

Unlock \$10,000 in December With Your Donation

Dear Friends,

We have some very exciting news to share with you...in honor of our 55th Anniversary, our Board of Directors has pledged to match every donation we receive in December, up to \$10,000.

With your donation, you can unlock an additional \$10,000 to help protect the rivers of Illinois.

Our network is growing every day because of people like you, who value science, understand the dangers of climate change, and cherish our rivers and natural places. Our members want to do everything they can to ensure we all have access to clean water and natural areas that are vital to human health and places of peace and rejuvenation.

If you are in a financial position to do so, we are asking you to please make a donation today because we have a lot of work to do in 2023.

We have made great progress the past few years to make Illinois a leader in meeting the climate change crisis head on through the Climate & Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA).

But our work is never done. We are up against big polluting industries with deep pockets and an unconscionable willingness to pollute our rivers, destroy wildlife habitat, degrade the land, and deny that climate change threatens every one of us.

To make matters worse, our bedrock laws like the Clean Water Act are being attacked at the Supreme Court level. That is why it is even more critical to act at the local and statewide level.

With your help, PRN is fighting back against the assault on the environment, like the decade-long fight to stop the Bulldog Coal Mine that threatened the Salt Fork River in Vermillion County. We must continue to fight for our rivers because if we don't, who will?

We have ambitious goals for 2023, but we cannot achieve them without your support.

Thank you,

The staff of Prairie Rivers Network

**Your Donation Can Help Unlock
An Additional \$10,000
To Protect Our Rivers.**

Give for the First Time - Renew Your Membership - Make an Extra Donation - Every Dollar Counts!



A PROMISE HALF-FULFILLED

By Robert Hirschfeld

The passage of the Clean Water Act, 50 years ago, ended an era of burning rivers choked with industrial chemicals and raw sewage and marked the beginning of a new public awareness of environmental harms. Real progress was achieved in reducing pollution, cleaning rivers and lakes, and bringing back fish and wildlife to America's waters. Unfortunately, a half century later, the Clean Water Act remains a promise half-fulfilled.

Passed in 1972, the law set a goal that all waters in the U.S. would be fishable and swimmable by 1983 and all pollution into America's navigable waters would be eliminated by 1985. Yet almost 40 years beyond those target dates, our goals remain distressingly remote. Today, half of the rivers and streams that have been studied are so polluted that they are classified as "impaired" by the US EPA, and thus unsuitable for safe swimming, drinking, fishing, and other uses.

Here in Illinois, the numbers give evidence of the grim reality. According to the Illinois EPA, 89% of Illinois'

rivers and streams are impaired by pollution such that they cannot fully support "primary contact," i.e. swimming. Forty-two percent of rivers are too polluted to fully support aquatic life, and 100% of rivers assessed are too polluted to fully support fish consumption. These figures should shock and alarm us and demand our attention.

The Clean Water Act succeeded by requiring polluting industries and sewage treatment plants to limit the release of pollutants into waters through a pipe or from an identifiable source. Yet, the law entirely avoided addressing the issue of polluted runoff such as fertilizers and pesticides from farmland and oil and toxic chemicals from city streets.

Agricultural runoff—manure and chemical fertilizers—is now the leading cause of water pollution in the United States. The gruesome embodiment of this is the Gulf of Mexico "dead zone." Nitrogen and phosphorus from the vast agricultural lands of the Midwest find their way into streams and rivers and eventually spill into the Gulf, creating a biological wasteland where oxygen levels are too low to support aquatic life.

Because the farm lobby is powerful and boasts allies in both political parties, it has successfully fended off any attempt to regulate water pollution from farms. Federal and state agencies largely rely on "voluntary programs," such as paying farmers to use practices like cover crops, which are intended to keep soil on the farm and

reduce runoff. While these practices are laudable, this approach has not succeeded in reducing water pollution from farms. Despite millions of dollars spent on such efforts in Illinois, last year the state released a report that indicated that nitrogen and phosphorus pollution have increased in recent years.

