

For more timely notices of the Prairie Group activities sign on to our Alerts Listserv by going to the internet address <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?SUBED1=il-prairie-alerts&A=1>.

## 1 Chair's Corner

A few years ago the Prairie Group switched to an electronic newsletter. However, because we don't have everyone's correct email address, we have decided to mail out hard copies once a year so everyone hears from us at least annually. This is also a way for us to remind you to sign up for our listservs if you are not on them already.

Prairie Group maintains two listservs. We publish our newsletter three times a year, which is posted on our "IL-PRAIRIE-NEWSLETTER" listserv. This listserv is solely for disseminating our newsletter, and therefore we automatically sign up new Sierra Club members. We communicate more frequently with members via the "IL-PRAIRIE-ALERTS" listserv. The alerts listserv averages only about 3 messages a week and is used to post information about upcoming events and action items. To sign up for either

listserv, go to the listserv links at the bottom of the home page of our website. If you have any problems, send an email to Jim Beauchamp at [jwbeauch \(at\) illinois.edu](mailto:jwbeauch@illinois.edu) and he will help you out.

The Prairie Group does not have regular membership meetings or outings. Instead, at various times of the year we hold special events such as cleanups, hikes, legislator visits, seminars, and tours. The best way to find out about these events is via our listservs but we also are on Facebook (Sierra Club Prairie Group - Illinois Chapter) and we maintain a website at <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/prairie>. On this website is the contact information of Executive Committee members; let us know if you want to get more involved in the Prairie Group or have suggestions.

Enjoy the rest of the summer!

Stacy James

## 2 Kickapoo Rail Trail Fundraiser

Please join us at our Thursday, August 28<sup>th</sup> fundraiser for the Kickapoo Rail Trail. We will be mingling, eating, drinking, and learning more about the trail from 6:30-8:00pm at Sleepy Creek Vineyards east of St. Joseph. We will be joined by Dan Olson, Executive Director of the Champaign County Forest Preserve, who will be giving a presentation about the 24.5-mile trail project. The trail committee has done a great job of raising grant money for the multi-million dollar project, but they need private matching funds from people like you! We are asking for a minimum donation of \$25, a suggested donation of \$50, and encourage greater amounts if you can afford it! Reservations are required because the event is capped at 75 people; you can RSVP to Rachel at [rlvellenga \(at\) yahoo.com](mailto:rlvellenga@yahoo.com). Hope to see you there! If you can't attend but want to make a donation, visit [www.kickapoorailtrail.org](http://www.kickapoorailtrail.org).

## 3 Political Endorsements

Sierra Club is very involved in political endorsements because we need allies in Springfield to support new environmental laws and to help with local issues like Clinton Landfill. This year, the Prairie Group decided to endorse Ann Callis for the 13<sup>th</sup> District of the US Congress and Carol Ammons for the 103<sup>rd</sup> District of the Illinois House. This is our last newsletter before the election, so consider yourself prodded to get to the polls! Below is more information about what is going on with these campaigns.

### *Ann Callis fundraiser*

Join Sierra Club members from western Illinois for this Ann Callis fundraiser  
5:30-7:00pm, Tuesday, August 12<sup>th</sup>,  
Floyd's Thirst Parlor, 210 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Springfield.  
A donation of \$25 or more is required.

## 4 Prairie Group Endorses Carol Ammons

The Prairie Group is pleased to announce our endorsement for Carol Ammons who is running for the IL-103<sup>rd</sup> Illinois House District in the November election. Carol has demonstrated her keen interest in protecting our precious natural resources. In particular, she is outspoken in her support of the people who live in the 5<sup>th</sup> and Hill area of Champaign exposed to toxic waste left from a century old coal to gasification plant. Carol is also outspoken of her support for clean water by not allowing toxic waste stored over our

precious Mahomet Aquifer. She has also proposed opposition to Sunrise Coal building the Bulldog mine in Vermilion and Champaign Counties. We feel confident that Carol, when elected, will be a strong supporter on environmental concerns for Illinois.

