

# Prairie River Notes

A publication of Prairie Rivers Network

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The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

Spring 2007

## Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Prairie Rivers Network!

Prairie Rivers Network has been working for clean water and healthy communities for 40 years! We will celebrate PRN's 40th Anniversary at our Annual Dinner on November 9<sup>th</sup>. If you haven't had an opportunity to attend our annual dinner, this is the year to do so. The staff and Board are planning an exciting event that will highlight our accomplishments over the past 40 years and the important work we will be undertaking in the future. PRN's members are the cornerstone of our organization, and we hope you will be able to attend the dinner and share in this exciting time for PRN.

Prairie Rivers Network was established in 1967 by Bruce and Patricia Hannon as the Committee on Allerton Park to oppose the construction of the Oakley Reservoir on the Sangamon River near Monticello, which would have put Allerton Park underwater. This group of concerned and dedicated citizens also fought to stop dams, reservoirs, and other environmentally costly water projects that would have permanently altered the habitats of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

After their successful efforts, the Committee on Allerton Park was renamed Central States Education Center in 1984 to illustrate their statewide focus on empowering people to preserve our natural resources. Under the leadership of John Marlin, CSEC brought together people that crossed political and social boundaries to support a greater common cause: the protection of our natural waterways. Central States Education Center was changed to Prairie Rivers Network in 1998 to more accurately reflect our focus on issues that impact Illinois' rivers and watersheds.



Since its inception, PRN has consistently used grass roots organizing and advocacy to protect the rivers and streams of Illinois. From the successful opposition of dams proposed in the 1970's that would have permanently altered the flow of our rivers, to our current efforts to ensure full enforcement of the Clean Water Act to protect our drinking water and fish and wildlife habitats, PRN works with local citizens to advocate for the protection of our rivers at the federal, state, and local level.

With the support of our members, Prairie Rivers Network has grown to become the statewide leader in river protection, conservation, and restoration. Thank you for being a part of this great conservation tradition in Illinois.

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# Illinois' General Assembly Considers Great Lakes Protection

With the January 2007 introduction of House Bill 375 (HB375) and Senate Bill 50 (SB50), Illinois legislators have the opportunity this session to enact standards-driven, ecosystem-based measures for protecting the finite water resources of the Great Lakes. Both HB375 and SB50 seek adoption of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact ("the Compact"). Unlike other agreements related to protecting Great Lakes water resources, the Compact provides comprehensive, legally enforceable standards for approving new projects proposing large scale water withdrawals of Great Lakes basin waters.

The Compact's primary objectives are to protect, conserve, improve and restore Great Lakes water resources as well as water dependent resources. Recognizing that Great Lakes waters support a variety of uses from recreation to commercial fishing to supporting wildlife, the Compact's standards are designed to maintain healthy, sustainable levels of water as well as the integrity of the basin's varied ecosystems.

Compact provisions ensuring improved protections for Great Lakes water resources include the following:

- identifying the Great Lakes Basin as a single hydrological unit
- requiring each Great Lakes state to inventory state water resources and sources of existing water withdrawals, and to share this information through a common database
- adopting an ecosystem based, adaptive management approach using periodic cumulative assessments of water withdrawal and diversion impacts on basin water resources
- providing enforcement measures via administrative or legal proceedings

A crisis point for Great Lakes Basin water resources is not impending; it is here. It is an interconnected crisis of water supply and water quality. In the Great Lakes Basin, maintaining sustainable water levels is essential to ensure the continued existence of critical water dependent habitats, the stability of Great Lakes economies, clean drinking water, and the integrity of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem.

Awareness of, and support for, the Compact continues to grow.

*(continued on page 6)*

## 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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Brad Walker - Mississippi River Restoration Coordinator  
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Painted Turtle

## Mississippi River Restoration - What is NESP?

Part of PRN's expanding work in the area of Mississippi River Restoration is to press for protection and restoration of wetlands, side channels, and wildlife corridors in forums where decisions regarding planning for and expenditure of restoration dollars are being decided.

