



Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

FARM BILL PASSES WITH IMPORTANT CONSERVATION REQUIREMENT BUT STILL LEAVES US FEELING EMPTY

BY STACY JAMES

President Obama signed the long-awaited Farm Bill into law on February 7, 2014, bringing an end to a multi-year effort to pass the massive legislation. For three years, we met with legislators, wrote letters to the editor, and educated the public about the importance of conservation on agricultural lands. **Fortunately, we have something to celebrate: conservation compliance was linked to federal crop insurance subsidies.**

If you don't know what I'm talking about, I'm deeply hurt because I've been reporting on our Farm Bill work since 2011! The linkage of conservation compliance to crop insurance means that more farms will be developing and implementing conservation plans. These plans require farmers to preserve wetlands and reduce erosion, which in turn benefit water quality and wildlife habitat. Yippee!

Conservation compliance originated in 1985, with the idea that farmers should provide the public with environmental services in exchange for billions in federal subsidies they receive from taxpayers. A government policy success story, conservation compliance resulted in significantly

less soil erosion and wetland destruction. But conservation compliance wasn't linked to what has grown to be the largest farm subsidy: crop insurance. Therefore, the conservation community made it a priority to link compliance to insurance.

The Farm Bill also includes the conservation easement and cost-share programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These programs provide technical and financial assistance to farmers who voluntarily adopt conservation practices such as cover crops and buffer strips. Unfortunately, these programs took a hit in the Farm Bill as legislators sought to cut federal spending while still providing subsidies to farmers. In the coming years, there will be less funding for farmers seeking to enroll in federal conservation programs. We are concerned this will result in more sediment and fertilizer pollution in streams. No "Yippee!" for this one.

When Prairie Rivers Network began working on this Farm Bill, we had hopes of accomplishing far more than what Congress passed. We wanted to expand the conservation compliance program to include more

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environmental benefits. In addition to protecting wetlands and preventing erosion, we wanted farmers to maintain buffers along streams and reduce fertilizer runoff. Unfortunately, the battle cry of most conservation groups was quickly whittled down to about three priorities, of which only one was achieved. Not realizing a significant game-changer after engaging in a multi-year effort causes us to ask, what next? If we want agricultural policy reform that results in significant improvements in water quality, perhaps the Farm Bill is not the best vehicle for accomplishing real change.

Skepticism aside, achieving a victory in the Farm Bill reinforces our credibility and serves as a precedent for future victories. And so we continue our efforts to reduce water pollution from agriculture by reforming the ethanol mandate of the Renewable Fuels Standard, developing rules to reduce pollution from factory farms, and participating in Illinois' Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

Thanks to those of you who responded to our Farm Bill action alerts--we'll need your help again in future challenges! //

GREETINGS FROM GLYNNIS

Prairie Rivers Network at Fifteen

This issue of *Prairie Rivers Notes* includes our 2013 Annual Report. As I was helping Vickie (Operations Manager Vickie Nudelman) prepare the report, I realized that it was the fifteenth annual report of Prairie Rivers Network, a name our Board of Directors adopted for the organization in 1998, along with our current mission.

I was curious about what Prairie Rivers Network's first annual report looked like, and I was delighted to find copies in our archives. I invite you to join me in reflecting on some of the differences between the organization as it was then and now. Some of them are striking:

- Our annual budget is tenfold larger now than in 1998 (\$77,000 vs \$770,000)
- Membership has grown from around 150 to over 900
- Staffing levels have increased from two full-time equivalents to ten

Less easy to quantify but equally impressive is the increased level of sophistication and influence of our work. Today we are working on more aspects of clean water and healthy rivers, and with more partners and capacity than ever before. We can credit this to the many things that have stayed constant for Prairie Rivers Network over the past fifteen years: talented staff, a visionary board of directors, and a loyal and dedicated membership.

I recognize many of the names on the donor list from 1998, many of you are still with us now. The hard work and

support of so many over the years has kept Prairie Rivers Network on a trajectory of growing strength and stability. We are well positioned to face the next fifteen years with optimism about achieving our goals.

Prairie Rivers Network in Chicago

This spring Prairie Rivers Network will increase our presence in Chicago when Water Policy Specialist Robert Hirschfeld moves there. He will continue his work on Asian carp and coordinating communications for all our programs. This move will improve ties with our many Chicago-based partners and provide the opportunity to grow and diversify our membership in the region.

