

## Upcoming Events

### New Location For Meetings

Regular monthly meetings of the Prairie Group are now held at the **Unitarian Church**, 309 W. Green, Urbana. Meetings are at 7:30 p.m. the second Wednesday of each month. Parking in the back (south side) of the church. Come to the north or south entrance and ring the bell. (For last minute breaking news on meetings or other events, sign up for our listserv (see details in this issue) or check <http://Illinois.sierraclub.org/Prairie>).

### Wednesday, January 14

#### — Comprehensive Planning

To start off the year 2004, we'll learn about the important comprehensive planning process for the cities of Champaign and Urbana. Developing a long-range vision of how our communities will grow is a critical process for designing livable communities. This is a great opportunity to hear what is planned and to learn how citizens can be involved.

### Wednesday, February 11

#### — Introduction to Local Environmental Issues

Would you like to know more about local environmental issues? It seems we hear about global concerns on a daily basis, yet the news is limited about the importance of our own backyards. This meeting will introduce you to a panel of experts on Central Illinois ecology. They will explain the critical things we should be concerned with and stimulate dialogue. Check the Prairie Group website for details. You can also sign up for the alerts e-mail list for last-minute details.

### Wednesday, March 10

#### — Bird House Extravaganza

This is a chance to test your architectural skills and provide housing for your feathered friends. Using a kit, we will construct all-cedar bluebird houses. You can either take your birdhouse home for backyard use or donate your house to Meadowbrook Park, the Anita Purves Nature Center, or another local nature center. There is a \$5 charge (waived if you donate your birdhouse). Contact Mike Corn at [mcorn@uiuc.edu](mailto:mcorn@uiuc.edu) or call 344-0049 to reserve a birdhouse kit by March 1.

## ONE EARTH, ONE CHANCE®

### The Prairie Group Needs Your Help!

Margaret Mead once said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." These are inspiring words, and they have proven true time and time again. But there is one small group of thoughtful, committed people that could sure use your help — the Prairie Group of the Sierra Club.

As a member of one of the nation's oldest, largest, and most effective environmental advocacy organizations, you're well aware of the Bush Administration's onslaught against virtually all of our country's environmental and public health protection laws. Sierra Club members in large cities, small towns, and rural communities across the country are engaged in campaigns to protect local watersheds, create new wilderness areas, clean up polluting facilities, and educate the public on a wide variety of environmental initiatives.

Locally, the Prairie Group has been active in issues related to sprawl and community planning (see below for the related article by Peg Flynn), protecting the Salt Fork River from a devastating bank-clearing project, and educating the membership and general public through its monthly program meetings. Locally sponsored outings also keep members connected to the special places we're trying to protect.

Most of this work is done by a small group of people trying their best to fulfill Margaret Mead's words. But if the Sierra Club here in East Central Illinois is going to be an effective voice for environmental protection in the coming election year, we are going to need your help. There are many opportunities to contribute, depending on your talents and available time. In fact, most volunteer opportunities require commitments of only one to two hours per month!

Some of the areas in which the Prairie Group would greatly appreciate extra assistance are:

- the Newsletter Committee would love to have "beat reporters" to write quarterly newsletter articles on Champaign or Urbana environmental issues or on topics of current local, state, or national interest;
- the Program Committee would benefit from additional members to develop program calendar and enlist public speakers;
- the Publicity and Communications Committee needs someone to help get the word out through local newspapers and other media outlets regarding upcoming meetings and special events;
- the Political Committee, gearing up for the 2004 elections, needs additional members to screen questionnaires and interview candidates as a part of the Club's endorsement process; and finally,
- the Conservation Committee would benefit from issue and volunteer coordinators to work with the Group Executive Committee in shaping local campaigns and mobilizing volunteers and the public.

The Outings Committee needs help in planning and conducting outings to compliment our programs. Outings are important activities in introducing people to the treasures of our wild places and the need to protect what little natural areas we have left.

