

Prairie River Notes

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The Illinois Affiliate of National Wildlife Federation

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Illinois Celebrates It's Our River Day

The 87,000 miles of rivers and streams in Illinois provide us with invaluable services free of charge. They give us a place to recreate, unwind, explore, and build memories. They provide us with fluid highways on which to transport our commercial and industrial goods. They remind us of our history, the laws of nature and the fragility of life. And of course, they give us food and drain away the waters from our fields, streets and parking lots.

Many people already do something to give back to their local stream. However, there are still many that are not aware of the gifts and services provided to us by these wonderful systems, and they are not involved in their protection. Thanks to Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, Illinois now has "It's Our River Day" — a day dedicated to helping reconnect people to their rivers and streams, and a day that hopefully will change the way every citizen views and uses these invaluable resources.



Volunteers from Lincoln's Challenge

Last year, Lt. Governor Quinn designated the third Saturday in September as "It's Our River Day" (IORD). With a mission to increase awareness and appreciation of our rivers through events focused on education, recreation, and conservation, IORD is a day for the citizens of Illinois to give back to their rivers. Last year there were approximately 30 events that were held to celebrate Illinois' rivers. This year that number doubled to 61 river-related events held by communities across the state. This is a trend that we all hope to see continue. (continued on page 6)

Prairie Rivers' Annual Dinner – November 4th **Keynote Speaker: Tim Gallagher**

Prairie Rivers' annual dinner will be held on November 4th and we are delighted to announce that our special keynote speaker will be renowned author and photographer Tim Gallagher, who is one of the first three people to see the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, previously thought extinct because of widespread habitat loss. Gallagher has a new book, "The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," and is the editor-in-chief of *Living Bird* quarterly.

Gallagher will tell us of the Ivory-bill's near demise and its amazing rediscovery. He will talk of his pursuit to learn everything about the bird and his search of the bayous of Arkansas where he finally had the thrill of seeing it. This bird has survived, in part, due to ongoing efforts to protect the bottomland hardwood forests and slow moving rivers that the Ivory-bill calls home.

The annual dinner is an opportunity for us to personally thank all of our members for their generous support and dedication to Illinois' rivers and streams. All current members will be receiving their invitations in the mail shortly. For reservations call Vickie Nudelman at 217-344-2371. We hope to see you there.

For more information about the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, turn to page 5.

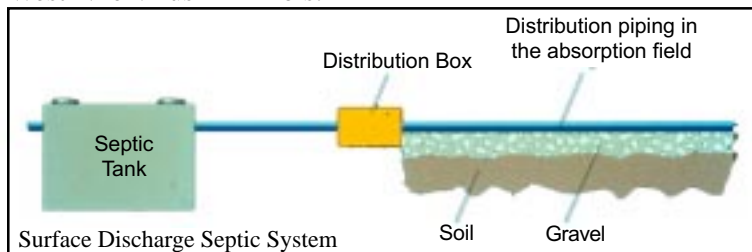
Regulating Septic Systems

Did you know? There are currently tens of thousands of homes in Illinois that have septic systems which discharge to surface water and are currently not regulated by the Illinois EPA (IEPA) under the Clean Water Act. Clean water advocates think its time for this practice to come to an end.

While many homes in Illinois are connected to municipal sewage systems where their waste is processed at local treatment plants and then discharged, some still rely on private sewage disposal systems. There are two major types of private sewage systems. A subsurface system discharges waste into a drainage field underground where bacteria can process the pollutants in the sewage before it reaches the groundwater. The second type is a surface discharging system, which discharges the liquid waste directly to the ground's surface, a collection tile, a drainage way, or a body of water.

Most states have banned the use of surface discharging systems completely. Illinois is one of very few states that allows these systems to be installed without requiring them to receive permits. It is estimated that there are at least 130,000 surface discharging systems operating in the state, with 6,000 new systems being installed each year. The failure rate is high, and there is a lack of monitoring or compliance standards to combat the problem. Current studies suggest that 20 to 60 percent of these systems are failing or have failed, resulting in the potential for raw sewage to be discharged into surface waters.

