

Nature's Notebook

SPRING 2026





discover the nature of life

The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County is dedicated to protecting, conserving, enhancing and promoting Winnebago County's natural heritage for the environmental, educational and recreational benefit of present and future generations.

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Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*)

UPPER LEFT: Spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*)

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out in the field

Spring Burns Bring a Fresh Start to Your Forest Preserve Habitats

FPWC burn crews have been busy this season doing a little spring cleaning!

Our burn crews are responsible for implementing **prescribed burns**—also known as controlled fire—at your preserves each spring and fall. Prescribed burns are an important conservation tool used by our Natural Resources team to mimic naturally occurring wildfires in a safe and controlled environment.



So why prescribed burns? Controlled fire provides several key benefits to the health of your natural lands, including the reduction of invasive plant species and the improvement of soil health through nutrient cycling. This allows native plants to thrive and enhances the overall biodiversity of preserve habitats.

If you see burn crews at your preserves this spring, please use caution. Pay attention to signs and stay on trails.

Front Cover: Common green darners (*Anax junius*) by Jen Boeke
Back Cover: Wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) and golden groundsel (*Packera aurea*), Colored Sands Forest Preserve by Alfredo Ortiz

Introducing Your 45th Preserve: Paula Swanson Forest Preserve



The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County is excited to introduce your forty-fifth preserve, Paula Swanson Forest Preserve!



Located in Shirland, Illinois along the Sugar River, this 88-acre parcel is an area of great natural resource value with high quality wetland and river frontage habitats that are home to a variety of waterfowl, songbird, amphibian, and reptile species. The preserve also includes acreage currently in row-crop agriculture, which will be restored to prairie and woodland habitats.

The purchase of this property from the McKee family was made possible in part by a generous donation from Paula Swanson. Originally from Iowa, Paula and her late husband, Jim, were avid birdwatchers and extremely active in the greater Rockford area, volunteering their

time at sites that included the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory at Colored Sands Forest Preserve and Severson Dells Nature Center.



Paula Swanson

Paula sadly passed away at the age of 87 on February 18, 2025. FPWC is deeply grateful for the lasting legacy that Paula created by fostering an appreciation for Winnebago County's natural areas and wildlife in others, as well as for her generosity and forward thinking.

Paula Swanson Forest Preserve is located at 10178 W Winslow Road in Shirland, IL. While marked trails and a parking lot aren't in place just yet, the preserve is open to walk-in visitors. Parking is available along the road, but please do not block the entrance gate to the preserve.

A dedication marking the official opening of the preserve is expected to take place this summer, so stay tuned for more information. In the meantime, we hope you are able to take the opportunity to explore your newest Forest Preserve of Winnebago County!

featured programs



Green frog (*Lithobates clamitans*)

Fabulous Frogs with Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Connie McIntosh

Thursday, March 26 | 6:00 p.m.
Headquarters Forest Preserve, Rockford

Learn about the life cycle, calls, and importance of native frog species before heading out for a short walk to listen for calling frogs!



Orchard oriole (*Icterus spurius*)

Nature Nook Spring Clean Up with Burpee Museum of Natural History

Thursday, April 9 | 9:00 a.m.
Burpee Museum of Natural History, Rockford

Help prepare the Nature Nook Outdoor Exhibit for spring! The morning will include an educator-led learning session followed by hands-on work in the Nature Nook. **Great for all ages!**

From Backyards to Boardrooms: Building Community Led Climate Resilience at Every Scale with Illinois Extension

Wednesday, May 6 | 1:00 p.m.
Headquarters Forest Preserve, Rockford

Learn how climate change is already shaping daily life and practical steps you can take to strengthen your climate resilience.!

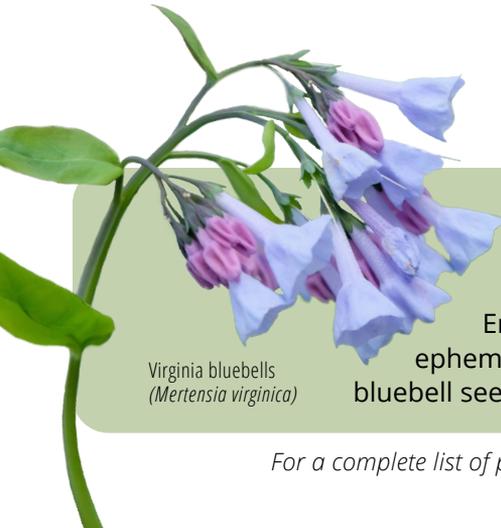
Wildflower Walkabouts with Severson Dells Nature Center

Explore wildflower hotspots at your forest preserves in search of what's blooming on these popular hikes!

Wednesday, May 6 | 6:00 p.m.
Deer Run Forest Preserve, Cherry Valley

Wednesday, May 20 | 6:00 p.m.
Colored Sands Forest Preserve, Rockton

Registration required. Opens online on April 1 at www.seversondells.com.



Virginia bluebells
(*Mertensia virginica*)

REAP Day with Illinois Extension Saturday, May 23 | 9:00 a.m.

