Prairie River Notes

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The Illinois Affiliate of National Wildlife Federation

Summer 2003

Pew Commission Finds Ocean Pollution Originates in Illinois

A new report on the status of our nation's oceans finds that one of the biggest pollution problems plaguing marine ecosystems is coming from Illinois and other inland states.

After conducting the first national review of US ocean policies in more than 30 years, the Pew Ocean Commission released its report on June 4, outlining a new national agenda for restoring the nation's oceans. The Commission, which was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and chaired by former Congressman and White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, spent three years traveling the country to learn about challenges facing the nation's oceans and formulating recommendations for addressing them.

While excess harvests of the nation's fish stocks were identified as the most obvious impact on the marine



Because starfish move slowly, they are unable to escape the growing "Dead Zone."

Photo by Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

environment, the Commission found that the greatest pollution threat to coastal marine life is the runoff of nitrogen from fertilized farm fields, animal feed lots, and urban areas, including those found far away from the coasts. Excess amounts of these nutrients cause massive algal blooms that deplete oxygen in the ocean and cause huge hypoxic zones, or "Dead Zones," such as the one in the Gulf of Mexico which was the size of the State of Massachusetts in the summer of 2002, and where little or no marine life can survive.

In short, the runoff from nutrient pollution in Illinois is (*Continued on page 3*)

New Mercury Report Highlights Need for Stronger Clean Air Act to Protect Rivers

On May 28, the National Wildlife Federation and Prairie Rivers Network announced the release of a new report that shows rain falling in northeastern Illinois contains mercury levels that exceed levels the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers safe in surface water.

The report measured mercury concentration in rain samples collected between April 21 and May 2, 2003 at two different sites. One sample station was the Botanic Gardens in Glencoe and the other was in Northbrook at the family business of Prairie Rivers Board Treasurer, Mike Rosenthal. Analysis of the rain samples collected



at both sites showed average levels of mercury that were more than three times the EPA safe levels for surface waters, while high levels were between twenty two and thirty two times the EPA standard.

Mercury is a toxic chemical that is bio-accumulative, meaning it slowly builds up in the tissue of animals and people. The health effects of accumulated mercury include damage to the nervous and cardiovascular systems. While the testing conducted for the NWF report was done in northeast Illinois, mercury contamination is a problem in waters throughout the state. In fact, contamination is so widespread we now have a statewide fish advisory in effect, with levels in fish tissue high enough to pose a risk to pregnant or nursing women, women of child bearing age, and young children.

In addition to these risks to human health, recent studies have shown that mercury is having serious effects on fish and birds. Specifically, mercury has been shown to impact the survival and development of fish and duck embryos. In addition, mercury has been shown to impact the reproduction, nervous systems, and survival of a number of water oriented birds, including terns, loons, and egrets.

(Continued on page 3)

Education Effort in the Vermilion River Watershed

DNR Grant Helps Fund Display

Ever wonder where you can go canoeing, camping or fishing? Or have you been concerned about the quality of your local streams? For residents of the Vermilion River watershed (in the east central part of the state) a new educational display, "Re-discovering the Vermilion Rivers," answers these questions and more.



Created by Prairie Rivers Network and funded by the Conservation 2000 Ecosystem Partnership Program, a program of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the display will travel to libraries, businesses, and events, and is currently scheduled through the end of December, 2003.

With outstanding nature photography and a professional layout by Jason Lindsey of Perceptive Visions, this impressive eight by ten foot display is designed to inspire audiences to reconnect with the natural world around them. An accompanying brochure points readers to recreational areas and gives them steps to take at work and at home to protect their local watershed.

If you would like to have this display for a public event or particular location please contact Marc Miller at mmiller@prairierivers.org, or (217) 344-2371.

