



CEJA: AN EQUITABLE, CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE FOR ILLINOIS

Kim Knowles

The Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA) is a comprehensive climate bill that centers on racial and economic justice while putting Illinois on a track to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2050.

It is the product of hundreds of listening sessions with community members, and it represents the voices of the 200+ organizations and businesses that make up the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition, of which Prairie Rivers Network is one. The bill's comprehensive nature (at more than 900 pages long), renders a full summary impossible for this newsletter. Instead, we chose to focus on some of the equity programs that make CEJA a first of its kind.

What is Equity in CEJA?

CEJA creates a set of programs that address historical and systemic racial and economic injustices that have kept people of color and low incomes from accessing economic and social benefits that many of us take for

granted. These injustices have also placed them at greater risk from pollution and public health crises like COVID-19. Low income, African American, and Latinx households also bear a higher energy burden, meaning they spend more of their income on energy (up to 3x more) than the average household. Finally, many communities in downstate Illinois have come to depend on the fossil fuel industry for their livelihoods and the tax revenue that funds essential services. As Illinois transitions away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, these communities are experiencing economic hardship. CEJA addresses each of these inequities in several ways.

Workforce & Business Development

Simply training people in new skills is not enough to overcome long standing barriers. As such, CEJA provides opportunities for people of color to find jobs, sustain businesses, and build wealth through the creation of 1) a network of workforce training hubs that train people and connect

them with real jobs; 2) business incubators that help new or struggling businesses get off the ground; 3) and an advanced business accelerator program to help businesses make the leap to managing large renewable energy projects. CEJA also provides low cost loans and grants to upstart businesses that demonstrate a commitment to working in under-resourced communities.

Reducing Energy Burden

Lower incomes, less efficient housing, and limited access to energy efficiency programs explain the higher energy burdens faced by black and brown and economically disadvantaged households. CEJA helps reduce energy burden by requiring utilities to make the electric grid more affordable, cleaner, and more equitable. It also increases funding for and access to energy efficiency programs and to Illinois Solar for All, the state's low income solar program.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

ELLIOT BRINKMAN

Spring is always a special time, but this year is unlike any other in recent memory. The events of the past year give a whole new meaning to the annual emergence and renewal we've come to expect during this time of year. Flowers are blooming, buds are breaking, and birds are chirping. As the natural world awakens, so do we.

We are in a much different place than we were a year ago. Instead of fear and uncertainty ruling the day, it's gradually becoming safer for us to return to some semblance of normalcy—reconnecting with family, friends, and loved ones after a difficult year apart. The political winds are shifting, too. Instead of fighting a concerted attack on public health and environmental protection, we can turn our attention to the opportunities this moment holds for the health of our air, land, water, and community.

While this spring offers us some relief on many fronts, we mustn't grow complacent. We have to exercise care and caution as we move into this new normal, making good on our early-pandemic promises to focus on what matters—caring for one another and not squandering our precious time. The team at Prairie Rivers Network certainly isn't wasting any time, and the pages of this newsletter are evidence of that.

Despite a tumultuous year, we've made a lot of progress. We look forward to putting into place some of the strongest protections in the nation on the storage and disposal of toxic coal ash. We continue our push for comprehensive clean energy policy that addresses the climate crisis while lifting up those in need. We welcome the return of the majestic, but once extirpated, sandhill crane. There is a lot to celebrate, honor, and look forward to this spring. //

OUR MISSION: Protect Water. Heal Land. 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 I GIVE

I grew up loving the newts under thick moss and clouds of frog eggs in a local reservoir near Berkshires, Massachusetts. When marriage brought me to the Midwest, my "here" became Evanston, Illinois and Northwest Indiana grassland and shaded oak savannahs. You love the place you are, and I love the clouds of dragonflies on Lake Michigan and the rattle of sandhill cranes.

Like all of you, I work at the local and national level to protect our community and wild things; I engage on national and international environmental efforts. Regionally, I push to protect Lake Michigan and our oak savannahs. At home, I garden for pollinators, leave my leaves, avoid toxins, eliminate turf, and try to buy less.

Illinois is an agricultural and coal mining state. Chicago may feel important, but environmental change won't happen unless we engage the whole state in the issue. We need a reputable, effective voice in the heart of big environmental issues. That's Prairie Rivers Network. That's why I give.

Leslie Shad



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PROTECT WATER.

THE “KAR-R-R-R-O-O-O” IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS

For the past few months, Prairie Rivers Network has been working with the International Crane Foundation and several partners to bring the Midwest Crane Count to the Illinois River Valley. What is the count, and why is it important?

