

# Prairie River Notes

A publication of Prairie Rivers Network

Volume 9, Issue 3

The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

Fall 2007

## Third Annual "It's Our River Day"

In 2004, Lt. Governor Pat Quinn designated the third Saturday in September It's Our River Day (IORD). The declared goal of this special day is to increase awareness of the many benefits the rivers and streams of Illinois provide to people and wildlife. This state-wide celebration gives Illinois residents the opportunity to learn about, enjoy and protect their local rivers.

IORD events range from canoe trips to waterfront fairs to river clean-ups. This year's IORD was also the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Salt Fork River Clean-up near St. Joseph. Organized by the Salt Fork River Partners, with assistance by PRN, Save Our Trees, Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, the Salt Fork River Clean-up is an event that residents from a variety of communities look forward to each year.



River Clean-Up

In the last couple of years, the scope of the Salt Fork River Clean-up has expanded to include invasive species removal. This year, volunteers removed invasive species such as garlic mustard and cattails in three primary sites, including a wetland restoration now in its second year. In addition to clean-up and invasive species removal, Champaign County Audubon Society volunteers and area residents placed bluebird, wood duck, and purple martin boxes in the wetland; bat boxes were also placed in the area by a Scout Venture group. The bats will help with

mosquito abatement.

In Vermilion County, Judy and Gregg Sacotnik led another annual Vermilion River Clean-up, which focused on an illegal dump site. They partnered with the City of Danville, Lincoln Challenge, and Keep Vermillion County Beautiful. Over 2 dumpsters were filled with debris such as tires, metal, and

miscellaneous trash. This adds to the 2004 and 2005 events where volunteers collected a total of 25 tons of illegally dumped items, most of which were old, large appliances such as washing machines.

The Alton Market Place coordinated with area Sierra Clubs, the National Great Rivers Education Center, The Nature Institute, Missouri River Relief, Prairie Rivers

Network, and others to hold their first It's Our River Day event. The event featured a river clean-up in the morning, an environmental expo, live music, and a riverside bike ride.

By participating in IORD events like these, Illinois residents are continuing to learn how they can help protect the health of their rivers and communities. Be sure to look for the nearest IORD event next year, or get out, get involved, and help create one in your community!

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## Progress on Pathogens in Our Waterways

Shockingly, most sewage treatment plants are not required to disinfect the pathogens from their wastewater before discharging to streams and rivers. Over 800 sewage treatment plants and semi-public facilities in Illinois do not disinfect their wastewater on a year-round basis. Approximately 270 more of these facilities have seasonal disinfection exemptions, often during the months of November through April, the season deemed unsuitable for water-based recreation in Illinois. Over the last year, Prairie Rivers Network has led the charge to improve the process by which Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)

administers exemptions to disinfection and has through a series of meetings and contacts with IEPA, USEPA, Sierra Club and Environmental Law and Policy Center, succeeded in several respects.

*(continued on page 6)*



## PRN Annual Dinner - November 9th

*Celebrating our Founders, our Friends, and our Future*

Prairie Rivers Network's annual dinner will be held on Friday, November 9th at the Hilton Garden Inn Conference Center in Champaign. This year we will be celebrating our 40th Anniversary. Help us have the best dinner yet by bringing friends and family and introducing them to Prairie Rivers Network and all the important work we are doing to make Illinois' rivers and streams safe and clean.

Our guest speaker this year will be Charles Wilkinson, a distinguished professor at the University of Colorado Law School. His specialty includes federal public land law. The National Wildlife Federation presented him with its National Conservation Award, and in its 10-year anniversary issue, Outside Magazine named him one of 15 "People to Watch," calling him "the West's leading authority on natural resources

law." Wilkinson's expertise and passion for protecting our environment will lead to an interesting presentation.

Our annual fundraising dinner is always a fun and entertaining evening that allows us to personally thank all of our members for their generous support and dedication to Illinois' rivers and streams.