One such forum has been presented through the Navigation and Ecological Sustainability Program (NESP) being undertaken by the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for the Upper Mississippi River (UMR). It is a 50-year program intended to upgrade the Locks and Dams system constructed for barge navigation on the UMR and also to increase the level of ecological restoration work in order to repair degraded ecosystems caused largely by over 60 years of operating the navigation system.

The majority of the UMR Locks and Dams system, composed of a series of 29 dams along the 850 river system miles, was built during the 1930's and designed with a lifespan of about 50 years. The locks were originally built to accommodate 600-foot long barge tows, typically hauling agricultural commodities (primarily corn and soybeans) south to New Orleans and other products (iron, fuels, and chemicals) north. The dams, along with other river structures and levee systems, have altered the UMR from a naturally flowing large floodplain river to a series of confined slow flowing lakes. This alteration has had a dramatic and detrimental impact upon the river ecosystems, seriously degrading their ability to provide natural services to humans and other species.

Current usage of the system has fallen from historic highs in the late 1970's and early 1980's. But because of changes in the barge industry, moving to 1,200-foot barge tows, delays at the locks have increased in

recent years, leading to efforts by the Corps to plan for major improvements to the navigation system.



Paddle Boat on Mississippi River

The NESP also includes ecological restoration activities for island building, fish passage, floodplain restoration, water level management, backwater and side channel restoration, wing dike alteration, and island shoreline protection.

One might question why these two separate components, navigation improvements and ecological restoration, are included within the same program. Neither is directly dependent upon the other. In fact, the need for the ecological restoration component is largely the result of the impacts from the construction and operation of the original navigation system, which the Corps acknowledges. The Corps' stated reasoning for combining them is their goal "to achieve an environmentally sustainable navigation system for the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway" and that "the needs for navigation efficiency and

*(continued on page 6)*

## PRN Announces the New Upper Mississippi River Electronic Newsletter

The newsletter is devoted exclusively to the Mississippi River and includes articles on restoration efforts, recreation, and other important issues related to the river.

To get on the mailing list contact Brad Walker at [bwalker@prairierivers.org](mailto:bwalker@prairierivers.org) or download the newsletter directly from the PRN website at [www.prairierivers.org/Projects/Restoration/newsletters.html](http://www.prairierivers.org/Projects/Restoration/newsletters.html)

## Thinking Ahead...the 2007 Farm Bill

As you know there are many important laws that help protect our health, communities, precious natural resources and wildlife. Perhaps one of the most important laws and one that is up for reauthorization in 2007 is the Farm Bill. It has been said, that the Farm Bill should actually be called the Food Bill, or the Food, Environment, and Health Bill because the impacts of agricultural activities are so widespread. The Farm Bill not only deals with regulating and assisting agriculture, but it also determines how we ensure economical food and fiber production, create alternative energy sources, build an agriculture trade balance, and how we support and protect the valuable resources that provide us with clean air, water, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

Some of you, (particularly those of you who are farmers, grew up on farms, or hunt) may be familiar with the conservation programs that the Farm Bill funds. Many of these programs are administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and assist farm operators and landowners in implementing practices on their property that provide,

protect, or restore habitat for fish and wildlife, and protect drinking water resources. However, you may be surprised to hear that the past three Farm Bills combined have put more funding behind conservation programs than any other piece of Federal legislation.

PRN is working with watershed groups, landowners, and state and local agencies to increase the acres of land enrolled in these conservation programs, and we are supporting efforts to increase funding for these valuable programs in the 2007 Farm Bill. We are also working (through our affiliation with the National Wildlife Federation) with the Agricultural Wildlife Working Group (AWWG) that have representatives from a cross-section of national hunting, angling, conservation and wildlife organizations. This group is working to analyze existing conservation programs and their implementation in order to determine needed changes and improvements for the 2007 Farm Bill. If you would like to learn more about the Farm Bill and what the AWWG has to say on this issue please visit:

<http://trcp.brandspringsolutions.com/documents/2007farmbillreport.pdf>

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## Update on Executive Director Search

As we announced in our last newsletter, Prairie Rivers Network's Executive Director, Jean Flemma, left PRN in January to continue to work for environmental protection in Washington D.C., on the staff of the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans. Her leadership during her nearly five years here has brought outstanding growth and increasing respect for our organization.

