



DIRECTOR'S NOTE: MAGGIE BRUNS

“When people look back on this tumultuous moment, the record will reflect that Prairie Rivers Network did not stall or give up. Rather, we pressed forward, securing big wins for communities across Illinois while building sustained local power along the way.”

NWF Board Chair Frederick Kowal (left), PRN Executive Director Maggie Bruns (center), and NWF President and CEO Collin O'Mara (right) at the National Wildlife Federation 90th Annual Dinner. Photo by Laura Kilgus/9Ten Photography.

This summer, I traveled to Providence, RI to accept the National Wildlife Federation's Affiliate of the Year award at their 90th Annual Meeting. I was invited to address our colleagues from across the country, and quite honestly, had a hard time determining which recent “wins” to discuss to keep to my time limit. That's a rare problem to have when you take a step back and contextualize the moment we are working through.

It's the timing of this national recognition that means the most to me. Working through one of the most unstable years in our country's history, we pushed on and didn't waver. Through it all, we secured new protections for the Mahomet Aquifer, advanced nature-based solutions in the Quad Cities, and helped pass new climate legislation, building on previous historic wins. We doubled down on science, investing in new tools and staff to expand our research on herbicide drift and helping to visualize the chemicals drifting through Illinois' air every month throughout the lengthening growing season. And we are not slowing down. As Collin O'Mara, president and CEO of National Wildlife Federation, simply put it: **“They [PRN] have set themselves apart as a conservation powerhouse.”**

As you'll read, communities supported by our network are rising up to tackle big, challenging issues. Our work continues to grow and impact future generations in ways that you and I may never see—just like the work of a small group of committed people working to stop a dam that would have flooded out Allerton Park some 59 years ago. Our growing network is advancing solutions from the ground up, building capacity for more communities to carry the work forward. That is something worth celebrating.

What's next? Shifting hearts and minds about Illinois' future. Some of this work will happen in Springfield as we strive to

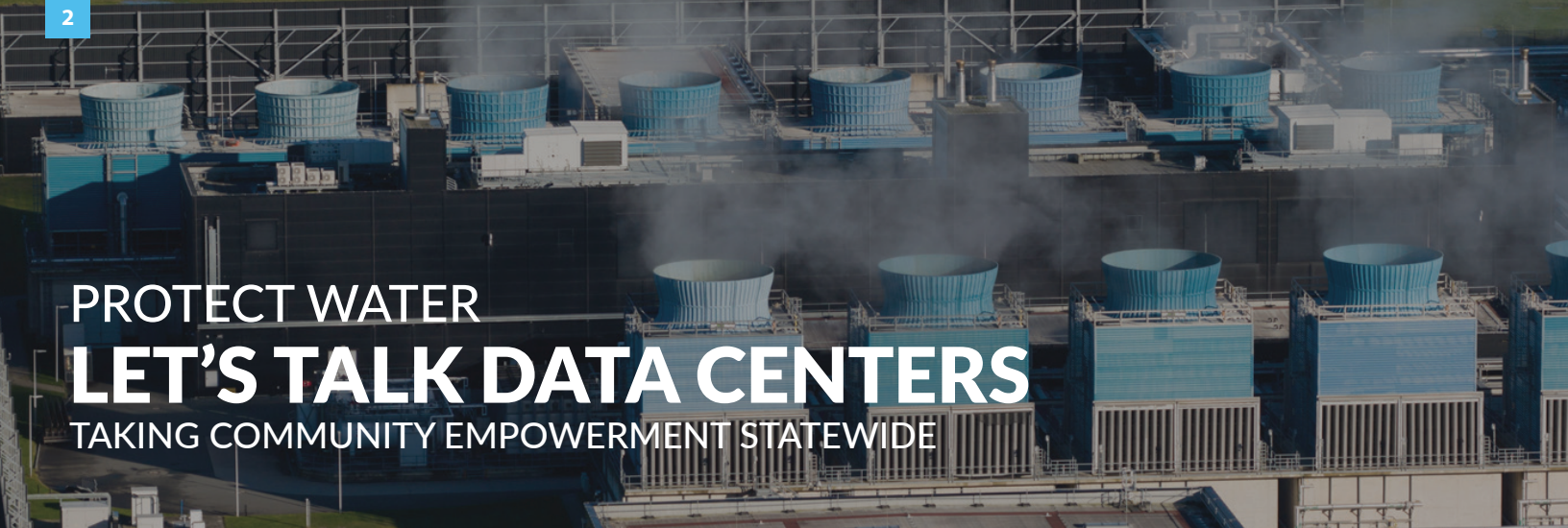
rein in data center development and protect children playing outdoors by enacting new pesticide notification protections for schools and park districts. Some of this work may take a more technical, hands-on approach, via supporting community leaders battling coal ash or those working to access opportunities provided through CEJA and now CRGA. And some of this work is blue-sky thinking—reimagining the landscape of Illinois. We envision an Illinois where nature and rivers run free and are accessible to all, clean energy powers our future, our soils are restored and producing food rather than ethanol, and the scars of other extractive industries are healed to support people and wildlife once more.

