

# PRAIRIE FLYER

Newsletter of the Sierra Club Prairie Group • East-Central Illinois • April/May/June 2007

## Upcoming Events

Regular meetings of the Prairie Group are held in the Geneva Room at the McKinley Foundation, 809 S. 5th Street (at the corner of 5th and Daniel), at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month unless otherwise noted.

Refreshments always provided! For more information, visit <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie>.

April 10

- The Recent Impact of Global Climate Change on the Arctic and Its Potential Impact on Us

Welcome back Chad Kister, staunch advocate of the Arctic, whose first presentation to the Prairie Group a couple of years ago drew an enthusiastic crowd. Kister, author of Arctic Quest and Arctic Melting, presents the latest on climate change's impacts on the Arctic and Alaska and shows the critical need to immediately begin reducing fossil fuel emissions and replace them with solar, wind, and other renewable resources. Arctic champions in Congress have introduced legislation to protect the Arctic Refuge coastal plain as wilderness. Kister's tour will help spread the word nationwide about the need to lobby for wilderness protection.

May 8

- Local Transportation Developments Panel Discussion

Invited speakers discuss recent initiatives for encouraging bicycle use and safety as part of the local transportation mix, along with other efforts to get residents out of their cars. Panelists TBA; check <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie> for details as date approaches.

June 12

- Annual Potluck Picnic

Join us at Dick Bishop's (3514 N. High Cross Road). Bring a plate, utensils, and a dish to share. We provide hamburgers, veggie burgers, fixings, sodas and water.

## ONE EARTH, ONE CHANCE®

### New Lobby Committee Gets to Work

by Alice Englebretsen and Ken Blue

The Sierra Club is unique among environmental organizations in that it faces no restrictions on lobbying thanks to its different tax status. Of course, the Sierra Club does many things, but being authorized to actually put pressure on elected officials regarding environmental issues is a critical role for the Club. In the spirit of this ability, the Illinois Chapter has formed a statewide Lobby Committee. The purpose is to train volunteers from all groups in Illinois in the techniques of lobbying state legislators all over the state on critical issues. This unified approach makes any lobby effort much more effective in terms of passing important laws to protect our environment.

Linda Sullivan, a volunteer from the River Prairie Group, along with staff from the Chapter office, designed a recruiting and training program for new volunteer lobbyists. Alice Englebretsen and Ken Blue agreed to take on this very important task for the Prairie Group and volunteered to serve on the Chapter Lobby Committee.

The first training session in November was held in Springfield for the downstate groups. We learned about the most effective ways to communicate with legislators, the times that work best in terms of the legislative cycle, how a bill becomes law, and how to track pending bills on the state legislative website. We also discussed the committee's structure and which committees to watch for environmental issues.

The second training in January discussed the particular issues

that the Illinois Chapter deemed most important for this legislative session. Even the organizers were amazed at how many volunteers showed up on that cold Saturday to take up this important role of advocating for the environment. About 70 people from around the state were in attendance.

Five issues described to us as being most important to promote for the 2007 legislative session are:

#### 1. Clean Energy

State representatives and senators are asked to support forthcoming legislation to help businesses and individuals cut their power bills by saving energy through new energy efficient requirements, and to diversify our power supply to promoting wind power in Illinois. Energy-efficient priorities are to:

- Establish a statewide energy efficiency program
- Increase energy efficiency in new and existing buildings
- Set minimum efficiency standards for common appliances not covered by national standards
- Require state and other taxpayer funded buildings to meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standard, and increase efficiency in existing state buildings.

#### 2. Conservation Land Acquisition Funding

We are asking our legislatures to support funding for buying open space as part of any new capital

*Lobby, continued on 4th page*

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# Long Distance Hiking in the Midwest

by Don Davis

What's a long-distance hiker to do who lives in Illinois? There's no 2000-mile Appalachian Trail or 2500-mile Pacific Crest Trail here for months of hiking. But backpackers who want to get out for a week or more on a trail do have some options nearby.

First of all, the two trails mentioned above — the AT and the PCT — as the knowledgeable call them, are “National Scenic Trails” as designated by Congress in the National Scenic Trails Act of 1968. These trails are under the auspices of the National Park Service and are maintained and supported by volunteer organizations. Trails take lots of maintenance and support!

