

# Prairie River Notes

A publication of Prairie Rivers Network

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The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

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## Ethanol and Illinois

### Potential impacts to water quality and quantity

For years, ethanol has been touted as a “cleaner fuel alternative” with little discussion regarding growing environmental concerns related to increased acreage production, questionable comparable fuel efficiency, production impacts to air and water and a major change in infrastructure. While there are no easy answers to the ethanol dilemma, Prairie Rivers Network is focusing on the many issues that need to be addressed regarding the process by which the ethanol production industry is permitted to use and discharge water in the State of Illinois.

Ethanol production plants are regularly marketed to the public as non-wastewater producing or as only discharging non-contact cooling water. This is not necessarily the case. For every gallon of ethanol produced, most plants will discharge approximately two gallons of wastewater with potentially high levels of concentrated contaminants either directly to a surface waterway or indirectly to be treated at a municipal wastewater facility.

Of course, this assumes that plants function exactly as planned. There are many examples, however, of ethanol plants that have illegally discharged or experienced equipment failures and dumped toxic chemicals into adjoining streams. For instance, according to officials at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, there have been numerous violations filed against ethanol plants in

their state for illegal discharges into streams of pollutants such as syrup, bad batches of ethanol, and sewage. Similar records can be found in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota. Large-scale spills at or en route to or

from these plants can also occur and are of particular concern as ethanol travels quickly through the soil and can readily contaminate groundwater.

In addition to the impacts ethanol production can have on water quality, these plants are highly consumptive water users. According to the Renewable Fuels Association, it takes about three gallons of water to produce one gallon of ethanol. This industry-supplied estimate is conservative though, and depending on the size of the facility and the process used, up to eight gallons of water per gallon of fuel may actually be required with up to six gallons lost due to evaporation. Clearly,



this could have a significant impact on ground and surface water supplies if the number of ethanol plants in Illinois grows at the rate that has been proposed by some in the industry.

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## Annual Dinner a Howling Success!

Thank you to all who joined us at our Annual Dinner on November 3rd and to all of our members who were unable to attend, but donated generously. You helped raise over \$80,000 in donations, pledges, and ticket sales. Our staff and board enjoyed talking with all of our members, and we hope you enjoyed hearing about all the great work the staff is doing to protect our rivers and streams.



Our guest speaker, well-known conservationist Dave Foreman, most recently of The Rewilding Institute (<http://rewilding.org/>), talked about the importance of preserving large, continuous habitat corridors to maintain a healthy and vibrant ecosystem for creatures large and small. He discussed the impacts of human activity and urban sprawl on large carnivores, such as the wolf, and how the displacement of these native animals can have damaging



effects on nature's delicate balance. The good news—he and other passionate conservationists are not giving up, and are working with local people, governments, and organizations to help restore wildlife corridors and reduce those damaging effects with great success. Our members “howled” in agreement with the importance of working together to preserve and protect our environment and the many species that share our earth.

**Thanks to the generosity of our members, Prairie Rivers Network received an additional \$10,000 in donations as a result of meeting two challenge grants that had been offered by:**

**Michael Scully and  
Bruce Semans**

Thank you again for your support!



### ***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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## Recognizing Those That Go The Extra River-Mile

### Volunteers of the Year - Joe Petry and Eric Robeson

Every year at our annual dinner Prairie Rivers Network recognizes those volunteers that have worked directly with PRN and have gone the extra river-mile to protect their local stream. These people are our Volunteers of the Year. This year, we recognized Joe Petry and Eric Robeson of Champaign for their efforts in spearheading the very successful, first annual Boneyard Creek Community Day. Joe and Eric poured their energy, enthusiasm, and people skills into this first-year event dedicated to restoring, protecting, and cleaning up the Boneyard Creek and drew in nearly 300 volunteers to work on a Saturday morning in April! Plans are already in the works for the next BCCD and we hope to see that record broken. Our sincere thanks and appreciation go to Joe and Eric for all of their hard work!

### River Steward - Fran Caffee

In order to honor and thank those individuals that have dedicated countless volunteer hours to protecting their local river or stream, Prairie Rivers Network created the River Steward Award. This award allows you the opportunity to nominate volunteers or groups in your own community that you feel deserve this recognition.

