

Tallgrass Sierran

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THE HEART OF ILLINOIS GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB ♦ P.O. Box 3593, Peoria, IL 61614 ☎ (309) 637-1393

HOI Group Meetings

WED
JAN 16

Trails! Trails! Trails!
Forest Park Nature Center, 7 p.m.

The "Trails Guru and Father of the Rock Island Trail" George Burrier, will give an update on the status of several Peoria area rail-trail projects, including the extension of the Rock Island Trail to downtown Peoria; a western Peoria trail to Farmington; and what is happening with the East Peoria and Morton trails. *All are welcome! Refreshments served after the meeting.*



WED
FEB 20

A Reporter's View of Environmental Issues
Forest Park Nature Center, 7 p.m.

WCBU Public Radio News Director Jonathan Ahl will give his views on environmental issues in Central Illinois. Known for his coverage of Peoria City Council meetings and special news reports, Jonathan Ahl recently was a guest on the Illinois politics "State Week in Review" program. His special reports have been carried by the Great Lakes Radio Consortium and on National Public Radio, and he is one of the bright & rising stars in the Peoria news scene. *All are welcome! Refreshments served after the meeting.*

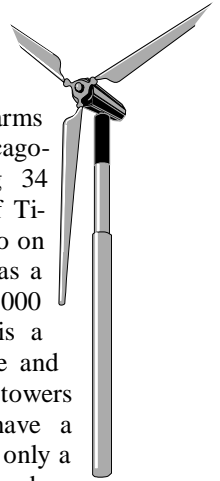
Illinois' First Wind Farms

BY RALPH GINN AND JANE JOHNSON

Two wind energy electricity generating farms are in development stage in Illinois. Chicago-based Illinois Wind Energy LLC is planning 34 windmills on a 2,200 acre site southwest of Tiskilwa (Bureau County) that is expected to go on line by fall of this year. Originally planned as a project that could power the equivalent of 18,000 homes, Stefan Noe, president, says there is a strong possibility of doubling the farm's size and capacity within the near future. The windmill towers are more than 220 feet in height and have a blade span of 230 feet. Each tower will take only a 25 foot diameter area out of agriculture production. Tiskilwa is located in an area that is rated at 4 on the wind resource scale of 1 to 7. Not as high as the Dakotas and Wyoming that rate a 6, but economically viable.

A second site for a wind farm is not as deep in the planning stages as the Tiskilwa project but could be on line in Lee County, near the town of Compton as early as 2003. Navitas Energy Inc. of Minneapolis is planning the 59 tower farm but is encountering resistance from electrical giant Commonwealth

(Continued on page 2)



Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Multi-Media Slide Show Comes to Peoria

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

An exciting multi-media slide show is coming to the Forest Park Nature Center, Thursday, February 7, at 7:00 p.m. Heart of Illinois Sierra Club is hosting a special program titled "Caribou Commons/the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge" presented by award winning photographer, writer and conservationist Ken Madsen, with comments from a member of the Gwich'in Native American community.

This slide show blends original music, digital recordings from the wild, and stunning photography from the Arctic. Ken Madsen made a remarkable one-thousand-mile wilderness trip from the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the remote Gwich'in Indian village of Old Crow, Yukon, taking pictures for this presentation. The program is intended to show the urgent need to prevent oil development in the Arctic Refuge and to provide permanent protection for the calving grounds for the Porcupine Caribou herd.

The 100-mile stretch of coastline in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the only section of Alaska's Arctic coastal

plain not already open to oil development. The coastal plain in the Arctic Refuge is the core calving area of the Porcupine Caribou herd and is home to polar bears, musk-oxen, grizzlies, wolves and 130 species of migratory birds. This fragile and productive ecosystem is known as "America's Serengeti." Despite recent surveys that show that 70% of Americans believe the Arctic Refuge should be protected as Wilderness, multinational oil companies such as British Petroleum, Arco and Exxon are pushing for access for industrial oil development.

The program shows that protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is more than a conservation issue: it is a cultural and human rights issue. Gwich'in people in Alaska and Canada have depended on the natural rhythms of the Porcupine Caribou herd for thousands of generations. The Gwich'in people want to prevent oil development in the refuge and a representative from the tribe will be speaking at the program.

