

Prairie River Notes

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The Illinois Affiliate of National Wildlife Federation

Spring 2006

New Mercury Control Rules Applauded

Prairie Rivers Network and other clean water and air advocates from around the state celebrated in January when Governor Blagojevich proposed the adoption of new regulations requiring the elimination of 90% or more of the mercury pollution emitted by Illinois' 21 coal-fired power plants by 2009. The new rules were submitted to the Pollution Control Board for review on March 14th by the Illinois EPA and are expected to go into effect later this year.

Mercury is a highly toxic chemical whose effects on the central nervous system are comparable to those of lead. Exposure, which usually comes from eating fish tainted with mercury, can cause severe neurological and developmental problems and is widespread. The Centers for Disease Control has estimated

that 1 in 12 women of childbearing age in the United States have unsafe levels of mercury in their blood, and according to the US EPA, as many as 630,000 children born each year could be at risk of developmental disorders because of mercury exposure in the mother's womb. In Illinois, our 87,000 miles of rivers and streams and 309,000 acres of lakes are so polluted by mercury, we have a statewide advisory in effect warning people to limit their consumption of certain fish species caught in our waters.

Fortunately, the largest source of our mercury pollution problem in Illinois and nationwide is easily identified—coal-fired power plants. Illinois currently ranks fifth in the nation for mercury emitted by power plants. Unfortunately, new rules adopted by the federal government last year to regulate mercury emissions from power plants fell far short of the 90% reductions that the US EPA experts said were technologically possible and far short of the reductions needed to protect public health. Instead, the federal rules only required Illinois power plants to reduce 47% of mercury emissions by 2010 and 79% by 2018. Under a pollution trading system that was also proposed, it was estimated that the 79% reductions would not likely be reached until 2025. The ability to trade mercury credits is of significant concern in Illinois, as it means some plants would not have to reduce emissions at all. Moreover, studies have shown that between 40 and 80% of mercury emitted from power plants is deposited locally, creating mercury "hot spots".

In sharp contrast to the federal rules, Illinois' proposed rules require the majority of power plants in Illinois to capture 90% of their emissions of mercury pollution by 2009, with the remainder of plants required to meet that goal by 2012. It also prohibits mercury pollution trading. By stepping up and requiring the controls that federal regulators failed to impose, instead of having some of the largest mercury emissions in the country, Illinois will now be at the forefront of reducing mercury pollution, protecting our children's health and our environment and serving as a model for other states.

To find out how you can help support the new rules, during their review at the Illinois Pollution Control Board and the Joint Committee on Administrative Rulemaking, see page 4.



Coal-Fired Power Plant

Community Rallies Around Boneyard Creek

Last summer, Joe Petry, a professor of Economics at the University of Illinois came to Prairie Rivers Network with the idea of revitalizing the Boneyard Creek in Champaign, and inspiring community pride in this frequently overlooked waterway. Numerous individuals have worked long and hard over the years to protect this stream and Joe and others wanted to see that effort continued and expanded. As a result, what started as a clean-up has become a community-wide event.

This Earth Day, April 22nd, Champaign - Urbana residents will be coming together to celebrate Boneyard Creek Community Day. Among the sponsors of this event are Joe and Ann Petry, the Cities of Urbana and Champaign, the Urbana and Champaign Park Districts, the University of Illinois, Urbana Middle School, Project BLUE, Royce Wagner and Associates, Robeson's Inc., Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation, ABC Sanitary, Champaign-Urbana Rotary Clubs, Dean's Superior Blueprint, and Prairie Rivers Network. Volunteers will have the opportunity to help clean up the creek, mark stormdrains with medallions that say "Dump No Waste - Drains to Creek", remove



invasive species and plant native plants. Activities will take place in Champaign, Urbana and on the U of I campus. Registration starts at 9:15 in Scott Park and the volunteer portion of the day is expected to end by noon. From noon until 4:00 volunteers and the C-U community are invited to Scott Park for an after party that will include educational programs about the creek, food, and music from local musicians. For more information or to volunteer please contact Prairie Rivers Network at 217-344-2371.

The Boneyard event is just one example of how communities can come together to protect their local stream. Even if you do not live near the Boneyard, there are still several river clean-ups, such as the Vermillion River clean-up, and other events that will be happening around the state on Earth Day and throughout the year.

