

McLean County Greenways News

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From the Chair

Michael Brown, Ecology Action Center

Curb or Recycle Your Leaves to Protect Water Supply

Fall brings cooler temperatures and changing colors on our trees. Why do these colors change? "Trees must replenish the chlorophyll because sunlight causes it to fade over time," says the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This is why we see beautiful orange, red, and yellow hues year after year. With millions of trees in Illinois, this adds up to billions of leaves!

Eventually, many of these beautiful leaves end up in our yards where we need to rake them up. Bloomington and Normal Public Works Departments both offer convenient curbside leaf collection service for residents. However, we should all take care to pile them up near the curb, but NOT in the street itself.

In addition to potentially blocking storm sewer inlets and causing flooding of your street, leaves can act as a storm water pollutant. Washed into the storm sewer system and eventually into creek, streams, and lakes, the additional nutrients from the massive amounts of leaves breaking down can remove oxygen from the water, suffocating plants and wildlife.

The Princeton Environmental Commission suggests alternatives beyond curbside pickup. Leaves are a perfect substitute for mulch. The leaves can be run through a mower and used on vegetable gardens or flower beds to hold in moisture or stop weeds from growing. Spreading leaves around your gardens will help replace nutrients in your soil, while also recycling your leaves.



Leaves also make great compost. Leaves are rich in nutrients which combine well in a compost pile. Shredding leaves and adding another nutrient like manure can be spread onto gardens and help them flourish. The pile should be kept moist and turned frequently. Luckily, leaves don't take a long time to decompose so within a matter of months you should have rich compost to spread onto your spring garden!

As a last resort, storing your leaves in bags until the springtime is also an option. It might be hard to find brown materials to combine with green materials when composting in the spring. Having a backup of fall leaves ensures the perfect compost ratio.

Please help us keep our local waters clean – either compost leaves or pile them neatly near the curb for collection. For information on composting, contact the Ecology Action Center at (309) 454-3169 or consult ecologyactioncenter.org.

“Light the Night” Draws 400

Despite cold and overcast weather, approximately 400 bicyclists attended “Light the Night” in Uptown



Normal on the evening of Sept. 11. The annual event promotes bicycle safety and is an opportunity for riders to acquire night vision equipment and have their bikes checked for maintenance. Representatives from the Town of Normal, Normal Police Department, Connect Transit, Bike BloNo, Friends of Constitution Trail, and McLean County Wheelers among others were on hand to answer questions and promote safe cycling

and transit in the Bloomington-Normal area and McLean County.

B-N Hosts IDOT Fall Planning Conference

For the first time over a decade, Bloomington-Normal hosted the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Fall Planning Conference. This conference is the primary annual event for the State of Illinois’ transportation planning agency. Approximately 125 transportation planners and engineers attended this year’s event at the DoubleTree Hotel by Hilton in Bloomington.

Topics included a panel of transportation representatives from the U.S. Department of Transportation, passenger transportation in Illinois, climate change, travel demand modeling, maximizing public input, and tracking transportation performance. Local planners and engineers from the city, town, and regional planning commission made presentations on “Bicycling in Bloomington-Normal” and “Intergovernmental Cooperation”. There was also a bicycling tour of the Constitution Trail and a tour of Uptown Station.

Lakes Fest 2014

Evergreen Lake and Lake Bloomington were the sites for the first Lakes Fest event on Sept. 27 and 28. Highlights included a fishing tournament, lake treasure hunts, boat rides, bat house construction, and a 5K race along with a raffle, with proceeds benefiting the Friends of Everbloom. Sponsors included McLean County, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, City of Bloomington, Wired2Fish, and McLean County Soil and Water Conservation District.

EAC Fundraiser Supports Local Efforts

Runners of all ages banded together on Sept. 26 and 27 to take part in the Fleet Feet Sports/We Care Cities fun run, 5 and 10-K races and half marathon. The events were held at G.E. Park in Bloomington, Constitution Trail, and Eastview Christian Church in Normal. The 13-mile half marathon was contested on a course that took place in both the town and city. The annual event helps raise funds for some of the programming conducted by the Ecology Action Center. Approximately 787 runners participated over the two days of the event.



Watershed Oversight Committee

The McLean County Watershed Oversight Committee met on Sept. 18. The Committee is currently meeting in subcommittees to update the Evergreen Lake Watershed Plan. The subcommittees are Agriculture, Urban, and Biological. Items such as nitrate levels, data gathering, aquatic surveys, stream gauging and monitoring and agricultural watershed conservation are among items being reviewed by the sub-committees. The group will meet again in January 2015 to discuss the progress of the sub-committees.

Constitution Trail Extension

A ½ mile extension of Constitution Trail from Kerrick Rd. to Ziebarth Rd. was completed in early October. The Constitution Trail now extends over 37 miles throughout the Bloomington-Normal area.

The Constitution Trail marked its 25th anniversary earlier this year with a celebration of the tremendous asset that the trail has become to the local community; and by recognizing the local officials and staff from Bloomington and Normal that helped make Constitution Trail a reality.



Greenways Information

If you are interested in becoming a member, or are interested in attending McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee meetings, please contact Rick Nolan at rnolan@mcplan.org or (309) 828-4331 ext. 26