

# Prairie River Notes

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## Mississippi Clean Water Collaborative

In an exciting new initiative funded by the McKnight Foundation in Minneapolis, Prairie Rivers Network and eleven other conservation groups from eight states along the Mississippi River will work together for the next three years to improve water quality throughout the Mississippi River basin.

The groups, who had historically received McKnight funding individually, were brought together by the Foundation earlier this year to develop a collaborative program that would strategically focus state and regional efforts in the Mississippi basin. By sharing and replicating models and strategies that have worked in individual states and pursuing common strategies on a broader scale, the groups expect to increase their effectiveness and have a greater impact on water quality improvement than they would have had if they pursued individual strategies.

Sediments and nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen are the two most pervasive system wide pollutants in the Mississippi River and have significantly degraded the ecological health of the entire watershed. Sources of these pollutants include agriculture, industry, urban runoff, new development, and municipal sewage treatment plants. The impacts on the ecosystem from these pollutants are significant, ranging from habitat loss of aquatic life, to algae blooms and impacts on water use for human activities and consumption.

Priorities for the collaborative will include nutrient pollution reduction; improved implementation of the Clean Water Act antidegradation policy that is intended to keep clean waters clean and prevent further degradation of already polluted waters; expansion of the work Prairie Rivers is doing to ensure strict limits are placed on NPDES pollution permits and Section 404 permits that allow dredging; and efforts to improve the implementation of farm programs that are intended to protect water quality and the environment.

The project will not only improve the water quality of the Mississippi River, but will also expand and enhance the capacity of all of the groups involved. Prairie Rivers Network is very excited to be a part of this unique conservation effort and is very grateful to the McKnight Foundation for their support and for their foresight in conceiving and supporting this innovative new collaborative.



Mississippi River



Mississippi River

## Record Turnout at Prairie Rivers' Annual Dinner

Celebrating the year's victories and looking to the future, over 300 guests gathered on November 4<sup>th</sup> for Prairie Rivers Network's Annual Dinner. Our staff and Board enjoyed meeting with members and guests to share the highlights of the work we had pursued over the past year with their support (see below).

An exciting keynote was provided by Tim Gallagher, author and photographer, who talked about his rediscovery of Ivory-billed Woodpecker, previously thought extinct. The Ivory-billed has survived, in part, due to ongoing conservation efforts to protect the bottomland hardwood forests and slow moving rivers that it calls home. His tale inspires us to continue our river



conservation efforts throughout Illinois. While we may not see the results immediately, we can take heart in knowing that we are keeping the rivers healthy for people, fish and wildlife—and possibly a special species we do not yet know we are saving.

Thanks to challenge grants offered by four generous supporters—Kyle Robeson, Clark Bullard, Irene Bullard, and Jon McNussen—the evening was a big success financially as well, bringing in pledges and donations totaling more than \$55,000. These donations will be critical to our efforts to provide clean rivers and healthy communities in 2006. Our heartfelt thanks to all who came to support us.

## Highlights of 2005

### Clean Water

- **Safer rivers for fishing and swimming** – We challenged Illinois EPA's practice of exempting wastewater discharges from disinfection, ensuring that rivers where kids play and people fish, are free of dangerous pathogens.
- **Preventing algae growth** – After more than two years of effort, Illinois will become one of the first states in the Midwest to limit phosphorus pollution in its rivers, preventing the growth of algae that chokes aquatic life and poses health threats.
- **More oxygen for fish and aquatic life** – We fought a proposal by polluters to decrease the amount of oxygen available in Illinois' lakes, rivers and streams.

### Habitat Protection

- **Cleaner air and water and protection for the Middle Fork** – In a landmark settlement with Dynegy Midwest Generation, \$500 million in new pollution controls will be installed on five Illinois power plants; precedent-setting mercury emissions controls will be installed on their Oakwood plant; and 1100 acres along the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River will be donated to the state, creating a protected corridor that stretches from Kickapoo State Park to the Middle Fork State Fish and Wildlife Area.
- **Balancing drainage with healthy habitat** – We

produced "A Citizen's Guide to Illinois' Agricultural Drainage Practices and Law," promoting environmentally sensitive agricultural drainage.

- **Protecting rivers from dredges and dams** – We discouraged projects that would fill and channelize rivers, winning an important victory with the Friends of Kickapoo Creek to prevent a dam that would have had serious impacts on the health of the creek.

