

# Prairie River Notes

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The Illinois Affiliate of National Wildlife Federation

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## How Healthy is Our Stream?

That is the question the Livable Communities Alliance and other Will County residents began to investigate during a Hickory Creek Monitoring Day, held the last Saturday in June. Local activists, school teachers, parents, and expert creek stompers in the 12 and under age group turned out to collect water samples from the creek. Representatives from Prairie Rivers Network, the Illinois Chapter of Sierra Club, and Integrated Lakes Management assisted the residents. Professional biologists, assisted by the volunteers, sampled fish and aquatic insects to better understand the state of the creek.

Hickory Creek is one of many Illinois streams facing increasing pressure from the advancing frontiers of urbanization. Historically known for its wealth of riverine life and several good fishing holes, the creek has shown declining health in recent years as the southwestern Chicago suburbs have expanded into its watershed.

The results of the June monitoring were consistent with those shown in other recent studies of this creek. Concentrations of several pollutants associated with human activities, including phosphorus, bacteria, nitrogen, and dissolved minerals, were elevated well above state averages. Additionally, fish and insect collections showed the predominant species in Hickory Creek to be more pollution tolerant, indicative of poor stream quality.

Despite these findings, Hickory Creek remains an asset to the communities through which it flows. Families that participated in the monitoring day shared stories of children spending summer days exploring the creek. However, it is at a critical juncture: without acknowledgment of and planning for needed protections, it will continue to degrade. With coordinated planning and sincere exploration of alternatives to traditional development practices and wastewater disposal, Hickory Creek can recover and remain a healthy, attractive part of Will County.

By taking time to monitor their stream and document its condition, the people who value Hickory Creek have taken an important step towards protection.



Analyzing Hickory Creek Water Samples

Water quality monitoring can be a great way to explore and learn about your local stream, and data collected can help you protect it. If you would like to start monitoring your stream, please contact Beth Wentzel at Prairie Rivers Network, 217-344-2371 or [bwentzel@prairierivers.org](mailto:bwentzel@prairierivers.org).

## River Adventures Closer than You Think by: Beth Wentzel

How much driving through weekend traffic does a Chicago resident have to endure to hike and fish along remote fern-draped, sandstone bluffs, or gaze out from the top of a cliff and see only river and forest for miles? My recent exploration of a cluster of State Parks in north central Illinois verifies that these treasures and more can be reached within an hour and a half of the city without ever setting a tire on either I-90 or I-94.

Just south and west of Rockford, Castle Rock State Park, Lowden Miller State Forest, and Franklin Creek State Natural Area offer a variety of river related recreation opportunities. Franklin Creek first caught my eye as I was trying to find a place in north central Illinois where the late-May floodwaters might have receded enough for me to successfully fish. Although I did not find low, clear water full of visible, hungry fish as I had hoped, I did find a simple hiking trail along a beautiful creek flowing through impressive cliffs that were alive with vegetation.

Abandoning the pursuit of fish in high, turbid waters also allowed me to visit other nearby natural areas. Castle Rock State Park and Lowden Miller State Forest sandwich the Rock River several miles upstream of Dixon and offer several miles of hiking trails through the forests and

prairies on each side. To enjoy paddling through these parks on the Rock River, consider renting a canoe or kayak from TJ's Bait and Canoe Rental ([www.tjscanoerental.com](http://www.tjscanoerental.com), or 815-732-4516). Castle Rock State Park offers riverside campsites available to boaters doing overnight trips on the river.

Finally, springtime birders who suffer from stiff necks associated with tree-top warbler searching should put Castle Rock on their list of destinations. One site in the park includes stairs that take visitors up to a rock bluff that offers an impressive view of the Rock River and eye-level tree tops full of birds.



Castle Rock State Park

Enjoy and support Illinois State Parks near you.  
Find more information on Illinois DNR's website at  
<http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/index.htm>.

## State to Regulate Mercury

Mercury is a highly toxic chemical whose effects on the central nervous system are comparable to those of lead. Exposure, which can cause severe neurological and developmental problems, is widespread. The largest industrial source of mercury emissions is coal fired power plants. In 2001, Illinois utilities released more than 4,000 pounds of mercury. Illinois EPA is currently considering restrictions on mercury emissions from power plants. **Write to Governor Blagojevich at 207 State House, Springfield, IL 62706. Tell him we need mercury rules that require power plants to reduce emissions 90% by 2008 to protect people, fish, and wildlife.**

## Proposal Could Impact Fish

A proposal filed with the Pollution Control Board by the Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies (IAWA) would lower the amount of dissolved oxygen required in streams and lakes. If adopted, the standard for dissolved oxygen in Illinois would be lower than any other state, and potentially devastating to fish and other aquatic life who require sufficient amounts of oxygen to grow and survive. Your help is needed to protect fish and water quality. **Write the Governor at 207 State House, Springfield, IL 62706 and ask him to oppose the IAWA proposal to lower the dissolved oxygen standard in Illinois and to protect the fish and other aquatic life.**

## Help Rivers in Your Neighborhood

Did you know that you can do something in your own neighborhood that will spread an important message about protecting the quality of Illinois' watersheds and drinking supplies?

