



Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

ON FLOOD AND FIRE

BY ELLIOT BRINKMAN

This has been a summer of extremes. We have witnessed swollen rivers throughout a waterlogged Midwest, while the drought-stricken West is ravaged by wildfires. Summers like these bring nature's most powerful forces to the forefront of the public consciousness and should prompt us to reflect on how we respond to those forces. The parallels between our nation's historical response to wildfire and our current response to flood risk are striking, and provide us with a special opportunity to confront the error of our ways.

The story of fire suppression in our country follows an all-too-familiar narrative: fire is a dangerous force that destroys property and hinders economic opportunity; thus, it must

be avoided, controlled, contained, and suppressed at all costs. By the 1920's the U.S. Forest Service established a policy of total fire suppression, and became even more aggressive in 1935, when it instituted the infamous "10 AM Policy" which dictated that once a forest fire is detected, it must be extinguished by 10 AM the following day. These attitudes were further ingrained when the 1940's saw a charismatic Smokey Bear reminding us of our civic duty to prevent forest fires. Limited appreciation of the role of fire in complex ecosystems, paired with dogmatic policies resulted in profoundly negative impacts on our landscape.

Our uninformed attempts to protect people and valuable timber resources eventually backfired, having precisely

IN THIS ISSUE //

- Carol's Currents..... 2
- New Madrid Levee Boondoggle 3
- Annual Dinner - November 6 4
- Redesigning Ag in Nature's Image.. 4
- River Steward Award Nominations .. 5
- Board of Directors Update 5
- Vying for Fed Funds for Flooding 6
- New I ♥ Wildlife T-shirt 7

the opposite of the intended effect. Eliminating fire led forests to become less healthy, and the buildup of fuels contributed to more intense and catastrophic fires. It wasn't until the 1960's and 70's that government agencies began to understand the essential role of fire on the landscape, and the pitfalls of total suppression. These realizations led to shifts in policy that acknowledged fire's role in healthier, safer ecosystems. From this, we have the valuable opportunity to apply some of these lessons to our approach to flooding.

//continued on page 5//



NATURE'S MOST POWERFUL FORCES TEACH US TO LIVE WITH NATURE NOT AGAINST IT

CAROL'S CURRENTS

I am privileged to be a steward of Crooked Creek, which meanders through my back yard, and the Sangamon River as it flows by my living room window. These waters, small and large, have given me and my family many hours of recreation, helped us build friendships, provided opportunities for meaningful dialogue and action about the value of the river in our community, enriched our creative spirits through our river-themed art, and served as a peaceful daily retreat to replenish us from fast-paced lives.

When we moved to the river almost ten years ago, one of our first river experiences involved our two strong nephews hauling an old washing machine out of the silty river bottom where it sat half-buried. Over that first year, we hauled a variety of garbage out of the water. Clearly not everyone was as enamored with the river as we were. But, we soon met others in our community who also saw the beauty in the Sangamon. Together, we formed the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy with the mission of stewarding the Sangamon River.

Over the years this group of river stewards has connected many people to the river, helping them to experience the beauty of the Sangamon by



leading regular float trips and hosting river clean-ups. We educate local leaders about the importance of river conservation, help to promote the Sangamon River as a destination for recreation and learning, and share the beauty of the river through members' photography and my husband's regular river-focused column in our local newspaper.

Perhaps one of the most important efforts our group has undertaken is participating in Riverwatch, a citizen science program supported by the Great Rivers Research and Education Center in Alton, IL. Annually, we collect water samples from the Sangamon and its tributary creeks in order to determine the number of macroinvertebrate species (e.g. bugs) that are a biological signal of river health. Through this process we have learned much about the health of these waterways, and have used this information to help others in our community appreciate that the Sangamon is a healthy river that is worth protecting.

