

# *Prairie River Notes*

**Volume 5, Issue 3**

A publication of **Prairie Rivers Network**  
The Illinois Affiliate of National Wildlife Federation

**Fall 2003**

## **Lessons from a Clean-up**

On Saturday, October 4, nearly 200 volunteers participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Salt Fork River cleanup, headquartered at Champaign County's Salt Fork River Forest Preserve. Many brought canoes or kayaks and collected trash from the river. Others worked from johnboats loaned by the Forest Preserve. Still others cleaned the river's corridor, working their way along banks and floodplains where the river winds through the Preserve and private properties. Landowners opened their properties, providing volunteers access to the river.

When the cleanup ended, participants - muddy from their work - gathered at the Preserve's Walnut Hill pavilion to enjoy refreshments provided by generous Champaign-Urbana businesses and other supporters. Jean Flemma, executive director of Prairie Rivers Network, thanked the volunteers, the donors and the sponsoring groups for making the event a success. Several lucky volunteers won gifts donated by local businesses.

But the volunteers needed no thanks. Trash in the two huge dumpsters parked nearby was thanks enough. The volunteers had left their river and the trails along its banks a cleaner, more appealing place to fish, canoe, or enjoy an autumn walk and a safer home for wildlife. Trash in the dumpster told another story. In the past, before landfills were available, many people used riverside ravines as dumping grounds. Saturday's volunteers collected broken canning jars, rusting farm equipment, rolls of wire fencing, and other trash that still washes from those long-abandoned dumps.

Regrettably some people still consider the river a dumping ground: two muddy overstuffed chairs, a plastic swan planter, 35 used tires, a broken slide set, appliances, toys, and athletic shoes of recent vintage were among the trash collected. It also included live-bait boxes, hundreds of readily recyclable aluminum cans and plastic water bottles, construction materials – particularly pieces of foam insulation board – and dozens of baseballs, some in such good condition that volunteers took them home. Finding this trash in and along the Salt Fork reminds us that all who live and work and play along its corridor and tributaries must care for the river.

Prairie Rivers Network and co-sponsors of the Salt Fork Cleanup – Salt Fork River Partners, the Champaign Chapter of Izaak Walton League, and the Champaign County Forest Preserve – are grateful to the fishing and canoe clubs, students from the U. of I., scouting groups, and individuals young and old and in between who value the Salt Fork River and were willing to give their time and energy to enhance it. Our thanks to each of you.



## Individuals CAN Make a Difference

By James Jozwiak, President, Illinois Smallmouth Alliance (Reprinted with Permission)

As fishermen, we usually get a first hand (down and dirty) look at our river environment. As opposed to driving by or over the water as most people do, we're actually standing in it. This last year I had the opportunity to be involved in helping stop two different pollution events on the West Branch of the DuPage River. The first was in the spring when a new housing development was being built next to a stretch I fish. As I waded upstream, I noticed a huge pump shooting a high volume of water out of a retention pond built for the development and into the river. Heavy rains had filled the pond with red clay, so the developer decided to empty the pond into the river.

I got on the phone to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the woman in charge of this area couldn't have been more professional. She said she may be able to check it out that day. Sure enough, a few hours later I saw her there with the developer and she's putting it on him. I run over and introduce myself, and she continues to tell him what's up. He plays innocent, saying he didn't know it was wrong. She made him take out the pump, install a berm to protect the river from any runoff and bring in hay bales. She also asked me to keep an eye on the development for any more violations.

The second incident occurred at almost the exact stretch and happened later that summer. As I fished one evening a very strong smell of diesel fuel came from the river. On the water you could see a light slick working its way downstream. As I worked upstream looking for the source, it got too dark to continue. I assumed someone had spilled some fuel and it would be gone in a day or so. Well, a week later I get to the river and it's still coming! There is a gas station on this particular corner and I went inside to check out the situation. The guy said the fire department had already been called BY ANOTHER FISHERMAN.



To make a long story short, everyone got involved—the forest preserve, the IEPA, the fire department, the park district, and the oil company. After a month of drilling and testing paid for by the oil company, the conclusion was an old oil drum leaked diesel oil underground and the fuel leaked through the ground and into the river. It was great to see everyone involved act in a professional and judicious manner. I was proud to see another river angler step up and press the issue because I feel I dropped the ball by not acting sooner.

