

Joining Sierra Club members in Lake and Northeastern Cook Counties in Illinois

WOODS & WETLANDS News



Sierra Club Newsletter (Issue No. 39) The Sierra Club Woods & Wetlands Group, PO Box 876, Grayslake, IL 60030 March 2005



VOTE for the Environment!

Green Oaks Mayoral Race

In our winter issue we questioned the practices and plans of Tom Adams for Green Oaks and Lake County's wetlands. His hope to replace wetlands with skyscrapers and reten-

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Endorsement: Jeff Werfel Candidate for Mayor of Grayslake

Acting on the recommendation of its Grayslake Political Committee, the Sierra Club has endorsed Jeff Werfel in the race for Mayor of Grayslake. Running at the top of the Grayslake Unity Ticket, Jeff is advancing a thoughtful, progressive, and Earth-friendly program for the village. Jeff proposes:

- Environmentally sensitive commercial development to benefit the community's tax base with little or no new residential development or, if new residential development must be allowed, only high density development for which a compelling "business case" has been made.
- Invigoration of Grayslake's now moribund Open Space Committee to coordinate land protections strategies and investigate ways to protect that community's natural resources, like Gray's Lake.
- Greater cooperation and coordination with other units of government and private community organizations in order to preserve open space.
- Development of cooperative relationships with area farmers to promote locally grown produce, encourage new and alternative farming methods and creative uses for farmland that might otherwise be developed into single family home subdivisions.
- Education and outreach to develop community appreciation and stewardship of the environment,

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**Jeff Werfel,
Candidate
for Mayor
of Grayslake**

**Also on the
ballot:
Lake County
Transportation
Tax
Referendum**
**READ ON for
details**

COVER STORY CONTINUED: GRAYSLAKE

including preservation of trees, wildlife habitat, and landscapes like the native savanna.

Jeff opposes the proposed extension of Atkinson Road though the wetlands south of Route 120.

Jeff resides in the Prairie Crossing community and is currently a Grayslake village trustee acutely sensitive to the needs of the village's taxpayers. He is also a member of the Nature Conservancy and of the board of the Liberty Prairie Conservancy.

Donations can be sent to: Citizens For Jeff Werfel, 550 Bluestem Lane, Grayslake, Illinois 60030. If you can volunteer, please phone 847-223-5409.

The Club urges each of its Grayslake members to vote for Jeff Werfel on April 5.

Moreover, we hope that members in other municipalities prone to the ravages of sprawl development will be encouraged by the action of this team of Grayslake Sierra Club members, and form Sierra Club endorsement committees in the next election cycle. ●

COVER STORY CONTINUED: GREEN OAKS

tion ponds, and eagerness to accept development proposals with questionable developers, drew our attention. We're glad to learn that Green Oaks will have a better choice for mayor on the April 5th ballot.

A few days after the W&W News arrived in the mail we were pleased to receive a phone call from Carol Fischer promising to do more as mayor to protect Green Oaks' wetlands and open space, and improve the way the village conducts business.

While we would have preferred to have a few members from Green Oaks run our endorsement process, we hope that our members will choose the candidate who promises to do more than "balance" development at the expense of the environment. ●

Lake County Transportation Tax Referendum

Lake County will be asking voters to approve a half percent sales tax increase on April 5 to support its proposed Road Improvement Program. After careful review, W&W has decided to take a neutral position and offer our members a list of pros and cons, and some perspective. This was a difficult decision for the group's Executive Committee.

The county's proposed Program offers several improvements that we have supported in the context of an improved transportation system for years:

Intersection improvements: Congestion on many of our local roads is exacerbated by back-ups waiting for left and right turners. Turn lanes can go a long way to reduce these bottlenecks, and reduce air pollution from idling SUVs, trucks and cars.

Intelligent Transportation System: Considering the money we pay for traffic controls already, it's maddening that coordination of traffic lights lacks the intelligence of a video game. The program promises ITS to help you make all the lights on traffic corridors in the area east of Rt. 94, and holds promise for making buses more efficient and attractive by giving them the green too. However, with the budget cuts threatened for mass transit by Illinois, it's unclear whether there will be many PACE or CTA buses around to use it.

Focus on strategic regional arterials: About 40% of the roads included on the county's program were included in our Crossroads plan. The Crossroads Plan offered a superior congestion relief alternative to the sprawl and congestion that Rt. 53 would cause, and included expanded mass transit linked with improved SRAs. This Program offers incremental progress on this front.

A rail underpass at Rt. 60 and the WI Central: With more trains needed, and more coming when double tracking of this route is complete, more grade separations like this one proposed near Butterfield Rd. make lots of sense.

