

Prairie Group General Meetings

Prairie Group meetings are held the second Wednesday of every month, 7:30 p.m. in the Bondurant Room of the Illinois Disciples Foundation, at the corner of Wright and Springfield, Champaign, unless otherwise noted.

Wednesday, January 15, 7:30 p.m.

Re-living the Fun Times with Pictures

Happy New Year! Escape winter's chill and join the Prairie Group as we re-live memories from past outings and vacations. Bring ten or so of your favorite photographs or slides from a trip (or trips) that you would like to share with the group. Just think, we can see the world in just one evening! Please come!

Wednesday, February 12, 7:30 p.m.

Winter Madness with a Twist!

Last year at our Winter Madness event, several new people volunteered their time and talents to help protect the environment. We'd like to repeat last year's success and invite you to join us for an evening of discussion and strategizing. This is your opportunity to contribute to the Prairie Group's efforts — through writing, organizing, and researching, or by bringing an environmental issue to the table. This year, we'll have an additional twist to the action: we plan to write letters to decision-makers, holding their "feet to the fire," and demanding they put the health of the public and the protection of our last wild places ahead of the profits for a few. Remember the elections of November 2002 and the likely impact the complete control of the federal government by the Republican Party will have on clean air, safe food, and wilderness. It's time to get cracking! See you there!

Wednesday, March 12, 7:30 p.m.

Springfield Update

Once again we'll feature Jack Darin, Illinois Chapter Director, who will share what's happening in Springfield and give us great tips on effective lobbying of our legislators. In addition, we plan to meet with Naomi Jakobsson, new State Representative for the Champaign-Urbana area, who will share her experiences and impressions regarding the likelihood of passing good environmental legislation this year. This will be a great opportunity to get the inside "scoop!"

And there's more — the Prairie Group will host a spring meeting to discuss energy issues. The Cheney Energy Plan, shelved at the time of this printing, will undoubtedly be resurrected next year. We plan a comprehensive presentation that will not only outline the devastating effects should that plan become law, but also how we can work together to demand an energy policy with a vision that includes more than oil rigs and smoke stacks. Stay tuned!

Illinois Energy Futures

by George Gore

Did you know Illinois gets about 50 percent of its energy from nuclear power and the rest from coal? Natural gas is growing and burns much cleaner than solid coal or even liquid oil. Studies on wind power in Illinois show a cost effective potential to provide about 10 percent of our power. Unfortunately, solar is not yet cost effective, but prices keep falling and perhaps oil and gas prices will skyrocket. Fuel cells and a hydrogen powered economy have tremendous long-term potential.

Meanwhile, Yucca mountain in Nevada is planning to open for nuclear waste in ten years; many nuclear plants are getting long-term operating permits reauthorized; and Congress approved a taxpayer subsidy of catastrophic insurance. Nuclear power doesn't seem to be going away, in fact there's reportedly talk of expanding Clinton nuclear power plant.

On the coal front, Illinois politicians keep talking about "clean coal" so we can stop importing western coal, reduce emissions, and create Illinois jobs. Far cheaper and more effective would be a comprehensive energy efficiency program, including combined heat and power, geothermal heat pumps (Illinois has great soils for this), more efficient appliances, cost incentives to save, etc. On a national level (extremely unlikely) such a plan could reduce our power consumption nearly 40 percent, closing old, inefficient and dirty power plants.

ONE EARTH, ONE CHANCE®

Prairie Notes

by George Gore, Chair

THANKYOU FOR VOTING

To everyone who voted in the recent elections: you made a tremendous difference. With your continued help, the environment will reap the rewards of better protection!

MARCH FUNDAPPEAL

The March fund appeal is the one time each year our Illinois Chapter and local Prairie Group ask for help. The slow economy is hurting Sierra Club's membership numbers at a time when we face our greatest challenges in the U.S. and our greatest opportunities in Illinois. In 2003, chapter funding for legislative work was cut nearly in half. Fortunately, other funds used only for conservation work replaced the cut. Your contributions are more important than ever: donations help fund important legislative work in Illinois and in Prairie Group. New opportunities to protect Illinois' environment are unprecedented, but we need your help to ensure this isn't a lost opportunity.