The end result is that we have a cleaner river, and fishermen were involved in helping to bring to light two pollution incidents. Even as individuals we CAN make a difference.

If you would like more information about how to report pollution in your rivers, visit the Prairie Rivers website at [www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org) and click on "Get Involved" and then select "Report Water Pollution." You can also get more information about stormwater retention requirements for construction sites by clicking on "Clean Water Policy" and then selecting "Controlling stormwater pollution."

# Stream Stories

## Summer Day on the Des Plaines

By Beth Wentzel

Last month, I headed north of Chicago to take advantage of a beautiful late summer day and explore the upper reaches of the Des Plaines River with my friend, Doug Chien. Less than forty minutes from downtown, we unloaded the bicycle, canoe, and fishing rod among hundreds of acres of undeveloped marsh, floodplain forest, and prairie in the Van Patten Woods. This lovely destination, protected courtesy of the Lake County Forest Preserve, offers wonderful fishing and canoe access to the Des Plaines River, as well as a great hiking and biking trail along the river.

According to the Illinois Natural History Survey, 51 species of fish, including several bass, sunfish, and northern pike have been found in the Upper Des Plaines watershed. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any of these sport fish in the stretch that we canoed, thanks in part to the over-abundant non-native carp. These languid lunkers root around in the streambed, rendering the waters too muddy for some native fish to thrive and too muddy for anglers to find their favorite fish.

I stowed the fishing rod and turned my attention instead to the diverse plants and wildlife that serve and are served by this slow, meandering stream. The banks and surrounding landscape display an impressive variety of grasses, rushes, sedges, and other wetland plants that offer cover and food to fascinating wildlife. Wood ducks, great blue and green-backed herons, egrets, kingfishers, hawks, and beaver were just a few of the creatures that made their presence known as we floated past. Perhaps the most unexpected hosts on the river were a couple of sandhill cranes who delighted us with comic calls and a synchronized strut across a mudflat.

If you are in or near Chicago and crave a quiet day in a wild place, add the upper Des Plaines River to

your list of sanctuaries. The Lake County Forest Preserve should be applauded for protecting this amazing area from development and providing recreational opportunities all of us can enjoy, whether by foot, pedal, or paddle.

**Getting There:** Take I-94 north from Chicago. Exit on Route 132 (Grand Avenue). Turn left (north) on Route 21, and left (northwest) on Route 41. Turn right (east) on Wadsworth Road, cross the river, and turn right into the parking area. From there you can walk or bike upstream or downstream on the maintained trail. This location can also serve as a put-in for a canoe trip downstream or a take-out after paddling the stretch upstream from the Russell Road crossing. For more information check the Lake County Forest Preserve District website at [www.lcfpd.org](http://www.lcfpd.org).



Doug Chien, Conservation Field Representative for Sierra Club, on the upper Des Plaines River.

*Stream Stories will be a regular column featuring river outings in Illinois. If you would like to share a stream story for our newsletter or our website, send a copy to Jean Flemma at [jflemma@prairierivers.org](mailto:jflemma@prairierivers.org).*



## Solutions in Big Rock Creek

In February, a new pollution permit was proposed to allow the City of Plano, in Kendall County, to more than double its sewage discharge to Big Rock Creek, one of the healthiest streams in the Fox River watershed. However, thanks to new regulations that Prairie Rivers Network helped establish over a year ago, new discharges to high quality streams cannot be permitted unless there are no feasible alternatives that would minimize the pollution.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working with local river conservation advocates and others—Friends of the Fox, the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Environmental Law and Policy Center, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois EPA, and the City of Plano—to explore creative alternatives to minimize pollution. All parties have agreed on several changes to the proposed system, including additional treatment to remove phosphorus and reuse of a portion of the wastewater on a nearby golf course. Funding for

the new treatment plant will be provided by the developers of the new residential areas served by the system.