Leadership Transition

With mixed emotions I will be saying goodbye to my current role at Prairie Rivers Network, although not for some time. A fantastic professional opportunity for my husband will have our family moving to Lincoln, NE in the summer of 2015. Of course, while change can be difficult, it is also an opportunity. I'm very pleased that I will be able to work with the board over a long transition period to find the right candidate for Prairie Rivers Network's next Executive Director. With new leadership will come fresh ideas and energy to keep increasing the effectiveness of Prairie Rivers Network.

We'll keep you apprised as the transition progresses.

With warmest wishes,



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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2013 ANNUAL REPORT



Prairie Rivers Network is Illinois' advocate for clean water and healthy rivers.

We champion clean, healthy rivers and lakes and safe drinking water to benefit the people and wildlife of Illinois.



2013 Annual Report

Thanks to our members, supporters, staff and board of directors, Prairie Rivers Network continued its trajectory of growth in 2013. Our programs are strengthened by a growing network of people and organizations that allow us to have more influence in pursuit of clean water and healthy rivers in Illinois. I am so pleased to be able to share with you the evidence, in both progress and financial stability, of another strong year for Prairie Rivers Network. - Glynnis Collins, Executive Director

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We mourn the passing of long-time Board member Charles Goodall in 2013.

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Elliot Brinkman
Water Resources Specialist

Robert Hirschfeld
Water Policy Specialist

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IMPROVING POLICIES

U.S. EPA ordered to set rules for safe disposal of toxic coal ash.

Coal ash is the second largest industrial waste stream in Illinois. Until we get new rules, it will continue to be handled with little oversight, endangering water and public health.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working with a national coalition to get these much-needed regulations. In 2013, a federal court ruled in our favor, ordering the U.S. EPA to develop new coal ash disposal rules.



PRN-founded Heartland Coalfield Alliance holds a "coal camp" training retreat to lead the charge against dirty coal.

Illinois proposed new comprehensive rules for the closure of coal ash dumps at coal-fired power plants.

Pollution from coal ash has been found in the groundwater at every power plant examined in Illinois. For several years, Prairie Rivers Network has been investigating and highlighting pollution from coal ash dumps, leading to the development of critical new rules by the Illinois EPA that will help protect our water resources.

Exposing coal's drain on the Illinois economy.

Prairie Rivers Network commissioned a report documenting state revenue related to the coal industry in Illinois, along with expenses and foregone revenue (through subsidies and tax breaks). The net impact for 2011 was a drain of \$20 million on the state budget.



Traci Barkley speaks to the press about coal ash pollution.

Growing support for addressing invasive species in our rivers.

The man-made canal system in Chicago connects the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River basin, leaving both systems vulnerable to devastation from invasive fish, plants, and disease.

Prairie Rivers Network has been working with a coalition of Illinois and Great Lakes organizations to promote major rehabilitation of Chicago's waterways to restore the natural separation between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins.

In June 2013, Governor Quinn publicly supported the idea, saying, "Ultimately, I think we have to separate the basins. I really feel that is the ultimate solution."

Plans for near-term structural improvements are underway. They will address the Asian carp threat while improving water quality and paving the way for full separation.



Robert Hirschfeld gathering stories and pictures along the Illinois river to highlight the impact of invasive species.

Ruling means more accountability for U.S. EPA on nutrient pollution.

Nutrient pollution from sewage treatment plants, farms, and city streets is fouling Illinois waters, killing aquatic life and causing the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

The U.S. EPA has waffled for over a decade on setting legal limits for this pollution. In 2013, a federal court ruled in our favor, requiring the agency to make a decision. This gives us leverage as we keep the pressure on EPA to use all their available tools to reduce nutrient pollution.



PRN continues to educate farmers on conservation practices like these "Women Caring for the Land" workshop participants.

Moratorium on new sand mines in LaSalle County provides time to improve mining operations affecting the Illinois River.

The Illinois River has seen a boom in sand mining because it is one of the few places in the U.S. with sand that is the right texture for use in hydraulic fracturing (fracking) operations.