To learn more about activities happening in your area, please check out our "Events Calendar" link on our website, www.prairierivers.org. If you want to send us an event to post on the calendar, email kerndt@prairierivers.org. This Earth Day, check out everything your local river has to offer.

Scully Challenge Renewed!

Thinking about a donation to Prairie Rivers Network? Now you can double your gift! Thanks again to a generous supporter, Michael J. Scully, your gift will be matched dollar-for-dollar if you donate \$100 or more for the first time.

Please donate now and help Prairie Rivers protect and preserve Illinois' 87,000 miles of scenic rivers that are so important for outdoor recreation and wildlife. If 50 people donate \$100 or more for the first time, the challenge grant from Mr. Scully will be worth an additional \$5,000 to Prairie Rivers.

Buying or Selling a Home?

Help Prairie Rivers 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 that take advantage of it. Call Debby at 217-355-1000.

Prairie State Plant Permit Challenge Settled

Prairie Rivers Network, the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, and others have settled their challenge to a water pollution permit that had been issued by Illinois EPA for the Prairie State Generating Company's planned construction and operation of a new coal-fired electricity generating facility in Washington County, Illinois.

Several pollution permits are required for this facility including water discharge permits for the power plant, the onsite coal mine, and the coal combustion waste disposal site that will be located in adjacent Randolph County. Prairie Rivers Network had objected to each of these permits when they were proposed, raising questions regarding compliance with the requirements of the Clean Water Act. When the power plant's water discharge permit was issued by the Illinois EPA without changes needed to address the concerns we had raised, the Sierra Club and Prairie Rivers appealed it in December of 2005.

Of particular concern was the potential for harmful chlorinated organics to be directly discharged into the Kaskaskia River, a source of drinking water for communities downstream such as Sparta and Evansville. Recent research shows that chlorination byproducts in drinking water contribute to bladder cancer and are linked also to miscarriages, birth defects, rectal and colon cancer, kidney and spleen disorders, immune and neural system problems. By not requiring adequate monitoring of discharge waters, the permit didn't do enough to ensure the health and safety of those downstream.

The groups also appealed the permit because it did not include a stormwater pollution prevention plan, leaving too much room for pollutants to be washed into the Kaskaskia River and its tributaries during heavy rains. Water quantity issues were also cause for concern, especially in light of last summer's drought conditions on the Kaskaskia River. Specifically, opponents

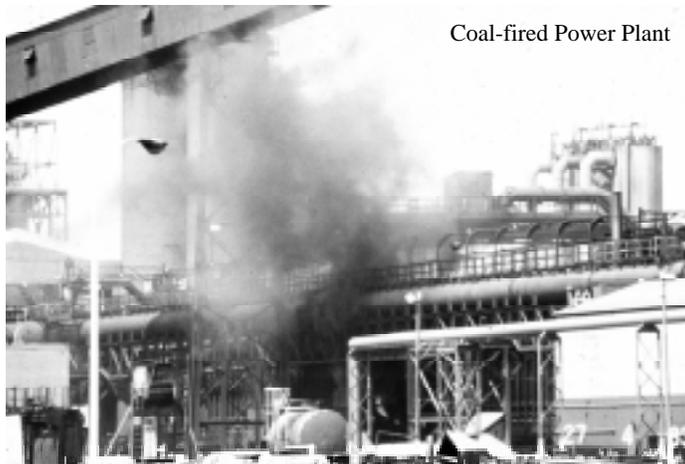
worried that the river would be adversely affected by the additional 30 million gallons of water a day the state is allowing Prairie State to withdraw from the Kaskaskia River.

After extensive discussions, Prairie Rivers Network, Sierra Club, and Prairie State Generating Company entered into an agreement that settled the appeal of the power plant's water discharge permit in February of this year. Under the agreement, Prairie State will conduct enhanced water quality monitoring of the Kaskaskia River and its discharge from the cooling water towers in order to detect potentially harmful levels of chlorinated organics. They will also install a new river monitoring gauge to more accurately monitor river flow rates and will develop a larger holding pond for river water,

increasing the power plant's reserves that can be used during drought periods. The company has also agreed to provide funding to the Kaskaskia Watershed Association to benefit the Kaskaskia watershed, and has expedited the completion of its storm water plans.

