

Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

COVER CROPS: AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR REDUCING WATER POLLUTION

BY STACY JAMES

In Illinois, crop production ranks 2nd on the State's list of top contributors of water pollution. Thousands of stream miles and lake acres have too much nitrogen, phosphorus, atrazine, and sediment pollution. Fertilizers, pesticides, and topsoil leave farm fields during storms and snowmelts via overland runoff or underground tile drainage systems. Signs that there are too many agrichemicals in the water include algal blooms, loss of natural plant and animal life, and fish kills. Too many Illinois waters suffer these conditions, and the effects travel downstream too; Illinois cropland is a major source of the pollution that causes the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Unfortunately, state and federal water pollution laws can do little to stop this type of pollution; farming activities are largely exempt from them. And other environmental policies, like the Farm Bill and the Energy Independence and Security Act, unintentionally encourage this pollution by fostering market conditions that favor cropping systems that are particularly polluting (such as tile drainage and corn-after-corn rotations).

As we work towards better policies, we also must come up with effective solutions that can be adopted on farms relatively easily by a critical mass. Fortunately, we already know that there are a number of practices that farmers can adopt which significantly reduce runoff of agrichemicals from farm fields. One of the practices getting the most attention right now is the planting of cover crops, which have the potential to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution from farm fields by half.

In brief, cover crops are planted in the fall as a winter crop and "cover" the soil during a time of year when fields are normally bare. Farmers get a number of benefits from cover crops, including healthier soil, production of livestock forage, and reduced erosion. Winter is a time when agricultural

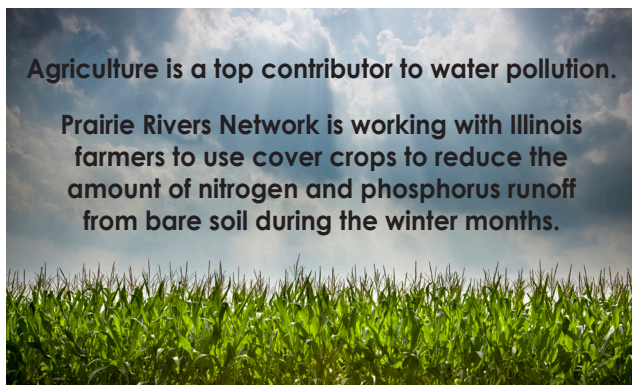
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fields can shed a disproportionate amount of topsoil and polluted runoff, so having a living crop in the field is a great way to reduce water pollution.

Realizing cover crops are a rising conservation star, Prairie Rivers Network co-sponsored a cover crop workshop in January with other members of the Lake Vermilion Water Quality Coalition. The workshop took place in Danville and was attended by approximately 60 people. Several participants already had some experience with cover crops and were there to learn more, while others were yet to take the plunge.

In February, we promoted a second cover crop workshop in Princeton. Princeton is located in the Big Bureau Creek Watershed, where we are working with the Friends of Big Bureau



Agriculture is a top contributor to water pollution.

Prairie Rivers Network is working with Illinois farmers to use cover crops to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from bare soil during the winter months.

//continue on page 5//

GREETINGS FROM GLYNNIS

As spring slowly takes hold in Illinois, I am writing to you from London, which is experiencing an unusually cold spring – March will be the coldest they've had in 50 years. This follows on the heels of severe flooding and unusual snowfall during the winter. (Unusual snowfall in London is a bit different from unusual snowfall in Illinois – I was astonished that my children's school was closed for two days because of a two-inch snowfall!)

As is the case in the US, extreme weather here in the UK means that climate change is a hot topic. Unlike in the US, politicians (backed by popular support) have committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But, financial worries are taking a toll and there is much talk now about whether the fragile economy can afford such measures: the artificial conflict between a healthy economy and a healthy environment rears its head!

