Edition # 31 January 2026

NEWAYGO COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

NCEC NEWS

The Environmental Resource Hub for Newaygo County

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"Supporting the beauty and sustainability of the Newaygo County environment through Information, Education, and Advocacy"

January NCEC & Ally Events

Introduction to Wild Ones and Native Seed Stratification

Saturday 1/31
10am

Fremont Area District Library
104 E Main St, Fremont, MI 49412

Oceana, Newaygo, and Muskegon counties are joining forces to bring together passionate native plant enthusiasts across our region! Join us for the Muskegon KICK-OFF EVENT with Acting President Connie Crancer. We'll be discussing upcoming events as well as native seed stratification techniques that you can implement at home. All attendees will take home FREE native seeds with instructions on stratification and what to do afterwards. No registration is required.

More Info

West Michigan Conservation Network
NATIVE PLANTINGS ON A SHOESTRING
January 30, 2026
Time: 2 - 4 PM
wmconservation.net

Native Plantings on a Shoestring Budget

Friday 1/30
2pm-4pm
Wisner Center, Cascade Library
2870 Jacksmith Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

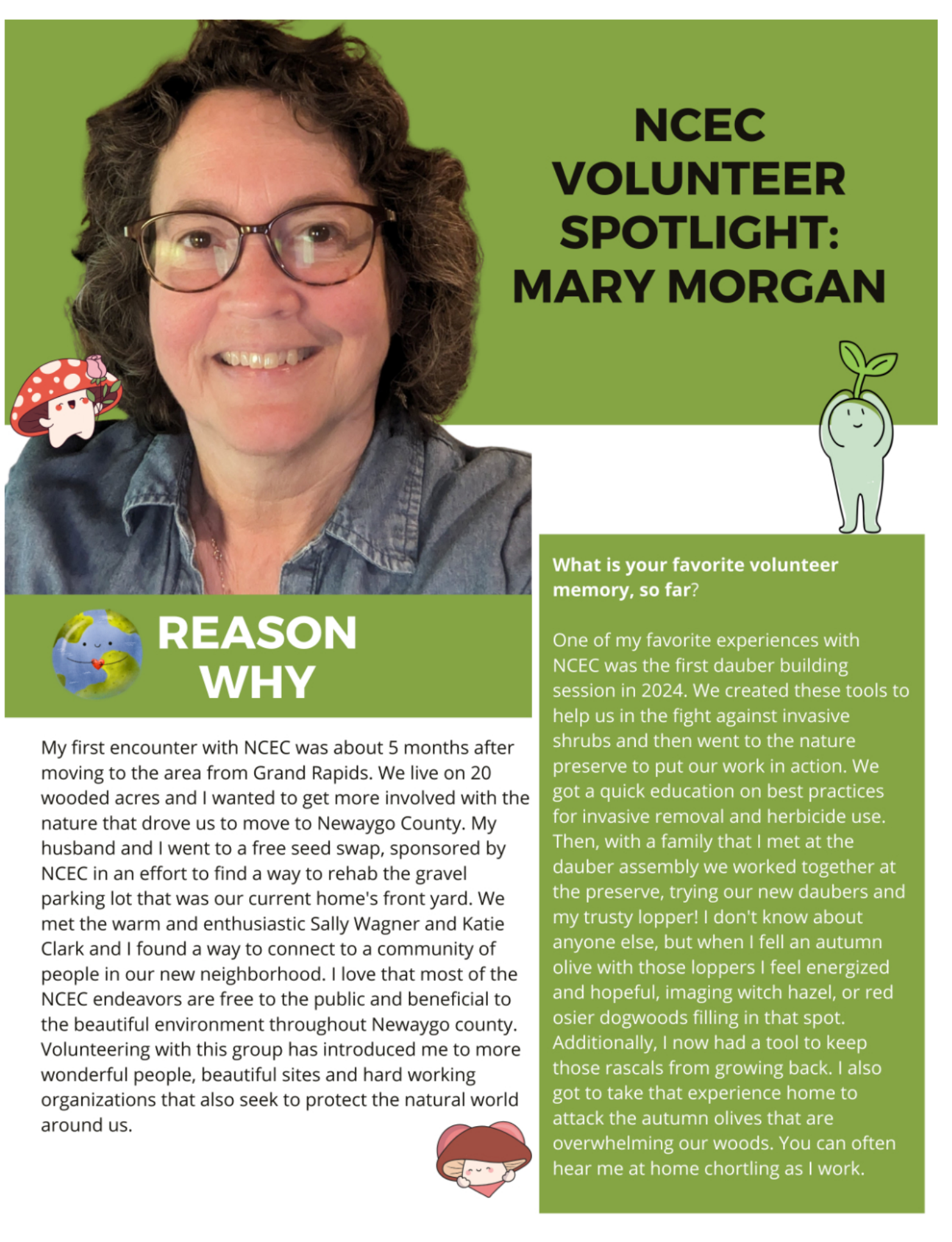
Interested in planting native plants on your landscape, but don't have deep pockets? This workshop will help you plan out a place for native plants AND grow your own! Natives are very easy to grow and take no special equipment. But they do have special needs. This method of winter sowing will yield dozens of native starts with little cost or effort. All materials provided. Space limited. This event is co-hosted by West Michigan Conservation and NCEC