No matter what your zip code, you likely have storm drains between your sidewalk and the street that carry water off of the streets in your neighborhood after a heavy rain. Along with rainwater, however, any other sort of debris, lawn chemicals, or oil in the street will also flow into the storm drain. When water has washed off our streets, and out of our sight it often flows untreated and unfiltered into local rivers. If you live in Champaign County the storm drain water might end up in the nearby Saline Branch of the Salt Fork River. If you live in Aurora, it flows into the Fox River. This polluted water affects local wildlife and habitat, the water in which you might want to fish and swim, and from which some down-stream communities draw their drinking water.

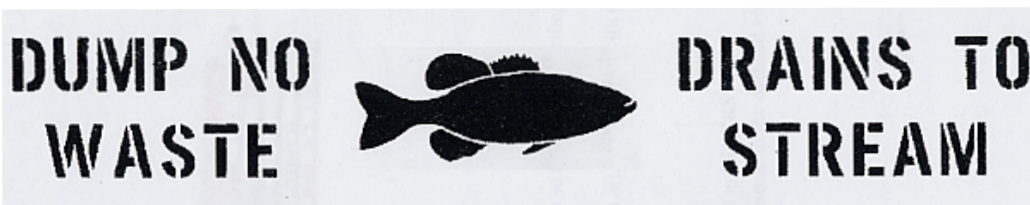
The elimination of street-side pollution is the simplest way to avoid the effects of polluted storm drain runoff. Many people simply do not realize that the oil they spill while working on their car, or the fertilizer they put on their lawn can soon flow

into the nearby rivers where they fish and swim. Now, with just a few volunteer hours, you can help build awareness in your own neighborhood about the need to keep pollutants from washing down storm drains.

Prairie Rivers Network is proud to be able to lend you our **Storm Drain Stencil Adventure Kit** that includes everything that you, or your local after-school program, church group, scout troop, or group of friends, will need to safely and effectively stencil neighborhood storm drains with the simple and straightforward message of "DUMP NO WASTE—DRAINS TO STREAM." People who see this message, and the information we provide with the kit for you to distribute, will be able to make better informed and more environmentally sound decisions that directly affect our waters.

Contact Prairie Rivers Network at 217-344-2371, to ask for more information about using our Storm Drain Stencil Adventure Kit, or to learn how to start a storm drain stenciling program in your town to protect your local river.

This project was made possible by donations from US Cellular, The Meyer Charitable Foundation, and our members.



## Miller Leaves Prairie Rivers

Marc Miller, Prairie Rivers Network's Watershed Organizer for the past five years, has left our organization to become a Senior Policy Advisor in the office of Lt. Governor Pat Quinn. Prairie Rivers' staff and board congratulate Marc on this career move and look forward to working with him in his new role.

We have undertaken a wide-ranging search for a new organizer and we will let you know when one is hired. In the interim, Executive Director Jean Flemma and Watershed Scientist Beth Wentzel are sharing duties of the Organizer, assisted by members of our Board of Directors and volunteers.

## **Illinois, Be *RiverSmart*!**

Prairie Rivers Network has announced a new campaign – “Illinois, Be RiverSmart!” – to help state residents prevent water pollution. The campaign lets citizens know how their everyday activities can impact nearby rivers, lakes, and streams, and what easy things they can do to reduce those impacts.

State public opinion polls show that Illinois residents rank protecting water quality very high on their list of concerns. A national poll revealed that most Americans think rivers need protection and would like to help but do not know how. The RiverSmart campaign tells them how.

The majority of pollution in Illinois’ rivers, lakes, and streams come from the landscape. This “nonpoint source” pollution originates from activities on the farm, streets, sidewalks, and lawns, and contributes water pollutants such as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, bacteria, heavy metals, paints, solvents, oil and grease, which are carried off into our storm sewers and streams by rainfall events.

RiverSmart suggests actions people can adopt in their everyday lives to conserve water and reduce pollution. Some of the actions include running the dishwasher or washing machine only when you have a full load, fixing leaks in your faucets, toilets, and cars, buying environmentally friendly products, using a compost pile, and maintaining your septic system. Additional tips can also be found on the Prairie Rivers website, [www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org), on the RiverSmart project page.

Prairie Rivers has been partnering with media outlets around the state to air public service announcements on radio and television and in newspapers. Print, radio, and television versions



of the announcements can also be found on Prairie Rivers’ website or are available by request at 217-344-2371.

