

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, October 9, 7:00 p.m.
(note the earlier time!)

Candidate Forum — Champaign Library Meeting Room

We are sponsoring a candidate forum for the Champaign-Urbana area. This is an opportunity for candidates to present their environmental views to the environmentally concerned citizenry and for us to ask them questions. Forum participants will be:

- Tom Berns (E-R) and Naomi Jakobsson (D) running for the State House
- Dan McCollum (D) and Rick Winkel (E-R) running for the State Senate
- Carl Estabrook (G), Josh Hartke (D), and Tim Johnson (E-R) running for U.S. Congress.

Let's have a good turnout so the candidates will know that the environment is an important issue for people in our area.

Wednesday, November 13, 7:30 p.m.
Post Election Celebration

Wednesday, December 11, 7:30 p.m.
Potluck and Gift Draw

ONE EARTH, ONE CHANCE®

Notes From the Chair

by George Gore

THANKYOU

Thank you Tom Talty for redesigning our Prairie Group website! If you haven't seen the new layout, please visit our new Illinois Chapter website at www.illinois.sierraclub.org and click on our part of the state map.

Another big thank you to everyone running for our executive committee! Sierra Club is all about empowering local members to make a difference; your volunteer leadership is essential to protecting the environment.

REGISTERED TO VOTE?

Time is running out fast, you must register 30 days in advance if you want to vote in November. Have you moved lately or changed your name? Some very close races are expected... the environment needs your help! You can register to vote directly with your city or county clerk. Some libraries, schools, and community organizations have Deputy Registrars. You can also fill out a motor-voter form when you get your driver's license, but may not be able to vote absentee the first time you vote.

VOTE SMART

The Sierra Club is endorsing candidates in many races. You can find out about some Illinois candidates at www.illinois.sierraclub.org Another very useful resource for evaluating the environmental track records of federal races is www.sierraclub.org/politics.

CONSERVATION CONGRESS V

The fifth round of Illinois' Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Conservation Congress is under way. The track record is impressive with new DNR programs such as environmental license plates, Conservation 2000, Ecowatch programs, and environmental education. Customers of DNR, including hunters, fishers, farmers, and environmental groups get together in a three-year cycle to discuss and propose changes to DNR policy. The first year, proposals are made and prioritized in the five DNR regions of Illinois and representatives are selected to participate in the state level decision making. The second year, regional proposals are compiled together and representatives of statewide groups and regions gather in the capital for a formal Congress to decide what conservation issues are recommended to DNR. The third year, DNR researches the recommendations and starts implementation if feasible.

The Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club organized our groups to get representatives in every region to support the same Sierra Club priorities. We hope to prevent commercial logging of all state lands and stop destruction of isolated wetlands, however we will have our work cut out for us because the Congress is traditionally dominated by non-environmental groups.

WRITE YOUR GOVERNMENT

When was the last time you contacted your elected officials about a concern? As a rule of thumb, meeting officials in person is most effective, followed by personal letters, phone calls, postcards, and finally e-mail. Your influence is especially powerful at the state and local level. Just a half dozen citizens contacting a state representative about a specific bill is considered a significant

public outpouring. With thousands of bills every year, most politicians just follow the party line unless they hear from you. If you don't speak up, why should politicians worry about the environment or your concerns?

TAKE ACTION!

What should you write about this month? Elections are coming up November 5th, so why not write a Letter to the Editor about the environmental record of a federal, state or local candidate? Keep it short, highly focused, and accurate. If you are not sure, just ask tough questions. By raising environmental issues like oil, you can shift the debate from increasing supply using money and force to creating new technology jobs that reduce our demand, dependency, and pollution, while saving money. Perhaps members of your county board or city council voted for or against a new landfill, incinerator, or factory hog farm. Make sure voters in your community know who is good, bad, and dirty on election day!