Out of numerous nominations that were sent in, we selected Fran Caffee of the Valley of the Fox Group as this year's River Steward. Fran has donated countless hours over the years to protecting the Fox River. She formed the Sierra Club's Valley of the Fox Group in 1992. While the work of the Valley of the Fox Group depends on its many active members, Fran has consistently been the 'glue' that pulls volunteers into new efforts, garners support and funding for their efforts and maintains the general atmosphere within the group that encourages Valley of the Fox Group members to do what they can on behalf of their local environment, especially the Fox River. The Valley of the Fox Group's territory covers the towns of Kane and Kendall counties that sit on the Fox River. Congratulations Fran on being named Prairie Rivers Network's 2006 River Steward!



From left: Eric Robeson, Kim Erndt, & Joe Petry

### Mississippi River Steward - Chad Pregracke

Since we recently expanded our work to assist in the efforts underway to restore the Mississippi River Basin, we could not overlook one very special River Steward nomination. Normally our River Steward award is reserved for individuals or groups that volunteer their time to conservation efforts. This year, however, we received a nomination for someone that started out as a volunteer and found a way to make it their full-time job. Chad Pregracke is our Mississippi River Steward.

In high school, Chad Pregracke started cleaning trash out of the Mississippi one piece at a time in his john-boat. With his undeniable charisma, energy, ingenuity, and love for the Mississippi and all rivers, Chad took a one-man operation and turned it into a highly successful, not-for-profit organization dedicated to restoring bottomland forest, organizing community-based river clean-ups, and educating teachers and citizens about the importance of these precious river systems aboard their floating classroom.

Today Living Lands & Waters is comprised of 4 barges, 2 tow boats, 5 john boats, 6 trucks, and 10 full-time staff. To date with the help of over 30,000 volunteers they have removed over 3 million pounds of garbage from the Mississippi, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Anacostia, and Potomac Rivers and planted close to 25,000 trees. Our sincere thanks and congratulations to Chad Pregracke, as our special "Mississippi River Steward".

## Why They Support Prairie Rivers Network

Prairie Rivers Network is lucky to have many long time and new supporters from around the state. It is because of them that we are able to continue to protect the rivers and streams of Illinois for people, fish and wildlife, and we wanted to share some of their stories in our newsletter. If you would like to share your story of why you support us, please email us at [info@prairierivers.org](mailto:info@prairierivers.org).

### Debby Auble and Ward & Associates Realtors, Inc.

Debby Auble has been supporting Prairie Rivers Network for too many years to count and long before we were an actual membership organization. With her passion for protecting the environment and supporting organizations in her local community, becoming a donor to PRN was a natural fit for her. As a real estate agent and businesswoman, Debby is keenly aware that a healthy environment is critical to the quality of life and the economy in her community. As the grandmother

of three year old Nehemiah, she is also very concerned about leaving a legacy of clean water and air for future generations.

In addition to her regular donations, Debby has found a unique way to support PRN. Any time a home buyer or seller uses Ward & Associates as their agent and mentions PRN, she gives us 20% of her commission from the sale. We have benefited many times from this generous offer and from Debby's steadfast commitment to our organization, and we thank her for all that she does for us and the environment in Illinois.



### Eric Walter and Gorilla

One of our newest supporters is Gorilla, a custom web design firm in Chicago. Since their inception more than a decade ago, Gorilla has worked to ensure that their clients' web sites faithfully represent their brands online and fully leverage the capabilities of the Internet to help our clients and their customers reach their goals. ([www.gorillachicago.com](http://www.gorillachicago.com))

Gorilla first became a donor to Prairie Rivers Network last year, when their President, Eric Walter, went to California to do some work with Patagonia. While there, he was introduced to a program started in 2001 by Patagonia's founder called *1% for the Planet*—an alliance of businesses committed to leveraging their resources to create a healthier planet by donating at least 1% of their annual net revenues to environmental organizations worldwide.