This Spring I had the privilege of becoming a steward not just of my river but of all the rivers in Illinois. At Prairie Rivers Network, we are the voice for Illinois' waters. But as I have learned from my river, our rivers desperately need your voice to help others connect to and appreciate their beauty, importance and the need to protect them. We protect those things we most love. I hope you will find ways to help others connect to the rivers and streams you love so that they will grow to love and protect them, too. *Carol*

prairieriversnetwork

Prairie Rivers Network champions clean, healthy rivers and lakes and safe drinking water to benefit the people and wildlife of Illinois.

Drawing upon sound science and working cooperatively with others, we advocate public policies and cultural values that sustain the ecological health and biological diversity of water resources and aquatic ecosystems.

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NEW MADRID LEVEE PROJECT IS HARMFUL BOONDOGGLE THAT MUST BE STOPPED

Prairie Rivers Network & partners seek EPA veto

BY KIM KNOWLES

Down in the Missouri bootheel lies a huge expanse of wetlands where migratory birds seek rest and food, and where fish spawn and rear their young. By storing massive amounts of water during storms, the wetlands also protect the Illinois towns of Cairo and Olive Branch from destructive flooding. These precious wetlands get their water from the Mississippi River through the last remaining gap in the complex of levees that divide the river from its floodplain. Without the gap, the wetlands would die, along with many of the fish and birds that rely on them. It is this natural flooding through the gap in the levee that has created the most important backwater fisheries habitat in the Middle Mississippi River.

The gap in the levee remains because the area is a federally-designated floodway. As such, it is intended to flood during big storms. Landowners in the floodway, despite having been compensated for use of the land in this way, are not happy about the periodic flooding. They want the gap closed, and the Army Corps of Engineers is determined to give them what they want, no matter the cost.

The Corps' New Madrid Levee project would close the 1500 foot gap in the Mississippi River levee with a 60-foot high wall and drain the area with massive pumps. The price tag is high, \$165 million taxpayer dollars, especially when you consider who gains, and who loses.

The winners are few. A small group of powerful agricultural landowners in the floodway want more certainty over crop production. With the gap closed, these landowners will be freer to plant still more crops and otherwise further develop the floodway. Senators McCaskill and Blunt stand to gain the farmer vote through support of the project.

STOP the
NEW 
MADRID
LEVEE!

The losers are many. Too many. The Town of Olive Branch, Illinois lost 50 homes in a 2011 flood, because Missouri landowners in the floodway brought last minute legal action to try to stop the Corps from using the floodway. The delay cost Olive Branch millions of dollars in damage. Cairo, IL; Paducah, KY; and Hickman, MO are at similar risk of flooding should the levee be built. Once the gap is closed it is fully expected that development within the floodway will intensify. More development means more opposition to operation of the floodway when it is needed. Putting these small struggling river towns at greater risk of flooding also makes it more difficult for them to attract businesses and residents, intensifying economic insecurity.

And then there's the wildlife that depends on this area for survival. We've walled off so much of the Mississippi River from its natural floodplain that few backwater habitats persist. It is in these backwater areas that critical spawning, rearing, and nesting occur, allowing wildlife to recover, reproduce, and thrive. There are fewer and fewer of these places, and we must protect them.

The Corps has been trying unsuccessfully to build this thing since 1954. In 2007, opponents thought they'd finally seen the end of it when a federal district court ordered the Army Corps to "tear down that wall" (or something like that) and dismantle the parts the Corps had built. But being forced to tear down the project proved no deterrent. The Corps is poised to release its final plan recommending once again that the project be built, and with taxpayer funding.

So how can we finally kill this thing? There is a way. Under the Clean Water Act, the EPA has the authority to veto the project. An EPA veto would ring the final death knell for the New Madrid levee. And that's what we're working to achieve. With the help of our partners, Prairie Rivers Network has been co-leading a campaign to convince EPA that it must veto this project. **You can help.** Join our social media team and look for action alerts over the coming months.

Email kknowles@prairierivers.org to join the campaign.

Let's #stopthelevee once and for all!

