

WILD ROOTS

NATURE CENTER

Calendar & Newsletter
July - December 2026
Volume 47 No. 2



the 6th annual
GOLDEN HOUR
IN THE GROVE

September 26th
5:00pm - 7:00pm

Embrace the beauty of the golden hour at our annual fundraising soiree. Enjoy The Grove, our unique nature playscape, on this serene fall evening just for adults. Savor heavy hors d'oeuvres by The Norwegian, gourmet s'mores by the fire, cocktails and mocktails from Prairie Street Brewing Co., and live music! PLUS! Participate in the Craft Beer, Wine, & Liquor Pull, and bid on exclusive auction baskets!

Tickets On Sale July 6th at
WildRootsNatureCenter.org/GoldenHour

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Interested in Sponsoring? Contact Linda at 815-335-2915 or Linda@WildRootsNatureCenter.org

A Note from the President

Every day, we see the impact of the meaningful work we do. The green landscape of our “Forest City,” paired with the biodiversity of the Kishwaukee River, is no accident. It reflects the collective effort each of you makes.

At Severson Dells, now Wild Roots Nature Center, there’s always a sense of excitement when a bus pulls in. It’s a real opportunity to make a difference. For each student, it can be the moment that sparks a lifelong connection to nature. Like many of you, my own passion started early—well before I could tell a hickory from an oak—but it’s those early experiences that shaped where I am today.

Nature education is an investment. Sometimes you see the impact right away, but more often it’s a seed that’s planted—one that grows over time into something much bigger: a thriving ecosystem, a lasting commitment, a ripple effect that reaches far beyond that initial moment.

Fifty years ago, Fannie Severson planted that seed when she donated her deer lodge, with the hope that it would become exactly what it is today: a place that grows, supports, and inspires thousands.

None of the progress over the last 50 years would have been possible without all of you. This is a community that shows up with curiosity, with commitment, and with a willingness to act. You’ve helped drive stewardship of this land, expanded our reach to places like Prairie’s Edge, and supported efforts to protect our local environment through advocacy and engagement.

That collective effort has strengthened our connection not just to the land, but to each other. And that matters.

I’m proud of the work you’ve helped inspire, and even more proud of the impact it continues to have. Without places like this, our “Forest City” would likely have fewer trees, and the Kishwaukee River fewer species calling it home.

Thank you for investing in nature education and for believing that our future can, and should, be greener and stronger.



Michelle Borgialli, Board President (right) and Ann Wasser, Executive Director (left).

Michelle Borgialli
Michelle.board@WildRootsNatureCenter.org



Wild Roots Nature Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit nature education organization in Rockford, Illinois. Operating two locations: the historical Severson Dells and Prairie’s Edge, currently in the process of being restored, Wild Roots’ mission is to inspire conservation of nature through education and stewardship, cultivating connections between people and place.

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Our Rebrand

You may have noticed new colors, a new font, and a new logo in this newsletter. In case you missed it, we're rebranding!

Beginning July 1st, 2026, the name Wild Roots Nature Center will define our mission of inspiring stewardship and conservation of our natural world and connecting people to place. This new name will be used to identify our work on both sides of Winnebago County and serves as a symbol of our growth and success

Why Wild Roots?

The name Severson Dells Nature Center has served us well through the years, but with the addition of a second location, Wild Roots Nature Center better reflects our growing organization.

With two locations, we looked for a name that would reflect our commitment to the community and to nature education. Wild exemplifies our belief that children and adults benefit most from active, hands-on learning opportunities in nature. Roots reflects the stability and longevity of our organization, even as we grow. Approved by our board of directors and the Severson family, we believe Wild Roots will serve as a beacon

for nature education and conservation for years to come.

What about Severson Dells? What about the former Elliot Golf Course?

While we will never abandon the work we do at Severson Dells Forest Preserve (summer camps, field trips, hikes, lectures, public programs), we are now expanding our work to include an urban green space at Prairie's Edge, the former Elliot Golf Course. This site will be known as Wild Roots Nature Center at Prairie's Edge.

Severson Dells Forest Preserve is land owned and managed by the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County. As such, the name of this property will remain unchanged. Separate from the Forest Preserves, our organization will be known as Wild Roots Nature Center at Severson Dells when we're operating at Severson Dells Forest Preserve.

You can learn more about our rebrand, including the design of our new logo and our updated color palette, as well as read our frequently asked questions at WildRootsNatureCenter.org/WildRoots





Volunteer with us!

The best gift you can give is YOU.

Restoration / Conservation Crew

Volunteers join us for restoration projects on the 2nd Saturday of each month (excluding December). Most projects include removing invasive species. No background knowledge is required. Tools are provided. Contact Liz at Liz@WildRootsNatureCenter.org for more information. Upcoming Restoration Work Days take place from 9am-12pm on the following dates:

July 18	October 10
August 8	November 14
September 12	

Nature Center Host

Volunteers staff the front desk in 4-hour shifts. Duties include answering the telephone, greeting visitors, conducting gift shop sales, and assisting members in checking out library materials. Apply online at WildRootsNatureCenter.org/volunteer

School Programs

Volunteers help lead field trips at Wild Roots. We currently have a great need for guides on our Discover Nature Hikes, which focus on enthusiasm for nature! We provide all training necessary. School programs take place during the week from approximately 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For more information, please contact Andrea at Andrea@WildRootsNatureCenter.org

Public Programs

Volunteers host stations for Science Saturdays and assist with other community events. If you enjoy crafts, demonstrations, sharing nature knowledge, and helping guests feel welcome, you would be a great fit! Shifts and dates vary, but you get to pick your hours. Contact Liz at Liz@WildRootsNatureCenter.org for more information.

Special Events

If you're interested in volunteering at any of our special events like Golden Hour in the Grove, Luminaria, tabling events, or maybe you have a special interest you're interested in sharing, let us know! Special events have fixed dates and times for volunteering, but other interests in volunteering can have self-directed hour contributions. You can contact Andrea at Andrea@WildRootsNatureCenter.org for more information.



