



# Tallgrass Sierran

July/August 2008 Volume 36 No. 4

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

## HOI Group Meetings

**WED  
JULY 16** Peoria Riverfront Walk &  
Dinner - Liberty Park, 6 p.m.

Meet at Liberty Park on Peoria's downtown riverfront at 6 p.m. for a short hike. Dinner and refreshments to be at Rhythm Kitchen after the hike. Members attending this meeting will be choosing the movies for the Third Annual Environmental Film Festival in November. Please join us! All are welcome!

**WED  
AUG 20** Grandview Drive Walk &  
Dinner— Grandview Park, 6 p.m.

Meet at Grandview Park at 6 p.m. for a short hike to Basta Mangiare on Prospect Road in Peoria Heights for dinner and refreshments. All are welcome!



## Heart of IL Sierra Superfund Project Team Wins State Sierra Grant

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

Congratulations to Joe Laszlo and Judy Stalling, along with individuals from DePue, who have been awarded a state Sierra Conservation Committee Grant. Funds will go toward production of a video to show the Superfund site in DePue. Years of delay and continued pollution have bogged down the clean-up effort. Laszlo and Stalling met with Bradley professors and put together an effective grant proposal to obtain the \$1,000. funding. Video production is hoped to be done by the end of the year,, so that the DePue story can be shown around the state and generate action on cleaning up the site.

## Ignorant But Not Dumb

BY RALPH GINN, *Opinion Columnist*

In Susan Jacoby's recent book, *The Age of American Unreason*, she contends that Americans are not dumber, I.Q. averages have remained constant for 50 years, but many are ignorant (lacking knowledge) and unreasoning. She says, "America is now ill with a powerful mutant stain of ignorance, anti-rationalism, and anti-intellectualism." Ms. Jacoby is the author of seven books and is a consultant to the rationalist think tank, Center for Inquiry.

Jacoby asserts that contrary to what religious fundamentalist would like us to believe, the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were not pious Christians, intent upon creating a religion based government, but were men of extraordinary learning and intellect with purpose to form a government respective of all beliefs. In 1816, Thomas Jefferson said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free.....it expects what never was and what never will be." There are ominous signs that this is just what many Americans expect... to be ignorant and free. In 2004 Americans elected a President who had lied about the reason for going to war in Iraq, and had authorized torture of prisoners, rendition, wire tapping, and suspension of habeas corpus. Each of which erodes the path to freedom.

Ms Jacoby notes that Americans are alone in the developed world in their view of evolution. Evolution is a bedrock principle of science, its mechanics have been understood since Darwin and Wallace introduced natural selection to the world

in 1859. Understanding of these mechanics has evolved with intense scientific observation and experimentation, but the process stood firm through constant assault from those who have little understanding of its conduct. In spite of scientific certainty, fifty percent of Americans do not believe in evolution today, the same proportion that didn't in 1926 after the famous Scopes Monkey Trial. Astonishingly, a University of Texas survey found that 1 in 5 high school biology teachers in the U.S. believe that dinosaurs and humans inhabited the earth simultaneously.

Science in general attracts an alarming share of pejorative attention. Twenty percent of Americans reject the observations of Copernicus and Galileo, made 350 years ago, that the earth revolves around the sun and instead believe the reverse. Thomas Friedman writes in a New York Times article entitled, "Dumb as We Wanna Be," that the summer gas tax suspension proposed by two of the Presidential candidates, Clinton and McCain, would increase our debt to China, increase our transfer of wealth to Saudi Arabia, increase our contribution to global warming, and further deplete badly needed infrastructure funds for roads and bridges. Yet, millions of Americans think this tax break is a great idea.

Susan Jacoby offers some reasons for this national unreason. In 2002 the National Endowment of Arts released a survey showing that only half of adult American adults have read a book of any kind in the preceding year. Newspaper

(See *Not Dumb*, page 2)



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

## Aventine Ethanol Plant Public Hearing in Pekin, Monday, July 14<sup>th</sup>

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

Sierra members from across the state are concerned about expansion plans for the Aventine Renewable Energy, Inc., plant at Pekin on Route 29, along the Illinois River. The original plans called for a gas fired plant. The company now states they will be using coal to fuel the plant, which negates perceived environmental benefits from the ethanol. The use of coal will add to particulate air emissions and other health concerns. Residential homes are located very close to the plant. In the past, Aventine has had several permit violations at this location. Individuals should ask that Aventine prove it can maintain its current facilities without violation, before this permit request is approved.

