

# Prairie Rivers Notes

Volume 8, Issue 2      A publication of Prairie Rivers Network  
The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

Summer 2006

## Protecting Illinois' Water

Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) has been busy on many fronts, keeping Illinois water clean and pressing for changes that will help restore polluted rivers and streams.

### Stormwater Management

Since 2003, almost 7000 construction and industrial operations in Illinois have been granted coverage under the general stormwater NPDES permit. As a condition of coverage, permittees are required to complete a stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) for reducing erosion and controlling runoff. The SWPPP and its proper implementation are critical to pollution prevention, but limited Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) staff time and resources mean few of these plans are being reviewed or enforced.

PRN is expanding efforts to identify and prevent stormwater pollution and will be partnering with Sierra Club, local watershed groups and interested citizens to review SWPPPs and press for better compliance and enforcement. In addition, we have jointly developed the Stormwater Patrol, a program to empower concerned citizens to protect their local waters from polluted stormwater runoff. The first training was held in April and provided participants with the information they need to ensure that construction sites do not muddy local waters.

These included measures that should be employed at construction sites to control erosion; steps to ensure that good plans are in place to control stormwater runoff from construction sites; identifying and reporting problems at construction sites; and simple monitoring techniques to determine if streams are suffering from stormwater runoff. Participants have since visited and inspected construction sites, documented poor conditions with pictures, reported problems to the IEPA and have requested copies of construction site SWPPPs for review.



### Permit Compliance

IEPA and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issue permits for discharges of pollutants (including fill materials) to surface waters and wetlands. The workload of the agencies in reviewing permit applications and issuing permits is so great, that they generally lack resources to follow up and ensure that permit requirements, such as pollutant limits or mitigation measures, are being met. While PRN has for many years reviewed state and federal permits before they were issued to ensure they included strict requirements to protect water quality, we now plan to expand our efforts to monitor compliance with those requirements. We will focus on two areas to start: NPDES permit limit compliance and wetland mitigation compliance. NPDES permits contain numeric concentration limits for specific pollutants discharged. The permits also require the discharger to monitor and report levels of pollutants actually discharged. These reports are available on the Internet, allowing us to track permit compliance and encourage IEPA to address cases of egregious or repeated violations of permit effluent limits. At the same time, many permits issued by the USACE for fill in wetlands require that impacts be mitigated by constructing or rehabilitating wetlands near the impact site. We have started to obtain data of required wetland mitigation sites and will begin surveying them to determine whether projects are actually built where they should be and if so, whether they appear to be functioning as required. *(continued on page 2)*

(continued from page 1)

## Disinfection of Wastewater

Under the Clean Water Act, sewage treatment plants (STPs) are required to disinfect their wastewater, which can include pathogens and other bacteria, unless they receive an exemption from doing so. In the late 1980's, IEPA began exempting many municipal dischargers from the disinfection requirement because the commonly used disinfection method of dumping chlorine into wastewater was having significant negative impacts on aquatic life in the streams where discharges were occurring. In addition, IEPA determined that people were not using the streams where discharges were occurring so human exposure to pathogens was not likely. In recent years, however, new techniques have been developed that mean heavily chlorinated wastewater no longer needs to be discharged as a by-product of disinfection. In addition, demographics have shifted on many streams where STPs are discharging, and more people are recreating on waterways downstream of plants that are exempt from disinfection regulations.

The federal permit required by STPs to discharge wastewater—known as an NPDES permit—must be renewed every five years. During this renewal process, the public has the opportunity to review the permit and offer input on issues such as the disinfection exemption. Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) has been leading the effort to review these permits and question whether continued disinfection exemptions are appropriate for permits on rivers where recreational activities are occurring. Based on questions and concerns expressed by PRN, Sierra Club, members of the public and local watershed groups such as Friends of the Fox, Salt Fork River Partners, and Champaign County 4-H, municipalities from Rantoul and Urbana, to Manhattan and Sandwich have recently concluded that it is now

appropriate to disinfect their wastewater. We will continue efforts to help more municipalities embrace this advancement in wastewater treatment, as the incremental cost in plant operations will be a small price to pay for a cleaner, safer river, and a healthier community.

