

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

# WOODS & WETLANDS

## News



### **November program:**

#### **Restore the Nippersink!**

Mary Kozub, McHenry County Conservation District

12,000 years ago, glaciers in our area deposited mounds of materials along their slow, grinding paths. When the glacier receded, left behind streams followed the geography, meandering and snaking around the hills of glacial debris. One of these streams, 12,000 years later, is a triumph of conservation...

Nippersink Creek is a post-glacier jewel that flows just to our west in McHenry County. The fancy hotels are largely forgotten, but the Creek has risen to become an environmental star as one of the first river restorations in the world.

It all started in 1986, when new McHenry County Conservation District ranger Ed Collins looked down from a hill toward the creek after a heavy rain. What he saw was the original, meandering path of the wild river, which had long ago been straightened to improve nearby farming. With imagination, conviction, a strong back and hundreds of like-minded people, the Nippersink's winding shape was revived in 2001. Come hear how this 12,000 year old river in our own backyard was returned to its true state. ✂

#### **Directions to Meetings:**

From the East: Take Route 22 (Half Day Rd) west just past Milwaukee Ave (Route 21) to the first stop light (Olde Half Day Rd). Turn right, then quickly left into the library parking lot.

From the West: Take Route 22 (Half Day Rd) east. Just before you hit Milwaukee Ave (Route 21), turn left at the stop light for Olde Half Day Rd. Turn quickly left into the library parking lot. ✂

#### **NOVEMBER MEETING**

**Thursday, November 17**

**7:00 pm**

**Vernon Area Library  
300 Olde Half Day Road  
Lincolnshire**

***Restore the Nippersink!*  
With Mary Kozub, McHenry  
County Conservation District**

### **December program:**

#### **Midwin: from World's Largest TNT Factory to 1st National Tall Grass Prairie**

Joyce O'Keefe, Policy Director of Openlands Project

We all know the history of the Midwestern prairie—grasslands stretching for hundreds of miles in all directions, until the westward migration of settlers plowed much of the grasses and wildflowers, converting the land to crops of corn and wheat. In 1940, just to the south of us, even more was done to the defeated grasslands, when the Army bought up 150 farms to start the Joliet Arsenal.

At its peak it produced 5.5 million tons of TNT per week, employed 12,000 people and provided more than half of all munitions used by the

Army. TNT from the Arsenal was used during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts before it was closed in 1977.

But there was a silver lining to this vast explosives factory. For safety and security, the Joliet factories are surrounded by more than 19,000 acres of fenced-off open buffers of fields, pastures, prairie remnants, woods and streams. After the Arsenal closed, the Openlands Project took note, eventually leading to our first national park for grasslands, the Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie, established in 1996 but little known even to Chicagoans.

The scope of restoration needed to bring back prairie on thousands of acres is enormous, from demolition of storage bunkers to decontamination of explosives-tainted soils to growing the untold quantity of seed needed for planting. And threats to this new park from adjacent coal burning power plants could kill the Midwin Tall Grass Prairie while still in childhood.

Joyce O'Keefe, Policy Director of Openlands Project, will give us the history of Midwin, plans for its future, and the challenges faced by this wonderful new park. ✂

#### **DECEMBER MEETING**

**Thursday, December 15  
6:45 pm (NOTE new time!)**

**Vernon Area Library  
300 Olde Half Day Road  
Lincolnshire**

***Midwin: from World's  
Largest TNT Factory to 1st  
National Tall Grass Prairie  
With Joyce O'Keefe, Policy  
Director of Openlands Project***

# Clean Energy is Health Care: Part I

By Evan Craig, Group Chair

To maintain our health we rely on clean air, clean water, safe food and a healthy environment. When politicians talk about health care, they're talking about insurance, doctors and drugs, which regrettably have little to do with caring about what we need to be healthy. By ignoring large chronic sources of pollution our elected officials are ignoring serious threats to our health that insurance and drugs cannot prevent. The release of man-made toxic materials into our environment has been discovered to cause many chronic illnesses.

Many man-made toxins released into our environment have a direct toxic effect on body chemistry, damaging critical body functions like our nervous systems or immune systems. Mercury, for instance, is a neurotoxin that endangers the babies of 1 in 6 women of child bearing age, but the

Bush administration is allowing thousands of tons of it to be spewed into our air by refusing to enforce the Clean Air Act. Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury pollution in Illinois, but Governor Blagojevich is permitting new coal power plants that will release tons more. The Illinois Department of Public Health warns against eating large fish out of any Illinois river or lake. People who eat these fish can accumulate unhealthy levels of mercury. Sierra Club sponsored events around Illinois last month offered a simple test that measures mercury pollution in a person's body from a sample of their hair. In 1992 in *If You Love This Planet*, Dr. Helen Caldicott wrote that there were 80,000 chemicals in common use, very few of which had been tested for carcinogenicity.

