



Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

## OUR FOOD CHOICES CAN PROTECT WATER AND WILDLIFE

BY KIM ERNDT-PITCHER

You have probably heard the phrase “Vote with your fork.” It means that our values can be expressed in where we put our food dollars. Many of us get to choose how the food we eat has lived and died and how it was grown each and every day. We can choose to put our dollars behind the industrialized food system that supports mega-farms, billion-dollar corporations, processed foods, and has a large ecological footprint (pesticides, water use, fossil fuel consumption in the manufacturing, packaging, and transport of this food). Or, we can choose to spend our money on food that is grown close to home, is minimally processed, is grown in a way that does not degenerate the soil, air, or water and that supports our local economy, and keeps farmers in charge of their farms and land.

Additionally, as we see the definitions and labels of organic become more common, we must not forget that it



is still important to know your farmer and know how she or he grows the food that you purchase. Organic production can be industrialized too, and it can also use its fair share of pesticides, have a large ecological footprint (think of those organic peppers grown in Mexico or Chile), and involve large Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).

Whatever demand we create is the system we support. While the state of our food system may seem too overwhelming to face with mega-corporations and federal regulations, we must not forget that we CAN do something. That “something” can have a bigger impact than you might think. We can support the farmers that grow healthy nutritious food, farmers that protect our air, streams, soil, animals, and neighbors. When we support them, every day, we demonstrate the need for more of these types of farms.

There is no doubt that it takes effort and forethought to support a more localized and environmentally wise food system, and that this is much more difficult than it should be in many cases. But, it is an important vote, and we try to make it easier for you to cast that vote.

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For the past year and a half, Prairie Rivers Network has worked with numerous other organizations to form ReGenerate Illinois, a collaborative effort that strives to create a local food system for Illinois, a food system that is deeply rooted in regenerative agriculture practices. Together, we foster the growth of farms that produce food in a way that regenerates the land, water, and soil and the markets that support them. Our work with ReGenerate Illinois and the IDEA Farm Network, a growing network of farmers that are interested in improving the way they farm (See pg. 5 for more), is our way of ensuring that Illinois water resources and wildlife habitat needs are incorporated into our land use decisions.

Using basic ecological principles, regenerative farming practices rebuild soil organic matter, store carbon, and eliminate the need for pesticides and fertilizers. They also protect biodiversity, increase water

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## CAROL'S CURRENTS

### NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR PRN

In the early 1900s, there was no nationwide constituency to support conservation. Many people cared about wildlife conservation, but nobody was organized to advocate or influence policy decisions. In the words of NWF founder Ding Darling, “Wildlife doesn’t vote and neither do conservationists.”

Darling dreamed of a federation promoting conservation interests, encouraging social diversity, and demanding action from Congress. His dream became a reality in 1936 when he convinced President Franklin Roosevelt to convene more than 2,000 hunters, anglers, and conservationists from across the country to the first North American Wildlife Conference in Washington, DC. There, the General Wildlife Federation (later the National Wildlife Federation) was formed with the idea of uniting sportsmen and all outdoor and wildlife enthusiasts behind the common goal of conservation.

Ding Darling’s dream continues today as the National Wildlife Federation and its 50+ independent state and territorial affiliates continue his legacy, protecting wildlife and natural resources. Prairie Rivers Network became Illinois’ affiliate of the Federation in 2001.

The NWF affiliates enhance the ability of the national and regional staff to protect wildlife and natural resources. We are autonomous, nonprofit organizations that take the lead in state and local conservation efforts and partner with NWF on a wide variety of regional and national issues. This

diverse network of partners elects key members of NWF’s leadership and sets NWF’s conservation policy priorities.

For PRN’s part, we actively collaborate with NWF staff and staff of other affiliates on many areas of our state and regional work. We co-lead the Working Lands Affiliate Caucus and are active in several other caucuses, regularly proposing policy resolutions. And in 2014, PRN was honored as Affiliate of the Year for our record of conservation work with the Federation.

In 2016, NWF’s leadership and state affiliates adopted a new vision to guide the future of the Federation. Together we believe America’s experience with cherished landscapes and wildlife has helped define and shape our national character and identity for generations. Protecting these natural resources is a cause that has long united Americans from all walks of life and political stripes.

To hunters, anglers, hikers, birders, wildlife watchers, and other outdoor enthusiasts, this conservation ethic represents a sacred duty and obligation to protect and build upon our conservation heritage for the sake of wildlife, ourselves, our neighbors, and — most of all — for future generations.

