

MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
RESOLUTION #20-19

ACCEPTING THE 2020 CONSERVATION CONGRESS
CONGRESSIONAL CONVERSATION SESSION SUMMARIES

WHEREAS, the McHenry County Conservation District (hereinafter referred to as the "District"), is a conservation district organized and existing under the laws of the State of Illinois (70 ILCS 410); and

WHEREAS, the McHenry County Conservation District (hereinafter referred to as the "District"), was created in 1971 by voter approved referendum as a conservation district organized and existing under the laws of the State of Illinois (70 ILCS 410); and

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees of the District did call and convene a Conservation Congress on February 8, 2020 as approved on June 20th, 2019 through Resolution #19-31; and

WHEREAS, the Delegates at said Conservation Congress did provide comment and feedback which was collected and summarized by District staff; and

WHEREAS, the summary has now been completed and reviewed by the staff and Trustees of the District.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Trustees of the District that it is necessary, desirable, and in the best interest of the District and the residents of McHenry County to accept the 2020 Conservation Congress Congressional Conversation Session Summaries as presented and to maintain a copy available to the public; and the President and Secretary of the Board of Trustees are hereby authorized to execute this resolution and the Executive Director is authorized to execute other necessary documents to execute the intent of this resolution.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, this Resolution #20-19 has been executed this 24th day of March, 2020 by the President and attested by the Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the District.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

Abstain: 0

Vernon M Scacci

Vernon M Scacci (Mar 27, 2020)

**VERNON SCACCI, PRESIDENT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Carolyn Campbell

Carolyn Campbell (Mar 27, 2020)

**CAROLYN CAMPBELL, SECRETARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Conservation Congress 2020 – February 8, 2020

Conversation #1 – Reciprocity Returning the Gift

Delegate Congressional Sessions

Respectfully Summarized by Wendy Kummerer, Director of Marketing & Education

What does ethical reciprocity look like?

Ethical reciprocity between humans and the natural world also includes the biological systems that we do not see – all of the organic material below the soil. The prairielands of Illinois are unique due to the richness and complexity of prairie soil. A big part of reciprocity relates to what we do not see.

We know we have to restore nature through restoration efforts: burning, re-planting, and helping native oak trees reproduce and thrive. We need to restore our landscapes to allow plant and animal communities to reproduce themselves. We cannot restore naturally without controlling invasives.

Promote planting of natives to preserve our environment. Acknowledge and appreciate what we have. We are happier people when we exist in the natural world and are connected to it.

Looking at the soil as a living thing and how you conceptualize these ideas can have an impact on how people treat it. For example, soil technically isn't alive but is full of living things, but by saying the soil is alive, you can cultivate better respect for the soil and then create sustainable agricultural practices.

Getting people to think about the consequences of their actions. People throw trash out their car window because it's "out of sight, out of mind". We need to make people realize the problems with this and their role in these problems.

Provide people with experiences to create a sense of wonder and then they will feel a responsibility to reciprocate. Create an "aha" moment for someone that changed their mindset to be more grateful for/respectful of nature? Provide experiences to create a sense of wonder and ideally people will feel a responsibility to reciprocate.

Need to start early and instill these values in young people.

How can we return the gifts Nature has given us here in McHenry County?

Reciprocity also means ownership and responsibility. We need to practice respecting life in all forms, starting with our own backyards: Provide Backyard Habitat; Plant Butterfly Gardens; Plant Natives; Compost to divert food waste from landfills – residential AND commercial waste- encourage/promote them to do; Natural Fertilizer – contact a local horse owner; Recycle.

Advertise and educate about environmentally friendly options. Sometimes people just aren't aware that certain options exist. Be caretakers, respect the land, and see yourself as part of the system.

Volunteering is a way of giving back and learning and then teaching others what you have learned. It's also rewarding to see what you have accomplished.

Host a weekend workday – Tree Planting Party – Promote ways/ideas to go chemical free. Target young people. Involve students in restoration projects – partner with schools for habitat days.