Calendar of Events

July - December 2026

All programming, unless otherwise noted, will require registration.

How do I register?

ONLINE

WildRootsNatureCenter.org/events

Please note: You're able to create an account with our online registration system to make registration and donating easier and less time consuming. If you're unsure if you have an account or not, please call us at 815 - 335 - 2915.

PHONE

815 - 335 - 2915

You may call us to register during our open hours. Please be ready with your program selections and form of payment at the time of your call.

IN PERSON

8786 Montague Road, Rkfd

Visit us at our Wild Roots Nature Center at Severson Dells location to register for programs. Please be ready with your program selections and form of payment. We are open Mon. - Sat. from 8am - 4:30pm.

Can I volunteer for these programs?

Some of our programs offer volunteer opportunities, but these must be arranged in advance of the program. For more information on volunteering, please visit page 5 of this newsletter. You can also visit us at WildRootsNatureCenter.org/volunteer to learn more. If you're interested in bringing a group or have a special volunteering request, contact Andrea Wallace Noble, Education Programs Manager, at andrea@WildRootsNatureCenter.org or 815 - 335 - 2915.

I notice a member rate and a non-member rate. How do I receive the member rate?

There are many benefits to becoming a member of Wild Roots Nature Center, including reduced rates for most programs and exclusive programs just for members. Individual memberships are just \$45/year and family memberships are only \$75/year. For more information, including a list of member benefits, visit page 26 of this newsletter or visit us at WildRootsNatureCenter.org/become-a-member, or contact Linda Sandquist, Director of Development at Linda@WildRootsNatureCenter.org or 815 - 335 - 2915.

Summer Programming

July - August



Explore: Hikes, Walks, and Paddles

Canoe Convoys

Canoe Convoys are back and better than ever! These Canoe Convoys are in partnership with Boone County Conservation District. All canoeing gear, including paddles and personal flotation devices (life jackets) are provided. Guests are asked to bring their own snack, water, sun protection, bug protection, and water-ready clothes and shoes. This program is best for people who meet the following requirements: (1) Participants must be a minimum age of 12 years old (2) Due to the limits of our boats, we require a minimum weight of 70 lbs and a maximum weight 250 lbs (3) Participants must be able to crouch, kneel, balance, sit up, and sit down independently (4) Participants must have a basic comfort in and around water wearing a life jacket (personal flotation device).

Classic Paddle

Monday, July 6 5:30 PM-8:30 PM

Monday, August 3rd 5:30 PM-8:30 PM

Perfect for first-time and lifelong paddlers, this program includes basic canoeing instruction and a guided tour down the river. Attendees must be able to paddle consistently for 1-2 hours.

Cost: \$20

Intermediate Paddle

Saturday, July 11 8:30 AM-11:30 AM

Perfect for intermediate paddlers looking for a little bit of challenge. Paddlers should be familiar with forward, back, sweep, j-stroke, rudder, draw, and pry strokes to navigate a canoe through narrow sections and winding turns.

Attendees must be able to paddle consistently for 1-2 hours.

Cost: \$20

Day Trip

Saturday, August 22 9:00 AM-3:00 PM

This program requires previous canoe experience, as we will be paddling for 4-5 hours. Paddlers should be familiar with forward and back paddle, rudder, j-stroke, sweep, draw, & pry strokes. Ability to navigate canoe through narrow & winding sections of a river. This is not a good fit for inexperienced paddlers. Attendees must be able to paddle consistently for 4-5 hours with breaks.

Cost: \$35

American Trails

Mon, June 29 - Mon, July 6

Take a self-guided stroll around the paved loop at Severson Dells Forest Preserve and learn about notable nature achievements and the people that made them as the USA celebrates 250 years!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

All Ages

Prairie Succession Hike

Tuesday, July 14 6:00 PM-7:30 PM

Take a hike at Funderburg Conservation Area in Boone County to learn about what plants can be expected to come up in a first, second and third year prairie restored from a conventional agricultural field. This is an opportunity to see what we can expect will occur in the restoration at Prairie's Edge. Meet at the parking lot on Marengo Road, just east of the Poplar Grove Road intersection.

Location: Funderburg Conservation Area

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

Ages 10+

Family Hike Series: Creek Walk

Thursday, July 16 1:30 PM-3:30 PM

Have you ever wondered what is beyond the path to the Dells? Join us for this adventure trek into the creek and beyond the riverbend. You will experience a hidden part of the creek most don't get to see as we walk in the water to view 30' tall rock walls, ancient fossils, and more! This trek takes place in the water on uneven and sometimes hidden rocks. Reasonable mobility is required for this adventure.

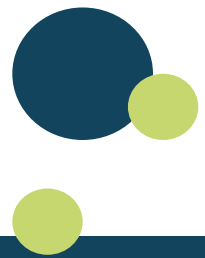
Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

Ages 7+

Summer Programming

July - August



Explore: Hikes, Walks, and Paddles, cont.

Tuesday Walking Group

Tuesday, July 21 10:00 AM-11:30 AM

Tuesday, August 18 10:00 AM-11:30 AM

Walk with friends for this casual walking club. We'll stroll at a gentle pace and pause to take in whatever beauty beholds us!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

Ages 18+

Full Moon

Thursday, August 27 7:30 PM-9:00 PM

Tonight is the Sturgeon Moon, named by Indigenous Groups for the increase of sturgeon caught during August! We will explore the forest as well as talk about a variety of wildlife that is beginning to make moves during this season of change.

