

Prairie Rivers Network

Protecting Illinois' Streams

River Scapes

Prairie Rivers Network's five year Strategic Plan (2005-2010) for improving Illinois' rivers and building a river conservation movement in the state.

Mission Statement

Prairie Rivers Network strives to protect the rivers and streams of Illinois and promote the lasting health and beauty of watershed communities. By providing information, sound science, and hands on assistance, Prairie Rivers helps individuals and community groups become effective river conservation leaders.

History

Prairie Rivers Network was established in 1967 as the Committee on Allerton Park to oppose the construction of the Oakley Reservoir on the Sangamon River near Monticello, Illinois, which would have put Allerton Park underwater. After that successful effort, the Committee on Allerton Park was renamed Central States Education Center in 1984 to illustrate their statewide focus on empowering people to preserve our natural resources. Central States Education Center then changed their name to Prairie Rivers Network in 1998 to more accurately reflect their focus on issues that impact Illinois' rivers and watersheds.

Since its inception, the organization has consistently used grass roots organizing and advocacy to protect the rivers of Illinois. From the successful opposition of dams proposed in the 1970s that would have permanently altered the flow of our rivers, to our current efforts to ensure full enforcement of the Clean Water Act to protect our drinking water and fish and wildlife habitat, Prairie Rivers works with local citizens to advocate for the protection of our rivers at the federal, state, and local level.

Working with researchers from the University of Illinois and the state's Scientific Surveys, we have access to the latest scientific and technical information, and a talented pool of interns and student volunteers with expertise in engineering, natural resource management, and environmental law. These relationships and our staff expertise enable us to achieve far more than other organizations of similar size.

Today, the organization has three full time staff, one part time staff, one AmeriCorps volunteer, several part time student support staff, and a significant corps of volunteers, and an annual operating budget of \$250,000.

PROGRAMS, PROJECT AREAS, AND 5-YEAR OBJECTIVES

Programs

The conservation work of Prairie Rivers Network is organized into three inter-related program areas:

- Clean Water Program;
- Healthy Stream Flow and Habitat Protection Program; and
- Watershed Stewardship and Awareness Program.

The various 5-year objectives for these programs, and the project areas intended to achieve them, are described below. Some of the projects are already being implemented. Others will be undertaken when and as new resources become available. Also set forth here are two Prairie Rivers goals that relate to the organization itself and how it plans to grow in size and effectiveness over the next five years—the goal of increasing financial support and membership, and the goal of increasing the leadership effectiveness of the Board of Directors.

Benefits of Programs

The ultimate purpose of these programs is to foster a healthy environment, healthy people, and a healthy economy. Promoting the enduring health of Illinois rivers and streams achieves a suite of benefits for Illinois residents and for the many wild species that share our land. Healthy waterways provide reliable, low-cost sources for drinking water. They provide attractive recreational opportunities--boating, hiking, fishing, and others--while adding beauty and serenity to the landscape. Together with their surrounding lands, sound waterways supply food and home for many animals, from frogs, turtles, and fish to mink, otters, and eagles. As they make our lands ecologically healthier, they also make them more appealing for new residents and new employers, who desire to locate in places where vibrant nature is close at hand. Finally, waterways teeming with life help people connect to their natural homes, and encourage them to become involved. In the long-run, only an engaged citizenry that cares about its rivers can ensure their continued protection.

Clean Water Program

Program Description: The overall aim of the Clean Water Program is to improve the quality of water that flows in Illinois' rivers and streams. Prairie Rivers has made clean water a central focus of its work. Its activities have achieved important results. Over the next 5 years we will continue and expand our efforts to achieve this indispensable goal by working in four project areas.

