

# 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 20

### 18th Congressional Candidates Forum

Forest Park Nature Center, 7 p.m.

The Democratic primary candidates for the 18th Congressional District, DK Hirner and Carl Ray, and the Republican incumbent, Aaron Schock, have been invited to discuss environmental issues at our January meeting. At this time it is not known who will accept our invitation. Look for an announcement in the Peoria Journal Star as the meeting date approaches, or contact an HOI Excom member for up to date information.

WED  
FEB 17

### Environmental Law, Green Energy Initiatives

Forest Park Nature Center, 7 p.m.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas Kilbride will talk about environmental law. Also, Dave Schaab from Waste Management will give a presentation on the company's green energy initiatives.

## Coming.....

### New HOI Website, Changes to Tallgrass Sierran

Look for the new HOI Sierra Group website, coming sometime in January. Initially, you will be able to link to the site by going to the Illinois Chapter website at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org>, then selecting the "Heart of Illinois (Peoria)" group from the selection list on the right. You can then bookmark the site to navigate to it directly. (Currently, this link points to a limited informa-

(See *Changes*, page 2)

## Polar Bears, Polls, Leaves, and Pesticide

BY RALPH GINN, *Opinion Columnist*

**LOSING A LIFELINE:** Charging Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar with cutting the lifeline of the polar bear, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and other environmentalists are protesting his decision to not apply the bear's Endangered Species Act protection to global warming polluters. In a tiresome litany of loopholes in the legislation they pass, Congress gave Salazar the power to revoke this Bush-era policy, but did not have the courage to rescind it themselves. It wouldn't be a surprise if there was a tacit agreement that Salazar would let the Bush policy stand. His judgement to retain it undermines his environmental record which, up to this point, had been well received by environmental groups.

Polar bears face the triple threat of declining sea ice which is vital to their hunting success, oil and gas development in coastal habitat, and trophy hunting permitted by Canadian law. Without sea ice, the bear cannot survive. Creditable wildlife scientists predict polar bears will go extinct in the wild by 2040-2050. In the good guy/bad guy role Salazar has proposed designation of 200,000 square miles of Alaskan waters and sea ice as critical habitat for the polar bear. This designation means oil and gas development cannot go forward without intensive review by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Also, to block trophy hunting, NRDC and other groups are pressing FWS to recommend the highest level of protection for polar bears at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meeting in March of

2010. Canada is home to some of the best polar bear habitat in the world.

**SO WHAT?** A recent poll of 1,500 adults by the Pew Research Center found that the number of Americans that believe there is solid evidence the world is getting warmer is down 20 points from a poll taken in 2006. In the recent poll, only 36% believe that human activities are responsible for the increase in warming. Ironically the steepest drop has come in the last year when the Obama administration has taken steps, in antithesis to denial by the Bush administration, to control heat-trapping gases. During the three year period between these polls, the scientific evidence points to accelerated climate change: melting sea ice and glaciers, higher recorded temperatures, rising sea levels, increased carbon dioxide levels in ocean waters, expanding deserts. Go figure! Al Gore, the professor of climate change education, and usually the smiling face of efforts to educate the public, admits there's a factor that drives him crazy. He cites a poll of CEOs which found 80% would not spend money to make their factories more efficient and save money in the long run, if it hurt their next quarter bottom line. Gore calls that "functionally insane." CEOs or Americans in denial don't alter the raw data of climate change or it's human origins. Polls don't change facts.

**WHAT'S THIS?** In October the Chillicothe City Council voted 6-1 to change the city ordinance that regulates leaf burning. The new regulation would expand leaf burning from two days a week to six.

(See *Polar Bears*, page 2)



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(Changes, from page 1)

tional page, which will be changed to the new website address sometime in January.)

In conjunction with our new website, we will also provide an electronic version of the *Tallgrass Sierran*, and later this year, when everything is working to our satisfaction, we plan to eliminate the current print version of the *Tallgrass Sierran*. We are very much aware that many of our members do not have internet access. During the next couple of months our HOI Excom will be discussing ways to still reach out to those members, perhaps by issuing a limited, reduced print edition to those members requesting it.

We are making these changes for two main reasons. Over the last couple of years the National and Illinois Chapter Sierra Clubs have drastically reduced funding for local groups such as HOI. It costs us \$350 to \$450 to publish each issue of the *Tallgrass Sierran* (6 issues per year). This is by far our greatest group expense. Our website and the electronic version of our newsletter will cost us nothing, since it will be hosted on National Sierra Club servers. In addition, the National and Illinois Chapter Sierra Clubs are strongly encouraging all groups to eliminate the print version of their newsletters.

