

CONSERVATION CONNECTION



MACON COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



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P: 217-877-5670 EXT 3
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3342 NORTH PRESIDENT HOWARD
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UPCOMING EVENTS

**29
SEP**

TREE SALE ORDER FORMS DUE

**08
OCT**

TREE SALE ORDER PICKUP AT SWCD OFFICE

**06
OCT**

FISH SALE ORDERS DUE (CARP ORDERS DUE 9/22)

**16
OCT**

FISH SALE ORDER PICKUP AT SWCD OFFICE

CONTENTS

- FALL FISH & TREE SALE
- COLD WATER FISH
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- NATIVE SEED SALE
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- FROST SEEDING
- WHAT'S IN MY CRP?

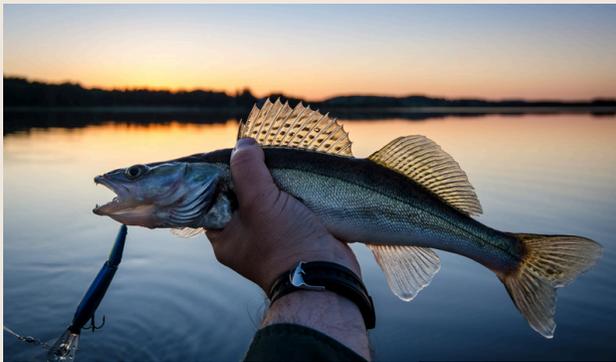


MCSWCD UPDATES

Macon County SWCD |

ARE COLD WATER FISH RIGHT FOR YOUR POND?

If you have ever considered adding cold water fish to your pond like pike, muskie, walleye, or perch there are a few factors that these fish will need. Your pond will need to be both large and deep enough for there to be a temperature gradient for them to have cold enough water in your pond. Not sure if coldwater fish are right for your pond? Consider visiting IDNR's fisheries website www.ifishillinois.org.



SPRING FISH AND TREE SALE

Hugh (SWCD office pet) wants you to take advantage of our Fall fish & tree sale this season! The fish sale includes game and management fish as well as pond supplies. The tree sale includes blooming trees, maples, oaks, walnuts, evergreens, larger trees, and fruit trees. See insert for more information.



Interested in becoming an associate member of the Macon County SWCD Board?

Our board is made up of 5 individuals with a vested interest in natural resource management and environmental stewardship. As an associate member, you would have the opportunity to participate in local conservation.

Call 217-877-5670 X3 for more information.

THE STATE OF THE USDA OFFICE

SWCD

- As of this May, the general assembly chose not to restore SWCD funding that was cut in half. For the 2025 fiscal year, SWCDs across the state will be functioning with only half the funding they normally receive.

NRCS

- In addition to not renewing IRA funded contracts, the NRCS dismissed all probationary employees (employees hired within a year). In the DeWitt/Macon/Piatt working group this included 3 employees, two from the Macon office. NRCS is working diligently to cover the missing staff and high work load in the Macon office.

FSA

- Macon County FSA remains the same.

Despite these difficulties we remain dedicated to working towards the conservation of vital natural resources and partnership with landowners, farmers, and other agencies.

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH!

Follow us on Facebook-**Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Visit our website-**www.maconcountyswcd.net**

Subscribe to our **e-newsletter** on our website!

FOLLOWING US ON FACEBOOK?

Within the last year we created a new Facebook page that you may not be following! Follow for MCSWCD updates! Our Spring Newsletter will also be issued digitally. If you would rather receive an e-newsletter



instead of a paper copy, visit our website to subscribe, maconcountyswcd.net.

RATHER RECEIVE AN E-NEWSLETTER?

NEW DRILL FOR RENT!

Macon County Soil and Water is excited to have recently purchased a 1006NT 10' End Wheel No-Till Drill that is now available for rent!

This Great Plains drill

is brand new and ready for work! The drill has a standard seed box and a small seed box and is great for putting in pollinators, filter strips, food plots and anything else you can think of. Rental price is \$100 for 24 hours of use with a \$100 cleaning deposit. Stop by the office to talk to SWCD staff about rentals and fill out a rental agreement form.