In addition to this major shortcoming of the Clean Water Act the US Supreme Court may soon further limit the law's reach. Many experts believe the current Court will hold that the Act does not have jurisdiction over many wetlands, as well as streams that are dry for part of the year. Such a ruling would accelerate the loss of wetlands and increase pollution in streams across the country.

In the face of this, Prairie Rivers Network continues its work to hold polluters accountable, to protect our waters from unregulated farm runoff, and to halt the loss of wetlands. The 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act is a moment to reflect on past successes and to plan ahead. We must dig in now and demand action from decision makers, particularly on farm runoff, if we expect to celebrate progress in another 50 years. //

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Farm runoff is now the leading cause of water pollution.



WELCOME, MAGGIE BRUNS

We enter the holidays and look to 2023 with much to be thankful for and optimistic about. After a thoughtful search—that included both board and staff—we are thrilled to announce that Maggie Bruns will be the next Executive Director of Prairie Rivers Network.

For more than twenty years, Maggie has advanced environmental protection at the local, state, and federal level—most recently, at the League of Conservation Voters in Washington, DC. From managing an executive team and liaising with the board, to directing and mentoring grassroots organizers, leading large fundraising campaigns, and transforming communications strategies to engage a more diverse audience, she has the breadth of experience we need for the challenges ahead.

Maggie will work closely with our board, staff, members, and partners to carry out our mission. She has a vision for engaging in the implementation of recently enacted and historic programs like Illinois' Climate and Equitable Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act to help make our communities, rivers, and wildlife more resilient in a changing climate.

Personally, I am particularly proud that Maggie got her start in environmental advocacy when I hired her as a PRN intern during her student days at the University of Illinois. In DC, we became friends and colleagues, and now she has returned to lead PRN to a bolder, more just future—one we could have hardly imagined back then.

As always, we offer our sincere thanks for your partnership and support for our work to protect water, heal land, and inspire the change required in this moment. We wish you the happiest of holidays and a joyous new year.



With gratitude,

Jean Flemma

*Former PRN Executive Director (2002-2006)
and current Board Member*

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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THANK YOU!

As 2022 comes to a close, the staff at PRN would like to thank all of you that attended our Annual Dinner at Allerton Park in September. As you will read later in this newsletter, it was a fantastic evening with great friends we have missed during the pandemic. It was refreshing to finally get to see you all in person once again and not over Zoom!

We also would like to express our deepest thanks and appreciation to our many members who give generously to PRN each year. Your faith in us and the work we do inspires us each and every day. We could not fight polluters, safeguard our rivers, or protect wildlife without your help. We are forever grateful!

Passage of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act in 2021 has led to plenty of opportunities to get our hands dirty in its implementation. We have big plans in our fight against pesticides like Dicamba, and we continue to keep an eye on the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River and Dynege's plans to move the ash. It is a big year ahead of us, and we are glad you are there with us every step of the way!

IN MEMORIAM

REMEMBERING PATRICIA HANNON

The history of PRN's beginnings and the legacy of our founders is something worth celebrating, and yet it is with a heavy heart we mourn the passing of Patricia Hannon.

Five years ago, for the 50th Anniversary celebration of PRN, we interviewed Bruce Hannon, one of our founders and the namesake of the Bruce Hannon Friends, a group of our most dedicated supporters committed to sustaining the work of PRN into the future. In that interview Bruce reflected on Allerton Park and PRN and told us, "The key to all of this, the key to the start of all of this," was his wife Patricia Hannon.

Patricia Hannon passed away in early September. Her passing is a loss to the Hannon family, to our community, and to all who knew her. She was also instrumental in saving Allerton and in the formation of what would later become Prairie Rivers Network.

Her Legacy of Saving Allerton Park

The story of how Allerton was saved began with a hike in Allerton Park by Patricia. Bruce and Patricia were staying with their family in a nearby cabin, and it was that day that she learned of the plans to dam the Sangamon River and flood the park. Patricia came back to the cabin on a mission and told Bruce about the Corps' intention. She organized a bonfire, started a petition, and spoke about

what the park meant to her. And thankfully, through the hard work and perseverance of volunteers, many of whom are still PRN members today, Allerton was saved.

