

# Prairie River Notes

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## US EPA Pledges Improved Enforcement of Clean Water Laws

### Sees Central Role for Groups Like Prairie Rivers Network

by Kim Knowles, Water Resources Specialist

The times they are a-changin'. At least in word, we've come a long way from the days when W's EPA refused to recognize carbon dioxide as a pollutant and issued rules that made it easier to mine coal by blasting off mountain tops and filling streams and valleys with the refuse. In a breath of fresh air, US EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson publicly admitted last summer that the EPA is not doing enough to deliver clean and safe water to our communities. Administrator Jackson directed her staff to boost enforcement actions against serious violators and to provide more information on the EPA web site in a form that is easily understood and useable.

With kudos to environmental groups like Prairie Rivers Network, she declared, "We have seen that when information is made public, it can be a powerful tool to help improve the environment directly. An informed public is our best ally in pressing for better compliance."

Is this a new world, or just lofty language? Has US EPA delivered? Well, so far so good. At Prairie Rivers we've already noticed an improvement in the information made available by US EPA on facilities that pollute our waterways and on the compliance records of those facilities. It is now easier to find the physical location where pollution enters our streams and lakes as well as information on the health of our waterways and, in some cases, on-line copies of the permits that govern pollutant discharges. We've been asking the Illinois EPA for better access to such information for years.

It seems US EPA aims to deliver on its enforcement promise as well. According to our partners in Tennessee, EPA recently brought enforcement actions against two Clean Water Act violators demanding penalties of \$68,000 and \$335,000 respectively!

This naturally begs the question, what about Illinois? Although Illinois' enforcement program received a favorable review from US EPA in 2007 compared to other states, according to Ms. Jackson, US EPA "needs to raise the bar for clean water enforcement programs" because "we have a long way to go" to clean and safe water. With 56% of the miles of streams studied in Illinois still not meeting public health and environmental goals set nearly four decades ago, we think there's room for improvement in the enforcement program.

Illinois facilities are doing well in self-reporting (89% submitted the required monitoring reports in 2008) and the IEPA is resolving some of the problems informally, but the state appears loath to impose penalties.

In 2008, Illinois levied \$0.00 against CWA violators though 82% were in some form of non-compliance. In contrast, Louisiana imposed penalties of \$401,000.

Prairie Rivers Network has been steadily increasing the pressure on IEPA to hold violators accountable and requesting that penalties be imposed to send a clear message that the law must be observed! We are expanding our own enforcement work and will pursue legal action against repeat offenders.

While admittedly there's still "a long way to go" to clean and safe water, let's take a moment or two to recognize and celebrate the progress at US EPA. Salud, Lisa Jackson.



Lisa Jackson

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# Welcome Upper Sangamon River Conservancy

by Scott Hays, President of USRC

A new group has formed to preserve, maintain, monitor, and promote appropriate public use and awareness of the Sangamon River in Champaign County. The volunteers of the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy (USRC) care deeply about the Sangamon River. The organization engages in activities such as river clean-ups and monitoring and provides a local resource for anyone interested in finding out more about the Sangamon River.

The USRC's mission includes education, recreation, and stewardship. The educational mission involves informing the public that the upper Sangamon River is a true resource; a healthy, mostly pristine river that deserves attention and protection. With much of the land along the riparian corridor in thick deciduous vegetation, the river in this area flows under a rich and diverse canopy of Sycamore, White Oak, Silver Maple, Honey Locust, and several other species. As part of Illinois Riverwatch, first year invertebrate monitoring by USRC members indicated that the water in the river is in "very good" health. In addition, this area of the river has been identified as an area of "ecological significance" by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Anyone who spends an afternoon on this part of the Sangamon will easily see why.

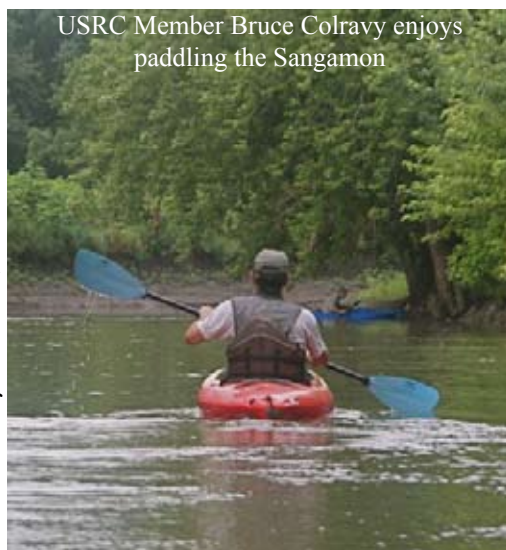
Part of the recreational mission is to promote the Sangamon River to local residents seeking a unique natural experience. Conveniently, a number of public lands along the river in Champaign County provide public access. These include the Sangamon River Forest Preserve near Fisher, Lake of

the Woods Forest Preserve, Barber Park (a municipal park in Mahomet), the "Open Space Lands" just south of Mahomet at the SR47 bridge, and Riverbend Forest Preserve. While these access points make it relatively easy to put together shorter or longer Sangamon River trips, nearly all are in need of various types of improvements to make the river more easily and more safely accessible. The USRC will work with public officials to facilitate such improvements.