*continued next issue*

## The candidates

**Jim Bland** has been active in various forms of environmentalism for the past 30 years. This has involved work with the Field Museum, U.S.EPA, and with his own consulting firm. With the sale of his business, he looks forward to contributing more directly to the Woods and Wetland Group. In the past three years, he has been involved with the Sierra Club in the evaluation of Sequoit watershed plan, in submittals to SMC to change sediment monitoring protocols for developers, testimony for the Zoning Board of Review, in litigation concerning Hickory Creek and with contributions to the newsletter. Apart from the serious mission of the Club, he has enjoyed the camaraderie and fellowship it represents. Jim regards the Club and local group as exceptionally important institutions at a time when Federal and State regulators are not living up to their public trust.

**George Etu**, a Sierra Club member since 1978, has always been involved in leadership roles, including serving several years as Group Chair. A vital source of information about Sierra Club procedures and know-how, he is currently the Vice Chair and Illinois Chapter Representative for our Group. George wishes to continue strengthening and improving the Group as an effective environmental organization.

**Dennis Murphy** has been a resident of Lake County for over 14 years. He is a long time member of the Sierra Club. He is a Past President of the Chicago Herpetological Society and spent many very active years in that organization. He served as a Village of Third Lake Trustee for 7 years and is a former Board Member of the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO), where he worked for responsible waste management. Dennis is a dedicated supporter of environmental and habitat protection issues, he is knowledgeable and well informed, and will work to strengthen the W&W as an effective grassroots activist organization. Dennis has been Treasurer of the Woods and Wetlands Group for the past 3 years and a member of the ExCom for the last 2. In addition, Dennis has served as chair of the Woods and Wetlands Group Political committee and a member of the Illinois Chapter Political committee for the last 2 years.

**See ballot and instructions on outside back panel**

**Help the Group take action at Conservation Committee Meetings**

Next meeting is November 30 at 7pm. (No Conservation Committee meeting in December.)

Monthly Conservation Committee meetings are held at College of Lake County, South Lake Campus, Room 203. 1120 South Milwaukee (Brown brick building on west side of Milwaukee Ave., 0.2 miles north of US 45 and about 2 miles south of Town Line Rd; park in back. Call Larry Marvet, 847-537-2083, for details.

## Sierra Club Woods & Wetlands Group

[illinois.sierraclub.org/w&w](http://illinois.sierraclub.org/w&w)

Group Chair, Evan Craig 847-680-6437  
Outings Chair [ww-chair@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:ww-chair@illinois.sierraclub.org)

Vice Chair, George Etu 847-432-3787  
Chapter Rep. [ww-vicechair@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:ww-vicechair@illinois.sierraclub.org)

Conservation Larry Marvet, 847-537-2083  
[ww-cons@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:ww-cons@illinois.sierraclub.org)

Membership **YOUR name here!**  
Contact Group Chair to volunteer

Treasurer, Dennis Murphy 847-223-4262  
Political Chair [ww-polichair@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:ww-polichair@illinois.sierraclub.org)

Secretary **We need you!**  
Contact Group Chair to volunteer

Newsletter Jill Koch 847-223-1825  
[jillkoch@tds.net](mailto:jillkoch@tds.net)

Woods & Wetlands News is a publication of the Sierra Club Woods & Wetlands Group, involving members in Lake and northeastern Cook counties in Illinois. It is published four times per year and is free to Woods & Wetlands Group members. Address: Woods & Wetlands News, Woods & Wetlands Group, 200 N. Michigan Avenue, St. 505, Chicago, IL 60601.

## On the horizon

The Antioch Homeowners for Rational Zoning, Inc., a citizen's group, is working to stop a development on the 12-acre Pedersen Estate at the corner of Bowles Road and Route 59. They're working to prevent zoning changes in association with the construction of a banquet hall and condominiums on the site, which contains a mature oak stand and a pond which drains into already-damaged Lake Tranquility. Watch for information, and visit [www.ahrz](http://www.ahrz) for the full story.

# Transportation Summit a rush hour

By Evan Craig, Group Chair

Our state legislators, after watching the Lake County road tax referendum go down in flames, have finally gotten the message that we expect them to bring our fair share of state transportation dollars back to our congested region. They've vowed to band across party lines to support consensus improvement projects. Unfortunately, the Transportation Forum held on September 15 by the Lake County Partners, intended to pick projects by consensus, was fraught with several critical flaws. And it remains to be seen whether perennial Rt. 53 hawks in attendance will keep their promise to focus on less environmentally damaging options.

## Discussion of alternatives and less environmentally damaging improvements was not allowed

First, the event's name was misleading. It should have been called a Road Summit. On the eve of the event we were informed that any discussion and support for intelligent traffic controls, trains, buses, vans, taxis, carpools, bicycles and walking would not be considered. We were reassured by some that plans for mass transit are being aggressively pursued elsewhere, but we are concerned that those modes critical to building strong communities will not receive the same unswerving support. In the opening remarks the topic was further narrowed. We were told that the easier, quicker, more beneficial and less environmentally damaging road options that we favor, like intersection improvements and signal synchronization, would not be considered either. The choices only included major projects to add lanes along entire road segments.

