

*Sangamon River Clean-Up*  
*Mussel Season Wrap-Up*  
*Greenway Progress Report*  
*USRC Receives VSN Award*  
*2022-23 USRC Board Members & Leaders*



**Recreation \* Stewardship \* Citizen Science**

# USRC

## Newsletter



**Breaking news >>>**

## **Elizabeth Koning wins Sangamon River Duck Race**

**11th Annual Fundraiser Event**

This year marked the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sangamon River Duck Race. All proceeds for the race go toward supporting the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy and their many activities. There were 735 duck chances sold this year; a record number for race. Tamara Ducey was the Duck Race coordinator. Thank-you Tamara and everyone else who contributed to the great success of the event.

### **2022 Sangamon River Duck Race Winners**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place - Prize: \$500.00 cash  
-Winner: Elizabeth Koning  
-Donated by: First Financial Bank
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place - Prize: Kayak & Paddle (value \$250,00)  
-Winner: Brad Roof  
-Donated by: USRC
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place - Prize: \$100.00 cash  
-Winner: Ryan Grussing  
-Donated by: Mary & Glenn Stech
- Last Place - Prize: Duck in 2023 Race  
-Winner: Alaina Hershberger  
-Donated by: USRC



## **Work Days Pause at Greenway**

### **First Sweep of Honeysuckle Nearly Complete**

*USRC workdays will return to Sangamon River Greenway Park in early 2023*

USRC volunteers, under the leadership of Joe Niernberger, resumed their efforts in September to remove invasive honeysuckle from the Sangamon River Greenway Park in Mahomet. Joe has coordinated the removal efforts for the past few years. He and his small, yet determined, group of USRC volunteers have now completed their first sweep of the dense thicket of honeysuckle in the Mahomet Greenway. The weekly workdays have made tremendous gains over the past year. Volunteers cut the large honeysuckle and pulled the smaller ones by hand or with the help of the Extratigigator, a tool for prying plants out of the ground. The brush piles are burned during scheduled monthly workdays. September and November monthly workdays resulted in the burning of 18 brush piles and some additional cutting.



Honeysuckle primarily invaded the wooded edge of the 20 most-western acres of the park. Interior areas had previously been only lightly disturbed. However, the eastern 10-acre portion of the park had been clearcut and was still in use as pastureland as recently as the 1970s. Those acres were heavily infested with honeysuckle with some areas having nearly 100% coverage. In 2018, the wooded edge of the park was cleared of honeysuckle and chipped, courtesy of Mahomet Landscapes. Since then, the work crews have been cutting away at the thickest of the honeysuckle and are now nearly complete in that effort. The next move will be for the crew to address issues with other invasives such as garlic mustard. If you are interested in helping with this project contact Joe Niernberger at [naturalareas@sangamonriver.org](mailto:naturalareas@sangamonriver.org).



# 2022 River Clean-up Report

*"Low water proved to be both blessing and curse, with lots of exposed trash for paddlers to pick up, but creating several low areas where watercraft had to be dragged ...", Scott Hays, USRC.*

Thirty-seven volunteers took part in the 2022 USRC Annual River Clean-Up. Volunteers removed an estimated 1.5 dry tons of garbage from the river channel along with 12 tires. Water levels were low this year, which makes it easy to locate and remove garbage, however it creates difficulty in transporting it down river. "Low water proved to be both blessing and curse," explains USRC River Clean-up Coordinator with lots of



Coordinator Scott Hays. "It provides lots of exposed trash for paddlers to pick up, but it leaves several low areas where watercraft has to be dragged through and lots of debris to cross over that might normally be submerged." In spite of the challenges Scott goes on to say that, "We had a great time during our 2022 Sangamon River Cleanup. We had excellent turnout, in particular support from our young people at the University of Illinois Wildlife Society. It was nice to see a full contingent of canoes and kayaks setting off downriver."

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District has been an important partner with all USRC activities and the river clean-up was no exception. Peter Goodspeed, Director of Natural Resources, along with his crew provided both land and on-water support. "The Champaign County Forest Preserve



is ever grateful for the river cleanup events that the USRC organizes every year," says Goodspeed. "The Sangamon River flows through or adjacent to four of the seven forest preserves, a combined length of the river that stretches nearly 5.7 miles. The removal of litter, refuse, and other junk from the river improves the health and value of this aquatic ecosystem, which benefits both wildlife and people." Thank-you CCFPD.