Gorilla is a proud member of 1% for the Planet and as part of their corporate responsibility, now donates 1% of sales to organizations like Prairie Rivers Network that are dedicated to protecting and preserving the environment. According to Eric, Gorilla was very excited to become a part of this program, noting, "We're ecstatic to be supporting the great work of Prairie Rivers Network. It's comforting to know that they are actively protecting the health of the rivers and waterways that sustain our employees, their families, and their communities."

In turn, we are very grateful for Gorilla's support and their belief in our work.

**If you would like more information about how your company can join 1% for the Planet, visit their website at [www.onepercentfortheplanet.org](http://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org).**



# Highlights of Prairie Rivers Network Work in 2006

## Clean Water Protection

### *Cracking Down on Polluters*

To complement our program that ensures Clean Water Act permits strictly limit the pollutants that can be discharged to our rivers, we initiated a new effort to ensure that polluters be held to those limits and began cracking down on violators.

### *Cleaner, Safer Water for Fishing and Swimming*

Challenging Illinois EPA's practice of exempting wastewater discharges from disinfection, we eliminated this exemption at plants from Champaign and St. Joseph to Sandwich and Braidwood and got IEPA to admit the disinfection requirement should be regularly applied.

### *Mississippi River Clean Water Collaborative –*

We began a new effort with eleven other groups along the River to improve water quality throughout the river system and the Gulf of Mexico.

## River Stewardship & Awareness

### *Keeping on Cleaning Up*

We helped organize the first annual Boneyard Clean-up in Champaign-Urbana, forging a new partnership with the cities, park districts, local Rotaries and businesses, the University of Illinois and many others.

### *Cleaning and Conserving Rain Water*

We initiated a program to install rain gardens at local Habitat for Humanity homes and are developing instructional materials for homeowners who want to use rain gardens to prevent polluted rainwater from rushing down the nearest storm drain.

### *Illinois Stormwater Patrol*

We continue training citizens to monitor stormwater runoff at construction sites and elsewhere, and to be on the lookout for pollution in their local streams.

## Habitat Protection

### *Mississippi River Habitat Restoration*

We began a new effort to work with local citizen groups along the Mississippi River to build support for projects that will restore wetlands, side channels and wildlife corridors.

### *Healthy Land – Healthy Water*

We began an effort to ensure that farm conservation programs aimed at protecting habitat and water quality achieve their intended purpose.

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## Farewell from the Executive Director

As some of our members may know, I will be leaving Prairie Rivers Network at the end of January to return to work in Washington, DC.

The past four years have been an incredible experience for me at Prairie Rivers, a truly grass roots organization that is working with people on the ground to protect their rivers and all the benefits those rivers provide to their communities. I am very proud to have been part of an organization with such a long and accomplished history.

Prairie Rivers Network is now stronger than ever and well positioned to move forward under new leadership. Our budget has doubled and our staff has grown accordingly.

We have updated our strategic plan and have several new programs underway that have expanded the scope and impact of our work. Our staff is experienced, dedicated and well respected around the state. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the strong support of our members who believe that the protection of water quality and river habitats is critical to the health of our communities.

I am very grateful for that support and feel confident that the continued good work of our staff will continue to earn your respect. Thank you very much.



## Ethanol and Illinois - Potential impacts to water quality and quantity

(continued from page 1).

Generally, ethanol production facilities pump their source water from nearby aquifers, though some plants have chosen to or propose to withdraw from surface waters such as rivers. Whether drawing from ground or surface water, this extraction poses problems for public water supplies as more ethanol facilities are being built without a comprehensive review of long-term impacts to the water resources. Unsustainable withdrawals from groundwater sources may contribute to a lowering of the water table, affecting local wells and reducing base flows in nearby streams.

Our understanding of groundwater reserves and pumping capacity are not well understood in Illinois, especially in rural areas where we must rely on a patchwork of already drilled wells for most of our information. In addition,

withdrawals from ground or surface waters are not tracked or regulated in the state, and there are no established in-stream flow requirements. This means that current law does not restrict large withdrawals that will likely accompany the growing number of ethanol plants and does not protect the many water uses and public benefits that come from water left in the stream or in the ground.