1. Clean Water Act Enforcement and Improvement Project

The goal of this project is to protect the public interest by advocating for the effective and full implementation of the Clean Water Act, restoring Illinois' polluted waters and keeping clean waters clean. The project uses provisions of the federal Clean Water Act (i) to compel the state to apply its new, forward-looking anti-degradation policy to all discharges into high-quality waters; (ii) to strengthen individual pollution permits and overall policies and water quality standards; (iii) to seek better land management and stormwater controls in urban and suburban areas; and (iv) to improve implementation of the "total maximum daily load" (TMDL) watershed restoration program.

Prairie Rivers currently has in place a strong, science-based program that forces IEPA to strengthen and improve individual pollution-discharge (NPDES) permits. In selecting permits to review and challenge, it focuses on those that are of special importance because of the quality of the waterway involved, the amount and type of pollution being discharged, or the policy issue raised by the permit. As it does this work, Prairie Rivers also identifies and seeks to change chronic policy problems that diminish the effectiveness of the state's permit program. Much of that work in the coming 5 years will focus on the implementation of the state's new anti-degradation policy, which Prairie Rivers helped initiate. Newly applicable regulations under the NPDES program, which require better control of stormwater from construction and post-construction activities, provide another important opportunity to work with local groups to improve protections for their particular watersheds.

Measuring Success: The true measure of success of this project—like the other elements of the Clean Water Program--will take the form of cleaner Illinois rivers and streams, as evidenced by lower pollution levels at water monitoring stations. Success would also be measured by (i) the number of NPDES permits and policies improved through our intervention and the decrease in pollutant discharges allowed; (ii) improvements in the implementation of the anti-degradation policy by the Illinois EPA as well as improvements to other aspects of the NPDES permit program; (iii) the number and effectiveness of new ordinances to control stormwater that are adopted by local communities and the number of local groups monitoring construction-site pollution; and (iv) the number of individual TMDLs that we strengthen, by the policies and individual permits that are strengthened as a result of them, and ultimately the number of watersheds in which water quality is brought up to governing water quality standards.

Strategic Value: Given the importance of clean water to our overall mission, we expect to continue working on the Clean Water Act Enforcement Project for many years to come, though the focus may evolve as new challenges arise. Continued efforts in this area would make use of and further strengthen our unusual expertise regarding Clean Water Act permits and regulatory regimes. We expect this project over the next 5 years to add strength to our ties with local watershed protection advocates and with river recreation advocates and businesses. It will also draw on the

considerable public interest today in smart growth while emphasizing to the general public the connections between suburban land use practices and river health.

Project Strategies:

- Advocate implementation of the new anti-degradation policy, working with local citizens to improve individual permits and establish precedents for future permits.
- Seek improvements to 10-15 individual NPDES permits per year. Legally appeal permits that do not comply with the Clean Water Act as necessary.
- Participate in state-sponsored stakeholder discussions regarding TMDL development, advocating for strong TMDLs plans that clean up polluted waters.
- Recruit river advocates to participate in stakeholder groups for 10-15 TMDLs that will be developed in east central Illinois during the next 3-5 years. Provide them the tools needed to advocate for strong TMDLs plans that address all sources of water impairment.
- Provide guidance to citizen watershed groups and directly to local governments on model ordinance provisions that local governments can use to control polluted stormwater discharges. Train local citizen advocates on how to monitor construction projects in their watersheds to ensure that they comply with regulations controlling polluted run-off.
- Advocate the development of other needed policies, regulations and programs to ensure the full implementation and enforcement of the Clean Water Act in Illinois.
- Advocate substantially increased funding to bring about full implementation and enforcement of the Clean Water Act in Illinois.

2. Water Quality Standards Improvement Project

Illinois suffers today, not just from failures to enforce existing laws (addressed by the Clean Water Act Enforcement Project), but from deficiencies in its state-wide water quality standards. Many are unduly weak, while others are written in ways that undercut their effectiveness. The goal of this project area is to push the Illinois EPA and the Pollution Control Board for more protective regulatory standards. Deficiencies in current regulations are often identified in the course of our NPDES permit work. A more vigorous regulatory-reform project, accordingly, would efficiently complement and strengthen our current permit review work.