Unfortunately, the moratorium came after the LaSalle County Board approved a controversial new mining operation adjacent to Starved Rock State Park; Prairie Rivers Network and our partners continue to fight that project.

Now we are working with other groups, citizen activists, and governments to craft improved planning for sand mining and the protection of natural corridors along the Illinois River.

PROTECTING LAND AND WATER

Illinois and Mississippi Rivers

Chicago's Stickney sewage treatment plant (the largest in the nation) will finally start removing phosphorus and nitrogen pollution from its wastewater thanks in part to years of pressure and a federal lawsuit by Prairie Rivers Network and our partners.

The Stickney plant is a major source of nutrient pollution in the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone.



The Dixon Waterfowl Refuge is a piece of paradise hidden away. A showpiece of what Illinois once looked like. And could again.

Vermilion County and the Salt Fork River

The proposed Bulldog coal mine in East-Central Illinois would have taken water from the Salt Fork River to wash coal and then discharged polluted water back to the river.

We worked with residents and advocates to slow the development of the coal mine: the Village of Homer will not sell water from the Salt Fork River, a proposed railroad spur needed for transporting coal was blocked, and leasing of mineral rights has slowed.



Spotted salamander at the Middle Fork Woods Nature Preserve.

Photo - Rob Kanter



River otters enjoy a day on the river.

Photo - Harold Hopkins via Vermilion County Conservation District

Big Bureau Creek

More farmers in the Big Bureau Creek watershed north of Peoria have incorporated cover crops and grassed waterways into their farms thanks to our outreach efforts. These practices decrease soil erosion and nutrient pollution.

Perhaps more importantly, these "early adopters" serve as examples to their neighbors, helping spread the use of these practices in the community.



Member support makes river protection possible. Thank you.

Photo - Chris Young

Chicago and Calumet Rivers

In fall 2013, Chicago's Metropolitan Water Reclamation District broke ground on new sewage disinfection facilities at two of its plants that discharge to the Chicago and Calumet Rivers. As a result of pressure by a large coalition that included Prairie Rivers Network, these plants will pollute less, making the rivers much safer for recreation.

STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK OF RIVER ADVOCATES

Heartland Coalfield Alliance

Founded by Prairie Rivers Network in 2010, the Heartland Coalfield Alliance continues to grow. The Alliance works to “reduce impacts from dirty coal mining, coal burning and coal waste disposal while promoting cleaner, more sustainable and affordable energy solutions.”

In June, we welcomed over 75 people from eight states to a retreat in Southern Illinois. Leaders from across the nation worked with attendees to build skills, networks, and campaigns to ensure that the true costs of coal are borne by the industry as we work to create a cleaner energy future.

River Bend Wildland Trust

Over the past two years, Prairie Rivers Network convened habitat conservation groups working along the Mississippi

River in Illinois to foster better identification of needs and coordination of activities. An early outcome of the work was the formation of a new land trust targeting important river bottomland habitat in the Quad Cities area.

Sharing Compelling River Stories

In June 2013, staff members Elliot Brinkman and Robert Hirschfeld paddled stretches of the Illinois River from Chicago to St. Louis as part of a new storytelling and media initiative. Carrying cameras and microphones, they met with members of our network throughout the state, capturing interviews, videos, and photos of those who work, live, and play along the river. Using new communications media will help us reach bigger and broader audiences.

Statement of Activities

for the year ended December 31, 2013

Revenue and Support

Donations	\$166,896
Grants	\$453,454
Investment Income	\$481
In-Kind Donations & Reimbursements	\$16,302
Sales & Miscellaneous Revenue	\$9,150
Total Revenue	\$646,283

Expenses

Programs Salaries	\$305,907
Programs Taxes & Benefits	\$48,230
Direct Programs Costs	\$286,918
Fundraising (including salaries & taxes/benefits)	\$92,271
Management/General (including salaries & taxes/benefits)	\$41,665
Total Expenses	\$774,991

Net Assets*

Beginning of year	\$539,157
End of year	\$410,449

Membership and Fiscal Management

Prairie Rivers Network’s revenue comes mainly from private foundation grants (70% of 2013 revenue, some of which is earmarked for 2014 spending) and member donations (25% of 2013 revenue). Over 80% of 2013 expenditures were in pursuit of our clean water and healthy river programs. Fundraising and administrative operations combined accounted for 17% of spending.