MACON COUNTY PARTNERS FOR CONSERVATION COST SHARE PROGRAM

Macon County Soil and Water has funds available for our FY26 Cost Share Money. If you are looking for 75% cost-share assistance for cover crops, pollinators, or another conservation practice call us at 217-877-5670 ext 3.

SPRING SALES



Need more fish and trees? See the insert flyer for more information on our fall fish and tree sales!

FESTIVAL OF SPRING



We had a blast talking to kids about pollinators and are excited to attend Harvest Festival this fall!

POND DEMO



We hosted a pond shocking demo this June, Read more about it on page 9.

MCSWCD'S YEAR SO FAR

PRAIRIES AND PATIENCE

Macon County SWCD |

ESTABLISHING A NATIVE PRAIRIE

JIMMY RADE- MOSSY OAK PROPERTIES ILLINOIS LAND & LIFESTYLE HABITAT BUILDERS

Prairies and Patience ...sounds like another country song, right? Well, it's also a couple words that should be used synonymously when "building" a prairie habitat. It's amazing that prairies were once so prevalent where we live right here in Macon County, IL. In this article, I'll touch on some pointers that may help you get started or help in your current pursuit of establishing your own "mini-prairie". These tips will be helpful for larger establishments as well, but the focus here is on a smaller scale.



The first step, and quite possibly the most important, is preparation. You have to prepare the ground for what you have planned for it. Just putting out seed without preparing the ground is like moving into a house that's got the last owners and all their stuff still laying around all over the place. Some people will disagree with tilling, but if you can use light tilling, that will help tremendously with the eviction process. Done in the heat of summer, this will burn up any of the cool season grasses and/or weeds that have established themselves there and it will also activate the next round of weed seeds that were lying dormant in the soil. Give it a couple weeks for those seeds to germinate and then till that again or hit it with some glyphosate (also controversial to some folks). If you have a much smaller scale prairie planned, you can also use clear plastic sheets (weighted down to keep from blowing away). This will create an unforgiving greenhouse environment that will scorch the unwanted plants below. Leave it there for a bit, as uncovering them too soon will just allow them to bounce back.

Now that the house is "cleared and cleaned" we can start moving in our things. Hopefully during your clearing process you've decided on what types of native species you want to introduce to your prairie and have read up on their needs. Many seed companies that offer native prairie plants will offer pre-mixed bags or even pre-mix them to order.

A couple reputable places to look for seeds are Pheasants Forever and Prairie Moon Nursery. They will typically have recommendations on the appropriate method on planting or sowing the particular seeds that you've purchased. These seeds come in all shapes and sizes and have different requirements that a person could write a whole book on, so do yourself a favor and talk to the person that is selling you the seeds and get their advice on timing and application.

So now you've got the house ready and you've moved your things in, it's time for you to enjoy the fruits of your labor, right?... wrong! Many native prairie plants will spend at least the first year of their life establishing their massive root system.

The prairie can be a dry, hot place in the summer and if you're going to survive, you've got to have deep roots. These plants know that and concentrate the majority of their energy (in the beginning) on establishment rather than reproduction. Your first "growing season" will likely be pretty disappointing... patience, my friend. Some may disagree, but I even recommend mowing at the highest level your mower will allow for that first year. There will still be weeds that try to establish and reproduce in that first year. They will outgrow your target prairie species on the surface that first year and likely double the second year if allowed to seed. Since your target species are doing most of their growing underground right now, mowing is mostly deterring weed reproduction. No need for weekly mowing and keep the deck high. In my personal opinion this will give your prairie some help against the old tenants trying to move back in. You will see some of your prairie plants getting started and its ok if you feel the need to not mow, just know that allowing competitors to seed will be harmful next year.



