

*Sangamon River Clean-Up*

*USRC River Riders*

*Mussel Project Update*

*VSN Awards USRC Grant*

*2021 USRC Board Members & Leaders*



Recreation \* Stewardship \* Citizen Science

# USRC Newsletter



**Breaking news >>>**

**10th Annual Fundraiser Event**

## Sangamon River Duck Race:

### “The Winner Is...”

This year marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the joint fundraiser between the USRC and Mahomet Parks & Rec. Once again sales topped 500 ducks, which provided each organization with \$1130.00 to help support their noble causes. Thank you to everyone who sponsored a duck and helped make the event a great success. The Sangamon River Duck Race is the USRC's primary fundraiser each year.

### 2021 Sangamon River Duck Race Winners

1<sup>st</sup> Place - \$500.00 – Paul Devine

-Donated by First Financial Bank

2<sup>nd</sup> Place - \$250.00 – Sarah Moore

-Donated by USRC & Mahomet Parks & Rec

3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Yeti Cooler (\$200.00 value) – Mary Schwenk

-Donated by First State Bank of Forest

4<sup>th</sup> Place – Yeti Cooler (\$200.00 value) – Peggy Emkes

-Donated by First State Bank of Forest



## 2021 Sangamon River Clean-Up

### USRC Marks 10 Years of River Clean-Ups

*After a decade of hauling toilets, car doors, carpeting, mattresses, barrels, and other trash from the Sangamon River, volunteers remain determined.*

The annual USRC River Clean-up took place over the weekends of September 11<sup>th</sup> and September 18<sup>th</sup>. The result of the this year's effort was the removal of 1.5 dry tons of garbage and 4 tires from the river. Garbage notables included numerous large drums, a vacuum cleaner, large plastic tubing, and a toilet!



The work is dirty and exhausting. Even so, volunteers have stepped-up each year to remove garbage that made its way into the river by way of careless or deliberate actions. Fourteen volunteers, including support from the Champaign County Forest Preserve District's Natural Resources staff, took part in the September 11<sup>th</sup> clean-up. The crew began the clean-up at the canoe and kayak launch at the Mahomet Greenway Park,

and finished at River Bend Forest Preserve. St. Andrews Student Lutheran Campus Center has participated in USRC River clean-ups for many years. They brought 17 volunteers to the September 18<sup>th</sup> clean-up. Although Pastor Amy Thoren was unable to attend this year, her recruitment skills along with the leadership of their trip coordinator Brendan O'Shaugnessey, were instrumental in the success of the event. The USRC is very grateful for the reliable support and great energy that the group continues to bring to the river clean-ups. Thank you also to Scott Hays for continuing to be the river clean-up coordinator, and to Mary Stech, Joe Niernberger, and Phil Hult for their support roles at both events. And a special thanks to Ben Thompson of Kingfisher Kayaking for his able-bodied assistance.





# "Community Science in Action" Update

*Working through less than ideal search conditions, the USRC and Illinois RiverWatch, along with their partners in research, have completed the first year of a ten-year study of freshwater mussels*

This summer USRC and Illinois RiverWatch, along with their partners in research and education, completed mussels surveys at 4 locations. The partners include Illinois Natural History Survey, Missouri Botanical Garden, and St. Louis Zoo. Volunteers were provided the opportunity to work and learn along side professionals from these prominent organizations. This year's 4 sites will be revisited every other year through 2029. The project, titled *Biodiversity of Freshwater Mussels of the Upper Sangamon River: Community Science in Action*, will monitor 4 additional locations next year that will also be revisited biennially. By tagging, measuring, weighing and photographing mussels at the 8 chosen locations along the Upper Sangamon River, a wealth of information can be gained with regard to mussel populations, growth rates, and mortality rates.

Genetic information will be gathered from species of special interest, such as the pistolgrip, *Tritogonia verrucosa* (pictured to the right). Relatedness among different populations of the same species may be determined as a result.



More than 750 volunteer-hours were logged by the 138 volunteers over the 4 events. The amateur malacologist found 1129 individual mussels that represented 17 species. The 581 mussels within the numbered transects were tagged and photographed. All mussels were identified, measured and weighed

before being returned their river home.