While the issues surrounding this permit have been resolved, concerns about other impacts to air and water quality are still outstanding. The Sierra Club and allies have appealed the air emissions permit for the project. In addition, at a public hearing in November, Prairie Rivers Network and other opponents asked the state to tighten monitoring and pollution limits on the water permit for the project's planned coal waste landfill. Those permits have yet to be issued by the IEPA.

According to the Prairie State Generating Company, however, every aspect of Prairie State is being developed to ensure the best practices in environmental protection are applied, and they are setting a new environmental standard. Prairie Rivers looks forward to working with them to ensure that such practices are applied from the time the coal is extracted from the ground, to the point when they are disposing of the waste resulting from coal combustion.



Coal-fired Power Plant

Auto Switches – Switched Off

Legislation pending in the Illinois General Assembly will help reduce a significant source of mercury pollution in Illinois. HB 5578, introduced and championed by Representative Karen May, will require the development and implementation of an auto switch recycling program in Illinois that will prevent switches containing mercury from being incinerated along with scrapped automobiles.

Before 2003, many auto manufacturers used mercury in light switches and anti-lock brakes. When those autos are scrapped and recycled (usually by melting down the steel), the mercury in those switches is emitted into the environment by the steel smelter smokestacks. The result? An estimated 800 pounds of mercury pollution is released into the air in Illinois each year.

Currently, these switches are not being removed from autos recycled in Illinois. If nothing is done, thousands of pounds of mercury will be emitted into the

environment when hundreds of thousands of cars with mercury switches in Illinois meet the end of their useful life in the next decade. HB 5578 establishes a comprehensive switch recycling program that provides education, financial assistance, and technical guidance for proper removal and disposal of auto switches

containing mercury. The program will involve the auto manufacturers, the scrappers, and the steel recyclers. Much credit is due to Representative May for bringing these stakeholders together to negotiate a program that all could agree to. The bill is expected to be sent to the Governor for signature some time this spring.



To address these and other mercury pollution problems in our state, Prairie Rivers has joined forces with many other groups, including the Illinois Environmental Council, Illinois Sierra Club, and Illinois PIRG to launch the **Mercury Free Illinois** campaign. For more information, check out the new website at www.mercuryfreeillinois.org.

Citizen Support for New Mercury Rules Needed

The new rules to control mercury emissions from power plants will need to be approved by both the Illinois Pollution Control Board and the Joint Committee on Administrative Rulemaking. Citizen input will be critical to this process. To express your support, you can send a letter to the Illinois Pollution Control Board at

James R. Thomson Center, Suite 11-500
100 West Randolph St.
Chicago, IL 60601

For more information, visit our website at
www.prairierivers.org or
www.stopmercurypollution.org

Stormwater Patrol

Protect Your Streams from Eroded Sediment and Other Sources of Stormwater Runoff

Construction sites have a great potential to pollute nearby waters with mud carried by stormwater runoff. This training will give you tools to ensure that construction sites and other sources of polluted runoff do not harm your local waters. You will learn about:

- Clean Water Act requirements for construction sites
- Tips to control erosion
- Other sources of polluted stormwater runoff
- Identification and resolution of problems
- Monitoring techniques to detect streams suffering from stormwater runoff

Saturday, April 8, 2006
9:00 am – 12:30 pm
Hinsdale, Illinois

To register call 217-344-2371 or email
gcollins@prairierivers.org

Rain Gardens in Bloom

Rain gardens are an attractive landscaping feature planted with perennial native plants. They use landscaping features and rain barrels to capture runoff from impervious building structures (roof-tops, garages, sidewalks etc.), and then store/retain the water on-site. With a well-designed rain garden, stormwater is less likely to wash off lawns, driveways, and sidewalks, where it would likely pick up pollutants before entering rivers and streams via nearby storm drains.

Consequently, rain gardens act as mechanisms to abate runoff rates, improve on site filtration, purify water, and beautify homes with native landscape.

Rain gardens also promote water conservation in two ways. First, native plants, which are more adapted to the local climates, require less watering to maintain. Second, by capturing rain water on site and using it later when watering is needed, homeowners can minimize the water they must use from municipal sources.