Measuring Success: In the next 3-5 years we will focus on achieving (i) adoption of protective standards for nutrients, (ii) appropriate upgrades for Chicago area waters through the Use Attainability Analysis process, (iii) designation of Outstanding Resource Waters, and (iv) improvement of standards where “site specific criteria” have been inappropriately applied to allow waterway degradation. Success would be

measured proximately by achievement of these improvements and ultimately by the improved quality of Illinois waterways.

Strategic Value: As a statewide river conservation organization and one of the few organizations in the state dedicated to Clean Water Act implementation and enforcement, we are among the few groups capable of undertaking technically complex work of this type. The health of Illinois waterways is closely linked to the standards set for their water quality. Without high standards, waterway health will remain elusive.

Project Strategies:

- Advocate the adoption and enforcement of scientifically based nutrient standards for point source discharges.
- Advocate the designation of Outstanding Resource Waters to protect the state's best rivers and streams. Support efforts to designate at least ten Outstanding Resource Waters during the next five years.
- Participate in the Des Plaines and Chicago area UAA working groups, pressing for improved water quality standards and use designations that are scientifically based.
- Strenuously oppose efforts by IEPA or others to weaken water quality standards particularly when such efforts are not scientifically supported.

3. All Rivers Lead to the Sea Project

This project will promote the development and implementation of new state and local policies that reduce Illinois' contribution to the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico, thereby also improving the health of rivers within Illinois. The huge Gulf dead zone (like the growing number of other dead zones around the world) is caused chiefly by nutrients discharged into the Mississippi river by unregulated sources, particularly polluted runoff that comes from farms and cities. As it grows, this project would address what two recent national ocean commission reports have identified as one of the greatest threats to the health of America's oceans, non-point source pollution, particularly nutrient pollution. While this project is clearly linked to Prairie Rivers' other work in the Clean Water Act program, our specific 5-year objective is to establish new partnerships to promote, and to achieve implementation of, governmental policies to curb this form of pollution.

Measuring Success: Success of this project would ultimately take the form of increased health in the Gulf dead zone and in the Mississippi River and its tributaries. In terms of the Illinois component and the work of Prairie Rivers, success would be measured by the number and effectiveness of the pollution-control policies put in place. The monitoring of existing policies and discharge levels are attractive first steps, since future federal policies are likely to hold Illinois accountable for its nutrient discharges to the Mississippi river. For Illinois to respond in an economically

efficient manner, it will be necessary to establish an effective monitoring protocol to provide the foundation for incentives and accountability at the watershed level.

Strategic Value: Prairie Rivers is well suited to this project because of our expert staff and networking capabilities, which could be used to build a statewide consensus for action. Since wetlands and streamside habitat are likely to be essential elements of any program to reduce nutrient pollution, we would work closely with fish, wildlife, and recreational constituencies. Work in urban areas would build directly on current efforts to protect streams as amenities among residential developments in northern Illinois. Overall the project would strengthen Prairie Rivers by providing opportunities for new alliances with water companies, with currently regulated point-source dischargers, and with other groups interested in protecting the resources of the Gulf of Mexico.

Project Strategies:

- Form new strategic partnerships with regulated dischargers of nutrients and others who are interested in protecting marine resources impacted by nutrient runoff to gain their support in our efforts to extend regulatory coverage to the many uncontrolled polluters.
- Advocate strong TMDLs, nutrient standards and other state policies that will reduce nutrient pollution in Illinois waters from all sources.