Free Registration

Native Plant Seed Sowing: Winter Milk Jug Greenhouse

Saturday 2/7
10am-12:30pm
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

In this workshop, you will create a mini-greenhouse from a common milk jug and sow native plant seeds in it. You will take your mini-greenhouse home, place it outside for the rest of the winter, and watch the seeds sprout and grow as the weather warms.



NCEC VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: MARY MORGAN

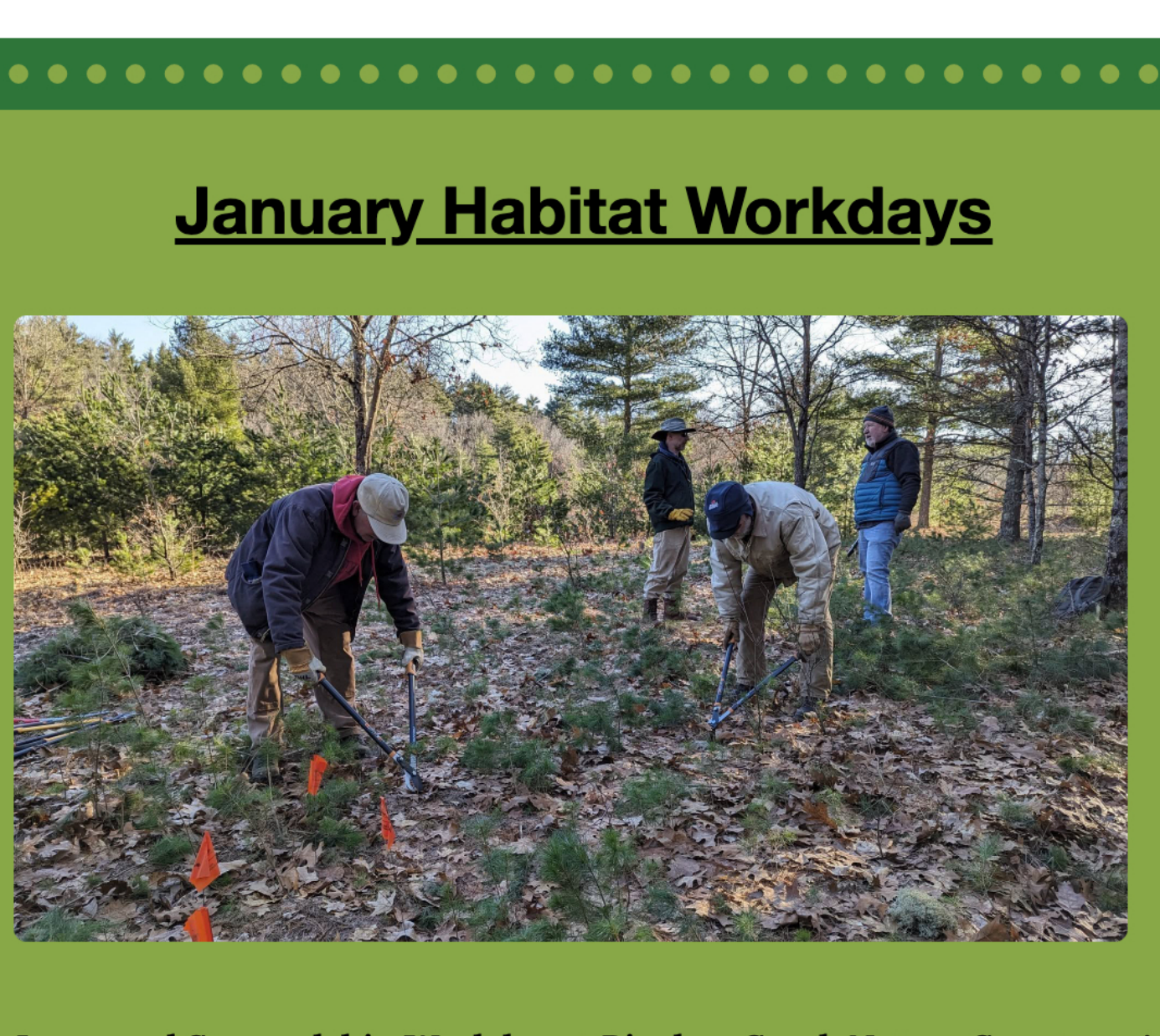
REASON WHY

My first encounter with NCEC was about 5 months after moving to the area from Grand Rapids. We live on 20 wooded acres and I wanted to get more involved with the nature that drove us to move to Newaygo County. My husband and I went to a free seed swap, sponsored by NCEC in an effort to find a way to rehab the gravel parking lot that was our current home's front yard. We met the warm and enthusiastic Sally Wagner and Katie Clark and I found a way to connect to a community of people in our new neighborhood. I love that most of the NCEC endeavors are free to the public and beneficial to the beautiful environment throughout Newaygo county. Volunteering with this group has introduced me to more wonderful people, beautiful sites and hard working organizations that also seek to protect the natural world around us.

What is your favorite volunteer memory, so far?

One of my favorite experiences with NCEC was the first dauber building session in 2024. We created these tools to help us in the fight against invasive shrubs and then went to the nature preserve to put our work in action. We got a quick education on best practices for invasive removal and herbicide use. Then, with a family that I met at the dauber assembly we worked together at the preserve, trying our new daubers and my trusty lopper! I don't know about anyone else, but when I fell an autumn olive with those loppers I feel energized and hopeful, imaging witch hazel, or red osier dogwoods filling in that spot. Additionally, I now had a tool to keep those rascals from growing back. I also got to take that experience home to attack the autumn olives that are overwhelming our woods. You can often hear me at home chortling as I work.

January Habitat Workdays



Inaugural Stewardship Workday at Bigelow Creek Nature Sanctuary!

Saturday 1/31
10am

Bigelow Creek is the newest property in Brooks Township under MNA's stewardship! Join us in the field for a property tour, some tree and brush thinning, and brush pile burning if conditions allow! Bring weather appropriate clothing, solid foot-wear, work gloves, a water bottle, and loppers (optional). No obligation to stay the whole time, you can come and go as needed. Check Facebook or the NCEC calendar for cancelation information in the case of inclement weather.