ECO-ECONOMY

Does the environment depend on the economy? Or would our economy collapse without the environment? The answer is simple for us, but most business leaders and economists just don't understand how dependent humans are on nature, let alone the science of how nature interacts. Lester Brown, founder of WorldWatch and an environmentalist with an agricultural economics background, has a new book, *Eco-economy*, that points a viable path to a new sustainable economy. His clear explanations of how world systems really interact will give nearly everyone a new insight to life on earth. We hope business leaders will eventually realize just how critical the environment is to keeping an economy healthy.

HELP WANTED!

Would you be interested in helping directly change government decisions? We need your help us get voters registered no later than 30 days before the November 5th election, let your neighbors know about the environmental records of candidates for upcoming November elections, or help in many other ways. If we help candidates with good environmental records win, we help the environment win. With new district boundaries, a new governor, some very hotly contested local races, and about 25 percent of the population voting in a non-presidential election... **you really can make a significant difference for the environment!** Please contact our Political Chair, Dick Bishop, if you're interested in helping environmental candidates protect your backyard.

STUDENT AWARDS

Do you know any students who work really hard to protect the environment? Perhaps they formed a new environmental club in high school or college, started recycling, got the cafeteria to offer vegetarian meals, or started a campus energy audit. We'd like to reward such dedicated students with a free membership in Sierra Club! Please tell us why you think a particular student deserves our thanks.

VOTE!

If you don't vote, why should politicians care about you?

Outings

Backpacking Trip — Camp Hutchins Area of Shawnee National Forest

October 24-28, 2002

Near Carbondale, IL. The Prairie Group is considering adopting the Camp Hutchins proposed wilderness area. Located south of Murphysboro, it is part of more than 21,000 acres of undisturbed forest. We'll explore both on and off trail. Meet at Trail of Tears Campground Thursday evening and hike a loop, spending Friday-Sunday night on the trail. Some backpacking experience preferable, though not essential. Daily hiking distances will be short enough to allow for some free time. Breakfast and dinner Friday-Sunday is provided. \$30 covers food/campground cost. Contact Jack Kuehn at 217-649-8397 or j-kuehn@uiuc.edu

— Other Activities in the Area —

5th Annual Salt Fork River Clean-Up

Saturday, October 5, 2002, 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Come to Salt Fork F.P. to help clean up one of the state's most beautiful streams right here in Champaign County!

Salt Fork River Forest Preserve —known to many as Homer Lake — is at 2537 S. Homer Lake Road near the town of Homer, just 20 minutes from Champaign-Urbana.

Volunteers of all ages and abilities are needed. Bring canoes or other small watercraft to work on the river, clean stream banks, or staff sign-in tables and refreshment areas. Enjoy a morning on our "hometown stream" and learn about it while at the same time help enhance it.

The clean-up will refocus attention on the fact that we value this fine recreational resource right here in our backyard and are ready to work to restore and protect it. We expect a higher than ever turnout of volunteers and greater than ever media attention to the event.

The clean-up is sponsored jointly by Prairie Rivers Network, the Salt Fork River Partners, Champaign-Urbana's Izaak Walton League, and the Champaign County Forest Preserve. For more information contact Prairie Rivers Network at 217-344-2371.

Outings-Related E-Mail List Available

An e-mail discussion list has been created to announce and discuss local chapter outings. Sign up two ways:

Send an e-mail to: LISTSERV@LISTS.SIERRACLUB.ORG
Subject: [leave blank]

[Message body] subscribe IL-PRAIRIE-OUTINGS-FORUM

You will receive from the list server a confirmation note that will require a response. The confirmation note will explain what to do to confirm your subscription.

Or visit <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?SUBED1=il-prairie-outings-forum&A=1> and sign up directly.

If for any reason you have problems signing up, please e-mail Mike Corn (mcorn@uiuc.edu) for assistance.