The waste from failing systems may contain disease-causing organisms associated with gastroenteritis, salmonella, hepatitis A, or leptospirosis. Neighborhood children and animals playing in or near a discharge pool may become infected as well as carry disease-causing organisms to their homes. Pooling water from surface discharging systems also carries the threat of attracting mosquitoes, the primary vector for West Nile Virus in Illinois.



The Clean Water Act of 1972 requires anyone who wishes to discharge pollution to surface waters to have a permit. While municipal treatment systems are subject to such permit requirements, IEPA currently does not require private surface discharging septic systems to obtain permits. The systems are therefore in violation of the Clean Water Act, placing homeowners with these systems at risk of being sued in federal court for discharging wastewater without a permit.

While IEPA has not put a permit system in place, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) does have some regulations controlling their use. Implemented by local health departments, enforcement is inconsistent across the state. In addition, some counties have banned the systems outright or limited their use, but there is no consistent policy across the state that requires monitoring and limits their use only to situations when no practical alternative exists.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working with Sierra Club, the Environmental Law and Policy Center, and the Illinois Environmental Council to require IEPA and IDPH to address the overuse and failure of these systems. We are pressing IEPA to require permits that would include meaningful discharge limitations, and monitoring and maintenance requirements for these systems. We also serve on the Advisory Commission on Private Sewage Disposal to advise IDPH on these issues, working towards developing legislation that would establish a uniform system for local public health departments to enforce permit requirements, establish criteria for determining when these units are allowed to be installed, and allow IDPH to collect reasonable fees to fund the administration of the program.

Storm Drain Patrols Storming Their Towns

This summer, many community groups have joined the Prairie Rivers Network storm drain patrol, watchdogging their local storm drains to keep them free of trash and debris and stenciling them with a waterproof paint and the important message “DUMP NO WASTE - DRAINS TO RIVERS.”

Simultaneously, educational flyers are handed out in their neighborhoods, highlighting the simple things citizens can do to keep pollution out of their storm water, out of their storm drains, and out of our rivers. Many people are not aware that the water that runs off driveways, parking lots, streets, and even farm fields during rain storms, picking up trash, yard and pet waste, sediment, fertilizers, and other pollutants along the way, does not go to a treatment plant. Instead, it is dumped directly into the nearest river.

Here are just a few of the folks that have joined the storm drain patrol, helping to alert people to the need to keep pollution out of storm run-off and out of our rivers:

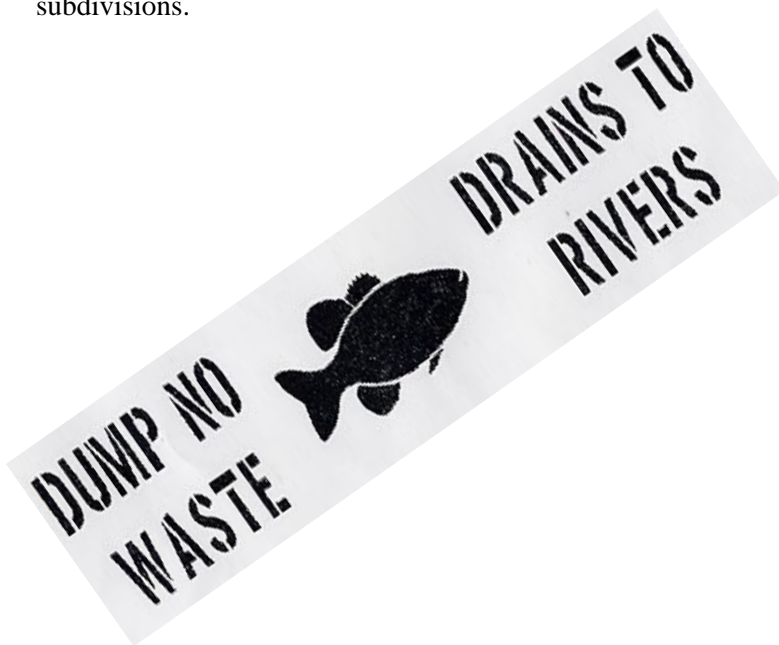
On May 14th, Gary Apfelstadt, and his 7th grade class at Urbana Middle School stenciled storm drains in the neighborhood around the school as part of their Water Works Celebration, providing an opportunity for students and family members to get active in protecting their watershed. On May 21st, in Savoy, Prairie Rivers Network and Jim Miller, public works manager for the city, worked with local community members who came together to stencil in the Arbours and Prairie Fields subdivisions.



