



Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

THE ILLINOIS RIVER

BY ELLIOT BRINKMAN

The Illinois River, from its Great Lakes origins to its confluence with the Mississippi River in Grafton, Illinois, holds untold stories and natural gems just waiting to be discovered and shared. Our namesake river illuminates our state's rich heritage, and is a testament to how humans have interacted with the natural world, for better and for worse. At one time, the river was one of the most biologically diverse and productive ecosystems in North America, but over the past century, it has suffered greatly — from overexploitation of its resources, pressures from expanding development and agriculture, and intensive alteration to support barge transport. In the face of these threats, though, there is a growing movement to restore and protect the river. As a part of this restoration effort, it is vital for advocates to find and tell the stories

of our river, and the people that live and work along its banks.

This need for more and better storytelling led my colleague Robert and I to set out on a weeklong trip down the Illinois River, from Chicago to Grafton, documenting people and places, and recording this moment in the river's history. Although our advocacy work requires many hours behind a desk, one should know and experience a place firsthand to be an effective champion for it. And, indeed, our trip gave us a better sense of the place and its people as well as a fuller understanding of the complexities of restoring and managing this historically rich but currently degraded river system.

While we were often confronted with the disappointing realities of a highly altered and impaired system,

we were also moved by the resiliency of both the people and landscapes. We observed the clear and apparent impacts posed by the urban landscape, and the less obvious impacts that agricultural expansion and command-and-control

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river management have presented. Regardless of the physical landscape, we were met by optimism and similar visions for a healthier river and healthier communities.

The spirit of this vision is embodied in several places along the river, particularly in the small places where the native landscape has been restored. We had the opportunity to experience restored floodplain wetlands, remnant prairies, and upland forests, discovering natural treasures far beyond what we could have anticipated.

Upon a visit to one of these sites, one is immediately struck by the diversity of plant and animal life. The prairies are blanketed in native grasses and wildflowers. The water in the wetlands is clean, clear, and teeming with fish, amphibians, and birds. The ecological functions have been restored to a large degree, as is evident by the variety and abundance of plants and animals. It doesn't require technical expertise to feel that these places

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Elliot and Robert on the bank of the Illinois River



GREETINGS FROM GLYNNIS

I am writing this in the final days of my yearlong visit to London, looking forward to our return to Illinois and being more connected with all of you.

Remembering a good friend

As many of you know by now, last month we lost Charles Goodall, a dear friend and Prairie Rivers Network board member of thirteen years. In this issue of *Prairie River Notes* we share just a few remembrances of Charles and his conservation work.

I always appreciated the thoughtfulness that Charles brought to the question of how we can live with nature in a way that will meet our needs while allowing future generations to thrive. Being a seventh generation farmer in East Central Illinois surely helped instill this value, and perhaps this legacy also contributed to Charles' independence of thought. He was never afraid to ask tough questions; he welcomed opposing points of view, never letting his ego stand in the way of changing his mind; he was unafraid to hold an opinion contrary to the conventional wisdom of the many communities of which he was a central part. At the same time, Charles brought warmth and respect to his interactions, and the

understanding that reasonable people can disagree on many points (something that we surely can use more of these days). Charles went beyond just thinking about problems and solutions, he strove to live those solutions. Among many examples are adopting less-polluting farming practices, conserving energy, fighting a coal mine that would surely leave an unwelcome legacy for children and grandchildren, and generously sharing time, money, expertise and wisdom with the Prairie Rivers Network family.

Homeward Bound

From the winding down of the 2012 London Olympics when we arrived last September, to the arrival of a new royal baby just weeks ago, it has been great fun for our family to be in my husband's hometown for so many cultural milestones: the Queen's 60th jubilee, Margaret Thatcher's funeral, and a British man winning Wimbledon for the first time in nearly eighty years, among others.

We've had a chance to enjoy some of the wonderful nature here in person. And I was completely charmed by how nature takes over primetime for several weeks each year with the programs *Springwatch* and *Autumnwatch*. These live shows on the BBC document UK wildlife in an appealing and accessible way. I wish we had something like them in the US. Many episodes are available on youtube – check it out!