4. Agricultural Programs Reform Project

This challenging project seeks improvements in the administration of agricultural programs in East Central Illinois to ensure that they consider the effects of agricultural methods on water quality, aquatic life, and hydrologic flows. It includes developing an accurate public understanding of the significant impacts of agriculture on Illinois waterways and ensuring that farm producers are assigned responsibility for the problems they help cause. Agriculture is, far and away, the leading source of water pollution in Illinois today, and its pollutant discharges are almost entirely unregulated. Although many steps could be taken to address this vast challenge, our efforts will be most effective if focused on maintaining a presence at meetings of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), including its state Technical Advisory Committee meetings, where we seek to influence programmatic decisions that might increase or diminish water-quality impairments.

Measuring Success: Success of this objective is necessarily difficult to measure and quantify, given the extraordinary influence of agribusiness and its ardent refusal to accept responsibility for water-quality problems. Our best measures at present are to track citizen participation in Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) meetings, monitor our influence on SWCD decisions, and otherwise record our influence on agricultural policy recommendations by the state Technical Advisory Committee as well as policy decisions by other agencies.

Strategic Value: Agricultural non-point source pollution is the number one source of water quality impairments in Illinois. Hydrological and habitat alteration, which includes drainage district channelization and maintenance, is the second greatest source of impairments. These sources need to be addressed in order to achieve our mission of clean, healthy streams. Constant presence is required at the forums that debate relevant agricultural policies to ensure that a voice for the rivers is heard.

Project Strategies:

- Serve on state NRCS Technical Advisory Committee to advocate for agricultural incentive programs to be used in a manner that have the greatest benefit on water quality and riparian habitat.
- Inform and recruit grassroots watershed groups to participate in the decision making processes of their local SWCDs, County Board, and other agencies that in implementing agricultural policies, have an impact on water quality and riparian habitat.

HEALTHY STREAM FLOW AND HABITAT PROTECTION PROGRAM

Clean water is only one component of a healthy river system. Integrated with the Clean Water Program is Prairie Rivers' Healthy Stream Flow and Habitat Protection Program, which promotes water flows that, in timing and volume, are consistent with the maintenance of ecologically sound river systems. It also promotes habitat protections that reduce flooding, protect wildlife, enhance in-stream flow uses of waters, protect drinking water supplies, and sustain the ecological processes that are the underpinnings of entire landscapes. Healthy water flows and habitats are not only essential for healthy terrestrial and aquatic life, they also are key to water quality. Prairie Rivers plans over the next 5 years to promote this goal through the following project areas.

1. Water Supply Protection Project

This project, when funded, will seek to develop and secure implementation of new, enforceable policies that regulate water withdrawals and balance the needs of instream flows with out of stream uses. To accomplish this ambitious, vital goal, Prairie Rivers will build an alliance with water companies interested in maintaining adequate public water supplies and with other entities interested in securing reliable water flows for fish, wildlife, and recreation. Statutory change, of course, takes time and patience, and powerful state interests (particularly industrial agriculture) have in the past successfully resisted all efforts to update our state's water laws. Still, many groups around the state are interested in this issue and desirous of seeing change. The Governor's Conservation 2000 Program sponsored a detailed study of Illinois water law and the options for reform. Prairie Rivers would build upon this past effort, and try to provide the key missing piece to overcome resistance to this much needed

updating of Illinois law. Without this change, increased diversions of water, from both ground and surface waters, could literally frustrate the achievement of all of Prairie Rivers' goals.

Measuring Success: Success would be measured incrementally by securing full implementation and enforcement of existing IDNR regulations, by the implementation of new policies regulating ground and surface water withdrawals for industrial and agricultural use, and ultimately by the implementation and enforcement of a regime to protect ecologically sound minimum water flows and groundwater supplies.

Strategic Value: This initiative will strengthen Prairie Rivers by allowing us to speak on behalf of individual citizens who are concerned about the availability, as well as the quality, of the water they drink. It will strengthen our leadership role with citizens who are concerned about the water needs of fish and wildlife. It will also require us to build a coalition with a broad range of interests, including those concerned with protecting ground water supplies, if it is to be truly effective.