On July 31st, and August 6th, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the LaMoine River Ecosystem Partnership, and local volunteers came together to stencil in the communities of Rushville and Macomb. The benefits of stenciling and cleaning storm drains were rewarding. Says Beth Pearson of the DNR, “I felt great helping the environment by picking up litter and creating community awareness.”

Finally, on August 27th, in Danville, Brenda Dwiggens, and members of the Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association came out to stencil, enjoy each other’s company, and make a difference in their environment. More events are scheduled in the next few weeks, and there’s still time to bring the storm drain patrol to your neighborhood! You can borrow our storm drain stenciling kits for free, and coordinating assistance is provided. Please contact Jane Li, at jli@prairierivers.org or 217-344-2371 for more information.

The storm drain patrol is made possible with the generous support of US Cellular, the Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation, and the Meyer Charitable Foundation.



Nominations for *River Steward Awards* Deadline: 5 pm, October 20th, 2005

Prairie Rivers Network announces our new *River Steward Awards*, celebrating Illinois' rivers and those who protect them by recognizing individuals who provide us with leadership and inspiration to protect the state's rivers and streams for people, fish, and wildlife.

Citizens around our state are working to protect Illinois' rivers. Too often, their outstanding efforts and successes are not known outside of their local community. Prairie Rivers Network wants to recognize the people who make these achievements possible, sharing their victories and inspiring others.

River Stewards will be honored at Prairie Rivers Network's annual dinner, November 4, 2005. The honoree and a guest, as well as the nominator, will be invited to attend. The award recipient will also be announced to the river conservation community around the state, to the media in a press release, and posted on our website.

For information on how to nominate someone for a *River Steward* award, email Jane Li, Volunteer Coordinator at jli@prairierivers.org. Or, visit our website www.prairierivers.org

Is Your River Safe for Recreation?

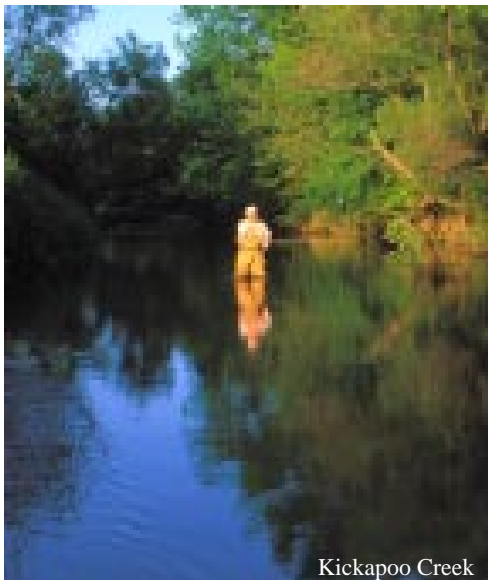
The disinfection of wastewater discharged by sewage treatment plants provides protection to humans from pathogenic microorganisms and is an important part of disease prevention. Unfortunately, in Illinois the disinfection of wastewater is not automatically required. To the contrary, when issuing or renewing discharge permits for sewage treatment plants, Illinois EPA all too often assumes that streams where wastewater will be discharged are unsuitable for primary contact activities (such as swimming or fishing) and unlikely to allow contact due to remoteness from any parks or residential areas, and therefore exempts the discharge from fecal coliform water quality standards and wastewater disinfection.