Updates on Facebook

Help Restore the Newaygo Barrens — Call for Ongoing Volunteers!

The Newaygo County Environmental Coalition (NCEC) is excited to partner with the Michigan Nature Association (MNA) on a critical Newaygo Barrens Restoration Project, made possible through a **Michigan DNR Wildlife Habitat Grant**. This multi-year effort will improve and protect some of Newaygo County's most ecologically valuable natural areas — and volunteers are essential to making it happen.

Restoration activities will take place at several key sites, including Coolbough Natural Area, Bigelow Creek Sanctuary, and Karner Blue Sanctuary. The project focuses on thinning invasive and overgrown woody vegetation, restoring open savanna and prairie habitats, and supporting rare and sensitive wildlife species. **While the grant provides critical funding, it also requires a local match — and a significant portion of that match comes from volunteer hours. Every hour you give counts toward this effort, including your driving time to and from these volunteer activities.**
No matter your experience level, your help is meaningful. **Training and guidance will be provided as needed, and work will take place throughout the grant period, which runs through October 2027.** If you're interested in volunteering or would like to learn more, please contact NCEC or watch for upcoming volunteer opportunities in our newsletter and on our website.

Together, we can restore, protect, and celebrate the Newaygo Barrens. Thank you for being part of this vital work.

Just like native seeds need a few months of stratification under the snow to grow, we humans need time to rest and reflect as well to keep our creative juices flowing and our minds sharp. Our team is taking the month off from writing new content as we plan and prepare for the year ahead. We invite you to reread this article from last year to help guide and inspire your own time for reflection.

What seeds have been stirring in you that you want to tend and water in 2026? How is the environment around you inviting you to participate in, protect, and connect with our beautiful outdoors?

The Dreaded New Year's Resolution

written by: Mary Morgan

Here it is again, the yearly resolution ritual. It begins by making an inventory of the ways we believe we fell short of our self proclaimed goals the previous year. Next, we formulate our intent to improve. To keep ourselves honest, we publicly proclaim our resolution. After one to two weeks of firm resolve...we backslide a bit. Eventually we completely abandon our goal. Why do we do that? Perhaps it's because our resolutions often focus on sacrifice or discomfort. "I vow to lose weight" translates to eat less, sweat more. "I will save more money" becomes don't buy that new outfit, or no concert tickets this year.

