

Prairie River Notes

Volume 6, Issue 4

A publication of **Prairie Rivers Network**
The Illinois Affiliate of National Wildlife Federation

Winter 2004

Record Number of Guests Celebrate Illinois Rivers

Reflecting on the growth and success that Prairie Rivers Network continues to enjoy, 200 guests – a record for our organization – gathered in Champaign on Friday, November 12 for our Annual Dinner. The event celebrated the victories Prairie Rivers has won for Illinois rivers in the past year and looked ahead to the work we will undertake in months to come. It gave our staff and board members an opportunity to personally thank those who help make our work possible through their generous financial support.

During the cocktail hour, guests enjoyed the string music of Alton symphony members John Chick and Deberah Haferkamp. John is also the team leader of the Great Rivers Field Station in Brighton.

During dinner, guests heard about our activities in 2004 from Executive Director Jean Flemma, and a report from environmental writer Richard Manning on a visionary project in Montana to create an unprecedented, 3-million-acre grassland reserve that will support people as well as wildlife. Cooperative, locally based projects such as this are at the center of our work at Prairie Rivers and have largely determined its success over the years.

Commitment to Prairie Rivers work was evident among those who attended the dinner. When board president Eric Freyfogle announced that a few generous donors were challenging dinner guests to increase their giving to Prairie Rivers by \$10,000 and offering to match that increase with an additional \$10,000, the guests met the challenge, increasing their giving by \$10,290 over last year.

Prairie Rivers' board of directors and staff are grateful for this generous support and very pleased with the opportunity that the dinner gave us to visit with so many of the people who share our vision for Illinois rivers. Our heartfelt thanks to all who came to celebrate with us and to pledge support of our work in 2005.



The Year in Review

2004 was a busy year for Prairie Rivers Network and clean water advocates around the state. As in the past, much of our success has stemmed from the fact that so many Illinois citizens have been willing to speak out on behalf of their natural surroundings. The Illinois Constitution proclaims, we all enjoy a right to a “healthful environment,” but that right is often dependent on our willingness to defend it.

Together we have defended our rivers against polluters who would decrease the amount of oxygen available for smallmouth bass and other aquatic species. We

fought to reduce mercury emissions from power plants that clog our air, rain down on our waters, pollute our fish, and threaten public health. We secured the proposal of a new limit on phosphorus pollution that will reduce the growth of green algae that suffocates our streams. We also helped shine the light on arcane and unnecessary drainage practices that destroy fish and wildlife habitat and degrade water quality. There is still work to be done, but we enter 2005 stronger than ever, and determined to succeed. With the support and efforts of citizens throughout Illinois, we will.

2004 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Reducing Nutrient Pollution: Prairie Rivers, in collaboration with the Sierra Club and Environmental Law and Policy Center, pressed for long-overdue reductions in the amount of phosphorus that sewage treatment plants and others release into Illinois streams. In response, Illinois EPA recently proposed that phosphorus in new or increased wastewater discharges be reduced to just 1 mg per liter – a level that would significantly reduce excess algae growth and other problems in rivers and streams. We are now working to win the Pollution Control Board’s approval of this important change, the first significant limit on phosphorus discharges to Illinois streams.

Engaging New River Advocates: Prairie Rivers developed new initiatives to inspire and equip citizens to care for Illinois rivers. Our “Illinois Stream Team” is a volunteer monitoring program that enables citizens to investigate and report to a central database the chemical and physical quality of waters in rivers and streams. In September we trained the first volunteers for the team. Our long-term goal is to have monitors in every Illinois watershed. Our Storm Drain Stenciling program is part of a “Be River Smart Illinois” campaign which we launched to inform the general public of simple steps they can take to improve water quality and protect their rivers. Using kits that we assembled, volunteers can paint “Dump no Waste - Drains to Rivers” notices on storm drains throughout their communities. Prairie Rivers is working with volunteers to stencil drains in Champaign, Urbana, and around the state.

Reforming Drainage Practices: Prairie Rivers began a long-term effort to reform Illinois drainage practices. The Illinois Drainage Code, unchanged since the 1870’s, authorizes hundreds of drainage districts throughout the state to levy taxes, channelize and dredge river beds, and clear trees from private property. Although these action speed the movement of water from the land, they have enormous consequences for streams, including the destruction of fish and wildlife habitat and increased water temperatures, flood heights, and stream bank erosion. Working with landowners to intervene in a drainage district’s plan to dredge and channelize a portion of the Salt Fork River, we began to build public awareness of alternatives to these practices and lay the foundation for a state-wide effort to improve drainage practices.