The USRC would like to thank the Living Earth Collaborative for funding in part this great project. Also, thanks to Dr. Danelle Haake, Stream Ecologist and Director of Illinois RiverWatch, and to Sarah Douglass, INHS malacologists. Their leadership has been critical to making the project possible. If you are interested in becoming a part of the USRC's Mussel Team, contact Bruce Colravy at [citizenscience@sangamonriver.org](mailto:citizenscience@sangamonriver.org) to be placed on our contact list.



## Nature Conservancy's VSN Awards USRC \$1000 Grant

For the second consecutive year the USRC has received a grant from the Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN). While last year's grant equipped the USRC with chain saws, chaps, safety helmets, gloves, loppers, and hand saws; this year's grant will further outfit the USRC's Natural Areas volunteers with a much needed piece of equipment. The \$1000 grant will enable the USRC to purchase a Stihl FS-360 Brushcutter, which will significantly increase the efficiency of removing invasive bush honeysuckle as well as other invasive species. The current Natural Areas' project is the Mahomet Greenway Park. The USRC and the Natural Areas volunteers are grateful to the VSN for their ongoing support of our mission. We look forward to our continuing partnership with the VSN in the years ahead.



## Breaking News >>>

# Natural Areas Volunteers Make Progress



*Anna Keck torches one of the brush piles*

Natural Areas volunteers continue making great progress in removing invasive honeysuckle at the Mahomet Greenway Park. Seven volunteers participated in the September 25<sup>th</sup> burn day. Most of the burn piles that had accumulated from the last 3 months of workdays are now ashes. The amount of honeysuckle bushes, many of which are very large, that have been removed so far this year is impressive. It has opened the understory of the woodland and provided a view of the Sangamon River that was previously unavailable. Monthly burn day events like the one on the 25<sup>th</sup>, along with weekly workdays by a small but persistent group of volunteers, is the reason for such great progress. We look forward to seeing the spring flowers next year.

Although other invasives will need to be managed once the invasive honeysuckle is under control, it is satisfying to see the woodland begin to appear as it should. As of September 25<sup>th</sup>, USRC Natural Areas volunteers have logged a total of 262 hours this year. The weekdays account for 174 of those hours, with the monthly burn days accounting for 88 hours.

Joe Niernberger is currently the Natural Areas Coordinator. Joe has taken a persistence approach to restoring the woodland. If you are interested in being a part of this effort and would like to volunteer, you can contact Joe at [naturalareas@sangamonriver.org](mailto:naturalareas@sangamonriver.org). The workdays are on the events calendar on page 4 of this newsletter. We hope to see you in the woods.



*Natural Areas Coordinator Joe Niernberger tends to one of the fires*



## New Member Group

# Introducing the USRC River Runners

The USRC is forming a new group for those who are interested in getting out on the river with other like-minded paddling enthusiasts. The USRC River Runners will host all of our periodic floats down the river and will also coordinate the Annual Sangamon River Cleanup events. Long-time USRC float trip coordinator, Scott Hays says, "Membership in the USRC River Runners is open to anyone interested in the river. All who have participated in past float trips will be added to our member list and invited to join." Hays adds that "since the Sangamon can be a challenging river at times, the purpose in forming a member group is to be sure paddlers have some level of experience in paddling the Sangamon or have basic skills in handling a canoe or kayak."

As with all USRC float trips, our equipment, including our canoe/kayak transport trailer and USRC canoes and kayaks are available for use free of charge for members of the USRC River Runners. For all USRC float trips, the USRC River Runners will coordinate shuttling trip participants between the beginning and end points of all excursions. We hope that you will be able to join. Just send an email to Scott Hays at [riverrunners@sangamonriver.org](mailto:riverrunners@sangamonriver.org).

## Upcoming Float Trips

Look for upcoming float trips through the end of November as weather and river conditions permit. The Sangamon River has been running low as we move into drier fall weather. Plans include the Annual "Take It Outside" Black Friday Float for the Friday after Thanksgiving. A float trip will also be scheduled for the first Sunday in November. Float trips will be announced and coordinated through the USRC River Runners. Sign-up for our email list by contacting Scott Hays at [riverrunners@sangamonriver.org](mailto:riverrunners@sangamonriver.org) for more information. You may also keep up to date on float trips and other USRC events through our website at [sangamonriver.org](http://sangamonriver.org), as well as our Facebook page. Hope to see you on the river soon.