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

Ages 8+

Family & Community Adventures

Readings from the Rookery

Friday, July 10 9:00 AM-10:30 AM

Friday, July 24 9:00 AM-10:30 AM

Engage your senses with storytime, a craft, and a nature activity designed for younger kiddos and their families! Each participant will leave with a free book!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

Ages 2-10 plus adult

Pastries and Perseids

Thursday, August 13 4:00 AM-5:30 AM

Wake up to the stars and a meteor shower! Join us for coffee, hot cocoa, and breakfast treats donated by Amazin' Glazin' as we watch for shooting stars in the pre-dawn hours. Bring a lawn chair and a blanket and keep your eyes on the skies!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$5 member / \$8 non-member

All Ages

Adventure Trails!

Saturday, August 15 10:00 AM-2:00 PM

Hit the trails at Severson Dells Forest Preserve for this fun, drop-in style family scavenger hunt! Check in with our ranger station to get your mission and explore our trails with a self-guided adventure packed with hands-on activities for all ages!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

All Ages



Community Science

Science of the Seasons

Saturday, July 18 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Saturday, August 8 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Participate in real community-driven science on these monthly walks! Learn about our seasonal wildlife and plant monitoring techniques and try them out for yourself. It's a perfect way to learn more about the volunteer research we coordinate and how you can get involved.

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

Ages 12+



SCIENCE SATURDAY



Join us the first Saturday of each month from 10am-2pm for this free, family friendly drop-in event! Engage in hands-on experiments, activities, crafts, and take home nature books & more!

Backyard Animals

July 11th

Learn how to attract birds to your birdfeeder, help plants grow, and how to identify the little bugs crawling on the leaves in your backyard. PLUS! Meet LIVE ANIMALS!



Celebration of Indigenous People

October 3rd

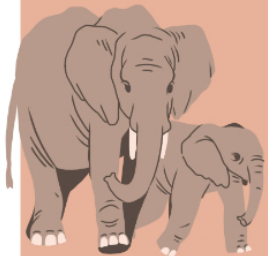
This Science Saturday invites local Indigenous groups to utilize Severson Dells to teach community members about stewardship of nature and Indigenous culture & traditions.



Friends in Nature

August 1st

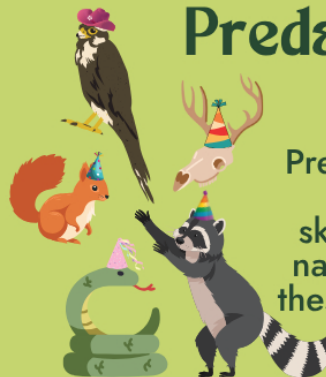
Nature, like everything else, is better with friends! Fish swim in schools, elephants travel in herds, and wolves howl to their friends! Bring your friends and see how your connection stacks up to nature!



Predator Prey Party

November 7th

Prepare to unleash your inner scientist as we explore the skulls and furs left behind by nature's creatures! Learn how these features make an animal a predator or prey!



Art in Nature

September 5th

Art is all around us, and nature wants to show it off. Join artists from all over and show off your skills in a variety of ways!



Bird Bonanza

December 5th

Spread your wings of knowledge and soar into a feathered frenzy! Uncover bird adaptations that have made birds true masters of the sky!



8786 Montague Rd, Rockford, IL 61102

For more information, visit WildRootsNatureCenter.org/Science-Saturdays



Fall Programming

September - December



Explore: Hikes, Walks, and Paddles

Family Hike Series: Ephemeral Art Sunday, September 13 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Visit Wild Roots Nature Center for the Family Hike Series fall program! Our staff will lead a peaceful walk around the paved loop followed by the making of some temporary nature art using materials gathered while on our walk.

Location: Severson Dells
Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member
All Ages

Tuesday Walking Group

Tuesday, September 15 10:00 AM-11:30 AM
Tuesday, October 20 10:00 AM-11:30 AM
Tuesday, November 17 10:00 AM-11:30 AM
Tuesday, December 15 10:00 AM-11:30 AM

Walk with friends for this free casual walking club. We'll stroll at a gentle pace and pause to take in whatever beauty beholds us!

Location: Severson Dells
Cost: Free
Ages 18+



LGBTQIA+ Nature Journaling

Saturday, September 19 1:00 PM-2:30 PM

Join us & The LIAM Foundation in a safe place to express yourself through nature journaling, reflection, and contemplation. This is a space for folks who identify in the LGBTQIA+ community to explore nature. A short walk will follow the journaling for those who wish to join.

Location: Severson Dells
Cost: Free
All Ages



Fall Colors Hike Wednesday, October 7 5:30 PM-7:00 PM

Come on a lovely stroll through the woods and prairies as we see what fall colors we can find. This will be a moderate walk over some uneven terrain, with a little bit of elevation gain.

Location: Severson Dells
Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member
Ages 8+



Full Moon Hike Saturday, October 24 6:00 PM-7:30 PM

Time to explore the Hunter's Moon! As we trek through the woods and prairies at dark, we will talk about some of the larger creatures in the woods—but no need to be scared!

Location: Severson Dells
Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member
Ages 8+

Self-Guided Gratitude Walk

Thursday, November 26 - Sunday, November 29

Take a self-guided stroll through the woods of Severson Dells Forest Preserve and stop at the various stations with prompts to help you express gratitude in this and all seasons!

Location: Severson Dells
Cost: Free
All Ages



Family & Community Adventures

Dance at the Dells

Saturday, September 19 5:00 PM-6:30 PM

Join us for this beloved event that celebrates performing art in nature! Enjoy a walk through Severson Dells, interspersed with site-specific dances by Meghan and Caitlyn Baylor and their team of dancers. This is a moderate hike with multiple stops. This project is supported by Rockford Area Arts Council

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$15 member / \$20 non-member

All Ages



Member Morning Social

Saturday, October 3 9:30 AM-10:30 AM

MEMBERS ONLY: Join us and enjoy pastries, coffee, juice, and a chance to meet other members. Plus, stay after for Science Saturday!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free for members

All Ages

Spook the Dells

Saturday, October 17 6:00 PM-7:30 PM

There is no reason to be afraid of the woods! This Halloween, come out to Wild Roots at Severson Dells to learn more about nocturnal animals at this family-friendly event. Join us along our paved path for an interactive theater experience that highlights the amazing nocturnal animals that call Severson Dells Forest Preserve home. Enjoy a s'more by the fire at this family friendly event.