Enforcing the Clean Water Act: Prairie Rivers continued to closely monitor implementation and enforcement of the Clean Water Act and intervene when agencies fail to fulfill their responsibilities under the act. For example, we sought to strengthen dozens of draft permits for municipalities, industries, and others who wanted to discharge pollutants into state streams. We intervened when proposed permits failed to meet the act’s standards, forcing the agency to require fuller compliance. When an association representing those who discharge wastewater into Illinois streams proposed pollution levels which would reduce dissolved oxygen in the state waters and negatively impact fish and other aquatic species, we initiated a campaign to oppose it, and are continuing work to prevent this unwarranted and damaging change.

Improving Chicago Area Waters and Minimizing the Impacts of Development: With partners such as the Environmental Law and Policy Center and Sierra Club and citizen groups along the Fox River, Manhattan Creek, Hickory Creek, and other streams, Prairie Rivers continued to use the Clean Water Act to help protect streams in the rapidly developing Chicago region. We provided technical and organizing assistance to citizen groups, empowering them to influence community officials as sewage treatment plants were expanded to serve new households. We served on Task Forces formed to consider improved water quality standards for the Des Plaines River, the Chicago River, and other area waters.

Watershed Roundup

Despite the arrival of cold weather, efforts to preserve the biological and chemical integrity of Illinois streams have not slowed. Grassroots watershed organizations around the state have been working hard to deal with the present, plan for the future and get people together to do something for their local stream or river.

Many of our friends along the Vermilion River and members of Keep Vermilion County Beautiful are gearing up for the first Vermilion River clean-up in the spring of 2005. The clean-up will be held in two phases, a land based clean up in April and a canoe/river based clean up in July. We are very excited for the Vermilion River and all of its friends!

Taking advantage of Prairie Rivers Network's "Be River Smart" campaign, groups from Danville, Bloomington, and Urbana are gearing up to hold storm drain stenciling events this spring, using kits assembled by Prairie Rivers for this purpose. We hope to work with many volunteers throughout the state in the coming year to paint their storm drains with the important message "Dump No Waste – Drains to Rivers." If you are interested in planning such an event in your watershed, contact Jane Li at jli@prairierivers.org.

Friends of Kickapoo Creek in McLean County has also been very busy, gearing up for storm drain stenciling events, designing a brochure and creating Kickapoo Creek note cards that feature Jan Holder's (President of Friends of Kickapoo Creek) paintings of the Kickapoo. This energetic group recently recruited a University of Illinois, Landscape Design class, taught by Carol Emmerling-DiNovo, to create vision-to-action plans for the watershed. Plans included wetlands, parks, preserves and farms for native plants and organic food. Also, in an exciting turn of events, on Tuesday, December 14th the McLean County Zoning Committee rejected a local developer's attempt to convert highly erodable land adjacent to the creek from agricultural use to residential development designation. Friends of Kickapoo introduced key factual evidence and expert testimony, providing the zoning committee specific and ample reasons to reject the application unanimously.

In October, more than 120 volunteers from around the state journeyed to Starved Rock State Park to help the Friends of Plum Island chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society and the Living Lands and Water's crew clean up Plum Island. The Friends of Plum Island, with the help of many from around the state, including the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, the Trust for Public Land, and Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, recently rescued the island from slated development. A dedication ceremony was held at the end of the clean-up. The island is now an Illinois Audubon Sanctuary and Natural Heritage Landmark. Congratulations!

Up north, the Friends of the Fox River, Prairie Rivers Network, Sierra Club, and the Openlands Project will be holding a training for citizens interested in learning how they can use the Clean Water Act to protect their streams from threats posed by urbanization. "Water Rules! Using the Clean Water Act to Protect Your Streams" will be held February 26, 2005. For information or to register, contact Beth Wentzel at bwentzel@prairierivers.org.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. There is much more happening around the state, so be sure to check out our new River Happenings Calendar on the website (www.prairierivers.org). If you would like to receive help planning an event, report your group's recent success, or post a public event on the calendar, please contact Kim Erndt at kerndt@prairierivers.org, or you can call any of our staff at 217-344-2371.