So now we're to our second growing season... year two! The first thing you'll probably notice is the Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Smooth Oxeye (*Heliopsis helianthoides*) if they were included in your seed mixture. Both of these flowers are aggressive and eager to get started. This will bring hope to those who've been eagerly anticipating signs of life. Many of your prairie plants don't become showy until late spring or early summer. The warm season grasses that are normally included in these mixtures (Big Bluestem, Indian Grass, Little Bluestem, etc.) aren't even close to their full potential at this point. You can definitely see that they're on their way by now. Some plants will seem like they just didn't show up to the party, but will oddly appear out of nowhere in year three. While many prairie perennials don't bloom until their second year, apparently some may decide to wait a little longer (for reasons that are likely specific to the location and situation). An example in the plot I have in front of my house is Wild Bergamot (*Monarda*

fistulosa). The leaves on this plant are very similar to that of Smooth Oxeye, so when not in bloom, can be easily mistaken for that. In year three, the Wild Bergamot decided it was bloom time and it really was a fantastic surprise. Not only that, but the Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) made it's flowering debut as well. This is also typically a second year bloomer that didn't flower until its third year for me. Perhaps it has to do with me mowing the first year, but that's just speculation. Moving into late July and early August, your big, warm season grasses are becoming very noticeable and really bringing your prairie to the picture you had in your head when you started this whole thing. You'll start noticing that the local wildlife has started using the site. Deer will bed there and browse on a number of the forbs. Bluebirds will be attracted to insects that will be there and goldfinches will be attracted to a number of the flowering plants, especially Lanceleaf Coreopsis. Moving forward, you'll want to do the occasional controlled burn and keep an eye out for invasive plants. Big enemies of areas like this will be shrubs and trees such as Autumn Olive, Callery Pear and Honeysuckle. Keep an eye out for these, as they can show up from out of nowhere and grow very fast.

As a final note, my advice here has been from my personal experience and I urge that you always understand what the rules and laws are for your area before you attempt to do any of this. If you are a part of any CRP, CREP or other government programs, be sure that you check with that department before taking action. Additionally, controlled burns should always be coordinated through your local fire dept. at minimum. Good luck and have patience!



ALL PHOTOS TAKEN BY JIMMY RADE.

QUESTIONS FOR JIMMY?



You can reach him at (217) 310-2088!



MOSSY OAK
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America's Land Specialist

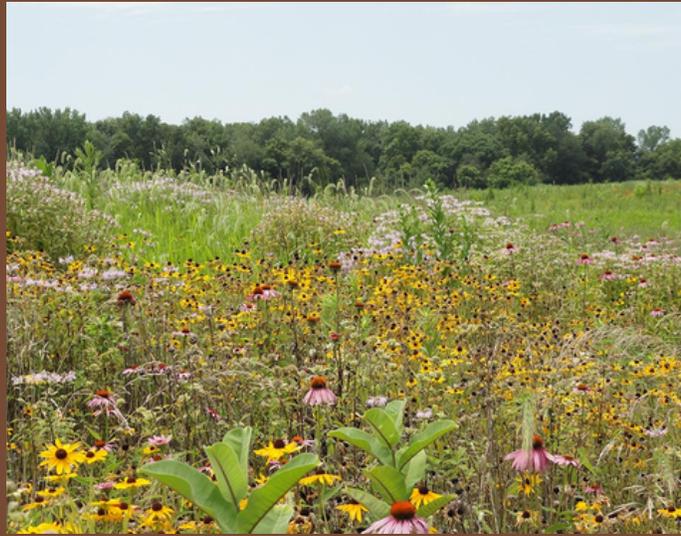
NEED NATIVE SEED?

Macon County SWCD has teamed with Pheasants Forever to get you the seed you need!



All seed is compliant with NRCS Standards.