After receiving one of the Lieutenant Governor's Rain Garden Initiative Mini-grants, Prairie Rivers Network approached Habitat for Humanity of Champaign and Piatt Counties to see whether they would be interested in working together to plant a rain garden at one of the Habitat homes currently under construction. Both Habitat and the new homeowners responded enthusiastically, and we have now partnered with volunteers from Habitat and the Illinois Natural History Survey to help design and install the garden. We look forward to completing this project later this spring.

Rain gardens are an important tool for protecting water quality as impervious surfaces increase with spreading development. By turning your garden into a rain garden, homeowners can keep rain where it falls, thereby conserving water use and protecting water quality of nearby streams.



Habitat Home Site for Future Rain Garden

With all the benefits rain gardens bring, Prairie Rivers Network is planning a larger effort to promote the installation of these gardens and to develop a manual that can be used to guide interested homeowners. In the meantime, the progress of Prairie River's garden with Habitat for Humanity can be viewed by visiting our rain garden blog site, www.xanga.com/PrairieRivers. Pictures and resources used during each phase, as well as the successes and obstacles encountered during the project will be posted. The blog will continue until the completion of our rain garden, which is scheduled for April or May of 2006. Feel free to post comments on the site.



A rain barrel can be used to capture runoff from a roof-top

A Farewell from Jane Li

As some of you might know, I will be leaving Prairie Rivers Network at the end of March to begin a job with the Illinois State Water Survey. I have enjoyed my time with Prairie Rivers and have appreciated the



Jane Li and her dog, Lucy

opportunity to work for such a wonderful organization and to meet so many people committed to the environment in Illinois.

While I had not anticipated leaving Prairie Rivers this spring, complications with the AmeriCorps grant that funded my volunteer coordinator position prompted me to explore other opportunities. This search eventually led me to the floodplain map modernization project with the Water Survey.

I leave Prairie Rivers Network with many happy memories. I have greatly enjoyed sending out monthly Electronic newsletters to our ever-growing list of recipients; traveling across our beautiful state to give river conservation awareness presentations; organizing storm drain stenciling events with neighborhood groups, students, and scout troops; and working with Habitat for Humanity and the Lt. Governor's office to plant a rain garden at a new Habitat home in Champaign-Urbana. For these shared memories and more, thank you for your support and enthusiasm for protecting our rivers and our water quality.

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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Karin Krohn—Stream Team Coordinator

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
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Name _____

Address _____

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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.*

Rolling on the River: A Benefit for Illinois' Environment

Come Ride With Us!



This Labor Day weekend we invite you to celebrate Illinois' environment and help raise money for a great cause! **Rolling on the River** will kick off September 2, 2006. This two-day event will feature premium bike rides (ranging from 10 to 100 miles), on-site woodland camping, canoeing and kayaking on the Fox River, Nordic walking, and an environmental expo. Come for a day or stay the weekend—your choice. Great incentives for fundraising and tools to make it easy to raise funds online are available.

All ages are welcome to attend – so bring the whole family and support Prairie Rivers Network, the Illinois Environmental Council, and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. The proceeds will benefit all three statewide environmental groups, while building awareness of key issues such as safe drinking water, river conservation, clean air, healthy foods, habitat preservation, and sustainable communities.

To find out more, to volunteer, or to put together a team for this event, visit our website at www.rollingriverride.org. Register online today!

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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!

Stormwater Patrol Training

Hinsdale, IL
Contact: Glynnis Collins, PRN
April 8th, 9 am - 12:30 pm

Citizens, Construction Sites, and You

Hinsdale, IL-Gary Borger TU
Contact: Jean Flemma, PRN
April 14th, 6:30 pm

Boneyard Creek Clean-Up

Champaign and Urbana, IL
Contact: Kim Erndt, PRN
April 22nd. All Day event

Vermillion River Clean-up

Salt Fork, Middle Fork, and North Fork
Contact: Judy Sacotnik, sacotnik@insightbb.com
April 22, 2006

Illinois Ride for the Environment

Sept. 2-3, 2006
www.rollingriverride.org

Photo Attributions
Don Archer, City of Champaign: page 2;
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Jane Li: page 5, 6;
ecocitycleveland.org: page 5;
Jason Lindsey, www.perceptivevisions.com:
page 7, and borders;

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



Earth Share
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