Oxygen Debate Continues

The debate over oxygen requirements in streams continues, and your involvement is critical. The Fall 2004 edition of *Prairie Rivers Notes* explained in detail the proposal submitted by the Illinois Association of Wastewater Agencies (IAWA) to rollback regulations that require dissolved oxygen in streams. If adopted, this proposed rule would be the weakest in the country during the most critical times of the year and could impair growth and survival of fish and other stream life.

Since our last newsletter, experts and other interested parties have been discussing the problems with the proposal and trying to identify an appropriate, protective alternative. These discussions are expected to continue several months into the new year, and the Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB) will have at least one more public hearing on the rule. Ultimately, the IPCB will decide whether the rules will be changed and citizen input is very important. Please write a letter to the IPCB and/or plan to speak at one of the hearings to ask the IPCB to maintain strong protections for streams by rejecting any proposal to weaken dissolved oxygen criteria.

New Phosphorus Restrictions

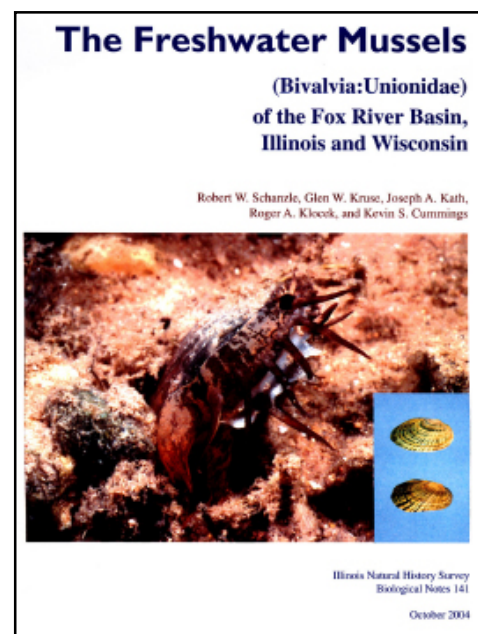
Several months ago, Illinois EPA proposed a new rule that would require substantial reduction of phosphorus in the discharge from new and expanding wastewater and industrial facilities. Following two public hearings over several months, the first comment period closed in mid-December. If this rule is adopted, it will be the first significant regulation to reduce phosphorus pollution in Illinois' streams reducing the prevalence and growth of green algae that suffocates our streams. *Prairie Rivers* presented technical testimony to the Illinois Pollution Control Board, and several members and other organizations submitted comments in support of the rule. Thanks to everybody who participated. We will keep you updated on the outcome of this process.

Letters should be sent to:
Illinois Pollution Control Board
P.O. Box 19274
Springfield, IL 62794-9274.

New Mussel Publication

The Illinois Natural History Survey has a new publication available. *Illinois Natural History Survey Biological Notes 141 -The Freshwater Mussels (Bivalvia: Unionidae) of the Fox River Basin, Illinois and Wisconsin* by Robert W. Schanzle, Glen W. Kruse, Joseph A. Kath, Roger A. Klocek, and Kevin S. Cummings, 35 pp. (Paperback, \$6 per copy, includes shipping and handling).

Freshwater mussels in the Fox River basin were surveyed during 1997-2001. 96 stations were sampled resulting in the collection of 27 species of native mussels and 2 species of introduced mussels. This publication provides detailed species descriptions and range maps for each of the collected species plus tables comparing the results of the current survey with those of previous surveys. For order information, please contact Ruth Johnson 217-333-6880.



Introducing the AmeriCorps Volunteer for Illinois Rivers

We are pleased to announce that Jane Li has joined Prairie Rivers Network as our new AmeriCorps Volunteer Coordinator. She started work at Prairie Rivers in the middle of October.

Jane is a recent graduate of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign with a bachelor's degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences. Volunteering is not new to Jane. She previously volunteered as a state park nature interpreter in Virginia in the summer of 2003 and with collegiate organizations such as Alternative Spring Break and Campus Vegetarian Society.

As the volunteer coordinator, Jane will work with Kim Erndt, our Watershed Organizer, to increase the capacity of watershed groups around the state. She

will be recruiting volunteers through events and presentations. If you have any questions about how your group can get more involved in river events or would like to increase your membership, feel free to email Jane at jli@prairierivers.org.