### River Stewardship and Awareness

- **Illinois Stream Team** – Fourteen groups are now monitoring water quality in their local streams. Our goal is a Stream Team in every watershed.
- **Cleaner rivers, new advocates** – Working with volunteers from the Vermilion and Sangamon rivers, two new annual clean-ups were started that drew hundreds of participants.
- **Reaching new volunteers** – Our new e-newsletter now goes out once a month to river advocates around the state with tips for protecting water quality and a calendar of up-coming river related activities.
- **Storm drain patrol** – Citizens from seven communities stenciled hundreds of neighborhood storm drains with the important message, "Dump No Waste – Drains to Rivers."

## Put Your Watershed on a Low-Salt Diet

To ensure public safety, communities across America pour at least 13 million tons of salt and other deicing materials on roads and highways each winter (U.S. EPA, 1999)\*. The Illinois Tollway alone uses approximately 57,000 tons of salt annually.

Unfortunately, using regular salt can be damaging to roadside plants, car exteriors, and local streams and rivers. If you want to reduce the amount of salt added into your local water body this season, consider using antiicing techniques and deicing alternatives that contain less salt.

Antiicing driveways and sidewalks is more effective at melting ice, reducing the amount of salt needed to melt ice and shovel snow. Simply apply deicing materials onto sidewalks and roads **prior** to large storm events.

Many deicing alternatives to salt exist on the market. Though a bit more expensive, they are generally better for local streams and rivers. A few can even be used at colder temperatures where salt is no longer effective,

providing an added benefit. No matter which chemical deicer is selected, it should be used wisely and in according to directions. Do not use a chemical deicer to melt every bit of snow and ice. Use only enough to break the ice/pavement bond, then remove the remaining slush by plowing or shoveling. Below is a chart of common substitutes to regular salt.



Northern Cardinal

### DEICING/ANTIICING AGENT CHARACTERISTICS

AGENTS	FORM	BENEFITS	DRAWBACKS	TEMPERATURE
Sodium Chloride/ Halite/ Regular Salt	Rocks	Cheap; melts vertically	Often used improperly; adds chlorine into water	down to 10 F
Calcium Chloride	Flake, pellet, liquid	Out-performs other salts at lower temperatures	Environmentally similar to salt; adds chlorine into water	down to -25F
Calcium Magnesium Acetate	Rock	Will not harm plants; salt-free		22 to 25 F
Potassium Acetate	Powder	Environmentally benign & biodegradable; good for chlorine-sensitive watersheds	Powder is difficult to apply	down to -75 F
Sand	Sand granules	Causes friction	Has no melting capabilities; causes sedimentation	N/A

## Prairie Rivers Network's River Steward Award Winner

This year, Prairie Rivers Network announced its new River Steward Award. This award recognizes those volunteers—individuals and groups—that stand out from the crowd, the ones that go the extra mile to protect and restore their favorite river or stream. In future years we will be asking people around Illinois to nominate volunteers they feel are worthy recipients of the title River Steward. There are many people in Illinois that are doing great things to protect their streams, and we cannot possibly know them all. We will need input from around the state to help identify them.

However, this year, the first year of our River Steward Award, we thought the choice was obvious. The first ever River Steward Award was given to a woman and a group that have demonstrated the strength, patience, wherewithal, and resourcefulness that it takes to be effective in protecting their local stream. We thank and recognize Jan Holder, President of Friends of Kickapoo Creek and the entire group of Friends as our 2005 River Stewards.

In early 2002, Friends of Kickapoo Creek was a small group of landowners concerned about the rapid development occurring along their creek, Kickapoo Creek in McLean County. In just three short years, albeit tough at times, the Friends of Kickapoo Creek has grown to be one of the most effective and dynamic grassroots organizations Prairie Rivers has had the

Jan Holder and Kim Erndt



honor to work with. Their list of accomplishments is long and each one is certainly worthy of mentioning. They quickly learned to delegate the tasks at hand, push the envelope, and stretch dollars to achieve their goals. Over the past three years they have been able to protect sections of land along the creek; they built public awareness of storm-water issues by working with citizen groups to mark storm-drains with medallions that say "Dump No Waste - Runs to Creek;" they stopped the construction of a dam at the headwaters of the creek - this land will now be protected; they developed a brochure and website; they regularly monitor the water quality of their stream as Stream Team members; they have performed biotic surveys with IDNR along their stream this past summer; and they applied for not-for-profit status.

As part of our mission at Prairie Rivers, we strive to improve the effectiveness of small grassroots groups and help create new ones. Over the next few years we will continue to recognize more River Stewards like Friends of Kickapoo Creek. It brings us great joy to see, work with, and know people that truly change the destiny of Illinois' rivers and streams for the better.