Over the past ten years, the organization has experienced a compounded annual growth rate of over 10%.

*Net assets at the beginning of the year include grant funds received in previous years earmarked for work in 2013. Similarly, net assets at the end of the year include grant funds earmarked for 2014 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 guidestar.org.

Thank You Members and Supporters!

We are grateful to our donors and funders, especially those who have been with us for many years. Your support ensures that the fight for clean and healthy rivers is carried on, and that the voices of the people make it to Springfield and Washington D.C. to combat the special interests that would avoid accountability for polluting and degrading natural resources.

If you are just getting to know Prairie Rivers Network, we invite you to visit our website at prairierivers.org and 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.



If you have any questions or suggestions, please don't hesitate to get in touch!

Community Partners

A special thank you to our community partners. We encourage you to support and thank those businesses and organizations that protect our rivers and streams.

Businesses

Platinum \$5,000 and above

McKenzie Wagner, Inc.*

Gold \$1,000–\$4,999

Fox Development Corporation *
The Highdive
Marco Technical Documentation
Patagonia-Enviro Department
UpClose Marketing and Printing *

Silver \$500–\$999

Blue Moon Farm
Common Ground Food Co-op
First Mid-Illinois Bank & Trust
Paul's Machine & Welding Corporation

Bronze \$250–\$499

Anderson Farms
Champaign Surplus *
Champaign Telephone Company
Progressive Asset Management
Lisa Janes, Silver Lux Photography **

Members \$50–\$249

A.M.S. Incorporated
Busey Bank Investment Group
CDC Paper & Janitor Supply
Country Road Greenhouse
Creative Water Gardens
International Galleries *
Simplified Computers *
The Chicago Community Trust

Groups/Public Entities

Bangs Lake Advisory Committee
Champaign County Audubon Society
Ezra Levin Foundation
First Presbyterian Church of Urbana +
Laborers Local Union #393
Middlefork Audubon Society
National Wildlife Federation
Northwest Illinois Audubon Society
Robeson Family Benefit Fund
Salt Fork River Partners
Sierra Club, Prairie Group
UIUC Hydrologists in Action +
Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana-
Champaign
Vermilion County Conservation District

Grantors

Alliance for the Great Lakes
The Educational Foundation of America
The Energy Foundation
Grand Victoria Foundation
The Lumpkin Family Foundation
The McKnight Foundation
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Ohio Citizen Action Education Fund
Rockefeller Family Fund
Women, Food, and Agriculture Network



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The Bales Family
Irene and Clark Bullard
Glynnis Collins and Nick Brozovic
Bill Davey
Jean Flemma and John Epifanio
Jane and Eric Freyfogle
John B. Gilpin
Nancy Goodall
Bruce Hannon
Patricia Hannon
DiAnne and Terry Hatch
Jim Heins
Susan and Lewis Hopkins
Dixie and Gary Jackson
Karen Carney and Rob Kanter
Kim Kramer and Melissa Orlie

Annette and Charles Lansford
Anna Keck and Jason Lindsey
Chris and David Main
Diane and John Marlin
Robert J. McKim
Jon McNussen
Jean and David Nanney
Sharon and Jack Paxton
Michael Rosenthal
Beverly and Thomas Rauchfuss
Bruce Semans
Trent Shepard
Cecily Smith and David Delaney
Bill Van Hagey
Sherry Weaver
Sherrill and Richard Worthen

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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\$5,000 and above

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SPEAK UP FOR STRONG COAL ASH RULES

BY TRACI BARKLEY

All too often, the producers of dirty energy leave nearby communities (and state taxpayers) a final, parting gift - a massive bill for the cleanup of toxic wastes contaminating rivers and drinking water.

Burning coal in power plants emits unhealthy gases and soot. It also leaves behind massive piles of coal ash that is stored nearby in pits. Under Illinois law, these pits can remain in place indefinitely, often perched precariously along rivers and above aquifers. Even well-constructed pits leak after a few decades. Poorly constructed ones leak much sooner, carrying concentrated toxins—arsenic, cadmium, mercury—into soils and waters. Leakage is usually slow, steady, and invisible. But heavy rains and floods can rewrite the script. They did in North Carolina early this year, when a collapsed retaining wall sent 82,000 tons of ash into the Dan River, causing massive death to fish and other aquatic life. The estimated clean-up cost? Almost \$1 billion.