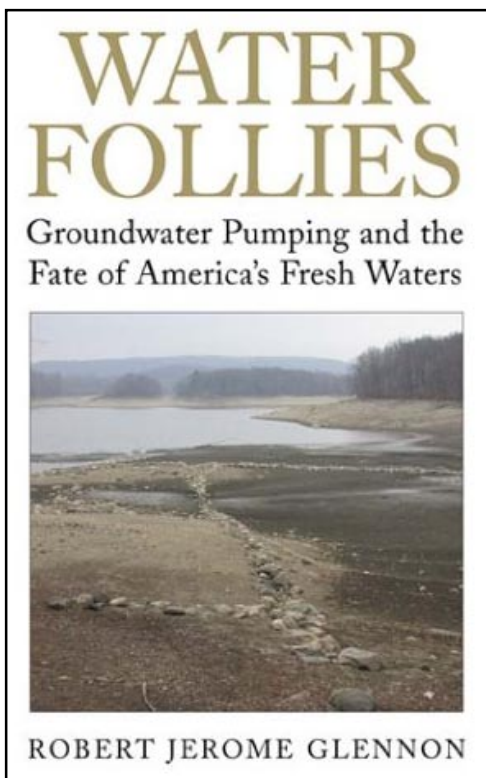
Open discussion between local watershed organizations and dischargers is proving to be an excellent means of finding solutions that are relatively easy to implement and, most importantly, provide stronger protection for our streams from the impacts of development.



## Dinner to Feature *Water Follies*

Prairie Rivers Network's Annual Dinner to be held on November 14 will feature Robert Glennon, the Morris Udall Professor of Law and Public Policy at the University of Arizona law school. A highly regarded scholar in water law and legal history, he is also an active campaigner for vast changes in the ways that we use our water flows and waterways. His highly acclaimed book, *Water Follies* (2002), uses "poignant and sometimes perverse tales," from all across the country, to "tell of human foibles including greed, stubbornness, and, especially, the unlimited human capacity to ignore reality." He will accompany his talk with slides that portray the ecological and human costs of misusing water.

Don't miss this fascinating and provocative speaker. Make your reservations by calling Dixie Jackson or Lisa Fitzgerald at (217) 344-2371.



# *You Can Help Illinois' Rivers*

## **Protect Illinois Wetlands**

In Illinois, we have already lost 85 to 90 percent of our original wetland acreage. The economic value of the state's remaining one million acres of wetlands is \$7.5 billion, according to the Clean Water Network. These areas protect our property from flood damage by absorbing rainwater, filter pollutants out of our water supplies, and provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife. Illinois has 57 rare animal and 11 rare plant species that are wetland dependent for at least part of their lives. Also, wetlands provide habitat for many popular game species of waterfowl and fish.

As the result of a 2001 ruling by the U. S. Supreme Court, more than 150,000 acres of the wetlands that remain in Illinois have been stripped of all protection from unsound development. Moreover, new rules proposed by the White House this year could make matters worse, raising the total acres of unprotected wetlands to 300,000—altogether, almost a third of the wetlands we have left in the state.

In spite of these threats, however, there is cause for hope. We have the opportunity to close some of the loopholes created by federal action through

state legislation, namely the Illinois Wetland Protection Act (House Bill 422). This bill was passed by the House in May and will be considered by the Senate in November. Briefly, it would require a permit from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the destruction of any Illinois wetland that is not federally protected.

**Call or Write today to urge your state senator to vote YES on the Illinois Wetland Protection Act – House Bill 422 – and reduce floods, protect wildlife, and keep our water clean.**



You can find out who your state senator is and obtain contact information online at <http://www.elections.state.il.us/DLS/Pages/DLSAddressCrit.asp>

## **River Saving Tips**

There are many easy things that we can do in our daily lives to protect our local rivers, streams, and watershed. Beginning with this issue, each newsletter will feature a few of them here on our Take

Action page. Following are five basic steps for conserving water at home.



- Repair leaky faucets or toilets right away. Leaks can waste 50 gallons of water a day.

- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth, shaving, or washing dishes. This can save 3-5 gallons of water a day.
- Install low flow toilets to save 3-5 gallons per flush.
- Install water saving showerheads. Older showerheads can waste 20 gallons of water per day.
- Run your washing machine and dishwasher only when they are full.

Information adapted from River Network's Riversmart campaign, [www.riversmart.org](http://www.riversmart.org)

## Drainage Project Raises Concerns

The Upper Salt Fork River Drainage District (USFDD) in Champaign County has filed a petition with the Circuit Court seeking approval to clear-cut streamside trees and dredge the river for approximately twenty-one miles. The \$673,000 price for this environmentally damaging project would be borne by landowners in ten drainage districts and the village of Rantoul, with per-acre assessments ranging from \$18.77 for agricultural land to \$75.08 for commercial property.