By concentrating our efforts on our website and electronic newsletter, we can provide more up-to-date information on more topics to our HOI members, as well as other non-members in Central Illinois who care about the environment. It will be much easier to send out electronic action alerts on specific topics to those members and non-members who request to be notified.

More detailed information about our website and electronic newsletter will be in the March/April printed issue of the *Tallgrass Sierran*. If you have questions or concerns, please contact John Wosik at 309-222-2519 or [johnwosik@comcast.net](mailto:johnwosik@comcast.net). We value all of our members and want to hear from you regarding these coming changes.

## Industry Mine Has Over 300 Clean Water Act Violations

By JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

The Industry Coal Strip Mine, southwest of Macomb in McDonough County, has committed over 300 violations of its state water permits in the last five years. From January through August of 2009, the mine had over 60 exceedences of its state water permitted levels of pollutant discharges into area streams. Research done by the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), Chicago, documented the mine violations of the Clean Water Act. ELPC, Sierra Club, and Prairie Rivers Network, joined in a 60 Day Notice Letter of Intent to Sue due to the repeated violations. The coal company routinely discharged wastewater from its operations containing iron, manganese, sulfates, and total suspended solids at levels in excess of the amounts allowed by its NPDES (National Pollution Discharge Elimination System) permit. The coal company also discharged wastewater that violates pH limits and sulfate limits contained in its permits. The combined pollution could well mean the death knell for fish, invertebrates, and overall water quality of Grindstone Creek and other affected streams. No recent aquatic studies are known to have been done in the mine area.

This issue has direct bearing on the proposed North Canton coal strip mine, which has been permitted by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, but does not yet have other required state permits. The North Canton mine would discharge into the West Branch Copperas Creek, which feeds into Canton Lake, the public water supply for over 20,000 people. The North Canton mine would also discharge into the Middle Branch Copperas Creek, which joins Copperas Creek and flows into the Illinois River. Over 50 local Canton citizens and members of the Canton Area Citizens for Environmental Issues (CACEI) attended a press conference organized by HOI Sierra on December 11th. CACEI Chair Brenda Dilts and several other group members spoke about concerns for their water supply. The press conference was at the Fulton County Health Department in Canton. The same mine company and engineer are involved with the proposed North Canton mine and the Industry Mine.

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Sundays and holidays would remain no burn days. Their stated "reasoning" was that spreading the burn over more days will reduce smoke pollution. No condolences were offered to complaining residents with asthma, emphysema, or other respiratory ailments, and no answers were forthcoming as to how six days a week of burning would be better for these victims than two.

**HIDE AND SEEK:** Illinois State Senator Dave Koehler, Peoria, is investigating chemical drift from farm pesticide and herbicide applications that have gone wrong for neighbors. The Illinois Senate held a public hearing on the matter and Koehler says more public hearings are likely. Chemical drift has affected countless numbers of Illinois residents as well as rural citizens in other agriculture states.

It affects organic vegetable growers and families living near wind blown and errant airborne chemicals. Perpetrators are crop dusters and ground applicators.

Illinois Representative Don Moffitt of Gilson became involved in this issue when two children playing in their own farm yard were victims of misapplication. This is not a new problem. Mr. Koehler should be congratulated on his interest in addressing an issue his predecessors ignored for years. Mr. Moffitt is a johnny-come-lately but welcome none the less. They are in contrast to most Illinois legislators, who consider any action that is opposed by agribusiness or the Farm Bureau akin to voting a \$10 million grant to The Illinois Atheist Society. Several years ago HOI tried to help a family living in rural Tazewell County that had been a victim of many uncontrolled chemical applications. Receiving zero

help from the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA) or the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), they hired an attorney with environmental law experience. I had a chance to read Illinois law on chemical application and most of the correspondence between the victims and IDA, IEPA, and the attorney, and found Illinois law to be very magnanimous to grain and livestock farmers, factory farms (CAFOs), and the Farm Bureau. The family's case went nowhere. Why? After some multi-step tracing it was discovered that the small local company that did the chemical applications was owned by a larger company who was in turn owned by? If you guessed the Farm Bureau, you would be correct.