The stewardship mission involves preserving and maintaining the health of this vital resource and includes keeping the river free of garbage and trash. While USRC members strive to leave the river cleaner than we found it with every outing, we also schedule specific trips with garbage pick-up as the goal. River monitoring and improving river access points are also major components of the stewardship mission. Finally, as part of the stewardship mission, the USRC has developed ten Sangamon River "Best Practices" for people who visit the Sangamon River.

The USRC, still relatively new, has plenty of volunteer opportunities for new members. These opportunities include helping with clean-ups, river monitoring, staffing information booths, helping with the web site, and many more. Members can even act as volunteer photographers and submit river photography to the website. Mostly, however, the USRC simply hopes to make more local residents aware of the local treasure that is the Sangamon River in Champaign County.

For more information, or if you want to get involved, visit [www.sangamonriver.org](http://www.sangamonriver.org).



USRC Member Bruce Colravy enjoys paddling the Sangamon



*... 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, PRN helps individuals and community groups become effective river conservation leaders.*

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# 50 Years of Atrazine

by Sarah Scott, Support Staff

Atrazine, one of the family of triazine herbicides, has been widely used to control broadleaf and grassy weeds in agriculture and lawns. First approved for use in 1959, it is widely used in corn growing; over 75% of corn crops nationwide are treated with atrazine every year. Swiss-based Syngenta, one of the manufacturers of atrazine, touts that it is an economical form of weed control that prevents crop damage, and that it also has positive environmental effects because farmers can spray atrazine instead of tilling the soil to reduce weeds, thus preventing soil erosion and reducing carbon dioxide gas from tractors.

However, the use of atrazine is not without controversy. In 2005, atrazine was banned in the European Union; this was part of a larger ban on chemicals that have a high tendency to leach into water. Atrazine does not degrade quickly in the environment - it persists for months in soil and can last for a year or more in water. As it degrades, it forms other toxic chemicals.

There are concerns that atrazine contamination of drinking water may be linked to low birth weights, menstrual problems and cancers in people. High doses of herbicides including atrazine are linked to frog deformities and intersex frogs, specifically male frogs that develop female organs. Atrazine is a restricted-use pesticide in the U.S. (only certified people can apply it), and it is not labeled for use within fifty feet of a well or sinkhole, and within sixty-six feet of any point where any field surface water runs off into streams or rivers. Interestingly, there are no restrictions on other points along streams, and drainage ditches are sometimes excluded from these regulations.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set a limit of 3 ppb (parts per billion) for atrazine in drinking water, but does not require timely notification of residents when this limit is exceeded. The EPA has limited monitoring resources; of thirty monitoring sites around the state, most are sampled only once every five years, consisting of one sample taken before atrazine application and two afterwards. The problem is that this monitoring may not occur when atrazine levels are likely to be highest, such as after a heavy rain that increases levels in streams through run-off.

Since drinking water systems may only test for atrazine levels yearly, the EPA requires that the manufacturers of atrazine test more frequently. However, a recent study shows that utilities are not getting the information they need from these companies. Recently it was revealed that atrazine levels in Piqua, OH were measured by Syngenta at 59 ppb in April 2005, yet local authorities were not notified. The EPA commented that this level of exposure was safe and that Syngenta was not required to release this information.

There are also concerns about long-term, low level exposure to the chemical, especially for pregnant women. Atrazine levels may be mostly “safe” but at certain developmentally-important times during pregnancy, fetuses may be at higher risk for birth defects. In a recent study by Purdue University, levels at 0.1 ppb were linked to low birth weights.



Recently, Holiday Shores Sanitary District in Madison County, IL and forty-two other water districts, sued atrazine-makers Syngenta and Growmark to cover the costs

of removing atrazine from drinking water. Water utilities commonly face the problem of atrazine removal—most water utilities do not have adequate filtering systems. EPA recommends a charcoal filter; most utilities are using sand filters as charcoal upgrades are cost-prohibitive. The lawsuit contains six counts: 1) trespass onto the property of the water district; 2) nuisance to the property of the water district; 3) negligence; 4) strict liability; 5) violation of the Illinois Environmental Protection Act; and 6) violation of the Illinois Water Pollutant Discharge Act. The lawsuit will not affect whether atrazine continues to be manufactured and used—that decree would have to come from Congress. Prairie Rivers Network is watching this lawsuit with interest; given the burden atrazine causes for water treatment systems, we expect future regulations will further restrict the use of this harmful pesticide.