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

All Ages



Perspectives Workshop with WNJI

Saturday, October 24 10:00 AM-11:00 AM

WNJI is hosting a hands-on workshop on how to generate ideas and write a Perspective. Whether you've been listening to Perspectives for years and you've had an idea or two you wanted to share, or are interested in becoming a better storyteller, join us! How do you take your unique perspective and turn it into a 90-second commentary to share with your fellow public radio listeners?

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

Ages 18+

Wildly Rooted in Rockford: RPS Middle School Art Show

November 13-15

Wild Roots is partnering with middle school artists across Rockford to bring an immersive art show blending nature education with representations of our area's magnificent native species. This show will be on display from November 13-15 during City Market Open Hours.

Location: City Market, 116 Madison St., Rockford, IL

Cost: Free

All Ages

Luminaria

Friday, December 11 5:00 PM-9:00 PM

Saturday, December 12 5:00 PM-9:00 PM

This seasonal favorite returns! Enjoy a stroll on a candle-lit trail, live music in the classroom, hot chocolate on the porch and make your own s'mores by the fire.

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

All Ages



Members Cookies & Crafts

Saturday, December 12 3:30 PM-4:30 PM

MEMBERS ONLY: Join us for holiday cookies and crafts! Plus meet other members and get early access to Luminaria!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free to members

All Ages

Fall Programming

September - December



Community Science

Science of the Seasons

Saturday, September 12 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Saturday, November 14 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Saturday, October 10 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Saturday, December 19 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Participate in real community-driven science on these monthly walks! Learn about our seasonal wildlife and plant monitoring techniques and try them out for yourself. It's a perfect way to learn more about the volunteer research we coordinate and how you can get involved.

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

Ages 12+

Community Science Results Presentation

Thursday, November 5 6:00PM-7:00PM

Volunteer scientists have been monitoring bumblebees, bats, plants, and birds in the Rockford area, and we have some exciting results to share with you! Our Community Science team is ready to share interesting finds, meaningful trends, and broader implications of the data collected by volunteer community scientists. This presentation is great for nature nerds and people who are curious about our local ecosystems and their health!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: Free

All Ages

Lectures & Learning

Nature on Tap: Snackin' on Sustainability

Tuesday, September 8 6:30 PM-7:30 PM

In partnership with the NIU STEAM Cafe, learn what sustainability looks like on a college campus. Join a staff member from Campus Sustainability as they talk about the prairie restoration they are doing on campus, and all of the other initiatives happening in DeKalb!

Location: Lucha Cantina

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

All Ages

Mushroom Foraging Workshop

Sunday, October 11 2:00 PM-3:30 PM

Join Ben King of the Madison Mycological Society and Bill Springer of Iconic Fungi as we talk about common mushrooms you can find in northern Illinois and then go on a short walk to see what is growing on the Severson Dells Forest Preserve trails! Please note, this is an introductory class and not all inclusive to all mushrooms that are edible or not. Never eat anything you aren't 100% sure of!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

All Ages

Nature on Tap: We Didn't Start the Fire

Tuesday, October 13 6:30 PM-7:30 PM

Fire on the prairie is an integral part of its lifecycle. Join Russ Brunner of the Byron Forest Preserve as he talks about the whats, whys, and hows of controlled burning.

Location: Lucha Cantina

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

All Ages

Nature on Tap: Are Tacos Compostable?

Tuesday, November 10 6:30 PM-7:30 PM

Did you know that a well managed compost pile can reach temperatures of almost 150*? Join Jessie Crow Mermel and Kate Whitacre of Nettle Curbside Compost as they talk about the science of composting, why it is important for the planet, and how you can contribute to the solution!

Location: Lucha Cantina

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

All Ages

Photography Lecture with David Olson

Wednesday, November 18 6:30 PM-8:00 PM

A photographic journey through Northern Illinois with David Olson! David is a renowned nature photographer, so be sure to join us for a wonderfully visually stunning presentation with plenty of time for Q&A.

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$3 member / \$5 non-member

All Ages



Just for Kids!

Homeschool Program

We offer a unique program each month just for homeschoolers to experience hands-on nature education. Each session will run twice a day! When you arrive, you'll be split into two age groups: 5-8 or 9-12.

*AM Session from 10:00-11:30 AM

*PM Session from 1:00-2:30 PM

Members: \$10 for members, \$15 for general admission

Spectacular Spiders

Thursday, September 17

Spiders are marvelous creatures with tons of spectacular adaptations! Learn through hands-on activities how they make their webs, catch their prey, and so much more.

Sensible Seeds

Thursday, October 15

Seeds are the start of life for plants, and they are packed with amazing adaptations like built-in clocks, shields, food, and more! We will collect wildflower seeds and take a close look at their features under a microscope.

Handy Hibernation

Thursday, November 19

Not all hibernators go into caves! Some rest in plant stems, under bark, or in the ground. We'll learn all about how different animals hibernate and look for hibernacula in the field.

Clever Clouds

Thursday, December 17

Cloud-watching is more than a past-time, it's an important scientific skill! Learn how to read the clouds to predict weather through hands-on matching, sorting, and observation activities.

Winter Wonder Day Out

Tuesday, December 22 9:00 AM-3:00 PM

Chickadees continue to thrive in even the toughest of temperatures, just like a little cold weather won't stop us from exploring nature. Experience hands-on activities, exciting games, and outdoor adventures during our winter break camp!

Location: Severson Dells

Cost: \$30 member / \$35 non-member
Ages 5-12.



FREE ADMISSION!

Saturday, October 17th
6:00pm - 7:30pm

SPOOK THE DELLS

WILD ROOTS NATURE CENTER
AT SEVERSON DELLS



Plus, meet
LIVE
animals!