Support Needed for Federal Legislation on Invasive Species by Traci Barkley

The introduction, spread, and establishment of aquatic invasive species poses a severe threat to the health of inland water ecosystems in the United States. This problem has been addressed in two past federal initiatives: the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (NANPCA) and the National Invasive Species Act of 1996 (NISA). Though these acts have afforded some progress, they have inadequately addressed the introduction of invasive species in the ballast water of transoceanic ships and intentional introductions for, among others purposes, aquaculture and hobby interests.

The **National Invasive Species Act of 2003, HR1080** aims to correct these problems by establishing a framework and providing funding in the following areas:

- Mandatory national ballast water management program.
- Screening and regulation of proposed importations of live organisms.
- Establishment of a national system of early detection and rapid response allowing federal, state and regional authorities to detect, contain, control, and eradicate aquatic nuisance species upon initial invasion.
- National Dispersal Barrier Program to prevent the interbasin spread of invasive organisms.
- Research supporting the prevention, control, and eradication of aquatic nuisance species.

This important act has the potential to protect us from the severe economic and environmental harm that is likely to result from additional introductions and further spread of invasive aquatic species into our inland waters.

If you are concerned about the impact of invasive species please write, call, or e-mail Illinois Senators Richard Durbin and Peter Fitzgerald and your congressional representative and ask them to support HR1080.

You can find the address and phone number for Senators Richard Durbin, Peter Fitzgerald or your congressional representative by entering your address at www.elections.state.il.us/DLS/Pages/DLSaddressCrit.asp.

Pew Commision (Continued from Page 1)

not just a problem for Illinois' rivers, it is causing problems as far away as the Gulf of Mexico. In fact, while only 7 percent if the water that flows into the Gulf of Mexico comes from Illinois, 15 percent of the nutrient pollution comes from here as well.

To address the problem of nutrient pollution, the Commission recommended that the EPA and states should establish water quality standards for nutrients, particularly nitrogen as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, while Illinois EPA is currently in the process of developing nutrient standards, it is highly likely the agency will not limit nitrogen. Moreover, development of nutrient standards will have little impact on the biggest source of nutrient pollution – agricultural runoff.

To address that problem, the Commission recommended that the Clean Water Act should be amended to control polluted runoff from agriculture, but it is unclear when that might occur. They also suggested that agricultural and other subsidies should be linked to compliance with the Clean Water Act, providing economic incentives to those that reduce their runoff. Also of note, they recommended that Combined Animal Feeding Operations, CAFOs, should be brought into compliance with current requirements of the Clean Water Act that limit wastewater discharges.

The Pew Ocean Commission focuses new attention on the problems of agricultural nutrient pollution that Prairie Rivers and others have long argued must be addressed. It is important to realize that our inability to reduce nutrient pollution here in the Illinois River basin affects not only Illinois' water quality and fisheries, but the health of our oceans and marine life as well. **America's oceans do not start at the coast, America's oceans start here.**

You can read or download your own copy of the Pew Report at www.pewoceans.org.



Mercury Reports (Continued from Page 1)

Coal-fired power plants are the number one source of mercury pollution in Illinois. According to the Great Lakes Regional Air Toxics Inventory, coal burning in Illinois releases 13,000 pounds of mercury a year. Much of this mercury finds its way back into our rivers and streams during precipitation events.

Direct discharges of mercury to our rivers may also be occurring, but Illinois EPA currently does not require pollution dischargers to use available, U.S. EPA approved testing methods for mercury, cadmium, and cyanide—testing methods that are sensitive enough to detect these pollutants at levels that are dangerous to human health or wildlife.

Still, coal burning is clearly the greatest source of this dangerous contaminant. Under current requirements of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. EPA is required to propose new standards for emissions from coal fired power plants by December 2004 that could reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent. There is concern, however, that the Agency requirements will not be sufficiently stringent to achieve these reductions. This concern is bolstered by the Bush administration's proposed "Clear Skies Initiative" that would actually allow mercury emissions from power plants at levels greater than what

is achievable under current Clean Air Act requirements.

