

PRAIRIE FLYER

Newsletter of the Sierra Club Prairie Group ■ East-Central Illinois ■ Oct./Nov./Dec. 2002

Upcoming Events

New Location For Meetings

Prairie Group regular monthly meetings have moved to the **Unitarian Church**, 309 W. Green, Urbana. Meetings are held at 7:30 the second Wednesday of the month. Parking is available in back (south side) of the church. Come to the north or south entrance and ring the bell.

Wednesday, October 8

— Illinois Wetlands Protection

Come learn from experts about the risk to Illinois wetlands and the reasons to protect them. We'll learn about the biology of wetlands and the reasons why wetlands are such a valuable resource. We will also hear what is going on in Springfield to pass HB422, an excellent bill that will protect the precious few isolated wetlands left in Illinois and also about how you can help.

Wednesday, November 12

— Mountaintop Removal for Coal Mining

Dave Cooper (a Sierran from Kentucky) will present a slide show accompanied by Appalachian music on how the mountains of southern West Virginia will be flattened in the next 20 years if we don't stop mountaintop removal. This may seem far removed from our flat land lifestyle, but we can all help raise awareness of this problem and pressure our elected leaders to make the right choice in preventing this disaster. Our Rep. Tim Johnson sits on the subcommittee of the House Transportation Committee assigned to the Shays-Pallone "Clean Water Protection Act," which would ban the practice of dumping mining waste into mountain streams.

Wednesday, December 10

— Winter Solstice Celebration

Come celebrate the darkest days of the year with fun, games and treats.

ONE EARTH, ONE CHANCE®

Some Thoughts on Open Spaces

by Anita Povich

During the warm and humid days of an Illinois summer, my thoughts often focus on cool places. You can find them all over town. Think about air-conditioned movie theaters, local libraries, and ubiquitous cool-as-a-cucumber shopping malls. Not only are malls air conditioned, they offer refreshments, a place to sit down, and entertainment. Pick a weekend and you might find 4-H exhibits, chiropractic screenings, fire fighters teaching fire safety to children, or model railroaders sending their engines around miniature tracks.

Malls are the stomping grounds of young people and a lure to adults, whose weekends are challenged by the BIG sale and newspaper coupon discounts. As a lover of open spaces, however, these cool places are not the ones I long for. I want more trees, water, and even wildlife. Even as I write this column, I visualize the shores of Lake Michigan or the bluffs of the Mississippi River. I imagine myself canoeing along Isle Royale or in Wisconsin's North Woods. Even the Door County peninsula calls out for my attention.

Any Sierra Club member in Illinois is aware of the many places in Illinois to canoe, hike, swim, and fish. But sometimes it seems as though there are more open spaces in other Midwestern states. And now I know why! A just-released study of public

attitudes toward open space in the state reveals that Illinois places sixth out of seven Midwestern states when it comes to percentage of recreation lands.

Although we are surrounded by agricultural lands in east-central Illinois, more and more of it is lost to development. In fact, based on five regions in Illinois, our Prairie Chapter is located in the region with the least available percentage of green space. In other words, we are last. The study's results prompted me to think more about saving the space we have and acquiring additional open spaces. Sierra Club members are not alone in their desire to preserve our green spaces.

Among the survey's findings, "...92 percent surveyed said there is a need to preserve non-agricultural open space in Illinois to protect wildlife habitat, 82 percent believe there is a need to acquire more open space before it is lost to development and 56 percent consider open space important to their quality of life."

One part of the study contains a chart comparing state-owned recreation areas by acreage in Midwest states. Some of the findings:

continued on other side

CHAIR'S CORNER

by Alice Englebretsen

With the year more than half over, this seemed a good time to reflect on the Prairie Group's accomplishments since I assumed the Chair position. It helps to look back, because looking forward sometimes seems overwhelming in all that is required to protect our planet. We have accomplished some worthwhile deeds, however. During our regular monthly meeting in January, we enjoyed viewing photos of member's trip, which was good for the soul and an excellent reminder of why we belong to the Sierra Club. In February we demonstrated to new and potential members all the aspects of the Prairie Group and the Sierra Club. In March, Jack Daren, Illinois Chapter Chair, visited us and presented valuable information on what was happening in Springfield and tips on effective lobbying.