Another issue that is making the news in the UK as well as in the US is hy-

draulic fracturing, or fracking (see our article on p 7) to extract natural gas from underground shale deposits. The UK imposed a moratorium on the practice over a year ago, mostly because of concerns about seismic events that can be triggered by the process. The moratorium has just been lifted because several new mandates related to seismic impacts will be imposed on all fracking operations. Unfortunately, I haven't seen much press coverage in the UK of the water and air pollution concerns that are front and center in the Illinois and national debate.

It's been interesting to follow the discourse on environmental issues in a different country, and to see the influence a different culture and different institutions have. And, as interesting as that is, I'm looking forward to returning to Illinois this summer.

Wishing you some time to stop and smell the spring flowers,



YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED IN SPRINGFIELD

ENVIRONMENTAL LOBBY DAY IS MAY 2nd

Prairie Rivers Network and our partners will be talking to legislators about our important environmental initiatives.

Please join us!

This is a great chance to meet your staff at Prairie Rivers Network, learn about lobbying, and network with other activists.

Most importantly, our legislators need to know that clean water and healthy rivers is important and that you expect them to protect our environment. They need to here from YOU!

If you are interested in talking with legislators or visiting with fellow river advocates, please e-mail Glynnis at gcollins@prairierivers.org.

prairieriversnetwork

Prairie Rivers Network champions clean, healthy rivers and lakes and safe drinking water to benefit the people and wildlife of Illinois.

Drawing upon sound science and working cooperatively with others, we advocate public policies and cultural values that sustain the ecological health and biological diversity of water resources and aquatic ecosystems.

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SUNRISE COAL SETBACK FOR HOMER RESIDENTS

BY BRIAN PERBIX

Defeat stings; especially when snatched from the jaws of victory.

On March 11th, 2013, Prairie Rivers Network and our friends at Stand Up To Coal were saddened that the Homer Village Board reversed its earlier decision, and voted to sell potable water and sewer services to Sunrise Coal - a subsidiary of Hallador Energy - for their proposed mine in southwest Vermilion County.

After more than a year of organizing, with hundreds of local farmers and residents turning out to meetings, going door-to-door, collecting petition signatures, and talking to their elected officials, we had hoped that our message of protecting clean water and healthy communities would prevail. It didn't. But, ultimately, we still hope we will.

Although the loss in Homer is a setback, it only marks the beginning of a larger process that will determine whether or not coal mining will return to the watershed of the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River.

Access to potable water was the first hurdle Sunrise needed to clear, but by no means the biggest. Still needed to open a coal mine are:

- Raw water to wash coal – and lots of it. We still don't think they can get enough, whether from the Salt Fork River, area groundwater, or other sources without triggering detrimental ecological consequences and threatening other water users.
- More coal – the current reserve is a patchwork, and holdout farmers and landowners are not willing to put their livelihoods at risk by signing a lease.
- More land – because township roads can't support mine trucks, there is no way to get the coal to market without the mine acquiring more land to build a railroad spur.
- Permits from Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Environmental Protection

Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Mines Safety and Health Administration. None of these have been issued, and all can be appealed.

Along with our partners, we will continue to work with community members to insist that local decision makers put clean water and healthy communities first. We extend our deepest thanks to all our members, volunteers and friends who have supported this work so far, and look forward to a successful future.//

Want to help?

Join Prairie Rivers Network at our coal organizing retreat next month:

When: May 17 – 19

Where: Camp Ondessonk, Ozark, IL

Description: Join the Heartland Coalfield Alliance for a two-day retreat in the heart of the beautiful Shawnee Forest! This retreat will focus on building the skills, networks and campaigns we need to create a just and sustainable energy future in America's Heartland.

heartlandcoalfieldalliance.org/retreat/

GO TEAM!

THANK YOU FOR DOING SOMETHING GOOD FOR YOURSELF AND OUR RIVERS

Thank you to all of our runners and walkers who have been training through the cold winter for their upcoming races and asking their family and friends to support Prairie Rivers Network with a donation. You can help support the team with an extra donation at prairierivers.org/run



CELEBRATE SPRING BY PLANTING A RAIN GARDEN

A rain garden is a unique, beautiful landscape feature designed to capture and use rain and snowmelt.

