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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. For Facebook, please join the Sierra Club Prairie Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SierraClubILPrairieGroup/>. For our Alerts List, click here: <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?SUBED1=il-prairie-alerts>, where you can subscribe or unsubscribe.

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## 1 Starwatching Outing August 8th, Perseid meteors Aug 11th and 12th.

If weather permits - we hope it might this time - we have two chances to watch the night sky with the Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society ([cuas.org](http://cuas.org)).

### 8-10PM Aug 8th at Middle Fork Forest Preserve

Please join us for an evening under the stars in northeastern Champaign County, at Middle Fork. This is a fine time to see the bright summer Milky Way, and Saturn. The CUAS will have telescopes; and if you have binoculars, feel free to bring them. Site: Click the Map on the Forest Preserve's web site: Champaign Co. FP Starwatching *will be off* if the weather is cloudy. Check the Staerkel Planetarium answering machine *that evening*: 217-351-2567 Dave Leake (of Staerkel Planetarium and CUAS) will post a message.

*From C-U:* North on I-57, or on Route 45, to Rantoul. Continue north on Route 45 to Ludlow, about 6 miles. Turn right (east) onto County 9 / 3500N, and go seven miles east on 9, crossing County 2500E. Half a mile further on 9, the starwatching site is 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.) On your left is a white-on-black Forest Preserve sign and a large metal shed, with a gravel driveway just after it. Pull into the driveway and park. *Please switch off your headlights* as you turn, if you arrive in darkness! More information: Stuart Levy, 217-369-3485 or [stuartnlevyatgmail.com](mailto:stuartnlevyatgmail.com).

### 11PM - ?, Aug. 11th and 12th, Perseid Meteor Shower at CUAS club site

Watch the Perseid meteor shower – the year's best during mild weather – with the CUAS at their club's site, about 20 minutes southwest of Champaign. Just come by, sit or lie down and look up. The best views will be late at night, on either night – at least 11pm, and later is better. Site directions and map: see [cuas.org](http://cuas.org). Or: South on Neil or I-57 to Monticello Road; then right (west) about 1.5 miles beyond 57 to County 700E; then left (south) for 3/4 mile to observatory site on the left.

## 2 Public Hearing by IEPA on the Bulldog Coal Mine

Sunrise Coal, L.L.C. from Terre Haute, Indiana wants to build the Bulldog Mine in Vermilion County southeast of Homer, Illinois. A permit was submitted for this coal mine, but there are still issues to be resolved before the permitting process is approved. One of the steps is to get approval is a permit to dispose of waste water generated from the mine operation into our public streams.

IEPA is holding a Public Hearing regarding the Notice of Water Discharge Permit (NPDES). This is an important opportunity for the public to comment on the feasibility of issuing the permit. Please plan to attend and weigh in on your objections to discharging coal waste pollution into our public waterways.

EPA Public Hearing  
Wednesday, August 12, 2015 at 5:30 pm  
Salt Fork Junior High School, 7087 N 600 e Road, Sidell, Illinois 61876

### 3 Prairie Group Picnic

We are planning another picnic on Sunday, August 16th at Crystal Lake Park in Urbana at 2:00. We will have a fired up grill, veggie burgers, buns, drinks and we can all take a turn at cranking some homemade ice cream. Please bring a dish to share, utensils and plate (better for the environment), grillable item if you don't want a veggie burger and bug spray. Also money if you'd like to rent a paddleboat. Hiking is also available in nearby Busey Woods. Lets plan on meeting at the covered picnic shelter nearest the fairgrounds. Sign up on Facebook or rsvp to [rlvellenga@yahoo.com](mailto:rlvellenga@yahoo.com) so we know how many to count on. Hope you can make it!

Rachel Vellenga

### 4 Farewell Stacy!

It is with heavy hearts that we say good-bye to Stacy James, the chair of Sierra Club's Prairie Group for the past 5 years. Stacy has moved to Spokane, Washington to take a job as a biologist. Stacy was a great leader who brought a sense of humor and great scientific knowledge to our group. She is most proud of her work to get a grant for native tree restoration/planting at the Perkins Road Dog Park which was funded by Illinois American Water. She was also proud of the work she did with a consortium of government organizations and fellow non-profits working to protect the Mahomet Aquifer. Work that will continue after her departure. She will be missed by all who worked with her and her departure is a loss for the group and the community. Stuart Levy has generously agreed to serve as Chair until the next elections which is much appreciated. Thank you Stacy for all your hard work and your patience.

Rachel Vellenga



Stacy James

## 5 Coal Ash Stories

The Prairie Group of the Sierra Club, along with Prairie Rivers Network and Students for Environmental Concerns, co-sponsored a Coal Ash Stories event on June 25 at Kickapoo Landing. Coal ash is a toxic byproduct of coal combustion and contains high levels of harmful heavy metals such as arsenic, lead, selenium, and many more. Many of these facilities are stored near rivers and lakes.

Coal Ash Stories, organized by Eco-Justice Collaborative, was held in Vermilion County as the kick off for a statewide tour in Alton, Peoria, Springfield and Chicago. The goal of the program is to show the nationwide problems of coal ash handling and disposal. The Kickapoo Landing event was well attended, with approximately 30 citizens from Vermilion and Champaign Counties present. Citizens viewed four documentaries, including one by independent journalist and filmmaker, Rhiannon Fionn, of the full-length documentary Coal Ash Chronicles by Working Films.