We will kick off our cocktail reception at 6 p.m. with music from The Farmer's Market String Band, which includes Tom Bassett, a PRN member for the past 10 years! You can also try your luck at our kayak raffle, sponsored by NWF, or wine wall, where you can win a bottle of fine wine.

Invitations will be mailed in early Oct. For more information, please contact us at 217-344-2371 or [vnudelman@prairierivers.org](mailto:vnudelman@prairierivers.org).

**We hope to see you and a friend there!**

### River Steward Award

Don't forget to nominate your *River Steward Award* candidate, who will be announced at our Annual Dinner. This award recognizes individuals who provide us with leadership and inspiration to protect the state's rivers and streams for people, fish, and wildlife. For information on how to nominate the next *River Steward*, email Cecily at [csmith@prairierivers.org](mailto:csmith@prairierivers.org) or visit [www.prairierivers.org](http://www.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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## Double the Fun at the Second Annual Rolling on the River Ride

On the weekend of the Second Annual Rolling on the River Ride (RRR), the Fox River and its tributaries were swollen out of their banks, twisting and pooling like beautiful rivers should. Thankfully, in spite of late August heavy rains and high water, 465 cyclists pedaled in support of Prairie Rivers Network, the Illinois Environmental Council, and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. Fundraisers and donors contributed more than \$90,000 towards the event.



Illinois House Minority Leader Tom Cross and professional cycling coach Robbie Ventura joined cyclists early in the morning for the official start of the ride. Representative Cross, along with Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, was an Honorary Co-Chair for this year's RRR. Robbie Ventura is internationally recognized as a former pro cyclist and a top pro cyclist coach. His company, Vision Quest Coaching, provided a free online training program for registrants. Thank you, Robbie!

This year's RRR saw the return of popular activities such as the organic cookout lunch, live music for post-ride participants and their families, and Sally the Clown's face-painting and magic. Once again, the National Wildlife Federation's Ranger Rick mascot was never without a group of young fans at his side. Other highlights this year included live music at rest stops, exhibits that included professional massage therapists from Simple Kneads and The Centre Peace, and demonstrations of solar-powered ovens and hybrid cars.

Cyclists that raised funds vied for prizes such as a trip to Mexico, Amtrak tickets, a weekend stay in a Chicago condo, a Trek bicycle, and Patagonia clothing. The top fundraiser this year was Bruce Karmazin, who raised over \$5,000. PRN's former executive director, Jean Flemma, flew in from D.C. to support the ride and was also one of our top fundraisers. To emphasize RRR as "Illinois' Ride for the Environment," teams that pledged more than \$1000 achieved "Green Team" status, with team captains receiving a special Green Team jersey. Long time PRN

supporter, Champaign Surplus, achieved green team status this year and cycled the entire 100 miles. Thank you to Champaign Surplus owners Lynn & Ira Wachtel. Team awards this year included the new category of Greenest Team, won by Team Springfield. Team leaders Becky and Stephen Jennison accepted the award wearing green tutus and tree branch head wreaths - their team costume brought lots of smiles to the event participants' faces. Creativity was also an essential part of the Jennison's fundraising strategy, as they hosted a special RRR party, providing guests with a computer pointed at the RRR registration page. What a great idea!

Many thanks to The Rush-Copley Medical Center in Aurora for being RRR's Title Sponsor for the second year in a row. New sponsors included:

- Ford Motor Company
- REI
- WRD Environmental
- Main Street Bank and Trust
- Rush-Copley Healthplex
- Chicago Parent

We are very grateful for the continued support from:

- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Lumpkin Family Foundation
- Grand Victoria Foundation
- National Wildlife Federation
- PRN members Michael Scully and John Sparks
- Patagonia
- The Homestead Bed and Breakfast
- La Salle Bank
- Long-time PRN member Debby Auble for helping with sponsorship recruitment
- Over fifty other sponsors!

And of course... there is the issue of the great food! A special thanks to Organic Valley, Organic Prairie, South Bridge Gourmet Coffee Company, Goodness Greeness, Whole Foods Market, Chipotle, Chicago Baking Company and Panera for all of the delicious and nutritious food they donated that helped keep the riders, organizers, and volunteers energized and smiling.

