



Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

MIDDLE FORK STEWARDSHIP: CLARK BULLARD

Protecting the Middle Fork has never been one person's responsibility. It has been all of ours. Yet one river steward has made it a large part of his life for almost 50 years. Clark Bullard is a PRN member, board member, and former National Wildlife Federation board vice chair. His work to protect the Middle Fork exemplifies the long-term dedication needed to keep our natural areas safe.

"You knew Clark was making an impact when his name started popping up on billboards around Danville," PRN board member Eric Freyfogle says.

The effort to protect the Middle Fork started a bit before Clark got involved. In the late 1960s, Danville area leaders proposed to build a reservoir on the river because Lake Vermilion was filling up with silt. They saw a new reservoir as the answer to their water needs and a key to economic development. Initially they went to the Army Corps of Engineers for help. When the Corps showed no interest, boosters sought aid from the state instead.

Bob Bales, Jim Smith, and others began going to hearings in 1967 to highlight the natural treasures that would be lost to reservoir flooding.

As they spoke out, the state moved forward, buying up property along the river and beginning engineering studies. The cause seemed lost when Bob turned to Clark, then an aerospace engineer, for help.

"One day Bruce Hannon and I were having coffee at the Illini Union when Bob Bales asked for engineering help with the Middle Fork," Clark recalled. When Clark initially resisted, saying they needed a civil engineer, Bob asked, "You can add and subtract, can't you?"

The Committee on the Middle Fork framed the message about the river, not only by talking about saving it, its wildlife, or recreational opportunities, but mainly by focusing on the water supply issue. Clark and others began to ask questions like, "Where else could Danville find adequate water?" Soon, Clark began posing serious engineering questions that cast doubts on the viability and benefits of the reservoir. As a result, legislators denied Governor Walker's request for construction funds, and funded instead serious investigations of alternative water supplies.

These delays offered opportunities to build momentum against the

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project and to broaden the focus to ecological and recreational issues.

"The inspiration and energy for a truly statewide effort goes to people like Betty Hanson and Sandy Bales," Clark said. It was a team effort. Sandy's 1967 letter to the state division of waterways asked what would happen to the purchased lands if the reservoir was not built. What would they do? They would make the land into a park, state officials replied. Betty drew maps identifying places in the valley best suited to various recreational activities along the potential "river corridor park." "It was the energy that got the committee organized," Clark said.

Outreach to political candidates and state legislators began in earnest and many others got involved, including groups like garden clubs and the Izaak Walton League. Petitions against the project were signed by 60,000 people; 10,000 letters were hand-delivered to state legislators. The group continued to build momentum by hosting annual

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CAROL'S CURRENTS

A NEW CHAPTER

I'm writing to share with you that I will be leaving my role as Executive Director of Prairie Rivers Network at the end of the year. It has been a true privilege to lead PRN through a period of growth and impact as we pivoted toward our next 50 years inspiring change. We have expanded our staff and office, renewed our mission, updated our strategic direction and expanded our reach and membership. Our funding is at its most diverse and highest levels in the life of the organization. PRN has grown in its strength and stature providing important leadership roles in many areas. We have created innovative pathways and developed champions for clean energy, regenerative agriculture and biodiversity protections across Illinois. With the election of new state leadership, we hope to inspire a new vision for conservation and biodiversity protection across the state. As I depart, PRN's future is indeed bright.

Under the leadership of PRN's Board President, Jon McNussen, the Board of Directors has formed a transition committee, naming Elliot Brinkman as Interim Executive Director. Elliot has served as PRN's Water Resources Specialist for Habitat Conservation for over seven years, leading conservation coalitions and building our conservation program. The Board has also organized a committee to search for the next Executive Director.

I am grateful to you, our members and friends, for all the support you have shared with me over the past three and a half years. It has truly been an honor to serve this Network and to

help it grow in important ways. On my path ahead, I plan to work at the community level, inspiring community leaders and members to take climate action by shifting local systems toward resilience and regeneration, putting conservation and nature-based approaches at the heart.

I wish you all the best and encourage you to continue to build and support this strong Network that empowers people across Illinois to be a voice for restoring our rivers, healing our lands, and caring for our neighbors.

With gratitude,



Meet Elliot Brinkman Interim Executive Director

I am beyond honored to serve as Interim Executive Director of Prairie Rivers Network. In my time here, I've watched the organization flourish--growing our influence and impact. I am humbled by the passion and hard work Carol has brought over the past three years, grateful for the work of my talented and committed colleagues, and thankful for the support of our members and friends. As Interim, I look forward to honoring that passion, commitment, and support so that PRN can continue to flourish for years to come.



