

# Illinois H<sub>2</sub>O Sentinels

2009 Annual Report of Illinois' Clean Water Campaign, Wetland Protection Campaign & Water Sentinels Program

## Eagle View Water Sentinels Cover What's Wet in the Quad City Area

Water Sentinels of the Quad City area are folks who must jump into the water with both feet. Since launching their Water Sentinels Program this spring, they have been busy—

- performing monthly water quality testing
- aiding Ducks Unlimited in verifying the presence of wetlands in their area
- helping fund and plant hardwood trees at Milan Bottoms, an ecologically important forested wetland along the Mississippi River.

"If it's anything related to water, the Water Sentinels will do it," said Sierra Club leader Sheri Colman who got the group started.



Now 25 volunteers collect and analyze water quality samples from 10 stream sites once a month. The temperature, pH, turbidity, phosphate and nitrate levels are measured in each sample.

Eagle View Group members, like Sierra Club volunteers throughout the state, are assisting Ducks Unlimited in updating the National Wetland Inventory for Illinois. They are visiting wetlands in their area, identifying the type of wetland found (or if it has been destroyed) and taking a photo. The collected data will help guide wetland preservation and restoration efforts by DU and other groups along the Mississippi River flyway.

They are also helping to restore a forested wetland along the Mississippi River. In October the group teamed up with the Natural Area Guardians and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to plant two acres of hardwood trees at the Milan Bottoms preserve at the Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge. Funding for the trees came from the USFWS and the Water Sentinels program.

## Woods & Wetlands' Stormwater Rangers Monitor Construction Sites

Since receiving training in March on how to resolve soil erosion and sediment runoff problems at



Photo: Evan Craig  
construction sites, the Stormwater Rangers of the Woods & Wetlands Group have been hard at work protecting Lake County streams.

It's not an easy or simple task. Take the abandoned Sunset Grove development in the town of Long Grove. Group leader Evan Craig has reached out to town officials, Illinois EPA, Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District, and the county's stormwater management commission about this problematic site for over eight months. It has been a perfect training ground for new Stormwater Rangers who have visited the site to observe improvements in soil erosion controls but continued sediment runoff from the site. The site's developer has been fined by the town and received a notice of violation from the IEPA.

The Woods & Wetlands Stormwater Rangers make use of an online workspace to document their investigations of this and eight other construction sites they are tracking. They report sediment runoff by measuring suspended solids in site runoff with an easy-to-use Ohio sediment stick, which each Stormwater Ranger carries.

## An Illinois Coal Boom

Foremost among the issues facing the Illinois in 2009 was the rush to mine more Illinois coal. Sierra Club water activists in Central and Southern Illinois teamed up with Prairie Rivers Network, Citizens Against Longwall Mining, and the Environmental Law & Policy Center to address the

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## Illinois' Newest River Hero



Photo: Chris Oszak

Cindy Skrukud, Clean Water Advocate for the Illinois Chapter and Water Sentinels staffer, was named a 2009 River Hero by the national group River Network.

“I have a great group of colleagues/friends who I work with pretty hard most every day on behalf of the rivers,

wetlands and groundwater in Illinois,” said Skrukud in her acceptance speech at River Rally.

“What I do in Illinois is simply a big team effort.”

## Water Sentinels Assist Ducks Unlimited in Identifying Illinois Wetlands

Ducks Unlimited is assisting the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service by updating National Wetland Inventory maps for the state of Illinois. And Sierra Club volunteers are aiding that effort by performing the 6000 field IDs of wetlands needed to verify the mapping work performed by DU staff.

Volunteers from northern, East-Central and western Illinois have been trained to identify different types of wetlands. Armed with maps provided by DU, volunteers visit the wetland, identify its type and take a photo. This project will continue through 2010 as DU passes on the maps for southern Illinois counties. DU will use the results of this project to guide its wetland restoration efforts.

## Coal Boom continued

### Joyce Blumenshine Honored for Her Leadership

impact of coal mining and coal waste on Illinois streams, wetlands, groundwater, farmland and communities.

New surface and underground coal mines are being proposed through the coal-rich, southern half of Illinois. Surface mining operations mine through and destroy headwater streams which the Army Corps of Engineers and Illinois EPA claim can be mitigated through enhancements of other offsite streams. Underground longwall mines will subside overlying farm fields, yet the Army Corps of Engineers refuses to address the impact this will have on the drainage off of agricultural lands until after the problem occurs.

In addition to the adverse impacts which coal mining has on the Illinois environment, Prairie Rivers Network and the Illinois Water Sentinels program has taken the lead in addressing pollution issues associated with the disposal of coal combustion waste in the state.

Sierra Club volunteers and staff, led by Mines Committee Chair Joyce Blumenshine, have attended countless hearings on Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources mine permits, NPDES permits and 401 certifications of 404 permits for coal mines and coal waste. Blumenshine was honored with the 2009 Sierra Club Special Service Award for her leadership on this issue as well as her three decades of conservation efforts in Illinois

### 2009 Program Statistics

- Held cleanups on Lake Michigan, Fox River, Salt Creek, Mississippi River and Canton Lake involving 230 youth and 241 adults
- Trained 30 volunteers to monitor and report poor erosion control practices at construction sites
- Trained 85 volunteers to field ID wetlands for update of Illinois' National Wetland Inventory
- 56 volunteers collect and analyze water quality samples on a monthly or quarterly basis in the Fox River, Salt Creek, DuPage River and Rock River watersheds
- Commented on over 80 NPDES permits, 404 permits, 401 certifications and Facility Planning Area expansions
- Over a dozen newspaper and magazine stories

**Engaged over 750 volunteers**