## Environmental impacts? "Just trust the road planners"

After a few speeches we were rushed through pages of simplistic maps and misleading, one sentence descriptions of 28 road projects. We were told to evaluate projects for their potential impacts on congestion,

economics and politics. When we asked why environmental impacts were not being considered, we were told that we should just trust the road planners. Of course, road planners are typically exempt from environmental laws, which is why we've opposed the Rt. 53 extension for so long.

## Lack of information and road myopia led to flawed choices

The maps we were given for reference lacked almost any of our region's character. Devoid of wetlands, streams, watersheds, high quality open space, or even forest preserves, they revealed only lakes and roads. Urban, population and employment centers were also withheld along with trip demand vectors customary for such an exercise. And road myopia resulted in seriously flawed choices. For instance, improvements along Rt. 45 received top votes. But starting in December, double tracking of the Wisconsin Central railroad will allow expanded commuter service, and possibly address congestion there in a better way. The four hour event was well equipped with electronic wizardry to instantly gather our votes, but was too compressed to effectively evaluate and rank 28 road projects. Many left wondering why the information was not distributed before the meeting, and why the meeting was crammed into four hours.

## Route 120 bypass worries environmentalists

The most worrisome vote of the entire event was whether to support a Rt. 120 bypass around Grayslake. The maps showed it in the defeated Rt. 53 (FAP342) alignment that would doom Almond Marsh, but we were told that alignment was provisional, and we were promised that it would be revamped and relocated as an accessible local arterial rather than a superhighway. While the other votes were between many choices in the same category, this vote was given its own category. The audience, comprised mostly of business people and politicians seeking a cure for sprawl, punched the yes button on their gizmos and it passed. Luckily, this project is at the beginning of a six year timeline, but vigilance will be required to minimize its environmental impacts.

## Maybe next year?

Another summit is promised for next year. We hope that it is better planned, more inclusive, and does much more to recognize the environmental vulnerability of our extremely rich natural environment.

In the meantime, we are gratified that business leaders have responded to our call for consensus, and seek our trust. We hope they are as eager as we are to turn our energies from the Rt. 53 boondoggle, to projects that will protect and restore more open space as amenities for our communities and wildlife. ✎

## Please come to Woods & Wetlands' Winter Party



Mark Your Calendar—  
You won't want to miss this!

Sunday,  
January 22  
3:00–7:00 pm

Come shake the winter blues with your Sierra Club friends.

Join us for some winter cheer and lively conversation at a member's home.

Please come... we want to see YOU there!

Sunday, January 22 ■ 3:00–7:00 pm

RSVP to [ww-blues@illinois.sierraclub.org](mailto:ww-blues@illinois.sierraclub.org) or call Group Chair Evan Craig at 847-680-6437



**Sierra Club  
Woods & Wetlands Group  
200 N. Michigan Avenue  
Suite 505  
Chicago, IL 60601**

November 17 program:  
*Nippersink Creek restoration*

Dec. 15 program: *Midwin—  
TNT Factory to Tall Grass Prairie*

## **Please vote in the local Sierra elections**

Once again, it's time for the Woods & Wetlands Group of the Sierra Club to choose officers for the local Executive Committee by confidential mailed ballots.

Leadership of our local W&W Group is determined by member election of a five-person Executive Committee with two seats open this year. Our ExCom plans local Group activities, keeps tabs on the Chapter and national opportunities, and decides how to spend some of the dues money that members send to the Club.

Besides outings and meetings, the ExCom members scramble to inject the Club's environmental protection agenda into local, regional and

national decisions, and to get out and enjoy our preserved open spaces with members. Selection of these ExCom members will affect the direction of our Group in our local arena, where we have the most influence. As we did last year, we are taking the Australian approach to elections rather than the traditional winner-take-all system.

Instead of voting for one candidate per office, voters rank the candidates 1 through 3 with 1 being your top choice, 2 your second choice, etc.

This system allows for a runoff election if two candidates do not emerge with at least 33 percent of the No. 1 votes in the count. In a runoff, the prioritized votes then determine

the winners. The method gives the group a greater chance of having leadership that appeals to a broad spectrum of the group's members, and encourages members to vote for people they want as leaders rather than the candidates who have the best chance of winning.

Use the ballot below. Please mail it to W&W Group Sierra Club, PO Box 876, Grayslake IL 60030. Ballots must be postmarked by January 27.

Please write your name on the envelope, but do not put it on the ballot itself. Ballots will be counted December 1at the Executive Committee meeting. 🌿

### **Woods & Wetlands Sierra Club Ballot**

**Candidate one:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Candidate two:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Candidate three:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Must be postmarked by November 28**

- For each Club member in your household, use the ballot to the left or a piece of scrap paper.
- Vote by ranking the candidates 1 through 3 with 1 being your top choice, 2 your second choice, etc. (See their statements on page 2);
- Put the ballot(s) in an envelope, write your name(s) and address on the envelope—required for your vote(s) to be tallied— which will be separated from ballot; and
- Mail to: Sierra Club W&W Elections, P. O. Box 876, Grayslake, IL 60030. Ballots must be postmarked by November 28.