Prairie Rivers and other groups will be closely following the proposed rule and the Clear Skies Initiative. The health risks that mercury poses for people, as well as fish and wildlife, make it abundantly clear that emissions must be reduced as quickly as possible. In addition, Prairie Rivers will continue to press Illinois EPA to require polluters to monitor their discharges using U.S. EPA approved technology that would enable them to determine whether mercury is being directly discharged at levels dangerous to human health or wildlife.

Copies of the NWF mercury report can be obtained from Prairie Rivers Network by calling (217) 344-2371.

If you are concerned about the health and environmental hazards posed by mercury contact your congressional representative and U.S. senators Richard Durbin and Peter Fitzgerald and encourage them to oppose the Clear Skies proposal. You can identify your congressional representative by going to www.elections.state.il.us/DLS/Pages/DLSaddressCrit.asp and typing in your address.

Celebrating Our Rivers: Kickapoo Paddle Festival

This spring Prairie Rivers Network co-sponsored the "Kickapoo Paddle Festival, A Celebration of the Middle Fork River" to showcase some of the great natural resources of Illinois – our rivers and streams – and several ways to enjoy them, especially fishing and canoeing.



The Paddle Festival took place on May 17th and 18th at Kickapoo State Park near Danville. The idea for a central Illinois paddlesports expo got its start as staff and volunteers from Prairie Rivers and the Central Illinois Chapter of the Illinois Paddling Council met with representatives of Kickapoo State Park.

The event was sponsored jointly by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Conservation Foundation, Kickapoo Landing, Prairie Rivers Network, the Campus Recreation Outdoor Adventures Program from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and WildCountry outfitters of Champaign.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, which promotes June as Illinois Rivers Appreciation Month, is also interested in upcoming rivers activities throughout the year and would like to help promote such events. Contact Lynette Mick at (217) 524-4162 or email at lmick@dnrmail.state.il.us for more information.

Participants enjoyed canoe and kayak manufacturer demonstrations, conservation kiosks, guided tours, featured speakers, paddling a replica birchbark canoe with voyageurs, children's fishing clinics, live music, and raffle drawings. Thanks to the many volunteers and organizations that helped make this event a success!

Audit of Prairie Rivers' Revenue and Expenses is Complete

In compliance with state and federal requirements, Prairie Rivers Network has secured an audit of our 2002 financial records. The audit shows that between January 1, 2002, and December 31, 2002, Prairie Rivers' revenue and expenses were as follows:

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Revenue:

Donations	\$ 73,507
Grants	\$103,585
Interest & Dividends & Realized Gain	\$ 1,613
Services, Honoraria	\$ 300
Sales	\$ 1,721
Miscellaneous	<u>\$ 129</u>
Total Revenue	\$180,855
Expenses:	
Salaries & Benefits	\$ 92,402
Payroll Taxes	\$ 7,072
Direct Program Costs	\$ 28,164
Fundraising	\$ 17,419
Outreach and Education	\$ 4,042
Depreciation	\$ 4,537
Total Expenses	\$153,636



While Prairie Rivers successfully secured the funding needed to support our programs and staff in 2002, the audit highlights a concern: too much of our funding is coming from grants. Advisors to not-for-profits suggest that heavy dependence on grant funding can cause problems for an organization when grantors shift their program priorities. Of more immediate concern, the poor economy has caused a decline in the value of Foundation endowments and many have greatly reduced their grants.

Prairie Rivers' staff and board are determined to gain more support from individual donors as a means of safeguarding our financial future and the future of Illinois' rivers. In coming months we will undertake various initiatives to meet this goal. If you have suggestions for ways to reach new members or gain support from individuals, please call Jean Flemma or Dixie Jackson at 217-344-2371 or email us at iflemma@prairierivers.org or djackson@prairierivers.org. Thanks!