Meet nocturnal animal characters on the trails & enjoy a s'more by the fire in this family-friendly event!

Sponsored by:



In honor of
Dr. Carl Hartman

Carving Out our Future

Impact of law on environmental protection

At Severson Dells, the land tells a story far older than our organization. Severson Dells was shaped by the retreating of glaciers and the landscape has been shaped by generations of people. Before colonists arrived to the area we refer to as Illinois, indigenous communities stewarded this land for thousands of years, using practices like prescribed fire to care for and sustain healthy and resilient ecosystems. When settlers did arrive, they transformed many of the prairies and wetlands into land suitable for agriculture and urban development. This left behind the legacy we know today, which is a land known for its cornfields and urban sprawl. Yet throughout all of this land change, dedicated individuals and communities of people have worked together to protect and restore the natural habitats of Illinois.

Our Past 50 Years

The landscapes we cherish here at Severson Dells, and those we soon will restore at Prairies Edge, are living legacies of past decisions of conservation, stewardship, and a belief in the value of wild places. As we mark 50 years of Severson Dells Forest Preserve, we are reminded that Illinois environmental protections only exist today because others took action generations ago.

Illinois Takes Action

Across Illinois, this action has taken many forms. One of the most influential actions was the creation of the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act of 1963, which was created during a time where our state's prairies and wetlands were rapidly being lost to urban expansion and

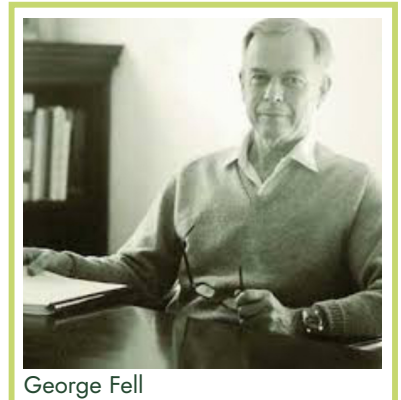
development. Many aspects of this legislation are significant, such as the fact that this action preceded some of the most historic conservation initiatives by almost a decade. This landmark feat is especially close to home, as it was founded by fellow Rockfordian, George Fell. George Fell is renowned as a founder of The Nature Conservancy and the Natural Land Institute, but he was also largely responsible for the founding and passing of the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act.



A prescribed burn at the prairie at Severson Dells Forest Preserve in 2022.

Under this legislation, land designated as an Illinois Nature Preserve is permanently safeguarded,

granting it the highest protection in the state. Illinois was the first state to create an official system of nature preserves of this kind, and the model has received both national and international recognition, with over a dozen states adopting this model. Today, more than 600 sites including 124,000 acres are protected under this system. Under these protections, 128 acres of land at Severson Dells are designated as an Illinois Nature Preserve, ensuring protection from development forever.



George Fell

Other landmark state protections include the Environmental Protection Act of 1970, the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Clean Water Act of 1972. In the over 50 years since these laws passed, the environment we live in has changed drastically. We now live in a state where clean air and clean water are a fundamental right that is legally protected, and natural areas have state protections that once didn't exist. In many ways, we are living in the future that past conservationists envisioned and worked tirelessly to create.

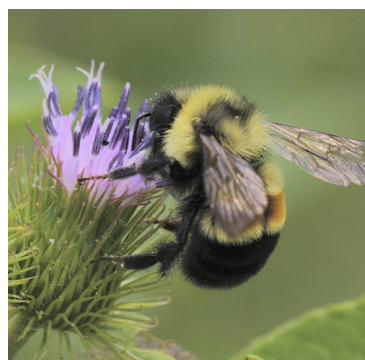


Fannie Severson

Legislation Under Threat

These gains, however, are not guaranteed. Today, these landmark pieces of legislation that were established in the past 50 years are under threat. A 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Sackett v. EPA* ruled to significantly narrow the Clean Water Act's scope, removing protections from up to 80% of U.S. wetlands. Additionally, the Endangered Species Act is under attack, and there is currently a proposed rule change that would limit violations of the Act. Under this proposed ruling, harming the habitats of endangered animals would no longer be a violation of the Endangered Species Act. This change could open large swaths of land that were previously protected to logging, mining and development. These landmark environmental protections of the 1970's need our continued effort to withstand the pressures of today. Rapid urban and commercial development, growing demand for water, and increased habitat fragmentation continue to pose new threats to the habitats of Illinois we care deeply about.

The future of Illinois landscapes and natural resources are being written right now as we make decisions about land conservation funding, water protection, renewable energy, and climate resilience. Our decisions and actions will determine what habitats endure for future generations. In the last 50 years, our environmental laws and protections started making a difference in the places we know and love now. It is



An endangered species: The Rusty-patched Bumblebee photographed by Dan Mullen on Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

daunting to think about how those places may change in the next 50 years. Just as past conservation efforts

shaped the Illinois we love, today's choices will shape the Illinois of tomorrow.

Making an Impact on our Future

What keeps me hopeful is that we all have a role to play in the future! Whether it's supporting conservation initiatives through voting, advocating for environmental protections, or volunteering at places like Wild Roots, history shows us that decisions and actions matter, and they leave behind a legacy that long surpasses us. Just as people of the past stewarded the prairies and forests and wetlands of Illinois, we too have the opportunity, and responsibility, to do the same. Not only for these next 50 years, but for all generations to come.

Carving out our Future was authored by Emma Zimmerman.

