

Prairie River Notes

A publication of Prairie Rivers Network

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The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

Spring 2008

Introduction to Our New Executive Director



Prairie Rivers Network is very pleased to introduce our new Executive Director, Stephen Davis.

Steve's early interest in environmental protection led him to pursue a BS degree in Forestry with an emphasis in Natural Resource Management. After receiving his undergraduate degree at Southern Illinois University, he continued his education at the University of Illinois, completing an MA in Environmental Studies with an emphasis on Geology and hazardous materials management.

Steve brings to PRN a sound working knowledge of environmental risk-based management and decision making approaches required under CERCLA (Superfund) and other federal and state environmental laws. As a senior project and program director in both the public and private sector, Steve has led, managed, and resolved many environmental liability projects over the years.

He has been instrumental in helping to refine/improve the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process at federal and state levels and has also participated in federal, state and industry led Natural Resource Damage focus groups.

As an expert in environmental damage assessment Steve has been involved in developing and negotiating Natural Resource Damage settlements in several states. In addition to Steve's NRDA background he has also been involved in several wetland restoration projects including the development of draft isolated wetland regulations for Illinois.

With over 25 years of experience in environmental management, and program and policy development, Steve is ready to lead PRN towards achieving more and greater successes in protecting Illinois' rivers and water resources.

Prairie Rivers' former Executive Director Jean Flemma left Prairie Rivers Network in February of 2007 to work on Capital Hill. Although the search for a new Executive Director took some time, the PRN Board and staff feel that it was worth the wait, and we hope our members will take the opportunity to welcome Steve to our organization. You can reach him at (217) 344-2371 or email him at sdavis@prairierivers.org.

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Rolling on the River

There may still be snow in the forecast, but Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) is already gearing up for the Third Annual Rolling on the River Ride (RRR) on Saturday, August 16, 2008. This fundraising event benefits three Illinois environmental groups: PRN, the Illinois Environmental Council (IEC), and Illinois Stewardship Alliance (ISA).

PRN, IEC, and ISA have set ambitious goals for this year's fundraising, and we hope our supporters will help us meet those goals. RRR provides participants with the chance to protect the environment by getting out and enjoying it. Cycling routes pass through the scenic Fox River Valley, and cross the Fox River, one of Illinois' most beautiful rivers.

This year fundraising incentives include bicycles from REI and Kozy's Cyclery, weekend stays in a Chicago condo or the Homestead

Bed and Breakfast in Plano, and Amtrak tickets. Supporters raising at least \$1,000 qualify to be on a "Green Team;" Green Team members receive Green Team jerseys and can participate in conference calls providing specialized fundraising assistance. In addition, Green Team members are invited to a Friday night reception at the Homestead Bed and Breakfast.

This year's RRR continues to build on the goal of providing a safe and fun experience for both cyclists and non-riders. Favorite features from previous

years, such as live music at all rest stops and canoe trips, will be back. New attractions for the 2008 RRR include afternoon roundtable discussions on a variety of environmental topics and solar gazing (with the Naperville Astronomical Association). The Dickson Valley Camp and Retreat Center will offer outdoor activities ranging from archery to rock wall climbing (free for campers, nominal price for others). As always, event riders will get a free lunch and t-shirt.

Attendance at the 2007 RRR doubled from the event's first year. To accommodate yet another expected increase in cyclists and other participants, the 2008 RRR headquarters

site has been moved to the Kendall County Fairgrounds (a short distance from last year's site). Should it rain, RRR participants won't have to worry about getting muddy this year, as registration and the environmental expo will be housed in a spacious 160' by 50' building.

Become a part of the fun, enjoy rolling hills and rivers, and help PRN continue its efforts to protect our rivers and other habitat for fish, wildlife and drinking water resources for healthy communities. Online registration and donations will be available by mid-March at the event website www.rollingriverride.org. Be a sponsor! Contact event director Marise Forbes at mforbes@ilenviro.org. Have a booth at our expo! Contact Cecily Smith at csmith@prairierivers.org.



... 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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New PRN Rain Garden Brochure Now Available!