Glynnis Collins

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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COAL SUBSIDIES DRAIN ILLINOIS' STATE BUDGET

BY TRACI BARKLEY

Last month, Prairie Rivers Network and partners released a report estimating that in the 2011 fiscal year, the coal industry drained nearly \$20 million from the Illinois state budget in subsidies and expenditures. The report, "The Impact of Coal on the Illinois State Budget," was authored by the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability and Downstream Strategies and commissioned by the Sierra Club, Prairie Rivers Network, Faith in Place, and Eco-Justice Collaborative.

Demand for Illinois coal is on the rise as are the costs to the state associated with supporting and regulating the industry. These costs are significant, amounting to more than \$66 million in fiscal year 2011, far exceeding the revenues generated by coal-industry activity. Further, Illinois has missed out on significant revenue opportunities. A severance tax could have brought in nearly \$100 million in FY2011. Illinois' coal mine permit fees are low when compared to other coal-producing states. No permit fees are required for permit revision, for acres under mines, or for coal ash disposal, and there is no sales tax collected on mine-related equipment purchases.

Of course, these numbers do not factor in the additional costs to our public health, productive farmland, clean and abundant water, and intact communities. This report is a wake-up call for Illinois -- **coal costs us all**. Illinois subsidizes big polluters from the coal industry, while citizens pay the price for the impact of dirty coal on our health, the environment and accelerated climate change. As our state faces a severe budget crisis, Illinois taxpayers must ask why they are giving millions of dollars in subsidies to an industry that provides so little in return.

Coal subsidies are draining our budget when we least can afford it.

Read the full report:

<http://tinyurl.com/impact-of-coal-on-IL-budget>

As the nation reduces its dependence on burning coal and coastal residents are coming out by the thousands to reject coal export terminals, our state has supported the coal industry through tax breaks, direct grants and foregone revenue opportunities. These are bad investments in

an industry that does not pay its fair share. Coal companies, some with more than 600 mine permit violations on record, take advantage of these perks while using dangerous and damaging methods to mine high-sulfur coal and export it out of state.

Illinois can do better. We have an increased understanding of the impacts of global climate change caused by greenhouse gases. We have an increased awareness of the problems with coal, including costs to public and environmental health and safety. Opportunities abound for our state to transition our investments away from coal and towards renewables. Clean energy is a winning and worthy investment for state lawmakers. Here in Illinois we are already seeing the benefits of moving to a clean energy economy. In recent years, Illinois has added over 20,000 jobs, lowered electric bills, and reduced harmful air pollution by bringing wind and solar power online. It is time for Illinois state lawmakers to redirect grants and tax breaks from the coal industry to sustainable energy development and job creation in the clean energy sector. //

THANK YOU RUNNERS, WALKERS, AND SPONSORS

Our Run for Your Rivers & Walk for Your Streams team participated in events throughout the 2013 Illinois Marathon weekend in Champaign-Urbana including the 5K, 10K, half-marathon and marathon distances. Visit prairierivers.org/run for a list of who ran and walked to raise over \$10,000 for Prairie Rivers Network!

Top fundraisers: Jean Flemma, Rob Kanter, First Presbyterian Church of Urbana Earth Care team, and UIUC Hydrologists in Action student team.//



SINGING THE FARM BILL BLUES

BY STACY JAMES

Prairie Rivers Network is primarily known for our state-level work, but we occasionally get involved in federal policy when the stakes are high. The federal Farm Bill is high-impact legislation that comes up for renewal every five years. It is a complex piece of legislation hundreds of pages long that sets national policy for nutrition, farming, forestry, and conservation programs. The Farm Bill is perhaps the most important determinant of our food environment, and is best known for authorizing billions of dollars of taxpayer spending on subsidies for food stamp recipients and farmers.

Isolated wetlands are at risk of being drained and plowed if Congress does not link conservation compliance to crop insurance subsidies in the next Farm Bill.

Much less well known is the fact that the Farm Bill authorizes farmland conservation programs that benefit the environment. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has two agencies that administer these programs: the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Agency conservation staff work with landowners to restore habitat such as wetlands and bottomland forests. Staff also help farmers reduce erosion and polluted runoff from farm fields and livestock operations by providing technical and financial assistance. These conservation programs are an important part of our national policy and have had measurable, positive impacts on rivers and wildlife.