Also during March, we held a two-day workshop on Building Better Communities, which was very well attended, and out of which has formed a core group of citizens interested in becoming involved in taking a long range view of how our communities grow. Our April meeting was a fun and interesting bus tour complimenting the March workshops which allowed people to see exactly the good and bad features of our community.

In keeping with the Sierra Club focus on water quality, Marc Miller of the Prairie Rivers Network was our featured May speaker. We learned a great deal about the state of our Illinois rivers and the various forces that determines water quality. We will continue to work with Prairie Rivers Network and stay aware of issues affecting our waterways and drinking water.

The summer was devoted to enjoying our open spaces with a picnic hike at River Forest Park Preserve in Vermilion County, softball at Ambucs Park in Urbana, and yet another fun evening at Meadowbrook Park walking/running/biking/skating. These activities remind us of the importance of preserving open lands and give all ages an opportunity to socialize and get to know each other.

In looking towards the future, I see a need to do more than ever before. There is so much to know and understand about the influences affecting our neighborhoods, drinking water, air, and general quality of life and how to protect our special resources and fight effectively for the future. The process never ends.

Please join us in this effort. It's a wonderful way to enjoy activities with others who also want to enjoy and protect our natural treasures. We have opportunities for people of all skill level and interests. Join us for camaraderie and a great opportunity to join the organization that knows more about enjoying the outdoors and protecting our special places.

Look At Our Alerts Listserv and Our Web Site for Up-to-Date Information!

by Jim Beauchamp

We apologize that the *Flyer* doesn't have all the latest breaking news. The main reason it doesn't is that our current print deadline is about two months before it gets mailed to you. When we did our own newsletter totally in town — which included gathering articles, editing, layout, master printing, hand carrying, copy printing, stapling, label stamping, more hand carrying, and final bulk mailing — turnaround time was much better. But it took a lot of people power, which is in short supply these days (we all have other things to do!). So when the Illinois Chapter offered to relieve us of all chores except article writing and editing by publishing our newsletter on the back of theirs, we jumped at the opportunity. However, the downside is the increased turnaround time. Sometimes we try to make up for that by sending special postcard mailings.

However, high technology comes to the rescue in the form of our electronic mail "listserv" and our website — assuming you have a computer on the internet, that is. The listserv is called IL-PRAIRIE-ALERTS, and you can join it by e-mailing Jim Beauchamp, George Gore, or Alice Englebretsen (see the ExCom roster for their e-mail addresses). Alternatively, you can go to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/archives/il-prairie-alerts.html> and join by clicking on "Join or leave the list." Or, another way you can access this is by linking to it from our website.

The Alerts listserv gives you two types of messages via direct e-mail to you:

- 1) Action alerts about the environment, especially about current legislation that you can influence by contacting law-makers.
- 2) Reminders and information about upcoming Prairie Group events.

The bandwidth is usually quite low, on the order of two or three messages a week.

We are grateful to Ted Turlentes for setting up the listserv and George Gore for developing it further. It has proved to be very useful for several years.

Our website is at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie/>

With the website you can find out all sorts of information about Prairie Group. The site has nine pages each of which shares a banner at the top that pro-

vides links to the other pages. The pages are

- 1) **Homepage.** This page has the current news about the group. Mainly it describes the upcoming events and gives some important links. A link at the bottom of the page features a bear who beacons people to join Sierra Club.
- 2) **Calendar.** This provides links to General Meetings, Outings, and Political Action Information
- 3) **Committees.** This contains descriptions of the various committees of the group (e.g., Political, Conservation, Membership).
- 4) **Meetings.** This contains descriptions of our recent meetings together with reports on the meetings including some digital photos.
- 5) **Newsletter.** *The Prairie Flyer* is archived (in PDF or text format) starting with Sept./Oct. '99.
- 6) **Reports.** Reports and articles written by Prairie Group members. Frequently these HTML articles have been taken from previous newsletters.
- 7) **Outings.** This describes upcoming and previous outings.
- 8) **Contacts.** A list of the ExCom members, their positions, and their e-mail and phone contact information. Also, biographies of some of the ExCom members are given.
- 9) **Links.** This gives URL links to other local environmental organizations, pertinent news and governmental organizations, and local natural areas of interest.