(Wind Farms, from page 1)

Edison. The Tiskilwa farm has a contract with Edison to buy its production but Navitas has been unable to get a similar agreement.

The American Wind Energy Association predicts that wind energy can provide 20% of America's electricity with turbines installed on less than 1% of its land, and with only 5% of that land occupied by wind equipment and access roads. Wind turbines require sufficient spacing for maximum efficiency. In its infancy, the wind power industry currently produces 3 billion kilowatts of electricity annually. That's equivalent to 6.4 million barrels of oil and is squeaky clean compared to coal. Bird fatalities (mostly raptors) are a concern. The wind generating industry is modifying equipment to make wind farms safer for birds.

There is nascent political support for wind power. Chicago's mayor, Richard Daley, is making a push to harvest wind energy from off Lake Michigan. However, the U.S. Congress and President Bush lag far below the horizon on this obvious alternative to global warming and reliance on Middle East oil. The Bush energy plan actually cuts funding for alternative energy sources and holds 1.2 billion for alternative energy research hostage to drilling for oil in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge.

Note: Stefan Noe, president of Illinois Wind Energy LLC, will be the speaker at the March HOI Group meeting. More details will be in the March/April Tallgrass Sierran.

More on Light Pollution...

BY MEREDITH CURREN

Last month's article, "Light Pollution: A Problem We Can All Fix", generated quite a bit of interest. As a consequence, the HOI Sierra Club was provided with more information on this subject from interested and informed readers. Here is what we have learned:

- More information on SELENE (Sensible and Efficient Lighting to Enhance the Nighttime Environment), can be obtained at <http://selene-ny.org/default.asp>. SELENE and other interested groups are urging support for a bill that would place new controls on the night lighting of state-owned buildings in New York. The bill's main focus is on saving energy, but also allows for the creation of "dark areas" to provide "nocturnal benefits" for the state's flora and fauna. It also recognizes how reduced air pollution emissions from the state's power plants work to protect the water quality in the lakes of the state. If passed, the bill would set a precedent for similar legislation for the rest of the country. The bill they want made into law - A.5352b (Assemblyman Grannis)/S.3386b (Senator Balboni) - passed both houses of the legislature last spring and is on the governor's desk awaiting his signature. SELENE urges people to write, call, or email Governor Pataki to urge him to ratify A5352/S3386, the light pollution reduction bills sponsored by Assembly Grannis and Senator Balboni. We are almost out of time this year, and the postal mail might be too slow. Please consider calling Governor Pataki. An email will also reach him quickly. If you do decide to write, we suggest you send a postcard. Anthrax fears have slowed letter and package delivery, whereas postcards continue to be delivered promptly. Governor Pataki is as follows:

The Honorable George E. Pataki
Governor of New York
State Capitol Bldg.
Albany, NY 12224
518-474-8390
gov.pataki@chamber.state.ny.us

- Readers may be interested to learn that there is one more dark sky preserve in the U.S., at the Lake Hudson State Recreational Area in Clayton, Michigan. It was established by legislative action in 1993, thereby becoming the first dark sky preserve in the USA. Two good sites to read are:

<http://pages.prodigy.net/bfrybarger/ida/ida.htm>

<http://pages.prodigy.net/bfrybarger/lakehudson.htm>

- If readers are really interested in delving into the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) program, they may want to consider attending their annual meeting in Tucson on March 16-19, 2001. David Toeppen (SC '60) reports that he attended the last two meetings and learned a great deal of worthwhile information. Once again, the IDA can be contacted at <http://www.darksky.org/ida/index.html> or by calling (520) 293-3198.