This list provides just an overview of the opportunities the Sierra Club provides for you to act on your environmental principles. Please contact Alice Englebretsen or Kirstin Replegle for more information on how to get involved. Let's turn Mead's small group into a large one — we'll be even more effective if we do!

## CHAIR'S CORNER

by Alice Englebretsen

Happy New Year, everyone! We have a major focus for our general meetings this coming year: local environmental issues. This concentration will give us a closer look at the unique ecosystem in east-central Illinois. As you know, there are precious few places here that were left untouched by human activity. By drawing upon experts in the local habitats, we can study the flora and fauna of the few remaining wild spaces and the out-of-the-way places as well. When feasible, we plan to visit various sites for an "up close and personal" look at where we live our lives. Our concentration on east-central Illinois will also include some fun activities, such as building bluebird houses in March.

In keeping with an initiative to understand and get involved in the local planning process, the first meeting of 2004 will find us discussing the community planning process. Officials from the planning departments in Champaign and Urbana will talk with us about citizen involvement. Anyone who desires a community that is livable, walkable, and shopable will want to learn more about how to get involved in designing livable communities. After listening and talking with officials from the planning departments, you may want to join the Planning Advocates of Champaign County. This group meets monthly, with the specific goal of building a core group of concerned citizens who desire a participatory role in the planning process. See Margaret Jean Flynn's article on "Building Better Communities" (in this issue) for more details.

Heads up! This is a critical election year in terms of electing candidates who want to protect the environment without bowing to pressure from special-interest groups. Sierra Club members have an opportunity to seek out candidates and elect into office those who appreciate the need to preserve our planet and reverse the destruction of the Bush years. Our Political Committee will again go through a rigorous process of 1) interviewing candidates running for election and 2) determining those who are pro-environment. As we did in the last election year, we plan to hold a political forum in September where participants can listen to local candidates and ask questions. As part of the process, we plan to endorse those we deem worthy.

If you would like to be involved in any of our activities, contact any member of the Prairie Group of the Sierra Club. There is a lot to do and learn, and we can't do it without the help of many people. Please contact us to learn how you can contribute. We welcome all.

## "Building Better Communities" Update: Planning Advocates of Champaign County

by Margaret Jean Flynn

The Prairie Group's "Building Better Communities" planning workshops, held last March in conjunction with the Illinois Student Environmental Network, brought together a diverse group of Champaign County citizens eager to gain skills and knowledge for becoming involved in local planning issues. Recognizing that the workshops were just the starting point, Alice Englebretsen and Kirstin Replegle initiated a series of meetings that sought to develop a permanent citizens group for studying Champaign County land use. While retaining its ties to the Sierra Club, the group was made open to non-Sierra Club members in order to encourage broad community participation.

Early informal meetings in June and July dealt with the group's definition, concerns, and goals. The July session was especially fruitful, with the group adopting the provisional name Planning Advocates of Champaign County and crafting a mission statement that pledged to encourage environmentally and socially responsible land use in Champaign County by educating and mobilizing the general public and business leaders, and by influencing public officials and planning bodies.

PACC then got under way in earnest. The August meeting yielded the PACC Information Gathering Outline, which targeted the main planning topics that PACC should study — the general categories being Transportation, Housing, Commercial

Development, and Natural Resources, each broken down into smaller subtopics — and identified the local, county, state, and federal players affiliated with each topic. Members agreed to study topics and/or players of particular interest to them in order to find out what stage major projects were at on various bureaucratic levels and to find out how citizen input could be effective in the context of each topic.

PACC's autumn meetings focused on formalizing the group's organizational structures and procedures; adding agendas and officers was felt to be a key step in increasing its effectiveness and cohesion. Related matters still to be tackled include developing a website and increasing outreach and publicity efforts.

The potential for a new Wal-Mart Supercenter in Urbana was much discussed in September and October, with a number of attendees saying that the issue could be a good way for PACC to learn the ins and outs of local zoning and development processes and to coalesce as an activist entity its "baptism by fire."