Long-distance trails have to cross roads, follow roads, go across public and private lands, through towns and wilderness. A long-distance hiker has to be able to understand this and be prepared to walk on trails, gravel roads, highways, bridges, and just about anything else that can hold a person's weight. Hiking through towns and in wilderness is normal. Map reading is essential because most trails are not well marked. You have to be good at foot care and other minor first aid (hopefully no major first aid will ever be needed). A long-distance hiker also needs to be an expert at protecting the wilderness and “leaving no trace” hiking — there are plenty of day hikers and OTVers that don't believe in this concept, as any long-distance hiker can see. I try to clean up the trails I walk, but sometimes it is just overwhelming to pick up all the soda cans, candy wrappers, spare clothing, and other trash that is left on the trails.

Long-distance hiking means you are on your own for the most part. The trails generally have no shelters or regular support personnel on the trails. Most go through or near enough to towns for food resupply. Supply means either shopping at a local store (sometimes this means a convenience store, so be prepared to eat whatever they offer) or mailing yourself food and other supplies to a local post office (a non-publicized

## Midwest Trail Photo Gallery



*A view of the Current River on the Ozark Trail. All photos by Don Davis.*



*A passage on the River-to-River Trail.*

secret is that post offices will hold packages mailed to yourself — c/o General Delivery — for up to 30 days before returning them).

As for physical fitness, anyone can walk. I mean it. It helps to use the stair stepper or treadmill at the gym before you go, but it is not necessary. Just make sure you are in moderate shape and start out slow. Don't burn out on the first day or two. Build up distance and daily walking time. After a week, you will be amazed at



*Break time along the River-to-River Trail.*

how good you feel. The other important trick for all long-distance hikers is keeping backpack weight to a minimum. The more you carry, the harder the hiking is. Learn what you can leave behind and still be safe and comfortable; your local outdoor shop can help you with this, but there is no need to spend a fortune.

If you are interested in this type of hiking, there are several good trails in the Midwest: the River-to-River Trail, the Ozark Trail, the Ice Age

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Trail, the North Country Trail, and the I&M Towpath.

All trails mentioned here are supported by volunteer organizations that survive on donations, which include money as well as working on the trail. See the websites at the end of this article for more information on how to support trails in the Midwest. The organizations are also the best source for information about guidebooks, maps and personal information needed to hike the trails.

The American Discovery Trail runs across the U.S. from California to Delaware and passes through Illinois on two routes, a northern and southern route. The southern route is the 170-mile-long River-to-River trail crossing southern Illinois from the Ohio River near Cave-In Rock (or Elizabethtown) to Grand Tower on the Mississippi River. It travels through the most beautiful sections of Illinois, including the Garden of the Gods, Shawnee National Forest, and Panther Den Wilderness. The trail goes through or near a number of towns for resupply and through several state parks. The River-to-River trail crosses or follows lots of roads, but trails through forests are beautiful with wonderful rock formations, lakes, creeks, and rivers, and several short, steep climbs to challenge the hiker. Although this is a marked trail, road crossings can be confusing; the guidebook sold by the River-to-River Trail Society is highly recommended. There are a lot of established campsites, but no shelters, so a tent or other rain protection is necessary. This trail is a good combination of wilderness and civilization.

The northern route of the American Discovery Trail follows the Illinois and Michigan Canal towpath. It is more suited to off-road bicycling than to backpacking, but is flat, easy, and somewhat populated — a good beginners trail for multi-day hiking. You cannot get lost. The I&M Towpath runs from Joliet to LaSalle/Peru for a total distance of 96 miles, but I do not recommend hikers start in Joliet because the northern section goes through suburban housing and is not conducive to backpacking (bicyclists can get through this part in a couple of hours, but a backpacker may be stuck sleeping near a

housing development). Starting at Channahon for backpackers is recommended; this makes the towpath to LaSalle/Peru closer to 60 miles. The path goes through a few towns, several state parks, and is fascinating from a natural and historical perspective with the old locks, lots of historical markers, and the wildlife living along the now-unused canal.

Missouri has the Ozark Trail. This is an incredibly well-maintained and supported trail with a continuous section of 210 miles and total mileage of over 350 miles, some of which is still being built. It is a personal favorite. The trail is very well marked with an excellent trail bed. It goes through highland hardwood forest and across creeks and rivers with very few road crossings and less than 10 miles total of gravel road walking (it is a rarity for a long distance trail to have this little amount of road walking, much less no paved road walking). This trail only goes near one town and is the most wilderness-oriented of the Midwest trails. With numerous creek crossings, be prepared for wet feet. The trail has few established camping sites; you are on your own.

In the northern Midwest, there are two trails. Wisconsin has the Ice Age National Scenic Trail that will eventually be 1200 miles long, entirely through Wisconsin. Currently about 600 miles are complete. The longest continuous section of non-road walking is 86 miles as of summer 2006. This trail goes through the most beautiful parts of Wisconsin from the Door County peninsula and passes through or near cities like Janesville, Madison, and Stevens Point to the Minnesota border. Several people have walked the entire trail and have the "Thousand Miler" recognition. Currently the trail is not complete, so thru-hiking the Ice Age Trail involves quite a bit of road walking at this point. The Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation sells maps and guidebooks to this trail and can use your help to make this trail nationally famous.

