

Prairie River Notes

Volume 4, Issue 4

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

Winter 2002

New Executive Director Named

Prairie Rivers Network is very pleased to announce the hiring of a new Executive Director, Jean Flemma. Jean will begin work at Prairie Rivers in January, 2003.

Jean is superbly qualified for the work she will undertake here at Prairie Rivers. She has a BA in Economics from Middlebury College and a MMA in Marine Policy and Natural Resources Management from the University of Washington. She went to Capitol Hill in 1992 to join the staff of the Marine Fisheries Committee. Currently she is a senior member of the professional staff of the U. S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources, where she is responsible for advising and representing the committee's ranking minority member on issues relating to fisheries management, endangered species, wetlands, coastal management, hydropower licensing,



Prairie Rivers' new Executive Director, Jean Flemma

Photo credit: Chris Main

water allocation, open space acquisition, and easements.

In her interviews with our board and staff, Jean demonstrated an impressive understanding of the issues that Prairie Rivers addresses and an appreciation of the role that grassroots groups play in dealing with those issues. It was equally clear that she will bring energy and commitment to her work here at Prairie Rivers.

Jean replaces Robert J. Moore, Prairie Rivers' director over the past five years. Rob left our staff in August to take a position with the Conservation Law Foundation in Vermont.

We look forward to Jean having the opportunity to meet with you and others who work with us on river issues. If you are in Champaign, please stop by our office to welcome her.

The Clean Water Act Promise Must Be Kept!

2002 marked the 30th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act. However, even as we are celebrating the tremendous successes of this important law, an attack looms on the horizon.

Clean water is essential to our health, our economy, our environment, and our way of life. With citizen involvement, the Clean Water Act has been overwhelmingly successful over the past three decades in protecting and restoring streams and improving the quality of life for all Americans.

According to USEPA's regulatory agenda, the Bush administration intends to adopt a rule in 2003 to limit the waters that will be protected under the Act.

The Clean Water Act affects us personally, and its protections should not be diminished.

(Continued on 3)

Photo credit: Jason Lindsey
www.perceptivevisions.com

Salt Fork Damage Update

by Beth Wentzel, Watershed Scientist

In July, high concentrations of ammonia from the Abbott Power Plant of the University of Illinois passed through the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District's Northeast Treatment Plant causing tremendous damage to the Saline Branch and Salt Fork of the Vermilion River. The Department of Natural Resources estimated that over 110,000 fish were killed; more than 40 miles of river were damaged.

Since the incident, the Attorney General of Illinois filed a complaint against the University and the Sanitary District, the University and the Sanitary District have proposed measures to avoid recurrence of the incident, and resource agencies have continued to assess the damage done to the river systems. Prairie Rivers Network continues to push for substantial enhancements in the Saline Branch and Salt Fork watersheds to mitigate the damage inflicted. We are also researching the incident and the proposed avoidance measures to determine whether some of these measures can be formally adopted around the state to ensure that the disaster is not repeated elsewhere.

Annual Dinner a Resounding Success

One hundred fifty members and friends of Prairie Rivers Network from across the state joined staff and board members for Prairie Rivers' Annual Dinner held in Champaign on November 15. Highlights of the evening included the introduction of Jean Flemma, Prairie Rivers' new Executive Director (See page 1), and remarks of special guest, Scott Russell Sanders. Among the nation's leading environmental writers, Sanders held guests spellbound as he read from his works on land, rivers, and people.

In addition to the introduction of our new Executive

Director, the evening marked another milestone for our organization. Bruce Hannon, one of our founders 35 years ago and outgoing president of the board of directors, was honored for his outstanding leadership and dedication to the organization.

The event also celebrated Prairie Rivers' work in the past year to restore and protect the rivers of Illinois. Eric Freyfogle, board president, described Prairie Rivers' goals for 2003 and invited guests to support the goals with gifts and pledges. Guests responded generously, surpassing the \$30,000 goal the board had set for the event.

"Guests responded generously, surpassing the \$30,000 goal..."

NPDES Fees Bill

by Marc Miller, Watershed Organizer

With budget problems looming over the 2003 state legislative session, this year may offer the best chance in four years to pass the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) fees bill.

NPDES permits are required under the Clean Water Act and administered by Illinois EPA. Illinois is one of very few states that indirectly subsidize water pollution by issuing NPDES permits to industry, developers, or municipal sewage treatment plants *free of charge*, while Illinois taxpayers pay millions of dollars each year to process, issue, and monitor compliance with these permits. The result is that Illinois taxpayers subsidize the degradation of their rivers and lakes.

The fees bill was proposed in each of the past four years by Prairie Rivers Network and other conservation organizations, but unfortunately failed. However, the need for additional revenues in 2003 could further justify the passage of the fees bill by reluctant lawmakers.