Emma Zimmerman is a Science Communication AmeriCorps Volunteer at Wild Roots passionate about making sure everyone is equipt with accessible nature knowledge as she works to translate research into stories, provides accessible explanations of science, and helps connect our community to the "why" behind the work we do. You can reach Emma at communication.americorps@wildrootsnaturecenter.org



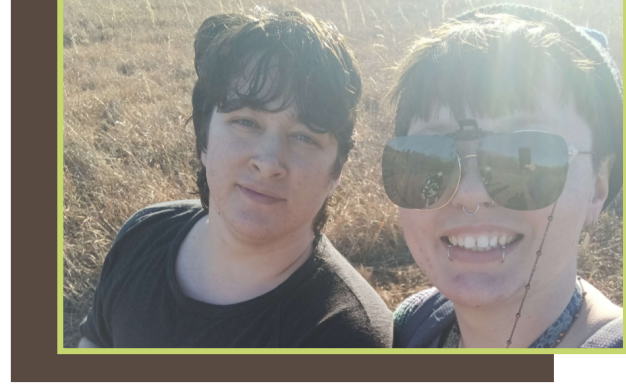
Sources:

Illinois Department of Natural Resources - Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
Illinois Environmental Council - Conservation Policy
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency - History
EarthJustice - How Trump and Congress Are Attacking the Endangered Species Act – and What You Can Do About It

Ways to Get Involved in Environmental Advocacy

- *Attend municipal meetings to learn about local initiatives or projects affecting the environment
- *Join neighborhood associations to help keep your neighborhood environmentally conscious
- *Connect with local organizations to volunteer with conservation projects
- *Join your local environmental advocacy chapters
- *Reach out to local government officials and emphasize the importance of environmental protection within our community
- *Write and call your representatives with concerns
- *Request meetings with your representatitves
- *Raise public awareness of envrionmental issues through sharing your beliefs about conservation

Wren Medina & Matthew Clum



Supporter Spotlight

"This is Sharon, my grandmother," Wren states as he pulls a small urn out of his bag. "Today (the date of the interview) is actually the three-year anniversary of her passing." For Wren Medina, Sharon was an inspiration.

"Sharon was a military wife during the Cold War. There was a lot of fear. Kids were doing drills and drills and more drills. Sharon wanted to bring joy to children because so many adults were handling the world in a very unfriendly way to children." Wren continues, "She always felt it was important to give back." Sharon made it her mission to make sure kids felt like kids despite the chaotic world. She even dressed up as the Easter bunny on base."

Remembering his childhood with Sharon, Wren says, "She would hand out cupcakes and popcorn balls on Halloween. She wrote elf letters to every single child of every class I was in. And she just volunteered a lot of her time and energy to making the world a bit brighter for kids."



Wren (left) and Matthew (right) embracing the joy of childhood.

Inspired by Sharon, Wren and his partner Matthew Clum chose to pick up that mantle. "Kids are the ones hit hardest by the changes in our world. We recognize that is a need."

Picking up the Mantle

Wren and Matthew spend most Saturdays at Science Saturday. They even had one of their earliest dates at a Science Saturday.

Remembering the date, Matthew says "We showed up and we were like the only people there without kids. We did all the activities and filled out our passport and got a prize at the end and it was really fun! It was the best date that we had been on thus far. So, we ended up making it a monthly tradition to come to Science Saturday to have a date and we bring the kids sometimes, too."

A few months ago, Wren and Matthew learned Severson Dells had a decrease in funding support for Science Saturdays in 2026. Liz Wiener, Public Programs Coordinator, mentioned adjustments had to be made due to the loss of funding including no longer having prizes for attendees who completed every station at the event.

"When we found out you guys didn't have prizes anymore, we were like 'that's devastating!' Kids can remember the activities, but if they are able to take something home, then they can look back on what they've learned."

Remembering the lessons Sharon taught them, Wren and Matthew saw this as their opportunity to make the nature center a brighter place. Since then, Matthew and Wren have been donating the prizes that hundreds of kids and adults receive at Science Saturdays.

Wren shares, "It's just really important to be educating the next generation about conservation and nature. We're supposed to be living with nature, not just exploiting it for resources. Sometimes kids aren't taught those things to the degree they need to know them to address the harm human activity has done. It's important to get familiar with the bugs and plants and make them not feel like strangers, but fellow living things that we should be looking out for."

"I love that you guys have free activities & programs for the community without some kind of transactional exchange expected," Matthew adds. "As a parent, there are not a lot of places that do that. And so we wanted to keep giving back to the magic you guys give to families."

Importance of Accessibility

Throughout our conversation, Matthew and Wren noted that their love of Severson is part environmentalism and part accessibility. Both experience a level of disability, as well as their child, Mariana.

Mariana is semi-ambulatory, meaning they use a wheelchair sometimes. A few weeks ago, Mariana was in double leg casts and was joining their class on a field trip to Severson Dells. The school was unsure of the nature center's ability to have Mariana join us for the majority of the field trip. What the school didn't realize is that Severson Dells staff members attend yearly accessibility training to ensure everyone gets to experience nature.

Wren and Matthew chaperoned the field trip and were more than pleased with the accommodations adopted for Mariana. Field Trip staff set aside dedicated nature education stations in the classroom so Mariana could experience the lessons just like their classmates. "Staff came together and created an entire room for Mariana and five of their friends to be in. They ensured Mariana

was able to participate as much as possible. We explored the path as much as we could and then we did the inside activities and they had an incredible time.” Wren continues, “it was so sweet at how fast Severson was not only able to accommodate, but willing to.”

Matthew joins in, “No one made us feel like we were a burden. Everyone here didn’t just accommodate Mariana, but also figured out a way to make it really fun and made them feel not just accommodated, but special. Mariana felt like their experience was better than the other kids.”

For Matthew and Wren, having their child feel seen by the nature center’s education staff was a sign that their decision to give back to an organization that would also give back to them. Like the human relationship with nature, our organization’s relationship with volunteers and supporters is also symbiotic and mutual.