After Jean announced she would be leaving, Prairie Rivers Network immediately began preparing for the transition and to search for a new Executive Director. During this transition period, Glynnis Collins has been promoted to serve as Interim Executive Director. Glynnis has been a Watershed Scientist with Prairie Rivers Network since the summer of 2005, thus is very knowledgeable of our mission and is very familiar with the staff and programs of the organization. The search committee, consisting of the Board President and three other Board members,

has been conducting a national search for a new Executive Director. The Board has consulted with the staff on prospective candidates. We have had many applications and interviewed several candidates. As we have not yet found the ideal candidate, the Board is considering hiring a search firm to help us identify more potential candidates.

PRN's staff is working closely with the Board to make this an orderly and successful transition, ensuring that our program work continues without interruption. We believe this transition period provides new growth opportunities and will contribute to the long range success of Prairie Rivers Network. We look forward to sharing information on these developments in the coming months.

If you have any questions about the transition, please feel free to contact Glynnis at 344-2371 or [gcollins@prairierivers.org](mailto:gcollins@prairierivers.org).

## Create Your Own Rain Garden

Do you ever think, “what a waste of water!” when you see water rushing out of your downspouts, down your driveway, and into the storm drain? Are you tired of wondering what to do about that wet spot in your yard? Well, installing a rain garden might be the perfect solution!

Rain gardens are shallow, vegetated depressions that capture storm water and put it to work. Benefits of rain gardens include groundwater recharge, sequestration of pollutants, less local and downstream flooding, and creation of wildlife habitat. Because rain gardens are periodically wet, they can foster unique, moisture-tolerant plant species that would not be able to grow elsewhere. Well-designed rain gardens absorb 30% more water than turf lawns and will drain completely within a few days after an average storm.

Research has shown that the intensive installation of rain gardens in neighborhoods can greatly reduce storm water runoff and street flooding. And this is good news for Illinois waterways, which receive untreated runoff from overland flow and storm sewers. Unfortunately, many of our surface waters have been damaged by pollutants in storm water, as well as by scouring from the sheer volume of runoff.

If you decide to create your own rain garden, there are several steps to take. First, you have to decide

where you want the rain garden to be. Next, you have to determine an appropriate size and depth. Then you have to roll up your sleeves and actually dig the garden. Depending on the size of the garden and the number of helpers you have, this step can be completed in as little as a few hours. Once the garden is shaped to your satisfaction, mulch the garden to maintain moisture and curb weeds, and then get plants



Front View of Rain Garden

in the ground. We strongly suggest the use of native Illinois species obtained from local sources. And finally, as with any other landscape feature, you must periodically water and weed the garden so that the desired plants firmly establish themselves.

Prairie Rivers Network has developed a 45-minute slide show presentation that covers why rain gardens are beneficial and the basic steps of design and installation. Our AmeriCorps intern, Mike Davis, is available this spring and summer to give the presentation to interested citizens' groups around the state. We are also developing a rain garden brochure that walks you through the steps of creating a rain garden.

If you belong to an organization that would like to see our presentation, or if you would like to receive a copy of our rain garden brochure and native plant list, contact Mike Davis at [mdavis@prairierivers.org](mailto:mdavis@prairierivers.org), Stacy James at [sjames@prairierivers.org](mailto:sjames@prairierivers.org) or call us at (217) 344-2371.



Work on Rain Garden

## New PRN Logo Receives Prestigious ADDY Award

This February, the local ADDY Awards were held in Peoria. The ADDY Awards are the world's largest and arguably toughest advertising competition, with over 60,000 entries annually. The ADDY Awards recognize all forms of advertising from media of all types, creative by all sizes, and entrants of all levels from anywhere in the world, starting on a local level, then regional, and ending with a national/international competition. On a local level, there are three awards: Silver, Gold, and Best-of-Show.