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK ANNUAL DINNER - NOVEMBER 6

We are excited about the upcoming Prairie Rivers Network Annual Dinner on November 6th! Please make plans to join Prairie Rivers Network's staff, board members, and your fellow river enthusiasts for conversation, good food, and fun as we celebrate the rivers of Illinois. Our keynote speaker will be Mark Shepard, a Midwest farmer leading the way in sustainable restoration agriculture.

Mark Shepard runs New Forest Farm in SW Wisconsin. The 106-acre perennial agricultural savanna is considered by many to be one of the most ambitious sustainable agriculture projects in the United States.

New Forest Farm is a planned conversion of a typical row-crop grain farm into a commercial-scale, perennial agricultural ecosystem using oak savanna, successional brushland and eastern woodlands as ecological models.

Trees, shrubs, vines, canes, perennial plants and fungi are planted in association with one another to produce food (for humans and animals), fuel, medicines, and beauty. Hazelnuts, chestnuts, walnuts and various fruits are the primary woody crops. The farm is entirely solar and wind powered and farm equipment is powered with locally produced biofuels that are not taken from the human food chain.

REDESIGNING AGRICULTURE IN NATURE'S IMAGE

Annual monocropping produces nearly all of the grain, meat, vegetables, and processed foods consumed today. These practices require giant machinery, tilling, and the application of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, resulting in the eradication of biodiversity, the erosion of topsoil, and output of 30% of global carbon emissions - more than from any other source.

Despite the massive human efforts applied to farming, we are woefully short of the inherent resilience, stability, and outright beauty of natural ecosystems. We need look no further than native ecosystems for a template of how to move forward from the many woes of annual monocropping. This is our goal and mission: Redesigning Agriculture in Nature's Image.

By intentionally designing and planting perennial ecosystems, we remove carbon dioxide from the air, provide habitat for wildlife, produce food, prevent soil erosion, and begin the creation of ecologically sustainable human habitats.

Does this actually work in reality? Will it really produce enough food, fuel, timber and human necessities to be economically viable? We firmly believe the answer is yes.



Mark Shepard, CEO of Forest Agriculture Enterprises, LLC, and founder of Restoration Agriculture Development, Inc. and Restoration Agriculture International, Inc.

Trained in both mechanical engineering and ecology, Mark has developed and patented equipment and processes for the cultivation, harvesting and processing of forest-derived agricultural products for human foods and biofuels. Mark was certified as a Permaculture designer in 1993 and received his Diploma of Permaculture design from Bill Mollison, the founder of the international Permaculture movement.

Mark serves on the board of the Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council. He teaches agroforestry and Permaculture worldwide. Mark is a farmer member of the Organic Valley cooperative, the world's largest organic farmers' marketing co-op, and is the founder and chief Cydermaker for the Shepard's Hard Cyder winery in Viola, Wisconsin.

Whether you call it Permaculture, Agroforestry, Eco-Agriculture, Agroecology, or Restoration Agriculture, Mark will talk with us at the dinner on how we can look to nature to redesign agriculture here in Illinois to help create a healthier, more ecologically sustainable world.

We look forward to spending an inspiring evening with you. See more at:

[PrairieRivers.org/dinner](https://prairierivers.org/dinner).

Please look for your invitation in the mail in early October. //

WHO IS YOUR RIVER SUPERHERO?

Who is your River Superhero? Nominate him or her for Prairie Rivers Network's River Steward Award! This annual award honors a volunteer who is working above and beyond to protect the waters of Illinois. Nominations are due by September 18, 2015. The award will be presented at the Annual Dinner on November 6.

Please e-mail Sarah Scott at sscott@prairierivers.org the following information for consideration:

- Nominee's contact information and your contact information
- Summary of nominee's river conservation efforts, general background information concerning the river/watershed of interest, and the specific work for which the nominee deserves recognition.

