



## 2013 Accomplishments

# Improving Policies

### **US EPA must set federal regulations for the safe disposal of toxic coal ash.**

Coal ash is the second largest industrial waste stream in Illinois. Until we get new rules, it will continue to be handled with little oversight, endangering water and public health.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working as part of a national coalition to get these much-needed regulations. A federal court ruled in our favor, ordering the US EPA to develop new coal ash disposal rules.

### **The Illinois EPA has proposed new comprehensive rules for the closure of coal ash ponds at coal-fired power plants.**

Our work over several years investigating and highlighting pollution from coal ash ponds in Illinois has led to this important development.

Prairie Rivers Network has confirmed agreement between the Illinois EPA and the Illinois Attorney General on three concepts necessary for effective rules:

- (1) public participation;
- (2) financial assurance; and
- (3) long-term protection for groundwater.

We are preparing to defend the agency proposal against industry attacks during the rule-making process.

### **Our report on the impact of the coal industry on the Illinois state budget will help change state leaders' underlying assumptions about coal's role in Illinois.**

The report documented state revenue related to the coal industry in Illinois, along with expenses and foregone revenue (through subsidies and tax breaks). The net impact for 2011 was a drain of \$20 million on the state budget.

### **Support for re-engineering Chicago's waterway system to keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes continues to grow.**

The man-made canal system in Chicago connects the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River basin, leaving both systems vulnerable to devastation from invasive fish, plants, and disease.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working with a coalition of Illinois and Great Lakes organizations to promote major re-engineering of Chicago's waterways to restore the natural separation between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins.

In June, Governor Quinn publicly supported the idea, saying, "Ultimately, I think we have to separate the basins. I really feel that is the ultimate solution."

Plans for near-term structural improvements are underway. They will address the Asian carp threat while improving water quality and paving the way for full separation.

### **Ruling means more accountability for US EPA on nutrient pollution.**

Nutrient pollution from sewage treatment plants, farms, and city streets is fouling Illinois waters, killing aquatic life and causing the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

The US EPA has waffled for over a decade on setting legal limits for this pollution. A federal court recently ruled in our favor, requiring the agency to make a decision on this important legal tool. This gives us leverage as we keep the pressure on EPA to use all the tools they have to reduce nutrient pollution.

### **Moratorium on new sand mines in LaSalle County provides time to improve mining operations affecting the Illinois River.**

The Illinois River has seen a boom in sand mining because it is one of the few places in the US with sand that is the right texture for use in hydraulic fracturing (fracking) operations.

Unfortunately, the moratorium came after the LaSalle County Board approved a controversial new mining operation adjacent to Starved Rock State Park; Prairie Rivers Network and our partners continue to fight that project.

Now we are working with other groups, citizen activists, and government to craft improved planning for sand mining and the protection of natural corridors along the Illinois River.

# Protecting Land and Water

## Illinois and Mississippi Rivers

Chicago's Stickney sewage treatment plant (the largest in the nation) will finally start removing phosphorus and nitrogen pollution from its wastewater thanks in part to years of pressure and a federal lawsuit.

The Stickney plant is a major source of nutrient pollution to the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone.

## Saline Branch and Copper Slough

Public outcry created a space for Prairie Rivers Network to work with the Urbana Champaign Sanitary District to protect the Copper Slough and Saline Branch of the Salt Fork by maintaining minimum discharges from its two sewage treatment plants if a water sale to Cronus Chemical happens.

## Vermilion County and the Salt Fork River

The proposed Bulldog coal mine in East-Central Illinois would have taken water from the Salt Fork River to wash coal and then discharged polluted water back to the river.

We worked with residents and advocates to slow the development of the coal mine: the Village of Homer will not sell water from the Salt Fork River, a proposed railroad spur needed for transporting coal was blocked, and leasing of mineral rights has slowed.

## Big Bureau Creek Watershed

More farmers in the Big Bureau Creek watershed north of Peoria have incorporated cover crops and grassed waterways into their farms thanks to our outreach efforts. These practices decrease soil erosion and nutrient pollution.

## Sangamon River and Saline Branch

Prairie Rivers Network worked with concerned citizens to get the Illinois EPA to force the Rantoul Foods hog slaughterhouse to clean up its act. We helped neighbors address problems with management of vast quantities of manure generated by the facility and thereby reduce pollution entering the Sangamon River and Saline Branch of the Salt Fork River.

## Chicago and Calumet Rivers

This fall, Chicago's Metropolitan Water Reclamation District broke ground on new sewage disinfection facilities at two of its plants that discharge to the Chicago and Calumet Rivers as a result of pressure by a large coalition that included Prairie Rivers Network. This will make the rivers much safer for recreation.

## Strengthening the Network of River Advocates

### Heartland Coalfield Alliance

Founded by Prairie Rivers Network, the Heartland Coalfield Alliance continues to grow. The Alliance works to "make a just transition from a coal economy to a clean energy and sustainable economy in America's Heartland."

In June, we welcomed over 75 people from eight states to a retreat in Southern Illinois. Leaders from across the nation worked with attendees to build the skills, networks, and campaigns we need to ensure that the true costs of coal are borne by the industry, as we work to create a cleaner energy future.

### River Bend Wildland Trust

Over the past two years, Prairie Rivers Network convened habitat conservation groups working along the Mississippi River in Illinois to foster better coordination of activities and identification of needs. An early outcome of the work was the formation of a new land trust targeting important bottomland habitat in the Quad Cities area.

### Sharing Compelling River Stories

In June, staff members Elliot Brinkman and Robert Hirschfeld paddled stretches of the Illinois River from Chicago to St. Louis as part of a new storytelling and media initiative. Carrying cameras and microphones, they met with members of our network throughout the state,

capturing interviews, videos, and photos of those that work, live, and play along the river. We will develop and distribute these stories that address the challenges and opportunities facing the Illinois River and its communities.



**Prairie Rivers Network staff thank you for supporting our work.**