



## RIVER PRAIRIE GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB DuPage County, Illinois Group Guide and Involvement Opportunities

This document was prepared to help new members of the River Prairie Group, interested current members of the River Prairie Group, and interested non-members of the Sierra Club to learn about the River Prairie Group. The current Welcome Wagon Host is [Joe Pokorny](#) ((708) 562-2998). He can be contacted for more information about the various activities of the Sierra Club's River Prairie Group of DuPage County, Illinois.

**NOTE:** Names in [blue underlined font](#) are email hyperlinks online but don't work in this PDF form; other links in the same font go to the web page of interest in either format.

This document was last updated on **March 13, 2009**.

Online version: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg/welcomewagon.htm>

### I. Overview and answers to frequent asked questions (FAQs)

#### ***What is the Sierra Club?***

The Sierra Club operates at the national, regional, state and local (e.g. county) levels. In this document, the following abbreviated terms will be used:

**National** - The National Sierra Club is composed of about 750,000 members throughout North America. Headquarters are in San Francisco, with about a dozen regional offices throughout North America. The national organization maintains a home page on the Internet that you can access through the World Wide Web at <http://www.sierraclub.org> .

**Region** - The Midwest Region of the Sierra Club is composed of Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio and Kentucky. Regional office is in Madison, Wisconsin. Phone (608) 257-4994.

**Chapter** - Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club is headquartered at 70 East Lake St., Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60601. Phone (312) 251-1680 or E-mail [illinois.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:illinois.chapter@sierraclub.org) . The Illinois Chapter is composed of 15 groups throughout the state with a total of about 25,000 members. A map of the State of Illinois, which is the Illinois Chapter and all 15 groups, can be found on the chapter's web page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org> .

**Group** - River Prairie Group of the Sierra Club (**RPG**) is primarily composed of Club members resident in the ZIP codes of DuPage County. This document pertains primarily to the workings of the River Prairie Group, with information on the other levels of the Sierra Club where pertinent.

**Sierra Student Coalition (SSC)** - The Sierra Student Coalition is the student-run arm of the Sierra Club. It is a broad network of high school and college students from around the country working to protect the

environment on the local, regional, national and international level. For more information, or to get involved, check the SSC webpage at <http://www.ssc.org>.

### ***What is the club's purpose?***

According to the Articles of Incorporation for the not-for-profit Sierra Club: The purposes of the Sierra Club are to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

### ***Does the River Prairie Group have a home office? Where do members meet?***

The Group doesn't have an office. General programs are usually held at the Glen Ellyn Public Library in downtown Glen Ellyn (see "Informative Programs" section). The number of general programs scheduled each year varies. However, the current practice is to conduct six general programs during the months of February, March, April, September, October, and November. Committee meetings are usually held in members' homes.

The River Prairie Group maintains an internet web page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg/>. It is a hotbed of information and announcements on upcoming Group activities with photos and links to other information sources.

### ***Who belongs to the River Prairie Group?***

The approximately 2,800 members of the River Prairie Group are from Greater DuPage County, meaning the county and some suburban areas around it. If you live in DuPage County or in cities straddling DuPage and either Cook or Will Counties, you will automatically become a River Prairie Group member when you join the Sierra Club. However, any Sierra Club member in North America can belong to any Sierra Club Group, so you have the option of changing your affiliation.

### ***How can I join Sierra Club?***

To join online, go through our web page link (and receive a "thank you" gift if you like) at: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg> and click on "**membership information**" or to receive a Sierra Club membership application form (no gift), contact River Prairie Group Membership Chair, [Bonnie Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520. Both methods give the RPG a credit for your initial membership.

Members join the national organization and are automatically added to the state and local membership rolls. A regular membership costs \$39 (\$49 for joint membership) and \$25 for students and seniors (\$35 joint). Life memberships and \$25 introductory specials are also available. A portion of the membership fee is distributed from National to Chapters and Groups.

### ***What publications am I supposed to receive as a member?***

As a River Prairie Group member, you will receive three publications regularly:

- \* **DuPage Sierran**, the quarterly newsletter of River Prairie Group activities attached to the *Lake and Prairie*.
- \* **Lake & Prairie**, the quarterly newsprint-style newsletter of the Illinois Chapter. The current and archive issues are downloadable from the Chapter web news page: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/News> (links are listed on the left with *low* for dialup (smaller file) and *high* for cable modem/DSL).
- \* **Sierra magazine**, the bimonthly magazine from National headquarters.