In 2017, this belief led the federation to form a new strategic plan for saving wildlife that are suffering declines across America, with the goal of

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## 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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## I RUN FOR PRAIRIE RIVERS NETWORK

KAREN KANE, ILLINOIS MARATHON FUNDRAISER



I like big-picture ideas. Water quality is a VERY big-picture concept because of the Mahomet aquifer, the nature of creeks, farm runoff, streams, rivers, the gulf, and oceans. PRN does tireless work on our behalf to ensure that

those responsible are keeping our waterways clean. PRN helps us be good water stewards in our towns, counties, state, and beyond. Feeling passionate about clean water and PRN's work makes it easy to raise money through the Illinois Marathon. It's a great way to raise awareness about PRN while enjoying our very own local Marathon. Join me in April 2018, and let's raise some \$ together. Bet I'll beat you to the top! //

## CURRENTS continued from page 2

increasing our fish and wildlife populations and enhancing their capacity to thrive in a rapidly changing world. The plan sets in motion a Common Agenda for Wildlife built upon sound science, clear priorities, and scalable solutions.

This agenda includes a commitment to protect, connect, and restore wildlife habitat; transform wildlife conservation; and connect Americans—especially youth—with wildlife. This third pillar of the plan is especially important, as it seeks to unite Americans, engage youth and expand the constituency for conservation, building a broad conservation force that will take action to protect wildlife habitat and increase wildlife populations.

*Carol*

## CHOICES continued from page 1

use efficiency, and protect the water cycle. Put into practice on a large scale, these practices have the power to restore farm health and put resilience back into the system, resilience that supports life in a changing and uncertain climate.

Each farm is different, and there are many ways they can implement regenerative practices. It could be increasing the number of crop varieties that are grown through intercropping (growing two or more crops in proximity), utilizing agroforestry techniques (combining trees and shrubs with crops), incorporating intensive rotational grazing of livestock, and/or increasing the amount of land on the farm that is left undisturbed by reducing mowing, restoring fencerows.

The bottom line is that we need to reconnect with our



Participants attend an IDEA Network pollinator event.



IDEA Farm Network members inspect cover crops.

food. The benefits that come from the farms that use these practices (carbon sequestration, cleaner air, healthy animals, nutritious food, clean water, and wildlife protection) should be part of our food purchasing decision-making process. As consumers, we need to start reading labels, asking how and where our food is grown, request retailers to offer choices that are regeneratively grown, ask our schools to provide locally-sourced healthy menus, and buy from our local farmers whenever possible. With our partners at ReGenerate Illinois and with the farmers participating in the IDEA Farm Network, we are expanding the possibilities for farmers and consumers. Together we will grow an Illinois-based food system that is rooted in regenerative agriculture. Please help us by voting with your fork! //



LOOK WHAT  
YOU MADE  
HAPPEN!

### VICTORY FOR THE PUBLIC PROCESS

If Asian carp reach the Great Lakes, a way of life could be lost. “This has been our homeland . . . We’ve always been here, for ten thousand years or more.” These are the words of Doug Craven of the Michigan Band of Odawa Indians talking about his culture and the importance of the Great Lakes and its fishery to his people since time immemorial. Doug was featured in the video *Seven Generations*, produced by PRN Water Policy Specialist Robert Hirschfeld in collaboration with the National Wildlife Federation.



On June 23rd, news broke that a commercial fisherman had found a live Asian carp just nine miles from Lake Michigan.

“We sent the news out to our members, the press, and government officials about the urgency for the immediate release of the delayed Brandon Road study,” Robert said. The study’s release was put on hold by the new administration in January after intense lobbying by the shipping industry.

The live carp galvanized people into action. PRN and other groups put out action alerts, videos, and stories about the potential impacts of Asian carp on the Great Lakes ecosystem. Doug’s story of what is at stake and what will be lost was one of them. Hundreds of PRN members contacted members of Congress, putting pressure on the Army Corps of Engineers to release the study, which they finally did on August 7th.

### FIGHTING BIG POLLUTERS

“We’re suing Scott Pruitt!” exclaimed PRN Executive Director Carol Hays. PRN’s not holding back; with our partners we were among the first to file a lawsuit against the United States Environmental Protection Agency and its secretary for efforts to rollback protections of our rivers. Scott Pruitt sided with big business and the energy industry to delay and possibly remove new limits on toxic waste entering our waterways from coal power plants. Delays like this favor power companies and put us at risk from mercury and other toxins entering the rivers and lakes we love.



The fight over Effluent Limitation Guidelines (ELGs) is yet another example of how the new administration is trying to undermine all of the environmental gains we’ve made since the Clean Water Act was established in 1972.