The same is true when we look to environmental resolutions. Reducing our carbon footprint can mean traveling less, eating less beef, buying less stuff. Sacrificing convenience, comfort or happiness can lead us to feel negatively about our resolutions and we eventually abandon them. But behavioral scientist Jiaying Zhao finds that we can best form lasting habits when we find happiness in our actions. She collaborated with Elizabeth Dunn to create an approach that leads to more satisfying resolutions. Their strategy embraces actions that lead to happiness matched with actions that meet our goal. In their case, substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The combination led to the Happy Climate Approach. You can hear her describe this endeavor in her TED talk: **How to Feng Shui Your Fridge - and Other Happy Climate Hacks.**

Using this approach we can examine the ways a resolution to "engage more with our environment" can bring us happiness. Beginning at home, reusing a plastic gallon milk jug can bring great joy and reward through the year. That is when you reuse that jug to plant native seeds this winter. Come spring you will have lovely native plants to enrich your own yard, for free (I might add). Join NCEC and WMCN on Jan 30th for a **workshop** that will teach you how. Another home based environmentally positive action is reducing the thermostat setting. But how do you make that fun? Here's the ingredients to creating joy in a cool house. Blanket, loved one and a warm drink...

Moving outside of our home, we can engage with the environment by simply taking a walk. Add a dog and you have happiness. If your dog is like ours, she loves the outdoors and her joy is infectious. To take it further, the dog and I pick up trash on our hikes. That action even has an official name, "plalking" (Look it up **here**.) And it just gets better. You can continue this positive activity by taking a walk at many of the Newaygo County area nature preserves and parks. NCEC engages with various local allies supporting those natural interfaces, like the Newaygo Conservation District, North Country Trail Association, Michigan Nature Association and many more.

Now that you found happiness hiking in the great outdoors, you can add to that delight by directly acting to improve the nature around you. Join in the effort to reclaim our native habitats from invasive species that are threatening native health. I, for one, get great joy removing autumn olives and bush honeysuckles. I also enjoyed meeting others who share my joy at local work days for ally organizations in West Michigan. If hacking thorny shrubs isn't your cup of tea, try picking autumn olive berries in the fall and making jelly. It's really quite good and think of all the seeds that you prevented from germinating. Or you could simply write a check to your favorite environmental group. You can go **here** to donate to NCEC or take a look at our **list of allies** for more opportunities to share the joy.

As you contemplate these individual actions I invite you to read Jiaying Zhao's words regarding their impact:

> **"I know that some of you may think that individual actions may seem trivial without large scale system change. I get that. But let me tell you how I think about this as a behavioral change expert. Our individual actions do matter because they embody our values and our care for the planet to other people. They can spread like a ripple effect to instigate collective action. They send a market signal to businesses and they can trigger broader structural institutional change. So yes, we do need system change, but we also need individual behavior change. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."**
>
> **Jiaying Zhao**

Now that makes me even happier.

2026 Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol Virtual Training Series

VERNAL POOL PATROL
FREE VIRTUAL TRAINING SERIES
Tuesday Evenings 6-8PM EST
February 10th
Vernal Pool Introduction
February 17th
Vernal Pool Ecology
February 24th
Vernal Pool Monitoring
Michigan Natural Features Inventory
Michigan Vernal Pools Partnership

Learn more about vernal pools and how you can help monitor and protect these fascinating and important wetlands across Michigan! This virtual training will provide information and resources to those interested in participating in the Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol or just interested in learning more about these important wetlands. The training will consist of three sessions presented on Tuesday evenings, February 10, 17, and 24 from 6:00-8:00 pm EST. If you are interested in participating in the Vernal Pool Patrol, please plan on attending ALL three sessions.

Register for the Training Series Here to Join the Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol!

What Else Can I Do?

This is our home. Help us protect our shared environment.

1. Share our website, posts, E-news with Newaygo Community members and Organizations.

2. Join a Team! about invasive species, native landscapes, and restoration opportunities.

3. Get involved with Environmental Advocacy.

4. Bring your skills and knowledge to NCEC.

5. Donate!

Contact NCEC

Environmental Allies are people, organizations, and departments who are actively doing the work of environmental education, promotion, protection, and recreation in the Newaygo County region.

Your organization can join the list of Environmental Allies by clicking here: **Environmental Ally Application.**

NCEC will promote your organization, events, activities and volunteer needs!
Click the button below to submit your event.

Ally Event Form

Your Support Makes A Difference

NCEC is a small but mighty 501c3 non-profit organization! We depend on your tax deductible donations to continue our work, and to help us grow with our Newaygo County Environment needs.

Donate

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