If you know an individual or group that should be considered as a River Steward, check out our website for more information about how to submit a nomination. Or call Kim Erndt at 217-344-2371.

## 2005 Scully Challenge Grant Met!

Prairie Rivers Network is very grateful to all of our members who donated \$100 or more for the first time this year and helped us receive an additional \$5,000 from Michael Scully of Springfield, Illinois. Thank you for your support.

We are also very fortunate that Mr. Scully has generously offered us the same challenge grant in 2006, so new \$100 donors will again be sought. Together, we will help provide cleaner rivers and healthy communities.

## Volunteers of the Year

Every year at our annual dinner, Prairie Rivers Network recognizes our volunteer of the year. In years past, this award has gone to individuals such as Brett Schmidt, who spent countless hours reviewing pollution permits, or Ellen Bullock, who donated her legal assistance when we took on the water pollution permit for the Black Beauty Coal Mine.

This year, we honored not one, but three individuals that have donated their “spare time,” energy, drive, and passion to protect their favorite river. These individuals have stepped outside their usual roles as teacher, farmer and recreational outfitter to become organizers and fundraisers. They have rallied their communities around a cause. They have gathered hundreds together to help clean up the riverbanks. Without further ado, they are:

**Judy Sacotnik, founder and owner of Middle Fork Canoe Outfitters.** She brought several Vermilion County community groups together to clean up the Vermilion River. Judy, along with a wonderful team of volunteers organized not just one, but two river clean-ups and a fall environmental festival on the Vermilion River. This festival will now be an annual event.

**Sandy Mason of the University of Illinois Extension in Champaign and the Allerton Allies.** She worked to help organize the first ever Sangamon River Clean-up in the Monticello area. With over 10 organizations assisting in the effort, Sandy demonstrated the passion, enthusiasm and smarts it takes to make an event successful. More than 175 volunteers participated. Her organizing skills, creativeness and fundraising abilities showed that she really was the steam behind this great event.

**Sue Smith of the Salt Fork River Partners.** She has tirelessly worked to organize the Salt Fork River Clean-up for eight years in a row. Sue and her family have lived on and farmed the land near the river for years. She is also a member of the Salt Fork River Steering



Sandy Mason and Kim Erndt

Committee and has been a long-time advocate and voice for the River. After long days working on the family farm, Sue dedicates her “spare time” to saving the Salt Fork River and organizing its annual river clean-up.

It is an honor for us to recognize these three volunteers this year.

Organizing a river clean-up is no easy task, and this year we had the privilege to work with these individuals and the other fantastic people on the river clean-up committees that represented local clubs, organizations and government groups. Each group and situation is as different as each river. In each group, a leader was born—someone that wanted to step up and pitch in that extra amount because he/she cared. It is our hope to see this happen in every watershed across the state. We hope that river clean-ups are just the beginning of great things to come. If you would like help organizing a river clean-up or another activity that will get people out on the river, contact Kim Erndt at [kerndt@prairierivers.org](mailto:kerndt@prairierivers.org).



Volunteers at the Salt Fork River Clean-up

## Phosphorus Rule Moves Closer to Adoption

In December, after consideration by the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR), a new rule to restrict phosphorus discharges from large wastewater treatment plants moved one step closer to adoption in Illinois. The rule is part of Governor Rod Blagojevich's "Prairie State Water Quality Initiative" to improve the quality of Illinois lakes and streams, fulfilling his pledge to address the impact of phosphorus in sewage plant discharges.

Phosphorus stimulates growth of plants and algae in lakes, rivers, and streams. Too much phosphorus can lead to excessive growth of plants and especially algae, choking water bodies and destroying habitat with their biomass. In turn, respiration by the plants and algae can use up so much oxygen that insects, mussels, and fish living in the water are stressed or even killed. Problems with phosphorus in fresh waters have long been recognized; the bans on phosphates in laundry detergent in the 1970's were enacted to address these problems. However, phosphorus continues to be a problem in Illinois waters, particularly as the use of dishwashers has grown: most dishwashing detergent still contains phosphorus. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) has listed phosphorus as a

potential cause of impairment for 2,588 miles of Illinois streams, out of an assessed total of 15,069 miles.

The new rule, which has been supported by clean water advocates around the state, will apply to large wastewater treatment plants (those generating over one million gallons of effluent per day), that are either new or are planning expansions. It places a concentration limit of one milligram per liter on the amount of phosphorus that can be discharged from the plant. This limit already applies to all effluent discharges to Illinois lakes and their tributaries. After consideration by the Pollution Control Board and JCAR, Illinois EPA can now file the rule with the Secretary of State in early January and it will become effective as soon as it is filed. Illinois EPA will then begin work on another rule that will apply to all discharges, not just those that are for expanding or new plants.

