

*The noblest task that confronts us all today is to leave this country unspotted in honor and unexhausted in resource...  
I conceive this task to partake of the highest spirit of patriotism.*  
- Stewart L. Udall

## **Veterans Conservation Corp Team Forms at Volo Bog State Natural Area in Ingleside Moraine Hills State Park & McHenry Dam in McHenry**

The Veterans Conservation Corp is forming a volunteer team at Volo Bog State Natural Area, Moraine Hills State Park & McHenry Dam, a complex of Illinois Department of Natural Resources sites in western Lake County and eastern McHenry County. A cooperative effort of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the VCC provides opportunities for veterans to continue serving their country by assisting with projects at our state parks and natural areas.

Seven veterans attended the October 1<sup>st</sup> inaugural meeting held at Volo Bog State Natural Area. While most were local, one participant came up from Chicago. The group's experience ranged from 2 years to 28 years of service to our country through Army, Navy & Air Force.

The group agreed that they wanted to "hit the ground running" and chose bird house building as their first project. They discussed ways to keep the group's momentum up through the winter months which led to a twist on the bird house concept - to cut and pre-drill the houses, then take them to Lovell and/or Hines Medical Centers to work with disabled residents for final assembly. The completed houses will then be used at the three IDNR sites to replace worn out bird houses and to expand some of the bird house trails. Other projects being considered are fishing with disabled veterans, invasive species control, habitat restoration, and fencing for a Leave No Child Inside project.

The youngest attendee, a US Navy vet, suggested that the Student Veterans of America would be a good resource through which to invite young vets whose experience is primarily through our conflicts in the Middle East. He suggested that VCC members invite other veteran friends to participate in one-day projects when they wouldn't necessarily wish to make an on-going commitment.

As there is currently no state money available for the VCC projects, the group discussed funding opportunities such as grants and potential support from the Friends of Volo Bog and Friends of Moraine Hills State Natural Area for specific projects.

The attendees discussed various approaches to frequency of meetings and project times - either monthly, quarterly or other. It was the consensus to start with monthly meetings featuring hands on projects at the core, but to also offer varied opportunities for participation, including an "as available" basis for some projects. Further, veterans were invited to join other on-going volunteer opportunities such as docenting at the sites' visitor centers, roving naturalist and weekend naturalist positions, and other areas of volunteer involvement at the IDNR sites.

Natural Resources Coordinator Stacy Iwanicki, who is acting as advisor to the group and liaison to the IDNR, emphasized how the VCC is bringing veterans from different generations and conflicts together around a common cause - protection and enhancement of the natural environment for Illinois' residents and beyond. For information on the VCC contact Stacy at 815-344-1294 or [dnr.volobog@illinois.gov](mailto:dnr.volobog@illinois.gov).

*Defense of our resources is just as important as defense abroad. Otherwise what is there to defend?*  
- Robert Redford

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