The Prairie Group is co-sponsoring a public listening session sometime on September 16<sup>th</sup>. Carol wants to hear first-hand the concerns residents have so she can better represent our concerns in Springfield. It will be held at the Urbana Civic Center; check time on the Prairie Group website <http://illinois.sierraclub.org/Prairie/> or on our Facebook page, Sierra Club Prairie Group - Illinois Chapter.

## 5 Citizen Science - Lil' Miss Atrazine

Atrazine is a persistent herbicide, widely used in corn agriculture throughout the Midwest. It's also an endocrine disruptor, implicated in human and environmental health effects, and has been banned in the EU. How much of it is in our surface waters?

A student group at University of Nebraska, Omaha, turned that question into a social-media-supported citizen science project: "Lil' Miss Atrazine" (with its own facebook page). Groups anywhere in the Mississippi River basin were invited to apply.

The City of Urbana did, thanks to its Sustainability Manager Scott Tess. So did other groups from Nebraska to Kentucky, Minnesota to Louisiana. The protocol was simple: you didn't send a sample to a distant analytical lab. Instead, the UNO group mailed a test strip and instructions – free. To take part, you needed a timer, a camera, a GPS to measure your location, a twitter account, and enthusiasm.

On a single day, June 7<sup>th</sup> – after the corn was planted, but while spring rains were still falling – each group took a water sample, exposed their test strip for ten minutes, and compared the darkness of two marks on the strip. The result told whether the test was positive (above the 3 part-per-billion USEPA limit for atrazine in drinking water) or negative. Then all tweeted to the Lil' Miss Atrazine hash tag - #lmatz - their GPS location, initials, a photo of the test strip, and their result: yes or no? Anyone anywhere could see the results.

This is a huge change from how such research projects would typically be carried out, and the Nebraska Watershed Network group which sponsored it says they consider it a prototype for future citizen science sampling studies.

In Urbana, Scott Tess coordinated taking two samples on the Boneyard Creek: as it crosses under Race St., and a mile westward as it runs through the U of Illinois campus. About eight of us from the Sierra Club joined in, including artist Kim Curtis and her 6- and 8-year-old children, former Excom member Kirstin Dohrer, who was visiting that weekend, and my wife Karen, who made it part of her birthday celebration.

Nationally, over 50 samples were reported, and about a third of those (not including Urbana's) found surface water levels above the USEPA threshold. ( See: <http://tinyurl.com/lmatz14map> )

Let's look forward to taking part in next spring's planned Lil' Miss Atrazine sampling campaign. We and other groups around the midwest will be able to test at many more locations – and to raise awareness, both of the presence of atrazine, and of the value of citizen participation in science, as we do it.

Stuart Levy

## 6 Rep. Naomi Jakobsson Gets A Tree

Rep. Naomi Jakobsson is not running again after serving in the Illinois House of Representative since 2003. As a champion for the environment for all these years, the Prairie Group dedicated a Tulip Tree in Rep. Jakobsson's honor. The tree is located in Victory Park in East Urbana and it now has a plaque.



Plaque by tree in Victory Park



Sampling for atrazine

## 7 Dick Bishop steps down from Executive Committee

While riding the bus to campus from his High Cross Road home in Urbana one morning, Dick Bishop talked with Jack Paxton, his bus-riding pal who said, “Get involved in the Sierra Club”. This took place in 1997. Dick took Jack’s advice – after all, Jack founded the local Group of the Sierra Club and the Prairie Group and was a persuasive recruiter.

This took place at a turning point in Dick’s life, who was about to retire from the University of Illinois Math Department, which he had joined in 1959. He joined the Sierra Club in 1998 and at the invitation of Jim Beauchamp became a member of the Prairie Group Executive Committee in 2001. Dick has stepped away from the Executive Committee after 13 years of service. His work on the Executive Committee has been invaluable in his many positions, from Chair, Political Chair, webmaster, and a steadfast leader and participant; he continues to act as secretary of the ExCom. Fortunately, he will continue to edit the group’s newsletter with some indispensable assistance from Stuart Levy.