This rule is an important victory for the rivers and water quality of Illinois. Our thanks to all who responded to our requests for letters in support of the rule and to the Governor for making clean water a priority in Illinois.

## ***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.*

### **Board of Directors**

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### **Staff**

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Maggie Bruns—Support Staff
Karen Krohn—Stream Team Coordinator

# Join Prairie Rivers Network!

## Or Give a Gift Membership!

### 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 includes quarterly newsletters, action alerts and the knowledge that you are helping to protect the environment of Illinois. We will send a card announcing your gift. For those giving a gift membership of \$100 or greater, we send *Paddling Illinois*, a 153 page book with detailed paddling information for Illinois' rivers and streams.

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

- \$15 Student Membership     \$25 Basic Membership  
 \$50     \$250     \$100     \$50  
 Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail (to receive Action Alerts) \_\_\_\_\_

*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.*

Burrow Owl



### Welcome New Members!

Prairie Rivers is very pleased to welcome over 100 new members who supported us for the first time in 2005. We thank them and ALL of our members for their support of our work to protect Illinois Rivers.

Walter Alspaugh  
Ansel Anderson  
Marc & Fran Ansel  
Keith & Pam Atteberry  
Sandra & Peter Beak  
Nate & Belinda Beccue  
Ann Bergeron & Kevin Fahey  
Vivian Biegaj  
Kay & Chris Bird  
Ray & Liesel Boehmer  
Ann Boisclair  
Robin Kearton Boynton & Steve Boynton  
Char & Dan Brady  
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Jeffery Jens  
Harold & Pat Jensen  
Elizabeth Johnson  
Donovan Kemna  
Wayne Kinney  
Suzanne Kissack  
Michael Klawitter  
Dorothy Koster  
William Kubitz

K. Peter Kuchinke  
Gregory Lambeth  
Dan Lindsey  
Michael Longo  
Sandy Mason  
Judith & James Mazzolini  
Richard & Anna Merritt  
Karen Metz & Pat Weatherhead  
Middlefork Audubon Society  
George Miley  
Craig Milling  
Craig Mitchell  
Irene Mostek  
Dorothy Neumann  
Terry O'Neill  
Howard Oneil  
Christine Oszak  
Deborah Owen  
Lois Pausch  
Amy Pavlik  
Elaine & Russel Peppers  
Joseph & Ann Petry  
Anne Readal  
Ann Reisner & Richard Brazee  
Steven & Candace Riddlebauer  
Chris Riggle  
William Roberts  
Blake Ross  
Leslie Ruffner  
Steve & Sally Ryan  
Jeffrey Sanders

Helen Sauvageau  
David Schejbal  
Yvette Scheven  
John & Joyce Schmale  
Paul Schutt  
Tom Seals & Ruth Wene  
Bruce Semans  
Shawnee Group of Sierra Club  
Frank & Carol Shupp  
Jeffrey Skibbe  
Betty Smelcer  
Lloyd Smith  
Phil Smith  
Eleanor Smith  
Brian Stolt  
Marty Stone  
Jennifer Sublett  
Don Swensson  
H. & P. Triandis  
Sandra Volk  
Caroline Wade  
Dana Walker  
Patricia Weiner  
Janice Weinman  
Barbara Welsch  
John White  
Guy Williams  
Donald Wuebbles  
Gary & Cari Yerby

All efforts are made to ensure this list is correct. We apologize for any oversights that may have occurred and hope you will let us know.

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217-344-2371  
[www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org)

## Mark Your Calendar!

***Prairie Rivers Network wishes all of our members a Happy Holiday and New Year!***

### **Communicating Nature Workshop Courses 1 and 2**

Barkhausen Wetlands Center, Belknap, IL  
Contact: Michael Jeffords, INHS  
Course 1: Saturday, January 7, 9am-4pm  
Course 2: Saturday, January 21, 9am-4pm

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

### **Coastal Allies Network Brown Bag Lunch**

220 S. State St., Suite 1900, Chicago, IL  
Wednesday, January 25, noon-1pm  
Contact: [coastalallies@greatlakes.org](mailto:coastalallies@greatlakes.org) or call 312-939-0838 x 3

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**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.**  
[www.earthshare-illinois.org](http://www.earthshare-illinois.org)