CALENDARS

Trent Shepard, local fund raiser extraordinaire, is again selling Sierra Club calendars. Order them before they sell out! Contact Trent at tshepard@prairienet.org or 344-2822 and help support Sierra Club's good cause.

GIFTMEMBERSHIPS

Forgot someone for the holidays? Need a birthday present fast? Give a Sierra Club membership. At least every other month your thoughtfulness arrives in the mailbox and you're helping educate about the environment and supporting a dedicated organization. It's win, win, win for all at www.sierraclub.org: click on "Join or Give."

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY CONSERVATION (CCC)

Marc Miller of Prairie Rivers Network recently convened several Champaign environmental groups to help us coordinate, plan, and share limited resources more effectively. We'll have new opportunities for policy making within the county, and get together for fun at each other's events.

ELECTION RESULTS

In Illinois, the Club's success was unprecedented, winning 66 of 69 endorsed races! Locally we endorsed Naomi Jakobsson and Tim Johnson. Their questionnaire response, interviews, and voting records factored into earning our endorsement and support, and their November win.

IS YOUR COUNTY SAFE?

The Illinois Department of Public Health has detailed statistical data about death rates by county and cause of death at www.idph.state.il.us. Click on health statistics and scroll down to "County Vital Statistics Tables" for information compiled through 1998: compare your county to the state average and other counties of interest.

CONSERVATION CONGRESS V UPDATE

This year the Illinois Department of Natural Resource's Conservation Congress went well, as six of the top ten proposals from our region for IDNR to focus on were clearly good for the environment. Four of ten delegates to state level came from environmental organizations. As their Sierra Club representative, I'll serve as the first alternate. Next year, the five state regions gather in Springfield and bring their top ten proposals to determine a consensus on which to forward to IDNR. The following year, IDNR explores proposals and reports back findings, often implementing suggestions such as environmental license plates, Conservation 2000, and the Ecowatch programs.

SHOW YOUR PATRIOTISM BY SLOWING DOWN

Going the speed limit saves gas and reduces oil imports. Longer-term, consider a more fuel-efficient car. If you're really motivated and in a city, walk, bike, skate, and use public transportation. As a bonus, we all get cleaner air.

CHAMPAIGN CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

In April, many of our group members will have a chance to vote in Champaign's City Council elections. We'll research and evaluate candidates for potential endorsement. If your city is having elections and you know about good or bad environmental candidates, please contact our political chair so we can share your insights with others.

ACTION ALERTS!

Sign up today for e-mail action alerts on important Illinois environmental issues! The legislature will soon be in session: we'll be busy trying to get good environmental bills signed into law. You can help by joining the Illinois Sierra Club Activist Network at www.illinois.sierraclub.org. Get local alerts from our PRAIRIE-ALERT e-mail listserv. Most legislators never hear from anyone except lobbyists about thousands of bills, so just a few people calling a specific legislator really does get their attention!

LEGISLATIVE ACTION THIS SPRING

Some of our goals include re-protecting isolated wetlands from developers, ending free water pollution permits, ensuring new subdivisions get sewage permits before houses go up, and restoring funding to protect more Illinois habitat (we rank 46th of 50 states for the amount of public land per capita). Sign up to receive action alerts today (see above) so you can help us help the environment!

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Got an urge to speak up? Send it here for publication!

VOLUNTEERS WANTED: GET INVOLVED

If you'd like to protect your backyard, contact us. We'll help you make a difference while having fun!

Political Forum — October 9, 2002

by Alice Englebretsen

The Prairie Group embraced a new challenge during the recent elections. We interviewed all political candidates running for Illinois State House and Senate and the U.S. Congress to determine their positions on environmental issues. In order to effectively make endorsements, we sponsored a Political Forum featuring the following candidates: Carl Estabrook and Josh Hartke (Tim Johnson was in session and unable to attend) for the 15th Congressional District; Tom Berns and Naomi Jakobsson for the Illinois House 104th District; and Dan McCollum and Rick Winkle for the Illinois Senate 52nd District.