Saline Branch and Salt Fork River Devastated by Ammonia Release

Article reprinted from the Prairie Rivers' newsletter and by permission from Marc Miller by Beth Wentzel, Watershed Scientist, Prairie Rivers Network

Between July 12 and 14 the Urbana Champaign Sanitary District's (UCSD) Northeast wastewater treatment plant released a large amount of toxic ammonia that killed more than 80,000 fish on the Saline Branch and the Salt Fork River, affecting altogether at least 20 miles of stream. According to the UCSD, the source of the ammonia was the University of Illinois' Abbott power plant, which reportedly used an ammonia cleaner at its facilities and dumped the waste into the sewer.

While 80,000 dead fish constitute one obvious impact of this incident, there are likely many other problems not yet fully understood. Prairie Rivers Network is continuing to seek additional information on the impacts to the river from the discharge. Concerns include the impact on dissolved oxygen levels downstream, the full effect on the river's fish populations, and the impacts on other aquatic life such as crayfish, amphibians and mussels.

As more information regarding this toxic discharge and its full effects becomes available, Prairie Rivers plans to discuss restoration options with the Sanitary District, the University, and several state and federal agencies. Should a cooperative effort fail to bring about necessary steps to recovery and future protection of the rivers, Prairie Rivers is prepared to take legal action. To that end the organization sent letters to both the Sanitary District and the University notifying them that Prairie Rivers intends to sue under the Clean Water Act if appropriate actions are not taken.

Prior to this incident, the Salt Fork River was an excellent destination for a day on the water and especially popular with anglers and canoeists. We are hopeful that through restoration efforts, the Salt Fork will regain its status as one of east central Illinois' richest streams.

Event Reports

Sierra Club Prairie Tour July 20, 2002

by Jack Kuehn, Outings Chair

Ten people joined David Monk, director of Educational Resources in Environmental Science (ERES) and Heartland Pathways for a tour of Champaign County prairie sites. Both organizations are non-profits, dedicated to prairie preservation and conservation of our Central Illinois natural heritage.

Though billed as a hike, this was a surprising series of visits to prairie sites here in our immediate area that many long time residents may not be aware of. It began with the urban prairie across the street from the ERES offices at 115 N. Market Street in Champaign, a stones throw from the new bus/train station. (Catch Monk in his office and ask him to give you a mini-tour!)



After a brief but surprisingly detailed history of the immediate downtown area surrounding Market Street, we headed out convoy-style to visit a Windsor Road restoration between 1st Street and Neil, a Route 45 site in Savoy, and a real jewel: Winfield Lake Park Prairie just south of Curtis Road, and east of Duncan. This site has been purchased by Heartland Pathways and is designated to remain permanently as a natural prairie.

Throughout the tour, Monk gave us plenty of interesting detail on more than 85 plant species and their culture, the history of each piece of land and the threats which remain to what little existing native prairie we have. Champaign County was once covered by 350,000 acres of prairie — very little remains. As long as Monk is around, we're sure to have at least a few acres of this beautiful, drought resistant, erosion-preventing natural landscape.

Heading out of town, we followed the railroad bed of the old interurban train between Champaign and Decatur. Public transportation may well experience a comeback in our area, because studies show that an intercity train, such as once existed, could be economically viable. What's more, a railroad is compatible with prairie conservation. Properly done, a train track co-exists very nicely with native prairie. Imagine commuting to your job in Champaign on a train from Monticello every day, with miles of prairie outside your window!



The last stop on our tour was the Heartland Pathway on Shady Rest Road outside Monticello. Here, the old rail bed crosses the Sangamon on an old trestle bridge. This bridge is part of a beautiful hiking and biking trail through a bottomland hardwood forest, now permanently preserved from development.

Note: ERES and Heartland Pathways have opened an art gallery located at 120 N Walnut Street in Champaign.

Living On the Prairie

by Jack Paxton

Jack Paxton has a very small prairie in his back yard in East Urbana. He also started the Prairie Group in Urbana in 1965. Jack retired after 32 years of teaching and research in the U. of I. College of ACES studying the Cognitive Biology of how a soybean plant "knows" a pathogen or insect is "eating" it, and what it does once it "knows" this. Jack states he "became more and more disturbed by agriculture's impact on the environment and lack of any goal or direction for where agriculture is going. Ah, pHarming!"