To take advantage of this opportunity call us at 217-877-5670 X3



For a **limited-time only**, if you live in the Conservation Districts of DeWitt, Iroquois, Ford, Livingston, McLean, Macon & Piatt, we can help you determine if you would benefit from a

MANAGED DRAINAGE SYSTEM

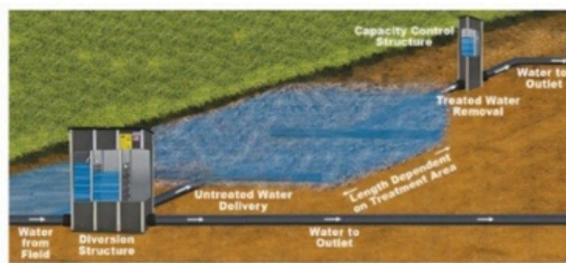


DRAINAGE WATER MANAGEMENT

Eligible producers will receive expert technical services, at no cost to them, for site assessment and selection, planning, and shovel-ready engineering design of select automated and manual conservation practices, **an estimated \$8000 value.**



SATURATED BUFFER

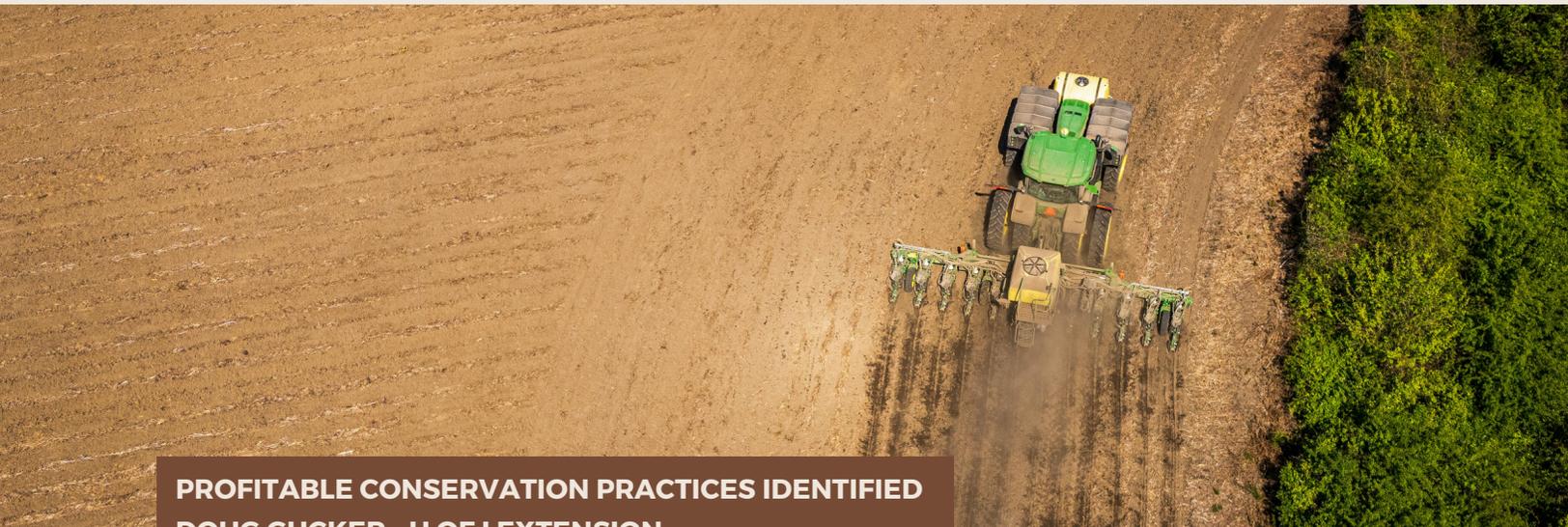


BIOREACTOR

This project is still in its early stages. More information to come! Questions can be directed toward MCSWCD or to Kate Schafer at ESE 515-771-2495

CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Macon County SWCD |



PROFITABLE CONSERVATION PRACTICES IDENTIFIED DOUG GUCKER - U OF I EXTENSION

In a recent publication, “10 Years of PCM Data – What Actually Pays on Your Farm”, it reviewed ten years of data from the Precision Conservation Management (PCM) program farms in Illinois, PCM identified two conservation practices that provided the most profit per acre for their farms with high Soil Productivity Ratings (SPR), with ratings of 133 and above. Those were tillage and nitrogen use.