The Illinois EPA Bureau of Air will hold a public hearing on July 14 at 7 p.m. in the Pekin High School Theater, 1903 Court Street in Pekin. The hearing will be held to receive comments and answer questions from the public prior to making a final decision concerning the application. The hearing will be held under the Illinois EPA's "Procedures for Permit and Closure Plans," 35 IAC 166, Subpart A. Lengthy comments and questions should be submitted in writing. Any questions about hearing procedures or requests to address special needs should be made to the Illinois EPA, Annet Godiksen—Hearing Officer, Re: MGP Ingredients, 1021 N. Grand Ave. E., P.O. Box 19276, Springfield, IL 62794-9276, 217/782-5544. Written comments must be sent to the Hearing Officer and be postmarked by midnight, August 13, 2008. Comments need not be notarized.

Persons wanting more information may obtain copies of the draft permit and project summary at [www.epa.gov/region5/air/permits/ilonline.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region5/air/permits/ilonline.htm) (please look under All Permit Records, PSD, New). These documents and the application can also be viewed at the Pekin Public Library, 301 S. Fourth Street in Pekin and the Illinois EPA's offices at 5415 N. University Street in Peoria, 309/693-5461 and 1340 N. Ninth St., Springfield, 217/782-7027 (for either Illinois EPA location please call ahead to assure that someone will be available to assist you).

Local Sierra members are needed to attend this hearing. For more information phone 688-0950.

### *Best Wishes to Jonathan Ahl*

Heart of Illinois Sierra sends congratulations and best wishes to WCBU news director Jonathan Ahl, who has moved to Iowa to be the public radio news director for the state. For everyone who depended on Jonathan's broadcast of Peoria City Council meetings, and for his diverse news stories: Thank You Jonathan! You made a tremendous contribution to public information for us all.

## Peoria City Council Proceeds with Kellar Trail-by-Rail Study

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

At the June 10th, Peoria City Council meeting, the vote was ten to one to approve \$15,000. for an engineering study on the Kellar Branch Line. The study is to examine if a trail can be placed next to the rail line. Kellar Branch Line Trail Advocates contend sections of the right-of-way are too narrow and steep for a side-by-side trail. The four million in trail grant funds obtained by the Peoria Park District cannot be used for a trail-by-rail, as such a design would not meet national trail safety codes and other standards. Peoria Heights is contributing \$5,000. toward the study. As of publication of this newsletter, rumors are abundant that Central Illinois Rail is leaving the Kellar and will be off of the line. The study report is expected back in August. Councilman Spain asked about the issue of the city charging fair market value for rent for use of the Kellar Line, however, other city management has not appeared to respond.

### *(Not Dumb, from page 1)*

and news magazine sales have been in decline for 30 years. TV news viewing has declined the past 20 years. Jacoby points to the absence of curiosity about alternate points of view. In the late 1800's Americans, including the devoutly religious, packed lecture halls to hear Robert Ingersoll, who made Peoria his home, and was known nationwide as the "Great Agnostic." Today, polarization is the norm. The culture of TV, video games, and cell phones occupies an inordinate amount of the population's time. National parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas sustain falling visitor numbers. Outdoor

recreation of almost every kind is in decline.

Is it valid to say that Ignorance, unreason, and incuriosity have a negative effect on environmentism? Is it reasonable that a distracted and incurious citizenry understands the dangers of ignoring global warming; the ecology of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge; the health hazards of toxic wastes dumped into oceans, lakes, streams and aquifers; the fragile relationship between predator and prey, or pollinator and plant? Will ignorant people believe the propaganda of agribusiness excusing CAFO's and ocean dead zones? Do the uninformed understand the

value of wetlands or do they believe them to be mosquito infested swamps?

While 60% of the populace says that protecting the environment and energy conservation should be top national priorities, our leaders in Washington bicker and stall. On November 4th, the issues of environmental protection and a sane energy policy may be swept away by the economy, the War, guns, abortion and gay marriage. Susan Jacoby concludes, "It is possible nothing will help us. The nation's memory and attention span may have sustained so much damage that they can not be revived." Yes, that is possible, but a change of leadership in Washington could make an enormous difference.

# PDC Attempts to Delist Electric Arc Furnace Dust Waste from Being Hazardous

## Diversions Attempt to cut 95,000 cubic yards a year from PDC #1 Hazardous Waste Landfill

By JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

In yet another attempt to wring more years out of the existing space at the PDC #1 Hazardous Waste Landfill at the edge of Peoria, the Peoria Disposal Company has applied to the Illinois Pollution Control Board to "delist" Electric Arc Furnace Dust (EAF). This is EPA number K061. PDC claims that their special treatment process makes this waste safe for landfilling in a municipal waste landfill, rather than in their RCRA licensed hazardous waste landfill, which is thought to be quickly nearing capacity.