## Water Quality Standard for Sulfate

PRN is supporting efforts by IEPA to modify the State's water quality criteria for sulfate, using sound scientific standards. Sulfate ( $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ ) is an ion that occurs naturally in rock and soil minerals. Water passing over and through these minerals can dissolve the sulfate, carrying it into groundwater and surface waters. In high concentrations, sulfate can be toxic to aquatic organisms and can cause diarrhea in humans and wildlife drinking the water. Coal mining activities and some industrial processes can lead to discharges of water high in sulfate. Some Southern Illinois streams influenced by runoff from coal mines have sulfate concentrations at levels that are toxic to aquatic organisms.

While agreeing that the current water quality standard for sulfates, set by the State of Illinois in 1972, needed to be reconsidered in light of new scientific information, PRN strongly objected to a 2004 proposal by IEPA and the Illinois Coal Association to substantially weaken the existing standard because that proposal was without sound scientific backing. Participating in a workgroup convened by the US Environmental Protection Agency, PRN instead fought for a revision to the standard based on state and federal guidelines. In the end, the established state and federal methodologies were used, and IEPA plans to propose a revision to the sulfate standard that is more sophisticated than either the existing standard or the original proposal and takes into account important water quality parameters that influence the toxicity of sulfate.



## Prairie Rivers Network Needs a Computer/Website Volunteer

Prairie Rivers Network is looking for a dedicated, knowledgeable volunteer with professional experience to help redesign our website and provide assistance when general computer problems arise.

Please contact Vickie Nudelman at 217-344-2371 or [vnudelman@prairierivers.org](mailto:vnudelman@prairierivers.org) if you are interested.



January 8, 2006

**The News-Gazette** ran a story on the growing problem of illegal, open dumps in Illinois, many of which are found along Illinois' rivers. Open dumping, which is difficult to enforce against, can threaten human health and the environment. For instance, old cars that have been dumped frequently contain petroleum products that leach into the soil and contaminate groundwater or nearby streams. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) hires inspectors and tries to find and force open dumps into compliance with landfill regulations or shut them down. The difficulty for IEPA, explained Jean Flemma, PRN's Executive Director, is that many of these sites go undetected. "It's one of those out of sight, out of mind challenges," Flemma said. IEPA relies on citizens to report these types of problems, and "if you are out on a bike ride or a canoe trip and see open barrels or pipes, don't assume it's okay."

March 15, 2006

A story by Janet Lundquist in **The Herald News** detailed concerns about the impacts that the New Lenox sewage treatment plant is having on nearby Hickory Creek. At issue is a permit the city received allowing it to triple its wastewater discharges into the creek but not requiring them to limit the discharge of phosphorus, though treatment and removal options were available. Excessive phosphorus discharges can cause algae growth and deplete the oxygen in the receiving water, suffocating fish and other aquatic life. New regulations requiring phosphorus limits were passed in January, and while the New Lenox permit was issued prior to the adoption of the new regulations, environmental and community groups still think they should comply. "For us it's pretty simple. The law requires this now, everybody else is doing it, why can't

New Lenox?" said Jean Flemma. Flemma was referring to the fact that many other plants agreed to the new limits before the new rules were in place.

March 26, 2006

**The Star** ran a story about Exelon's Braidwood generating station which had leaked millions of gallons of water contaminated with tritium in the area and into the Kankakee River since 1996. The IEPA did not discover the violations until the end of 2005. The problem, explained Jean Flemma is that IEPA "is desperately under funded" and does not have the resources to monitor the more than 5,000 water pollution discharge permits issued around the state. Polluters are required to self-monitor what they discharge and follow the limits set forth in their pollution permits, but "we don't know if companies are complying with permit requirements," Flemma said. "A permit is only as good as its enforcement." IEPA has since stopped the Exelon discharges, and the company has developed a plan to clean up the contaminated areas. The Will County State's Attorney and the Illinois Attorney General have filed a suit against Exelon seeking fines of \$50,000 per occurrence and \$10,000 per day. The outcome is pending.