THANK YOU!

TO ALL OF OUR MEMBERS
FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN 2018

prairieriversnetwork

At Prairie Rivers Network, we protect water, heal land, and inspire change. Using the creative power of science, law, and collective action, we protect and restore our rivers, return healthy soils and diverse wildlife to our lands, and transform how we care for the earth and for each other.

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WHY WE GIVE TO PRN



A wood duck skims the surface of the water.

ERIC & JANE FREYFOGLE

PRN provides a clear, consistent voice for the waters, lands, wildlife, and people of Illinois. We regularly link arms with landowners, citizens, and like-minded groups to increase our collective influence and expand our good results. The two of us give to PRN annually to support this essential, citizen-run conservation work. Fifty years ago—the year Congress created the national Wild and Scenic Rivers program—a young central Illinois engineer, Clark Bullard, began his active advocacy for Illinois rivers. Then, as now, he grounded his labors in sound science, good law, and savvy politics. To honor his unmatched service and to help it continue we have donated also to the Clark Bullard Advocacy Fund of the PRN Endowment. We invite all others inspired by Clark to join us. //

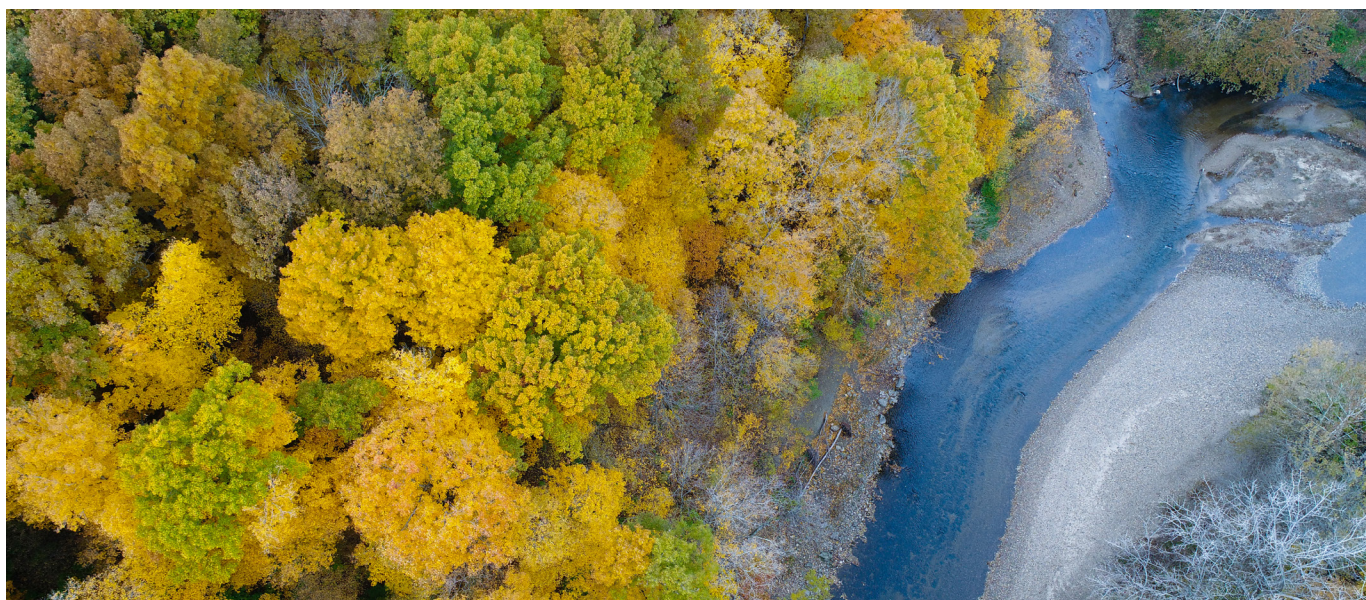
BULLARD continued from page 1

“farewell” trips down the Middle Fork with river enthusiasts and many public officials. All the while, more and more people joined the effort.

It was 1976 when the reservoir came up for a critical, final vote in the General Assembly. Despite pleas from Danville area lawmakers, the project was voted down. It would be another 13 years before the Middle Fork gained designation as a National Scenic River. Clark Bullard and Bob Bales again took the lead and rallied the forces. The reservoir idea had again reared its head, this time in the hope of drawing industry to the area. Clark knew that only federal law could offer long-term protection, but federal protection first required that the state give the river a special protected status. It was around this time, in the mid-1980s, that Clark’s name began popping up on billboards around Danville with

the names of Governor Jim Thompson and Congressman Terry Bruce, both supporters of the river corridor park.