Allerton was just the first of many special places that were saved by the work of advocates like Patricia Hannon. Our founders changed how the public views our rivers, and we at PRN, the staff, the board, and our generous members and supporters, are the proud inheritors of Patricia's truly remarkable legacy.

It is with the utmost respect that the PRN family offers our thanks for what Patricia started 55 years ago. //



Sangamon River at Allerton Park.



GOOD LUCK!

PRN would like to wish Catie Gregg and Ryan Grosso all the best as they move on to other endeavors!

Earning Statewide Recognition

Joining the team in 2017 as Agricultural Programs Specialist, Catie concentrated her work on nitrate pollution in drinking water. Her findings on nitrates led to statewide recognition for PRN as a leader in protecting our water from agricultural pollution, the main driver of nitrate pollution in the state. Catie's research found serious gaps in what we know about nitrate levels in the state, where nitrate levels are high, and what communities are doing to protect their citizens. Catie's insights and drive to protect our water will be sorely missed!



The Voice of the Podcast

Ryan first joined PRN in 2017 as a college intern. Once he graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he was hired as Water Resources Associate, joining our rivers and wildlife team in 2019. Ryan's work centered on restoring the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers systems. He was instrumental in getting our Stories from the Floodplain podcast off the ground by chronicling his trip interviewing people impacted by Mississippi River flooding.

Thank you, Catie and Ryan, for your hard work and dedication the past five years!

2022 RIVER STEWARD AWARD

Each year, the staff and board of PRN look forward to honoring someone who exemplifies what it is to be a steward of our rivers. The River Steward Award recognizes and celebrates the most exemplary river stewards—heroes with stories that we all need to hear. We are so excited to recognize someone whose clean water victories inspire our staff and other river advocates around the state. This year's River Steward Award goes to Callie Ramirez. Callie is a sophomore at St. Charles East High School and was nominated by her teacher Annemarie LaGrassa. What follows is Annemarie's nomination edited for length.

Callie was my student and a participant in my GeoAdventure Club, where we focus on outdoor science, conservation, and stewardship of the earth. Students learn and explore with naturalists from the Kane County Forest Preserve, and we have had many amazing adventures together!

As an 8th grader, Callie started her own club called the Fox River Helpers. This group meets monthly from April to November at various nature preserves along the Fox River to clean up debris along the shoreline. Her group has continued to grow over the last three years with many volunteers from the community and has collected hundreds of pounds of garbage. Callie

makes the work fun and h recycle and reuse some of the river.

Callie has been inspiratio other young members of th them that kids can make the world starting in th She is a gracious and mo deep devotion to keeping motivating others to get in of all the time and effort C true river steward! //



UNDER TH

“Amazing!” “Such a wonder not have asked for a more

These were just some of t this year's Annual Dinner what an amazing night it v members, guests, and sta where PRN began 55 year call, not through a comput in person. It truly was an i

A Party to Remember

The night kicked off with Allerton Park master natur PRN board members, who the trees, past the mans pond, and to the shores of the largest tributary of the

After the walk, guests were of the Jeff Magby jazz trio, earnest with the arrival of

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Callie has put forth as a



THE STARS AT ALLERTON

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Illinois River.

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and the party began in
more guests, cocktails

2022 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

The PRN Volunteer of the Year award holds a special place in our hearts because of the dedication it takes to earn it. This year’s winner is not one person but many, and the fight they took on over a decade ago exemplifies what it means to volunteer time to a cause that benefits everyone. This year’s Volunteer of the Year award goes to Stand Up To Coal.

The fight against Sunrise Coal and the long-proposed Bulldog mine in Vermilion County began over a decade ago when the company began buying coal leases under farmland between the towns of Homer, Allerton, and Sidell. At the time, local citizens banded together in collaboration with PRN and other groups like Eco-Justice Collaborative, Heart of Illinois Sierra Club, and Citizens Against Longwall Mining to put forth a grassroots effort opposing the mine.

We wrote about the long effort in our Summer 2022 edition of the newsletter, but it is worth repeating here just what it took to beat Sunrise Coal. Fighting this mine required a multi-pronged strategy and years of community involvement, public outreach and education, and attending agency meetings.