PACC meets on the fourth Monday of the month. People on PACC's contact list receive meeting notes, formal agendas, and meeting reminders via e-mail. If you would like to be added to the list, please contact Peg Flynn, PACC Secretary, at [mjflynn@insightbb.com](mailto:mjflynn@insightbb.com).

## Save Trees, Time, and Energy (Stop Unwanted Phone Calls, Mail and E-Mail)

by Laurie Mainczyk-Kulasik

Here's another Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Restore tip to help the environment.

Do you spend a large percentage of each day sifting through junk mail, catalogs full of useless items, answering unwanted sales calls, and emptying unsolicited e-mails? Americans receive close to two million tons of junk mail every year; close to half is never opened. Junk mail is a nuisance, and clearly a waste of time: we waste an estimated 3 to 4 days a year opening it. I could think of a few other things to do with that time: a get-away weekend to a B&B in Galena, a fall hike at Kettle Moraine S.F. with Sierra Club's outings committee, or just staying home to clean out the sock drawer. Basically anything would be more fun, interesting, and productive. Not to mention the demands junk creates on our environment. We could save nearly 100 million trees a year if we just put an end to junk mail!

In our complex, fast paced society, easy or clear solutions are not always evident. But you can put a substantial dent in reducing junk mail, unwanted sales calls and commercial e-mail and it only takes a few minutes.

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) is the oldest and largest national trade association. DMA takes a proactive stance in response to consumer problems. You can contact them on the web at [www.the-dma.org/](http://www.the-dma.org/), proceed under the Consumer Help category, click on "How to get my name off." All reputable direct marketing companies are members of DMA and use the "do not bother me" lists. Your information will be placed in the "do-not-call," "do-not-mail," and e-mail "opt-out" lists of your choice. This service is free if you print the registration forms and mail them in or \$5 if you register online. The only tedious thing was having to retype or rewrite my name and address to stop each phone, mail, and e-mail category. Don't forget to register your spouse and other family members separately.

Since I registered with DMA and waited until the next network update, I've seen a drastic decrease in junk mail and unwanted phone calls. (I didn't receive many unwanted e-mails, so I can't tell if the results are as significant.) I used to receive 3-6 calls a day and now am down to a few a week. (It's only been a few weeks since I joined the "do not bother list"). When I received only three pieces of mail, I realized how quick and easy mail is to handle when you don't need a wheel barrel to get it to the recycling bin. I can only tell you it's working for me. Take the time and let it work for you, and help reduce the impact on the environment. The savings of time, energy, and paper are fantastic. Remember to re-register if you move or change your phone number.

Although minimizing paper waste is good for the environment, there are reasons why you might not want to become a part of DMA's "do not bother me" lists. If you are a regular catalog shopper, use a lot of discount coupons, or take advantage of book, record and tape samples and introductory offers, this choice may not be for you. You may save fuel and ozone emissions by shopping from home with the convenience of making selections from home any hour of any day. Don't forget to recycle local junk mail, stuff that doesn't pique your interest, and advertising flyers addressed to your address or residence. If you decide to receive some or selected catalogs or magazines, please make an effort to reuse them. Some ideas for reuse: share them with friends, neighbors, cohorts, church group, dentist and doctors office, lunch room, bunco group or other place.

"For many people advertising mail is fun, informative, and a convenience," claims the DMA. If you think you could assist in reducing the demands junk mail makes on our environment, join in and help save a tree or two.

## An Easy way to Lighten Your Load. A Review of the GoLite Race Backpack

by Mike Corn

Sadly, the sands of time are beginning to wear away at my once vigorous, though still manly, frame (I'm old enough to remember Preparation "A") — and, thus, a year ago I decided to look for a lighter-weight alternative to my trusty Kelty internal frame pack. The Kelty — while the survivor of many week-long excursions — weighs in around 8 pounds and is simply overkill for the kind of casual backpacking I engage in these days. Fortunately, the "ultralite" revolution has started to mature and extremely, nay, absurdly lightweight backpacks are quite plentiful.