The Middle Fork of the Vermilion River has remained under threat despite its Wild & Scenic designation. A river’s health depends on uses of nearby lands, so Clark and others over the years have had to challenge land uses that could degrade it. Today, it’s the continuing threat from coal ash. Who knows what future threats will arise? River advocates like Clark Bullard and groups like PRN know that most environmental victories are temporary, but most losses are permanent. Thank you to all of our members and river advocates who have been fighting, and who continue to fight, for the Middle Fork. //



The Middle Fork of the Vermilion River as seen from above in October, 2018.



LOOK WHAT
YOU MADE
HAPPEN!

While we have faced many challenges to our water, land, and wildlife this year, it was not without bright spots. It is these victories we celebrate and draw inspiration from for the future. It is also because of you and your membership in PRN. We couldn't do this without you!

In May, we filed a lawsuit against Dynege for violations of the Clean Water Act and their continual seepage of coal ash into the Middle Fork. The lawsuit elevated the Middle Fork to a national level, landing the issue in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, and others newspapers across the country. The Middle Fork was also recognized as one of American Rivers' Most Endangered Rivers for 2018.

Also on the Middle Fork, we helped convince the Army Corps of Engineers to take a closer look at a bank armoring permit on the river. This will give the public a voice in the permitting process they might otherwise not have had.

With our national partners, we won a lawsuit requiring the US EPA to regulate closed power plants, like the Vermilion Power Station, under the federal coal ash rule. These plants were previously unregulated. This is a big win that will affect plants across the country, not just those in Illinois.

Phosphorus pollution is one of the biggest threats to the health of Illinois rivers and streams, and with the help of the Illinois Sierra Club, we brokered a new agreement to require the largest sewage plants to reduce phosphorus discharges into our rivers and streams and to develop plans for further clean up.

PRN and our partners defeated a dangerous effort by the Rauner administration to weaken Illinois' strong floodplain

regulations. Had the effort been successful, we would have seen more construction in floodplains and more flooding risks for vulnerable communities.

We released a paper on nitrates in our drinking water titled *Illinois' Ignored Water Crisis* and developed a map of nitrate violations across Illinois. We successfully advocated for Illinois to reinvest in its agricultural conservation programs after several were unfunded in the 2016 fiscal year. These included continuing to fully fund Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and once again participating in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, which had been suspended since 2015.

With farmers, partner organizations, and researchers, we have advanced the regenerative, biodiverse farming movement in Illinois and across the Midwest. This will lead to more healthy food while protecting our soil and water. It will also reduce the use of the most harmful pesticides.

We are helping lead the Illinois Monarch Project, developing a statewide effort to expand the habitat that monarchs and native bees need to thrive. We have also held sessions led by farmers for researchers, landowners, and their peers interested in learning more ecologically-friendly ways to protect and expand habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

We helped support and organize September 8th climate marches in communities around downstate Illinois, mobilizing people to raise their voices for climate action. This effort has expanded our network and sparked a movement.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS continued from page 4

We co-sponsored the Solar Urbana-Champaign 3.0 group-buy program in Champaign and Piatt Counties, hosting over 20 solar educational events that generated commitments for over 450 kW of solar on over 36 properties in the two-county area. We hope to see this effort expand across East Central Illinois.

We held two successful Wild & Scenic Film Festivals in Normal and Peoria where we premiered a short film titled *Defend the Fork*. We also held the very successful Day at the Fork where people hiked Kickapoo State Recreation Area and paddled the Middle Fork River. Over 125 people came out to show their support of the river that day. //



An urban garden hosts many species of wildlife. This garden is in downtown Urbana, Illinois.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 - 2023

In 2018, PRN embarked on a year-long effort to examine our mission and set goals for the next five years. Staff and board members met over several months to find the right words to reflect the work that we do and how we do it. We came away from this process inspired to tackle the environmental challenges we will face in the coming years, and we hope you will be moved to join us. The plan is available at prairierivers.org/strategic-plan.

Our Mission

At Prairie Rivers Network, we protect water, heal land, and inspire change. Using the creative power of science, law, and collective action, we protect and restore our rivers, return healthy soils and diverse wildlife to our lands, and transform how we care for the earth and for each other.