Illinois General Assembley - End of Session Legislative Wrap-up

Two pieces of legislation important to rivers were considered in the final days of the General Assembly.

Fees for Water Pollution Control Permits Pass — A Major Victory for Illinois Waters

Authority for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) to assess fees for water pollution control permits and deposit those fees into a new Clean Water Act fund that will be used to carry out the Agency's clean water activities was included in the budget that was passed in the final hour of the legislative session. River advocates have been working for many years to see these fees put in place.

Illinois is one of forty-three states with delegated authority from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act to administer a water pollution control permit program. These permits, known as National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, are required before anyone can discharge pollution to any waterbody of the United States.

Although it costs millions of dollars each year to process, issue, and monitor compliance with NPDES permits, Illinois was one of only eight states that did not charge fees for issuing them. As a result, Illinois taxpayers were subsidizing the degradation of the rivers and lakes they valued for drinking water, wildlife, and recreation.

The NPDES fees bill that passed, modeled after SB 1060 introduced by Senator Susan Garrett, will eliminate subsidies for polluters and provide more than \$26 million

annually for implementation of the NPDES permit program. It is designed to improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat and fishing, and to continue IEPA's work to protect Illinois' waters from the harmful effects of water pollution.

Wetlands Bill Passed by House, Needs Support in Senate

In the waning hours of the legislative session, the Illinois House approved HB 422, the Wetlands Protection Act, by a vote of sixty five yes, forty eight no, and four present. The bill, introduced by Representative Karen May, is considered by many to be the most important piece of environmental legislation taken up by the General Assembly in several years.

Passage of the bill was an important victory for the protection of Illinois wetlands and for a broad coalition of environmental, conservation, civic, and sportsmen's groups, that fought against powerful business and agricultural interests opposing the bill.

Senator Terry Link is sponsoring the bill in the Senate, where the deadline for passage will be extended until the Veto Session in November, giving the Senate the opportunity to consider the bill over the summer.

Passage of the bill in the House was made possible by many visits, calls, letters, faxes and e-mails to legislators urging their support. Similar effort will be needed to help the bill pass the Senate. To identify your state senator go to www.elections.state.il.us/DLS/Pages/DLSaddressCrit.asp.

Watershed Groups Continue to Grow

The best spokespeople for the rivers and streams of Illinois are the residents of the communities where those rivers are found. Prairie Rivers Network helps individuals and community groups become effective river conservation leaders in their local watershed.

In recent months, we have worked with **Friends of Kickapoo Creek** in the Sangamon River watershed to
highlight the benefits of the stream to the community. We
are also working with the **Salt Fork River Partners** to
expand their outreach and education efforts and to develop
strategies for responding to potential problems in the
watershed.

In addition, Prairie Rivers has recently worked with interested individuals to start two new groups. The first, **Bureau Creek Watershed Group**, held a "Meet the

Creek" event, on June 28th to highlight the natural and recreational value of Bureau Creek, a tributary of the Illinois River.

The second group, made up of Vermilion County residents, is tentatively named **Friends of Vermilion Rivers**, and is in the initial stages of identifying goals for the group.

In future newsletters, we will spotlight the work of these and other watershed groups around the state who are working to protect Illinois' rivers and streams.

Many areas of Illinois still need watershed organizations to act as a voice for the local rivers and streams. If you are interested in an existing group, or would like to form a new group, please contact Marc Miller at (217) 344-2371 or mmiller@prairierivers.org.

Kickapoo Creek Protected from Excessive Pathogens

... but your backyard stream may not be!

Last summer, Prairie Rivers Network began working with a newly formed organization, Friends of

Kickapoo Creek, to strengthen a proposed pollution permit for releasing treated sewage from a new development into a small stream. One of the concerns was that Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) did not plan to require disinfection of the waste before it was dumped into the creek. Without disinfection, waste may carry harmful pathogens into streams, potentially spreading disease. This proposed discharge of pathogens was particularly objectionable because Kickapoo Creek, just half a mile downstream of the sewage treatment plant, is already identified as impaired due to fecal contamination.