To finish off, I'd like to quote what I think is a fitting phrase written by David in his correspondence to me: **Light pollution is one conservation issue that doesn't involve a faraway forest in Alaska or wetlands in Florida, but concerns something just outside our front door.**

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An Old Friend is Dying

BY RALPH GINN

In a small park located on Peoria's central bluff stands a magnificent and ancient bur oak tree. It is dying. Five and a half feet in diameter at the trunk, 90 feet in height, with a crown spread of 110 feet, this giant has risen above the city for hundreds of years. Its age is speculation says Elroy Limmer, Peoria City and Park District arborist. Perhaps 400 years and likely over 200. Larger, by far, and probably older than the bur oak residing and protected in Giant Oak Park on High Street, it is believed to be one of the biggest, if not the biggest, trees in Peoria County. The Illinois State Champion bur oak lives in Lawrence County and has a diameter of over six and half feet, a height of 129 feet, and crown spread of 96 feet. The Peoria tree's home is bordered by Forest Hill, Twelve Oaks, Parish, and Loucks streets. Owned by The Twelve Oaks Apostolic Christian Church, the park is home to an assortment of trees, all dwarfed by one giant. But, the last three years have seen The Tree show stress symptoms that have accelerated into the loss of more than half of its normal foliage. Limmer predicts The Tree will die within a few years. Limmer and Illinois Department of Natural Resources forester, Pete Skuba, agree that the culprit is probably an apartment construction site within a few feet of The Tree's drip line. Compaction of top soil by workers and construction equipment, and basement dirt that was piled near the drip line are the likely cause of root suffocation that is choking the life from The Tree.

This is a sad loss for Peoria County and one easily avoided. A construction sight a few feet further to the south, or a construction company with a care or a clue about tree health and life requirements would have prevented this death. Ironically, the public's loss will be the perpetrator's loss too. Cleaning up a dead tree of this size will cost in the thousands. Limmer and Skuba agree that The Tree might yet be saved. They don't agree on the use of fertilizer, Skuba recommending and Limmer dissenting. They both believe a 3-4 inch layer of mulch from the trunk out to 4 feet beyond the drip line could possibly revive The Tree's



Emily Goodyear stands beneath The Tree, a magnificent bur oak located in Peoria. The Tree is in danger of dying, probably due to nearby construction. Photo: Ralph Ginn

root system enough to save its life. Let's hope the Apostolic Christian Church agrees and will take action soon.

The potential loss of yet another of Peoria's ancient giants, remember the white oak located on the site now occupied by Michael's parking lot, cries out for action by the City Council and Peoria County Board to implement an ordinance that will protect our finest trees. Heart of Illinois Sierra Club members Joe Laszlo and Rudy Habben have been attending meetings of the Peoria Urban Forestry Advisory Board for two years and have been instrumental in writing a tree protection ordinance. PUFAB has tried to create an interest for adoption among the members of the governing bodies and their staffs. With little of substance to show for its efforts.

Cooper Park Wetlands Registered as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve

BY THOMAS LERCZAK

On October 30th 2001, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission approved registration of the 55-acre Cooper Park Wetlands in East Peoria, Tazewell County, as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve. Cooper Park Wetlands is within Cooper Park and is located along the eastern shore of Lower Peoria Lake, along state route 116. Cooper Park is owned by the Fon du lac Park District.

There are now 64 registered Illinois Land and Water Reserves totaling 22,758.52 acres. Areas registered as Illinois Land and Water Reserves are protected from development under a voluntary conservation easement agreement involving the landowner, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Only areas meeting specific criteria are eligible to be registered as Illinois Land and Water Reserves. Cooper Park Wetlands not only has rare wetland communities such as shrub swamp and marsh, but pro-

vides habitat for the state and federally threatened decurrent false aster, a plant which may be found only along the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois River Bottomlands Natural Division and a few locations near St. Louis, Missouri.

Cooper Park Wetlands may be easily accessed by visitors at three entrances: at the south entrance to Cooper Park, the middle entrance to Cooper Park, and just south of the Spindler Marina. A gravel Trail and boardwalk guide visitors through the natural area. At one point, the boardwalk passes nearby a series of active beaver dams; the beavers themselves, though, may prove elusive. Multiple visits at different times of the year are necessary to fully experience the full range of natural biodiversity offered by this site. For more information about Cooper Park Wetlands Land and Water Reserve or the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, call Tom Lerczak at 543-2744.