Prairie Rivers Network recently completed a new and colorful 4-page brochure called "Rain Gardens for Illinois." Rain gardens are just what they sound like – gardens specially designed to capture and use rain! These gardens differ from normal gardens in their bowl-like shape that pools water in one spot. Typically 3-12 inches deep, rain gardens are placed in wet areas, at the end of downspouts, or downslope of hard surfaces such as driveways or sidewalks. Sand and compost are mixed into the soil to increase the rate at which the pooled water drains into the ground.

But why bother with a rain garden anyway? The reasons are numerous! By allowing water to stay on your property instead of running into the streets, groundwater is recharged, flooding is reduced, and pesticide and fertilizer residues that may be present on your lawn are not washed away. In some communities, storm drains run directly into streams, so reducing the amount of water that goes into sewers helps protect the streams. In other communities, storm drains go to sewage treatment plants, and it costs municipalities large sums of money to treat this influx of water.

The production of this rain garden brochure is part of our effort to endorse green solutions to stream pollution. Our thanks go out to the brochure's many sponsors! The Cities of Champaign, Urbana, and Savoy, as well as the

University of Illinois, all chipped in, as did three Illinois nurseries/garden centers that sell native plants suitable for rain gardens: Possibility Place Nursery (Monee), The Natural Garden, Inc. (St. Charles), and Floribunda Gardens (Oswego). The fantastic illustrations were done by Karie Neukomm, and Michael Jeffords and John Hilty contributed their photographs.

There are three ways you can obtain a free copy of our rain garden brochure:

1. Visit www.prairierivers.org (PDF of brochure is near the top of our Home Page)
2. Stop by our office and pick up a hard copy
3. Attend one of our upcoming rain garden presentations:

April 12, 2008; 10 am
Douglas-Hart Nature Center, Mattoon

April 19, 2008; 2 pm
The Natural Garden, Inc., St. Charles

April 27, 2008; 2 pm
Rock Springs Nature Center, Decatur

May 31, 2008; 10 am
Forest Park Nature Center, Peoria

Biofuels: The Potential Impacts On Our Water Resources

Join PRN for a workshop to learn about the impacts of biofuels on Illinois waters and how you can become an effective participant in the biofuels decision making process.



April 5, 2008 10:00 - 3:00

Location: White Oak Park, Bloomington, IL

Cost: \$15/ person (includes organic lunch)

Workshop Topics

The True Cost of Biofuels * Water Supplies in Illinois

Aquifer Hydrology: An Interactive Lesson

The Impacts of Ethanol Plants on Water Quantity and Quality

How to Effectively Participate in Biofuels Decision making:

A Case Study of One Activist's Lessons Learned

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

Limited to 30 participants!

To reserve your spot or for more info, please visit www.prairierivers.org or call 217-344-2371.

Lobby Day

How often have you thought that your state representative or senator made a bad decision in not supporting an environmental bill, or voted in a way that was not truly representative of their constituents' wishes? On April 2nd, you have the opportunity to participate in one of the most effective and exciting forums for making your concerns truly heard: Lobby Day. Held at the Capitol building in Springfield, Lobby Day attracts a number of environmental groups and citizens who want to speak directly with their elected officials on current legislation.

During every legislative session, literally thousands of bills are introduced into the Illinois House and Senate; in reality, it is impossible for legislators to know every thing about every bill. As a Lobby Day participant, you have the opportunity to give them facts they may not have, present viewpoints they may not have considered, and raise questions they may not have asked.

If you have never visited the Capitol building, spending time in either the Senate or House chamber galleries is an education in itself on legislative protocol. Visiting your legislator's office provides another slice of their working life, but more importantly, talking with your legislator puts a face on the concerns and questions you have about a particular bill.

There are several water resource-related bills being considered in the current session which, if passed, will have a positive impact on water quality in Illinois:

Senate Bill 2307

Amends the Environmental Protection Act to allow local health departments to assist EPA in enforcing performance violations of community-based wastewater systems. Local health departments may also make recommendation to EPA regarding system design, construction and management.