April 2006

Articles in **The Hub**, **The Daily Illini**, and **The News-Gazette** all reported on the Boneyard Creek Community Day which took place on April 22, Earth Day. More than 275 volunteers turned out to help clean trash from the Creek, remove invasive species, and mark storm drains with the important message, "Dump No Waste, Drains to Creek." The clean-up was one of many held around the state on Earth Day in an effort to improve the quality of our local rivers and our communities, and the comments made by Kim Erndt, PRN's Watershed Organizer,

regarding the Boneyard Creek event were true across the board. "We want to build awareness about this stream that's hidden in our community," she said. It's about protecting and restoring the natural amenities, managing storm water, and providing habitat for wildlife."

May 7, 2006

An article in **The DeKalb Daily Chronicle** highlighted concerns that PRN and others have about sewage treatment plants (STPs) that are being exempted from federal requirement to disinfect their wastewater. In this case, the Sandwich STP was seeking to renew its pollution permit and its disinfection exemption. PRN, Friends of the Fox, and Sierra Club all objected, arguing that people who used the river downstream from the plant could be harmed if disinfection of the wastewater was not required. "The thing that we are concerned about is pathogens, and that is bacteria and viruses," said Glynnis Collins, PRN's Watershed Scientist. The groups argued that the disinfection exemption is no longer needed because new technologies are now available to remove pathogens without causing harm to aquatic life.

May 11, 2006

A **New-Gazette** story about the Urbana-Champaign STP again focused on the disinfection problem. When the plant sought to renew its permit, the disinfection exemption was objected to by PRN, the Salt Fork River Partners, and others, arguing that people used the river for recreation and needed to be protected from pathogens. After consideration of the public's concerns, IEPA and the Urbana-Champaign STP agreed to a plan to implement disinfection by 2009 as part of a plant upgrade. PRN praised the decision, saying "this is the kind of cooperative public process that the Clean Water Act fosters, allowing us to improve water quality and our communities."

## 2006 Challenge Grants

We are very happy to announce that long time environmental advocate, Michael Scully, has renewed his \$5,000 Challenge Grant to Prairie Rivers Network.



Donors who give \$100 or more for the first time will have their entire gift matched dollar-for-dollar by Mr.

Scully, providing up to \$5,000 in additional funds that will support our work to protect Illinois' rivers and water quality.

Prairie Rivers Network has also been offered a \$5,000 challenge grant from the McKnight Foundation, which will match dollar-for-dollar funds raised from new and increased member donations.

Individuals who increase their donation from last year or who give to us for the first time will have their donation amount matched by the McKnight Foundation, for up to \$5,000 in additional funds that we will use to support our work.

Please help us meet these challenges by renewing your membership at the \$100 level, increasing your 2006 membership gift, or encouraging a friend to join Prairie Rivers Network.

## Thank You to Our Corporate Donors

We are grateful to the following businesses for their donations during the last year and encourage our members and friends to patronize these businesses that support our work:

Archer Daniels Midland Company  
Brown, Hobbs, & McMurray Insurance  
Bubble Toes Productions, Inc. (Jack Johnson Tour)  
Busey Bank Investment Group  
Cali's Cocina  
Champaign Surplus  
First Mid-Illinois Bank & Trust  
Giffin, Winning, Cohen, & Bodewes  
Illinois-American Water Company  
Kirby Foods, Inc.  
Patagonia  
Progressive Asset Management  
Robeson's Inc.  
Techline



If you own or work for a business that is interested in becoming a Prairie Rivers Network Corporate Member, please contact Vickie Nudelman at 217-344-2371 or [vnudelman@prairierivers.org](mailto:vnudelman@prairierivers.org).

## Charitable Planned Gifts

Because Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) is a non-profit organization registered with the state of Illinois, you can include us in your charitable planned gifts and ensure that the rivers and streams of Illinois will continue to be protected for generations to come.

Types of Charitable Planned Gifts:

### *Bequest*

A person could include a provision in his/her will or living trust to make a bequest to a charitable organization. That arrangement would be a "planned" gift. A gift in a will, will codicil or trust could be in the form of cash, securities, real estate or personal property, or as a percentage of the estate. If you currently have a will, you can add a gift through a will codicil.