Since Inauguration Day, the new administration has rolled back the Stream Protection Rule and taken the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Agreement. Stricter emission limits from the transportation industry are being reconsidered. They are trying to repeal the Clean Water Rule... the list goes on.

“We’re at an important point in our fight to protect the environment,” said PRN Water Resources Engineer Andrew Rehn. “We face well-funded opposition that is bent on scorched earth policies.” We can’t let that happen. PRN is standing up for Illinois’ rivers and clean water for our communities.

## HELPING FARMERS BE BETTER STEWARDS

“For too long the environmental movement and agriculture have been at odds,” PRN Habitat and Agriculture Programs Specialist Kim Erndt-Pitcher said. “The IDEA Farm Network is one way of fostering the growth of healthy farms. Farms that strive to regenerate the land.”

“It’s a place for farmers, from conventional to organic, to come together in a safe space to share ideas,” Adam Davis said. He is a co-creator with PRN of the IDEA Farm Network and a Professor of Crop Sciences at the U of I. “It’s a way for farmers to learn from each other without worrying that people will judge them as a bad farmer. It is more about following that curiosity and leveraging the lived experience of the group.”

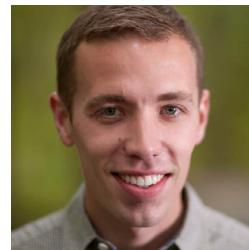
The IDEA Farm Network began in February 2017 with about 45 farmers meeting once a month at various farms to learn about different practices, ways to build soil health, protect water, and increase diversity on farmlands. In just eight months, it has grown to over 160 farmers going to meetings, participating in the online discussion group, learning from each other, and building lasting relationships.



Will Glazik, an organic farmer, crop advisor, and co-creator of the IDEA Farm Network, says “This thing has exploded beyond anything I could ever imagine. So I’m pretty excited to see where it goes. And it’s all driven from within.”

With the continued leadership and passion for improving agriculture from Adam and Will, PRN and our partners look to continue to grow the IDEA Farm Network to

the northern and southern parts of the state, where more farmers can learn from one another, be more adventurous and innovative, and expand scientific understanding of the best ways to build more resilient and regenerative agricultural systems.



## SAVING WETLANDS AND WILDLIFE

At last year’s dinner, we honored the people fighting the proposed New Madrid Levee. If built, the levee would have increased the risk of flooding to towns like Cairo, Olive Branch, and Metropolis. With one of President Obama’s last acts in office, his administration issued a decision in January that makes it nearly impossible for the Army Corps of Engineers to build the levee.

Stopping the New Madrid Levee saved more than 50,000 acres of wetlands. These wetlands not only protect downstream communities from flooding, they provide critical wildlife corridors that will be essential to wildlife if they are to survive and adapt to a changing climate.

The National Wildlife Federation estimates 40,000 ducks and 10,000 geese winter there. Great blue heron, egrets, and thousands of shorebirds have safe haven. Ninety-three species of fish are now protected, and mammals like the swamp rabbit, mink, and beaver will continue to have the habitat they need to thrive. The National Wildlife Federation recognized the indispensable contributions of PRN staff Kim Knowles, Staff Attorney, and Elliot Brinkman, Habitat Conservation Specialist, in this big win for wildlife. //



PRN Water Resources Engineer Andrew Rehn testifies in Washington, D.C. before the EPA on the ELG rule.

## ANNUAL DINNER ROUND UP

This year's 50th Anniversary Dinner Gala was an evening to remember, and it was our members that made it such an amazing event. There was a bit of dancing, a whole lot of giving, and a big appreciation for the network of people who have been protecting the rivers, land, and wildlife of Illinois for the past 50 years.

The silent auction was a big hit featuring baskets tailor-made by the PRN board of directors and PRN members which included tickets to Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, a Champaign Surplus shopping spree, an acoustic guitar from The Upper Bout, a Middle Fork River trip from Kickapoo Adventures, delicious treats from Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery, canoe paddles handcrafted by a member, and much more.

### You Donated \$100,000!

The giving didn't stop with the auction. Our record number of over 330 guests responded to Olivia Dorothy's ask to "give big in order to power PRN for the next 50 years," and they did by donating and pledging \$85,000 that night. We expect to hit the \$100,000 mark as more donations come in. In the words of Operations Manager Vickie Nudelman, "The generosity of our members never ceases to amaze me. We can't do our work without them."

Old and new members were also inspired to give big thanks to Carol Goodall Wock's \$15,000 Growing our Network Challenge Gift. All renewing members who give more than they did last year will have their increased donation amount matched dollar-for-dollar. New members who donate \$100 or more will have their entire gift matched dollar-for-dollar. The matching gift offer runs through the end of the year, so you still have time to give!



