

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Illinois Extension

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Expert guides lead educational hikes for local Extension volunteers

Education isn't just in a text book, in a classroom, or on a Zoom call. University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners enjoy taking educational hikes and learning about the history of the natural areas around them. The educational hikes with local experts help fulfill the volunteers' continuing education requirements in a fun, interactive, and hands on way.

"Late winter and early spring is a great time to get out and see the land while vegetation is dead and new growth is just starting to emerge," said Christine Belless, ag & natural resource program coordinator serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. "Master Naturalist and Master Gardener volunteers are eager to get outside, learn something new, and fellowship with one another."

On a recent hike held March 1, a group of 30 volunteers took part in a hike of Jubilee State Park with Ed Stermer, professor of geology at Illinois Central College. Stermer said, "I like taking hikes with my students before everything greens up."

He led the group to the top of the glacier moraine, which is 1000 feet above the valley floor. There the group visited sandstone and coal veins. Hikers experienced walking the creek bed, looking at rocks, picking them up, and touching coal. Stermer shared the story of how these rocks and minerals made it to Central Illinois and ended up here after Illinois' five glaciations, over 10,000 years ago and beyond.

"We have so many great natural areas to explore," explained Christine Belless, ag and natural resources coordinator. "There are many benefits to coordinating continuing education events at these sites throughout the year."

In addition to learning from the expert guide, EMNs learn from each other as they hike through the woods, prairies, and outdoor spaces. Each adventure gives EMNs the opportunity to explore sites that may be new to them, which gives them the opportunity to bring more public awareness to that location. It also sparks their interest in additional volunteer opportunities.

Belless shared that the educational hikes idea stemmed from the Naturalist Core Education training that takes place every year in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit. Educational hikes are an integral part of training. Local experts have led training groups on educational hikes at Rocky Glen, Tawny Oaks, Spring Creek Preserve, Dickson Mounds, Henry Allen Gleason Preserve, Chautauqua, and many other natural areas within the four counties.

For more information on future educational hikes and Naturalist Core Education training, visit extension.illinois.edu/fmpt.



Photo by Dina Pettit, Extension Master Naturalist

Ed Stermer, ICC geology professor, recently lead a hike for University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners at Jubilee State Park. Educational hikes are an important part of training and continuing education for Extension volunteers.

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