The Farm Bill contains another important conservation provision: conservation compliance. Conservation compliance requires recipients of farm commodity subsidies (e.g., direct payments, loans, disaster payments) to reduce erosion and preserve wetlands. In exchange for billions of dollars of annual subsidies, farmers are asked to be good stewards of the land. This policy is a proven win-win for farmers and the public: farmers foster the long-term productivity of their lands while also preserving environmental health.

Unfortunately, conservation compliance is not a requirement for recipients of crop insurance subsidies. Crop insurance is now the major subsidy and safety net program for farmers, with annual payments exceeding \$7 billion and growing as more and more farmers enroll. This gap in compliance coverage means that thousands of farms do not have to preserve wetlands and keep erosion in check. Recognizing this as a major loophole, conservation

organizations around the country made closing this loophole a top priority for the 2013 Farm Bill.

Linking conservation compliance to crop insurance subsidies was our top priority when we educated legislators and their staffers starting in 2011. We met in person with Congresswoman Cheri Bustos and Congressman Rodney Davis, and we met with the staff of Senator Dick Durbin, Congressman Dan Lipinski, Congressman Bobby Schilling, and Congressman Tim Johnson. Overall, these legislators were receptive to our message, and we hoped for a positive outcome. Congress was supposed to pass a Farm Bill in 2012, but the bill never made it to the House floor. In June 2013, we achieved a victory when the Senate passed a Farm Bill that links conservation compliance to crop insurance. Unfortunately, the House passed a very different bill a month later that does not include this linkage, reportedly due to great opposition by the Chair of the House Agriculture Committee, Frank Lucas of Oklahoma. Now that both the Senate and House have passed farm bills, the bills should go to a conference committee consisting of members of both chambers. We hope the conferencing happens soon and that the good environmental measures in the Senate bill are maintained in the final Farm Bill.



During the last two years, there have been times when we asked you to help us convey our policies to Illinois legislators. Our thanks go out to those who responded to action alerts by contacting your representatives! It is important for legislators to hear not just from paid staff, but also from their constituents. If any of Illinois' legislators will be sitting on the conference committee, we will likely be asking you to contact them once again to advocate for conservation priorities.

[//continued on page 7//](#)

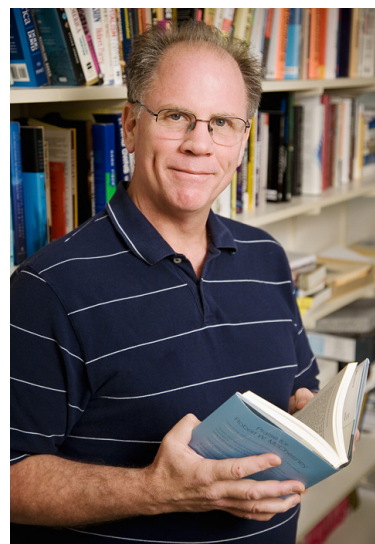
PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK ANNUAL DINNER - OCTOBER 11

Join other river enthusiasts and Prairie Rivers Network's staff and board members for conversation, good food, and fun as we celebrate the rivers of Illinois at our Annual Dinner on October 11. Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Robert McChesney, leading scholar of journalism and media communications and their roles in a democratic society.

With the cost of US elections growing cycle after cycle, many are concerned about how money influences politics. Will causes like clean water fall by the wayside without big donors and powerful lobbyists pushing them? Dr. McChesney will discuss his newest book, *Dollarocracy: How the Money and Media Election Complex is Destroying America*. In it, he and co-author John Nichols shine a light on the new class of consultants who wield millions of dollars to control elections while journalism, a core check and balance on the government, declines. It is important for us to understand these forces, and even more important to understand how we can face this challenge and strengthen our democracy.