Protect Water

Water is life — connecting, sustaining, and inspiring us all. At Prairie Rivers Network, we protect water from the ravages of pollution and restore the beauty and power of naturally flowing rivers. We hold polluters accountable, advance policies to allow river ecosystems to thrive, and promote practices that keep our waters clean.

Heal Land

Land and water form a system on which the entire community of life depends; to care for land is to care for water. Too often, human activity degrades land and water and imperils this community. At Prairie Rivers Network, we advance practices and policies that return health to our soils and increase biodiversity. We work with people to restore the lands along and between our rivers, repair the earth that provides our food, and ensure that animals have the habitat needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Inspire Change

We are part of an interconnected whole. Our community includes all parts of the Earth: soil, water, people, plants, and animals. At Prairie Rivers Network, we elevate and uphold the cultural values and understandings needed for all life to flourish. We use the images and voices of people to tell compelling stories of resistance and renewal. We educate and empower people to act. And we lead collective efforts to create new ways of restoring our rivers, healing our lands, and caring for our neighbors. //

ANNUAL DINNER ROUND UP

Good friends, good food, and good times were had by all at our 20th Annual Fundraising Dinner!

The evening kicked off with our reception and silent auction emceed by none other than PRN Communications and Outreach Coordinator and Abe Lincoln look-alike Jeff Kohmstedt. Featuring amazing items from sponsors Pantagonia, The Upper Bout, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Finest Home Inspection, Kickapoo Adventures, the Common Ground Food Co-op, and many more, the evening got kicked off in style with great company, amazing charity, and fun.

During the dinner, Executive Director Carol Hays outlined the new PRN strategic plan for 2019 - 2023. More on that can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.

NWF Senior Wildlife Biologist John Kanter and his brother, PRN board member and Environmental Almanac writer, Rob Kanter, headlined the evening's keynote address. The two spoke about growing up in Cincinnati, their different career paths, and the way their love of nature brought them closer as brothers. John's talk on wildlife made it clear: time is running out if we are to protect species from the ravages of climate change.



Volunteers of the Year Marty Kemper and Seth Swoboda with PRN's Kim Erndt-Pitcher and Carol Hays.

Award Winners

This year's award winners stole the show. We had the honor of bestowing the **River Steward of the Year Award** to Tom Eckels from Lake Villa, Illinois. As President of the Illinois Paddling Council, Tom volunteers his time to manage the Illinois Water TrailKeepers Program among many other activities. You can read more about Tom's work on the next page.

Volunteers of the Year Awards went to Marty Kemper and Seth Swoboda for their tireless work to protect trees and other broadleaf plants from the devastating effects of herbicides. For two years, PRN has worked with Marty and Seth on herbicide damage -- they have an undying commitment to monitoring herbicide damage to trees and native prairies, and have volunteered their time spreading awareness and organizing a tree-monitoring program across the state. Their dedication to being good stewards of the land and their efforts to educate the media, lawmakers, government officials, and the public make them well-deserving of this year's award.

The Fearless Fundraiser Award goes to the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana Earth Care Team. For the last 6 years, this group of avid walkers has helped raise over \$14,000 as part of our Illinois Marathon fundraiser campaign. Each year, these folks selflessly put themselves on the starting line to protect Illinois' water.

The Outstanding Public Servant Award went to the Illinois Natural History Survey Rivers Team. The river programs at the Illinois Natural History Survey have been around for a long time, cover a lot of territory, and provide expertise and perspective to the scientific community, managers, and decision-makers on a wide breadth of issues. In an era when science seems to be losing ground, the INHS rivers team is a vital link between sound ecological science and our many uses of water.

You Gave Big!

The evening could not have been possible without you and your incredible generosity. Because of your pledges and donations, we raised \$100,000 to protect the water, rivers, and wildlife of Illinois! Thank you to all the members, attendees, silent auction contributors, business members, speakers, award winners, and everyone involved with our 20th Annual Fundraising Dinner! It was a smashing success! Can't wait to see you next year! //

Did you miss the dinner? Catch the video!

[prairierivers.org/
2018-annual-dinner-video/](http://prairierivers.org/2018-annual-dinner-video/)

Save the Date!
21st Annual Fundraising Dinner

October 25, 2019

RIVER STEWARD OF THE YEAR

This year's River Steward Award went to Tom Eckels of the Illinois Paddling Council as nominated by Sigrid Pilgrim.