You don't have to be a master gardener or engineer to make a rain garden, and the numerous economic and environmental benefits of a rain garden will last for years. Benefits of a rain garden include:

- providing habitat for wildlife such as birds and butterflies
- reducing flooding and water damage
- absorbing more water than traditional lawns
- recharging ground water
- removing pollutants from storm water

Join us at one of our upcoming workshops or visit prairierivers.org/rain-garden for more information:

Springfield Rain Garden Workshop

April 29, 2013

Monday from 6-7:30 pm

Springfield Public Library (Lincoln Library)
326 S. 7th Street
Springfield, IL 62701

Peoria Rain Garden Workshop

May 4, 2013

Saturday from 10-11:30 am

Peoria Public Library
107 NE Monroe
Peoria, IL 61602

These workshops describe what rain gardens are and how they can be constructed and maintained. Attendees will leave the presentation with enough knowledge and resources to construct their own rain gardens.

FREE, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!

REGISTRATION REQUIRED: prairierivers.org/rain-garden

GREEN POLITICS NIGHT

Come celebrate Earth Week with fellow earth-friendly folks at Green Politics Night for Champaign County. You will hear updates on:

- Champaign's possible bag ordinance (Councilwoman Deb Feinen)
- Mahomet Sole Source Aquifer Petition (Champaign Assistant Attorney Joe Hooker)
- Urbana Climate Action Plan and other sustainability initiatives (Urbana Mayor Laurel Prussing)
- State bill to establish fracking regulations

In addition to our special-topic guests, we will also be inviting members of the Urbana and Champaign city councils and General Assembly representatives. This is a great opportunity to meet our local policy-makers and have conversations about important, local environmental issues.

Free appetizers will be provided but drinks are on your own. This event is co-sponsored by Sierra Club, Prairie Rivers Network, Faith in Place, and Audubon Society. Hope you can join us!

When: Thursday, April 25th from 6-8 pm.

Where: Escobar's Restaurant (Bar Lounge), 6 East Columbia, Champaign



I am pleased to present Prairie Rivers Network's 2012 Annual Report. In these pages you will see an organization making real progress for Illinois rivers, an organization with growing membership and influence, and an organization that is maintaining financial health in challenging economic times. Our most important asset—the network of people passionate about protecting clean water and healthy rivers throughout Illinois—is stronger than ever.

– Glynnis Collins, Executive Director

MEMBERSHIP AND DONOR GROWTH

Prairie Rivers Network's members and donors are essential to achieving our mission. Our network of supporters provides a credible voice in support of clean, healthy water to elected officials and other decision makers. Through their financial support, our members directly support the programs that are making a difference for Illinois' rivers. Thanks to you, over the past decade, Prairie Rivers Network has experienced a compounded annual growth rate of 15%. Our professional staff and our river protection programs have grown commensurately. Our membership topped 800 for the first time in 2012, putting us on track to reach our goal of 1,000 members by 2015.

SOUND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Revenue growth in 2012 allowed Prairie Rivers Network to increase our budget while maintaining an adequate cash reserve. The budget growth allowed us to increase staff time directed to our river protection programs. Revenue sources were private foundation grants (66% of revenue, some of which is earmarked for 2013 expenses), member donations (28% of revenue), and sales, interest, and reimbursements (6% of revenue). Of every dollar raised, over eighty cents goes directly to supporting our programs to protect and restore clean and healthy rivers in Illinois.

Statement of Activities for the Year Ended December 31, 2012

	Revenue		Expenses	
Donations	\$239,108	Programs Salaries		\$303,017
Grants	\$559,229	Programs Taxes & Benefits		\$42,769
Investment Income	\$754	Direct Programs Costs		\$341,274
In-Kind Donations & Reimbursements	\$36,223	Fundraising (with salaries & taxes/benefits)		\$67,442
Sales & Miscellaneous Revenue	\$10,270	Management/General (with salaries & taxes/benefits)		\$40,862
Total Revenue	\$845,584	Total Expenses		\$795,364

Net Assets, beginning of year \$488,937; Net Assets, end of year \$539,157 *

* Our net assets at the beginning of the year include grant funds received in previous years earmarked for work in 2012. Similarly, net assets at the end of the year include grant funds earmarked for 2013 work. Our finances are audited each year by an independent certified accountant and are available upon request. Our Federal 990 tax forms are also available upon request or through www.guidestar.org.