Scientific research shows that drainage district management practices such as channelization and clear-cutting—which have not really changed since they were established in the 1870's—can result in a host of negative impacts. Among other things, such activity can degrade wildlife habitat, increase flood heights and decrease base flows, and increase bank erosion. Indeed, habitat alteration is the third leading cause of water quality impairments in Illinois, affecting more than 2700 miles of rivers and streams, according to Illinois EPA.

New studies are showing that these traditional practices are no longer necessary, and other, river friendly practices can be used that balance drainage and environmental needs.

The law requires drainage districts to protect environmental values, including fish and wildlife habitat. Unfortunately, as is the case with drainage projects and the state, the USFDD petition fails to demonstrate how the proposed project meets these requirements.

Currently, the drainage code provides little opportunity for downstream landowners or others concerned about project impacts to participate in the decision making process, and voice their concerns about the impacts on our public resources.

If you would like to learn more and express your support for more accountability and public input in the decision making process that governs drainage projects, contact *Prairie Rivers* today at (217) 344-2371.

## Support River Restoration - While You Shop!

Kirby Foods is again offering Prairie Rivers members and friends a unique way to support restoration of Illinois rivers. Here's how it works: Complete the form below and take it to the service desk of a participating IGA store. Then, each time you shop, show the cashier your IGA *HVC* card. **Prairie Rivers will receive a rebate for a percentage of all your purchases between now and June 30, 2004.** If you registered last year, please **reregister** now.

The program is offered at the following stores:

- Jerry's IGA - Kirby Avenue, Champaign
- Jerry's IGA - Round Barn Road, Champaign
- Jerry's IGA - Philo Road, Urbana
- LeRoy IGA - LeRoy
- Tuscola IGA - Tuscola
- Jerry's IGA - Hoopeston
- Jerry's IGA - Sullivan
- Paris IGA - Paris
- Arcola IGA - Arcola
- Arthur IGA - Arthur

----- *Clip here and return to Jerry's IGA* -----  
**IGA *HVC* Charitable Rebate Enrollment Form**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

HVC Card Number: 4 -100 \_ \_ - \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ - \_

Organization Name: **Prairie Rivers Network**

Organization Number: **055020**



# *Watching Out for Our Waters*

## **Meet Bureau Creek**

At the end of June, the Princeton Community showcased a local natural treasure, Big Bureau Creek. With the help of Prairie Rivers, local sportsmen and paddlers hosted “Meet Bureau Creek Day” to promote the stream as a resource. Several local businesses supported the effort, which featured many conservation kiosks and opportunities for getting wet.

The Big Bureau Creek watershed covers 486 square miles in Lee, LaSalle, and Bureau counties, and the stream itself is 66 miles long. The stream drains directly into the Illinois River near Bureau, Illinois. One segment of the stream is considered by state agencies a Class A stream for fish diversity, and many other segments are considered Class B, a highly valued aquatic resource.

As part of the day’s events, fish sampling was performed on a small segment of the creek, turning up 21 different species, including greater and golden redhorse, banded and johnny darters, madtom, and many shiners and minnows. The range and types of species found suggest that the stream is healthy, and the abundance of small-mouth bass tells us the food web is well developed to support this top-end predator.



Big Bureau Creek possesses a great deal of natural beauty, and is a unique resource. The local group will work in the future to increase awareness about the amenities Big Bureau Creek has to offer.

*Prairie River Notes will feature watershed groups and the watersheds they strive to protect on a regular basis. If you would like us to feature your group, contact Marc Miller at [mmiller@prairierivers.org](mailto:mmiller@prairierivers.org).*

## **Ice Cream Social**

On a warm summer day, members of Prairie Rivers Network gathered at the Lake House in Urbana’s Crystal Lake Park to enjoy our Fifth Annual Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social. The July 13<sup>th</sup> event gave guests the opportunity to meet others who support our work to restore and protect rivers, visit with our Board of Directors and staff, and receive a brief update of Prairie Rivers’ activities.

The afternoon also included plenty of time to enjoy ice cream, cookies, and brownies, to relax on the Lake House deck, and to canoe Crystal Lake – thanks to board member Clark Bullard who provided canoes and life jackets.

Many thanks to all who attended this Fifth Annual event. We look forward to seeing YOU at next year’s Social.