Expand trail network so people don't have to use cars.

Need to charge something to keep things going because parks are a huge asset. Funding from all municipalities. Charge formed groups/ special users such as horses, snowmobile, etc. Program fee okay because it gives value. Make scholarships.

As planners, it's important to think beyond conservation activities and into transportation plans, water plans and involve municipalities and stakeholders. The way Infrastructure is planned and built, from big county level projects to homeowner projects like rain gardens can have a role.

Educate! Re-frame incentives for schools so the focus is less on testing and more on learning about reciprocity and experiencing nature; infuse their curriculum with mindset of reciprocity.

It is also important to educate people in key policy-making and public positions about our natural world and its value.

Given this diversity, how can your group give back to the greater conservation community?

Lead by example. Not kicking the can, be present in the moment.

The county has developed a water resource plan to retain water in the county.

MCCF provided funding for underprivileged kids to get transportation fee covered to day camp.

The townships are going to give ten free memberships to the McHenry County Defenders to students to encourage youth participation.

Small Waters and the Wildflower Preservation & Propagation Committee work with schools to plant native gardens.

Paddling group is working to open up 14 miles of the Kishwaukee to paddling, hoping more people can experience the river.

Openlands did a headwater study for the Chicago Wilderness region. Headwaters are small and easy to explore so would make the base for a great citizen project involving private individuals and schools

Agrarian program at MCC. The program's main goal is farm business sustainability but it focuses on organic food production and sustainable farming practices.

The USDA is promoting use of prairie strips – planting natives in between rows of crops. Every unit of government should give preference to planting natives.

Educate all providers in mental healthcare to give Rx outside. Create partnerships with the McHenry County Health Department/hospitals/VA hospitals.

Partnership with PACE or other transportation means to get people out to sites. Add a bus stop to open space areas/natural areas

Need more locations to connect with trails; wayfinding signs to point people from businesses to natural areas and vice versa.

How do we increase public awareness and inspire individuals to take a more active role in advocating for District programs?

Conservation District faces financial challenges. We need to engage others in Conservation District's mission and gain their support, especially people in public policy, government, and other key positions (county board, local, and township positions).

Continue to share success stories with public officials and with the general public.

Education is key to all conservation efforts. Allow kids to have a bigger voice. Encourage participation of youth and educate. They have broad minds and a non-linear way of thinking. Weave conservation ethic into programs for youth. The younger generation has a strong environment awareness due to events in the news about natural disasters and effects of climate change; they know about carbon footprint. They “get it”. Are we giving them the tools to address environmental challenges?

Give the Rx Nature prescription to your kids and at schools.

Send Robin Wall Kimmerer’s video out to people through the website, Facebook, newsletters, etc. to make people aware of this idea and then provide actions that groups and individuals can take to make a difference where they live.

Partnerships are necessary. Go to the people: Libraries, Sage YMCA, health clubs, park districts, the church community, NW Astronomers. Creative programming like “Bagpipes and Bonfires”, encourage walking groups, etc. Especially helpful if you have a partner embedded in another organization that can advocate for you. Partner with nurseries: Host a spring plant sale where a percent of sales for certain native species would be donated to the District; Homeowner’s associations can give awards for people who implement native plantings in their personal homes.

Additional Concepts/Ideas:

- Create events that attract a younger audience with a low-ticket price.
- Put QR codes on plants and trees. Make things interactive.
- Create silly, crazy ideas (think ice bucket challenge) to get people, especially kids, involved in supporting the District.
- Use incentives, money prize to lure people that wouldn’t normally get involved with the District.
- Awareness: mini educational videos – share/promote to partners; share social media – even “check-ins” help promote sites; more “behind the scenic views” videos. Once you reach them, hook them, and bring them back.
- More interpretive trails which are grant funded.
- Create and promote a wish list – fish stocking, wildlife resource center needs etc.
- Get Nature RX videos in physician waiting rooms.
- Promote electronic version of Landscapes.
- Lead by Example – step up and start initiative in own business/school/village

Conservation Congress 2020 – February 8, 2020

Conversation #2 – The Pursuit of Healthiness

Delegate Congressional Sessions

Respectfully Summarized by Wendy Kummerer, Director of Marketing & Education

What can we do to make McHenry County a regional hot spot?