Preserving the Prairies

I claim Prairies are Illinois' most important resource.

Two hundred years ago Illinois was covered with prairies. These rich, diverse ecosystems teemed with life and developed the soil which made early settlers of the prairie prosperous--- the deep, fertile soils that give Illinois the lead in world soybean and corn production.

Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, a cornerstone in the struggling sustainable agriculture movement, is in the U of I ACES and a faculty member at U of I - Springfield Extension. She says in her article in *Illinois Steward*, "The Wealth of Illinois is in her soil and her strength lies in its intelligent development." This quote is also etched over the entry to Davenport Hall on the University of Illinois campus from remarks originally made by Andrew S. Draper, University of Illinois president in 1899. "A century ago, he and others recognized that natural resources of Illinois and this country are the bounty and wealth that will sustain our quality of life for generations to come. Agriculture has changed since then, but protecting and improving soil quality remains a top concern."

Rather than developing prairie soils intelligently, we are exploiting them. We are paving and plowing our prairies to extinction in Illinois.

Many species of plants and animals of this prairie are lost forever as their prairie ecosystem is destroyed. We will never really know about these species and how they formed our rich soils unless we stop destroying them and also try to understand the prairie ecosystem. Only now are scientists beginning to appreciate how the diverse prairie ecosystem works.

Agribusiness is squandering our prairie soil resource, eroding rich soils by many acres a year. This soil waste

is two-fold as it fills our reservoirs and rivers and destroys them as well.

We pollute soils with man-made toxic compounds that are designed to last for a long time. These pollutants leach into our reservoirs and rivers, fouling our own water supplies while damaging river ecosystems.

Unfortunately, only a few small scraps of lesser-quality prairie are left for the settlers' grandchildren. This makes it difficult to know whether farming practices today are enriching or impoverishing Illinois' soils. It also makes study of the important processes which created this valuable soil very difficult.

There are important lessons for us as we try and sustainably deal with the uniform monocultures which agribusiness created out of those diverse prairie ecosystems. The prairie, which suffered through drought and flood over eons, devised ways to deal with climatic swings and still flourish. Present uniform monocultures of corn and soybeans are inherently unstable and require large inputs of fossil fuels and intensive management. Instability during droughts or floods (both of which occurred this year) causes chaos in our agribusiness system as reflected in commodity prices.

We can learn from the prairie itself how to carefully manage Illinois' greatest resource so that our great, great-grandchildren will have an undiminished resource to sustain them. We can learn a lot from prairie ecosystems, and do a much better job of living on the prairie sustainably.

None of these problems is God-given; all are human-made and as such can be corrected by intelligent development. Is agribusiness listening? Will you help them hear this message?

Do We Need Lawns?

On a related note: "Winterize your lawn," the big sign outside the garden store commanded. I've fed, watered, mowed, and raked it and watched a lot of it die anyway. Now I'm supposed to winterize it?! I hope it's too late.

Grass lawns have to be the stupidest thing we've come up with outside of thong swimsuits! We constantly battle dandelions, Queen Anne's lace, thistle, violets, chicory and clover that thrive naturally, so we can grow grass that must be nursed through an annual four-step chemical dependency.

Future Sierra Club Outings Survey

As planning for fall outings begins, 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're encouraging 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 your choices to mcorn@uiuc.edu or join the e-mail discussion list below and send your choices to it. As always feel free to e-mail Mike (mcorn@uiuc.edu) or Jack (j-kuehn@uiuc.edu) directly with ideas or suggestions for outings or with suggested additions to the list.

Would you like to volunteer for the Prairie Group,
or offer ideas for the Prairie Flyer?
E-mail geo_gore@yahoo.com

Prairie Group Website/E-Mail/Listserv

The Prairie Group website is <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie>. Check out the great new look, compliments of the talents of Tom Talty, our new Webmaster. Check this site for new 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 "ILLINOIS-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 (the default should be 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

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