As former PRN Water Resources Specialist Traci Barkley said of efforts to stop the mine, “This important victory is an amazing example of the power of people working together. PRN and SUTC really activated a diverse group of people to do the difficult, strategic, and sustained work to defeat outside corporate extractors.”

It is with great happiness and awe that we award the 2022 Volunteer of the Year award to the many people who make up Stand Up To Coal. Thank you for your dedication and maintaining the fire in your bellies to see this fight through to its happy conclusion... We stopped Bulldog mine! //



and food courtesy of Michaels’ Catering, the silent auction, and our short program.

PRN Senior Water Policy Specialist Robert Hirschfeld set the celebratory tone by telling the story of PRN’s beginnings and honoring the late Patricia Hannon and her activism. Patricia Hannon’s early morning Allerton hike 55 years ago was the inspiration that spurred the community to save Allerton from flooding by the Army Corps’ proposed dam on the Sangamon. This was the start of the group that would later become PRN.

Sue Smith from Stand Up To Coal gave a wholehearted thank you to PRN members and staff, past and present, for their dedication to stopping the Bulldog Mine which was finally terminated earlier this summer.

But most importantly, the party was dedicated to you, our members and supporters who came out

en masse to have a good time, visit, and support the important work of PRN. Each and every one of the PRN family, staff, and board members enjoyed being together for this wonderful occasion!

You Gave Big!

And lastly, your incredible outpouring of support at the Dinner was truly amazing! With bids on silent auction items and individual contributions, your gifts and pledges helped us raise over \$100,000! We cannot thank you enough for your generosity, your dedication to PRN and our mission, and for opening your checkbooks to support the work we do every day. Thank you! //

“The Fox River is so incredibly special to me. I decided to take action because there are too many people who have little to no care for the environment. Nothing can change if no one tries, so I thought I would try.”

2022 River Steward Callie Ramirez

WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

Each winter, we cannot wait to show you just how important you are to everything we do. From our fight against pesticides to the struggle of keeping pollution from entering our rivers, every bit of the work we do would be less successful if not for your support, actions, and inspiration. We are happy to share what we accomplished together in 2022!

Passing CEJA was Just the Beginning

PRN has been working tirelessly to ensure that the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) lives up to its name. CEJA, one of the nation's most comprehensive and equitable energy and climate laws, will help Illinois meet our renewable energy goal of 40% by 2030 and reduce health-harming and planet-warming pollution from our energy and transportation sectors.

Illinois has begun implementing the many programs in CEJA, and PRN is working inside the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition to lead the work, coordinating a dozen different working groups to achieve the high aims of CEJA. We are working with partners, advocates, state agencies, and community leaders to ensure that communities understand and will benefit from CEJA's opportunities including solar, energy efficiency, electric vehicles, and more. We have given presentations, attended conferences, and met with coal community leaders to support real people and real communities in the transition to a clean energy future in Illinois.

Fighting for the Big Muddy

While the Bulldog Mine was stopped, coal mining continues to be a threat to clean water in many parts of the state. In southern Illinois, PRN is working to stop pollution from the Sugar Camp and Pond Creek mines, both of which discharge into the Big Muddy River.

PRN and Sierra Club filed a "Motion to Intervene" in the Attorney General's lawsuit against Sugar Camp Energy, LLC

related to contamination from PFAS chemicals used when the mine attempted to put out an underground fire with foam containing the chemicals. Through intervention, we seek to become a plaintiff in the case and assert our specific interests in protecting the ecosystem and recreational resources of nearby water bodies, including the Big Muddy River.

"The public has a right to healthy, undamaged water systems. Sugar Camp mine has failed to ensure toxic pollutants like PFAS are not discharged into Akin Creek and Middle Fork Big Muddy River and must be held accountable for the harm they have caused to both the local community and to downstream watersheds."

PRN Senior Water Resources Engineer Andrew Rehn

PRN and Sierra Club are also taking action to reverse the approval of a pipeline that would discharge highly saline water from the Pond Creek mine into the Big Muddy. The 12-mile long pipeline was approved in the mine's NPDES water discharge permit issued this April. Pipelines like these are known to rupture, and indeed a similar pipeline at Sugar Camp ruptured this July, spilling over 20,000 gallons of mine wastewater near Macedonia, Illinois.