Approximately 50 people attended the Oct. 9, 2002 event at the Champaign Public Library. For about two hours, there was a spirited Q&A period, moderated by Kirstin Replogle. Each candidate was asked to make an introductory statement, followed by questions addressed to all or certain individuals, as appropriate. Enviro-topics ran the gamut starting with a question addressed to the U.S. Congressional seat on Free Trade. State offices got questions on Open Space, Real Estate Transfer tax funding, and Sprawl. A question was posed about HB 2576 on the protection of isolated wetlands. Both Berns and Winkle voted against the Sierra Club-sponsored bill this past spring. All candidates supported the concept of protecting isolated wetlands, but Berns and Winkle felt the bill as presented was inadequately considered and written, and pushed through the state legislature in haste. They thought more public input was necessary. We'll definitely pay attention to what Jakobsson and Winkle do when a better, stronger bill is reintroduced into the legislature.

The audience was invited to submit written questions to the candidates, and the session ended with a discussion of how each candidate would push for renewable energy in Illinois. Several mentioned encouraging alternative forms of energy, such as wind and solar. Each agreed that energy conservation (less fossil fuel usage, more bike paths and sidewalks) must be built into future legislation.

Sierra Club endorsed Naomi Jakobsson for State Rep.; we're certain she'll do a good job in supporting environmental concerns. Though we didn't make endorsements for the State Senate seat, we're encouraged that Winkle is a good listener and wants to do right by his district and the environment. Johnson was endorsed based on his support on several pro-environment bills in Congress; he voted NO on drilling for oil in the Alaska National Wilderness Reserve.

This was the first time many participated in grass-roots politics. If nothing else, it made us more aware of how our government works. Environmental preservation is in the hands of politicians — and we elect them: they need to hear from us on issues that matter.

The program was videotaped and is available to interested members. In addition to Kirstin's contributions, Dick Bishop served as timekeeper, Jim Beauchamp ran audiovisuals, and George Gore, Jack Paxton, Alice Englebretsen, and Jen Hensley provided their time and support.

Executive Committee (ExCom) Elections

Prairie Group ExCom plans local Sierra Club meetings, this newsletter, outings, and organizing for environmental issues in east central Illinois. There are three openings: please vote for up to three candidates and mail this ballot to: Prairie Group, P.O. Box 131, Urbana, IL 61803-0131. Ballots must be received by Feb. 1, 2003.

- Jim Beauchamp (Current Vice Chair, Membership Chair)
- Karen Beauchamp (Current Treasurer)
- Jack Kuehn (Current Outings Chair)
- Kirstin Replogle (Current Member-at-Large)

Event Reports

Backpack Trip to Shawnee National Forest, October 25-29, 2002

by Jack Paxton, participant

Jack Kuehn, Outings Chair, Prairie Group, put together a great backpack trip in the Shawnee National Forest from just south of La Rue Pine Hills up the Hutchins Creek drainage and back via Observation Point on the Mississippi Palisades. The group met on Thursday evening at the group campground site in the Trail of Tears Forest Service Group Camp on North Forest Road. About 10 p.m. it started to rain so I decided to just sleep in the three-sided shelter there. The others had already pitched their tents, except Stuart and Gary who slept in their panel truck.

Friday morning it was still raining, but we got a weather report saying it would be clear for the afternoon. So we lollid around until noon when we took off for White Pine trail above La Rue Pine Hills campground. We hiked on a pleasant afternoon down a long ridge to Hutchins Creek, which we forded a couple of times on a gravel road with some traffic! Then we took a tough hike up a steep ridge and down a canyon, all the time trying to find a faint trail but mostly working up a big sweat in rain slickers, relying on compass and GPS to find the campsite marked on map. We camped on a dry creek with pools close to an abandoned road and trail and filtered water for meals.