Our work often starts with a phone call from a concerned community member, but scales up to meet the challenge through members willing to pitch in as they can. Be it by direct investment in our efforts, showing up to county board meetings, or simply spreading the word: Thank you for your trust in our work and for being a part of Prairie Rivers Network. This national recognition shows our shared commitment to the future is only growing by the day.

LET'S KEEP IT UP!

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PROTECT WATER LET'S TALK DATA CENTERS

TAKING COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STATEWIDE

Less than a year ago, Prairie Rivers Network committed to expanding “our research, advocacy, and public outreach to ensure the next generation of industry in Illinois uses resources responsibly.” That next generation of industry? The massive, resource-intensive (and very thirsty) “hyperscaler” data centers powering the boom in generative artificial intelligence. These newer data centers go far beyond the older infrastructure which served online needs such as streaming, social media, and more.

This commitment closed our first-ever newsletter piece about the rise of data center development in Illinois¹. In that article, we outlined the threats these facilities pose to water supplies, the electric grid, and our communities. We also offered the type of solutions and guardrails we would throw our support behind. That was it.

2026 has been an incredible year so far, and we still have months to go. After we made that commitment in our newsletter, PRN’s work shining a light on data center development in Illinois almost immediately went statewide.

JANUARY & FEBRUARY

The groundbreaking POWER Act (Protecting Our Water, Energy, and Ratepayers) was drafted, introduced into the Illinois state legislature, and announced at press conferences in Chicago and at Prairie Rivers Network’s office in Champaign. The POWER Act’s chief aim: Holding data center developers accountable for facilities’ enormous use of water and energy, rather than communities.

MARCH

In response to rumors of a potential 300-acre data center development within county borders, the Champaign County Board created its Data Center Activities Task Force and invited Andrew Rehn, PRN’s Director of Climate Policy, to be part of it.

We also heard the public cry for information and began educating our direct community about the impacts of data centers. With our partners Faith in Place, Sierra Club, and Citizens Utility Board, we co-created some in-person

programming, called it “Let’s Talk Data Centers: Our Water, Our Power, Our Communities”, and piloted it within two weeks in Urbana-Champaign. The two-hour session was designed to listen to community concerns about data center development, to teach attendees how to do everything from writing letters to the editor to showing up at city council and county board meetings, and to discuss the progress of the POWER Act as it made its way through the Illinois legislature.

APRIL & MAY

After the first Let’s Talk Data Centers event in Urbana-Champaign, the word was out. Alongside our partners in the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition and other partners, our statewide tour began. We listened to hundreds of Illinoisans, from Oak Park to Carbondale, voice a wide range of concerns about data center development in their communities, as well as the broader impacts on their power bills and drinking water.