By Ryan Grosso

The goal of the Annual Midwest Crane Count has been to use citizen science and data collection to study the success of sandhill cranes. Healthy wetlands throughout Illinois and Wisconsin are critical for migratory populations and safe, successful nesting areas. As of now, many organized crane count efforts have been confined to the northern counties in Illinois. But we know that migratory and nesting pairs have been spotted further south.

Protecting Water Protects Wildlife

This year will be an opportunity to lay the foundation of a focused crane count in central Illinois. Our goal is to gather data at some of the most pristine, treasured areas along the Illinois River, like Dixon Waterfowl Refuge near Hennepin or Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge. George Archibald, co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, says about the effort: “It’s the start of a citizens’ science project that I hope will be repeated annually perhaps leading to rigorous scientific research to provide information upon which sound crane conservation practices can be developed.”

Bringing the Count to Central Illinois

On a dark and chilly April morning, Carol Beatty found herself in one of Illinois’ northernmost counties, patiently waiting to see or hear the distinct call of a sandhill crane.

Carol has been a birder for many years, sharing her passion for ornithology with several Audubon chapters scattered throughout Illinois. She has participated in Christmas and Spring bird counts for more than two decades, but for the first time on that April day in 2019, Carol ventured into new territory. She was a first-time counter in the Annual Midwest Crane Count.

While her focus was confined to a natural area in Stephenson County, more than a thousand people across five states in the Midwest were diligently watching and listening for cranes. This is all part of a far-reaching effort by the International Crane Foundation, headquartered near Baraboo, Wisconsin,



Sandhill crane (Photo credit: Rolland Swain)

to survey midwestern wetlands for sandhills and the rarer whooping crane.

There is a good reason why this annual event draws so many participants. Besides years of partnership and development, many are naturally drawn to the incredible nature of a sandhill or whooping crane. Their calls are loud and distinct. Sandhills produce “a loud rattling kar-r-r-r-o-o-o” that has the ability to echo for miles. On average, sandhill cranes stand around 4 feet tall, with a wingspan that can range from 5 to 6 feet. There aren’t many more obvious, natural sights than seeing a flock of sandhills soaring above or the sound of a breeding pair calling to each other in a marsh.

The Annual Midwest Crane Count is another step toward supporting the goals of Prairie Rivers Network in the Illinois River Valley. Our coalitions strive to preserve habitat and to support the diversity of life in the heart of Illinois. As simple as it sounds, a citizen science effort like this will give us insight into the success of cranes and the important habitat they rely on.

We look forward to sharing more information with you in the future as we develop the program and work with partners. //

HEAL LAND.

REGULATING COAL ASH: VISION TO REALITY

Very soon, Illinois will be among states with the strongest coal ash regulation. It's been a long journey, traceable back to grassroots campaigns to protect water in communities across the state starting decades ago.

By Andrew Rehn

The momentum really started building in 2018. Prairie Rivers Network, represented by Earthjustice, filed a Clean Water Act lawsuit against Dynegy for pollution from their coal ash ponds into the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, and the river was featured on the front page of Chicago Tribune with the headline “Coal Ash Stains Scenic River.” The drum beat continued when the Middle Fork was named one of the US’s Most Endangered Rivers by American Rivers that summer.

Years of grassroots activism from groups like ours and the Ecojustice Collaborative resulted in three key legislators who clearly understood the coal ash problem: Senator Scott Bennett, Representative Carol Ammons, and Representative Mike Marron. Late in 2018, Prairie Rivers Network and partners launched a report on groundwater pollution from coal ash titled *Cap and Run*. This final piece of the puzzle put coal ash’s threat across the state into clear view, and teed up a legislative push in the following year.

Passing the Coal Ash Pollution Prevention Act

Bolstered by grassroots support across the state, the Coal Ash Pollution Prevention Act passed in 2019, making Illinois one of just a few states with their own coal ash laws. In addition to establishing financial requirements on polluters to put up money for their coal ash ponds, the law started a rulemaking process that would result in specific regulations for coal ash impoundments.

Like all rulemakings in our state, the Illinois Pollution Control Board was charged with developing the rules. The law required the rules to be completed by March 2021.

Despite the global pandemic that took over in 2020, the rulemaking process moved forward. The Board held two week-long hearings where lawyers from our friends at Earthjustice, Environmental Law and Policy Center, and Sierra Club duked it out with industry over what would go into the rules. Community members from across the state virtually attended to speak up for clean water and remind the Illinois Pollution Control Board members what was really at stake.