To learn more about atrazine, you can read a recent New York Times article:

[www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/us/23water.html?pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/us/23water.html?pagewanted=1)

To see the specific details of the lawsuit, go here:

<http://documents.nytimes.com/atrazine-lawsuit#p=1>



## 2009 Accomplishments and Goals for 2010

### Raising Awareness of River Health Issues and Fostering River Stewardship



*In 2009, Prairie Rivers Network:*

- Trained over 100 people from 60 organizations to be effective advocates for clean water and healthy rivers.
- Successfully collaborated with partner organizations to convince Governor Quinn and Illinois Legislators to pass the Green Infrastructure bill (S.B. 1489) and to increase funding for upgrading wastewater treatment and drinking water facilities to \$160 million in 2010.
- Partnered with Illinois Public Media, U of I College of Media, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and others, to engage youth in the outdoors and to document their experiences in the media.
- Educated 250 people in NE Illinois, Bloomington and Champaign-Urbana areas on proper disposal of unused medications to keep these products out of rivers and streams where they harm fish and enter drinking water supplies.
- Trained partners in the Mississippi River Collaborative on how to monitor pollution from factory farms-- attendees came from as far away as Oregon and New York State.
- Worked with partners to hold the 4th Annual Boneyard Creek Community Day in Champaign and Urbana; 150 people participated in cleaning up this urbanized local stream.

*Looking forward: Our goals for 2010*

- Train and support even more river advocates in Illinois.
- Partner with the Illinois Natural History Survey to engage and educate communities in Central Illinois with

a rivers-themed Traveling Science Center and River Discovery courses that will reach thousands of people.

- Engage Governor Quinn and Illinois legislators on important clean water and healthy rivers issues, especially the need for increased funding for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

### Protecting Clean Water



*In 2009, Prairie Rivers Network:*

- Strengthened water pollution permits for 12 facilities, requiring them to reduce pollution entering our rivers and streams.
- Negotiated design improvements for a large sewage treatment plant that will significantly reduce pollution released by the facility.
- Appealed water pollution permits for two coal mines that would pollute drinking water and harm river life.
- Worked with State Senator Michael Frerichs to push IEPA to provide better oversight of the dozens of coal waste disposal ponds across Illinois similar to one that collapsed in Tennessee in December 2008.
- Fought a variance for Springfield's City Water Light & Power that will allow them to dump more than 10 times the legal limit of boron into the Sangamon and Illinois Rivers.

- Fought proposal for a new dam and reservoir in Springfield, IL. There are less environmentally-damaging and less expensive ways to meet the city's water needs.
- Collaborated with Carle Clinic Association in Urbana and Fox Fresh in Aurora to develop permanent drop boxes for unwanted medications. This alternative to flushing reduces pollution caused by medications, which typically are not removed by sewage treatment plants.
- Launched initiative aimed at reducing pollution from factory farms by pressing for better oversight and more transparency from state agencies, empowering local citizens to act in their communities, and by monitoring streams near several Clinton County facilities for pollution problems.

#### *Looking forward: Our goals for 2010*

- Launch major initiative to decrease harmful effects of our reliance on coal in Illinois; we will work with partners to fight for less water pollution and habitat destruction from mining, processing, and burning coal in power plants and from disposal of toxic coal ash.
- Highlight flagrant violations of the Clean Water Act, press for state action to resolve them; if necessary, take legal action to force polluters to obey the law.
- Track new \$320 million federal Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative to ensure that expenditures align with initiative's goal of reducing water pollution in the Mississippi.

## **Protecting Healthy Stream Flow and River Habitat**



#### *In 2009, Prairie Rivers Network:*

- Partnered with IDNR and local stakeholders to plan for habitat restoration in the Vermilion River Conservation Opportunity Area as part of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.
- Convinced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to consider water quality and habitat benefits when prioritizing restoration projects along the Mississippi.
- Watchdogged enormous hydrokinetic power project proposed for the Mississippi River to install 180,000 turbines in the river between St. Louis and Louisiana to ensure that this untested technology does not harm precious resources.
- With a broad coalition of partner organizations and local municipalities, defeated an irresponsible bill promoting tax subsidies for floodplain development; we expect to see the bill again in 2010 and will fight to keep development out of the floodplain.
- Contributed to discussion of regional water supply planning for the Mahomet aquifer in Central Illinois in several public forums.
- Helped improve and strengthen agriculture conservation practices promoted by the Illinois Natural Resources Conservation Service.

#### *Looking forward: Our goals for 2010*

- Review Illinois water law, to determine how it can be improved to provide protection for healthy stream flows and fair resolution of conflicts in the event of water shortages; build a coalition of allies who share this goal.
- Expand our push for more and better habitat restoration along the Mississippi.
- Partner with IDNR, landowners and land managers along the Vermilion River to restore and protect habitat through the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.
- Advocate for more river restoration in other high priority areas as defined by the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.