Attendees heard about the potential detrimental environmental and financial impacts data centers have on communities, and how they might impact decision-making in their own communities by calling for moratoriums on data center development at the municipal and county levels—especially important while the POWER Act was deliberated by the state legislature.

PRN staff, members, and partners joined with Illinoisans from across the state in Springfield for Environmental Lobby Day on April 8th and the POWER Act lobby day on May 30th. These events, hosted by the Illinois Environmental Council, brought hundreds of advocates to their legislators’ offices in the Capitol to call on them to support the POWER Act.

Also in April, the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition released the results of a statewide poll² conducted with likely 2026 voters. 75% of those polled supported legislation to hold data centers accountable after hearing a brief description of the bill.

Throughout the spring, county and municipal governments across Illinois deliberated on proposals from developers and considered local moratoriums. 15 Illinois cities and counties

¹Prairie Rivers Network. “March of the Data Centers”. PRN Newsletter, Volume 25, Issue 2, Winter 2025. <https://prairierivers.org/uncategorized/2025/12/march-of-the-data-centers/>. ²Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition, April 2026. “New Poll: Illinois Voters Back POWER Act by Overwhelming Margins”. <https://ilcleanjobs.org/2026/04/13/new-poll-illinois-voters-back-power-act-by-overwhelming-margins/>.



passed moratoriums on data centers, while the City of Joliet and Sangamon County both approved the construction of massive hyperscale developments.

Meanwhile, in Springfield, legislators were discussing data centers but not taking action. The senate held a marathon 2-day long subject matter hearing, while the house held five smaller hearings. PRN testified at multiple hearings, sharing expertise on water impacts.

Despite impressive polling in support of the POWER Act, despite robust turnout at both lobby days in Springfield, and despite hours of hearings, the legislature did not pass the POWER Act during the spring legislative session. In fact, the legislature doubled down, continuing the tax breaks for data center developers that Governor Pritzker had called on them to end.

JUNE, JULY & BEYOND

Almost immediately after the session was over, Governor Pritzker directed Illinois' Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to pause tax breaks for all data center developers, and called on the legislature to take action in the fall.³ While the Governor's directive is a step in the right direction, people want guardrails on data centers now. Data center developers aren't waiting.

Communities continue to reach out to PRN and partners for more information on hosting LTDC events in their area. As of this writing, several are scheduled for July and August in locations throughout Illinois, with more being considered as we prepare to drive the POWER Act through the state legislature's veto session late this fall.

At Prairie Rivers Network, we remain dedicated to educating the public about the risks data center developments pose to our water, power grid, and pocketbooks—and holding decision-makers accountable for the overall wellbeing of the communities they represent.



APRIL 20, 2026 | LET'S TALK DATA CENTERS: BLOOMINGTON, IL

Over 75 people filled the community room in Bloomington, IL's public library, sharing concerns about potential data center development activity in the area and worries about air and water pollution in addition to high power bills and resource depletion. Some attendees were members of a local Facebook group dedicated to sharing information about data center news in the McLean County area, and a few had never attended a community event like this one before. "Sitting at home is not enough," said one participant.

APRIL 23, 2026 | PUBLIC MEETING: CHAMPAIGN COUNTY DATA CENTER MORATORIUM

Over 200 people attended a public meeting in Urbana to discuss the moratorium on large scale data centers within county borders. After two hours of public comment and deliberation from the board, a 12-month moratorium was passed, giving the Data Center Activities Task Force the time they need to put standards in place to protect our communities, the Mahomet Aquifer, and our energy rates. "It's important that we put a pause on data center proposals while the county can consider what an ordinance that is appropriate to the scale of AI data centers looks like," said PRN's Andrew Rehn.

