



## Donor Support Makes the Protection of 15-Acres of Oak Woodland Possible

This past summer, donor support made it possible for McHenry County Conservation Foundation to purchase a 15-acre oak woodland inholding at Marengo Ridge Conservation Area. This key acquisition will allow the Conservation District to more efficiently manage the Conservation area in its entirety, while promoting oak woodland regeneration and supporting the plants and animals that thrive in this ecosystem.

McHenry County Conservation District Plant Ecologist, Laurie Ryan conducted a plant survey on the parcel and recorded these findings:

*“The topography is beautiful, rolling oak woodland with some old white oaks. We also found red, bur, and hill’s oak species. It was interesting to find a stand of catalpa trees out there as well in our natural woodlands; they were probably introduced from a landowner in the past, but show up as bright green in an air photo. The woodland definitely needs some land management work and I’m sure it will respond well to clearing and a follow-up prescribed burn.”*

*“Botanically and perhaps ecologically speaking, the most exciting spot is a small woodland vernal pool. These are a type of small, temporary forest wetlands that provide critical breeding habitat for a number of amphibians and invertebrates. In addition, they serve as an important link in the forest food web. Leaves fall into pools from surrounding trees and nourish invertebrates and tadpoles. Many of the amphibians that breed in woodland pools spend 90% of their lives in the surrounding*



Greener vegetation reveals the vernal pool in fall.

*forest, where they consume invertebrates like earthworms, slugs, and spiders, and themselves become consumed by larger forest animals such as raccoons and owls.*

*Through this complex food web, the energy that was originally stored in fallen leaves at the bottom of the pool cycles through many animals and ultimately returns to the forest system — maintaining important connections between aquatic and terrestrial landscape elements. It was no longer holding water when I visited this summer, but around the edges of this pool I found one of my favorite sedges, knobbed hop sedge (*Carex lupuliformis*), several bright red cardinal flowers (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and an interesting relative, Indian tobacco (*Lobelia inflata*).”*

*“As you move from the white oak woodland in the east downslope to the west you end up in an open wet meadow. At the top of the slope there is an old fireplace. I’m sure many years ago it was a great place to have a gathering and view the low meadow below.”*

**Thanks to donor support,** this parcel is now permanently protected for its conservation value and included in the long-term management plan of Marengo Ridge.



Top to bottom: Ditch Stonecrop (*Penthorum sedoides*); Knobbed hop sedge (*Carex lupuliformis*); Great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*)

## » Conservation Foundation Awarded a \$5,300 Mission Grant

McHenry County Conservation Foundation was honored to be the recipient of a \$5,300 Mission Grant awarded by The Community Foundation of McHenry County. Resilience was the theme of the 2020 Mission Grant award.

*"It implies a sense of strength, adaptability, and perseverance. We believe the incredible charitable organizations in our community have the resilience to help move McHenry County through these tough times and emerge even stronger in the future," stated Deborah Thielen, Executive Director of the Community Foundation.*

The generous support provided by the Community Foundation will strengthen the Conservation District's ability to better connect residents and visitors to the water, wildlife, and way of life made possible by the open spaces and natural areas protected by the District.

This year has been a complex year for all of us, and navigating the ever-changing world has often been overwhelming. Nature has remained a serene source of calm amidst the chaos for many of us, and the Conservation District has continued to work hard to keep sites open for the benefit of all.

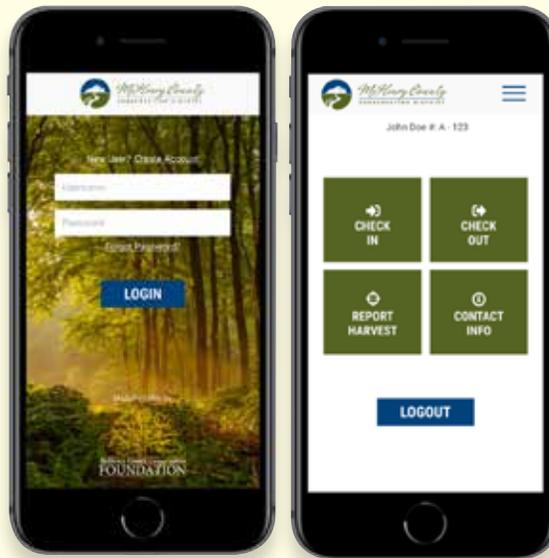


## Funding of Smartphone App Improves Efficiencies and Safety for Hunting Program

Nowadays, almost everyone has a smartphone. We use them to work, shop, socialize, navigate and the list goes on. In fact, McHenry County Conservation Foundation recently supported the District's purchase of a progressive mobile web application.

This smartphone app is designed to assist in the monitoring and management of the Conservation District's public hunting program. During this year's hunting season, participants will virtually check-in and check-out of their hunting locations, eliminating the need for staff in-person monitoring and the paper system. The app also gives Conservation District police officers real-time location data on all participants in the program using the app. In addition, participants record their harvest through the app, allowing for data-based compliance checks instead of randomized checks.

The app provides hunters with an emergency button which, in the event of a crisis, immediately alerts police with GPS coordinates and greatly improves emergency personnel response time. Officers will also more readily be able to identify hunters who have checked in, but failed to check out, an important feature to ensure hunters return from their hunt safely. Program participants are also able to use the app to log their successful harvests, alert District Ecologists of suspected diseased animals, and share their confirmation numbers after being reported to the State of Illinois.



Successful conservation hinges on human connection to nature and hunting is one of many pathways toward fostering this connection. For those who choose to participate, hunting creates an understanding and appreciation of wildlife and the ecosystems in which it lives. Hunting affords participants the opportunity to explore wild places. And, in a landscape relatively absent of natural predators, hunting is a vital wildlife management tool. It keeps nature at a healthy balance by helping maintain wildlife populations at levels compatible with human activity and land use.

In 2019, the District issued hunting permits for the Conservation District's waterfowl, deer, and the youth-only turkey hunting programs. Participants came from McHenry, Boone, Lake, DuPage, Kane, Cook and Winnebago Counties in Illinois, as well as Michigan, and Wisconsin. These individuals spent more than 16,800 hours on District sites and many of them also volunteered their

time to help steward the sites they hunt through brush cutting and invasive species management activities.

While initially launched to help further streamline the hunting program, there is potential to build this app out further to include tracking volunteer hours or providing emergency alerts to District event participants. From GIS implementation to this innovative cellphone app, the Foundation strives to support the evolution and efficiencies of the District's programs and staff.

Thanks to donor support, the McHenry County Conservation Foundation has transferred more than \$3.2 million to conservation entities in McHenry County. These contributions help strengthen the work of the Conservation District and its many partners, while also enhancing the health and vibrancy of our community and its residents.

**Become a Conservation Champion —**

Learn more, visit [mchenryconservation.org](http://mchenryconservation.org) or call (815) 678-4532, ext. 8204.