Conservation District is doing a great job. They are making connections from one conservation area to another.

Easy access to conservation sites is critical; make sites easily accessible to kids, especially bicycle paths. We need to have ways for kids to use the sites on their own.

We need to continue efforts to make people aware of the open spaces and Conservation District sites available to them. We need to tie use of sites to cell phones and to other technology. This will engage more people.

We need both active and passive opportunities to be out in nature. Have a variety of activities and a broad spectrum of ways to engage with nature.

Have Conservation District participate in employer sponsored health fairs and wellness events. Leave Conservation District brochures out in the public spaces (cafeterias, break rooms, HR departments).

Additional Concepts/Ideas:

- PACE should have stops at Conservation District sites so that people can get out to the sites and be picked up.
- Encourage hunting and fishing.
- Market forest bathing
- Encourage geo-caching.
- Develop clubs and facebook groups based around outdoor activities
- Give awards for outdoor participation.
- Use Mapmyhike.

How can we use healthier communities as a way to gather support for our conservation mission?

Reach out to the healthcare community to intertwine the Conservation District and healthcare. This can pull in people who might not know about the District and conservation.

Let people who become highly involved in supporting the Conservation District have off-trail privileges. This can provide opportunities for “wow” moments that then foster a love for conservation and a sense of ownership of Conservation District sites.

Advertise the health benefits of Conservation District sites with signage and educational materials. For example, on the bike trail you can have a sign that says, “You’ve just ridden 10 miles! You’re going to feel a lot better!”, or show how many calories you can burn if you hike this trail (like the way restaurant menus show calorie counts). Can show study findings about the benefits of being outside (less stress, less inflammation, better cognitive ability, lower blood pressure, etc.)

Social media messaging about the health benefits of conservation.

How can our District grow partnerships with those in the health industry?

Host a meeting of health community members to discuss partnerships.

DCFS and CASA are highly connected to the at-risk child community and might be open for partnerships/programs. Northwestern medicine recently bought Centegra – do they have existing programs of this nature and if not, can we develop any?

Connect with the American Pediatric Association and the County Health Department, Insurance Companies.

Create education materials to be left in waiting rooms for doctor's offices and the health department. Instead of looking at a 3-year old copy of Sports Illustrated they can look at Landscapes! Create a magazine targeted to the health benefits of getting outside. A brochure for Conservation District on how to use areas to benefit physical and mental health. Provide nature related mental health tips in newsletters and on website. "Did you know that McHenry County Conservation District is a healthcare provider? ..."

The development and use of Apps to aid use of recreational opportunities including "know before you go" type information. See Starved Rock App as an example on using that park. That App costs \$2. Connect with retirement communities to promote District sites as opportunities for healthy living.

Encourage and involve local companies in getting people into employee health care fairs; employees do not need developed open space and natural areas in order to benefit from being in and/or near them. Provide some trainings and outreach to businesses. Healthcare providers to get reduced insurance premiums by providing programs for employees.

Several watershed groups in McHenry County are working to arrange to work together to promote activities within the watersheds; collaboratively communicating benefits to the public. Watershed groups have historically focused on erosion control etc. but could expand knowledge for the use of waterway to improve health and promote the cost/benefit of recreation; fishing, kayaking, walking, etc.