Senate Bill 2407

Requires the Department of Natural Resources to create a one-year pilot project to encourage bulk harvesting of Asian carp in the Illinois River to

increase the number of native fish. An invasive species, Asian carp are voracious eaters that successfully compete with native aquatic species for food, affecting native species' sustainability.

Senate Bill 2860

Prohibits distribution or sale of any cosmetics, toiletries, or fragrances containing mercury by any person. A person who violates this provision is subject to a fine of up to \$500. Also requires that a manufacturer distributing cosmetics, toiletries, or fragrances containing mercury to persons in Illinois must disclose the level of mercury in these products. A manufacturer who violates this provision will be fined \$10,000.

House Bill 4800

Requires all oceangoing vessels engaging in port operations in Illinois to get a permit from the Environmental Protection Agency. Permittees will have to show that their vessel will not discharge aquatic nuisance species, or that if the vessel does discharge ballast water or other waste, that the vessel operator will use discharge technology and methods that are environmentally sound and can be used to prevent the discharge of aquatic nuisance species. Michigan passed almost identical legislation in 2005 which became effective last year.

How do you get more information about current legislation? Go to <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation> and type in the bill you wish to research.

The Illinois Environmental Council and Sierra Club are holding free lobbyist training sessions in the evening on April 1st, and in the morning on April 2nd. For more information and to register contact Chrissy Maher at cmaher@ilenviro.org or 217-544-5955.

PRN members in the Champaign-Urbana area interested in carpooling should contact Cecily Smith at csmith@prairierivers.org or 217.344.2371. In the Chicago area Sierra Club is organizing group seats on Amtrak; for more information contact Jennifer Hensley at 312.251.1680, x3.

The Power of “Regular Folks”

The Issue: Environmentally Harmful Agricultural Drainage Practices

More than 87,000 miles of rivers and streams flow along Illinois’ borders and through its interior. Add to this the fact that 76.3 percent of Illinois land is used for agricultural and it should be no surprise that agricultural practices have a significant impact on the quality of our water resources and river ecosystems.

As early Illinois settlers drained land for farming, they often dredged and straightened existing rivers for drainage channels. Over time, as these rivers try to reclaim their original shape, banks erode, sediment settles, and sandbars try to form. Since the late 1800s, the response to “fix” these changes has been to re-dredge and straighten, and also to remove trees and shrubs adjacent to the waterway. Environmental impacts from traditional drainage maintenance practices include degraded water quality from increased sedimentation, destruction of streambank and river bottom wildlife habitats, and loss of food sources for the wildlife that live in the rivers and on the land.



The photos above show the Spoon River before and after being dredged for drainage maintenance.

The Need: Turning Knowledge Into Practice

There are a multitude of habitats and species supported by river ecosystems and we know much about stream dynamics and how water flow impacts river channels. Using this knowledge, there is an effort that recommends using more targeted drainage maintenance techniques that work with a rivers’ individual hydrology; these techniques achieve results that last longer, are more economical, and reduce the environmental impacts resulting from traditional dredging.

Even with this knowledge, strong cultural and social values within agricultural communities continue to favor traditional methods of drainage maintenance. Illinois’ drainage law, written in the late 1800s, provides no impetus for adopting newer maintenance techniques. The law gives drainage commissioners broad discretion in carrying out

their duties and provides them with the power to levy assessments on landowners (tax landowners) within the district for the purpose of drainage maintenance.

The Means: Citizen Organization and Action

Encouraging drainage commissioners to consider alternative maintenance techniques can happen, but not without participation in the process by local citizens and groups. In Champaign County, citizen organizing on this issue began several years ago when the Salt Fork River Partners objected to the Upper Salt Fork Drainage District’s (USFDD) request for funds to re-dredge a 17-mile stretch of the Salt Fork River. Although the project was ultimately approved, the drainage district agreed to leave a few small segments intact in order to assess project impacts. More recently, another local group, Save Our Trees St. Joseph, and landowners within the USFDD have continued to oppose maintenance planning that does not include consideration of alternative maintenance techniques. The USFDD hired a consultant to design a long term maintenance plan. The plan will likely include recommendations for using targeted maintenance techniques which will hopefully help protect wetlands and other habitat.