## PRN Annual Dinner

We all hear what the river says, and what it says leads us to commit ourselves to protect its waters, fish, and plants, for now and for the future. Carolyn Raffensperger, Executive Director of the Science and Environmental Health Network, delivered this compelling message to over 200 guests during her keynote address at Prairie Rivers Network's twelfth Annual Dinner.



Members Libby Johnston and Bill and Glennie Hamel visit with PRN founder Bruce Hannon

Early in the evening, Executive Director Glynnis Collins presented a list of new PRN initiatives that will result in cleaner water, engaged river stewards and diverse stream ecosystems. PRN will be: 1) advocating for and ensuring stringent water protection from pollution caused by all phases of coal mining operations, including coal waste disposal; 2) developing, in partnership with the Illinois Natural History Survey, a traveling science exhibit and curricula for adult River Discovery courses that will engage thousands of students, parents and community members throughout Illinois; and 3) taking initial steps to achieve needed reforms to protect in-stream flows for fish and other river-dependent wildlife.



Chris Main and Cora Musial Enjoying the evening

PRN raised over \$40,000 at this year's dinner. Thanks to all our guests for joining and supporting our efforts to keep Illinois waters clean and our rivers healthy. A big thank you goes to PRN member Bruce Semans; through his generosity increased donations from current PRN members or donations

from new members at the dinner were matched dollar-for-dollar. If you were not able to attend the dinner, Bruce's challenge match will continue and apply to all increased and new member donations PRN receives through December 31, 2009. Thank you Bruce!

We also raised over \$1,500 from our raffle; prize winners took home a kayak, painted rain barrel, rain garden consultation with our own Stacy James, and prairie planting consultation with prairie restoration expert Jamie Ellis. Thank you also to Robin Kearton and Tom Faux of the Flexible Flyers for their engaging music during our reception hour.



Erin Knowles and Cari Vanderpool, winners of the painted rain barrel raffle prize



Visit [www.PrairieRivers.org](http://www.PrairieRivers.org) for more pictures and links to our community partners' webpages.

## Support Prairie Rivers Network

### There Are Many Ways to Give:

**Cash** Grain Stock Bequests

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Raffle Prizes Annuities Trusts

### Recruiting New Members

Life Insurance **Living Will**

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Have underperforming stocks? Put them to good use by donating them to Prairie Rivers Network.

Yes, I want to help protect our rivers and streams.

☐ \$25 Student Membership

☐ \$50 Basic Membership

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☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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E-mail (to receive Action Alerts): \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your support!*

All members receive our newsletter and action alerts. Your contribution to PRN is tax deductible.

Make checks payable to: Prairie Rivers Network, 1902 Fox Drive, Suite G, Champaign, IL 61820

## Congratulations Lucy Bannon - PRN's Volunteer of the Year



Lucy Bannon, PRN's 2009 Volunteer of the Year, started with PRN last year when she moved to Champaign to attend the University of Illinois. Lucy is majoring in environmental studies in the School of Earth, Society and Environment. Sharing outdoor experiences, such as canoeing with her family, sparked Lucy's early interest in the natural world and protecting the environment. She's been an enthusiastic addition to our office, always ready to take on assigned tasks, big or small.

Thanks Lucy!

## Congratulations Gary Mechanic - PRN's 2009 River Steward

Gary Mechanic, PRN's 2009 River Steward, is the essence of a River Steward. For over twenty years, he has dedicated his time to increasing public awareness of the need to conserve Illinois' rivers. Currently serving as vice-president of the Illinois Paddling Council, Gary developed the organization's WaterKeepers program. WaterKeepers monitor the health of their selected stream, and advocate for its protection. Gary was a leader in developing the "Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trails Plan" which stretches over 500 miles of rivers and streams. He is one of Illinois' strongest advocates for improving public access to rivers for the benefit of paddlers and others who enjoy their beauty.





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Happy Holidays

### Have you joined PRN's RiverWeb yet?

You can receive via e-mail our monthly electronic newsletter (e-news) about volunteer opportunities, clean water issues, and river conservation news within our state, as well as Prairie Rivers Network activities.

We also periodically send e-mails to members in specific geographical areas when we need your help in protecting your local river or stream.

We are asking all of our members with e-mail addresses to please sign up today and help us grow our online network. Just go to [www.PrairieRivers.org](http://www.PrairieRivers.org) and click on:



You can also become a fan of Prairie Rivers Network on Facebook.



### Photo Attributes

Jason Lindsey, [www.JasonLindsey.com](http://www.JasonLindsey.com) - pg 4 and border; EPA - pg 1; USRC - pg 2; tpmartins' photostream, Flickr.com - pg 3

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