Send comments to Ralph Ginn at [randdginn@dishmail.net](mailto:randdginn@dishmail.net).

# A Better Alternative to Lake Silt Problem - Take It Out

BY TOM EDWARDS

Lower Peoria Lake, formed by glaciers 10,000 years ago, still exists only because in 1970 then Gov. Richard Ogilvie, heeding Sierra and citizen outcries to "save Peoria Lake" from East Peoria City Council's then request for a permit to fill 1,000 acres, all of the lower lake's east side for building development, toured the lake. The result was that Ogilvie overruled his own staff and ordered denial of the permit request. Otherwise Lower Peoria Lake would have become just a little wider place in the river.

For both the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, it was the first ever denial of such a fill permit in Illinois by either the state or federal Army Corps of Engineers. Since then, despite various predictions that silt would fill the lake anyway, not one foot of its natural shoreline has been lost, upscale development has followed along it, and its navigation channel has never had to be dredged.

The Corps has since strictly enforced this de facto "no fill" rule and blocked attempts by lakeside landowners, public and private, to fill out into the lake, including for such as East Port Marina, Par-A-Dice Casino, Detweiller Marina, and Dixon's Fish Market.

## Change at the Top

But now the Corps' Rock Island office

wants to spend \$7.6 million to pile up bottom silt for an elongated, 21-acre island extending across nearly all of the front side of the now 90-acre State of Illinois owned backwater cove in the lower lake's northeast corner above the McCluggage Bridge — the most pristine part of all Peoria Lake. (The Corps also has two more larger islands planned for later just below the bridge.) The Corps' justification for the first island is to provide, for several years, 3 to 4 feet more water depth for "winter fish habitat" around the island. To keep the dredged up silt from washing away, the island would be ringed by 200-foot long, silt filled "geotextile" tubes piled 12 feet high, which will make it the highest island in the river.

But such islands themselves are "fill." And this one will close off the cove to the wind and wave action that has preserved it from silting in since the last ice age. Therefore, the cove will surely quickly become totally filled with silt, as hugely more silt washes down the river than stays in the 5-miles of Lower Peoria Lake and the 13-miles of Upper Peoria Lake. That will turn all of this 90 acres of ancient lake into land.

## A Superior Alternative

Rather than piling up silt for an artificial island - instead 1) pump it out to cre-

ate a 30 to 40 acre, 8 to 10 foot deep area down the middle of this cove for a permanent deep water fish habitat, plus provide a "sink" for incoming river silt from which it could be easily dredged; and 2) make the silt available for the valuable topsoil it is.

This was done by East Peoria to build its 300-boat East Port Marina in 1996. Because the Corps of Engineers refused to permit the city to pile up any silt in the lake for its then proposed marina, the city had contractors remove 155,000 cubic yards of silt. One stored 70,000 cubic yards and sold it locally for topsoil. The other barged it to Chicago Also, trains of up to 100 cars haul coal into Peoria and Pekin power plants weekly, and return empty. They could be returning with river silt to heal strip mines.

Over 90% of the silt comes through Upper Peoria Lake from the Illinois River's six tributary rivers between Chicago and Lacon. There are no creeks emptying into Lower Peoria Lake itself. East Peoria's Farm Creek empties directly into the river's main channel at the bottom toe of Lower Peoria Lake, not the lake itself. A means to trap incoming silt as it comes into the Upper lake is needed.

## Peoria Mayor Asked to Nominate a Citizen Environmental Representative to the Peoria City/County Landfill Committee

BY JOYCE BLUMENSHINE

Thanks to quick action by HOI Chairman Bob Jorgenson and Peoria Families Against Toxic Waste leaders Cara Rossen and Traci Fox, a letter was presented to Peoria Mayor Jim Ardis and the members of the Peoria County Board at their December 22nd, 2009, City Council meeting. This quick action followed a quote from Mayor Ardis in the December 21st Peoria Journal Star, where he commented that no one from the Peoria environmental community had requested any representative be on the City/County Landfill Committee. HOI members and individuals from PFATW attended Peoria City/County Landfill committee meetings and bid proposal meetings through the summer of 2009 and through the end of the year, as numerous issues of concern were apparent in the expansion proposals for the City/County Municipal waste landfill. Mayor Ardis immediately referred the request to Peoria Public Works Director Dave Barber, who is on the City/County Landfill Committee, and asked that the Committee consider the letter.

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