For years, Dick and his wife, Dolores, hosted the annual picnic at his home in rural Urbana. Group Chair Stacy James says,

“We’ll still see Dick Bishop in action, but we will miss his strong presence on the ExCom”. – Alice Englebretsen



Dick Bishop

## 8 Prairie Group Helps Students Get Activism Training at Sprog

*For the last few years, Prairie Group has been providing scholarships to emerging, young environmentalists. Sprog is a week-long Sierra Club youth training camp that teaches high school and college students how to run grassroots campaigns. Read the article below by this year’s scholarship recipients.*

At the very beginning of Sprog, we all sat in a conference room and were given the fundamentals of what we were going to be doing during the week. We were told we were going through trainings that will help us become better activists and organizational leaders. We would be hearing some guest speakers, and going through something else called “anti-oppression”. So, basically, we had no idea what we were really getting into.

That week we spent sitting in a college conference room was so much more than training us for leadership. Sure, we learned about how to run a successful grassroots campaign, but there are factors that go into that that we never even considered. It wasn’t just about fundraising and event planning and canvassing. It’s about understanding what people need and how you’re going to stand next to them, working to reach that goal. It’s about not forgetting about everyone’s individual preferences and beliefs. It’s about a wholly different level of respect, and human decency, and most importantly, anti-oppression.

During Sprog, we participated in a week-long simulation, in which we were citizens of the town of “Arreis”, which would soon be home to a coal-fired power plant. Some of us were in

favor of the plant, others hoped to block it. Ultimately, the former won, but not without a series of well-planned rallies, heartfelt speeches from people on both sides, and general passion of organizing. The people in favor of coal won because they better understood what the community, which had been hit hard by the recession, needed - jobs and hope. The lesson we took from this was that we cannot let a concern for the environment supersede human concern, rather the two must work in tandem.

We got a chance to learn about what kids our age are doing all around the Midwest to make this planet a better place, and found a community of like-minded people when some of us thought that such a thing didn’t exist. Sprog gave us a week to rant about all of the different people and corporations that were standing in our way, which, by the end, we learned that that wasn’t the answer to solving the problem. The most important lesson really presented itself by the end: staying angry at the oppressor doesn’t stop the oppression. We thank Sprog for teaching us that. – Abbey Hays & Jane Kanter

Participants  
in Sprog



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## 9 Picnic (6PM) and Starwatching (8-10PM) Outing Sep. 20<sup>th</sup> at Middle Fork Forest Preserve

Please join us for an afternoon pot-luck picnic and (if weather permits) an evening under the stars on Saturday, Sep. 20<sup>th</sup>, at Middle Fork Forest Preserve in northeastern Champaign County, near Penfield. (Come to either or both!) We'll watch stars with the Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society ([cuas.org](http://cuas.org)) – this is a good time of year to see star clusters and nebulae, in the brightest parts of our Milky Way. They will bring telescopes – though you're welcome to do that as well, and binoculars will be helpful if you have them. No moon nor bright planets are in the sky that evening, but many beautiful things beyond our solar system will be.

The 6pm pot luck picnic will be near the Activity Center, by the lake nearest the campground, and adjacent to several park trailheads. We'll run a grill and provide cups,

plates, etc. We can walk in the park as dusk falls before driving to the starwatching site. The 8-10pm star watching will be at the North Waterfowl Management Area, at the park's northwest corner, on County Road 9 / 3500N. Starwatching is cancelled in case of cloudy weather. If in doubt, Dave Leake (of Staerkel Planetarium and CUAS) will leave a message on the Planetarium's answering machine that evening - 217-351-2567.

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

More, including a map and directions, will be e-mailed to IL-Prairie-Alerts closer to the date of the event and posted on the Prairie Group web site. Or, for further information, please contact Stuart Levy, [stuartnlevy \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:stuartnlevy@gmail.com).

Stuart Levy