THANKS AGAIN to all the riders, volunteers, and sponsors who made this year's RRR even bigger and better. Your support ensures that PRN, IEC, and ISA are able to continue their efforts towards securing a cleaner environment for all Illinois residents. If you'd like to see some of the great photos of the event, please visit [www.rollingriverride.org](http://www.rollingriverride.org).

## How to Get Rid of Household Hazardous Waste

Are you concerned that your garage or basement may soon be declared a Superfund Site because of all the old cans of paint, cleaners, and other chemicals that have been accumulating there for years? Unfortunately, many homeowners throughout Illinois find themselves the leery stewards of hazardous waste because their communities do not have a long-term hazardous waste collection program. Prairie Rivers Network wants to thank these brave stewards for not dumping harmful chemicals down the drain, because drains are either connected to local waterways or sewage treatment plants that cannot effectively treat all toxins. But more importantly, we want to let you know that there are disposal options for you!



One option is to visit one of the state's long-term hazardous waste collection facilities. These facilities are located in Naperville (Fire Station #4, 630-420-6700 #7559), Rockford (Rock River Reclamation District, 815-987-5570), Chicago (Household Chemicals and Computer Recycling Facility, 312-744-7672), and Lake County (Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, 847-336-9340).

Another option is through the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's household hazardous waste one-day collection program. This program provides funding to a limited number of applicants around the state, who then establish a day and location where residents can bring specified waste products. The one-day collections are held every spring and fall, but the locations vary each season. Collection days will be held this fall at the following locations from 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. (see <http://www.epa.state.il.us/land/hazardous-waste/household-haz-waste/hhwc-schedule.html> for more details):

Sep 22	Carlinville, Macoupin County Carlinville High School
Sep 29	Robinson, Crawford County Waste Water Treatment Plant
Oct 6	Belvidere, Boone County Boone County Highway Department
Oct 6	Bloomington, McLean County Interstate Center
Oct 13	Chicago, Cook County Northeastern Illinois University
Oct 13	Freeport, Stephenson County Stephenson County Fairgrounds
Oct 20	River Grove, Cook County Triton College
Oct 20	Benton, Franklin County Franklin County Highway Department
Oct 27	Oak Forest, Cook County Oak Forest Public Works
Oct 27	Park Ridge, Cook County Maine Township Town Hall

If you do not live within a reasonable driving distance of any of the above facilities, then the activist in you might want to make a little racket. In order for your community to obtain some of the limited funding from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's waste collection program, a group or government agency must submit an application. Therefore, if you would like to have a collection day in your community, you could start by calling your local public works and ask the head of the department to apply for the program if an application is not already on file. Ask your friends and neighbors to call too, to increase your chance of being heard.

A final suggestion is to call around to recycling centers and resale shops in your community. You may be surprised by what you can get rid of that way! Your local public works department may even have a page on their website that describes where specific waste products can be taken.

Good luck, be safe, and thanks for keeping household hazardous waste out of Illinois' rivers and streams!

## Update on New Federal Water Protection Bill

This past July, Traci Barkley, Watershed Scientist for PRN, participated in a Clean Water Fly-In sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. Clean water activists and outdoor enthusiasts attended an all-day training and brainstorming session with D.C. conservation leaders followed by a full day of meetings with state legislators on Capitol Hill. Barkley and others met with elected officials to build support for the Clean Water Restoration Act, a new bill capable of protecting vital waters at a crucial time.

In May of 2007, bipartisan leaders in the House of Representatives introduced the Clean Water Restoration Act (HR 2421) to reaffirm Clean Water Act protection to diverse waterways that provide critical habitat to an array of wildlife. Illinois Representatives Rush, Jackson, Gutierrez, Emanuel, Davis, Bean, Schakowsky, and Kirk joined over 160 other representatives as co-sponsors. A Senate bill (S.1870) was introduced in late July by Senator Feingold with our own Senator Durbin joining 18 other co-sponsors. The bill will return crucial protections to America's waters, including vulnerable wetlands and small streams.

