

This newsletter only appears three times a year – in April, August, and December. In addition to our newsletter, we use Facebook and our Alerts Listserv to communicate with members about environmental events and action items. If you use Facebook, please join the Sierra Club Prairie Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SierraClubILPrairieGroup/>. To sign up for our Alerts List, click here: <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?SUBED1=il-prairie-alerts>, where you can subscribe or unsubscribe. Don't worry, we won't inundate you!

1 Coming Events

Environmental Cook and Book Club. Do you like reading and eating? Sign up for our first Environmental Cook and Book Club. Each person will have a couple minutes to describe an environmental book, podcast, documentary or article that they think other Sierra Club members might enjoy. Then we will all learn how to prepare fish friendly and mercury free sushi (vegetarian sushi) along with miso soup. Only \$3 per participant to cover the cost of ingredients. Space is limited so reserve your spot by e-mailing rlvellengaatyahoo.com. Date is Sunday, April 12th beginning at 5pm in Urbana. I will reply with the address once you RSVP.

Earth Week Happy Hour. Sunday, April 19th from 4-5:30 in the lounge at Escobars in downtown Champaign. We will get updates on environmental legislation, the Bulldog Coal Mine, and Earth Week activities on campus. We will be joined by Representative Ammons and Senator Bennett, Tyler Rotche from Prairie Rivers Network and Students for Environmental Concerns. We will supply appetizers and you can buy your own drinks.

Starwatching Outing on April 18th. Please join us for an evening under the stars from about 8-10 PM on Saturday, Apr. 18th, at Middle Fork Forest Preserve in northeastern Champaign County, near Penfield. We'll be there with the Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society (cuas.org) viewing planets (Venus and Jupiter), stars and star clusters (including the Orion Nebula in early evening), and distant galaxies (the Whirlpool, the Sombrero, and many more). They'll bring telescopes though you're welcome to as well and binoculars will help if you have them.

Site: Click the "Map" on the Preserve's web site: <http://ccfpd.org/Preserves/MiddleFork.html>

The plan: Come to the park's northwest entrance – along County 9 / 3500N, 1.5 miles west along 9 from the County 22 / County 9 intersection, or 0.5 miles east of where 9 crosses County 2500E. If coming from the west along County 9, you'll see a white-on-black Forest Preserve sign and a large metal shed on your left (the north side of 9), immediately followed by a gravel driveway. Pull into the driveway and park. Please switch off your headlights as you turn if you arrive in darkness.

Boneyard Creek Community Day April 18th 9-12.

This is an annual event to clean up trash in our local streams. While Sierra Club is not a sponsor, we are encouraging Prairie Group members to participate at the Boulware Trail site, where board member Stacy James will be site supervisor. You must pre-register at:

<http://www.boneyardcreek.org/>.

Wear clothes and shoes you don't mind getting dirty and wet. Clean-up materials will be provided along with lunch afterwards.

Energy Forum on May 4 Sen. Scott Bennett and Rep. Carol Ammons will host a Forum on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency,

Monday, May 4, 2015; 5:30 PM

University YMCA - Latzer Hall

1001 S Wright St, Champaign, IL 61820

State legislators will be making important decisions about Illinois's energy future this Spring in Springfield. Join Senator Bennett and Representative Ammons and a panel of experts to learn more about proposed legislation and the economic potential of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Rachel Vellenga

Weather call: The starwatching will be called off if the weather is cloudy. If in doubt, please check the Staerkel Planetarium answering machine that evening: 217-351-2567 – Dave Leake (of Staerkel Planetarium and CUAS) will post a message. There's no rain date. The Champaign County Forest Preserve District and CUAS do this three times a year, so our next chance will be in August.

Getting there from C-U: (In case County 22/2700E might still be closed south of the park, best to not go by way of I-74/Royal/Ogden.) Head north on I-57, or on Cunningham/Route 45, to Rantoul. Continue north on Route 45 to Ludlow, about 6 miles. Turn right (east) onto County 9 / 3500N, and go 7 miles east on 9, crossing County 2500E. Half a mile further on 9 you'll pass the starwatching site on your left. (Alternate route: Rantoul → 136 eastward to Gifford → north on 2300E to County 9 / 3500N → two miles eastward on 9 to 2500E, etc.)

More information: Stuart Levy, 217-369-3485 or stuartnlevy@gmail.com.

2 New Website

The Prairie Group website has migrated here: sierraclub.org/Illinois/prairie, with a new look!

We will keep the website updated with things like upcoming outings and events, newsletter editions, Sierra Club action alerts, and Excom member contact information. We have also included links that take you to the state outings page and the national membership renewal page. Thanks to computer-savvy board member Stuart Levy for making this transition possible.