Opportunities for Revitalizing Communities

In the fall of 2021 shortly after the passage of CEJA, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the bipartisan Infrastructure Act. The law boosted important programs to clean up legacy pollution and meet climate and clean energy goals. The IIJA included a "win" that PRN had been advocating for — it reauthorized the expired funding mechanism for the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Reclamation Program trust fund. It will also inject an additional \$11.3 billion into the program over the next 15 years. This effort will put people to work restoring polluted lands and waters, and it will help build a new economic foundation in Illinois' coal communities.

The IIJA was worth celebrating but it is dwarfed by what Congress did this summer when they passed the Inflation



PRN's Amanda Pankau met with Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland at an abandoned mine lands event in Chicago.

ED TOGETHER IN 2022

Reduction Act. The Act includes \$369 billion for “Energy Security and Climate Change,” the single largest climate investment in American history. Together, these programs will reduce U.S. carbon pollution 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, getting us four-fifths of the way to President Biden’s aggressive climate goal.

PRN is working to ensure these federal opportunities reach underserved communities, including rural and coal communities. This year we supported the work of the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Coal and Power Plant Communities, a federal group tasked with bringing federal assistance and programs to transitioning coal communities. This summer we worked with the IWG to organize and facilitate four listening sessions with six different coal and power plant communities. The sessions culminated in a “Revitalizing Energy Communities in the Illinois Basin” event in Carbondale. The event provided invaluable networking opportunities and information on how energy communities can benefit from federal funding and resources to support economic revitalization. PRN will continue to support the work of the IWG in Illinois into the future.

Getting Our Hands Dirty

Together with our partners in the IDEA Farm Network, we hosted five events during the summer of 2022 to assist Illinois farmers with improving the environmental health and profitability of their farms. Topics ranged from regenerating farmland to incorporating no-till and cover cropping systems that build soil health and support pollinator populations. We look forward to our winter programs and more exciting learning opportunities for 2023.

Using data collected from our Tree and Plant Health Monitoring Program, we released the report “Herbicide Drift and Chemical Trespass on Natural Landscapes and Habitats” for the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. The report provides an overview of the issue of herbicide drift and current monitoring efforts. It also provides the Commission with recommendations on how they can best protect Nature Preserves from herbicide drift.

Thanks to our amazing volunteers, we expanded our Tree and Plant Health Monitoring Program, which now covers approximately 7,800 square miles of the state. We held multiple webinars on the issue of herbicide drift and created three videos on the impacts of drift to ecosystem health. We are also building a strong and diverse coalition of



PRN hosted a picnic in June at the Homer Lake Forest Preserve with paddling on the Salt Fork River.

landowners, land managers, scientists, and advocates that can work together to protect our communities, our growers, and our wildlife, and who can help raise the alarm about the threat of herbicide injury to climate health.

Bringing What We Do To You

This year saw the successful launch of the PRN Lunch Series where program staff took you through the ins and outs of some of the issues they are working on to protect water, heal land, and inspire change across Illinois. From Andrew Rehn’s discussion on coal ash to Kim Erndt-Pitcher’s discussion on herbicide drift, we gave seven presentations to over 470 attendees. What we appreciated most about the events was seeing familiar faces during these Zoom presentations. Thanks to everyone who attended and who submitted questions!

And... We Stopped Bulldog Mine!

This past Spring, Sunrise Coal’s permit for the Bulldog mine in Vermilion County expired due to lack of use. This inaction effectively killed the proposed mine and the fight against Bulldog Mine was won. This is a grassroots victory that took years!!

Thank you Stand Up To Coal and PRN members for protecting the Salt Fork River. Fighting this mine took over a decade of work and required years of active community involvement. Victory takes time and commitment, and PRN will continue to fight against dirty fossil fuels.

These accomplishments this year would not have been possible without you, our members. Your support makes all the difference. With you, we are a strong voice in protecting our water. //



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