Passage of the Clean Water Restoration Act is needed because the 1972 Clean Water Act is no longer viewed as protective as it was originally intended to be. Recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court and the administration reflect a more narrow interpretation of the protections provided by the Clean Water Act. As a result, approximately 20 million acres of our nation's wetlands and 60% of our stream miles that do not flow year-round are at risk of losing federal protection. Illinois' waters are also at risk, because the state's water regulation program is closely tied to the Clean Water Act.

In Illinois, over 1.6 million people receive some of their drinking water from areas containing smaller streams that may no longer be regulated by the Clean Water Act. Therefore, some communities may have to find an alternative drinking water source in the future. Also, there are 746 wastewater discharge sites located on intermittent or ephemeral streams in Illinois, and these discharges may go unregulated in the future.

An estimated 150,118 acres of wetlands in the state could be considered so-called "isolated" waters – water bodies that are particularly vulnerable to losing Clean Water Act safeguards. Illinois has already lost 85% of its wetlands since the 1780's, and these wetlands are home to over 100 bird species and 860 native plants. Over 35% of bird species and 90% of amphibian species depend on wetlands.

The waterways at risk of losing protections under the Clean Water Act are not only important for wildlife, but are important to people as well. Fishing provides recreation and supports local economies; over 1.2 million people participated in recreational fishing activities in Illinois in 2001, spending nearly \$600 million. Approximately 3 million individuals participated in wildlife watching activities, spending over \$800 million.

People also benefit from the flooding protections that streams and wetlands provide. The monetary costs of flooding can be significant, and flooding risks increase as waterways are altered or replaced by developments. Intermittent streams and wetlands can keep the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers from flooding and they help minimize the damage sustained by downstream communities built on the floodplains of these great rivers.

Given the importance of our waterways and the losses of protections we are seeing under the Clean Water Act, we now need new legislation to restore protections to small streams and wetlands. The solution is the 2007 Clean Water Restoration Act, which is currently a bill in the U.S. House and Senate. Because it is your Congressional representatives who will be deciding on the fate of this bill, they need to hear from you!

### **Don't Wait ACT TODAY!**

Please call or write your representatives and tell them you want them to support the Clean Water Restoration Act.

Ask your friends and family to make similar calls, because it requires many unified voices to make a difference!

If you would like more information before you call or write, please call Traci or Stacy at 217-344-2371 and they will be happy to help!

## Progress on Pathogens in Our Waterways *(continued from page 2)*

Currently, IEPA has granted hundreds of seasonal and year-round disinfection exemptions supported by and based on materials submitted by the permit applicant. These exemptions are often based on outdated fecal coliform monitoring data and recreational use surveys, data used to gauge whether the release of pathogens into waterways could pose a risk to people. Under pressure from Prairie Rivers Network, IEPA has revised the process by which it approves these exemptions. In addition, IEPA has initiated a review process in which they will identify and reevaluate year-round disinfection exemptions.

It is often the case that current recreational uses of the waters downstream of the discharge are unknown and undocumented in the disinfection exemption application. The burden of proof rests on the public who are often unaware the treatment plant permit is up for renewal and that disinfection requirements have been or will be waived. Many types of recreational activities are taking place year-round in these contaminated waters, including swimming, paddling and fishing with the water user unaware of the threat posed to their health.

Prairie Rivers Network partnered with Illinois Paddling Council to create a list of frequently paddled streams and submitted it for use by IEPA. We continue to inform watershed groups, waterway users and citizens of the importance of communicating their recreational waterway uses to IEPA and local treatment facilities.

Residents have the right to know the state of disinfection for water discharges from sewage treatment plants in order to determine which waters are considered safe for recreational activities. Prairie Rivers Network has requested that IEPA house and maintain a central list of waters receiving undisinfected sewage in order to support responsible waterway use.