Project Strategies:

- Review Illinois case law, regulations and ordinances that relate to water quantity, use, and availability. Review federal, state, and local regulations to determine the extent of existing authorities for managing Illinois water resources. Identify gaps in current law and implementation responsibilities, and review past efforts to address those gaps with an analysis of why those efforts were unsuccessful.
- Form a coalition of entities from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors with expertise in water policy, law, and management and an interest in protecting minimum stream flows and water supplies. Develop and adopt a recommended set of principles to address these policy issues. These recommended principles would provide the foundation for a new water policy that is comprehensive, fair, and equitable to competing interests while promoting water uses that are sustainable over the long-term.
- Design and initiate a statewide advocacy campaign to secure the adoption of statewide water policies that protect groundwater and minimum stream flows. Recruit and organize a broadly-based coalition of citizen groups and stakeholders to educate decision makers and advocate the adoption of fair and comprehensive water-use policies.

2. Drainage Reform Project

This project seeks to protect water quality and riparian habitat from agricultural drainage and associated drainage district maintenance activities. The flows in Illinois rivers are today seriously distorted because of drainage practices and land-use patterns all around the state, particularly in urban areas and in agricultural regions dominated by intensive cropping. This component of Prairie Rivers' Healthy Stream Flow Program would develop and promote policies to reduce unnecessary

maintenance activities that cause harmful fluctuations in water flows and destroy riparian habitat. The prime targets for reform will be agricultural area drainage districts around the state. Necessarily this project will also involve educating the public on the ecological connections between a stream and its floodplain and on the ways that natural biological processes, when given time to operate, can remove pollutants from runoff before it enters waterways.

Measuring Success: Ultimately, success in this project will be measured by the restoration of more natural, healthy river corridors and water flows in rivers and streams, and by the many benefits that such habitats and flows would bring about. Success will also be measured by changes in the maintenance practices of rural drainage districts and the implementation of new policies that ensure environmental protection is part and parcel of any drainage activity.

Strategic Value: Since all floodwaters inflict economic damage downstream, addressing this issue allows us, in dealing with the public, to show how environmental protection so often yields economic benefits as well as environmental ones. The more forcefully we can make this point, the stronger Prairie Rivers will be. Particularly in rural areas, efforts to restore more healthy water flows are likely to entail the restoration of vegetation along riparian corridors, big and small. The widening of riparian corridors as valuable natural areas has obvious benefits to fish and wildlife. At the same time, wider corridors provide enhanced opportunities for recreation, on public as well as private lands.

Project Strategies:

- Advocate drainage practices that protect riparian corridors and prevent unnecessary dredging and flooding while still providing needed drainage.
- Develop an awareness campaign that informs grassroots watershed groups and the general public about the impacts of drainage district activities on water quality, wildlife, and flood control.
- Advocate statewide reform of drainage policies that will better protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and property while still providing needed drainage.

3. Wetlands Protection Project

This project seeks to protect streams and wetlands from straightening and filling through vigorous participation in the Clean Water Act section 404 permitting processes.

Measuring Success: Success would be proximately measured by the number of individual permits strengthened, by our identification of necessary policy changes, and eventually, by the achievement of these policy changes. Ultimately, success will take the form of cleaner, healthier rivers.

Strategic Value: No organization in Illinois today systematically scrutinizes section 404 permits, and while much attention has been given to the removal of 404 protections from “isolated wetlands” and other waters, little effort is made to ensure that the 404 program as a whole is implemented properly. Coverage of a water body under section 404 is meaningless when permits to dredge or fill are handed out freely and permit terms are often lax and lacking mitigation requirements.

Project Strategies:

- Annually review 8-10 permits that the Army Corps of Engineers proposes to issue under section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and press for improvements to permits that do not comply with the law and protect river habitat and water quality.
- Assist local advocates in commenting on permits and learning to identify projects in their watershed where 404 permits should be required.
- Identify chronic problems with the 404 process and policies and advocate changes to remedy those problems, thereby improving future permits and providing greater protection for wetlands and streams.