PROTECTING ILLINOIS' RIVERS



Prairie Rivers Network came together in 1967 as a successful citizen initiative to halt an unwise reservoir project on central Illinois' Sangamon River. Since that beginning the organization has responded to changing conservation needs and opportunities to become one of the largest, most effective conservation groups in the state.

Our river protection programs are guided by a vision of healthy waterways. Illinois' rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands provide valuable resources and services for people and essential habitat for other animals and plants. Our vision of healthy waters and good waterway use comprises the following elements:

- Clean water – Our rivers, lakes and streams should be clean enough for swimming and boating, to supply drinking water, and for responsible use by farmers and industry.
- Healthy water flows – Rivers and streams should be free from aggressive alterations of natural flows; such alterations can noticeably worsen flooding and droughts, disrupt healthy flora and fauna and deplete drinking water supplies.
- Edible fish – Waterways should support a wide range of commercial and sport fish that reproduce naturally and that everyone can safely eat.
- Resilience to climate change – Illinois' 120,000 miles of rivers should provide a framework of connected natural areas and habitats, allowing plants and wildlife to thrive and adapt to changing climates.
- Protecting the best – The state's cleanest and healthiest streams should enjoy enhanced legal protection to keep them that way.
- Rare plants and animals – Rare plants and animals in and around waterways should receive special protections to aid their survival and recovery.

Prairie Rivers Network's conservation programs are intended above all to change public policies related to waterways and to enhance the enforcement of sound policies, thereby achieving lasting benefits on a large scale. We act ethically, make use of the best science and economic studies, work cooperatively with other organizations, and are willing to talk with all interested parties to find solutions. We promote research, local activism, public education, and land acquisition to aid our efforts to improve public policies. For a complete list of our specific conservation programs, please refer to our strategic plan at prairierivers.org/about/history.

THANK YOU MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

We are grateful to our donors and foundation funders, especially the many of you who have been with us for years. If you are just getting to know Prairie Rivers Network, we invite you to read about our recent accomplishments at prairierivers.org/about. We also invite you to follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/PrairieRiversNetwork) or Twitter (@PrairieRivers). These are also great places to connect with others who share your interest in clean water, wildlife, and river recreation.

The Bruce Hannon Friends of Illinois Rivers recognizes those members who have pledged an annual gift of \$1,000 or more to sustain the work of Prairie Rivers Network into the future.



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Prairie Rivers Network thanks our community partners and encourages you to support and thank these businesses and organizations that protect our rivers and streams.

BUSINESSES

Platinum \$5,000+

McKenzie Wagner, Inc.*

Gold \$1,000 to \$4,999

Enterprise Holdings
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UpClose Printing and Marketing*

Silver \$500 to \$999

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National Wildlife Foundation
Sleepy Creek Vineyards

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Members \$50 to \$249

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GROUPS/PUBLIC ENTITIES

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Community Foundation For The Land of Lincoln
Friends of Kickapoo Creek
Illinois Watershed Association
Knox College, Department of Philosophy
Laborers Local Union #393
Newman Woman's Club
Northwest Illinois Audubon Society
Sierra Club, Prairie Group

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Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund
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The Educational Foundation of America
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The McKnight Foundation
Women, Food, and Agriculture Network

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CONSERVATION FUNDING IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Prairie Rivers recognizes past political champions and works to build new ones

BY ELLIOT BRINKMAN

Ask anyone on Capitol Hill about money these days, and you will likely be met with opaque terms like “sequester,” “continuing resolution,” and “fiscal uncertainty.” Just as the warming climate poses threats to sensitive and imperiled species, the turbulent fiscal climate could quickly cause a mass extinction of even the best conservation programs. In these tight times, it is vital that we advocate for these programs, and recently, that’s just what I did.