The program was developed by the national river conservation group, River Network, in cooperation with Swiss Re, the underwriter for the program.



### **You can help stop pollution!**

Have you ever noticed an oil slick on your local stream and wondered where it was coming from? Or have you seen pollution flowing down a local storm drain (and hence right into the river) and wondered who to report it to? Illinois EPA has a new online Citizen Pollution Complaint form that you can fill out in seconds. Jean Flemma recently used the online form when she noticed soapy water at a local car wash washing down the storm drain instead of being retained in the car wash bay. She emailed IEPA, and within days action had been taken and soapy water was no longer illegally flowing down the storm drain and into the nearby river. Individuals can make a difference!

If you see a pollution problem that needs reporting, contact IEPA at <http://www.epa.state.il.us/pollution-complaint/form-acrobat.pdf> or call 1-800-782-7860 or 217-782-3637.



## Volunteers Donate Valuable Time for Rivers

Each week generous volunteers come to Prairie Rivers' office to help with tasks ranging from fielding phone calls to photocopying documents, researching information, and preparing mailings.

Over the past 12 months, a skillful corps of University of Illinois students donated 367 hours of their time to Prairie Rivers Network.

According to Independent Sector, a coalition of nonprofits, corporations, and foundations, one volunteer hour has a value of \$17.19. In other words, these generous students gave hours worth \$6,314 to Prairie Rivers. Their gift of time and

talent helped stretch our staffing, enabling us to deal with many tasks, some of which would have gone undone without the volunteers. And that enhanced our work to restore and protect Illinois rivers.

We thank each of these students and all our volunteers for their gift of time – and invite others to join them in the coming year. Each hour donated benefits the state's rivers and streams, the lands surrounding them, and all the creatures – human and wild – who depend upon these natural treasures.

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## Summer Interns Cool Off at Prairie Rivers

Prairie Rivers Network is fortunate to have two interns for the summer — Natalie Galatzer and Nicky Dyal. Natalie, from Paw Paw, Illinois, has one year remaining at the University of Illinois. She is working on a Bachelors degree in Molecular and Cellular Biology.

In Natalie's youth, she spent week-long summer canoe trips on the lazy creeks of the Western United States with her family and a small pack of llamas. These adventures fueled her burgeoning love for the out-of-doors, and it is probably safe to say that she is a convert for life.

Natalie has volunteered for Prairie Rivers for the last two semesters. Her work has led up to her chief task this summer — finishing a Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program handbook. Operating in the field with these guidelines, volunteers will have a source of scientific techniques and standards by which they will be able to evaluate the water data they collect. This data will contribute to the deepening pool of facts and figures concerning water quality around the state.

Nicky Dyal goes to school at Vassar College in New York where she is working on her Bachelors degree in Environmental Studies. She grew up in a quiet corner of Connecticut. So why is she in Champaign-Urbana for the summer?

It's all part of Nicky's "experiments in landscape." She spent many of her childhood and college summers backpacking and mountaineering. She spent this past spring semester sailing and researching in the Caribbean. This summer her experiment has brought her to the Midwest and Champaign-Urbana with its easy terrain for biking, the University of Illinois, and Prairie Rivers Network.



Nicky Dyal

Natalie Galatzer

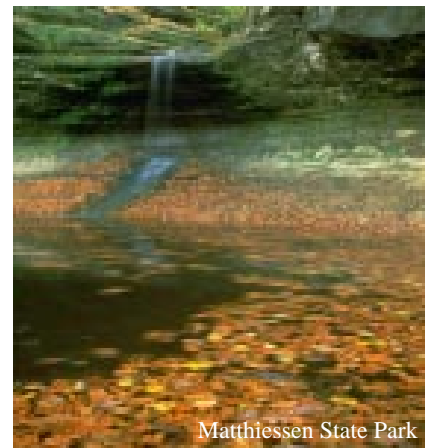
Nicky can be found at Prairie Rivers three days a week working on our Storm Drain Stenciling program — a new program that gets underway this fall — and other projects. She also spends the wee hours of the morning baking bread for a local restaurant. Come fall she will be found back on the East Coast preparing for her graduation in May and her next new landscape: the desert.

## **Where There's a Will, There's a Way**

Did you know that your will can be a simple and lasting way for you to help restore and protect Illinois' rivers?

By designating a set amount or percentage of your estate to Prairie Rivers Network, you can help protect rivers, streams, wetlands and their surrounding lands in years to come. Your bequest today will help ensure that future generations can use and enjoy these natural treasures.

To learn more about making a bequest to Prairie Rivers Network, please be in touch with Prairie Rivers' executive director, Jean Flemma. You may reach her by email at [jflemma@prairierivers.org](mailto:jflemma@prairierivers.org) or by telephone at 217-344-2371.