ON FLOOD AND FIRE continued from page 1

The science is overwhelmingly clear, and has been for some time. Floodplains are at the very heart of what makes our river systems so biologically productive and complex. Just as the health of our forests rely on fire, our river ecosystems rely on occasionally-inundated floodplains. Yet, our command-and-control approach to river management remains. In response to rising water, we seek only to constrain our rivers further, building our levees stronger and higher. This encourages more development in our floodplains, increases flood risk, and further degrades the quality of our rivers. And new floodplain development leads to calls for more flood control, creating a feedback loop of bad decisions and wrong-headed river management.

Because of the financial support of our members, Prairie Rivers is able to push for more wetlands and floodplain protection. We help land conservationists acquire, restore, and protect floodplain wetlands along our major rivers, while opposing ecologically destructive projects that would only further entrench the status quo (see New Madrid article on page 3). But we need greater public understanding and will if we are to fully rehabilitate our relationship with our rivers. In the future, we hope to have policies that acknowledge and respect the importance of letting our floodplains flood; policies that make our rivers healthier and communities more resilient in the wake of nature's most powerful forces. //

BOARD OF DIRECTORS UPDATE

Welcome Jean, Rob, and Bill!

Prairie Rivers Network is very happy to welcome Jean Flemma, Rob Kanter, and Bill Van Hagey to our board of directors. Jean is a former Executive Director of PRN and recently left her position as a Senior Policy Advisor for the Committee on Natural Resources in the U.S. House of Representatives. She is currently a Strategic Environmental Policy and Planning consultant. Rob is an Academic Advisor and lecturer with the University of Illinois School of Earth, Society & Environment, where he teaches courses in environmental communications and issues, and he is the author of the popular Environmental Almanac that runs in the News-Gazette and on public radio stations around the state. Bill is a long-time supporter of Prairie

Rivers Network and has a private law practice in Mahomet representing clients in a variety of business counseling and litigation matters.

Thank you, Jason Lindsey and Bruce Semans!

We thank Jason Lindsey who stepped down from the board this spring after 10 years of service. His beautiful photos have been featured prominently in our outreach materials, and his guidance has helped us advance our video and social media communications. We also thank Bruce Semans who stepped down from the board last year. Bruce is a long-time supporter of Prairie Rivers. He cares deeply about land and water conservation and places great value on connecting people to the land and water in order to foster a conservation ethic among the general public. //

THE RACE IS ON: VYING FOR FEDERAL FUNDS AGAINST FLOODING

BY HEALTHY WATER SOLUTIONS VIA ROBERT HIRSCHFELD

In September 2008, Andrea and Marcos Muñoz had a college student staying in the basement of their home in the Little Village neighborhood on the southwest side of Chicago, part of an urban immersion program. The student got a different immersion experience than she'd expected however – she woke up in the middle of the night to fetid water swirling around her bed, up to the mattress, as the Muñozes describe it.



Climate change is expected to bring more frequent and severe storms to the Chicago area.

That flood came from the biggest rainstorm ever recorded in Chicago. But such basement flooding is a common problem in Little Village and other parts of Chicago and the suburbs, as heavy rains overwhelm the region's aging pipes, causing a mix of stormwater and raw sewage to back up into homes and pool on streets and alleys.

Marcos Muñoz described how his family eventually eased their flooding problems by paying someone to cut into the pipe leading to their home and install a trap door that would let water flow only one direction. Other neighbors also resorted to this ad hoc solution, which cost about \$1,000.

“But not everybody can do that – it’s not cheap,” said Muñoz. Neither is the aftermath of flooding. “Believe me, it stinks,” continued Muñoz. “If I have a bed or couch (in a flooded basement), all those things you have to throw away, you can’t use them no more. And we don’t make that much -- that’s money out the window.”

Muñoz was speaking at a meeting hosted by the city of Chicago and local leaders in a church in Little Village in February, part of a multi-faceted effort to address flooding and the larger infrastructure issues that cause it.

The meeting was held as part of the city’s information-gathering and community input process for the competition run by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s National Disaster Resilience Competition. The competition is open to places that were declared disaster areas in 2011, 2012 and 2013. The grants totaling almost \$1 billion come from unused disaster relief funds. They are meant to fund innovative resilience projects while also spurring resident action and policy changes to better prepare for the storms that are expected to become increasingly common with climate change.