MAY 18, 2026 | LET'S TALK DATA CENTERS: CARBONDALE, IL

Nearly 125 people from across southern Illinois attended the LTDC meeting in Carbondale. Participants shared a broad spectrum of thoughts and concerns, pointing out that what might not be important to some parts of the state is, in fact, very important to southern Illinois. "Not all counties are created equal," said one observer. Another participant stressed the importance of passing the POWER Act as quickly as possible: "Lots of questions need to be addressed, and quickly, before we're overrun with these facilities."

³State of Illinois Newsroom, June 5, 2026. <https://gov-pritzker-newsroom.prezly.com/gov-pritzker-pauses-new-data-center-tax-incentives>

HEAL LAND

DEEPENING OUR ROOTS
IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

Which state in the U.S. offers hills, prairie, cliffs, multiple rivers, large forests, was once home to the extraordinary R. Buckminster Fuller, and is now home to a growing solar power industry?

Illinois, of course. You just have to look south.

Southern Illinois remains an enigma to many, largely due to the real (and perceived) economic, historical, and cultural differences between Chicago and the more rural regions of the state. There continue to be many efforts to bridge these gaps, and word is getting around about not just Southern Illinois' natural beauty, but the vast opportunity the region holds as part of a state whose climate and energy goals are far ahead of most others in our country.

It's currently an area of energy industry contrasts. Large solar and other renewable energy projects, evidence of Illinois' bet on the clean energy transition, stand alongside abandoned mines, coal plants, and "orphaned" oil and gas wells that represent fading (but still active) industries. Southern Illinois is remarkably resilient, but easing this transition requires the presence and investment of engaged partners as well.

Prairie Rivers Network is that engaged partner. Several PRN staff live and work in Southern Illinois, standing alongside communities to build on their inherent resilience and develop other assets, including reclaimed land, existing natural areas, and innovative educational and recreational opportunities. We're very energized by all the work we do, but a pair of projects in the last year enabled us to co-create meaningful growth, literally and figuratively, within two small communities.

PLANTING TREES IN OLMSTED

Olmsted, Illinois is nestled deep in southernmost Illinois alongside the Ohio River. PRN supported a local non-profit, Breaking the Cycle, in securing nearly \$30,000 in federal grant funding for tree planting at a new RV park and campground, built on a reclaimed clay mine. The USDA funding, administered by Faith in Place, was reduced to only \$6,900 due to federal

funding rollbacks in 2025. PRN—with support from the National Wildlife Federation— was able to step in and give \$10,000 to ensure the project's completion.

PRN staff later led an array of community partners in the area to help celebrate the grand opening of the site, and spent a gorgeous fall day surrounded by autumn colors and planting a variety of native tree species. "Working with partners, restoring land and wildlife habitat, protecting watersheds like the Ohio River Basin, and reconnecting people with nature is at the core of our mission," remarked Amanda Pankau, PRN's Director of Energy and Community Resiliency. "This project checked every one of those boxes."

PLANTING THE PRAIRIE IN HARRISBURG

Harrisburg, Illinois is located in Saline County, about halfway between the Ohio River to the east and Carbondale to the west. The community is home to Bulldog Early Learning Academy (BELA), a newer pre-K public school with an emphasis on child-led, hands-on learning and a strong interest in environmental education for its young students.

Enter PRN's SUNBEES program—Schools Uniting Nature, Biodiversity, and Environmental Energy Solutions, created with support from the Sol Systems Eldorado Impact Project. In June, PRN staff helped plant 2000 native plants into a 7500 square foot garden at BELA. The garden will provide habitat for pollinators, but it also lays the groundwork for a future outdoor classroom, will more deeply inform the school's current environmental education efforts, and will be supported by Harrisburg Middle School, where students can take part in a class that helps the garden grow. "This is an amazing opportunity for the students to benefit twice during their time in grade school," said Liz Mackenbach, PRN's Habitat and Biodiversity Organizer.

Prairie Rivers Network remains committed to deepening our other investments in Southern Illinois, and we're grateful for your support of our work to protect water, heal land, and inspire change for all of Illinois.



