

USRC Awarded VSN Grant  
Volunteers Remove Invasive Honeysuckle  
RiverWatch Honors USRC  
USRC Named "Best New Partner" by VSN  
And more....



Recreation \* Stewardship \* Citizen Science

# USRC Newsletter



## Breaking news >>>

### USRC Receives Grant

*The Nature Conservancy Volunteer Stewardship Network Fund (VSN) awarded the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy \$1100.00 for equipment in support of their efforts to control invasive species.*

The Upper Sangamon River Conservancy was outfitted with new chain saws, chaps, helmets, loppers and more, thanks to a grant from the Nature Conservancy's VSN Fund. The USRC would like to extend its gratitude to the VSN Coordinator, Brooke Thureau, for all of her help during the application process. Brooke and the VSN provided a bright spot in an otherwise difficult year.



## Volunteers Battle Invasives at Mahomet Greenway Park

### Bush honeysuckle: *Lonicera* sp.

*Once recommended for planting as ornamentals, for wildlife cover and food, and for erosion control, bush honeysuckle is now as aggressive invasive throughout Illinois.*

Anna Keck, board member emeritus, is the project coordinator in the USRC's effort to eradicate invasive bush honeysuckle from the Mahomet Greenway Park. Anna led a group of six volunteers on December 20, who made great progress thanks to new equipment from a VSN Award in the hands of determined volunteers. The cut and burn event has opened a portion of woodland for the return of native plants

and garlic mustard. *Lonicera* is also one of the first plants to leaf-out and among the last to drop leaves in fall giving it a competitive advantage over native plants and consequently reducing important food and habitat resources for monarchs (milkweed), spicebush swallowtails (spicebush), Promethea moth (sassafras) to mention a few. Honeysuckle berries also lack the nutritional benefits of most native food

**"The dense thicket they create prevents the enjoyment of our woodlands and stream banks for hiking, fishing, birding and more" – Anna Keck**

choked-out by the aggressive invasive. Much research shows that honeysuckle decreases diversity and abundance of native plants, it inhibits the survival and growth of tree seedlings, and may reduce the growth of mature canopy trees in hardwood forest by producing biochemicals. This biological phenomenon, allelopathy, is also employed by other invasives, such as spotted knapweed

sources. Studies also suggest that bush honeysuckle can threaten human health by increasing exposure to ticks that carry Lyme disease and Ehrlichiosis, and the common house mosquitoes, the vector for the West Nile virus. There is no shortage of reasons to want *Lonicera* removed from the landscape. If you would like to help contact us at [volunteer@sangamonriver.org](mailto:volunteer@sangamonriver.org).

Breaking News >>>

## RiverWatch Awards USRC Partnership Prize

Dr. Danelle Haake, RiverWatch Coordinator and Stream Ecologist for the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center announces the USRC the winner of the RiverWatch Partnership Prize for 2020.



### Old Friends

The USRC has participated in the RiverWatch program for the past 12 years, monitoring 10 separate sites, 65 total monitoring events, and collecting 10,243 indicator invertebrates during that time. This was accomplished with the help of 7 trained volunteers and dozens of other citizen scientists.

### RiverWatch Mission

Illinois RiverWatch safeguards the future of Illinois rivers and streams through stewardship, education, and sound science. RiverWatch utilizes trained volunteers to collect quality assured data on wadable streams and fosters coordination among groups

### RiverWatch Program Vision

RiverWatch envisions a collaborative river-monitoring network of citizens, organizations, agencies, private interests, and governments working together to ensure the health and beauty of Illinois streams and watersheds.



### Partnership Prize

The Partner Prize recognizes an organization that has had a positive relationship with Illinois RiverWatch. This organization is one that has multiple RiverWatch citizen scientists, promotes the RiverWatch program, and/or shares RiverWatch's priorities. Eligibility: Nominated organizations must have at least one of the following:

- Trained RiverWatch citizen scientists.
- Uses RiverWatch data to make a difference in their community
- Promotes the RiverWatch program
- Shares RiverWatch priorities.



COVID-19 Protocol for RiverWatch Volunteers this Year

### RiverWatch Workshop Coming to Mahomet

The Illinois RiverWatch program has benefitted from the volunteer efforts of citizen scientists and educators across the state. Over the past quarter of a century, volunteers have spent thousands of hours educating themselves and collecting data to help better understand our local rivers and streams. The Upper Sangamon River Conservancy is proud to partner with RiverWatch in this effort. If you are interested in becoming a trained volunteer you may sign-up at

<http://www.ngrrc.org/Riverwatch>.

The Mahomet Training Workshop is Saturday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 9am – 4pm at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve. Please contact [president@sangamonriver.org](mailto:president@sangamonriver.org) if you are interested in being sponsored by the USRC.