Light tillage, either one-pass or two-pass, was the most profitable type of tillage ahead of corn on the high productivity Illinois soils over the ten years between 2015 and 2024. They compared: No-till, Strip-till, one-pass light, two-pass light, 2-pass moderate, and two plus tillage passes. For this, they defined “light tillage” as a low-disturbance tillage pass, and “moderate tillage” as one low-disturbance tillage pass and one high-disturbance tillage pass. The ranking of the highest to lowest average return to the “operator and land” per acre over the 10-year period was: One-pass light (\$352/A/Yr) > Two-pass light (\$348/A/Yr) > No-till (\$347/A/Yr) > Two-pass moderate (\$340/A/Yr) > Strip-till (\$322/A/Yr) > Two plus tillage passes (\$315/A/Yr).

For tillage ahead of soybeans on our high SPR soils, this study showed that tillage was important. The ranking of the highest to lowest average return to the operator and land per acre over the 10-year period was: Two-pass moderate (\$448/A/Yr), Two-pass light (\$446/A/Yr), One-pass light (\$444/A/Yr), Two plus tillage passes (\$432/A/Yr), No-till (\$427/A/Yr), and Strip-till (\$413/A/Yr). Since most of our Illinois soybean acres follow a corn crop, which has a high amount of residue covering the soil, this may explain the importance of tillage in higher soybean net returns per acre.

The second conservation practice that showed returns was nitrogen use - timing and nitrogen rate. Applying nitrogen “mostly pre-plant” showed the highest return as compared to “mostly side-dressed” > “greater than 40% fall applied” > 50% pre/50% side-dressed, > 3-way split. When it comes to the rate of nitrogen applied per acre, those farms applying at rates that were within the range prescribed by the MRTN, also known as the Corn Rate Nitrogen Calculator (cornratecalc.org), had the highest net dollar return per acre.

During these times of tight grain farming margins, it may be time to consider the cost of that tillage pass, or those “few extra pounds of N per acre. Remember, it's profit (net return) per acre that keeps you farming.

For more information and to RSVP, please contact Doug Gucker at University of Illinois Extension – Macon County Office at 217.877.6042 or e-mail dgucker@illinois.edu. You can go on-line to: <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/dmp/>. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this program, please call 217.877.604

FROST SEEDING

Macon County SWCD |



FROST SEEDING

HUNTER ANDERSON -
PHEASANTS FOREVER

Fall is possibly the best season of the year. The leaves begin changing color, Friday night lights are in full swing, roosters are being tracked by German Short Hair Pointers, and habitat

managers plant their projects for the following year. As the temperatures begin to cool, more opportunities arise to get habitats on the ground. A perfect time for dormant and frost seeding which is a method of establishing habitat or food stands through spreading seeds onto the soil in late winter or early spring. This takes full advantage of the freeze-thaw cycles that aid in working the seeds into the ground. However, there are three different seeding periods that we see most often. In addition to frost seeding, there are other seeding periods that occur, including Spring planting and the dormant seeding period. Spring, when most farmers and gardens are planted, is the most popular time for seeding. During the dormant seeding period, a producer should seed below 50 degrees. As it keeps the seed dormant and does not germinate before ground freezes.

While the fall season brings much positivity, there are many challenges that should be taken into consideration. Although frost seeding can have high success rates, it can be dependent on the environment they grow in. Site preparation is crucial. Bare soil and seed-to-soil contact is an absolute must for the success of this process. Once the site is prepared, we prefer broadcasting the seed rather than utilizing a seed drill. Timing is essential for the freeze-thaw process to be effective. The ideal window is between when the ground is frozen in the morning and thaws early to mid-afternoon. Adding to the complex decision-making process, the type of soil plays a role. Sandy soil can present issues as it is less likely to freeze based on its material.

High success rates are not the only advantage of frost seeding. This method can ultimately achieve the ideal planting depth for most native seeds, which is ¼ inch. This can be effectively achieved through the broadcast planting method. This method offers a maximum of growing days with significantly less concern of drought conditions. Frost seeding is recommended for farmers on a budget as it's considered cost-effective. This seeding method is highly recommended for farmers on a budget due to it being cost-effective. In many cases, planting is cheaper than the seed, since all you need is one's hands. Using a method like the natural seed dispersal process is a great way to establish habitat with limited soil disturbance. As it can be rewarding to see a positive impact on the habitat and wildlife populations using native grass, forbs and legumes.