Prairie Rivers Network is concerned about the pace at which permits for ethanol plants are being approved without substantial review of the potential impacts due to water withdrawals and wastewater discharges. As such, we will be working with key partners to establish criteria for ethanol plant siting, construction and operation, and will be promoting the need for water usage controls generally in Illinois, in an effort to protect our streams from unsustainable withdrawals and contaminated waste streams.

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## Are You Receiving PRN E-Mail Action Alerts & E-newsletters?

Would you like to receive our e-mail action alerts to keep you up-to-date on important water quality issues in your community or receive our e-newsletter to keep you informed about volunteer opportunities, clean water issues, and river conservation news?

If so, please send us your name and e-mail address to [info@prairierivers.org](mailto:info@prairierivers.org).

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### Special Donations

Prairie Rivers Network would like to thank the following members for their generous donations in honor of PRN founders' Bruce and Patricia Hannon's 50th wedding anniversary.

Joe Conover and Janet Gates Conover

Nan and Gert Ehrlich

Karen Ennen and David O'Brien

*If you would like to honor an anniversary, wedding, or some other special event with a donation to Prairie Rivers Network, we will be pleased to mention it in our newsletter.*

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### Thanks Ranger Rick!



The National Wildlife Federation's Ranger Rick helped entertain riders of all ages at our first annual Rolling on the River Ride this past Labor Day weekend. NWF was a sponsor and strong supporter of the event, and we are very grateful for their efforts in making it a success.

# Join Prairie Rivers Network!

## or Give a Gift Membership!

### Looking for the Perfect Gift?

A membership to PRN 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 more, 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
 ☐ \$100
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 ☐ \$500  
☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

*Thank you for your support!*

All members receive our newsletter and action alerts. Your contribution to Prairie Rivers is tax deductible.

Make checks payable to: Prairie Rivers Network, 809 S. Fifth Street, Champaign, IL 61820

## Welcome New Members!

Prairie Rivers is very pleased to welcome over 100 new members who 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.

Anonymous	Mike & Martha Freeland	Virgil Kemp	Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn
Gary Apfelstadt	Katie Gall	Susan Kiddoo	Amanda Reck
Judy Bach	Gary Borger Chapter of Trout Unlimited	Marianne Kinzer	Sheila Reynolds
Gene & Wanda Baraldi	Mr. Tim Gerk	Robert Kirchner	Paul Rudy
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Michael & Lucienne Burrus	Juanita & Stewart Gustafson	Richard Mollahan	David Soucek
Roger Bury	Laurie & Mark Gustafson	Jeremy Morgan	Fred Spannas
Virginia Busboom	Mary Elizabeth Hamstrom	Robert Morrison	William Stewart
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Kathy Chen	Rev. DiAnne Hatch	J. David Mullan	David Szaflarski
Gale Cohen-Demarco	Scott Hays	Nasar Nallamothu	Eileen Tepatti
Jeff Courson	John Hegarty	Natural Area Study Group	Kevin Thayer
Damaris Day	Ed Heske	Robert Neuleib	Joy Thornton - Walter
Cynthia Deadrick	Jonathon Hinton	Northwest Illinois Audubon Society	Terry Tonielli
Joseph Eby	Kay Hodson	David Novak	Gretel & Jeff Van Wieren
Mary Eddy	Walter Hoffmann	Geraldine O'Laughlin	Florrie & James Wescoat
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Patricia Floess	George Johnson	John & Laurel Prussing	Jacqueline Worden
Gregory Foskett	Gayle Keiser	Margaret Quinn	Robert & Beth Zeiders

Every effort has been made to ensure that recognition of our supporters is correct. We sincerely apologize for any errors or omissions and urge you to notify us if we have made any mistakes.

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## Prairie Rivers Network Unveils New Logo

Prairie Rivers Network thanks Ross Creative+Strategy ([www.rosscreativeplusstrategy.com](http://www.rosscreativeplusstrategy.com)) for the creation of our new logo that shows PRN's commitment to protecting clean water and river habitats for people, fish, and wildlife. Keep a look out for our new logo in future promotional materials.



### Photo Attributes

Jason Lindsey, [www.perceptivevisions.com](http://www.perceptivevisions.com):  
pages 7 and border;

Prairie Rivers Network: pages 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

National Wildlife Federation page 6.

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.