Part of my trip was dedicated to honoring Senator Durbin for his decade of support for the program. The next part was the challenge: recruiting new supporters. In the midst of one of the worst budgetary quagmires of the last half century, talking money with legislators is not an enticing prospect. I knew it would be an exercise in hardiness.

But to my pleasant surprise, people were mostly receptive. Sure, I heard about the nation’s financial problems, but this was often coupled with stories about a favorite river or patch of woods and a willingness to support an effective and vital program.

In March, I traveled to Washington D.C. to advocate for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program. The grants provide federal funds to the states for protecting wildlife species, but it goes beyond protecting the habitats of obscure insects and amphibians. The on-the-ground outcomes of State Wildlife Grants are cleaner water, better and more places to play, and healthier communities and economies.

I do not wish to paint a naively rosy picture. The fact is, times are tight, and conservation is often first to the chopping block. But there’s also an important lesson to be learned here: for legislators to listen, we have to talk. We have to be respectful, but firm and steadfast even and especially in the most inhospitable climates. //

COVER CROPS continued from page 1

Creek to increase the adoption of conservation practices on farms. The watershed is polluted by too much nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment, and widespread adoption of cover crops could greatly improve the health of the creek.

We have learned firsthand at these workshops that an important barrier to wider adoption of cover crops is simply farmers’ unfamiliarity and lack of experience with them. Although use of cover crops is growing by leaps and bounds in some parts of the state, they are completely absent in other areas. Agencies such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Illinois Department of Agriculture are co-sponsoring conservation workshops that include talks on cover crops. Seed companies and con-

servation organizations are also taking the initiative to hold their own workshops.

Prairie Rivers Network is part of a growing network of organizations and individuals pursuing strong policies to control pollution from croplands. In the near term, we are pressing for Illinois to develop a Nutrient Management Strategy (required by the US EPA) that will lay the groundwork for real pollution reductions. We are also working to improve the Farm Bill, arguing that farmers who receive subsidies from taxpayers should have to employ responsible practices to control pollution. When pollution control requirements for cropland are enacted, cover crops will likely be an important tool for farmers to meet them. //

RIVER TRAINING DEBUNKED

RIVER STRUCTURES MAGNIFY FLOOD RISKS AND HARM THE ENVIRONMENT

BY KIM KNOWLES

For more than a century, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been wrestling with the Mighty Mississippi, determined to “train” it. The goal, per several acts of Congress, is to maintain a nine foot deep channel between Minneapolis and St. Louis. Barges need this depth to safely navigate the river. The Corps has taken this mandate very seriously, constructing thousands of river training structures in the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway navigation system. These training structures maintain a navigable channel by harnessing the forces of water and sediment in the river and directing them into the navigation channel where they scour the river bottom and deepen the channel. This allows barges to travel the river throughout the year, even when the river is low.

But what’s good for navigation is not so great for the rest of us. More than two decades of research has demonstrated that river training structures threaten people, fish and wildlife.

Since Katrina, there has been a growing acknowledgement that building more levees, destroying wetlands, and intensifying floodplain development places us in great danger of ravaging floods. But research shows that river training structures pose an even greater threat to riverside communities than these practices.

The most commonly used river training structures are wing dikes, bendway weirs, and chevrons. Though darlings of the Army Corps, these structures act as speed bumps in the river. Water stacks up behind them, raising flood heights by as much as six meters in some areas of Illinois. Data col-

lected by the National Science Foundation suggest that the Army Corps’ training structures are the primary reason we are seeing bigger floods in the Mississippi, and more often.

According to the US Geological Survey, the Corps’ management of the Upper Mississippi River System is destroying critical river habitat, including backwaters, side channels and wetlands, and is causing nonnative species to proliferate. The Corps’ mismanagement has resulted in a substantial loss of habitat diversity.

The loss of habitat has been particularly hard on endangered and threatened species. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Corps’ navigation system threatens the Higgins eye pearly mussel, the pallid sturgeon, the least tern, the winged mapleleaf mussel, the bald eagle, the Indiana bat, and the decurrent false aster.