Yet, just as often, the public access to and recreational use of the stream segment in question is unknown by

the Illinois EPA and such assumptions are made with little data or little effort to survey landowners or local communities. A recent review of 48 sewage treatment plant draft permit notices posted for public comment over a three month period revealed that 29 of these facilities would receive disinfection exemptions if the permits were approved as proposed.

Does your local sewage treatment plant disinfect its wastewater? Posted public notices of new or renewed draft permits are available for review at <http://www.epa.state.il.us/public-notice/index.html>. If an exemption is being proposed, local citizens are given 30 days to provide information regarding known recreational activities in the river that would necessitate disinfection.

Citizens can also call their local wastewater treatment plant and inquire as to whether the plant disinfects their wastewater. If yes, thank them for doing their part to protect the health of those living in your community and your local stream. If wastewater disinfection is not currently practiced, express your concern and your knowledge of recreational uses of the stream in question and ask when their current permit will be up for review. Mention that you will be writing letters to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency in support of disinfection and encourage others to do the same. Help ensure that your municipal wastewater treatment facilities are doing their part in providing an important barrier against human exposure to potentially harmful pathogens. If you have questions or would like assistance call Prairie Rivers at 217-344-2371.



River Conservation and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker

Prairie Rivers is thrilled to have Tim Gallagher as our keynote speaker at our annual dinner this year on November 4th, sharing the story of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the conservation efforts in Arkansas that helped sustain this remarkable bird.

In Illinois and across the country, groups are working everyday to protect their rivers from water pollution and from habitat destruction. Sometimes, it's hard to remember why we fight what sometimes feels like a never-ending battle. Then, we hear stories of hope—like the recent announcement that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, thought extinct for almost sixty years, had been rediscovered in the now protected Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas.

Ongoing efforts to protect the bottomland hardwood forests and slow moving rivers of the Big Woods of Arkansas are believed to have played a significant role in the survival and rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. As Scott Simon, director of The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas and co-leader of the search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, wrote of the Big Woods in a recent article,

"...the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, sometimes called the "Lord God bird," most assuredly confirms the sacredness of the place, which former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt referred to as 'the Amazon of North America.'

There was a time when this sanctuary and its most exceptional—yet unknown—resident, the ivory-bill, were in grave danger. The species may have been saved by actions taken in the late 1970s. A group of hunters and fishermen filed a lawsuit that stopped a channelization project on the Cache River.

Then, when The Nature Conservancy's Arkansas office opened in 1982, its initial focus was to work with partners to conserve the state's wetlands...



Ivory-billed Woodpecker

*The story of the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is indeed a story of hope. Actions taken long ago by individuals and organizations contributed to the survival of this iconic species... For birders and outdoor enthusiasts of all stripes, this rediscovery is a call to action, a time for celebration, and a time to roll up our sleeves and do what needs to be done."*¹

Stories like this give us all hope as we work to protect rivers. In Illinois, like Arkansas, we face the challenges of channelization, pollution, and increased habitat fragmentation. While we may not see the results of our work immediately, we can take heart in knowing that we are keeping the rivers alive for people, fish and wildlife — and maybe our own special species that we don't yet know we are saving.

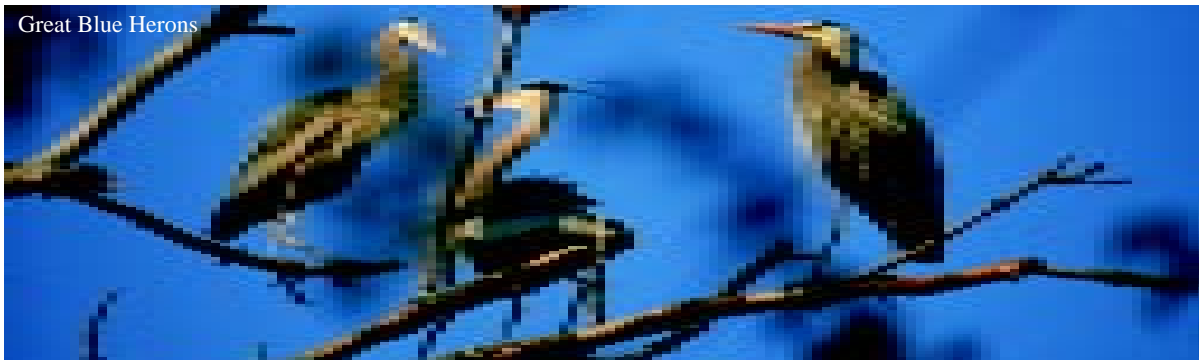
¹ Excerpted from "Saving the Big Woods: The rediscovery of the ivory-bill is a call to action" by Scott Simon. For the complete article, visit BirdScope, newsletter of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, at http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Publications/Birdscope/Summer2005/saving_woods.html