Last year's legislation proposed a fair fee structure to address the size of the discharge, the source for the discharge (including large construction sites), and the specific kinds of pollutants that would be released. The legislation would create the Illinois Clean Water Fund to administer the NPDES permit program and possibly fund beneficial projects and additional monitoring.

At a time when Illinois is facing enormous budget shortfalls, and when needs for water quality and river conservation are so great, it makes sense to stop subsidizing



Photo credit: Jason Lindsey
www.percipivevisions.com

It costs less to pollute a stream than to go fishing or paddle a kayak in Illinois!

water pollution and charge fees for these permits.

Additionally, the current subsidization seems unfair to Illinois citizens because they are charged license fees to fish or paddle in our streams. It costs less today to pollute a stream than to go fishing or paddle a canoe in Illinois!

Prairie Rivers Network will track progress of the proposed legislation this spring and let you know when to take action for Illinois' rivers, lakes, and streams. Stay tuned!

Prairie Rivers Network reviews many permits each year to ensure that the state agency enforces the law and protects the chemical and biological integrity of our streams.

Building a Sustainable River Movement: Help Wanted!

When historians look back on this period, a great deal will be written about the resource that we value and cherish – water – and how we confront the problems of scarcity, sustaining the diversity of life, or the very chemical quality of our waterways.

It will be noted how the watershed movement changed the dominant view of acting within political boundaries to finding sustainable and scientifically sound solutions on the watershed scale.

Although this change has taken hold – with thousands of volunteer-driven organizations nationwide – the truth remains that much more needs to be done, and that we need to increase the number of voices and organizations representing rivers and streams.

Prairie Rivers Network will be working over the next two years to create a number of new watershed groups, as well as increase the capacity of existing groups.

We will be asking our members to consider whether their home watershed needs a local voice, and we will be offering our help with the start-up of local groups. We have celebrated a recent success in the Sangamon River watershed with the formation of the Friends of Kickapoo Creek (McLean County).

Time and again, it is proven that an organization of river conservationists can be more effective than individual voices. Ordinary citizens who care about rivers and wildlife make up most watershed groups, and they are typically active only when a threat or opportunity arises. Groups also offer the benefit of spending time with those who share your interests and values.

If you would like to be put in contact with others in your watershed, please contact our watershed organizer, Marc Miller, by phone or email (217/344-2371 or mmiller@prairierivers.org)

The Clean Water Act Promise Must Be Kept! (Continued from page 1.)

The administration hinted at its intentions on September 19th, in Congress, when the Bush administration “questioned” the law’s coverage of non-navigable tributaries of navigable rivers, intermittent streams, man-made waterways, and wetlands. The Bush loophole could allow pollution to be dumped into small streams, degrading them and flowing on to impact larger creeks and rivers.

The details of the proposal are not yet available, but if the administration is successful, there is no guarantee that the small streams that flow past our homes, in which our children play, will continue to be safe for human contact. This could be the worst in an ongoing series of Bush Administration attacks on clean, healthy waters. We are preparing to challenge such attempts to weaken our most vital tool for river protection.

These actions are serious and will have far reaching implications for the health of our Nation’s waters. **The Clean Water Act promise must be kept!** Please write to President Bush, Senators Durbin and Fitzgerald, and your representatives in Congress, and tell them to keep the Clean Water Act intact.

Lend your voices today! Stand up for your cherished small streams and wetlands.

The Bush Record on the Clean Water Act:

January 2001 Placed more protective sewer overflow regulations on hold. These rules have yet to be enacted.

May 2001 Allowed wastes to be used to bury waters in the U.S. – a rule originating from the mountaintop mining exemption and drawn to include other industry sectors.

October 2001 Reversed the “no net loss” wetlands policy, reducing mitigation requirements.

August 2002 Proposed to redesign the backstop measure of water restoration plans for polluted waters (TMDLs) that is used when other measures fail. The Bush administration wishes to weaken standards that classify polluted waters and curtail federal oversight of state implementation.

September 2002 In testimony before Congress, administration officials questioned the Clean Water Act’s coverage of headwater streams, non-navigable streams, man-made waterways, and wetlands.

"DEAD ZONE" UPDATE

by Doug Daigle, Mississippi River Basin Alliance

Mapping this summer by Dr. Nancy Rabalais of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium has shown that this year's hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico has reached a new record size. The 8,500 mile extent of hypoxia in the lower water column reaches from the active Mississippi River delta well into Texas' waters, and exceeds record sizes set last year and in 1999.

We can, however, find good news on a couple of fronts. The first is seeing how far the national effort to address hypoxia has come since 1999, with consensus across the basin about the seriousness of the problem and the need to address it contrasting sharply with the contention that prevailed just a couple of years ago. The second is the continued commitment demonstrated by federal agencies and state governments to deal with the problem, even though these efforts haven't yet acquired the momentum needed to turn things around.

