



Tallgrass Sierran

March/April 2006 Volume 34 No. 2

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

HOI Group Meetings

WED
MAR 15

Lead Poisoning in Peoria
Forest Park Nature Center, 7 p.m.

Curt Fenton, Peoria County Health Department, will discuss the problem of lead poisoning in Peoria and explain County Health Department efforts to promote testing of children and inform the public. (Rescheduled from the February meeting.) *All are welcome! Refreshments served after the meeting.*

WED
APR 19

Carstensz Pyramid
Forest Park Nature Center, 7 p.m.

Barbara Gurtler continues her quest to climb the highest peak of the seven continents, this time the highest peak of Oceania, the 16,023 foot Western Papua peak, Carstensz Pyramid. Sometimes, the hardest part of climbing a mountain is getting to it. *All are welcome! Refreshments served after the meeting.*

Letters Needed!

Written Comment Period on the Peoria Disposal Company Hazardous Waste Landfill Expansion Permit Goes to End of March

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

Your comments are urgently needed to oppose the Peoria Disposal Company Hazardous Waste Landfill Expansion. Please write to: Peoria County Clerk, 324 Main St., Peoria, IL 61602. Enough is enough! Peoria County has been the dumping ground for hazardous waste from up to 15 states outside of Illinois for over 16 years. Only 16% of the waste

(See *Landfill*, page 3)

King Kong on the Farm

BY RALPH GINN

You probably know the story well, an entrepreneur captures a giant gorilla from an uncharted island, takes him to New York City, the gorilla escapes, all hell breaks loose, but he is finally overcome by beauty and bullets. The gorilla loose in farmland U.S.A. is the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) and there is no happy ending in sight.

Ag-business invented the mega-livestock farm, drove the small producers off the land, polluted the streams, fouled the air, and called it "progress." Originally, a country of cities and small farms, one percent of our population now lives on a farm. The population of the rural plains has decreased by 80% since 1930.

There are some striking parallels between what is happening today and the creation of the Great Depression Dust Bowl. Then, the U.S. Department of Agriculture encouraged would be farmers, with an offer of free land, to plow the grassland's sod and grow wheat. Today, governments, from county to national, have rolled the loaded dice to the pleasure and profit of the Smithfields, Cargills, and Tysons. During the 1930s the drought came, and the wind blew the bare topsoil across America. In May of 1934 twelve million tons of dust fell on Chicago. New York, Washington, and ships 300 miles at sea were colored brown. The Dust Bowl, bounded by Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas, 100 million acres, would be ruined for decades. The human suffering and misery was catastrophic. Today, small and medium sized livestock farmers are replaced by the mega-

monsters integrated into the plans of ag-biz. Mountains of manure create nitrates, phosphates, ammonia, and coliform bacteria that pollute the streams, rivers and lakes of America. Neighbors of these behemoths are nauseated by odors, their clothes and homes are inundated, and there is little opportunity to stop the noxious tide. CAFOs are thirsty slurpers of water and the Ogallala aquifer, that once supplied the underground water source for the Great Plains, is fast disappearing.

Many, including Heart of Illinois Sierra Club, are trying to impede the carnage. We have, with the help of several dedicated landowners, operated water monitoring projects at sites near three CAFOs. One in Knox County, in the Highlands watershed, and two in Woodford County, one near Old Prairie Pork and the other a stream adjacent to the Ken Fehr farm. This project began in the late spring of 2003 and continues today. We have since discontinued the Knox County monitoring because our Knox College student volunteers graduated and also because the coliform counts from those sites were at acceptable levels. The water runoff data from Old Prairie Pork has been mixed. Most samples have been in passable range but a few have been high, indicating that, on occasion, the operators have over applied or improperly applied manure. The Fehr farm is not using adequate application equipment and is creating some very high levels of pollution to ground water in the nearby stream. We have contacted the Illinois Environmental Protection

(See *King Kong*, page 2)



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Legislative Alert !

