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The Shawnee National Forest will host a steward training course starting this fall.

Work center offers trail steward courses

MURPHYSBORO — The Shawnee National Forest, along with Shawnee Community College and the University of Illinois Extension, will host the first Master Trail Steward Volunteer Trails Training Course this fall.

The fall trail stewardship clinics are part of a larger effort to train and mentor volunteers to become active land stewards for the Shawnee National Forest. Trail volunteers will have the opportunity to engage and learn valuable skills of trail construction during any one of the trail clinics at the Murphysboro Work Center. The clinics allow participants to build trail, rehabilitate and re-handle primitive hand tools and work with pack stock to haul gravel.

No skills are required, except excitement and dedication to the project at hand.

The stewardships begin Sept. 27 with basic trail tread construction. On Oct. 4, students will learn to work with pack stock to haul gravel and on Oct 25, advanced trail tread construction, including grade dips, layout and design, will be discussed. Basic trail tread construction experience is not required.

The course will continue on

Nov. 8 with a lesson on construction of trail features with natural materials and will wrap up on Nov. 22 with students learning how to rehabilitate and re-handle primitive hand tools.

Each class will be from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Murphysboro Work Center. Volunteers must wear long pants and boots. A water bottle and lunch is also recommended.

The main focus of these courses is to train and mentor interested volunteers in the fine art of planning and implementation of a volunteer work project on trails in the Shawnee National Forest, as well as at other sites throughout the region and nation. A booklet of modules geared towards the history, sustainability of natural resources, trip and project planning, tool care, basic trail tread construction and training in advanced trail feature construction will be included in the course, plus a CD of interactive video and documents related to modules designed for this curriculum.

Backcountry living skills (e.g., setting up camp, disposing of gray water and learning survival skills), environmental education, team building and

group cohesion skills will augment trail building knowledge and skills.

The goal of the course is to help participants become proficient trail crew leaders or volunteer leaders on a one-day scale, as well as during extended weekend or week-long projects in the backcountry.

Participants in the course are expected to complete each module and demonstrate their proficiency in the skills as they are taught, as well as spend time on their own completing mini-assignments related to each module. A final requirement of the course is to plan and implement a volunteer workday using the skills obtained throughout the duration of the course.

Completion of the course will be recognized with a certificate from Shawnee Community College.

This course is helpful for volunteers interested in becoming volunteer leaders, as well as future and current land managers that wish to learn the proper and practical skills for managing and constructing sustainable trails.

Contact the Murphysboro Work Center at 687-1731 for more information and to sign up.