RIVER STEWARDSHIP AND AWARENESS PROGRAM

Key to the success of our efforts under the Clean Water and Healthy Stream Flow and Habitat Protection Programs are the related aims of our River Stewardship and Awareness Program. This program seeks (i) to link Illinois residents in active ways to the rivers around them, helping them become more aware of river health and prompting them to get involved in their fates, and (ii) to help the environmental components of state government gain the funding they need to do their jobs properly. From its beginning under a different name more than 30 years ago, Prairie Rivers has worked to get citizens involved in environmental issues, particularly waterway-related issues. It has sought to turn ordinary citizens into responsible environmental stewards, able and willing to speak up for the health and beauty of their chosen natural homes. A key benefit of citizen involvement is that it helps government officials do better jobs in protecting the state’s environment, including its rivers. For citizen involvement to succeed, state agencies and bureaus need to have adequate resources to do their work and respond to citizen demands. Prairie Rivers, accordingly, plans to step up its efforts to help these agencies and bureaus obtain secure, adequate funding, from state and private sources.

1. Watershed Network Project

The public’s many interests in rivers will be protected only when and to the extent that citizens get involved. This project seeks to expand the network of watershed groups around the state that can act as the eyes and ears of Illinois’ rivers and streams, providing us with local support and information for a given watershed that would not otherwise be readily available. As we provide them the technical assistance they need

to become more effective watershed protectors, they can give us increased political influence, both with agencies and with legislators. When citizens become aware of water quality problems, they are often led to explore the causes of the problems and to pose increasingly probing questions about the ways in which we use our rivers and our lands. Working collaboratively with Prairie Rivers and other watershed groups around the state, grassroots groups can provide a powerful network of influence in the goal of protecting water quality and river health.

Measuring Success: Success would be measured by the number of watershed groups involved, by their size and longevity, and by their ability to participate effectively in decision making processes that affect rivers in Illinois.

Strategic Value: A network of watershed groups around the state strengthens the grassroots river conservation movement, provides local monitoring and influence with state and local decision makers (thus enhancing all of our projects), and expands the reach of PRN as an organization. Work of this type is essential to foster a fully-effective river conservation movement in Illinois.

Project Strategies:

- Provide capacity building assistance to grassroots watershed groups in areas such as planning, membership development, goal setting, issues work, and communications. Complete and circulate a grassroots watershed group manual that provides information on these and other tools that groups can use to become effective watershed leaders and protectors.
- Update and circulate a directory of watershed groups around the state. Initiate an on-line list serv or other form of communication that will allow grassroots watershed groups to easily communicate with each other, comparing experiences and successes, and supporting specific efforts.
- Conduct outreach efforts to recruit and establish new watershed groups around the state.
- Develop and host an annual or bi-annual watershed leadership forum that provides opportunities for training, networking, and leadership development for grassroots watershed groups in Illinois.

2. Grassroots River Project

This project provides opportunities for public involvement in river conservation activities, and complements the previous one in aim and methods. It seeks to establish a grass roots movement of *individuals* by providing opportunities for involvement in river conservation work independent of local watershed groups. Many citizens are reluctant to join groups or to make longer-term commitments. Others may be less interested in the fate of a particular local waterway and more interested in policy issues of broader influence. Whatever the situation, Prairie Rivers seeks to provide avenues for citizens of all interests to get involved.

Measuring Success: Success would be measured by the range of activities that we are able to provide and the number of citizens who, in consequence, become actively involved in river conservation activities.

Strategic Value: Polls show that the majority of Americans care about rivers and are willing to help protect them, but they do not know how to get involved. By providing opportunities for involvement, we increase public awareness about the threats to river health and empower new voices to speak on behalf of river conservation. We can also increase our public exposure as an organization, giving people an immediate, visible reason to support us.