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

Please Write and Phone Your State Legislators Regarding the Following Bills
More Information at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org>

Mercury Free Vehicles Act: Support HB 5578

This bill would eliminate the landfilling of mercury containing switches found in most cars and ensure they are properly recycled. Before 2003, many auto manufacturers used mercury in automobile light switches and anti-lock brakes. When those autos are scrapped and recycled (usually by melting down the steel) the mercury is emitted to the environment. The result? An estimated 18,000 pounds of mercury are emitted nationwide each year, with 800 pounds of mercury released per year in Illinois alone. HB5578 would establish a mercury switch removal program in Illinois to prevent the release of mercury into the environment as automobiles reach the end of their useful life over the next ten years.

Protect Scenic Byways: Support SB 2919

This bill will protect an area designated as a national scenic byway by the United States Department of Transportation by prohibiting strip-mining within 300 feet of the scenic byway. It will protect eco-tourism and local community quality of life along designated scenic highways.

Illinois Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard: Support SB 3080

All electric utilities would be required to meet a standard by providing 2% renewable energy supply as part of their overall power mix by 2007 and 8% by 2013. More renewable energy in Illinois means more jobs, economic growth, a cleaner environment, and less fuel cost volatility. Renewable energy is defined as energy from wind, solar, biomass and other environmentally superior energy resources. A Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard for Illinois would be realistic and attainable for all players in the Illinois utility market. Twenty other states have adopted various renewable portfolio standards. Illinois should catch up and be a leader in seizing renewable energy development opportunities, rather than falling behind.

Responsible Sex Education: Support SB 2267

This bill will provide \$3.5 million for optional safe-sex education in Illinois high schools that seek it. No federal dollars are currently invested in comprehensive sex education programs, as funding is only available for abstinence only programs. Combining abstinence and information about contraception has been proven to be more effective. With almost one-half of the global population under the age of 25, the choices young people make today will have a tremendous impact on the world for this and future generations. Support for voluntary family planning, reproductive health care and sex education programs plays a critical role in the global effort to curb population growth and helps to ensure a more sustainable environmental future.

**Check
www.ilga.gov
if your legislator is not listed
here.**

Senator George Shadid
121C Capitol Bldg.
Springfield, IL 62706
Phone 217-782-8250
District Office:
410 Court St.
Pekin, IL 61554
Phone 309-353-6276

Senator Dale Risinger
M103F Capitol Bldg.
Springfield, IL 62706
Phone 217-782-1942
District Office:
5415 N. University, Suite 105
Peoria, IL 61614
Phone 309-693-4921

Rep. David Leitch
220 Capitol Bldg.
Springfield, IL 62706
Phone 217-782-8108
District Office:
3114 N. University
Peoria, IL 61604
Phone 309-685-3900

Rep. Aaron Shock
226-N Stratton Bldg.
Springfield, IL 62706
Phone 217-782-3186
District Office:
741 W. Main St.
Peoria, IL 61606
Phone 309-672-9292

Rep. Michael K. Smith
253-S Stratton Bldg.
Springfield, IL 62706
Phone 217-782-8152
District Office:
45 East Side Square, Suite 301
Canton, IL 61520
Phone: 309-647-7479

(King Kong, from page 1)

Agency numerous times and they did issue a formal citation to Fehr. However, recent observations indicate that this farm continues to over apply manure on a field that drains directly into the stream. HOI will continue the water monitoring at both Old Prairie Pork and the Fehr farm and will continue to pressure the I.E.P.A. to take action. We are sincerely appreciative of the devoted volunteers that have done the ground work for this effort.

Water pollution is, however, only part of the story with this "gorilla." Odors are frequently intolerable, driving neighbors indoors, and making life miserable for the innocent. This is the face of CAFOs that is most aggravating and difficult to accept. Other than set-backs, that are dangerously inadequate, there is nothing in regulatory law that protects the

odor victims. A few neighborhood associations have sought relief via nuisances laws but have thus far been successful in only one Illinois case.

As bad as mega farms have treated their neighbors, the industry continues to bend the legislature toward rules that favor protection and profit. In 2002 the Illinois House passed a bill 118-0 that would criminalize taking photos or videos of farm structures or operations. Thankfully it failed in the Senate. In January of this year the Bush administration announced it will permit 6,700 CAFOs and 7,000 Tyson contract growers to escape penalty for fouling the air and water with animal wastes in exchange for data to "help curb future pollution." In this scheme companies and farms would pay fees to the EPA, and in return get a four year exemption for pollution violations.