### ***I am a Sierra Club member, but I am not getting my newsletter(s) or magazine! What should I do?***

To begin troubleshooting, DuPage County residents should contact the RPG HELEN Administrator, [Joe Pokorny](#), at (708) 562-2998. Or any member should contact National at: [membership.services@sierraclub.org](mailto:membership.services@sierraclub.org) or can call the Chapter office at (312) 251-1680.

### ***Is this person at my door or on the phone for real?***

Sierra Club-National does occasionally conduct telephone solicitations and launch door-to-door

canvassing campaigns to boost membership and raise money. If you would like to verify that the person asking you for money is legitimate, call the Chapter office at (312) 251-1680.

### ***Where can I buy a Sierra Club mug, T-shirt or calendar?***

Sierra Club sells these and other goods to help fund its conservation activities. The purchases make great gifts, too! Some of these goods are for sale at the Group's general programs or visit the national Club web page at <http://sierraclub.org> and click the “online store” link on the right.

### ***I am a new (or newly active) member. How can I get involved?***

**First** – Subscribe to the River Prairie Group News List-serve and receive monthly updates on activities, meetings, and information about your local group. To subscribe, go to:

<http://lists.sierraclub.org/archives/IL-RPG-NEWS.html> and click on “Join or leave the list”; then fill out the information requested and click “Join”.

**Second** – Consider your interests in the four categories of activities that our members conduct:

- **Outings**
- **Social**
- **Conservation (from habitat restoration to political lobbying)**
- **Administration**

Outings are largely recreational. Some outings involve workdays at Midewin Tallgrass National Prairie and at other conservation sites. Social events are activities planned for environmentally minded individuals to meet in a social setting. Conservation includes hands-on restoration, river monitoring, learning about environmental issues, and lobbying elected officials with phone calls, letters and occasional visits. Administration includes all of the nuts-and-bolts of running the club. Activities are guided by committees and teams, which are all overseen by the Group's seven-member, elected governing body, called the Executive Committee. See further descriptions below.

## **II. Outings**

Outings are the organized outdoor activities like hiking, backpacking, bicycling, canoeing, skiing, orienteering, photo hikes and camping that the Sierra Club is well known for. All year long, trained volunteers lead trips that last from one day to a weekend, and a few trips a year will last a whole week. Most are in the Midwest, and most are close to home. For trips longer in duration and farther a field, Sierra Club-National sponsors trips that are advertised in Sierra magazine. Leaders of Group Outings must limit the number of participants for each trip, and trips often fill up early - sometimes months ahead. So be sure to reserve a place well ahead of time. You will be required to pay a minimal fee to cover miscellaneous trip costs. The amount is publicized in the trip announcement.

The *Lake & Prairie* contains trips from around the state. Outings sponsored by the River Prairie Group are listed as (RPG) after each listing there.

**For the most up-to-date information**, check the Chapter Outings Web Page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/outings> and select *River Prairie* for just RPG or *All Illinois* for all local outings listings.

For general questions on Outings, call Group Outings Chair [Steve Turner](#) at 630-782-5865. For questions regarding particular trips, call the trip leader.

## **III. Social**

Social events like parties, progressive dinners, restaurant nights, museum trips, theater nights out, and casual meetings at restaurants/bars are planned by the Social Committee. These activities are another fun reason to get out of the house and meet fellow Sierrans. All activities are opened to any interested

person regardless of marital status or residency. Check the River Prairie Group Web Page at <http://www.illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg/> for current activities. To help, plan, and/or organize, contact Group Chair [Lonnie Morris](#) at (630) 627-3982. Suggestions are also accepted and encouraged. We are currently looking for a substitute Social Chair; if you are interested in this position, contact Group Chair [Lonnie Morris](#) at (630) 627-3982.

## IV. Conservation through Environmental Activism

### **Bluestem Network:**

A large phone tree lobbying effort that targets federal and state elected officials is thriving on the River Prairie Group's Bluestem Network, and you are welcome to join!

The tree is activated 6-12 times a year. Phone tree participants pass down an *action alert* notification to the next person on the tree. Frequently these notifications are left on volunteers' answering machines. The message left is simple: "The Bluestem Network of the Sierra Club has been activated." Members have a choice of receiving the action alert via email or accessing the alert on the RPG webpage. Each action alert contains information informing the volunteer about a specific issue or piece of pending legislation, the Sierra Club's stance on it, and which lawmakers to call. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the legislation and environmental issues surrounding it. To join the Bluestem Network, print, fill out, and mail the application on the River Prairie Group webpage at:

<http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg/bluestemform.pdf> or call the Bluestem Network Coordinator, Julia Nephew at 630-858-5123. You can also view the archive of alerts at: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg> and click on **Action Alerts** in the left-hand column.