It is much easier to keep this information up-to-date than the newsletter. We are grateful to Kate Higgs, Alice Englebretsen, and Tom Talty for setting up the site and developing it.

The Prairie Group webmaster position is available! Currently, I am trying to keep it up-to-date. However, I would be very happy to hand this job over to any interested (and competent) Sierra member who has the time to work on it. We need someone with website experience who also would be responsive to our needs.

Open Space — continued from other side

While Minnesota has more than 6 million acres of state recreation land, 1,223 acres per 1,000 people, and Michigan has nearly 4.5 million acres, or 450 acres per 1,000 people, Illinois has only 306,187 acres, or just 25 acres per 1,000 people.

This means that recreation land is a tiny bit less than one percent of the state. How does that affect us as Sierra Club members?

Should we renew interest in an Open Lands Trust program (begun by former Gov. George Ryan) — the survey indicated that 45 percent of people support a new fund and only 19 percent oppose the idea.

Would you be willing to pay annually toward open-space funding? —78 percent of the people quizzed said they would be willing to pay at least \$2 annually toward open-space funding, and 50 percent indicated a willingness to pay \$35.

The study reports that “for only \$20 per household, Illinois could purchase more than 368,000 acres of land over 20 years at a cost of \$5,000 per acre.” How aware are developers of people’s desire for walking paths and small lakes and ponds in new communities?

How can we keep an eye on zoning and development plans, even while we see open spaces becoming concrete?

Although surveys and studies can give us useful information, how should Sierra Club members use the results, if at all, to remind our elected officials of the need for more green spaces?

And finally, as we continue to enjoy the open spaces in our own lives, how can we continue to educate children and adults to the value of green space to life in general?

About the study: The Illinois Department of Natural Resources released the report in mid-July. In addition to the DNR, the study was conducted with the Illinois Natural History Survey and the University of Illinois, with assistance from the Illinois Association of Park Districts. The study targeted 5,000 residents statewide last year with questionnaires and received a return rate of 38 percent.

To download a copy of the report *Public Attitudes Toward Open Space: The Unmet Demand for Open Space in Illinois*, go to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources’s web site at http://dnr.state.il.us/orep/open_space_final_report.pdf

Defend the Shawnee Activist Training Workshop

Save the date — October 25-26 — for a weekend of information, skills, and fun! More information in *Lake & Prairie* and on the website.

Prairie Group Alerts and Outings E-mail Lists

Want to know about local environmental alerts, outings, or the latest opportunities to get involved?

Sign up today for our moderated alert listserv and our open forum outings listserv by going to <http://lists.sierraclub.org/archives> and scrolling down past many Sierra Club listservs to click on “IL-PRAIRIE-ALERTS” and/or “IL-PRAIRIE-OUTINGS-FORUM.”

On the next screen click on “Join or leave the list” then fill in blanks for “Your e-mail address” and “Your name.”

Finally, select the listserv settings you want (default is fine for beginners) and click on “Join the list.”

Any questions, please e-mail George Gore at geo_gore@yahoo.com or Mike Corn at mcorn@uiuc.edu.

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

Where the Heck Am I?

A review of the Garmin etrex Legend GPS mapping receiver

by Mike Corn

Over the years, involving hundreds of camping trips into places both familiar and remote, I’ve needed a compass perhaps three times — and one of those times was only to find some cached beer while returning from seven days of back country skiing. However, on a recent three-day trip to the Colorado high country, I realized I had to have a mapping GPS.

For those of you who have been held hostage in a Third World country for the last 15 years, GPS units are small electronic receivers that determine your location on the planet to within a few meters by triangulating the signals from Global Positioning Satellites. Modern GPS units can also use signals from the FAA’s WAAS satellites to further increase accuracy. Yep, the same technology that places a bomb in someone’s pocket in Baghdad can help you escape the maddening crowd.

Ranging in price from \$200 to \$600, newer GPS units not only locate you on the planet, but display maps (topo, roadways, rivers, etc) and track your route over time, displaying it as a trail on the map. In a desperate attempt to avoid spending \$600, I simply walked into REI in Denver and asked to see the two cheapest mapping GPS devices they had. I was shown the Garmin etrex Legend and the Magellan Sporttrac Pro. The Sporttrac had a larger screen and better reception, but I bought the Garmin on the basis that it felt more comfortable in my hand and the display, while smaller, appeared sharper. Buyer beware, however; as the Garmin screen would probably present a challenge for older eyes.