## **Buying or Selling a Home? Help Prairie Rivers Network when you do!**

If you use the services of Ward & Associates Realtors, a sponsor of Prairie Rivers Network, and mention our name, they will donate 20% of the profits per transaction to us! Buying and selling would equal two transactions. Our special thanks to Debby Auble at Ward & Associates for this generous offer and to any of you who take advantage of it. To take part, please call Debby at 217-355-1000. To date, this offer has already resulted in \$1,160 for river conservation.

## ***Prairie Rivers Network***

The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

*...strives to protect the rivers and streams of Illinois and to 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.*

### **Board of Directors**

Eric Freyfogle, <i>President</i>	Urbana
Jon McNussen, <i>Treasurer</i>	Villa Grove
Michael Rosenthal, <i>Secretary</i>	Glencoe
Clark Bullard	Urbana
Greg Foster	Urbana
Charles Goodall	Sidell
Bruce Hannon	Champaign
Ward McDonald	Mahomet
Anne Phillips	Urbana
Virginia Scott	Springfield

### **Staff**

Jean Flemma—Executive Director
Beth Wentzel—Watershed Scientist
Dixie Jackson—Office Manager
Olivia Dorothy—Support Staff
Natalie Galatzer—Intern
Nicky Dyal—Intern

# Join Prairie Rivers Network!

## Or Renew Your Membership!

### Membership Categories:

- ☐ \$15.00 Student Membership
- ☐ \$25.00 Basic Membership
- ☐ \$50.00 Friends' Membership
- ☐ \$100 River Steward
- ☐ Other

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street, P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email (to receive Action Alerts) \_\_\_\_\_

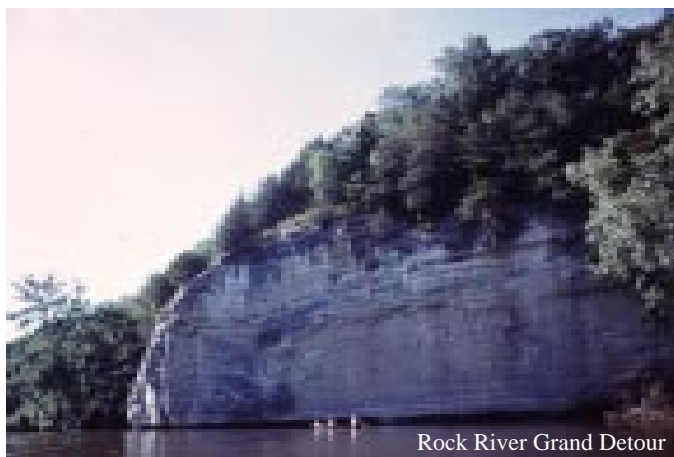
### Make checks payable to:

**Prairie Rivers Network**  
809 S. Fifth Street  
Champaign, Illinois 61820

*All who join **Prairie Rivers** will receive our newsletter and action alerts. Your contribution to **Prairie Rivers** is tax deductible.*

### Protect Illinois' rivers and streams:

Join Prairie Rivers Network — the only state-wide organization in Illinois working solely on river issues. Your donation will help fund our efforts to bring science and technical information to bear in issues affecting all of our state's flowing waters. Your name on our membership roster will add strength to our campaign to restore and protect Illinois' rivers and streams.



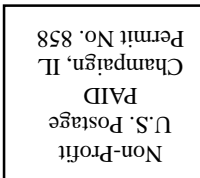
Rock River Grand Detour



Cache River

### Already a member?

Please hand this membership application to friends, neighbors, or colleagues and help get more people excited about protecting Illinois' rivers.



**Prairie Rivers Network**  
809 South Fifth Street  
Champaign, Illinois 61820  
217-344-2371 fax: 217-344-2381  
[www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org)

## Mark Your Calendar!

### **IL Wilds Institute for Nature Class Schedule**

July 20-22 - Butterflies of Illinois: Icons of Natural and Managed Landscapes. Field and in class activities on how to properly identify and study butterflies.

August 3-5 - The Mussels of Illinois. Field work learning about the complex biology of freshwater mussels.

September 28-30 - The Reptiles and Amphibians of Illinois. Field and class activities on how to identify and study Illinois herps.

Call for more details: 217-333-4322

### **Paddling in the Park**

July 24-25

Twin Lakes Recreation Area

Palatine

Photo Attributions  
Jason Lindsey, [www.perceptivevisions.com](http://www.perceptivevisions.com):  
pages 2, 6, 7, and borders;  
Ralph Frese: page 7;  
Prairie Rivers Network: pages 1, and 5.

Prairie Rivers Network is a member of Earth Share of Illinois. If you participate in a workplace giving campaign, look for ESI and you can designate Prairie Rivers Network to receive your contributions.