INSPIRE CHANGE

GROWING REALIZATION

EXPANDED STATEWIDE PESTICIDE MONITORING YIELDS ALARMING RESULTS

Prairie Rivers Network strives, using the combined creative power of science, law, and collective action, to 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. Delivering on this vision using these rational, inclusive tools is a core value for Prairie Rivers Network. It's how our work throughout Illinois has been carried out for nearly 60 years.

This spring and summer, we've called heavily upon all three of these creative powers. *Pesticide Drift in Public Spaces*¹, published in April of this year, is PRN's expanded research into chemical trespass, focusing on its frequent occurrence in the spaces where people of all ages work and play.

SCIENCE

For years, members throughout our extensive statewide network have contacted us with their observations of, and concerns about, pesticides and other agricultural chemicals drifting onto their property and harming their trees, gardens, other vegetation, and peace of mind.

With support from our network, including help from our amazing volunteers, PRN mounted a robust response by pioneering a pesticide monitoring and tissue analysis program at hundreds of sites across Illinois. The resulting data was eventually compiled into 2024's extensive report about chemical trespass and its destructive impact on trees and plants, *Hidden in Plain Sight*.

Since then, with the investment of a new one-time grant, PRN expanded this research to include in-depth monitoring for chemical trespass on public spaces throughout Illinois. The results of that research are now available as *Pesticide Drift in Public Spaces*, an addendum to 2024's *Hidden in Plain Sight*.

The new results show there is much more in our air. For example:

- **From May through September of 2025, PRN visited 10 monitoring sites for a total of 50 visits.**
- **Between all 10 sites monitored, there were 296 detections of 18 different pesticides during the growing season; an estimated 200 of these detections were independent exposure events.**

- **The most frequently detected pesticide was 2,4-D—a pesticide considered to be a possible carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.**
- **On average, there were 20 independent pesticide exposure events for each site during the monitoring period.**
- **Pesticides travelled over 3,700 feet from one potential application source during monitoring, and we know they can travel further. Similar chemical trespass events could put nearly 50% of schools, 54% of parks, and 40% of daycares in Illinois at risk.**

THE LAW

Unfortunately, Illinois communities are still without information about, and advance notification of nearby pesticide applications, despite multiple attempts by PRN and our partners to pass a state law requiring a flexible 24-72 hour notification period prior to pesticide applications within certain distances of schools, parks, and daycares.² The primary opponent to this legislation, unsurprisingly, is the agricultural industry. This includes the corn and soybean growers associations, the chemical and fertilizer associations, and the Illinois Farm Bureau.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

We're aware of increasing concern about this issue throughout Illinois. PRN has heard from seasoned conservationists, longtime gardeners, concerned parents, and many others about the evidence they see of chemical trespass. We will eventually reintroduce legislation designed to protect our communities from chemical trespass, but we'll need your help to be successful—and that's where collective action comes in.

It is essential that our members and communities continue educating themselves and join us in the push for real protections. While *Pesticide Drift in Public Spaces* joins *Hidden in Plain Sight* as a major tool in the toolbox for that push, there is much more work to be done.

In the coming weeks and months, PRN will tell more stories about chemical trespass in communities, release additional tools and educational materials, and, most importantly, provide more opportunities for taking action.

¹Link: <https://prairierivers.org/pdips-report>. ²WCBU, May 22, 2026. "Pesticide drift near Morton school prompts calls for prior notification from farmers." <https://www.wcbu.org/state-news/2026-05-22/pesticide-drift-near-morton-school-prompts-calls-for-prior-notification-from-farmers>

2026 ANNUAL DINNER GET YOUR TICKETS!



Secure your spot today! Prairie Rivers Network is excited to invite you to our Annual Dinner on Friday, October 30th, at Pear Tree Estate in Champaign. Join us as our dedicated team gives key updates on their work and hear how your support directly impacts our work and communities across the state. Plus, help us recognize an outstanding individual who is making a difference in Illinois as we present the 2026 River Steward Award.