### *Charitable Trust*

A person might establish a charitable trust that could provide income to the donor (or someone else) for a period of time (often for life). After this gift-deferral period, the trust would mature and the remaining assets would go to one or more charitable beneficiaries.

### *Appreciated Property*

This is a gift of securities, real or personal property, held long-term which has increased in value since date of acquisition, given outright to PRN or as the funding asset for a lifetime income plan.

### *Life Insurance*

A person may wish to name PRN as the beneficiary of an existing policy which is no longer needed for the donor's original purpose, or to purchase a new policy making PRN the owner or beneficiary.

For more specific information about charitable bequests in your will or living trust, please consult your attorney or financial advisor.

## ***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**

Jon McNussen, President

Charles Goodall, Treasurer

Anne Phillips, Secretary

Brain Anderson

Clark Bullard

Eric Freyfogle

Carolyn Grosboll

Bruce Hannon

Jason Lindsey

Ward McDonald

Michael Rosenthal

Virginia Scott

### **Staff**

Jean Flemma - Executive Director

Kim Erndt - Watershed Organizer

Glynnis Collins - Watershed Scientist

Traci Barkley - Watershed Scientist

Stacy James - Clean Water Program Coordinator

Vickie Nudelman - Office Manager/  
Fundraising Associate

Marise Robbins-Forbes - Director of Development

Cecily Smith - Volunteer Opportunities Coordinator

Olivia Dororthy - Support Staff

Anna Puchalski - Support Staff

## ***Fundraising Event Benefiting Prairie Rivers!***



September 2-3, 2006

To find out more, to volunteer, or to put together a team for this event, visit our website at [www.rollingriverride.org](http://www.rollingriverride.org). Register online today!

### **New Public Education Campaign Planned**

As a member of Prairie Rivers Network (PRN), you already know that clean rivers are critical to healthy communities, but not everyone is aware of that connection. In the next few months, and with support from the Grand Victoria Foundation, PRN will initiate a public education campaign to increase awareness about the importance of rivers in our communities.

Ross Creative+Strategy, a Peoria-based marketing and communications agency, will be donating their time and expertise to help us develop our new campaign to 1) increase awareness about PRN and our work to protect the water quality, rivers, and watershed communities of Illinois; and 2) increase public awareness about water pollution issues and the many amenities that our rivers provide including fish and wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities. Through this campaign, we hope to inspire Illinois residents to take an active role in improving water quality and rivers throughout the state.

We are very grateful to Ross Creative+Strategy for selecting PRN as one of only two pro-bono clients that they are working with this year. "We're happy to have the opportunity to donate our services," said David Goers, President of Ross. "It's one way Ross and all its employees can express our thanks to [Prairie Rivers Network] for all they do in Central Illinois and throughout the entire state." To learn more about Ross Creative+Strategy, visit their website, [www.rosscps.com](http://www.rosscps.com).



## Workshops To Be Offered

Watershed groups are an invaluable part of the effort to protect and restore the rivers and streams of Illinois. They are fun to work with because everyone involved is there by choice and sharing a common goal of clean water and healthy communities. However, these groups are often faced with complicated issues and multiple roadblocks. Many do not have the tools and information necessary to accomplish their goals in a timely manner.

Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) realizes the importance of grassroots watershed groups and wants to do everything we can to ensure that each group is successful. We understand that teamwork, encouragement, sound information, and having a large network of resources and contacts are critical to their success. Starting later this summer, PRN will increase our outreach activities by providing a series of workshops to help strengthen

and enhance the effectiveness of watershed groups throughout Illinois. They will include:

*Building A Successful Watershed Group* - Learn skills to work effectively as a group by delegating authority and responsibility, rewarding the thoughts and ideas of others, overcoming adversity, dealing with conflict, and gaining and retaining new members.

*Getting Your Message Out* - Learn how to write letters to the editor, OpEds, and press releases; as well as how to effectively communicate with reporters. Gain a better understanding of the importance and power of communicating messages through the media and how to create a message that will resonate with your target audience.