Illinois is home to 24 coal-fired plants. Ash dumps leak at every one of them. Many are near rivers or over groundwater aquifers, a consequence of thirsty power plants needing easy access to water. And the coal ash continues to pile up. Illinois power plants produce 4.4 million tons of ash per year. In addition, Illinois has become a dumping ground for coal ash from other states—at least 6 states at the moment—in part because of weak ash-handling rules.

In March, a crowd of river advocates gathered near Oakwood, Illinois, to highlight this danger and to urge state action. They came to the treasured Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, home to river otters and bald eagles, and the state's only National Scenic River. Nearby were the mothballed Vermilion Power Station and its three associated waste dumps. The pits lie in the Middle Fork's floodplain. Two of the pits were built without liners. All are vulnerable to flooding, erosion, and the subsidence of underlying coal mine voids. The slow contamination has already begun. The catastrophe still awaits, with some 3 million cubic yards of deadly ash and slurry poised to rush downstream.

Aware of the problem, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is seeking public comment on draft

rules governing this “coal combustion waste.” The rules would specify where and how coal ash can be stored. They would require site operators to develop various plans to monitor groundwater, to reduce and mitigate leaks, and to seal ash dumps when full.

These proposed rules are a useful step but not at all adequate, not to protect the many homes and businesses that depend on clean water, nor to conserve treasured rivers such as the Middle Fork. In the case of pits that leak, that are poorly built or that lie next to rivers, the ash needs to be moved to higher, drier locations and stored in better-built pits with longer lives. And the cost of this needs to be paid by the companies that generated the wastes.

Fortunately, Illinois citizens are making clear their objections to these rules, with Prairie Rivers Network at the forefront. At a February hearing before the Pollution Control Board, environmental advocates pushed to make the rules stronger and more protective. They called for the relocation of wastes in dangerous locations and for greater attention to the long-term stability of pits. They insisted that coal-ash generators give sufficient proof that they can, over the long term, pay for the clean-up, closure, and post-closure monitoring of their facilities.

As for what is at stake in Illinois, it is worth considering that the North Carolina ash spill—headline news around the country and with a price tag reaching \$1 billion—involved an ash pit storing 155 million gallons of waste. Illinois is littered with coal ash pits many times this size. The Dynege Vermilion plant hosts coal ash dumps containing 945 million gallons. Another of Dynege's plants on the Kaskaskia River holds over five billion gallons, more than 30 times as much as the North Carolina ash pit!

The Pollution Control Board will hold additional hearings on their proposed rules in Chicago on May 14 and 15. It needs to hear from citizens. Prairie Rivers Network will be there, as will others. To get information on the hearings—and to submit written comments—go to [//">prairierivers.org/take-action.//](http://prairierivers.org/take-action)



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UPCOMING EVENTS//



CHECK OUR ONLINE EVENTS CALENDER FOR THESE EVENTS AND MORE

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!

EARTH DAY HAPPY HOUR

April 22

Escobar's in Champaign

CONSERVATION AND THE

2014 FARM BILL

April 23, 5:30-7:30 pm

Alice Campbell Alumni Center Ballroom
 601 S Lincoln Ave, Urbana

RUN FOR YOUR RIVERS

ILLINOIS MARATHON

April 25 & 26

Run, walk, or donate.

prairierivers.org/run

MAHOMET AQUIFER

SOLE-SOURCE DESIGNATION

EPA PUBLIC HEARING

May 13 or 14, 7:30-9:30 pm

May 13 at Hilton Garden Inn in Champaign

May 14 at Freedom Hall in Morton

RIVERWATCH TRAININGS

April-May

[www.ngrrec.org/News-Stories/](http://www.ngrrec.org/News-Stories/RiverwatchWorkshops_sp2014/)

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RIVER RALLY

May 30-June 2

Pittsburgh, PA

www.riverrally.org

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK

HAPPY HOUR

June 6

Champaign-Urbana Location: TBA

PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK'S

ANNUAL DINNER

Oct 10

PHOTO ATTRIBUTES (C) // Jason Lindsey, masthead
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Prairie Rivers Network is the Illinois affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.



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