The next day we hiked cross country to Ranbarger Hollow Trail, then to the Godwin River-to-River Trail to Hutchins Creek Trail. The day was overcast but there was no rain. That night we camped near abandoned farm houses on Hutchins Creek at a beautiful bend in the river with a high bank and large blocks of limestone layered with chert. There was a nice ripple sound from Hutchins Creek, a campfire on the beach and a nice dinner followed by bioluminescent bugs on beach and banks.

Sunday morning turned out sunny with beautiful fall color as we hiked back to Pleasant Ridge trail and over to Godwin River-to-River Trail to a site closer to Monday's destination and vehicles. We camped on a dry stream again with potholes of opalescent water (from clay) and a cherty rough bed. But it was a beautiful hike up a series of ridges to the Mississippi Palisades overlook. We marked the trail with toilet paper near Trail of Tears so we could find our way back, but it was pretty straightforward.

Sunday night it rained after dinner so I hit the sack for another long night, but this time the rain stopped about 7 a.m. We sauntered through breakfast and packed up and retraced ridges once again to the South Hill Overlook view point by 11 a.m. While Mark hiked back to his van, hazy views provided a pleasant ending to a successful outing. Erica and I left U.S.F.S. station where we had left the car about noon and were back in Urbana by 4 p.m.!

Prairie Group Website/ E-Mail/Listserv

The Prairie Group website is <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie>. Check for updates on activities and information.

If you want to keep up with the latest opportunities to get involved, sign up for our listserv (group e-mail system) by going to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/archives> and scrolling down past many Sierra Club Listservs to click on "IL-PRAIRIE-ALERTS." On the next screen click on "Join or leave the list" then fill in blanks for ""Your e-mail address" and "Your name." Then select the listserv settings you want (default is fine for beginners) and click on the "Join the list" button. You should get an e-mail response to finish confirming your subscription. If you have any problems please e-mail George Gore, Interim Listserv Chair, at geo_gore@yahoo.com

Urban Sprawl Forum, September 4, 2002

by Jim Beauchamp

About 40 people joined the Prairie Group for its September 4, 2002 forum on Urban Sprawl. We presented a video, "Save Our Land, Save Our Towns," and five panelists commented on the video and answered questions from the audience. I served as emcee for the program; panelists taking part included: Frank DiNovo, Director of Champaign County Planning Commission; Cynthia Hoyle, Traffic Calming Specialist; Robert Kowalski, Urbana City Planner; Donald Fournier, Research Specialist, Illinois Building Research Council; and Bruce Knight, Champaign City Planner. After panelists gave their opening statements, I played segments from the video, then the various panelists made remarks related to the video about the situation in their respective areas. There were also a number of questions from the audience. Unfortunately, we did not record the panelists' remarks so, as a follow-up, I asked each panelist to give his/her answer to a single question (supplied by Cynthia Hoyle). At this time, I've received replies from Cynthia, Robert Kowalski and Donald Fournier.

Question: How do you see our cities managing future growth so that we are able to retain our current statistic of 25% of workers arriving at work by non-auto means?

Answers:

Cynthia Hoyle: "According to the U.S. Census since 1990 Champaign-Urbana has experienced a drop in the percentage of residents who walk, bike, use mass transit or other non-auto modes of transportation to get to work. In the 2000 Census approximately 27% of workers got to work without driving. This is a high percentage for a mid-western city of our size and is one of the primary reasons why we have a short trip to work (approx. 15 mins.) and less congestion than many other communities."

"To maintain our relatively low congestion levels we have to design future developments so that residents can easily walk or bike to other locations and easily access mass transit. This means that we must make our new developments pedestrian and bike friendly with interconnected sidewalks, trails and crosswalks. Pedestrians and bicyclists need well-lit streets, sidewalks, trails and crosswalks to encourage use and create a sense of safety, and we should maintain our sidewalks and trails to the same standards that we maintain our streets. We must also update our municipal codes so that more mixed-use is allowed, particularly along arterial streets. New mixed-use developments must have design standards that blend new uses into neighborhoods without creating nuisances for residential properties."