# *River Views*



## ***Prairie Rivers Network***

The Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation

*...strives to protect the rivers and streams of Illinois and to promote the lasting health and beauty of watershed communities. By providing information, sound science, and hands-on assistance, Prairie Rivers helps individuals and community groups become effective river conservation leaders.*

### **Board of Directors**

Eric Freyfogle, <i>President</i>	Urbana
Jon McNussen, <i>Treasurer</i>	Villa Grove
Michael Rosenthal, <i>Secretary</i>	Glencoe
Bruce Hannon	Champaign
Clark Bullard	Urbana
Virginia Scott	Springfield
Charles Goodall	Sidell
Greg Foster	Urbana
Mercy Davison	Congerville
Ward McDonald	Mahomet

### **Staff**

Jean Flemma—Executive Director
Marc Miller—Watershed Organizer
Beth Wentzel—Watershed Scientist
Dixie Jackson—Office Manager
Lisa Fitzgerald—Events Coordinator
Olivia Dorothy—Support Staff
Rob Kanter—Newsletter Editor



# Join Prairie Rivers Network!

## Renew Your Membership!

### **Membership Categories:**

- ☐ \$15.00 Student Membership
- ☐ \$25.00 Basic Membership
- ☐ \$50.00 Friends' Membership\*
- ☐ \$100 River Steward
- ☐ Other

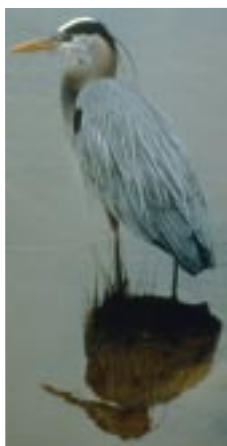
Your Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street, P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email (to receive Action Alerts) \_\_\_\_\_

### **Make checks payable to:**

**Prairie Rivers Network**  
809 S. Fifth Street  
Champaign, Illinois 61820

### **Protect Illinois' rivers and streams:**

Join Prairie Rivers Network — the only state-wide organization in Illinois working solely on river issues. Your donation will help fund our efforts to bring science and technical information to bear in issues affecting all of our state's flowing waters. Your name on our membership roster will add strength to our campaign to restore and protect Illinois' rivers and streams.

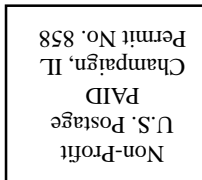


### **Already a member?**

Please hand this membership application to friends, neighbors, or colleagues. Help us meet a challenge issued by the McKnight Foundation: McKnight will match every NEW dollar we raise between now and November 30. This means your donation is worth twice as much to protect our rivers today and in years to come.

All who join **Prairie Rivers** will receive our newsletter and action alerts. Your contribution to Prairie Rivers is tax deductible.

\*Those who join at \$50 or above will also receive a **Prairie Rivers** poster featuring the nature photography of Jason Lindsey.



**Prairie Rivers Network**  
809 South Fifth Street  
Champaign, Illinois 61820  
217-344-2371 fax: 217-344-2381  
[www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org)

## Mark Your Calendar!

### **Prairie Rivers' Annual Dinner**

To celebrate the rivers of Illinois  
The Illinois Terminal Building, Champaign  
Friday, November 14, 6:30 PM  
For reservations: [lfitzgerald@prairierivers.org](mailto:lfitzgerald@prairierivers.org)

### **Sierra Club, Chicago Chapter**

Holiday Hike and Social  
Chicago Botanic Gardens, Glencoe, IL  
Sunday, December 14  
(843)699-0329

### **Greater Midwest Fly Fishing Show**

Drury Lane, Oakbrook, IL  
January 31 - February 1, 2004

### **Bronzeback Blowout 2004**

Illinois Smallmouth Alliance  
American Legion Hall, Elmhurst, IL  
Saturday, February 28, 2004

Photo Attributions  
Jason Lindsey, [www.perceptivevisions.com](http://www.perceptivevisions.com):  
page 5, 9, and borders;  
Lex Lane: page 1, and 8;  
Ralph Freese: page 4.

Prairie Rivers Network is a member  
of Earth Share Illinois. If you  
participate in a workplace giving  
campaign, look for ESI and you can  
designate Prairie Rivers Network to  
receive your contributions.