## 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).



## 2021-22 USRC Board and Leads

Mike Daab – President  
Mary Stech – Vice-President/Volunteer Coordinator/Hospitality Coordinator  
Joe Niernberger – Secretary/Natural Areas Coordinator/Roadside Clean-up Coordinator  
Bart Duesdieker – Treasurer  
Scott Hays – Board Member/USRC River Runners Coordinator  
Bruce Colravy – Board Member/Citizen Science Coordinator/Communications Director/ Newsletter Editor  
Elizabeth Kirby – Board Member  
Phil Hult – Board Member  
Joey Anthony – Board Member  
Michael Lambert – Web Master

## Feature Fauna >>>

### Belted Kingfisher: *Megaceryle alcyon*

The Belted Kingfisher is a year-round resident of Illinois. Typically seen along lakes, ponds, and streams, its diet consists primarily of fish that are caught by plunging at high speeds head-long into the water. They sit on a perch or hover over the water waiting for a small fish to appear just under surface. The Belted Kingfisher does eat other animals, such as crayfish, frogs, tadpoles, small mammals, young birds, and lizards. Bones, scales and other indigestible parts are coughed-up later in pellets.

This medium sized bird is commonly seen along the Sangamon River. They exhibit reverse sexual dimorphism, which is to say that the female is the more brightly colored of the species. Both males and females incubate the eggs. They also share feeding responsibility of the hatchlings.



The Belted Kingfisher, with its slate blue and orange colors, was nominated to be the new University of Illinois mascot. Last year the UI Senate vote 105 – 2 in favor. Because the vote is advisory only, proponents must now work to gain acceptance with the alumni and others within the university community before it will become the official mascot of the University of Illinois.

# Freshwater Mussels

## POP QUIZ...

### What's in Your River?

The mussels surveys are finished for the season. This is an opportunity to see how much you remember. All of the mussels in the quiz were found during this year's surveys. Good luck.



- a. Elephant Ear
- b. Threeridge
- c. Fluted-shell
- d. Washboard



- a. Fluted-shell
- b. Pimpleback
- c. Pistolgrip
- d. Threeridge



- a. Pimpleback
- b. Deertoe
- c. Wartyback
- d. Round Pigtoe



- a. Pink Heelsplitter
- b. White Heelsplitter
- c. Pink Papershell
- d. Fragile Papershell



- a. Plain Pocketbook
- b. Giant Floater
- c. Fawnsfoot
- d. Fatmucket



- a. Purple Wartyback
- b. Three-horned Wartyback
- c. Mapleleaf
- d. Rock Pocketbook

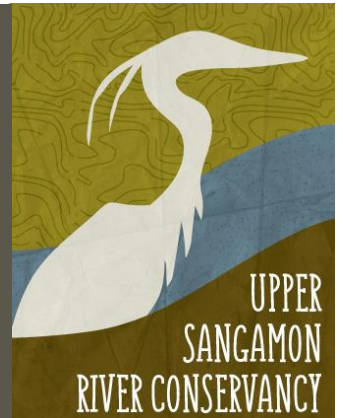


- a. Pink Papershell
- b. Pink Heelsplitter
- c. Fragile Papershell
- d. White Heelsplitter



- a. Plain Pocketbook
- b. Fatmucket
- c. Round Pigtoe
- d. Deertoe

Quiz Answers: 1. (b), 2. (c), 3. (a), 4. (d), 5. (d), 6. (b), 7. (a), 8. (a)



### Upcoming Events >>>

## 2021 Fall Calendar

*Adopt-a-Highway Clean-up*  
Museum of the Grand Prairie  
900 N. Lombard  
**Oct 24 – 9am-11am**

*Natural Areas Workdays*  
Mahomet Greenway Park  
Weekly Workdays - 10am - 12am

**Oct 14, 21, 28**  
**Nov 4, 11, 18**  
**Dec 2, 9, 16**

*Monthly Workdays -10am-1pm*  
**Oct 30**  
**Nov 20**  
**Dec 18**

*Recreational Paddle*  
**Oct 10** – 9:30am – Lake of the Woods canoe/kayak launch (near Izaak Walton Cabin)  
**Nov 7** – Time and Place TBD  
**Nov 26** – Time and Place TBD  
For details contact Scott Hays at [riverrunners@sangamonriver.org](mailto:riverrunners@sangamonriver.org)

Upper Sangamon  
River Conservancy

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