The etrex Legend contains a base map which has most major cities and roads included (the scale is 1:100k). More detailed maps (1:24k) can be purchased from the manufacturer and uploaded via a PC into the unit. You should be aware that a fair number of third party maps exist, but these will not upload into the GPS unit. You can use these third party packages to define routes on a map, and then upload the routes into the GPS.

The etrex Legend was very simple to use and worked flawlessly. All functions are accessible with one hand using its five buttons and one “click stick” on the unit. While it does take a bit of practice to figure out how to move between the various screens and options, one can quickly move between screens showing which satellites are being used, a current location map, navigation information, a trip computer, and a setup/utilities display.

After initially setting the correct time zone, I would simply turn the unit on (the “track log” was on by default) and as I hiked, my path would appear on

the map display. I could stop logging my route or save an existing track to memory for later use. At any point along the way I could press and hold the click stick down and a “way point” would be created at that location and displayed on the map. Using mapping software as discussed above, I could download and save tracks and/or waypoints. One can also zoom in or out of the map display.

The Legend also includes some items that might surprise you if you’ve read the unit’s specs on the Garmin web site. The Legend does not have an electronic compass or barometric altimeter. However, the unit does display elevation and a compass display estimating these values based on your movement and data from the GPS satellites. Thus, when switched on, my displayed altitude was invariably off — however, after moving for only a few seconds, it would quickly zero in to values that corresponded to a USGS topo map. Similarly, the navigation display page does have a compass display that points to your current heading or, alternatively, the bearing you need to take to return to a predefined route. For example, after arriving at some point, you can use the “trackbac” feature to have the display point you back along the exact route you took getting there.

Problems

The only significant problem with the Legend was the weakness of reception. Indoors it simply lacks the antenna to receive any satellite information, and even on my lap in the car, reception was spotty. Placing the unit on the dash resulted in enough satellite reception to have a typical positional accuracy of 21 feet. Even at high elevation in Colorado, I never received the WAAS satellites (they’re low on the horizon and I’m presuming the mountains blocked them), whereas in my front yard in Urbana they were found immediately. Garmin claims a battery life (2 x AA) of 18 hours. I never left mine on for more than an hour at a time and have yet to see the battery indicator show any change after approximately 10 hours of use. I also noticed that the comfortable rubber grip felt sticky — as if being damaged by deet-based insect repellent.

Would I recommend the etrex Legend? Absolutely —but be aware that the screen could be hard to read for older eyes — though the contrast and visibility is excellent, even in bright sunlight or using backlighting at night. Will it replace your compass? It could and then some — but at five times the price of a premium compass and its ability to run out of juice, you may want to slip your \$15 Silva in a pocket if you’re really heading out into the wilderness.

Find the Garmin etrex Legend at www.garmin.com

etrex Legend specs

Number of Waypoints	1,000	Unit Size (H x W x D)	4.4 x 2.0 x 1.2
Built in Memory	8 MB	Thumb Stick (five-position (cursor switch))	Yes
Number of routes/number of waypoints per route	20/125	Map Storage	Internal Memory
Battery Life	18 HR (2 AA)	Backlit Display	Single level
Display Size	2.1 x 1.1	Ext. Ant. Hookup	N/A
Display type	4 level Gray LCD	WAAS capability	Yes
Area Calculation	Yes	MGRS position format	Yes
Pixels (H x W)	288 x 160	Hunting/Fishing calculator	Yes
Standard GPS Antenna	Built in	Celestial Information Page	Yes
TracBack Mode	Yes	Proximity Waypoints	N/A
# of Tracklog Points	10,000	Built-in calendar	Yes
Unit Weight	5.3 oz.	Waypoint Icons	Yes
Audible Alarms	No	MSRP	\$214.27
Waterproof Standard	IPX7		

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* elected or appointed to ExCom for 2003-2004
** elected or appointed to ExCom for 2002-2003

OPEN POSITIONS

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