Additional Concepts/Ideas:

- Do health professionals need continuing education and could we provide those opportunities?
- Connect with the American Pediatric Association and the County Health Department.
- Create education materials to be left in waiting rooms for doctor's offices and the health department.
- Public Awareness – PSA beyond Facebook – billboards – WTTW – short videos.
- Need tax payers to understand values. Tree calculator – Morton Arb understand economic value of a tree in your own backyard.
- Appoint a Health Care provider as a board member on the Conservation District.
- Corporate Partners – Corporate Retreat to Conservation District.
- Faith based delegates and coordination.
- Promote the idea: You don't want to be last generation to do _____ in nature.

What makes for a good life here in McHenry County?

Balance.

Good health. There's not enough money in the world to replace good health.

Family is important. Use outdoor time as a way to encourage family togetherness. Picnics, reunions, games, camping, etc.

Grandparents go to see the kids play in organized sports but don't then invite those kids to take a hike with them. Shift perspectives to remind people that spending time together outdoors is just as important as watching the kid at a soccer game.

NextGen Delegates - See Complete NextGen Delegate Notes Below

"We're excited and ready."

Social media is used constantly, but face-to-face interactions still trump social media in terms of impact. Have to start bringing in nature at younger levels – elementary, junior high.

Richard Louv Presentation

When *Last Child in the Woods* was published in 2000 – there were 60 research studies on the effects of health and getting people outdoors. Today there are over 1,000 studies completed or ongoing. Children & Nature.org.

Cities and villages that saw tremendous population growth over the 30 years are realizing the importance of nature and making great efforts to reincorporate green space in urban setting and encouraging to include from the start of planning phases. We need to set and meet goals for # pollinator gardens, Rx Nature, whatever your goal is.

Everything comes back to stories about your "special place" and the connections we make with nature. Start with this instead, especially if working in politics. Referred to as "Habitat of the Heart" – you can't protect or love something you don't know or haven't established an emotion toward – not just facts – if you want to create change, stir that deep emotion in people. Avoid being trapped in dystopian trance, fixated on negative images.

Being able to recognize that we are not alone changes us. Human isolation/loneliness is at an all-time high – resulting in early deaths from suicide or disease. Need to combat this and promote healing in the outdoors. "We are surrounded by a great whisper if you just listen." Even in a city there are birds, you'll realize you're not alone if you just pay attention. Recommended books by Thomas Berry – a Catholic monk, wrote about spirituality in nature.

Conservation Congress 2020 – February 8, 2020

Conversation #1 – Reciprocity Returning the Gift

Next Gen Delegate Congressional Sessions

Respectfully Submitted by Bill Donato and Ed Collins, Director of Land Preservation & Natural Resources

What does ethical reciprocity between humans and the natural world look like?

Youth delegates felt there was an imbalance between the gifts we receive from nature and those we return and a need for people to do more.

Physical gifts back like protecting land, doing restoration work, not littering are important but so also is education. The giving of knowledge to people in order to make them aware of nature and their responsibility for it as well as how to be more involved in nature activities.

Some of the personal examples youth delegates used as examples of giving back in their personal lives included helping with prescribed burns, clearing brush at Pioneer Fen.

How can we return the gifts we have been given by the earth here in McHenry County and in the larger region we are part of?

This question and question one had some overlap and the conversation continued in the general direction that began in question one.

- Doing real science to get data in order to understand what is really happening with loss of species was identified as a way of giving back to nature.
- There was some discussion on making sure the way you were living was sustainable and allowed resources to be used indefinitely instead of being destroyed
- Youth delegates felt that meetings like the Conservation Congress were important because it allowed them to be part of a larger idea and they felt that was true for many other delegates as well.
- The concept of educating people when they are very young was brought up again as an effective way to move conservation forward.
- The idea of having direct experiences in nature was brought up with personal examples of how it changed the lives of the delegates offered. The ability for such experiences to change the direction of a person's life was discussed because being in nature is "real life" and not a digital world.
- The idea of giving back being a social possibility was discussed and examples from stewardship work days used.
- One participant brought up the importance of a mentor and how he had learned to hunt this year from a mentor in the Conservation District's hunting program. He talked about how the experience of sitting quietly in a tree stand had given him a new appreciation for what is going on around him. It made him feel he could someday return the mentorship to someone else just starting out.
- The idea of clubs as mechanisms for involving people in returning gifts to nature was brought up with examples from the schools.
- The idea of the importance of guided hikes was brought up so people could learn about nature
- The massive problems facing the world were discussed and the consensus from the youth delegates is that they are ready to tackle those problems.