What the Rules Might Look Like

We’re now at the end of that rulemaking process. As this article is being written, the rules are not yet finalized. There has been a last-minute curveball resulting in a 45-day extension of the deadline. However, the final rules are unlikely to deviate too far from the Board’s ‘Second Notice’ rules which were published in February. Some highlights include:

- Industry is required to maintain groundwater monitoring around their coal ash ponds with greater detail and reporting frequency than before.
- Illinois residents will have better access to the full plans for closure which industry has to post on their websites. What used to take weeks to acquire will now be publicly posted for all to see.
- Public participation is facilitated by longer deadlines for document review, requirements for translation services as needed, and new comment opportunities on industry proposals to be exempt from clean-up requirements.
- A new docket and potential rulemaking on sources of coal ash pollution that were not included in this rulemaking.
- Few, if any, of industry’s requests to weaken the rule were granted by the Board.

With the rulemaking not yet finished, any part of the rule could possibly change (so keep an eye on our website). But if the rules move forward largely unchanged, it’s safe to say that Illinois has made big strides towards a future safer from coal ash pollution. //



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THANK YOU!

We also thank the 174 members that donated under \$50, but are not listed here. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of our supporter recognition. We apologize for any errors and urge you to notify us of any corrections.

INSPIRE CHANGE.

STORIES FROM THE FLOODPLAIN

In recent years, Prairie Rivers Network has sounded the alarm about the devastating toll to the Illinois landscape caused by pesticide drift. In March, we spoke in depth on this topic with Dr. Nathan Donley from the Center for Biological Diversity as part of our podcast, *Stories from the Floodplain*. Here's a brief excerpt.

PRN: Pesticide drift is nothing new, but recently there's been an increase in reports of herbicide drift damage to trees, plants, and conservation areas. Can you talk about this problem?

Nathan: Pesticide drift has been around for a very, very long time, as long as pesticides have been used. And what we know is that there are two very bad players—Enlist Duo and dicamba—that have pushed this issue into the public consciousness and illustrated how big an issue pesticide drift can be to surrounding ecosystems. We use so many herbicides across the landscape, year after year, and all of them combine to make a problem that we don't really even know the scope of.

Right now we know a lot of people have reported damage from dicamba. There have been monitoring studies by Prairie Rivers Network and Audubon Arkansas that have tried to systematically look at this and shown the problem is immense. People can report incidents of harm, but if you're not looking for it, you're not going to find it. We don't have a systematic monitoring process across the entire country, which is what we really need.

And not just monitoring harm to agricultural crops but also harm to native plants and areas in protected reserves. Those are the plants that really provide so much respite and so much of an oasis in the sea of agriculture that we have in much of the Midwest. When they start getting harmed, the ecological consequences that can come with that just start cascading on themselves. So I think that we're realizing that the problem is very big in scope, but we still don't know how big it is. And I think that's really a result of regulatory failure.

PRN: So the rules and regulations we have are not protecting humans, wildlife, or the environment?

Nathan: No, they're not. Unfortunately, our pesticide regulatory system is, in my opinion, fundamentally broken.

Right now it exists solely for the benefit of agriculture, which is very frustrating to many in the public health field and for environmental and human health advocates. Agriculture should certainly have their say and be able to advocate for their position, but when they're pretty much dictating terms of use for most pesticides and public health advocates aren't even getting a seat at the table, then the process is skewed and it's broken. [The current regulatory regime] exists to approve pesticides and make sure pesticides make it to the market, instead of asking whether they should be approved or not.

PRN: When you have herbicide that is highly volatile, and you really can't control it after it has been applied. Where are we failing?

Nathan: The main problem is that a lot of the pesticides have been overused for so long and used irresponsibly that they're no longer effective. We're using things that were approved in the 1950s or 60s that really should be considered obsolete. And that's the case with dicamba, where it's an awful pesticide because it doesn't stay put. The problem is we're doubling down on this system, instead of saying, well, glyphosate kind of was a colossal failure after these decades of using it incorrectly. Maybe we need to be looking at different ways of dealing with glyphosate resistant weeds or other herbicide resistant weeds, instead of just piling on four or five different herbicides into your tank.

*To hear the full conversation, visit <https://prairierivers.org/podcast/>. There are new episodes of *Stories from the Floodplain* every month. Subscribe, listen, and let us know what you think! //*



TAKE ACTION!

If you care about conservation in Illinois, you should take action today and ask your legislators to expand conservation funding!

The funding that supports farmers' conservation efforts is under threat in Illinois. The current state budget has made it clear that we must fight to protect the programs and agencies that ensure Illinois farmers can incorporate more environmentally and financially sustainable practices.



Partners for Nutrient Loss Reduction

The General Assembly must pass the Partners for Nutrient Loss Reduction Act (HB 1792) in order for the state to tackle polluted farm runoff and implement the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. This legislation would add implementation of the strategy to the purposes of the Partners for Conservation Fund, and it will bolster our Soil and Water Conservation Districts and programs, like the Fall Covers for Spring Savings Program, in supporting Illinois farmers looking to incorporate more environmentally sustainable practices.