We are pleased to announce that the new Prairie Rivers Network logo took Gold in the logo category. This will now advance to the regional competition.

Thanks again and congratulations to the wonderful people at Ross Creative+Strategy ([www.rosscps.com](http://www.rosscps.com)), who donated their talents to develop the logo for us. We're very pleased to see their great work recognized by their peers in the advertising industry.

You've been seeing our new logo on baseball hats, on our website, and in our newsletter. We are currently working to update all our materials to incorporate our new look; keep an eye out for them later this year.



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## Great Lakes Protection *(continued from page 2)*

However, because the Compact is an interstate compact (or contract), each Great Lakes state must first enact the Compact into law before it will be a legally enforceable document. As of the end of February, the Compact has been signed into law in Minnesota. In addition to Illinois, Indiana and Michigan also have legislation pending; three of the remaining Great Lakes states will introduce bills during their 2007 sessions.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working with other environmental organizations to educate legislators on the importance of the Compact to the future economic

and environmental health of Illinois and its' residents. We will continue to work with legislators, groups and individuals as the Compact proceeds through both the House and the Senate. As an Illinois resident who cares about clean, sustainable Great Lakes water and a healthy Basin ecosystem, it is essential that you voice your support for Compact adoption to your elected officials.

For more information on the Compact and what you can do, or to schedule a presentation for your group, contact Cecily Smith at (217) 344-2371 or [csmith@prairierivers.org](mailto:csmith@prairierivers.org).

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## Mississippi River Restoration *(continued from page 3)*

ecosystem restoration should be pursued in a single joint purpose plan that addresses both purposes.”

Unfortunately, Prairie Rivers Network feels that the most likely outcome of combining the navigation and restoration efforts is that the status quo will simply continue; ecological restoration will remain secondary to navigation.

The status of the NESP is currently on hold; it was included in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2005 that was not approved by Congress

in 2006. It will most likely be pursued in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. Prairie Rivers Network will continue to work with other organizations to analyze and comment on the Corps' justification for the navigation portion of NESP, and support proceeding with the ecological restoration portions of the program.

For more information on our Mississippi River Restoration project, please contact Brad Walker at [bwalker@prairierivers.org](mailto:bwalker@prairierivers.org).

# 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       \$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, 809 S. Fifth Street, Champaign, IL 61820

## Help PRN Receive \$10,000

### Michael Scully \$5,000 Challenge Grant

We are again 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 to support our work.

**Your \$100 donation could instantly become \$200.**

### McKnight \$5,000 Challenge Grant

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 to support our work.

Encourage a friend to join Prairie Rivers Network at the \$100 level and their donation will be matched by both challenge grants – you can help make a \$100 donation become \$300 towards protecting and restoring Illinois' rivers and streams.

## THANK YOU

Prairie Rivers Network would like to thank all of our donors, volunteers, and partners for supporting us so generously over the past 40 years. PRN has made tremendous progress in protecting our rivers and streams, and we will continue our efforts towards clean rivers and healthy communities.

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*Protecting Illinois' Streams*  
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Champaign, IL 61820  
217-344-2371  
[www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org)

## Mark Your Calendar!

**Earth Day**  
April 21, 2007

**Boneyard Creek Community Day**  
April 21, 2007  
[www.boneyardcreek.org](http://www.boneyardcreek.org)

**Storm Water Patrol Training**  
April 28, 2007  
Downs, IL  
Contact Stacy James at [sjames@prairierivers.org](mailto:sjames@prairierivers.org)

**Rolling on the River**  
August 25, 2007  
[www.rollingriverride.org](http://www.rollingriverride.org)



**It's Our River Day**  
September 15, 2007  
[www.state.il.us/lsgov/cleanwater/iord.htm](http://www.state.il.us/lsgov/cleanwater/iord.htm)

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

Photo Attributes  
Jason Lindsey, [www.perceptivevisions.com](http://www.perceptivevisions.com):  
page 3, 7, and border;  
Prairie Rivers Network: pages 1, 2, and 5.

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.