The Action Plan submitted to Congress at the end of the Clinton administration provides a framework for the federal and state governments to work together to reverse the trend we're seeing in the Gulf. The Mississippi River Basin Alliance is working with its partner organizations, other stakeholder groups, state governments, and federal agencies to see that the Action Plan is put into effect. We've teamed with the Louisiana Governor's Office to pull together a sub-basin committee of lower river states to help implement the Action Plan, in partnership with federal agencies, farm groups, and others, and hope that a similar effort will begin upriver as well.

While the Action Plan has not yet garnered full funding, one of its major vehicles – the new Farm Bill – has promised record spending on USDA conservation programs. Promises don't always pan out, however, when competition for federal funds is intense. It's vital that the public let its representatives know that they want full funding for conservation programs in the Farm Bill, along with continued enforcement and implementation of the laws and programs that can clean up our waters and improve the health of the river system and the communities that depend on it.

Former Director Rob Moore named a national Clean Water Act Hero

Prairie Rivers is proud to announce that the Clean Water Network named Robert Moore one of thirty national Clean Water Act heroes as part of the celebration of the Clean Water Act's 30th anniversary. This award honors individuals who have made powerful contributions to the protection and restoration of America's rivers, lakes, wetlands, and coastal waters.

The 30th anniversary of the Act provides an opportunity to reflect on how far we've come and how far we have yet to go to achieve our goal of clean and safe water. In many ways, the Act truly did turn the tide on water pollution. We drastically reduced the percentage of American waters deemed unsafe for fishing and swimming, invested billions in sewage treatment plants and other technologies, and cut the rate of wetland loss dramatically.

Moore took over leadership of Prairie Rivers Network – Illinois' only statewide river conservation organization and Illinois affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation – in 1997 and proceeded to change the clean water debate in Illinois. For example, he decided to take on the Clean Water Act point source permit system. Clean Water Act pollution permits – known as NPDES permits – regulate the amount of pollution discharged by sewage treatment plants and industrial facilities. Although often viewed as technical and overwhelming, these permits are a central tool in water protection.

"If you want to clean up water, you'd better look at the permits allowing pollution," Moore advises.

In August 2002, Moore moved to Vermont to become the Lake Champlain Lakekeeper, but the work he initiated on clean water policy and permit review continues at Prairie Rivers Network with a crack team of staff, board members, and volunteers.



Former Executive Director Robert Moore holds up a white heelsplitter mussel which he found while sampling on the Sangamon River.

Asian Carp Pose Serious Threat to Illinois Rivers

by Traci Barkley, *Prairie Rivers Network* volunteer

Like people around the world, Illinoisians rely heavily on nonnative plant and animal species for food and fiber. Just think about it and I'll bet you come up with a few in your diet and daily use. No need for much concern though since state laws governing agriculture pests are relatively comprehensive. However, the case is quite different when it comes to nonindigenous species not related to agriculture, where state and federal laws provide only limited protection. Continuing the long-practiced approach of "innocent until proven guilty," current regulations for the aquarium, aquaculture, bait and pet trades allow the importation of exotic species that can cause serious problems for native species through competition for food and habitat and the introduction of disease and parasites. Once introduced, these exotic species can devastate ecosystems, generating headaches and costs for resource managers, and negatively affecting industry and recreation. Unfortunately, users and caretakers of Illinois waterways are learning this firsthand as two Asian carp species, purposefully introduced, are spreading rapidly through the state's waters.

Originally imported from China and stocked in aquaculture facilities to improve water quality, bighead carp (*Hypophthalmichthys nobilis*) and silver carp (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*) have since invaded Midwestern rivers by escaping from ponds, and possibly through deliberate release. Reproducing populations of both of these species are now present in most rivers of the Upper Mississippi River System, including the Illinois River. Bighead carp are currently moving up the Illinois River at an estimated rate of 40 miles per year and were last sighted within 50 miles of Lake Michigan.

Bighead carp and silver carp are filter feeders, and are capable of consuming large quantities of a variety of planktonic organisms. There is potential for enormous damage as these species will likely, in large numbers, deplete plankton populations required for food by native mussels, larval fish and some adult fish, including the paddlefish and gizzard shad. The introduction and spread of these two species pose a direct threat to biodiversity in Illinois rivers and the Great Lakes.

Currently, research on the potential impacts and possible control strategies is being conducted in Illinois. In order to predict the potential impacts of bighead carp in

the Great Lakes, researchers from the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) Great Rivers Field Station are examining the extent of dietary overlap between bighead carp and native filter-feeding fishes in the Mississippi and Illinois River systems. They are also reviewing nine years of Long Term Resource Monitoring Program (LTRMP) data on environmental factors and bighead carp collections to determine what conditions might favor the reproduction and spread of this species in the Upper Mississippi River System.