Delisting will allow PDC to bury this waste in its Indian Creek Municipal Waste Landfill near Hopedale, Tazewell County. The Indian Creek landfill is over the Mahomet Aquifer. Because it is a municipal waste landfill, it does not have the added liners and extra leachate collection that is at PDC #1 at Peoria.

Electric Arc Furnace dust results from steel mill processes. It is a listed hazardous waste because it contains known car-

cinogens and other highly toxic substances, including hexavalent chromium and cadmium. While much of this waste comes from Keystone, PDC accepts wastes from many other states. After trucking the hazardous waste to the PDC location on Southport Road, PDC will put the waste through their "stabilization" processing. PDC then wants to ship the treated waste to the Indian Creek landfill. While PDC mixes substances with the toxic waste, the total amount of hazardous substances are still in the waste. The parts per million of toxicity is reduced per test sample, however

the long-term risks of the waste still remain. Currently available technologies exist to recycle much of the heavy metals from EAF. There is a company near Chicago that processes EAF dust, and a new

facility is to open in Millport, Alabama. Enabling companies to cut costs through using municipal waste landfills for toxic materials is unacceptable, particularly when recycling is an option.

Please write your concerns to the: Clerk of the Board, RE: Case AS 08-10, Illinois Pollution Control Board, 100 W. Randolph St., Suite 11-500, Chicago, IL 60601.

### IMPORTANT HEARING! PLEASE ATTEND!

Illinois Pollution Control Board Hearing

Monday, August 18th, 2008

3 p.m. at the Peoria Public Library, Auditorium

300 NE Monroe, downtown Peoria

#### PDC ATTEMPTING TO DIVERT WASTE TO MUNICIPAL LANDFILL

Your presence is needed to show continued local concern regarding the Peoria Disposal Company Hazardous Waste Landfill. Public Comments can be made. See the related article for more information.

## Appeal of PDC's Revised Toxic Waste Permit Is Denied

By TOM EDWARDS

The Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB) on June 19 denied this writer's (Tom Edwards) challenge of major particulars in the revised permit for further operation, and closure, of Peoria Disposal Co.'s (PDC) hazardous waste landfill off Rt. 8 and adjoining Peoria's thickly populated west side.

The board considered only 3 of the 13 issues that Edwards had raised, saying he had only raised those 3 issues [in prior letters] "before the Agency (Illinois EPA) issued the permit." Actually, however, all 13 had been received by the IPCB in mail postmarked Dec.31, the last day for filing. The actual permit cannot be issued prior to closure of the public comment period, and surely not before the decision of the IPCB.

Two major issues of the challenge are that PDC's toxic waste landfill is the only active one in the nation that: 1) sits right above a city's water supply aquifer; and 2) is also located immediately upwind of the air Peorians must breathe.

Toxic wastes of 15 other states have been brought here, and EPA's permit allows 843 highly toxic chemicals to be buried on a hilltop in PDC's landfill. Only 13 other states still have commercial hazardous waste landfills.

During the public hearing period 185 mailings had been sent to the PCB, it reported, all supporting this permit challenge. Also testifying at the hearing, Joyce Blumenshine, ICC chemistry prof. Bill Cook, and local residents Tracy Fox and Joyce Harant voiced deep concerns about the safety of the landfill and urged greater regulation.

Regarding Edwards' assertion of no monitoring for gaseous air pollutants (as extremely toxic mercury) though there are vents in the landfill for them, in reply the EPA testified "that there is no specific provision in the RCRA rules for air monitoring at a hazardous waste landfill unit."

Edwards' other contentions were that landfill monitoring is done by PDC itself and not an independent body; that the

volume of the landfill had been increased by PDC and EPA by 43% without a public hearing; that the permit revisions would reduce the amount of pollution monitoring by nearly 50%; that independent investigation has reported leakage from landfill cells; that there is no monitoring of the extensive pre-law section of the landfill; that the federal EPA reported that Peoria County has by far the highest Toxic Release Inventory in the state and 16th highest in the nation due to PDC's landfill.

PDC sets the day, time, and means for taking water samples, with the frequency now cut to every 6 months rather than every 3 months, and a number just once a year.

PDC has been getting operational time extensions from the EPA for the last 10 years. EPA is now saying it must close beginning next year.