Deer Run Forest Preserve, Cherry Valley

Enjoy an educational hike about the spring ephemerals found at Deer Run before collecting bluebell seeds for our greenhouse! **Great for all ages!**

For a complete list of programs, visit www.WinnebagoForest.org/Events.

community connections

find us at

Polinator Palooza

Saturday 5/2

Severson Dells Forest Preserve

Sand Bluff Bird Observatory Open House

Saturday 5/9

Colored Sands Forest Preserve



Mourning cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*)

Rockton Pelican Fest

Saturday 5/16

Rockton & Nygren Wetland Preserve

Garden Fair Weekend

Saturday 6/6–Sunday 6/7

Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden

Backpacking with Burpee

Spring Ephemeral Wildflower Hike -

Deer Run Forest Preserve

Saturday, May 2

Mushroom Hike -

Funderburg Forest Preserve

Saturday, June 6



Pecatonica Wetlands Forest Preserve by Gina Alis



Deer Run Forest Preserve by @MoonlitMeadow

May apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)

Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden

In-Person Plant Sale Fundraiser

Friday, May 8–Sunday, May 10

Garden Fair Weekend

Saturday, June 6–Sunday, June 7

Macktown Living History

Macktown's Mysteries

Sunday, May 17

Pecatonic Adventures

Sunday, June 21

Painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*)



Dekay's brownsnake (*Storeria dekayi*) by Gina Alis



Severson Dells Nature Center

Woodland Wanderers Walking Club

Tuesday, April 21

Tuesday, May 19



Illinois Extension



NATURAL LAND INSTITUTE
Conserving Land in Northern Illinois



connect with us

Great spangled fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*)



Help plan the
future of your
forest preserves

**SHARE
YOUR VISION**



Learn more at www.WinnebagoForest.org/CommunitySurvey.



SAT, JUNE 13 | 9 AM
FOUR LAKES FOREST PRESERVE
AGES 3-16 | FREE FISHING FUN!

**free rod & reel
to first 100 kids
food, fun, prizes
free t-shirt**



Photo Credit: Judy Barnard

presented by

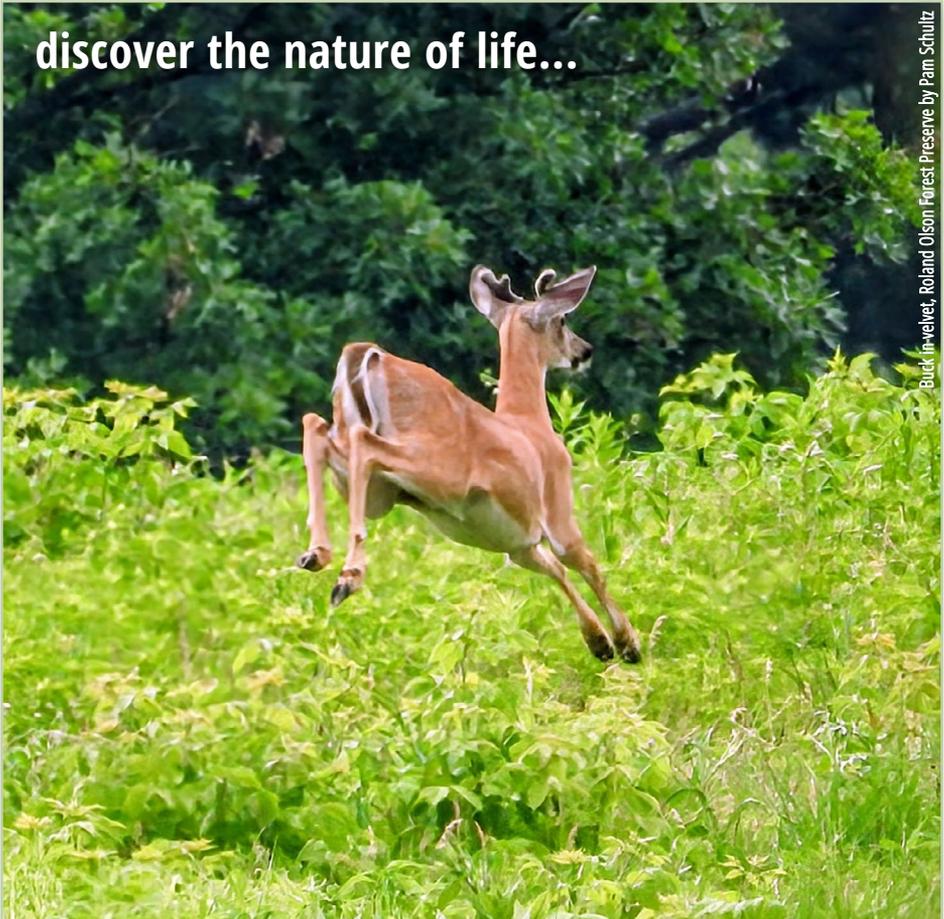


Free hotdog lunch provided by



explore your preserves

discover the nature of life...



Buck in velvet, Roland Olson Forest Preserve by Pam Schultz

11,637 acres • over 100 miles of hiking trails • 3 campgrounds • 3 golf courses

White lady's-slipper orchid (*Cypripedium candidum*)
by Sandra Vaughn-Pottorff

...endless possibilities

contact us

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Go.WinnebagoForest.org/Preserves