*Event Organizing* - Organizing large events is not only a critical part of a watershed group's outreach and education efforts; it is also important in helping get your message out, increasing your volunteer base, and achieving your goals. Receive helpful tips and ideas on organizing events such as river clean-ups and stream restorations, covering all the bases from planning to implementation.

For more information on these workshops please contact Watershed Organizer, Kim Erndt at 217-344-2371 or at [kerndt@prairierivers.org](mailto:kerndt@prairierivers.org).



## Meet Stacy James

Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) has hired a new Clean Water Program Coordinator to work on Mississippi River and other water quality issues in Illinois. Stacy James, who joined the staff in April 2006, has a B.S. in Biology and Ph.D. in Biological Sciences and Conservation Biology. Before joining PRN, Stacy was a post-doc for the U.S. Geological Survey Columbia Environmental Research Center in Missouri, where she conducted toxicity tests on aquatic organisms. She was also affiliated with USGS while a graduate student, focusing on the effects of contaminants on amphibians. While in Missouri, Stacy volunteered for the state's stream team program, and served as president of the Missouri Chapter of the Society for Conservation Biology.

Stacy is working on a number of issues with PRN staff and collaborators from other organizations, and serving as PRN representative to the Mississippi River Water Quality Collaborative, which was formed with support

from the McKnight Foundation to improve water quality in the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Stacy will also be expanding our programs related to Clean Water Act permit enforcement, stormwater permitting, and wetland mitigation.



## 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  
☐ \$500   ☐ \$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:**

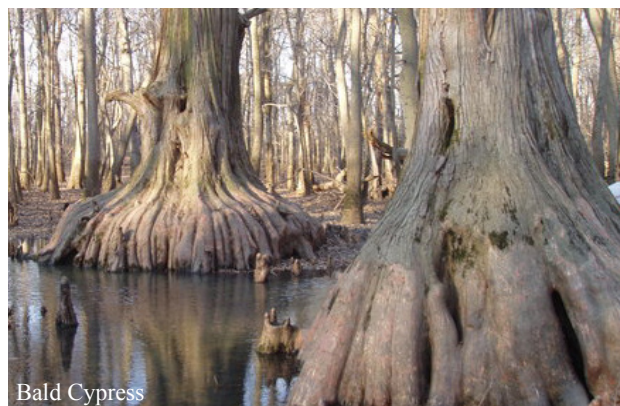
**Prairie Rivers Network**

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.*

Softshell Turtle



Bald Cypress

### Welcome New Members!

Prairie Rivers Network is very pleased to welcome the following new members who have supported us for the first time in 2006. We thank them and ALL of our members for their support of our work to protect Illinois rivers.

Vera Bojic  
Jesse Bruns  
Cali's Cocina  
Kathy Chen  
Joseph Eby  
Tracy Evans & Andrzej Bartke  
George Fahrenwald  
Ed Feser  
Gary Borger Ch. of Trout Unlimited  
Tim Gerk  
Sandra Golden  
Brendan Griffin  
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Jerry McCormick  
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Northwest Illinois Audubon Society

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Robert Palinkas  
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John Simpson  
William Stewart  
David Szaflarski  
Eileen Tepatti  
Terry Tonielli  
William White  
Todd & Sanne Wildermuth  
Benjamin Williams  
Jacqueline Worden  
Robert & Beth Zeiders



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Permit No. 858

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

## Mark Your Calendar!

Illinois Ride for the Environment  
September 2-3, 2006  
[www.rolllingriverride.org](http://www.rolllingriverride.org)



It's Our River Day (IORD)  
September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
[www.state.il.us/ltgov/cleanwater/iord.htm](http://www.state.il.us/ltgov/cleanwater/iord.htm)  
or  
[www.friendsoftheillinoisriver.org](http://www.friendsoftheillinoisriver.org)

It's Our River Day Mission:  
To increase awareness and appreciation of the river in Illinois through a series of events on education, recreation and conservation each year on the third Saturday in September.

Photo Attributes  
Jason Lindsey, [www.perceptivevisions.com](http://www.perceptivevisions.com):  
page 2, 7 and borders;  
Garrett Rodgers: page 1, 7;  
Prairie Rivers Network: pages 4, 6, 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.



**Earth Share**  
OF ILLINOIS