In addition, in response to objections filed by landowners, Champaign County Circuit Court Judge Holly Clemons denied the USFDD petition to increase levies 400% for maintenance because the district’s petition did not provide detailed information regarding what work would be done and how much it would cost. Signed on November 30, Judge Clemons’ order is significant in that it notes the court had to “consider environmental factors” in making its decision (although state drainage law requires a judge to consider environmental values, this is not typically cited as a factor in decisions).

As the USFDD example shows, moving towards positive change is not possible without participation and communication by “regular folks”. Over time, as landowners have attended drainage district meetings, or even as they have opposed district plans, establishing and maintaining a dialogue has been the greatest challenge and yet the biggest factor in moving towards better decision making regarding activities that impact our rivers and streams.

To read Prairie River Networks’ press release about Judge Clemons’ decision, visit our website at www.prairierivers.org. For more information about agricultural drainage law in Illinois and how you can get involved, call our office at 217.344.2371 or email csmith@prairierivers.org.

River Defense Fund

If you would like to help Prairie Rivers Network assist landowners and communities protect their local river, wetland, and their backyard from destructive alterations please consider donating to our new “River Defense Fund”. 100 percent of your donation will go towards helping pay legal and consultant fees necessary to protect rivers for the people, fish, and wildlife that depend on them for survival.

If you'd like to support this effort, please make your tax deductible donation out to Prairie Rivers Network and in the memo line, please be sure to write “RIVER DEFENSE FUND”.

On behalf of everyone that lives along Illinois' rivers and wants to protect their beauty for years to come, we thank you for your support!



White Heelsplitter

What can we do about flooding problems?



Rings of ice and snow mark winter flood levels on one section of the Sangamon River.

According to the State Water Survey, Illinois has had an extremely wet winter; this has been the third wettest on record. The precipitation total so far is 11.32 inches, which is 4.63 inches above average. February 2008 was the wettest February since record keeping began in 1895. This has resulted in higher than usual flows in Illinois rivers and streams.

We have all seen the news stories about devastating flooding across the state. Many of us who were spared such hardship suffered inconveniences from flooded basements and streets.

Unfortunately, many human activities have damaged natural features that can store and absorb water during extremely wet weather conditions. The destruction of wetlands, channelizing headwater streams, and replacing natural areas with vast areas of impervious surfaces all exacerbate flooding problems.

While it is unsurprising that severe flooding has come with extremely wet winter weather, the damage and expense incurred by society during extremely wet years could be lessened with a change in our approach to managing rainwater in ways that better mimic natural conditions.

When you support PRN, you are supporting our efforts to address these problems throughout Illinois. We are working to:

- Protect existing wetlands and promote creation of new wetlands.
- Maintain or re-create floodplains in small headwater streams that feed larger rivers.
- Promote sensible design for new development so that rainwater potentially contributing to flooding downstream is captured and slowed. Many existing technologies and design practices can do this.

You can make a positive difference on your own property by considering the following measures:

- Minimize the amount of impervious surface (roofs, pavement) on your property
- Install rain gardens (see article on pg. 3 about our new Rain Garden brochure)
- Install rain barrels to capture and use rainwater
- Use porous pavement
- Install a green roof

For details about these and other steps you can take at home, see: www.uri.edu/ce/healthylandscapes/tips/5.html

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

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.

Help PRN Go Paperless - Save a tree!

If you would like to save paper and receive this newsletter electronically, please send an email to vnudelma@prairierivers.org with the header "I want to help PRN go paperless."



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Mark Your Calendar!

Lobby Day
April 2, 2008
Springfield, IL
Contact: csmith@prairierivers.org

Boneyard Creek Community Day
April 19, 2008
Champaign, IL
www.boneyardcreek.org

Biofuels Workshop
April 5, 2008
Bloomington, IL
Contact: csmith@praireirivers.org

River Rally
May 2-5, 2008
Huron, OH
www.rivernetwork.org/rn/rally

Photo Attributes
Jason Lindsey, www.perceptivevisions.com: border, pg. 7
Prairie Rivers Network: pages 1, 5, 6
Marni Basic: pg. 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 PRN to receive your contributions.