A Final Message

I asked Wren and Matthew if they had a final message they’d like readers to know:

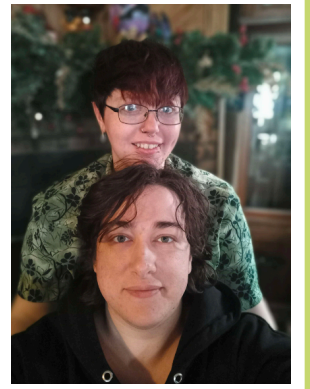
Matthew: “I think people, and I include myself under this banner, are often nervous to get involved in a volunteer capacity because there’s an anxiety about performance we culturally have. But, there are people who are glad to teach you and glad to have your hands and your presence. Your presence is valuable and makes an impact whatever your abilities are, whatever your

disabilities are. Just showing up is really a big deal and anybody can do that and make a positive impact in their community.

Wren: “We live in a society that doesn’t encourage us to give ourselves freely to each other because we’re taught to save and conserve all of that energy for the ‘hamster wheel.’ I get how anxiety-producing it can be to step off of that and try to live a life that is more in alignment with community, but I think we’re all capable of it. It’s been one of the most beautiful and helpful things that we’ve done for our family and our own health and well-being.

Also, the community needs us, the kids need us. They just need our softness. So, in whatever ways we can show up softly together, I’d like to see them there.”

We think Sharon would be proud.



Wren (above, in glasses) & Matthew

Wren and Matthew, inspired by the gifts from their past, have truly made an impact. Their story is a reminder of how our past can inform our future. People like Matthew and Wren have helped us become who we are these past 50 years and they pave the way for the next 50 years. Thank you!

FREE ADMISSION

LUMINARIA

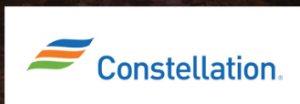
at Wild Roots Nature Center at Severson Dells

DECEMBER 11 & 12
5:00PM - 9:00PM

CANDLELIT TRAILS
S'MORES & HOT COCOA
WINTER NATURE ACTIVITIES
LIVE MUSICAL PERFORMANCES

sponsored by:

Kathleen Helge
in memory of
Barbara Whitsitt



MATERIAL
HANDLING,
HANDLED.



Your Support Keeps the “Free” in Our Free Events



Ever wonder what difference your contributions make?

It's only with your help that we can offer free high-quality programming to the regional community and beyond. Events like Science Saturdays only happen because of your generous and thoughtful donations. You help us keep the lights on, the nature center open, and nature education accessible when you support Wild Roots Nature Center.

Giving is easy.

Mail

You can mail a check to: Wild Roots Nature Center, 8786 Montague Road, Rockford, IL 61102. Please make your check payable to Wild Roots Nature Center.

Gifts of Stock or From Your IRA

You might be able to realize tax benefits while supporting Wild Roots if you give gifts of stock or from your IRA. We recommend consulting with a tax advisor to discuss how this strategy might work for your unique situation.

Monthly Giving

Our free programming happens all year long and you can give that way too. Our monthly donors make automated donations that spread their gift out over the entire year and provide a steady stream of income for Wild Roots. You can become a monthly donor by clicking “Donate Monthly” on our online donation form.

Using Your Donor Advised Fund (DAF)

Giving from your DAF can be an easy way to support Wild Roots with money you've already received a tax deduction on. Your investment advisor can make it easy for you to give on a monthly or annual basis.

Matching Gifts

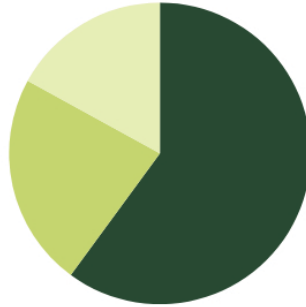
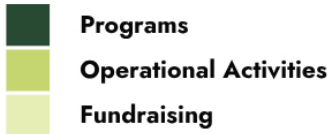
Many employers offer a matching gift benefit to employees, retirees, and spouses that can double the impact of your gift at no extra cost to you. Check with your employer or human resources representative to see if you qualify for this benefit.

Join the Heritage Society

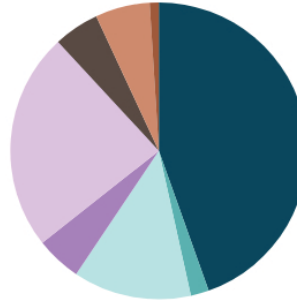
You can join our Heritage Society when you let us know that you've included Wild Roots in your will or estate plan. Becoming part of this special group of people means you care about nature education today and tomorrow and you want to support Wild Roots Nature Center far into the future.

For more information on how to support Wild Roots, contact Linda Sandquist, Director of Development at 815-335-2915 or Linda@WildRootsNatureCenter.org

EXPENSES:



INCOME:



ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash	\$672,057
Grants Receivable	\$27,184
Inventory	\$15,816
Total Current Assets	\$715,057

Non-Current Assets

Investments	\$2,593,562
Property & Equipment	\$1,193,552
Assets Held Externally	\$226,112
Endowment Investments	\$126,106
Total Non-Current Assets	\$4,139,332
TOTAL ASSETS	\$4,854,389

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

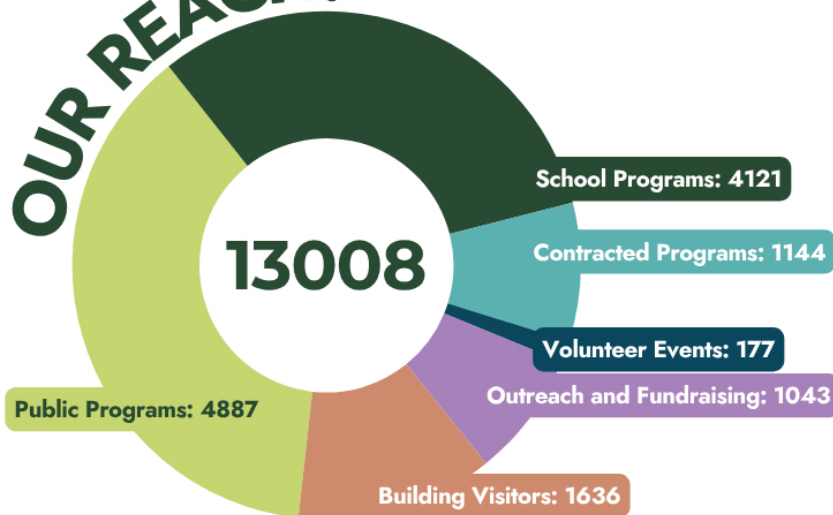
Current Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$224
Accrued wages & vacation	\$24,005
Deferred Revenue	\$14,730
Total Current Liabilities	\$38,959

Net Assets

Without donor restrictions	\$4,079,979
With donor restrictions	\$740,451
Total Net Assets	\$4,815,430
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$4,854,389

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Heritage Society

Every sunset brings the promise of a new dawn. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Heritage Society recognizes those special friends who include Wild Roots Nature Center in their wills or estate plans. These legacy donors discover the joy of making sure their generous support for environmental education lives on.