Breaking News >>>

## Nature Conservancy's VSN Names USRC "Best New Partner"

The Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network is a program that helps to build the capacity of local volunteer groups at the grassroots level within the Network. Today the VSN program strives to fill the gaps for organizations with small budgets and also serves as an incubator for new projects that can be funded and shared widely throughout the state. Past support through this program has gone towards the purchase of tools, herbicide, and native plants as well as helping to pay for items such as newsletters, websites, and other educational materials.

The USRC is grateful for the opportunity to partner with the Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network and we are appreciative of being their "Best New Partner". The future is brighter with them.



**The Nature Conservancy**  
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™



# Meet Mary Stech USRC Volunteer Coordinator



Mary sorts and identifies macroinvertebrates during a pre-Covid RiverWatch open lab.

## It's About Making a Life

One of Mary's favorite quotes is by Winston Churchill. "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give." It is apparent to those that know her that Mary understands the value of volunteering and the value of volunteers. She was the perfect candidate to be the USRC's volunteer coordinator, and as you might expect, she volunteered for it. Mary says "...the many volunteer opportunities with USRC provide

for all a sense of giving back to our home, Earth," and she emphasizes that "No experience is required!"

## Restoration and Renewal

Recalling what she had once read, Mary says that "there's something innately restorative to the human spirit about watching the flow of water in a stream. That sense of renewal is even greater, though, when it extends from one's own spirit to the larger environment."

Mary's contributions to the USRC are felt at every turn. In addition to her role as volunteer coordinator, Mary is also on the board of directors; she participates in invertebrate monitoring both in the field and the lab; she coordinates the meals for volunteers for our large river clean-ups and mussel surveys; she has been involved in roadside clean-ups, invasive species removal, outreach events, fundraising...well, you get the idea. Mary is one of the pillars of the USRC and we are all extremely grateful that she found us.



## Become a Volunteer

*To learn more about the many volunteer opportunities available at the USRC contact Mary Stech at [volunteer@sangamonriver.org](mailto:volunteer@sangamonriver.org) or visit our website at [sangamonriver.org](http://sangamonriver.org).*

## Quick Bio: Mary Stech

1985 – Registered Nurse, Associates of Science in Nursing, Parkland College  
1995 – Bachelor of Science in Nursing – Mennonite College of Nursing  
2002 – Masters of Science in Nursing  
Practitioner in the Family Nurse Practitioner Program, Mennonite College – Board Certified Family Nurse PR actioner  
2010 – Master Naturalist  
2011-2014 – East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Board, Education Coordinator  
2015 – USRC Volunteer  
2016 – USRC Board Member  
2018 – USRC Communications Director  
2020 – USRC Volunteer Coordinator

## Feature Fauna >>>

## Winter Stoneflies or Snowflies

Winter stoneflies (order Plecoptera) primarily belong to the family Taeniopterygidae or Capniidae. Most typically aquatic insects grow fastest in warm weather, but winter stoneflies are an exception. When the cold days of fall and winter arrive, stonefly nymphs emerge from the stream bed and begin growing quickly by feeding on detritus. Once the nymphs mature in winter or early spring, they leave the frozen stream through openings in the ice and then undergo one last molt to become adult stoneflies.

In search of a mate, the adult male will drum its rear end on the snow and ice. When a female feels the drumming



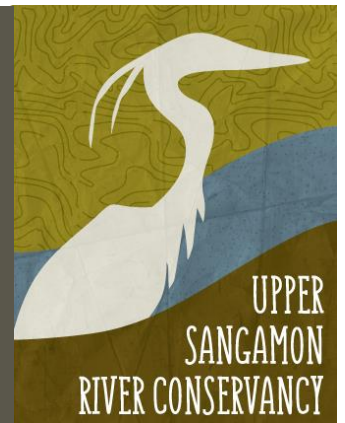
through the snow and ice, she will drum in response. By following the alternating drumming, they find each other. But how do they keep from freezing to death?

Winter stoneflies produce antifreeze compounds such as glycols, sugars and proteins that interfere with the formation of ice crystals in the haemolymph (blood). Therefore, their body fluids can remain liquid several degrees below their otherwise freezing point. If you happen to see a bug scurrying across the winter snow, it could very well be a winter stonefly. Source: The Xerces Society at [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)



*closing* **thoughts...**

# *A Look Back at 2020*



Thank-you to all of our great volunteers that made the best of a challenging year. We look forward to a better 2021.



**Upcoming Events >>>**

## **2021 Calendar**

*Roadside Clean-up*  
April 17<sup>th</sup> – 9am

*Recreational Paddle*  
Starting April – Check Website

*RiverWatch Monitoring*  
May/June – Check Website

*Invasive Species Removal*  
Periodically, Check Website

*Sangamon River Showcase*  
May – Cancelled (Covid)

*Mussel Surveys*  
August – Check Website

*Duck Race Fundraiser*  
August 28 – 6pm

*River Clean-up*  
September – Check Website



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River Conservancy

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