In Illinois, the Senate is considering legislation (SB 2333) that would require people who complain to the IEPA to identify themselves. Because whistle-blowers are routinely not required to give their name, this law would be another obstacle to those citizens reporting pollution. The Illinois Farm Bureau is the bill's originator and Dale Risinger (R-Peoria) is a co-sponsor. Another Illinois bill (SB 2744) seeks to make it illegal for a person(s) to file an anticipatory nuisance suit against a CAFO. Both of the latter bills were voted out of committee on Valentine Day and will be advancing to the full Senate. If you're thinking the public is being stripped of all recourse against the mega livestock industry, you are correct. The CAFO gorilla grows stronger every year. But, don't forget the remedy of last resort..... the **VOTE**.

Update on Battle to Stop the Banner Strip-Mine: Trees Destroyed by Capitol Resources Corporation/Freeman Coal Company

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

In what appears to be a completely spiteful fit of vengeance, massive logging of trees on the Banner fields and wetlands was done by an out-of-state company hired by Capitol Resources Development Corporation. The logging began several weeks after the Illinois Department of Mines and Minerals announced that a mining permit for the site could not be issued because of pending litigation. Citizens for the Preservation of Banner Township pursued legal action to save Prairie Lane Road across the property and halted the strip-mine permit affecting 634 acres at the south edge of Banner, Illinois. The lawsuit stalled the strip-mine, but could not save hundreds of trees edging sections of the property from destruction. An eagle roost and osprey nest are adjacent to the area. Donations to continue the lawsuit are very much needed. Send checks made out to "Save Rice Lake" to Mike Grigsby, 21574 North US 24, Canton, IL 61520.



Logged trees on the proposed Banner strip-mine site. Photo: Erik Grigsby

(Landfill, from page 1)

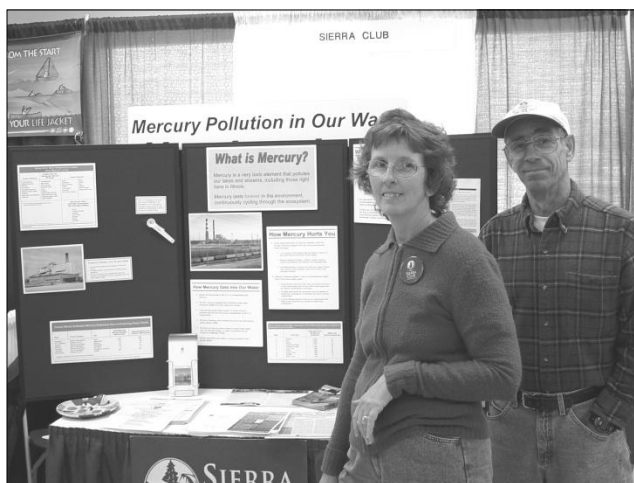
going into the site is from Peoria. The PDC Hazardous Waste Landfill is over the Sankoty Aquifer, our main regional water resource. Older parts of this toxic waste dump have pre-environmental regulations barrel trenches, unlined oil sludge pits, and burial of a wide range of industrial wastes going back to the early 1970s and before. PDC wants a 15 year extension to expand 8.2 acres laterally and to build up 45 feet higher over 32 acres of their active waste site. For more information, call 688-0950 or check out the following websites:

www.notoxicwaste.org
www.citizensforoureenvironment.com

Thanks to All You Dedicated, Wonderful Volunteers!

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

Heart of Illinois Group Sierra Club is full of wonderful people! Special thanks goes to the dedicated volunteers who staffed the Sierra booth at the East Peoria Fishing Show, February 10th, 11th, and 12th: Wendy Marquis, Diane and Bob Jorgenson, Joyce Blumenshine, Joe Laszlo, John Wosik, and Rudy Habben. Wendy and Diane and Bob did double duty days! Thanks folks for this great effort! John Wosik designed and prepared the excellent information on mercury pollution in our water. Handouts on mercury levels in fish and other information was available.



Diane and Bob Jorgenson help out at the HOI booth during the East Peoria Fishing show. Photo: Joe Laszlo

☐ Yes, I want to join the Sierra Club! My check is enclosed.

Name

Address

City State Zip

Introductory ☐ \$25 Individual ☐ \$39 Joint ☐ \$47

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to Sierra magazine and \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.

Please mail this to Sierra Club,
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