### **Restoration:**

Prairie Restoration Work Along the Prairie Path/Midewin Tallgrass National Prairie/Other Workdays: If you would enjoy a morning or afternoon on the beautiful nearby native prairies of Illinois and/or other environmental sites, then sign up for next weekend's restoration workday. Volunteers help preserve the prairie ecosystem by planting or collecting seed or removing invasive species. One club member calls the workdays "the poor man's health club." Sierra Club members cooperate with other environmental organizations and community groups at these year-round sessions of outdoor seed collecting, planting and brush cutting at area forest preserves.

Participants should dress for the weather and work gloves are recommended.

To volunteer for prairie restoration work along the Prairie Path, call Prairie Restoration Chair, [Bruce Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520.

Many of these workdays are sponsored by the Outings Program of the River Prairie Group. Recently, the RPG Outings Program has been sponsoring workdays to help restore the prairie at the Midewin Tallgrass National Prairie. Check the River Prairie Group Web Page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg> for a list of workdays sponsored by the RPG Outings Program and other environmental groups.

### **River Monitoring:**

The River Prairie Group's River Monitoring Network monitors the water quality of rivers in DuPage County. Volunteers collect water samples at specific sites along the Salt Creek, East Branch of the DuPage, and West Branch of the DuPage. The samples are analyzed for chemical pollutants. The results of the analysis can be reviewed at the River Prairie Group Web Page, <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg>. For more information or to participate in river monitoring activities call River Monitoring Chair, [Bonnie Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520.

### **DuPage County issues:**

To network with people concerned about various DuPage County conservation and environmental issues, such as wetlands protection, forest preserve issues, and open space issues call [Connie Schmidt](#) at (630) 393-6276. Generally, if you have a question regarding an environmental issue in DuPage County, Connie Schmidt would be the first person to contact. Connie would be able to direct you to the appropriate resource person if she is not able to handle your question directly.

**Issues outside of DuPage County:**

To learn more about a specific environmental issue in the state but outside of DuPage County, call the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club office in downtown Chicago at (312) 251-1680. Someone there will either have information or get you in touch with someone who does.

**National and Global Issues Action at a Local Level:**

- **Cool Cities:** Group activists are contacting local community leaders to encourage them to join the Cool Cities initiative. Communities all over America are responding the threat of global warming with smart energy solutions. These "Cool Cities" are taking decisive action to reduce heat-trapping emissions, lower energy bills, save taxpayer dollars, and protect our environment. Our group contacts are RPG Cool Cities Chair, [James Babcock](#) (primary), at (630) 530-4692, or Group Chair [Lonnie Morris](#) at (630) 627-3982. Also see: <http://www.coolcities.us/>.

**Visiting Elected Officials:**

Throughout the year, Sierra Club activists make lobby visits to the home district offices of the DuPage County Forest Preserve or County Board Commissioners, Illinois State Representatives or Senators, and U.S. Congresspersons. Environmental issues are discussed with DuPage County area elected county, state, and federal officials. If you would like to make a lobby visit to a state representative or a state senator, contact Group Lobby Chair, [Linda Sullivan](#), at (630) 620-5257 or to a DuPage County Forest Preserve Commissioner or County Board Commissioner.

**Writing Elected Officials:**

If you'd like to be a part of a campaign to write well-informed letters on environmental issues to elected federal and state representatives, then add you name to the Chapter-level Volunteer Lobbyists Network. You will receive action alerts about six times a year either by computer through electronic mail, or by a letter through the post. To join the Volunteer Lobbyists Network, call State Director [Jack Darin](#) at the Chapter office (312) 251-1680.

**Political Endorsements:**

The River Prairie Group conducts a very extensive political endorsement program. How does the Sierra Club decide which candidates to endorse in an election? The following Sierra Club Endorsement Process is followed by the leaders of the River Prairie Group (RPG). The Sierra Club is an environmental organization and only reviews factors directly related to environmental issues. A Sierra Club endorsement for election means that this candidate has demonstrated an environmental voting record and/or background and/or history for promoting pro-environmental policy.