Project Strategies:

- Develop a suite of volunteer events and activities including river clean-ups; watershed monitoring, training, and support; storm drain stenciling, and other programs that enable individuals to connect with their local river.
- Develop a volunteer newsletter and on-line calendar that informs interested individuals of river conservation issues, activities around the state, and other opportunities for participation.

3. River Awareness Project

This project seeks to increase the awareness of both the general public and their decision makers about river conservation in Illinois. Raising awareness generally is the first step toward building watershed organizations, recruiting new membership, and inspiring people to become leaders in river conservation. This project would seek to elevate public and decision maker awareness of river issues through direct actions, media, and other forms of outreach.

Measuring Success: Success would be measured by the development of a River Report Card, the implementation of outreach programs and the number of participants in those programs, increases in the number of media stories focused on river issues, and the development of other outreach materials such as interpretive maps.

Strategic Value: The need to increase public awareness of Illinois rivers and the associated benefits to PRN are self explanatory.

Project Strategies:

- Aggressively expand public outreach through presentations, update and improve our webpage, expand the circulation of our Prairie Rivers newsletter, and initiate a volunteer e-newsletter.
- Improve our use of earned and paid media for both issue specific campaigns and general public awareness efforts. Use public service announcements and other

tools available under the RiverSmart* program to spread the message of river conservation.

- Develop an annual State of the Rivers Report Card that measures successes and failures in river conservation, identifies areas needing improvement, and generates public awareness.
- Sponsor river canoe trips and hikes; develop interpretive maps for local river walks or canoe trips.
- Develop "dirty dozen" polluters lists for individual rivers to highlight pollution concerns for the media and local decision makers and to build relationships with local river advocates.

4. State Stewardship Enhancement Project

This project seeks, directly and by way of local watershed groups and individual citizens, to educate and inform budgetary decision makers in state government of the need to provide more appropriate funding for the Illinois EPA, the Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois DNR's Scientific Surveys, and other elements of state government responsible for the ecologically sound stewardship of the state's natural bounty. Many of the shortcomings of state governance today are due to shortfalls in state funding. Prime examples include the slow pace at which the state is able to produce watershed plans that set maximum daily pollutant loads, the lack of reasonable monitoring of waterways and individual pollution discharges, and the failure to assess overall water-quality effects when drafting discharge permits. Increased funding of state agencies could bring major improvements to Illinois waterways.

Measuring Success: Ultimately, success would be measured by more reasonable budgets for the various state agencies and bureaus. Major improvements, however, are likely to come about only after a series of years in which the clamor for sufficient budgets slowly builds. In the short-term, therefore, success will take the form of rising pressure, year by year, from lawmakers and others on key budget decision-makers.

Strategic Value: This goal, if achieved, would significantly help Prairie Rivers in its dealings with state agencies and bureaus, which would view us far more as partners in the cause to improve the Illinois landscape rather than, as they often now do, as adversaries whose sole role is to criticize their work. Stronger ties with state agencies and bureaus would help promote all of Prairie River's programmatic goals.

* RiverSmart is the public education program created by RiverNetwork and made available to organizations like PRN to use as a tool to increase public awareness of the steps they can take in their every day lives to improve water quality and river health.

Project Strategies:

- Advocate substantially increased funding for programs at IEPA, IDNR, and other state agencies that implement and enforce the Clean Water Act and other programs and policies that benefit water quality, habitat protection, and the environment.
- Oppose efforts to cut programs and staff that are integral to the protection of water quality, river health, and wildlife habitat.
- Work with coalitions of other interested advocacy groups to seek alternative and more stable sources of funding for agency programs that are critical to improvements in and protection of water quality, habitat protection, and the health of the Illinois environment.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND MEMBERSHIP

In addition to its programmatic and project goals, Prairie Rivers plans also over the next 5 years to improve itself institutionally, to raise its support to levels where it can accomplish even more to protect and enhance Illinois' environment. The past 5 years have seen substantial institutional growth in all areas; our goals for the next 5 years are even more ambitious.