Researchers from the INHS Illinois River Biological Station are assessing the effectiveness of electric weirs and acoustic bubble curtains in preventing the migration of bighead and silver carp through a series of controlled experiments in hatchery raceways. This project aims to test the potential effectiveness of the Demonstration Electric

Barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal in preventing the carp species from entering the Great Lakes.

A direct evaluation of the Demonstration Electric Barrier is being conducted by a team of scientists from the University of Illinois and the INHS Lake Michigan Biological Station through the use of a combined radio and acoustic telemetry system. Common carp, with surgically implanted transmitters, are released in the canal near the electric barrier and their movements are subsequently tracked with the use of antennas and underwater hydrophones. If

fish are detected passing through the barrier, there is an opportunity for the operational settings of the electrical field to be optimized, improving the effectiveness of the barrier in preventing the spread of nuisance fishes between the Mississippi and Illinois River Basins and the Great Lakes.

Identifying future invaders and taking effective steps to prevent introduction and establishment of species already introduced pose enormous challenges to those working in the fields of ecology, agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, pet trades, conservation, international commerce and state and federal regulation. The recent listing by the State of Illinois of the snakehead and the black carp as injurious species under the Lacey Act are moves in the right direction. However, a more coordinated, comprehensive federal framework of laws, regulation policies, and programs are essential in order to prevent future harm from the importation of harmful, nonindigenous species.

Photo credits: Jason Lindsey
www.perceptivevisions.com



Exotic species can alter elements of the food chain.

Prairie Rivers Training on Strengthening Water Pollution Permits

Do you want to protect your favorite streams from excessive pollution? Are you interested in ensuring that existing clean water laws are appropriately implemented and enforced? If so, *mark your calendars and plan to spend January 18th* with Prairie Rivers Network and other advocates at a one-day course on using the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program to protect rivers.

Prairie Rivers Network's Watershed Scientist, Beth Wentzel, and former Executive Director, Robert Moore, will lead the course based on *Permitting an End to Pollution*, the handbook we recently produced in collaboration with Clean Water Network and River Network. Participants will take home a copy of this manual and learn how to use it to understand, critique, and develop comments to improve NPDES permits.

The training will be held on Saturday, January 18, 2003, from 8:45 am to 5:00 pm in Hinsdale, Illinois (a western Chicago suburb). The training is free, and river conservation advocates are encouraged to attend. To register, contact Marc Miller, Prairie Rivers' Watershed Organizer at 217/344-2371 or by email at mmiller@prairierivers.org.



Permitting an End to Pollution will be used to train river conservationists to review these important water pollution control permits.

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, *President*

Jon McNussen, *Treasurer*

Michael Rosenthal, *Secretary*

Bruce Hannon

Clark Bullard

Virginia Scott

Laurene von Klan

Charles Goodall

Greg Foster

Mercy Davison

Ward McDonald

Ellyn Bullock

Urbana

Villa Grove

Glencoe

Champaign

Urbana

Springfield

Chicago

Sidell

Urbana

Congerville

Mahomet

Champaign

Staff

Jean Flemma—Executive Director

Marc Miller—Watershed Organizer

Beth Wentzel—Watershed Scientist

Dixie Jackson—Office Manager

Justin Glessner—Support Staff

Jeanne Shemonic—Events Coordinator

Looking for a holiday gift that will please all year?

Give a gift membership in Prairie Rivers Network!

.....

For just twenty-five dollars you can give a family member or friend a one-year membership in the only state-wide organization working to restore and protect Illinois rivers. Each gift membership will include a year's subscription to our quarterly newsletter, action alerts, and invitations to Prairie Rivers' events such as our annual river cleanup. And your gift will help support Prairie Rivers' work to restore and protect Illinois rivers all year long.

To give a gift membership, simply check the membership category you want, supply the recipient's name and other requested information, and send the form with your check to Prairie Rivers. We'll mail a handsome hand-written river gift card to the new member and a receipt to you for your tax records. Thank you!

Membership Levels:

- ___ \$100.00 River Steward
- ___ \$50.00 Friends' Membership
- ___ \$25.00 Basic Membership

Send gift membership to:

Name _____
Street, P.O. Box _____
City _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Send receipt to:

Your Name _____
Street, P.O. Box _____
City _____
Phone _____
Email _____



Make checks payable to:

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

*Photo credits: Jason Lindsey
www.perceptivevisions.com*

Prairie Rivers
Network
809 South Fifth Street
Champaign, Illinois 61820
217-344-2371 fax: 217-344-2381
www.prairierivers.org

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Champaign, IL
Permit No. 858

Best wishes for the Holidays and the New Year!
From the Staff and Board of Directors of
Prairie Rivers Network