The Friends of Kickapoo Creek and other area residents provided critical input to convince IEPA that people recreate downstream of the waste water treatment plant and that the failure to disinfect was, therefore, unacceptable. The modified permit, containing some disinfection requirements, was finally issued in May. While concerns about other aspects of the permit remain, this was a significant improvement.

Unfortunately, pathogen problems are not unique to Kickapoo Creek. There are approximately 1000 facilities in Illinois that discharge human waste to waters without disinfecting. Illinois regulations allow this exemption for any stream that is either too difficult to access or too shallow for summer pool parties. However, we all know that these factors do not render streams less attractive to children.

Prairie Rivers Network continues to work throughout the state to ensure that children are not put at risk by this policy, but we need more local advocates to join us. Call Beth Wentzel at Prairie Rivers (217-344-2371) to address pathogen problems near you.



Hickory Creek Threatened by More Sewage

Stream advocates are challenging Illinois EPA's proposal to allow a large increase in the amount of waste a sewage treatment plant in New Lenox will dump into Hickory Creek. This Will County stream is one of the finest in the Des Plaines River Basin, and it continues to offer good smallmouth bass fishing.

The creek is beginning to show signs of stress, though, after decades of development in the watershed. At least nine sewage treatment plants discharge waste to streams in the watershed, contributing to the creek's substantial nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. These nutrients cause excessive algae growth, smother streambeds and cause low oxygen in the water at night. This in turn threatens smallmouth bass and other fish, aquatic insects, mollusks, and crayfish that live in Hickory Creek.

Hickory Creek and nearby communities are at a critical juncture. The watershed faces intense development pressure as the next frontier of Chicago suburban growth. At the same time, it is clear that to ensure that Hickory Creek remains an asset to these communities rather than a nuisance, nutrient pollution must be reduced, and provisions must be made to protect the creek from impacts of development. Sound planning and creative solutions will be necessary.

Fortunately, Hickory Creek has a strong new local advocate, the **Livable Communities Alliance**. Dedicated to preserving and creating healthy, livable communities in Will and southern

Cook Counties, the organization recognizes the role of healthy streams in its vision for healthy communities.

With the help of the federal Clean Water Act, which pohibits IEPA from issuing pollution permits for new discharges that will contribute to stream impairments, Prairie Rivers Network will work with Livable Communities Alliance, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Sierra Club, anglers, and others to demonstrate to IEPA that Hickory Creek cannot take any more pollution.



Pollution from Construction Sites Can Harm Rivers and Wildlife You Can Help Prevent It!

Summer has arrived, and with it, the peak construction season. You may have seen construction projects underway in your neighborhood and noticed a lot of soil coming off the site. This is bad for rivers and wildlife. Soil tracked into roads or washed off the construction site ends up in our streams, smothering streambeds, destroying habitat, and muddying the water, making it difficult for fish to see their prey. Even soil that is washing down storm drain ends up directly in our rivers with the same harmful impacts.

Existing law requires that soil be contained on site to the extent possible and that construction sites may not harm streams. To comply with the law, each construction site greater than one acre must develop and implement a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan that describes the steps the contractor will use to prevent soil from leaving the site. Unfortunately, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) does not review these plans or monitor sites frequently to ensure that plans are followed. Therefore, it is up to local citizens to ensure that these laws are enforced.

If you are concerned about runoff from a construction site request a copy of the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan from the developer. These documents **must** be made available to citizens, and unless you request it, there is no guarantee that one has been developed.

You can also conduct your own spot inspections of the site. When driving past, pull safely to the side of the road, and check each of the questions found on the attached list. Clip this list and keep it in the glovebox of your car. Do not trespass and please ensure your safety first.

Buying or Selling a Home:
Help Prairie Rivers Network when you do!