A Thanks to Our 2004 Volunteers

Prairie Rivers Network prides itself on our fantastic volunteers. Each week, a regular group of student volunteers assist our staff with a myriad of tasks. We are proud to note that many are in their second year of service! We also have a dedicated group of non-student volunteers who have worked with us for years.

With our small staff, we would not be nearly as effective in our jobs without the help of these dedicated volunteers. A very sincere thank you goes out to: Jenny Acosta, Geriann Albers, Maggie Bruns, Steven Butler, Saemi Chung, Deby Elenter, Natalie Galatzer,

Derek Gronlund, Mary Herget, Jennifer Hill, Junyong Jang, Rob Kanter, Karin Alissa Krohn, Carla Minniti, Matt Nichols, Kannan Puthuval, Cecily Smith, Sarah Stanfield, Katie Thompson, Kim Whitlock, Kent Williamson, and Edwin Winzeler. Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication!

If you or someone you know would like to volunteer at Prairie Rivers Network, please contact Kim Erndt, Watershed Organizer at kerndt@prairierivers.org or at 217-721-0818.



Jean Flemma and Geriann Albers

Volunteer of the Year 2004

Prairie Rivers' 2004 Volunteer of the Year is Geriann Albers, a student at the University of Illinois, currently working on her Bachelor's degree in Natural Resource and Environmental Science (NRES). Geriann has been our Volunteer Coordinator for two years in a row now, and her skills and hard work do not go unnoticed. Every semester, Geriann does an excellent job of recruiting new volunteers and creating the office volunteer schedule. She also trains the volunteers and keeps everyone up to date on task and schedule changes. She can also be credited with keeping all NRES students updated on new class offerings and social events. Thanks Geriann, you have done an excellent job!

Donations Honor Hannon



Bruce Hannon (right) and David Main

Prairie Rivers received two generous donations this fall specifically honoring Bruce Hannon, our long time Board member and founder of the organization. The first, for \$1,000, was donated by Bruce's wife Patricia—a long-time supporter of Prairie Rivers—on the occasion of his 70th birthday. The second, a \$500 donation from Charles and Annette Lansford, was made in recognition of Bruce's work to protect and conserve the rivers and the environment of Illinois. Our sincere thanks to our donors for their support and Bruce for all his hard work on behalf of the environment and Prairie Rivers Network.

Illinois Stream Team: Volunteers Wanted

Prairie Rivers Network is looking for volunteers who want to join our Stream Team, a citizen water quality monitoring program that trains participants to investigate chemical and physical aspects of water quality in their local stream. Groups who participate in our training receive a monitoring kit that they can use on an ongoing basis to collect important data about the water quality of their stream. The kits contain simple equipment necessary to measure eight important water quality parameters: dissolved oxygen, pH, temperature, orthophosphate, nitrate, alkalinity, turbidity, and flow. For more information, contact Kim Erndt at kerndt@prairierivers.org.



Stream Team volunteers on the Sangamon River

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.

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Marise Robbins-Forbes—Director of Development
Jane Li—AmeriCorps Volunteer Coordinator
Olivia Dorothy—Support Staff

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

Make checks payable to:

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

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Email (to receive Action Alerts) _____

☐ This membership is a gift for:

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Phone _____
Email (to receive Action Alerts) _____



Looking for the perfect gift?

A membership to Prairie Rivers Network is the perfect gift for avid hikers, fishermen, paddlers, birders, or anyone who is concerned about the health of Illinois' rivers and streams. A one-year gift membership to Prairie Rivers Network includes quarterly newsletters, action alerts and the knowledge that you are helping to protect the environment of Illinois. A card announcing your gift will be sent, and for those who give a gift membership of \$100 or greater, a copy of *Paddling Illinois* will be sent to the gift recipient as well by Prairie Rivers Network!

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.



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809 South Fifth Street
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217-344-2371 fax: 217-344-2381
www.prairierivers.org

Mark Your Calendar!

Water Rules!

Using the Clean Water Act to Protect Your Stream
Batavia, Illinois
February 26, 2004
For more information, or to register, contact Beth
Wentzel at 217-344-2371.

16th Annual Bald Eagle Days

at the QCCA Expo Center
2621 4th Ave. Rock Island, IL
Saturday, January 9th from 10am-7pm
Sunday, January 10th from 10am-5pm
Cost \$4 adult/ \$1 children
For more information visit
<http://qccaexpocenter.com>

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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.