Illinois Celebrates It's Our River Day (Continued from page 1)

This year on IORD, September 17th, grassroots watershed organizations, ecosystem partnerships, townships, parks departments, and citizens' groups around Illinois, organized events to celebrate their local stream. In Monticello, for example, a hardworking group of eleven stakeholders rounded up over 150 volunteers to help clean-up the banks of the **Sangamon River**. Volunteers from Champaign-Urbana to Decatur gathered to work side-by-side and remove tires, glass bottles and barrels from this beautiful river. Similar river clean-ups took place on **Salt Creek, the Kishwaukee, Vermilion, Illinois, Kankakee, Iroquois, Mackinaw, Chicago, Des Plaines, Little Calumet, Fox and DuPage Rivers**.

River clean-ups were not the only events taking place on September 17th. There were float trips to look at historical bridges, hatchery tours, birding hikes, live music and boat tours, all promoting the various services provided to us by our rivers.

Next year, we hope the number of events that occur around the state will double once again. Now is the time to start thinking of an event that you can help organize in your community to celebrate your local river or stream. For more information on what you can do in your community or how you can help out another group please contact Watershed Organizer, Kim Erndt at kerndt@prairierivers.org.



Prairie Rivers Network

Protecting Illinois' Streams

...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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Join Prairie Rivers Network!

Or Give a Gift Membership!

Protect Illinois' Rivers and Streams:

Join Prairie Rivers Network — Illinois' statewide organization dedicated to water issues. Your donation will help fund our efforts to bring science and technical information to bear on issues affecting all of our state's waters. You will add strength to our campaign to restore and protect Illinois' rivers and streams for people, fish, and wildlife.

Yes, I want to help protect our rivers and streams.

☐ \$15 Student Membership ☐ \$25 Basic Membership

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50

☐ Other \$ _____

Name _____

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Thank you for your support!

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.*



Black-capped chickadee

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!

Illinois Stream Team: Volunteers Wanted

Prairie Rivers Network is looking for volunteers who want to join our Stream Team, a citizen monitoring program that trains participants to investigate chemical and physical aspects of water quality in their local stream and to look for potential sources of water pollution. 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. We are currently planning a winter workshop followed by a spring training in the Decatur area. For more information, contact Traci Barkley at tbarkley@prairierivers.org.

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Prairie Rivers Network
Protecting Illinois' Streams
809 South Fifth Street
Champaign, Illinois 61820
217-344-2371
www.prairierivers.org

Mark Your Calendar!

Prairie Rivers Network's Salt Fork River Clean-Up
October 8th, 8:30am
Homer Lake Forest Preserve

Prairie Rivers Network's Annual Dinner
November 4th, 6:00 pm
Hawthorn Suites, Champaign
For reservations call 217-344-2371

For a more complete listing of river and volunteer activities around the state go to our online website at www.prairierivers.org and click on the Events Calendar link

Photo Attributions
Jason Lindsey, www.perceptivevisions.com:
page 7, and borders;
Larry Chandler, www.ivory-bill-woodpecker.com:
page 5;
Ralph Freese: page 2;
Prairie Rivers: page 1, 2, and 3;
Robert Shaw: page 4, 6 and 7

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.