The first step in the endorsement procedure is to send questionnaires to candidates running in a specific race. Typically, questionnaires are sent out to all the candidates who have filed their intentions to run in the Primary Election with County Board of Elections. The environmental voting records of incumbents running in the election are also analyzed. And, the RPG maintains an on-going relationship with incumbent candidates who have received prior endorsements by visiting them regularly to discuss environmental issues.

Next, a team of RPG activists analyze the questionnaire data and the environmental voting records of the incumbents. Interviews are conducted with certain candidates. At these meetings, a discussion about current environmental issues is conducted.

Finally, the RPG team meets to discuss the interview and presents the RPG elected Executive Committee with a recommendation. The Committee must vote by a 2/3 margin to present a recommendation for endorsement to the Illinois Chapter's Executive Committee. Members of the RPG group then travel to the next meeting of the Illinois Chapter to convince Sierra Club activists from the entire State of Illinois of the merits of endorsing a candidate from the RPG. The Illinois Chapter must confirm the endorsement by a 2/3 vote. If the candidate is running for federal office, the National Sierra Club Political Committee must also confirm that endorsement recommendation by a 2/3 vote.

If you would like to assist in the political endorsement program of the River Prairie Group, please contact Political Chair, [Linda Sullivan](#), at (630) 620-5257.

**Staying informed/Taking action by computer:**

1) The National arm of the Sierra Club maintains an electronic activist network available to anyone with online access. You can receive action alerts on environmental legislation by visiting <http://www.sierraclub.org>, then click on "**Take Action**" and follow the steps to sign up for the Activist Network.

2) Illinois Sierra Club Activist Network sends e-mail alerts on statewide legislative issues. Visit <http://illinois.sierraclub.org>, click on "**Take Action**", and then on "**Sign up here**" under **1) IL SC Action Network** and/or **2) IL Action Alert List-serve**.

3) Also check the River Prairie Group Web Page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg>. And sign up for periodic (monthly) Group news at: <http://lists.sierraclub.org/archives/IL-RPG-NEWS.html> and click on "**Join or leave the list**"; then fill out the information requested and click "**Join**".

4) Also note the **Bluestem Network** information above for Action Alerts.

**Informative Programs:**

The River Prairie Group hosts speakers who present lectures and slide shows on a wide range of topics -- from outings and travelogues, to wildlife protection, recycling, pollution, politics, and volunteer opportunities. These general programs are held at the Glen Ellyn Public Library. The Glen Ellyn Public Library is located in downtown Glen Ellyn at 400 Duane Street. Duane Street is south of and parallel to the Metra Train tracks. The days and times of the meetings vary; for further information, check the River Prairie Group Web Page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg> or call Program Committee Chair [Bruce Blake](#) at (630) 629-2520.

**General Volunteerism:**

RPG gets involved with many volunteer activities throughout the year. For a look at our list, check out the Volunteer form at: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg/volunteersignup.pdf>, our *Join Us* Brochure at: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg/JoinUs.pdf> or contact our Volunteer Coordinator, [Tom Richardson](#), at (630) 832-3532 or Membership Chair, [Bonnie Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520.

**V. Administration**

If you want to pitch right in to help make the group function, here are some of the varied opportunities that await you:

**Executive Committee "Excom" Meetings:**

Meet the Group's leaders, share your ideas with them and learn the nuts and bolts workings of the River Prairie Group ---where its money is going and on what its leaders are focusing in any given month.

Members who wish to join the River Prairie Group Executive Committee have made the commitment to give a significant amount of their volunteer time to help with the day to day operations of the group. The amount of time varies depending upon which committee the member agrees to manage (chair). This amount of time can be from just a few hours each month to numerous hours a week. Extra "hands" are always needed to help with the running of the various functions of the River Prairie Group. The group secretary and treasurer need to be members of the Executive Committee. For more information about these roles and the amount of time that would be involved, call the current RPG Executive Chair, [Lonnie Morris](#), at (630) 627-3982.

To serve on the Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee's seven members are elected for staggered terms of two years each.

Elections are held in October. To run for office, you have to be nominated well ahead of time. If you think you'd like to serve, talk to the current Excom Chair, [Lonnie Morris](#), at (630) 627-3982. Your next step will be to place your name with the nominating committee.

**Program Coordinators** help plan and carry out the programs that accompany the general meetings.

They need help with the following tasks:

\*finding speakers

- \*setting up
- \*cleaning up
- \*supplying and serving refreshments
- \*greeting attendees

If you want to help, call the Program Chair, [Bruce Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520.