Unfortunately, there are many signs that the money could be spent in a zero sum game. While road improvements are definitely needed across the county, every transportation study that neglects mass transit improvements and the true costs of sprawl predicts more congestion, not less. We won't beat traffic in Lake County by building more of the same. We need a different approach that directs growth away from open space and grows vibrant communities that pollute less.

How Lake County misses the mark

No Mass Transit: Lopsided transportation plan. Aside from the underpass and possibilities of ITS, this plan lacks any commitment to the more efficient ways to grow and get around. Money is needed for expanded parking and improved METRA stations, for extended and expanded rail service, and more buses. This is crucial to break away from the vicious circle of chasing bad development with roads that cause it, and instead encourage development around transit.

County money for state roads: About half of the county's Program is for state roads that the state already plans to improve. And the other half is for state roads that are presently not planned for improvement. Why isn't the state paying for our state roads? We are concerned that the failure of Lake County legislators to bring home state transportation funds will get worse if Springfield considers this sales tax a new revenue source for the state transportation budget. With an austere budget, attempts by Springfield to reallocate dedicated funding sources have become common. Lake County has a great need, but gets less than other collar counties that need less. Last year Will County, which has a freeway, bypasses developer impact fees, and also shares our plight of no gas tax, took home \$135M more state transportation dollars than Lake County. We believe this is because the attention of our legislators is divided between growing a sensible transportation system, and the efforts of a few misguided legislators who perennially attempt to grab money for the environmentally devastating Rt. 53 boondoggle. While Rt. 53 is no longer in the state's transportation plan, the howl and cry from those hoping it will relieve the congestion

caused by sprawl is just as shrill now as ever. At a recent Village Board meeting where the county presented its program, the Mayor of Vernon Hills even sought to divert some of these referendum funds directly to Rt. 53. Unless they stop fighting about 53, it's likely that these sales tax funds will be siphoned off as offsets to other counties as well.

Weak promises: The referendum does not bind the county to the Program it proposes. If it passes, the program will change as projects are found to be less feasible or more attractive, and as intense lobbying occurs. Only when the tax revenues are used to back loans will the money be committed to specific projects, and the program puts that off for several years. This sales tax is expected to raise at least \$500M, and we think it should be more committed to a more balanced system.

Ignores other funding: Other counties and smart villages charge developers impact fees. These raise road revenues, and encourage more compact development patterns that conserve open space. Lake County could but does not. The Program also makes no mention of money available as generous Congestion Mitigation / Air Quality grants from the federal government that could account for 50% of the Program funding. Absent also is an accounting for any contribution by the municipalities where ITS will be implemented. Altogether these could double the available funds, leaving half of the money unaccounted for by the Program. These oversights further highlight the question of how the money will be spent, and raise the question why the county is asking for a half percent rather than the amount sought with no Program in its last referendum.

There have been a lot of hasty road plans recently, including the Tollway's Rt. 355 Extension plan and its toll hikes which are pushing trucks onto Rt. 41, and they ignore the effects on the air and our health. We need transportation system improvements that put us on a track toward more sensible and sustainable development. If this Transportation Sales Tax Referendum passes, we hope that efforts are pursued to address these remaining concerns. ●

More trains= Cleaner air, less traffic and less sprawl

The sensible solution to the problems of sprawl and traffic is expanding our transportation choices and better planning development. More travel choices can reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, promote neighborhood economic opportunities, and help to control sprawl. It also helps to build safer, more vibrant communities. Six southeast Wisconsin counties and cities are working together to develop a 33-mile extension of the Chicago Metra Union Pacific North rail line that would use upgraded existing rail to connect northeastern Illinois and Chicago to the Wisconsin communities of Kenosha, Somers, Racine, Caledonia, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, Cudahy and Milwaukee (Amtrak station). The Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) Metra commuter train extension is an attractive transportation plan that will:

- **Provide modern, efficient, reliable connection** to a multitude of world-class employment and educational opportunities—and cultural, entertainment and recreation destinations to the north.
- **Provide a fast, reliable, easy, and affordable alternative** to congested highway travel, and is less subject to weather and construction delays. It will use existing rail right-of-way.
- **Be accessible and a practical alternative** for commuting with 362,100 jobs and 540,000 residents projected within 3 miles of the proposed stations in Wisconsin. Three out of Wisconsin's five largest cities are on the KRM route. Milwaukee is the 19th largest city in the U.S.
- **Cut down on traffic** by offering more transportation options. KRM commuter rail extension is projected to reduce cars on I-94 north of the Illinois border by up to 12 %.
- **Cut air pollution.** Most rail-ridership will be diverted from autos, which cause 75% of our hazardous air pollution.
- **Reduce sprawl** by directing future development to existing communities around transit stops. Commuter trains encourage transit-oriented development, resulting in communities that are more efficiently served by transit.

Find information and updates at www.transitnow.org or by phoning Transit NOW at 262-246-6151. ●

Join the Conservation Committee!