I have known Tom Eckels for more than a decade and cannot think of a paddler who would be more deserving of the River Steward of the Year Award.

Tom currently is and has been President of the Illinois Paddling Council, the state organization representing paddlers' interests (www.illinoispaddling.info). In addition to his duties as President, he also manages the Illinois Water TrailKeepers Program. This program annually holds dozens of river clean up events organized through outreach stewards and many volunteers. Tom consistently supports these efforts to help the Water TrailKeepers carry out their aspirations for the water trails they maintain.

As an example, Tom will travel from his home near the Wisconsin border to Chicago's south suburbs every year to assist and bring resources to the clean ups and trainings organized by the Water TrailKeeper for the Little Calumet River. Tom brings clean up tools, signs, expertise in water safety, and an attitude of help and support every year. He



Tom Eckels clearing debris from our rivers earned him this year's River Steward of the Year Award

manages to both care about people and water trails and works in a whole variety of ways to improve paddling access, water trail information, and the condition of water trails.

Tom also has the ability to connect people to each other and help them realize their goals through partnerships and coalitions. Tom is always willing to help and projects a caring, friendly, and supportive attitude to the paddling community and to professionals with whom he works on paddling access.

Congratulations to Tom for his amazing dedication to Illinois' rivers! //

ILLINOIS MARATHON TEAM

KAREN KANE, ILLINOIS MARATHON FUNDRAISER

Hey ladies! Get ready to put on your walking shoes and join the Mother Nature's Daughters Team ahead of next spring's Illinois Marathon. PRN member and walker Karen Kane will lead our efforts to break our marathon fundraising record, and she will need your help to do it.

"Asking family and friends to support your walking is easy," says Karen. "All you need to do is tell them why you love your rivers, water, and wildlife. Your passion can really open a person's heart and pocketbook in support of PRN."

You don't need to run a marathon to raise money for PRN. You can run or walk as much or as little as you want. Here's how it works:

- Join the team by contacting Karen at run@prairierivers.org.
- Set your fitness goal. Whether you're running a marathon or walking the 5k or anything in between, we want you to stay active and be healthy. Helping us raise money is the easy part!
- Set a goal for your fundraising, then raise the bar even higher. Too frequently people underestimate how much friends will give to something you care about.
- Email, call, and talk to your friends. A personalized email telling someone why you're raising funds, your fitness goals, and asking them for help can go a long way in protecting our water, land, and community.

Join Team Mother Nature's Daughters for fun, camaraderie, and knowing you're helping to protect the water and wildlife of Illinois! //



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Dear River Advocates,

In the late 80s and early 90s, I would bring my children on a campout for their birthday each year, just one-on-one with Dad at the Middle Fork River. I brought my kids to the Middle Fork because I felt it was so important to have my children connect with nature.

I saw my daughter’s concern when spring beauties were senselessly mowed or when willows that beavers munched on met a similar fate. She would ask, “Who did this?” Those trips taught me that my passion for protecting this place could be passed down. I felt more secure in the knowledge that the next generation appreciated the fact that the Middle Fork was saved for them.

Today, we face a crisis much larger than just the concerns I have for the Middle Fork, one which makes a 9-year old’s cares over wildflowers look quaint by comparison. **Worldwide, humans have been responsible for a 60 percent decline in wildlife populations in just the last four decades.** In Illinois, unregulated runoff of pesticides and fertilizers threatens our groundwater and healthy soils. Converting meandering streams to drainage ditches has destroyed wildlife habitat and threatens communities with flooding. Lastly, our continued reliance on fossil fuels has put our children and our grandchildren’s very existence in peril.

To fix this will take decades of work. As a lifelong activist, I was honored and humbled when my fellow board members established the Clark Bullard Advocacy Fund as part of the Prairie Rivers Network Endowment a few years ago. And with the serious wildlife extinction and climate change crisis we are facing, I respectfully **ask you to donate today to the Clark Bullard Advocacy Endowment Fund.** Any amount you can give will help Prairie Rivers Network work to protect our rivers, water, and wildlife for years to come. The Endowment provides PRN with the agility to face unexpected issues as they arise, and the financial stability to continue inspiring and mobilizing grassroots advocacy for conservation policy reforms.

For the past 50+ years, Prairie Rivers Network and our members have been fighting to protect nature. **A donation, big or small, to the Prairie Rivers Network Endowment will make sure we are here for the next fifty years to protect our water, heal our lands, and inspire the real change we need.** Please use the enclosed envelope to send in your Endowment donation today.

Sincerely,

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