Along with the city of Chicago, Cook County, adjacent DuPage County and the state of Illinois are also applying for funds under the program. While such government entities are not allowed to file a joint application in the competition, the idea is for them to work together to address the flooding and other infrastructure challenges that don’t see boundaries between cities or counties.



Chicago’s outdated combined sewer system means that raw sewage is dumped directly into the river after heavy rains.

The four applications all made it through phase one of the competition, announced in June, based on conceptual plans. Now they are working on their applications for the final round of the competition, where they will submit detailed proposals due in October for green infrastructure and other stormwater-related improvements.

Article continues at: www.healthywatersolutions.org/news/article/flooding

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO SUPPORT CLEAN WATER AND HEALTHY RIVERS

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Thank you for your support!

All members receive our newsletter and action alerts. Your contribution to PRN is tax deductible. Make checks payable to: Prairie Rivers Network, 1902 Fox Drive, Suite G, Champaign, IL 61820

New Ways to Give to Prairie Rivers Network

Prairie Rivers can now easily accept direct contributions of securities. These types of contributions may provide you the benefit of a charitable tax deduction for the full value of the donation without the income tax associated with capital gains.

As you are approaching retirement, you might consider donating pre-tax money from an IRA, 401k, or 403b retirement account, avoiding all ordinary tax liability for your donation. This may provide a better tax advantage than simply getting a charitable tax deduction for your donation.

Check with your tax professional to see if these would be beneficial options for you.

SUPPORT PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK AND LOOK GOOD AT THE SAME TIME



Prairie Rivers Network's new *I ♥ Wildlife* shirt is here. Shirts will be available at our Annual Dinner, or get them online at: PrairieRivers.org/wildlife-shirt.



We also have our very popular *I ♥ Clean Water* shirt in adult and kids sizes. Shirts will be available at our Annual Dinner or go to PrairieRivers.org/shirt.

RUN FOR YOUR RIVERS A BIG SUCCESS - THANK YOU!

A BIG THANKS to our Run for Your Rivers & Walk for Your Streams fundraising team that raised over \$5,800 at the 2015 Illinois Marathon. Visit PrairieRivers.org/run for a list of our running and walking stars. Top fundraisers were the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana Earth Care team and new board member Rob Kanter. Thank you!

We also thank our business sponsors:

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YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Renew your membership or become a new member today because clean water is worth protecting.
prairierivers.org/membership



Goodbye and best wishes to Water Resources Scientist Stacy James, who moved to Spokane, Washington to work as a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. From victories reducing pollution from factory farms to helping residents reduce pollution and flooding at home with rain gardens, to serving as president of her local Sierra Club, we thank Stacy for her passion in protecting our natural world and 9 years of service at PRN.

UPCOMING EVENTS//



CHECK OUR ONLINE EVENTS CALENDER FOR THESE EVENTS AND MORE

IT'S OUR RIVER DAY
 September 19

MAHOMET AQUIFER MEETING
 Champaign Public Library
 September 19, 10:30 am

MISSISSIPPI EARTHTONES
 FESTIVAL
 Alton, IL
 September 19

GREAT LAKES RESTORATION
 CONFERENCE
 September 29-October 1
<http://conference.healthylakes.org/>

MANAGEMENT OF ILLINOIS RIVER
 SYSTEM CONFERENCE
 Pere Marquette Hotel, Peoria
 October 27-29

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK'S
 ANNUAL DINNER
 November 6

WOMEN, FOOD & AG NETWORK
 CONFERENCE
www.wfan.org/conference
 Davenport, IA, November 6-7

PHOTO ATTRIBUTES (C) //
 Jason Lindsey, masthead
 David Hale, masthead
 Boston.com, Mike McMillan-USFS page 1
 Chris Walker and Michael Zajakowski,
 Chicago Tribune page 6



Prairie Rivers Network is the Illinois affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.



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