Volunteers of the Year Kate McDowell, Amy Hassinger and Latrelle Bright with PRN E.D. Carol Hays.

Carol's dedication to expanding the sustainable agriculture movement cannot be understated. Earlier this year she donated 220 acres of her family farm to PRN. Carol's gift, estimated at around \$3 million, is the biggest ever donated to PRN. Her generosity strengthens PRN's Endowment for our next 50 years.

PRN board member and Environmental Almanac commentator Rob Kanter brought a lot of laughter to the evening as our emcee and presented a quick roundup of 50 years of accomplishments. You can see slides highlighting our first five decades and photos from the event at <https://prairierivers.org/dinner>.

### Award Winners

The evening also gave PRN a chance to recognize the work of river stewards and volunteers of the year. **Seth Brady** and **Randy Smith** are two Naperville high school teachers who were instrumental in organizing this year's first annual Illinois Waterway Cleanup Week in September. For their efforts, they were honored as our River Stewards of the Year. Seth and Randy worked tirelessly to encourage students and communities across the state to work together to clean up community waterways. Scores of students took part in the activities. Their work led to an Illinois General Assembly resolution designating the Cleanup Week.

Our 50th Anniversary celebration didn't start last Friday night; it started earlier in the year with a PRN Day at Allerton event which included **Latrelle Bright's** *The Water Project* performance art piece. **Amy Hassinger** read from her novel *After the Dam* interspersed with PRN's founders talking about how the founding of PRN changed their lives. We honored Latrelle and Amy as Volunteers of the Year along with **Kate McDowell**.

We all have stories to tell, and Kate is helping us tell the stories of the wildlife that depend on us, of the farmer who wants to do better for the environment, and of the rivers that want to run clean and wild.

From new members to founding activists, to staff current and former, our network of river conservationists is strong and making a difference every day. //

## ILLINOIS WATERWAY CLEANUP

Seth Brady and Randy Smith are two high school teachers from Naperville who might not have set out to change Illinois, but that's exactly what they did.

They initiated the first annual Illinois Waterway Cleanup Week and got students out in the community making a difference.

Students volunteered in September to clean up local rivers, streams, lakes, even sewer grates, all in an effort to make their corner of the world better. Scores of kids took part across the state, and they learned important lessons about their watershed and how to protect it. Teachers also got access to free watershed lesson plans that PRN helped Seth and Randy create.



*Uni High students at the PRN office participating in the Waterway Cleanup.*



*Rob Kanter, Seth Brady, Carol Hays, Laura Schultz and Randy Smith at this year's annual dinner.*

Seth and Randy are part of PRN's Network. They worked hard to encourage students and communities across Illinois to get involved, and their efforts led to an Illinois General Assembly resolution designating September 11th through 16th as Illinois Waterway Cleanup Week.

“Seth and Randy went above and beyond regular expectations for what teachers do,” PRN Executive Director Carol Hays said. “They helped students across Illinois get involved in the environmental movement and learn how to protect our watersheds.” //

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2018

2018 is shaping up to be an exciting time at PRN. Join us for these great events that we have in store!

### Run for Clean Water

Plan on running an event during the Illinois Marathon in April in Champaign-Urbana? Join the PRN Run for Clean Water team and fundraise to protect the water, rivers, and wildlife of Illinois.

### PRN Day at Kickapoo

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, we will host PRN Day at Kickapoo in May to enjoy the Middle Fork of the Vermilion, Illinois' only designated wild and scenic river. Be prepared for nature walks, canoe and tubing trips, food, fun, and more!

### Wild & Scenic Film Festival

If you joined us for this year's Wild & Scenic Film Festivals (WSFF) in Champaign, Peoria, or Carbondale, get ready for new films and new locations! PRN will host two festivals next year: Peoria in April and Naperville in September. //

## \$15,000 EXPANDING OUR NETWORK CHALLENGE GIFT

Prairie Rivers Network has been offered a challenge gift from sustainable agriculture advocate and PRN member Carol Goodall Wock, which could raise an additional \$15,000 for Prairie Rivers Network.

Donors who give \$100 or more for the first time or increase their donation from last year will have that new donation or the increased amount matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$15,000. These additional funds will help grow our network to meet the challenges we face in the years to come because Illinois can't wait! We must protect our vital water resources, land, and wildlife now. //

**You Can Protect Wildlife Big and Small**  
**RENEW, GIVE, JOIN!**  
[PrairieRivers.org/donate](http://PrairieRivers.org/donate)



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