1. Increase Membership to 1,000 Members

Since adopting its express river focus in 1997, Prairie Rivers Network has worked to develop sound conservation programs and to obtain the necessary funding to support them. The time has come to divert more of our energy to the expansion of the organization's devoted, but comparatively small membership base. This will require significant new effort on the part of the staff and Board to solicit and maintain new members.

Measuring Success: Our goal is to increase individual membership to a total of 1,000 by 2008.

Strategic Value: A larger membership can give added strength to our program work, particularly in political settings. It can also expand the number of citizens able to devote time as well as money to the river-protection cause.

Project Strategies: Work with our new consultant to review current membership development program and to institute new and expanded strategies to increase and maintain membership.

2. Double Private Financial Contributions

A key component of our success to date--and of our continued growth--is our ability to attract unrestricted contributions from individual donors. Private donations now exceed \$65,000 per year.

Measuring Success: Our goal is to double this number, to \$130,000 per year, by the end of 2008.

Strategic Value: Increased support from private sources provides greater flexibility in the development of organizational goals and programs.

Project Strategies: Work with our new consultant to review current programs to develop, solicit, and increase contributions from individual donors. Institute and implement new strategies that will build on and expand current efforts.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As it seeks to gain more resources to fund its programs, Prairie Rivers will continue to strive to make the best use of volunteers, so that its dollars are stretched as far as possible. No volunteers are more important to the long-term success of the organization than those who serve on the Board of Directors. Their efforts and enthusiasm are vital to all of the remaining goals. A key role of the Board is to oversee the staff and to ensure that Prairie Rivers remains an attractive place to work for highly talented staff members. The Board also establishes the overall policies and goals of the organization and ensures that resources are available to achieve those goals.

1. Maintain and Build Prairie Rivers' Staffing Capability, Benefits, and Infrastructure

PRN has successfully recruited and retained skilled staff that can implement the current programs of the organization. Maintaining a high-quality staff will require the Board to assess staffing needs and employee compensation and benefits, to evaluate office workstations and information-technology systems, and to develop and implement plans to implement needed changes.

Measuring Success: Success would be measured by the achievement and maintenance of quality employee benefits, competitive salaries, and a safe, healthy and efficient working environment with state-of-the-art technology systems.

Strategic Value: Achievement of this goal will plainly strengthen Prairie Rivers' tradition of attracting, developing, and retaining high quality individuals to carry out its missions.

Project Strategies:

- Assess needs and develop plan for staff expansion to implement new programs and projects consistent with the organization's strategic plan.
- Review current benefits and salaries to determine competitiveness and institute new benefits as needed.
- Develop long-term plan for updating technology and systems to ensure maximum staff efficiency.

2. Update and Improve Board Development Plan

The PRN Board has operated well, but additional structure could improve Board operations and increase the effectiveness of the hours that volunteer Board members can contribute to the organization. A sound Development Plan would include an assessment of current PRN Board roles and responsibilities; the clear delineation of Board responsibilities and expectations; an improved manual to guide Board members; and standing committees to recruit and mentor new Board members, oversee finances, and provide fundraising capabilities.

Measuring Success: Success would be measured proximately by the stability and effectiveness of PRN and its Board and ultimately by the overall success of the organization.

Strategic Value: Successful completion of this effort will create an effective Board that is conscious of its own role and responsibilities, motivated by the mission of the organization, willing and able to actively participate in Board leadership, and qualified to guide PRN toward continued success.

Project Strategies:

- Review and update the Board Development Plan and Board Manual.
- Review, update, and refine the focus of Board standing committees including Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, and Leadership Committee.
- Expand the Board's size and recruit new members that enhance and increase the breadth of Board members' expertise, skills, and diversity.
- Work with our new consultant to develop and implement a Board fundraising plan.