Contact your lawmakers today and ask them to Support the Partners for Nutrient Loss Reduction Act!

Take Action Today
[prairierivers.org/
take-action](http://prairierivers.org/take-action)

A REMEMBRANCE: NAN EHRLICH

In January 2021, Prairie Rivers Network lost one its most ardent, influential, and generous founders, Anne A. "Nan" Ehrlich. Nan died in Champaign at age 93.

Born in Schenectady, New York, Nan moved to Champaign-Urbana in 1968 when her husband, Gert, became a professor at the University of Illinois. She quickly engaged in community and civic affairs and developed a passion for the prairie landscape and especially its rivers.

Unbounded Energy

When a dam proposed for the Sangamon threatened the University of Illinois' Allerton Park, Nan joined the Committee on Allerton, the "ancestor" organization of Prairie Rivers Network. She brought to the fledgling organization unbounded energy, superb writing skills, and important contacts with community members as well as political insights honed in her work among diverse local and statewide groups and her position as the Executive Director of the Illinois Public Transit Association. She diligently monitored area-wide press coverage of the battle and helped ensure accurate reporting of the committee's work.

In January 1973, the Committee formed the Coalition on American Rivers, incorporating as a non tax-exempt organization so its members had the right to lobby elected officials on behalf of rivers. Nan joined the Board of Directors, becoming its secretary-treasurer. As the Coalition undertook work that ultimately led to changes in federal policy regarding flood control dams and waterways, Nan provided valuable advice and unwavering support to the board. She also befriended and mentored the group's first paid employee, the young Executive Director, John Marlin.



LOVE'S RIVERS

by PRN River Champion Michael Witte

Sit by Love's Rivers, watch them flow
The eddies, the currents over slick rock
Cattails defending the banks and
hawks on their prey diving low

Otters protect the family pool
Beavers build out the family lodge
Proud daddy and mama bear fish and sun
Out with their cubs on the river's lawn

The growl of a badger protecting her den
The call of a loon on water's smoothness
The flash of a big fish jumping sky high
The croon of the pack romancing the sky

Love's Rivers—feel them flow in you
Love's Rivers we float, paddle and ford
We make love on the banks
We give mighty thanks

Love's Rivers keep us whole

*Copyright, All Rights Reserved:
Michael Brian Witte, 12/21/2020*

A Bridge Between Successes

In late 1983, with battles over dams drawing to a close and the organization existing only on paper, it was reborn as the Central States Education Center and turned its attention to pollution flowing into waterways, particularly from landfills. Nan became the bridge between the Allerton successes and waste victories the revived organization achieved. She was the wise soul counseling another very young new Executive Director, John Thompson. She was the mother hen, gathering the ever-growing flock of youthful employees and University of Illinois student volunteers for an outing to her secluded retreat near the Salt Fork River. She kept the reborn group steady during rough periods of funding.



SANDY BALES AND NAN

Nan retired from the Board of Directors just before the group became Prairie Rivers Network, promoting clean water and ecological health for all Illinois waters. But she never retired her enthusiasm for and generous support of the beloved organization or the friendship she shared with its founding members and their families.

It's safe to say that as Prairie Rivers Network celebrates successes now and in the future, we are benefiting from the continuing influence of Nan Ehrlich. //

CEJA (From page 1)

Supporting Fossil Fuel Workers and Communities

In Illinois and across the country, the transition away from coal power is underway. Out-of-state energy companies have made risky investments in expensive and aging Illinois power plants and mines and then often closed them with little warning or support for Illinois workers and communities. CEJA includes a plan to help impacted communities adapt to the inevitable energy transition and build resilient economies. The bill provides displaced workers with advance notice of plant closures, continued health care and retirement benefits, and full tuition scholarships at Illinois state and community colleges, as well as access to the workforce hubs mentioned above. CEJA also provides local governments with tax base replacement and access to Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) economic development staff and investment incentives to renewable energy companies that locate in transitioning communities or hire displaced energy workers.

CEJA places Illinois at the forefront of equitable renewable energy policy, and Prairie Rivers Network is proud to be a leading member of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition. The Coalition provides expertise and support from grassroots organizing to policy development, advocacy, and implementation. Please help us pass this landmark and essential piece of legislation by supporting Prairie Rivers Network and by contacting your legislators today at <https://tinyurl.com/pascejanow>. //



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PRN Membership Levels

						
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If you celebrated your 72nd birthday or you turned 70 1/2 before 2020, you can make a donation to PRN by direct transfer from your IRA, and your gift will count towards your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD, <https://tinyurl.com/iragift>). You might save on your taxes, too! The SECURE ACT of 2019 made major changes to the RMD, so be sure to check with your tax advisor for more information.

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