## Scott Hays: USRC River Clean-Up Coordinator

Scott Hays is the long-time river clean-up coordinator for the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy. Scott took-on the role in 2012 when the USRC first began its large version of what had previously been just a handful of core volunteers' attempt to clean unnatural debris from the river. "In my mind," Scott says, "the more trash people see in a river, the more justified they feel in further trashing it. Our cleanups stop that cycle cold." During Scott's tenure as USRC River Clean-up Coordinator, volunteers have removed an estimated 18 dry tons of garbage from the river, including 131 tires. In addition to the environmental benefits, Scott believes that "getting trash out of the river is important because it improves paddlers' connection to nature." Thank-you Scott, for yet another successful river clean-up.



## 2022 Sangamon River Clean-Up >>>

### Local Organizations Answer the Call



University of Illinois Wildlife Society volunteers

The success of the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy is due to its committed volunteers and to the great partnerships that have been forged over the years with many wonderful organizations. The University of Illinois Wildlife Society (TWS) has been a partner with USRC river clean-ups, as well as citizen science opportunities, since 2012. This year the TWS brought 23 enthusiastic volunteers to the river clean-up. They accounted for a great deal of garbage collected. We are grateful to contributions that the Wildlife Society has made over the years and we are particularly appreciative of the work by TWS President Lauren Brunk, and TWS Trip Coordinator Kristina Schoenecker in their organizing and recruiting efforts that resulted in such a passionate group taking part in this year's clean-up. Thank-you TWS.

Kingfisher Kayaking, operated by Ben Thompson and his crew, is a local not-for-profit that offers kayak rental on east-central Illinois rivers in 5 watersheds, one of which is the Sangamon. Their mission is "to provide more affordable and accessible kayak rentals to the general public throughout the East Central Illinois rivers." They believe this "will create a more informed and engaged community that contributes to the health, science, and advocacy of East Central Illinois rivers through hands-on educational kayak tours and other conservation programs." Ben and his crew made a significant contribution to this year's clean-up effort as they were able to extend the length of the area cleaned by several miles. To inquire about opportunities at Kingfisher Kayaking visit [kingfisherkayaking.com](http://kingfisherkayaking.com) for more details.



Kingfisher Kayaking ready to launch



## Mussel Survey Update >>>

### Mussel Survey Update

## Citizen Scientists Respond to Call

Citizen science participation in the mussel project increased once again in 2022. This year 151 citizen science volunteers answered the call over the 4 surveys this year. They amassed a total of 1054 volunteer hours. This finalized the first visit to all eight sites in the study, with 4 sites completed in 2021 and 4 more sites in 2022. Thus far, the project has drawn 334 citizen scientists and 1883 volunteer hours. The mussels were collected, tagged, weighed, measured, and photographed before being released back to the stream segment in which they were found. In future years, recapture



will allow for a wealth of new information. The project hopes to determine the state of mussel populations in the Sangamon River, provide education to the public on freshwater mussels, and give non-professionals an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to science. The biggest highlight of this year's survey was finding a state endangered spike mussel (*Elliptio dilatate*) pictured to the left. According to INHS malacologist Sarah Douglass, it is the first record of the species found in the Sangamon watershed since 1991. Also, found in the surveys was the state threatened monkeyface (*Quadrula metanevra*) and species of most concern that included the fluted-shell (*Lasmigona costata*), the pistolgrip (*Tritogonia verrucosa*), and the rock pocketbook (*Arcindens confragosus*). Nineteen different species are represented within the 2796 individuals plucked from the waters.