**Social Committee** members plan events like parties, progressive dinners, and restaurant nights out. Our current Social Chair has stepped down. If you are interested in guiding this committee and learning more about its work, call [Lonnie Morris](#) at (630) 627-3982 for more information.

#### **Group Newsletter:**

All members are encouraged to write and submit articles or photos for the Group's quarterly newsletter, *DuPage Sierran*. Its primary purpose is to report on the Group's activities like outings, programs, activism and lobbying.

Those with experience in journalism or desktop publishing knowledge are invited to become Editorial Board members. They review submitted articles, plan layout, determine editorial content, write and edit articles.

We are currently looking for a new newsletter editor for the *DuPage Sierran*. If you are interested in contributing your expertise, please contact [Bonnie Blake](#) at (630) 629-2520.

**The Chapter newsletter**, *Lake & Prairie*, also accepts articles and photos. Call the Chapter office at (312) 251-1680 for details.

**Membership Committee** members welcome new members, keep track of membership statistics and coordinate membership benefits. Volunteers are needed to call new members to welcome them into the club and to greet new members at general meetings. The committee is launching a strong effort to retain new members, beginning with surveying current members and lapsed recent members by phone. If you'd like to help, call Membership Chair, [Bonnie Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520 or RPG HELEN Administrator, [Joe Pokorny](#), at (708) 562-2998.

#### **Publicity Team:**

Distributing posters to area bulletin boards and placing announcements in newspapers and other media about upcoming meetings and about the Club's position on environmental issues is the responsibility of the Publicity Team. If you'd like to help, contact Publicity Co-Chairs [Linda Sullivan](#) at (630) 620-5257 or [Bruce Blake](#) at (630) 629-2520.

#### **Fundraising Team:**

If you can think of revenue generating activities, call Fundraising Chair, [Bruce Blake](#), at (630) 629-2520 or to volunteer, see below.

#### **Fundraising Events (help needed!):**

**Native Plant Sales Fundraiser:** Every spring, RPG purchases locally native perennial and annual plants for sale at store events, other Club meetings, and via an order form in the *DuPage Sierran*. If you would like to help transfer plants, set up, sell, and take down and clean up at these events, contact [Bruce Blake](#) at (630) 629-2520. Plant order forms are listed on the RPG web page:

<http://illinois.sierraclub/rpg> and look for the link and also in the first quarter *DuPage Sierran* inside the first quarter *Lake and Prairie*; you can download an *L&P* copy at the Chapter web page: <http://illinois.sierraclub.org> and click the *News* tab and pick the issue from the column on the right (low – for dialup; high – for DSL/Cable Modem).

**“Party at the Farm” Fundraiser:** Every mid/late May, RPG hosts a fundraising “party” with fun and entertainment at the Schmidt “farm” in Warrenville. If you would like to help with setup, take down, and other operations, please contact [Connie Schmidt](#) at (630) 393-6276. The date and more info will be listed on the RPG web page.

**Welcome Wagon Team:**

The job of a Welcome Wagon Host is to help people find their way around the maze of multiple goings-on in the club. Welcome Wagon Host's names and phone numbers are placed the River Prairie Group Web Page at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/rpg>. Welcome Wagon Hosts field calls and direct interested callers to the correct resource person to answer their concerns. This volunteer job generally requires a few hours a month and can be done at home. If you are able to field calls at your home from members or those curious about the club, then contact Welcome Wagon Host [Joe Pokorny](#) at (708) 562-2998 to become a member of the Welcome Wagon Team.

**Outings Leaders and Assistant Leaders:**

Leaders are needed to carry on the tradition of outdoor recreational opportunities in the club. Any Sierra Club member with a willingness to help out on trips is welcome to attend Outings Committee meetings. The Outings Committee, composed of trip leaders, usually meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. At these meetings, members discuss past outings and approve future ones. Leaders and assistants must have a current First Aid certificate and CPR training. The club sponsors such training periodically.

To find out where the next Outings Committee meeting will be held, call Outings Chair [Steve Turner](#) at (630) 782-5865.

**Representatives to the Illinois Chapter:**

The River Prairie Group needs members to attend the bimonthly Illinois Chapter Executive Committee Meetings. Sierra Club members from the entire State of Illinois meet and discuss environmental issues. Your presence would be representing the River Prairie Group. If you would like to learn more about this function and perhaps attend as an observer one of the Illinois Chapter meetings; please call RPG Chapter Delegate [John Stevens](#) at (773) 342-2794.