Hunter is the Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist that services Champaign, Vermillion, Ford, Iroquois, Macon, Piatt and DeWitt counties. You can contact him at handerson@pheasantsforever.org or (435) 429-1687



WHAT'S IN MY CRP?

BIRD SPECIES THAT UTILIZE RESTORED HABITAT DELANEY HAUBNER - SWCD

It is possible that you have seen the Macon County SWCD truck in your neck of the woods. Odds are that we were out visiting a field of CRP near you on a maintenance check. While the main focus of these checks is to ensure that what was planted is growing and that invasives haven't taken over, we also get the pleasure of seeing new habitat and Illinois native species moving back in.

Depending on the practice that the field is placed in (pollinator habitat, filter strip, field border, etc.) different species of grasses and native plants are recommended to be planted to best meet the need of the practice and since different birds prefer certain habitat types it is a good sign to see specific birds utilizing an area.

Some of the birds we see are generalists that aren't picky when it comes to habitat type. In most ag fields you will likely see killdeer (1), barn swallows (2), and red-winged blackbirds (3). Killdeer lay their nests on bare/gravelly ground often in lanes or between row crops, barn swallows feed on flying insects near ag fields, and red-winged blackbirds nest in cattails and other dense vegetation near waterways, ditches and creeks. You may even see a red-tailed (4) or red-shouldered hawk (5) looking down from a telephone pole for its next meal. These are the birds you can expect to see almost every time you visit the field. In pollinators and other grasslands we see a little bit more variety. Seed eaters like Dickcissels (6) and American Goldfinches (7) forage in the native grasses, a Common Yellowthroat (8) can be heard singing "witchety-witchety-witchety", and sparrows like Field Sparrows (9) can be seen flitting on field edges. In habitats that hold more water like wetlands, creeks, and farm ponds we see lots of Swamp Sparrows (10) and even Northern Waterthrushes (11) when they pass through.

Restoring native habitat brings life back to our fields—literally. Take a walk, watch the birds, and discover the wildlife that thrives when we care for the land.



CONGRATULATIONS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS!

Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District would like congratulate the 4 students who received scholarships through the Community Foundation, Lucas Clapp, Lacey Bourn, Jacob Clapp, and Peyton Peters!

Many of these students have received this scholarship before and we are thankful for the opportunity to continue supporting them as they pursue degrees and careers in the agricultural industry!

POND SHOCKING DEMONSTRATION HOSTED JUNE 2025

Macon County Soil and Water hosted a Pond Demo this June at Passion Community Church.



Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District and a group of about 50 pond owners, fishermen, and nature enthusiasts were led by Jim Garavaglia (IDNR Fisheries Biologist) who spoke to the group about pond management and fish stocking. This presentation was followed by a trip around the pond to shock and gather fish from the pond. We are thankful to Jim, Passion, and our sponsors for making this event possible! We are hoping to host another one next summer so be on the look out for information on our Facebook page!



LOOKING FOR OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN MACON COUNTY?

SEPT

06

2025 BARn Crawl
Macon County
Fairgrounds Fundraiser

SEPT

11

September Tour
Macon County Lady
Landowners

SEPT

18

Band-a-Thon
Illinois Raptor Center
Bird Banding Station

SEPT

28

2025 Prairie Pedal
Macon Co Conservation
Foundation Fundraiser

OCT

11

Fall Harvest Festival
Macon County
Conservation District

MACON COUNTY SWCD



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SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ARTICLE AUTHORS!

Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District is thankful for partnership with others in conservation, people who are experts in their fields.

Have any ideas for things you would like to see included in our newsletter? We are open to suggestions!



**WANT TO SEE YOUR COMPANY HERE? CALL US OR EMAIL US FOR AD INFORMATION!
217-877-5670 EXT 3**

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THE SPRING EDITION MARCH 2026