We hope you will join us for a powerful evening of inspiring change and raising critical funds that help Prairie Rivers Network stand up to the threats across Illinois.

More details and tickets are available at prairierivers.org/dinner.

RIVER STEWARD: Call for Nominations!

The River Steward Award recognizes and celebrates the important work of an individual whose on-the-ground efforts to protect the state's rivers and streams inspire us. There are many dedicated volunteers around our state who spend countless hours working to protect Illinois' rivers. They educate us; they do the legwork; they speak the unpopular truths; they go above and beyond. Prairie Rivers Network wants to recognize the people whose clean water victories inspire our staff and other river advocates around the state.

To nominate a deserving candidate, please send their name, contact information, and a summary of their volunteer efforts to dwalker@prairierivers.org with the subject line "River Steward 2026."

PLANNED GIVING WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT YOU?

You're a loyal member of the Prairie Rivers Network family and we rely on your contributions every year to protect our rivers, land, and communities for generations to come. Make sure that you leave a lasting impact after your lifetime by including a provision for Prairie Rivers Network in your will or trust.

Call Devin Walker at 217-344-2371, ext 203 or visit prairierivers.org/legacy to learn more.

“My time with Prairie Rivers Network began in 1997 when I became Executive Director and since my departure in 2002, they have continued to grow and take on new challenges threatening our rivers. Their work on issues such as land use, water pollution, habitat loss, and climate change continuously impresses me, as does their ability to inspire the public. We are at a pivotal moment for our environment, and that is why I have included PRN in my will. Prairie Rivers Network is a perfect choice to make a meaningful impact in Illinois.”



Rob Moore, PRN Executive Director 1997-2002



ROUND UP FOR GOOD: Common Ground Food Co-op

In April, Prairie Rivers Network was selected for the Round Up For Good program at Common Ground Food Co-op (Urbana, IL). This generous program gives co-op owners the opportunity to round up their total as a donation to a community organization each month. In April, Common Ground owners rounded up for a total of \$5,683.32 to support our new collaboration, Nurtured in Nature, and their efforts to address the nature gap in Illinois. Thank you!

STAFF & BOARD WELCOMES AND GOODBYES

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Director of Ecological Health

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JULIANA VIDAL

PRN WELCOMES JULIANA VIDAL TO ITS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Juliana Vidal, based in Bloomington, Illinois, joins PRN's board as an interdisciplinary professional, bringing broad experience in environmental, social, and geographic sciences.



Her work has spanned the nonprofit, local government, consulting, and state agency sectors, including time as a Climate Policy Fellow with Second Nature, and as a GIS Climate Adaptation Fellow with the Natural Resources Division of California State Parks and Parks California. Her work also frequently focuses on community engagement, participatory planning, and collaborative facilitation, and squeezes in data and GIS analyses whenever possible. The throughline connecting Juliana's personal and professional projects, she says, is "a deep commitment to labor for a just society." When asked to name her favorite river, she offered the American River, "for its clear water and as an unexpected place to spot sea lions from inland Sacramento."



GOOD LUCK, ALAYNA!

We knew it might happen eventually, but that doesn't mean we're happy to bid Alayna Moore, PRN's communications assistant and former Americorps VISTA, goodbye as she moves on to fresh opportunities in North Carolina. Thanks so much, Alayna, for your insights and hard work!

HELP ADVANCE PRN'S MISSION

For nearly six decades, Prairie Rivers Network has been harnessing the creative power of science, law, and community action to protect our water, land, and all who call Illinois home. Over the years, we've brought together our network of advocates, scientists, businesses, community members and policy makers to protect rivers, restore habitats, and hold polluters accountable. Today, we continue to honor our roots in community-led advocacy while working toward a more resilient future for generations to come.

Consider donating today to help push our mission even further at prairierivers.org/donate



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