Our Facebook page remains at the address given above in the red heading. – Stacy James, Chair

3 Lobby Day

The spring session of the 2015 Illinois legislative season is going on now, and the Prairie Group of the Sierra Club is doing its part to inform state legislators of our priority bills. (The Prairie Group area is in the 12 county region of East Central Illinois which covers a number of legislative districts.) Every year the Illinois Chapter works with other pro-environment organizations to determine the legislation that all agree upon, with the goal of banding together to get meaningful legislation passed.

In February the Illinois Chapter holds a briefing session for Lobby Team volunteers. Experts on topics are brought in to teach volunteer members from all over the State about the issues to discuss with their elected officials. The volunteers then go back to their local communities and make appointments to visit their State legislators in their district offices. Several members of the Prairie Group Executive Committee are making visits now.

Of particular note are bills SB1698 and HB1326 which protects the Mahomet Aquifer from storage of toxic chemicals like PCBs. Our own newly appointed State Senator of District 52, Scott Bennett, and newly elected State Representative Carol Ammons of District 103 introduced both bills respectively. With volunteers all over the State explaining these bills to their local legislators, we hope for co-sponsorship from both Senate and House members. Protecting the Mahomet Aquifer is so important to those of us in East Central Illinois who depend on the Mahomet Aquifer for drinking water, and now this issue gains state-wide attention by making these priority bills.

Lobby Day in Springfield is Earth Day on Wed. April 22, and is the final push to gain support for important environmental laws. It's always an exciting time, and this year there will be a big rally to encourage awareness of these important pieces of legislation.

Alice Englebretsen

The bills are listed on the Illinois Chapter website at:
<https://illinois2.sierraclub.org/act/legislative-priorities>

4 Update on the Mahomet Aquifer

Thus far, 2015 is proving to be a good year for the Mahomet Aquifer, our irreplaceable drinking water supply! The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finally designated the aquifer as a sole source, in response to a petition from City of Champaign and its intergovernmental coalition partners. Kudos to the intergovernmental coalition for taking steps to protect our water supply! While this designation does not protect us from the privately-funded Clinton Landfill toxic waste project, future federally-funded projects will be subject to more scrutiny to ensure they do not pollute the aquifer. Also, the designation may provide more legal protection options in the future.

The other good news is the legislation sponsored by Representative Ammons and Senator Bennett. They have introduced bills that prohibit the storage of PCBs and Manufactured Gas Plant waste (hazardous waste products from conversion of coal to gas) above the Mahomet Aquifer. The bills have a number of opponents so the legislators are working on amendatory language to address some of the concerns. Members of the Prairie Group Executive Committee have been corresponding with the Ammons and Bennett offices to support passage of the bills.

If you want to read more about the sole source designation, visit www.epa.gov/r5water/gwdw/mahomet/index.htm.

5 Prairie Group Excom election

At the meeting of the Excom on February 1 we elected to continue with the same officers and other major leadership positions for 2015. Specifically, the officers will be:

Stacy James, Chair; Stuart Levy, Vice Chair; Alice Englebretsen, Treasurer; Don Davis, Assistant to Treasurer; Dick Bishop, Secretary (volunteer).

Excom members (besides Stacy, Stuart, Alice, and Don): Bob Illyes, Eva Jehle, Rachel Vellenga. Other positions.

Alice, Chapter Delegate; Don, Alternate Chapter Delegate; Rachel, Outings and Programs Chair; Stuart and Bob, Webmasters; Alice and Don, Political Committee; Dick, Newsletter Editor.

We are very pleased that the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club has made the legislation one of their top priorities, which means their lobbyists are in Springfield asking legislators from around the state to support the bills.

Meanwhile, Clinton Landfill is challenging Illinois EPA for modifying their permit last summer. This permit modification prevents the landfill from storing high concentrations of PCBs and Manufactured Gas Plant waste. Clinton Landfill has appealed Illinois EPA's decision to the Illinois Pollution Control Board and the Board is reviewing the case. The appeal is likely to go on for months if not years. However, the case may become moot if the Illinois General Assembly passes the legislation proposed by Ammons and Bennett.

ACTION ITEM: if your Senator or Representative is not currently a sponsor (i.e., declared supporter) of the Mahomet Aquifer legislation (House Bill 1326 and Senate Bill 1698), ask them to become one! Please call up their district office as soon as you can. Heres the current sponsors:

House Bill 1326: C. Ammons, W. Davis, C. Hays, B. Mitchell, A. Brown, R. Gabel, A. Moeller, S. Scherer, C. Lilly, E. Nekritz

Senate Bill 1698: S. Bennett, A. Manar, C. Rose, B. Cunningham, M. Bush, N. Harris, K. Lightford, J. Morrison, P. Van Pelt, H. Steans.