Finally, the North Country Trail runs from New York to North Dakota and is also a trail in progress with a finished total mileage of 4600 miles. The Midwest section goes through Ohio, Michigan from Door County,



*Wildlife along the I&M Towpath.*

WI to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, across the very northern tip of Wisconsin, and on across Minnesota and North Dakota. This trail is currently disconnected. For example, in Wisconsin the longest continuous section is 20 miles. Along Lake Superior in northern Minnesota, the trail runs for 200 miles along Minnesota's "North Shore." This trail is a combination of gravel roads, stream crossings, and tough valleys for the streams running into Lake Superior. Be prepared for cold, even in summer, and as for bugs — well, it is the Northern Minnesota Boundary Waters — enough said.

For those with dreams of the AT, PCT, the Discovery Trail or another of the more famous long-distance trails, these trails are a good way to see if you really want to long-distance hike. After a week on any of these trails, you'll have a fairly good idea of what it will mean to walk daily for months at a time. Even if you don't dream of longer hikes, getting out for more than a weekend on these trails are well worth the walk and are fantastic examples of the beauty here in our own backyard.

Web links for organizations supporting the trails mentioned in this article:

River-to-River Trail Society:  
<http://www.rivertorivertrail.com/>

The Ozark Trail:  
<http://www.ozarktrail.com/>

Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation:  
<http://www.iceagetrail.org/index.html>

North Country Trail Association:  
<http://www.northcountrytrail.org/index.htm>

The American Discovery Trail:  
<http://www.discoverytrail.org/>

Illinois & Michigan Canal Towpath:  
[http://dnr.state.il.us/orep/planning/im\\_info.htm](http://dnr.state.il.us/orep/planning/im_info.htm)

National trails:  
The Appalachian Trail Conservancy:  
<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/>

Pacific Crest Trail Association:  
<http://www.pcta.org/>

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budget. Historically, Illinois has not funded state conservation land acquisitions except as part of large capital spending programs, and as a consequence funding for open land acquisition has not been reliable.

### 3. "Cool Cities"

As we discussed in an earlier *Prairie Flyer*, the Sierra Club has initiated a "Cool Cities" program around the country, in which municipalities pledge to cut greenhouse gas emissions and, in general, become more energy-efficient. Many communities have signed onto this program; however, one of the requirements is for cities to perform an emissions inventory, which requires expertise many communities do not have. The Cool Cities Act of 2007 would offer state support in this technical process.

### 4. Clean Water

For many years, phosphates have been banned in laundry detergents. Large concentrations of phosphates cause problems after being discharged into our rivers, lakes and streams. Unfortunately, a longstanding loophole has exempted dishwashing detergents from this ban. We are asking legislative representative to support banning phosphates in dishwash-

ing detergents.

### 5. Great Lakes Water Supply

The Great Lakes' water supply continues to face threats and efforts by other states to tap into this precious resource. Given that only one percent of the water in the Great Lakes water basin is replenished by rain and snowmelt every year, it is critical for Illinois to sign onto the "The Great Lakes — St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact."

With the coordinated statewide effort of the Lobby Committee on these important issues, the goal is to improve the prospects of passing legislation that will truly improve our environment. There are many more issues that will evolve over time, and the formation of the Lobby Committee will continue.

We will update you on events in Springfield as the legislative season moves forward.

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## Get More Involved! Join the Prairie Group Listserv

If you want to keep up with the latest opportunities to get involved on behalf of the environment, sign up for our listserv (group e-mail system) by going to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/archives> and scroll 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 (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 listserv subscription.

If you have problems signing up, send an e-mail to Jim Beauchamp at [jwbeauch@uiuc.edu](mailto:jwbeauch@uiuc.edu).

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## Support the Prairie Group with Sierra Club Gear!

As in previous years, the Prairie Group has various types of Sierra Club gear for sale just in time for warm weather activities. We have backpacks, messenger bags, caps, t-shirts, and more! Proceeds from these popular items go towards future Prairie Group programs and social events.

For more information, please contact Alice Englebretsen at 367-7344 or [a.engelebretsen@insightbb.com](mailto:a.engelebretsen@insightbb.com).

### **Executive Committee Members of the Prairie Group**

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### **Open Positions**

Program Chair; Publicity Chair; Fund Raising

Website: [www.illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie](http://www.illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie)

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