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Memorials & Honorariums

"No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave." — Calvin Coolidge

Memorials are a meaningful way to honor the life of a loved one after they have passed by supporting a cause the loved one was passionate about. Honorariums are a way to recognize a loved one or commemorate a special occasion with a philanthropic gift.

We are grateful to those who chose Wild Roots for these meaningful gifts.

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In Honor
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Wild Roots Activity Planner

July

- June 29 - July 6 - Self-Guided American Trails – ongoing
- July 6 - Canoe Convoy – 5:30pm-8:30pm
- July 10 - Readings from the Rookery – 9am-10:30am
- July 11 - Canoe Convoy – 8:30am-11:30am
- July 11 - Science Saturday: Backyard Animals – 10am-2pm
- July 14 - Prairie Succession Hike – 6pm-7:30pm
- July 16 - Family Hike: Creek Walk – 1:30pm-3:30pm
- July 18 - Restoration Workday – 9am-12:00pm
- July 18 - Science of the Seasons – 1pm-2:30pm
- July 21 - Tuesday Walking Group – 10am-11:30am
- July 24 - Readings from the Rookery – 9am-10:30am

August

- Aug. 1 - Science Saturday: Friends in Nature – 10am-2pm
- Aug. 3 - Canoe Convoy – 5:30pm-8:30pm
- Aug. 8 - Restoration Workday – 9am-12pm
- Aug. 8 - Science of the Seasons – 2pm-3:30pm
- Aug. 13 - Pastries & Perseids – 4am-5:30am
- Aug. 15 - Adventure Trails – 10am-2pm
- Aug. 18 - Tuesday Walking Group – 10am-11:30am
- Aug. 22 - Canoe Convoy – 9am-3pm
- Aug. 27 - Full Moon Hike – 7:30pm-9pm

September

- Sept. 5 - Science Saturday: Art in Nature – 10am-2pm
- Sept. 8 - Nature on Tap: Snackin' Sustainably – 6:30pm-7:30pm
- Sept. 12 - Restoration Workday – 9am-12pm
- Sept. 12 - Science of the Seasons – 2pm-3:30pm
- Sept. 13 - Family Hike: Ephemeral Art – 2pm-3:30pm
- Sept. 15 - Tuesday Walking Group – 10am-11:30am
- Sept. 17 - Homeschool: Spiders – times vary
- Sept. 19 - LGBTQIA+ Nature Journaling – 1pm-2:30pm
- Sept. 19 - Dance at the Dells – 4pm-5:30pm
- Sept. 26 - Golden Hour in the Grove – 5pm-7:30pm

October

- Oct. 3 - Member Morning Social – 9:30am-10:30am
- Oct. 3 - Science Saturday: Celebration of Indigenous People – 10am-2pm
- Oct. 7 - Fall Colors Hike – 5:30pm-7pm
- Oct. 10 - Restoration Workday – 9am-12pm
- Oct. 10 - Science of the Seasons – 2pm-3:30pm
- Oct. 11 - Mushroom Foraging Workshop – 2pm-3:30pm
- Oct. 13 - Nature on Tap: We Didn't Start the Fire – 6:30pm-7:30pm
- Oct. 15 - Homeschool: Sensible Seeds – times vary
- Oct. 17 - Spook the Dells – 6pm-7:30pm
- Oct. 20 - Tuesday Walking Group – 10am-11:30am
- Oct. 24 - Full Moon Hike – 6pm-7:30pm
- Oct. 24 - Perspectives Workshop with WNIJ – 10am-11am

November

- Nov. 7 - Science Saturday: Predator Prey Party - 10am-2pm
- Nov. 10 - Nature on Tap: Are Tacos Compostable? – 6:30pm-7:30pm
- Nov. 13 - 15 - Wildly Rooted in Rockford: RPS Middle School Art Show – ongoing
- Nov. 14 - Restoration Workday – 9am-12pm
- Nov. 14 - Science of the Seasons – 2pm-3:30pm
- Nov. 17 - Tuesday Walking Group – 10am-11:30am
- Nov. 18 - Photography Lecture with David Olson – 6:30pm-8pm
- Nov. 19 - Homeschool: Handy Hibernation – times vary
- Nov. 26 - 29 - Self-Guided Gratitude Walk – ongoing

December

- Dec. 5 - Science Saturday: Bird Bonanza – 10am-2pm
- Dec. 11 - 12 - Luminaria – 5pm-9pm
- Dec. 12 - Members Cookies & Craft - 3:30pm-4:30pm
- Dec. 15 - Tuesday Walking Group – 10am-11:30am
- Dec. 17 - Homeschool: Clever Clouds – times vary
- Dec. 19 - Science of the Seasons – 2pm-3:30pm
- Dec. 22 - Winter Wonder Day Out – 9am-3pm

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Monday-Saturday
8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Our mission is to inspire conservation of nature through education and stewardship, cultivating connections between people and place.

Our vision is a community inspired to explore, understand, and protect the natural world—where curiosity leads to stewardship, science informs action, and every person feels connected to each other and the land.

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