By Larry Marvet

As your incoming Conservation Chair, let me introduce myself. My environmental interests have always focused on conservation issues, like protecting wetlands and wildlife. I started by walking Ft. Lauderdale beaches from 11 pm to 2 am to help nesting sea turtles. (My legs still hurt from that.) The Everglades needed help—and still does—so I joined with some great activists to help a little, and learn a lot.

Two children and a move from tropical Florida to arctic Chicago slowed me down for a few years, but Bush environmental policy and idling bulldozers at of my local forest preserve have reawakened me.

If you are reading this article, you didn't join Sierra Club to improve your resume. At the least, you want to learn about environmental issues in your area and beyond. And, perhaps, you've wondered what you can do help. That is what the Conservation Committee is about.

We'll meet on the 4th Wednesday of each month to discuss local, state and national environmental issues, or issues you bring to the meetings. And we'll talk about ways to act on those issues from phone calls—to letter writing—to Congressional meetings—to whatever creative ideas we can come up with.

Come and just listen at our little meeting, or to lobby on Capitol Hill—or anything in between. Knowledge is the best weapon we have in these days of clever spin and newspeak. If you want to make a difference, please join us on:

Wednesday, March 23, 7pm
College of Lake County
Southlake Educational Center
1120 S Milwaukee Ave, Room 104 Vernon Hills

This is a brown brick building about 0.2 miles north of Route 45 on the west side of Milwaukee Avenue. Park in the back. ●

New W&W Public Meetings

Recently, some of our W&W members have begun coming to ExCom Meetings and asking, “**So where’s everybody else?**” Willing to wait their turn on the agenda, they come to ask when and where the group’s Public Meetings are, and a few volunteered to find a meeting spot and time where we can invite all our members to come together.

The new W&W Public Meetings will be held monthly on the third Tuesday starting on April 19, 7:00 pm at the Fremont Township Office, 22376 W. Erhart (intersection of Peterson and Rt. 60). The highlight of the meetings will be a 45 minute information session presented by a specialist, with an opportunity for members to get involved to make a difference. We’ll have some time to meet other members and talk about where we’ve been—and where we’d like to go—and give members and leaders a chance to make short announcements. Those with kids or work the next morning should be able to get home by 9:30 unless they stick around to discuss the evening’s topics and help clean up.

Initial topics might include: Restore the Nippersink, Coyotes Next Door, Midewin: TNT Factory to Tall Grass Prairie, Journey to The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, The Redrock Wilderness, Photographing Nature, Wildlife Rehabilitation—or a topic of popular demand For the night’s special topic, check the [W&W website](#). Contact www.chair@illinois.sierraclub.org if you have topic that you think others will want to know about.

This is for you. Come have fun. ●

Woods & Wetlands Outings

Thanks to all those who took our online Outing survey in January. After studying the results, the new W&W Outings Committee has surged ahead, planning several outings that we're sure you'll enjoy! Those who signed onto the Outings e-mail list, and those of you who keep track of the W&W Group activity through the website got first crack at these outings, but it's not too late for those reading this W&W News to sign up. A brief list:

Join our free e-mail lists—it's easy to join our ISSUES list and our ALERTS list right from our website!

If you've changed your e-mail address, remember to resubscribe.

To sign up, visit <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/w&w>

April 2, Saturday Arctic Photo Exhibit at Field Museum, Chicago, 10:00 a.m.

Stunning exhibition of photographs by Subankkar Banerjee—Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land. We'll see the exhibit and have lunch. E-mail evan.craig@illinois.sierraclub.org or call 847-680-6437.

April 28-May 1, Thursday-Sunday Hiking Shawnee by Amtrak, Chicago to Carbondale

Daily hikes from local lodging will include box canyon, pine forest, and Camp Hutchins Proposed Wilderness during the spring wildflower and migratory bird fantasia. Estimated cost of \$300 includes train from Chicago, rental carpool, single lodging and meals. Camp sites available. E-mail evan.craig@illinois.sierraclub.org or call 847-680-6437.

May 22, Sunday Hike Camp Sagawau, Palos Preserves, 10:45 am

The only way to see the only canyon in Cook County—a tour guided by Cook County Forest Preserve staff. Bring your own brunch. \$3. Contact barbara.bell@illinois.sierraclub.org or call 847-367-4253.

June 18, Saturday Fox River Day Canoe Trip, Chain O' Lakes State Park

Bring picnic lunch and meet at 11:30 am. Canoeing basics overview for beginners. Rent canoes from the concessionaire at the boat launch. Cost per canoe is \$11 /4 hour trip. E-mail geno.spain@illinois.sierraclub.org or call 847-526-8409 after April 1.

To learn more about these outings and join the outings list visit illinois.sierraclub.org/w&w/Outings ●



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illinois.sierraclub.org/w&w

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