## 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).



### 2022-23 USRC Board and Leads

Mike Daab – President  
Mary Stech – Vice-President/Volunteer Coordinator/Hospitality Coordinator  
Joey Anthony – Secretary/Nest Box Coordinator  
Bart Duesdieker – Treasurer  
Joe Niernberger – Invasive Species Coordinator/Roadside Clean-up Coordinator  
Scott Hays – Board Member/USRC River Runners Coordinator  
Bruce Colravy – Board Member/Citizen Science Coordinator/Communications Director/ Newsletter Editor  
Michael Lambert – Board Member/Web Master  
Phil Hult – Board Member  
Tamara Ducey – Duck Race Coordinator

## Breaking News >>>

## USRC Receives VSN Grant

For the third consecutive year the USRC has been awarded a grant from the Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network. This year's award of \$900 brings the 3-year total for the grants from VSN to \$3000. The grants have provided the USRC with tools and

equipment used for natural areas restoration work. The equipment purchased thus far includes chain saws, chaps, helmets, brush cutter, loppers, hand saws, gloves, and more. The new tools provide for greater safety and efficiency during restoration work performed by USRC volunteers. The USRC is grateful for the grants and especially for the wonderful support that we have received from Brooke Thureau, Volunteer Coordinator.

Currently, the USRC's natural areas project involves removal of invasive species from the Sangamon River Greenway Park at 1404 South Division St in Mahomet. If you would like to be a part of this effort by participating in natural areas restoration with the USRC, simply contact the coordinator for the Greenway project Joe Niernberger at [naturalareas@sangamonriver.org](mailto:naturalareas@sangamonriver.org).

# The Nature Conservancy

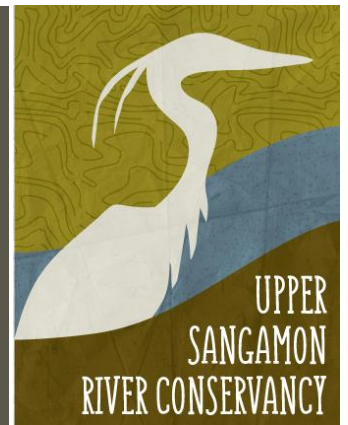




# Mussel Project to Be Subject of Short Film

## LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!

### *A Spotlight on Mussel Grubbing*



This summer during 3 mussel surveys, some volunteers were filmed in their roles as citizen scientists for the USRC/Illinois RiverWatch mussel project titled Freshwater Mussels of the Sangamon River: Community Science in Action. Perspective Visions, Inc. is creating the short film. The crew included photographer and director Jason Lindsey, producer Talia Watkins, and film crew members Kevin Lau and Ian Mitches.

The goal of the film is to put a spotlight on the 10-year mussel project, as well as, citizens science volunteers opportunities and the efforts by the USRC and RiverWatch to promote inclusion in their citizen science events.



USRC volunteer and Master Naturalist, Nina Carmichael attended all 4 mussel surveys this summer. In the film, she provides a description of her experiences as a citizen science volunteer and she offers a message for others who might consider delving into citizen science. Dr. Danelle Haake, stream ecologist and Illinois RiverWatch coordinator, Sarah Douglass, Illinois Natural History Survey malacologist, and Bruce Colravy, USRC citizen science coordinator also provide commentary in the film, which will come out late this year or early next year. Funding for the film comes from CUAHSI (Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrologic Sciences, Inc.)



**Volunteer Opportunities >>>**

## 2023 Events

### *Adopt-a-Highway Clean-up*

Contact Joe Niernberger at  
[adoptahighway@sangamonriver.org](mailto:adoptahighway@sangamonriver.org)

### *Sangamon River Showcase*

Contact Mike Daab at  
[president@sangamonriver.org](mailto:president@sangamonriver.org)

### *Natural Areas Workdays*

Contact Joe Niernberger at  
[naturalareas@sangamonriver.org](mailto:naturalareas@sangamonriver.org)

### *Recreational Paddles*

Contact Scott Hays at  
[riverrunners@sangamonriver.org](mailto:riverrunners@sangamonriver.org)

### *Nestbox Building*

Contact Joey Anthony at  
[joey.anthony11@gmail.com](mailto:joey.anthony11@gmail.com)

### *Invertebrate Monitoring*

Contact Bruce Colravy at  
[citizenscience@sangamonriver.org](mailto:citizenscience@sangamonriver.org)

### *Mussel Surveys*

Contact Bruce Colravy at  
[citizenscience@sangamonriver.org](mailto:citizenscience@sangamonriver.org)

### *Sangamon River Clean-up*

Contact Scott Hays  
[riverrunners@sangamonriver.org](mailto:riverrunners@sangamonriver.org)

Upper Sangamon  
River Conservancy

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