As a Colorado boy, I turned to the GoLite company based in Boulder, Colorado. GoLite makes around a dozen backpacks. I was unable to find a Champaign-Urbana-based dealer, so I stopped into a Galyans in Chicago determined to pick up something suitable for three to four days of backpacking. GoLite packs are generally quite simple frameless packs made of a water resistant and quite tear proof nylon. I had originally intended to get their "Gust" model, which is a large (4000 cubic inches) rucksack type pack (1 lb., 4 oz.). Unfortunately, Galyans was out of the Gust, so I settled on the smaller "Race" model.

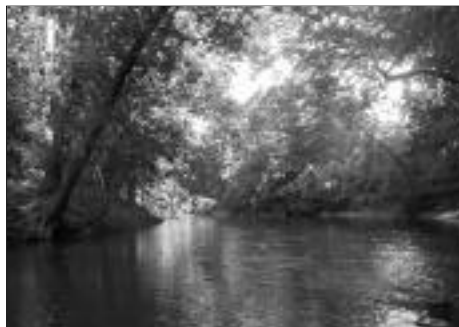
The medium-sized Race (2000 cubic inches), like the Gust, is a rucksack-type backpack. It is very light (1 lb., 8 oz.) and came with a camelback-style water bladder. The back and sides of the pack have mesh pockets which gain you another 700 cubic inches. About the size: the Race is definitely too small to hold four or five days of camping gear. However, it comfortably got me through a couple of nights in the Colorado high-country earlier this past summer.

The Race seems quite well made, though on first examination all the GoLite packs seemed flimsy; I don't believe this is the case but rather the result of the wispy feel of the thin coated nylon (SiLite) they're made from. Not a true rucksack, the Race does have some integral molding (foam pads) to give shape to the pack and additional comfort while hiking. I found the Race to be very comfortable and my sea-level lungs really appreciated the seven pounds of savings versus the weight of my Kelty.

My only complaints about the Race were the single strap used to tie down the top flap and its water resistance. The single tie made it difficult to center balance the items I stored in the top pocket. As far as water resistance goes, the material is pretty good; nothing in my pack got soaked. Nevertheless, clothes near the outer edge of the pack definitely benefited from the raincoat I tied over the pack. GoLite recommends using a third party waterproofing to enhance the fabric's natural water resistance.

I like and will keep my Race, though my hunt for a true replacement for my Kelty continues. Fortunately, most manufacturers are now following in the GoLite footsteps so there are many choices, though my experience with the Race will definitely take me back for a closer examination of some of the other larger GoLite packs.

GoLite Race  
Weight 1 lb 8 oz  
Comfortable carrying weight 30 lbs  
Volume w/pockets 2700 inches (medium)  
List: \$99  
[www.golite.com](http://www.golite.com)



These two photos were taken while canoeing on the Lower Salt Fork, the way a pristine river should look.

## Here's A Chance to Get More Involved! Join the Prairie Group Listserv

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 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 any problems signing up, please send an e-mail to George Gore at [geo\\_gore@yahoo.com](mailto:geo_gore@yahoo.com) or to Jim Beauchamp at [jwbeauch@staff.uiuc.edu](mailto:jwbeauch@staff.uiuc.edu).

Our mailing address is: Sierra Club Prairie Group, P.O. Box 131, Urbana, IL 61803.

### Executive Committee Members of the Prairie Group

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

\* elected or appointed to ExCom for 2003-2004  
\*\* acting chairs

### OPENPOSITIONS

Conservation Chair; Outings;  
Secretary; Program Chair;  
Listserv Chair;  
Environmental Education;  
Fund Raising; Membership Co-Chair;  
Publications; Publicity Chair