Dr. McChesney is a Professor of Communications at the University of Illinois, and a leading scholar charting changes in journalism, in print and on the internet. He will be familiar to many of our Champaign-Urbana members; he hosted the *Media Matters* weekly radio program on the Champaign-

Urbana NPR station for 10 years. He has authored many books on the history and political economy of communication, emphasizing the role media play in democratic and capitalist societies. Not just a scholar, McChesney is also an activist in promoting the diverse and independent media



needed for a strong democracy; he co-founded Free Press (www.freepress.net) in 2002 and still serves on the board of directors today. A Cleveland native, McChesney was a sports stringer for United Press International before launching his academic career. And in 1979 he was the founding publisher of *The Rocket*, a Seattle-based rock magazine. In his spare time, McChesney writes about professional basketball for a number of websites. //

See more at prairierivers.org/dinner
Look for your invitation in early September.

THE ILLINOIS RIVER continued from page 1

are special. Set against the dominant, altered landscape, they transport you to a different space and time. But there are limitations and challenges to maintaining these special places and pursuing the vision of a healthier river.

While habitat restoration sites along the river are numerous, they are often separated physically from each other and from the river itself. They require intensive stewardship in the form of dollars, technical expertise, and sweat to maintain the fragile, natural balance that has been re-created. They are sometimes separated socially from the river communities that most need them.

It is important to acknowledge the realities and persistent challenges of restoring our river, but also to be energized

by the countless opportunities that exist. These restored sites provide real values—economic, social, and environmental—but they are also symbols of what is possible when appropriate investments in our land and water are made.

As we continue to be faced with challenges and afforded opportunities, we must continue to craft the story of our river that interprets our legacy, and charts a course for the future. We have to transport people to these special places, literally and figuratively, so that they may experience the beauty and recognize the potential for a healthier, more natural Illinois River. //

See photos of Elliot and Robert's trip at:
<http://tinyurl.com/ILRiverTrip>

CHARLES GOODALL, 1944-2013

Tributes to a true river advocate

BY SUZANNE SMITH, Salt Fork River Advocate

The environmental community has recently lost a dear friend with the passing of Charles Goodall. As a farmer who grew up in the Sidell area, he was a land steward at heart, not only speaking about good management, but living it out in his life. My husband and father-in-law did business with him for many years, and from time to time Charles would stop by with new ideas to toss around. He was always challenging the status quo, and his passion for learning and growing were evident in his tireless endeavors to make the world a better place. He didn't just talk about drainage issues, he became a drainage district commissioner. When he saw the problems of conventional agriculture, he moved in the direction of organic production. And when a coal mine threatened his land, water, and community, he stood up and fought against the establishment of this mine.

It has been my privilege to spend the last two years beside him in the fight against the proposed Bulldog coal mine in Vermilion County. His determination was an inspiration and his playfulness while in the midst of the fight showed us all how to endure the battle. He spoke out even when it might be uncomfortable, always bringing truth into the room. He loved people and valued the friendships and connections that came while searching for answers. These are some of the key components that bond our "Stand Up to Coal" group, thanks in part to Charles' leadership. He will be deeply missed by many, but our resolve remains strong. Thank you, Charles, for all you have given us.

BY STACY JAMES, Water Resources Scientist

As an introvert, it's hard to describe the sense of loss I have felt since Charles' passing. I was fortunate to be able to work with and learn from Charles through our involvement in the Lake Vermilion Water Quality Coalition. The Coalition is dedicated to reducing water pollution in Lake Vermilion near Danville. Since Charles' farm is far from Danville and does not drain into the lake, I was impressed he cared so much about the issue that he would trek to the monthly meetings. At these meetings, he was always pushing the group to do more and think bigger. He shared his ideas with a great candor, integrity, and passion that I admired and sought to replicate. When he spoke, it was with a smile on his face and a willingness to listen to the responses. I found it comforting to have him there.



I am keeping the last email he sent me before his death, which was likely sent from his hospital room. In it, he thanks me for the work I have done with the Coalition, while all-too-casually mentioning he has been less involved of late due to "medical stuff going on." But it is I who should have thanked him, for his years of service, thoughtful input, positive energy, and contribution toward my professional development. It is a great loss, personally and professionally, that I can no longer call upon one of the best men I have known.

BY CLARK BULLARD, Board Member

Charles always stood up for what he believed in. He looked you in the eye, and spoke from his heart directly to ours. Most recently he distinguished himself as a citizen with the courage to "Stand Up to Coal," leading the campaign to protect people's lungs from coal ash dust, the Salt Fork River from toxic leachates, and valuable farmland from subsidence.