Permits for which disinfection exemptions have been granted regularly contain no effluent limitations for fecal coliform and do not require fecal coliform monitoring. This monitoring is essential to ensure actual conditions are in line with modeled conditions in the stream. Furthermore, many of these exemptions are granted for streams impaired by fecal coliform. Per Prairie Rivers Network's request, all new and renewed NPDES permitted facilities with fecal coliform in their discharge will be required to monitor and report levels of fecal coliform in their effluent.

Almost all Illinois' waters are designated as General Use, which protects primary contact activities such as swimming and paddling. If a state wishes to remove or downgrade a water body's designated use, a formal Use Attainability Analysis (UAA) must be performed and approved by USEPA. It seems that IEPA has downgraded the primary contact use of waterbodies through the granting of year-round disinfection exemptions for sewage treatment plants without properly and formally following the approved UAA process. Prairie Rivers Network has worked with USEPA to identify problems with the current process, and continues to discuss the steps IEPA will need to take in order to transition from their current process to conducting proper UAAs.

In the longer term, there is still work to be done in terms of rule revisions to the water quality standard for pathogens, including extending the recreational season and broadening protection to additional water-based activities. But for now, Prairie Rivers Network claims victory! We believe that more judicious review and approval of disinfection exemptions, as well as improved communication between water dischargers and waterway users, will provide enhanced protection to the citizens of Illinois. Stay tuned for more information on the disinfection status of the Illinois waterways you recreate in.

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## Prairie Rivers Network is Moving!!



After many years at the McKinley Foundation on the U of I campus, Prairie Rivers Network will be moving to a new home. We would like to thank Peter Fox and Fox Development Corporation for their generosity in providing new office space to Prairie Rivers Network at a significantly reduced price. We would also like to thank Masha Trenhaile for all of her work and help in designing our new office.

The staff and board hope you are able to stop by our new location and say hello:

Prairie Rivers Network  
1902 Fox Drive, Suite G  
Champaign, IL 61820  
217-344-2371  
217-344-2381 fax

# 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 will 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       \$250       \$500  
 Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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, 1902 Fox Drive, Suite G, Champaign, IL 61820

## Want to Help Save a Tree? Send Us Your E-mail!



Please help us be more consistent in our efforts to protect the environment. The use of paper newsletters and renewal letters are very costly to the environment. PRN would like to be able to send you correspondence via email.

If you would like our quarterly newsletter and renewal notices via email, please send us your email address with the header, "I want to help PRN go paperless" to [vnudelman@prairierivers.org](mailto:vnudelman@prairierivers.org).

It's one more way you can make a difference!

### Thank You Bruce Hannon

To honor Bruce Hannon's 40 years of faithful service and guidance to Central States Education Center and Prairie Rivers Network, Janet Gates Conover and Joe Conover have made a generous donation to Prairie Rivers Network.

They would like to acknowledge the outstanding work the Board continues to do, year after year, to make life better for all of us and to improve our water quality and environment.

### PRN Needs Help with Challenge Grant

PRN needs your help in meeting our Michael Scully \$5,000 Challenge Grant. Members who donate \$100 or more for the first time will have their entire gift matched dollar-for-dollar, providing up to \$5,000 in additional funds to support our work. \$

Although we have many generous members, we are not currently at the level we need to be in order to meet this challenge grant. If you have not already renewed your membership, please do so at the \$100 level. If you have already sent us your membership, please consider sending an additional donation for a total of \$100 for the year. Your \$100 donation will be doubled! Thank you. \$

*Return Services Requested*

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**Prairie Rivers Network**

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## Mark Your Calendar!

**Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.**  
**Urbana Park District 100th Anniversary**  
October 14, 2007; 3:30 - 5:00 pm  
Crystal Lake Park, Urbana

**PRN Annual Dinner**  
*40th Anniversary Celebration*  
November 9, 2007

**PRN River Retreat**  
October 27-28, 2007  
csmith@prairierivers.org

### Photo Attributes

Jason Lindsey, [www.perceptivevisions.com](http://www.perceptivevisions.com): pages 1, 2, 6, 7, & border

Ralph Frese: page 2

Paul E. Burd Photography: page 3

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 PRN to receive your contributions.