It is time for us to develop a healthier living and working relationship with the Mississippi River. For too long, narrow business interests have determined how the River is managed. Those interests have accrued benefits from this, while riverside property owners, the taxpayer, and the public at large have paid the price. We have lost untold dollars and resources as flooding becomes increasingly more severe, fish populations that once supported huge commercial fisheries have dwindled, and the river’s natural resiliency and ability to moderate floods and absorb pollution have been lost. Prairie Rivers Network has joined with other river groups in calling for a moratorium on river training structures as part of a new way of tending the river that makes it safe for all of us: people, fish, and wildlife.//



Wing Dikes



Chevrons



Bendway Weirs

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OIL AND GAS FRACKING REGULATIONS

BY TRACI BARKLEY

We are watching proposals to ban temporarily or regulate high-volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) operations in Illinois. Three different bills are working their way through the Illinois General Assembly. Two bills (HB 3086 and SB 1418) would impose a moratorium on this type of fracking so it can be studied to determine how, or even if, it can be carried out safely. HB 2615 would instead establish regulations on the practice.

High-volume horizontal fracking is controversial. The practice has grown more common as a way to extract natural gas from underground deposits where drilling had previously been considered uneconomical. But the process involves injecting large volumes of water laden with chemicals (some toxic) deep underground. During the lifecycle of a fracking operation, there are opportunities for this water to contaminate drinking water supplies. Fracking also has the potential to release methane, a potent greenhouse gas, into the air. While burning natural gas for electricity is generally preferable to coal because it causes less greenhouse gas pollution, the potential for fracking to release methane may be enough to counteract this benefit.

Fracking has been used for decades in Illinois and elsewhere in the oil industry. High-volume horizontal hydraulic fracking, however, is a new technology. Illinois is not alone; states across the US are struggling to either prohibit this practice or adapt environmental protection policies to the rush of this technology.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, Faith in Place, the Environmental Law and Policy Center and many of our other partners in Illinois’ environmental community were instrumental in negotiating HB 2615, what could be the country’s strongest regulations on high-volume horizontal fracking. As originally drafted, the bill would enact many restrictions and reporting requirements on these operations with the aim of minimizing water and air pollution. The bill would make information about fracking operations public, require construction standards and pollution controls to protect water quality, and allow for public involvement in the regulatory process. NRDC’s website has a nice summary of the proposed rules (<http://tinyurl.com/ck2l6qw>).

However, the knowledge and understanding of risks associated with high-volume horizontal fracking is rapidly changing and growing. A temporary moratorium would allow Illinois to learn from impacted states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania. More information about how to best protect people and resources from potential harm could lead to better-informed, more effective regulations of the technology.

At Prairie Rivers Network, we will be advocating for the moratorium and regulations. Both outcomes are preferable to the status quo, where technology has outpaced our tools for protecting clean water. //



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UPCOMING EVENTS//



EARTH DAY

April 22

Earth Day is a great opportunity to make a difference, introduce a friend to our rivers, and renew your commitment to being a good steward!

GREEN POLITICS NIGHT

April 25

Escobar's in Champaign

RUN FOR YOUR RIVERS

ILLINOIS MARATHON

April 26 & 27

Run, walk, or donate.

prairierivers.org/run

RAIN GARDEN WORKSHOP

April 29 in Springfield

May 4 in Peoria

prairierivers.org/rain-garden

ENVIRO LOBBY DAY

May 2

gcollins@prairierivers.org

HEARTLAND COALFIELD

ALLIANCE RETREAT

May 17-19

heartlandcoalfieldalliance.org/retreat/

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK

SPRING HAPPY HOUR

May 31

Champaign-Urbana Location: TBA

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK'S

ANNUAL DINNER

Oct 11, 2013

For more events, go to:

prairierivers.org

RIVERWATCH TRAININGS

Become a Citizen Scientist and protect Illinois Rivers!

See a full list of RiverWatch training workshops at:
<http://tinyurl.com/bo38qo7>

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Prairie Rivers Network, masthead

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 6



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