Forty years ago the same Charles Goodall was one of two county Farm Bureau members who led the statewide campaign to save the Middle Fork River from destruction by an ill-conceived dam project, and secured its permanent protection as Illinois' first and only National Scenic River. His tireless efforts led to a compromise that secured Farm Bureau support for the federal designation.

We will miss his insightful contributions to PRN's positions on agricultural issues. As a drainage district commissioner, he experimented with creative ways to provide drainage without wrecking habitat for fish and other wildlife. As a farmer, he had been developing a model land lease for absentee landowners who want to ensure that tenants farm their land in a sustainable manner.

To the end, Charles was always working on behalf of healthy land and water, thriving wildlife, and strong people and communities. Now it's up to the rest of us. //

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

SINGING THE FARM BILL BLUES continued from page 4

The Farm Bill is an important tool in the toolbox, but it alone is unlikely to provide the sort of policies necessary to significantly reduce pollution from agriculture. For example, we had high hopes that conservation compliance would not only be linked to crop insurance, but that it would undergo other significant reforms to make it a more expansive and protective program. Unfortunately, the conservation community that worked on the Farm Bill settled for a few provisions out of a long list of needed reforms. Adding insult to injury, many politicians don't realize or acknowledge the toll that some farming practices are taking on our country. Reportedly, it is harder and harder to sell Congress on agricultural conservation.

Instead of completely relying on the Farm Bill, we should look to the federal Clean Water Act and state legislation. Unfortunately, pollution from crop production is exempt from the Clean Water Act. Many believe that in the face of continued pollution problems due to agriculture, the

exemption needs to end or be modified. But amending the Clean Water Act is far more daunting than passing a Farm Bill in this anti-regulatory, anti-EPA political climate.

Therefore, a more immediately viable option is for states to adopt laws and policies that make sense for their particular situation. In Illinois, an opportunity is emerging because the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Illinois Department of Agriculture have invited Prairie Rivers Network to participate in a diverse stakeholder workgroup that will recommend state pollution reduction policy for the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus, found in fertilizers. Our participation in this workgroup will lead to further actions such as legislation. We face many of the same hurdles we did during our Farm Bill work, but our conviction is strong that policy reform is necessary to achieve meaningful improvements in the health of our rivers. //

Want to read more?
<http://tinyurl.com/NPR-BigAgConservation>

NOMINATE YOUR RIVER HERO

Do you know a volunteer who is working hard to protect the state's rivers and streams? Help celebrate and elevate their work with a nomination for our 9th Annual River Steward Award. Nominations are due by August 26, 2013. The award will be presented at the Annual Dinner. Go to prairierivers.org/riversteward to nominate your river steward.



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UPCOMING EVENTS//



IT'S OUR RIVER DAY
 September 21, 2013

TAKE A CHILD OUTSIDE WEEK
 September 21-29

Champaign County Forest Preserve District
www.ccfpd.org/childoutside/schedule.html

NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY
 September 28, 2013
www.publiclandsday.org

SALT FORK RIVER
 ART & MUSIC FESTIVAL
 September 28-29, 2013
 Sleepy Creek Vineyards • Oakwood, IL

GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON
 MANAGEMENT OF THE
 ILLINOIS RIVER SYSTEM

October 1-3
 Peoria, IL

<http://tinyurl.com/ILRiverConference>

RIVERWATCH SYMPOSIUM
 October 1
 as part of the above conference

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK
 ANNUAL DINNER

October 11, 2013
 I Hotel and Conference Center
 Champaign, IL

GREEN BUSINESS SUMMIT
 October 15, 2013
 Tinley Park, IL

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK
 HAPPY HOUR
 December 6, 2013

CHECK OUR ONLINE
 EVENTS CALENDER FOR
 MORE INFORMATION ON THESE
 AND OTHER EVENTS

PHOTO ATTRIBUTES//

Prairie Rivers Network, masthead, 1,2
 Jason Lindsey, masthead, 4, 6



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Prairie Rivers Network is the Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.



If you participate in a workplace giving campaign, look for ESI and designate Prairie Rivers Network to receive your contributions.