Given this diversity how can your group give back to the greater conservation community?

This question entered on students' ability to give back as a group.

- Clubs and in school organizations were brought up again as an easy way to involve students. Examples included the Johnsburg outdoor club and the fishing club at Prairie Ridge.
- The need for volunteer hours for National Honor Society might be a good way to channel involvement
- Real world activities are very appealing to students.
- All the students recalled how doing actual science in the field like water testing and invertebrate sampling made a big impact on their outlook.
- Student delegates felt there was a place for both in curriculum and extra curriculum activities to involve people more.

How do we increase public awareness of their role in an Honorable Harvest lifestyle while inspiring individuals to take a more active supportive role in advocating for District programs lands and the funding necessary to sustain them?

Students had a number of concrete suggestions for the Conservation District to consider. These included:

- Go to elementary and middle schools into the classrooms and do it repeatedly to interest students at an early age.
- Go to High School career days or just set up a lunch table.
- Reach out to environmental clubs at the schools and let them do the word of mouth advertising for what a good time activities can be socially.
- Don't rely on the digital because it is too impersonal. Digital has to really grab someone's attention otherwise it goes into the SPAM folder. You have to present something that really makes people stop and actually read what has been sent along digitally.
- Consider a conservation minute or other method that brings info to students on a regular basis each week. Examples included Tic-toc and the Great Hack.
- Things need to be fun and entertaining to keep people's attention

Conservation Congress 2020 – February 8, 2020

Conversation #2 – The Pursuit of Healthiness

Next Gen Delegate Congressional Sessions

Respectfully Submitted by Bill Donato and Ed Collins, Director of Land Preservation & Natural Resources

What can we do to make McHenry County a regional hot spot where people live healthy and enriching lives?

- Weave green space into existing school campuses
- Redefine class work breaks and employment work breaks to include an outdoor option
- Create open areas for lounging in schools if they are not already either or use existing ones. The goal is to “destructure” the feel of the school.
- Areas locally the student delegates thought were hotspots were Glacial Park, Prairie View and the Hollows.
- Schools need to encourage more freedom in decision making and outdoor class areas would help do that
- Make Conservation District sites available after hours for students to gather and hang out in. Allow these to be certain areas on certain days and send out after hours open reminders digitally.

How can we use this as a way to gather support for our agency’s conservation mission?

- Host events at “hotspots” to get people to become familiar with the sites
- Once they are used to coming there use the hotspot to further educating them

How can the District grow partnerships with those in the health industry?

- Work with insurance companies to give young people a discount if they spend the 120 minutes per week outdoors. This could be done using their phones.
- Have the district try and get administrators to understand that the outdoors is an essential part of a healthy life for students. If the administrators won’t listen go to the county board of education. Possibly set up an experiment with test scores to show that outdoor time is helpful to learning.
- Develop and internship program with local high schools
- Do a nature RX program for students which would be a new audience for that program.
- Talk to school nurses and health people about the value of getting outdoors for students
- Use existing peer to peer mentoring programs by offering meeting space of these programs at District sites.
- Make nature part of the regular curriculum

What makes a good life?

- Being active in a community or school
- Using places to be active and socialize and give back to nature at the same time

General Observations and Suggestions

- Would it be possible for particular demographic groups such as youth or the Hispanic community to report to the Board every six months or every year on issue of conservation/education/recreation that are important to them?

10.11a 20-19 Accepting 2020 Conservation Congress Summary (RES)

Final Audit Report

2020-03-27

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