"We also need to revisit our current street standards and incorporate traffic calming into our street designs. Programs providing for retrofitting of existing streets to calm traffic are also needed."

"We have to rethink how we are currently planning and make sure we design our communities for multiple modes of transportation, not just autos. If we design our communities properly we can increase our non-auto usage while still providing for vehicular transportation. If we, however, allow our communities to be designed primarily for the automobile, congestion and length of trip to work will inevitably increase and workers walking, biking and riding mass transit will continue to decline."

Robert Kowalski: "Simply to continue to Grow Smart. First and foremost, infill development and increased density in appropriate locations within the built environment needs to be encouraged. Why do so many developers choose to build on the fringe of town? Simply because in most cases it is easier and cheaper. Infill development presents challenges of high land costs, assembly of property and sometimes environmental clean-ups. However, infill development will typically offer the most benefits for the community as a whole. In

Future Sierra Club Outings Survey

In planning for outings, we thought chapter members would be the best source for ideas on where to visit. Therefore a preliminary list of 76 popular spots in Illinois, sorted by their distance from Champaign-Urbana, has been placed on the chapter website at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie/OUTINGS.html>. This table also includes a URL to some information about (almost) each site. We encourage you to take a

moment to scan this list and e-mail to us those spots you'd like to visit — ideally choose a few at various distances from our area. Please e-mail choices to mcorn@uiuc.edu or join the e-mail discussion list below and send choices to it. As always, feel free to e-mail Mike (mcorn@uiuc.edu) or Jack (jkuehn@uiuc.edu) directly with ideas or suggestions for outings or suggested additions to the list.

"That being said, requests for new development at the city limits needs to be compact and contiguous and always continue a connected system of streets and sidewalks. A connected street and sidewalk system encourage walking and bicycling and makes it much easier for transit to serve new development. Also, new commercial areas need to be appropriately designed to accommodate walkers, bicyclists, transit and cars."

"The key to getting this done is thoughtful comprehensive planning that clearly outlines the development goals for the community. Comprehensive Plans need to stay current and accurately illustrate how the community wishes to grow. Through this careful planning we can maintain the high quality of life that residents currently enjoy in Champaign-Urbana."

Donald Fournier: "Both Champaign and Urbana are cities growing at the edges. The predominant form of growth is low density and auto-centric. In the past 50 years, Champaign's population has grown by about 50%, while its land area has grown by a factor of four. Most of the new growth is now beyond the bounds for the local mass transit system, leading to more automobile dependence."

"The cities of Champaign County need to formally adopt the principles of smart growth and encourage developers to follow them. See the American Planning Association's Growing Smart Program at www.planning.org.

"Emphasis needs to be placed on infill and revitalizing neighborhoods in decay. They also need a "Green Builders" program which highlights energy efficient and environmentally friendly construction techniques (see DOE's Build America Program at www.eren.doe.gov and EEBAs web page at www.eeba.org. Mixed used development and affordable housing need to be part of the program."

"The County and the cities need to form a coalition where they all agree on a common approach to development and to incentives and educate the development community to the issues. They need to show how all can benefit from a more sustainable approach. Mass transit and alternative transportation all rely on connectivity and density to be viable. These two issues need to be integrated into the master planning process."

*Actually, the 25% statistic is an approximation for Champaign and Urbana combined. According to the 2000 census, for Urbana 33.1% of trips to work were non-automobile, for Champaign 21.3% of such trips were non-automobile, and for Savoy 6.8% such trips were non-auto. A further breakdown shows that in Urbana, 10.9% used transit, 17% walked and 5.2% used other means to get to work. In Champaign 6.2% took transit, 12.3% walked, and 2.8% used other means. In Savoy 5.4% used transit, 0.3% walked, and 1.1% used other. The mean travel time to work in minutes was 14.6 minutes for both Champaign and Urbana and 17.7 minutes for Savoy .

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* elected or appointed to ExComm for 2001-2002
** elected or appointed to ExComm for 2002-2003