Workday	12–3:00 p.m. Restoration Workday	
7–8:30 p.m. Cultural Attitudes and Modern History of Prescribed Fire		7–8:30 p.m. Ecological Restoration as a Spiritual Journey		7–8:30 p.m. Bonfire and Storytelling: Controversies in Prescribed Fire	

Volunteer Opportunities



HABITAT RESTORATION DAYS —

**Scouts, Students, Families
and Individuals are invited!**

Drop in and make a difference! This is a great outdoor service opportunity for scouts and high school students, as well as individuals and families with children over age six. Dress for weather and off-trail activities; including sturdy footwear (sandals not allowed). Bring drinking water and insect repellent. Tools and equipment are provided. Contact the Site Steward from the list below for site-specific instructions.

	LOCATION — MAP ON INSIDE BACK COVER	MONTHLY SCHEDULE	SITE STEWARD — CALL BEFORE YOU GO!
SATURDAYS	Alden Sedge Meadow South, Alden/Harvard	Third Saturdays, 1–3:30 p.m.	Judy and Jack Speer (815) 648-1372; smallwatersNFP@yahoo.com
	Boger Bog, Bull Valley	Fourth Saturday, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.	Ders Anderson (815) 455-1537; danderson@openlands.org
	Dufield (McConnell Rd. Entrance), Woodstock	Second Saturday, 9 a.m.–12 p.m. (Except January & February)	Jeff Schumacher (815) 337-9315; schumacher.jeff1@gmail.com
	Exner Marsh, Lake in the Hills	Third Saturday, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.	Len Bannon (847) 669-1381; lennsandy@gmail.com
VARIABLE	Cotton Creek Marsh, Island Lake	First & Third Sunday, 1–3 p.m.	Mike Bouska (815) 759-0731; MikeBouska@att.net
	Coral Woods, Marengo	Contact Site Steward for dates. Opportunities most weekends.	Bonnie Leahy (815) 923-2208; bh.leahy@att.net
	High Point, Harvard	Second Tuesdays, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.	Orrin Bangert & Randy Stowe, (815) 943-6333; glaggan@yahoo.com
	Lake in the Hills Fen, LITH	Contact Site Steward for dates.	John Scott (847) 658-6241; janetescott@yahoo.com
	Marengo Ridge, Marengo	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Kevin Kucharski (815) 715-3231; kucharski.kevin@comcast.net
	Pioneer Fen, Johnsburg	Second Tues. 2:30–4:30 p.m. & Second Sat. 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	Pat Sullivan-Schroyer (815) 347-9005; psullivanschroyer@gmail.com
	Pleasant Valley, Woodstock	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Greg Rajskey (815) 814-5055; quirkaceae@yahoo.com
	Stickney Run, McHenry	Contact Site Steward for dates.	Pete Jackson (224) 612-1803; beepjackson@comcast.net
	The Hollows, Cary	Contact Site Steward for dates. (Spring, Summer and Fall only)	Margie Szymanskyj; szymanskyj@earthlink.net



Hey Volunteers! Stay Connected...

Join the Conversation! We hope to get more of our volunteers connected and communicating with not only us, but with each other!

Our **Natural Resources Volunteers** can join our Group on the McHenry County Conservation District Facebook page. This is a great place to receive updates, events, announcements, training opportunities, and to share your amazing experiences with our volunteer community!

Request to join the group—and you're in!
<https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverMCCD/>



Take part in this year's
Festival of the Sugar Maples!
Volunteer Training Workshop
Saturday, Feb. 29, 9 a.m.–Noon.
Coral Woods, Marengo



Volunteer Positions Needed: March 7 & 8 and March 14 & 15 • 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Tour leaders, sugar house assistants or tree tapping demonstrators. No experience necessary. New tour leaders and first-time volunteers start off with a pancake breakfast before learning about the history and techniques of maple sugaring and tree-tapping.
Contact the Volunteer Coordinator — (815) 338-6223, 1201 or Volunteers@MCCDistrict.org to learn about the different positions and shifts available, sign up to volunteer, and register for the training workshop. Note: a background check is required for all new volunteers over age 18.

Eagle Scout Candidates— looking for a project?
Contact the Volunteer Coordinator after April 15 for the 2020 project list.