If you use the services of Ward & Associates Realtors, a sponsor of Prairie Rivers Network, and mention our name, they will donate 20% of the profits per transaction to us! Buying and selling would equal two transactions. Our special thanks to Debby Auble at Ward & Associates for this generous offer and to any of you that take advantage of it. Call Debby at (217) 355-1000.



Construction Site River Protection Checklist

- Is the construction site exit covered with coarse gravel to prevent dirt from
- entering the street?

 Are there silt fences (usually black fabric fences) installed around the
- site?
 - Do these silt fences appear to be cap-
- turing all of the soil?
 - Are there ponds on the site to capture water and settle soil before water runs
- off the site?
 - If there are storm drains near the site, are there filter material or barriers around them to prevent sediment from
- entering?
 - Has some vegetation been left on the
- construction site?
 - Is bare soil on the site covered with
- straw, mulch, or fabric?
 - If there is a stream nearby, is the water downstream of the site as clear as the

If you an experience in a single in any of these questions then the site may not be stabilizing soil and preventing runoff.

Report it to the IEPA field office near you. The field offices and contact information can be found on the

IEPA's website at http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/field-ops/wpc-fos.html.

If you need assistance or have any questions, contact Beth Wentzel at Prairie Rivers Network (217) 344-2371.

Take an Elected Official Canoeing

Most of us would agree that spending time on a river can be relaxing and enjoyable—even an inspiration. In May, Prairie Rivers Network counted on the Salt and Middle Forks of the Vermilion River to deliver a positive experience as they hosted members of the Champaign and Vermilion County Boards on two separate canoe tours.

As expected, the outings gave a fresh perspective to the county board members who attended, as they saw firsthand how beautiful these rivers truly are. Among the board members and other guests were volunteers with experience in natural resources and paddle sports who gave both structured and impromptu lessons about rivers and the wildlife that depends upon the flowing waters.

What provides inspiration is usually a personal matter, but Prairie Rivers had some assistance in this area after each of the canoe tours. For the Champaign County guests, an immature bald eagle and an osprey circled overhead at the Salt Fork River Partners cookout. In Vermilion County, guests were able to tour the Kickapoo Paddle Festival and see the benefit of river-related recreational tourism.

Canoe trips like those on the Salt and Middle Forks will help to ensure that issues affecting rivers are on the agendas of various local governments, and help to promote recreation, habitat improvement, and riparian corridor protection. We encourage others to take their elected officials on a journey down their local stream.

We also extend a sincere thank you to all the Salt Fork River Partners and Prairie Rivers Network volunteers who helped shuttle and feed guests and guide them down the rivers. We could not have done it without you.

"Other roads do some violence to nature, and bring the traveller to stare at her; but the river steals into the scenery it traverses without intrusion, silently creating and adorning it, and is as free to come and go as the zephyr."

Henry David Thoreau A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers



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.

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Join Prairie Rivers Network!

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 on 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.

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Prairie Rivers Network

Mark Your Calendar!`

Prairie Rivers' Ice Cream Social

To honor our donors Lake House, Crystal Lake Park, Urbana, IL Sunday, July 13, 2003, 2:30 - 4:30 PM For reservations: djackson@prairierivers.org

Paddling in the Park

A canoeing and kayaking festival Twin Lakes Recreation Area, Palatine, IL Saturday and Sunday, July 26 & 27 For info: Donna@paddlinginthepark.com

4th Annual Flatwater Classic

A canoe and kayak race Chicago River Sunday, August 10 For info: (312) 939-0490 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

6th Annual Salt Fork River Clean-up

To enhance this fine recreational stream Salt Fork River Forest Preserve near Homer, IL Saturday, October 4, 2003, 8:30am - 12:30pm For info: jflemma@prairierivers.org

Prairie Rivers Annual Dinner

Friday, November 14, 2003 Details to come later

receive your contributions.