Prairie Rivers Network staff, Tyler Rotche and Andrew Rehn, presented a technical overview of the coal ash impact locally from the Dynegy plant on the Middlefork River, the only National Scenic Waterway in Illinois. In addition, a number of local citizens expressed concerns about the past dumping of coal ash in the neighborhood of the Grays Siding area east of Oakwood as well as on the recent closing of Pond 6 at Kickapoo State Park due to potential coal ash pollution from the Grays Siding site.

Rhiannon Fionn noted that citizens need to understand we are facing a serious water pollution issue that can harm their health, environment and wildlife. Further, she said, there are no “white knights” and that people need to be informed to protect themselves as well as to demand that IEPA ensures more protections, especially in light of Congress active attempts to prevent the federal EPA from doing its job to ensure those protections.

Lan Richart, co-founder of the Eco-Justice Collaborative, reported that this team is working to accomplish the following goals:

- support for the new federal coal ash rules?
- a call for final approval of even stronger state rules regulating coal ash disposal ?
- ensuring the stringent enforcement of all laws governing the impact of coal ash on Illinois surface and groundwater.

It must be noted that the federal coal ash rules, which are scheduled to take effect this fall, do NOT apply to the Dynegy Vermilion site since it is closed. But the federal coal ash rules will apply to many other active sites nationwide.

Bill H.R. 1734 is now before both houses of Congress in Washington DC and will effectively gut the regulations before they can be implemented. To take action, go to <http://sierraclub.org/illinois/prairie> and learn how to call your Congressman to ask this bill not be approved.

Rules regulating coal ash at the state level in Springfield are being developed by the IEPA and are currently before the Illinois Pollution Control Board. The collaborative team presenting at the Coal Ash Stories event believe that Illinois rules should apply to all facilities, including Dynegy Vermilion, with a few exceptions. The legal disposal of coal ash as a “beneficial use” at sites such as Grays Siding, where it was used as land fill, demonstrates the continuing problem with allowing coal ash to be regulated as a non-hazardous waste. Lenient regulations, inadequate disposal containment, and limited oversight will continue to result in incidents of contaminated water and compromised public health. Citizens are being urged to now apply strong public pressure to protect the Middle Fork and local residents from coal ash contamination.

Lori DeYoung, with significant contribution by Lan Richert, Rhiannon Fionn, Alice Englebretsen, Stuart Levy, and PRN.

## 6 Summer PROGram in Minneapolis

Allison Steffens, Students for Environmental Concerns Chair at U. of I.

Midwest SPROG gave me the skills to organize for 100% clean energy.

This past July I was sponsored by the Prairie Group of the Sierra Club to attend this year's Midwest "SPROG" (Summer Grassroots Organizing Training) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Before SPROG, I had the desire to create change, but was unsure on how to really do it. In the past, I focused on a multitude of environmental projects at the same time, all focused on different issues. However, SPROG was an empowering moment because I learned the skills to begin designing my own campaign. At SPROG, I learned more about the Sierra Student Coalition's (SSC) Seize the Grid Campaign, the growing nationwide movement to transition college campuses' energy sources from old and dirty fossil fuels to 100% renewables by 2030. From going to SPROG this year I realized that I can start a Seize the Grid Campaign at my school, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (U. of I.)

The environmental and social justice student-movement has been continuously growing at U. of I. and I believe clean energy is the next step my community should take on! U. of I. already has strong Divestment and Beyond Coal Campaigns, that together with Seize the Grid, can call out the negative impacts of the fossil fuel

industry, demand purchasing of 100% clean energy for campus and an investment in renewable energy solutions for campus.

Last week, I met other young and inspiring leaders from Duke, Michigan State, and Ohio State who are also working on strategies to transition our campuses nationwide to 100% clean energy. Discussing campus-specific energy issues and solutions were some of the most important and insightful sessions for me. Working closely with other students on Seize the Grid showed me the impact I can have at my university. and working with peers also new to the campaign provided a comforting sense that I am not alone. Beyond SPROG, we will support each other in our shared goal of transitioning our universities to clean renewable energy.

The reassurance and empowerment I gained at SPROG inspired me to create a clean energy movement on my campus. My first step for Seize the Grid will be planning U. of I.'s kick-off event on September 22nd, when Seize the Grid campaigners throughout the country will deliver letters to their campus administrations demanding clean energy. I will deliver a letter at the U. of I. annual Environmental Expo.



Students  
at Midwest  
SPROG

## 7 IMPORTANT: Update on the Mahomet Aquifer

Many people think that because several positive things have happened regarding the threat to the Mahomet Aquifer by toxic PCBs being accepted into the Clinton Landfill in Clinton, IL. There has been some progress: The USEPA passed the “sole source” designation for the aquifer; and the legislation sponsored by State Rep. Ammons and Sen. Bennett (HB1326 and SB1698) passed in both the House and Senate, and is waiting on Gov. Rauner’s desk for signature.

However, that does not mean the Mahomet Aquifer is protected from future, and perhaps ongoing, dumping of toxic wastes. There are continued threats to the aquifer such as legally dumping MGPs (manufactured gas product), fly ash, and coal combustion waste into the Clinton Landfill. The owners of Clinton landfill are actively pursuing these new accounts, seeking permission to build a rail spur, so these dangerous waste products can be shipped to the landfill easily via Rail Road.

However, much is going on behind the scenes. Learn more about what is going on and how to get involved at a public meeting sponsored by the Champaign County Healthcare Consumers, the Prairie Group of the Sierra Club and several other local organizations.

Saturday, September 19, 11 am to 1 pm, Champaign Public Library

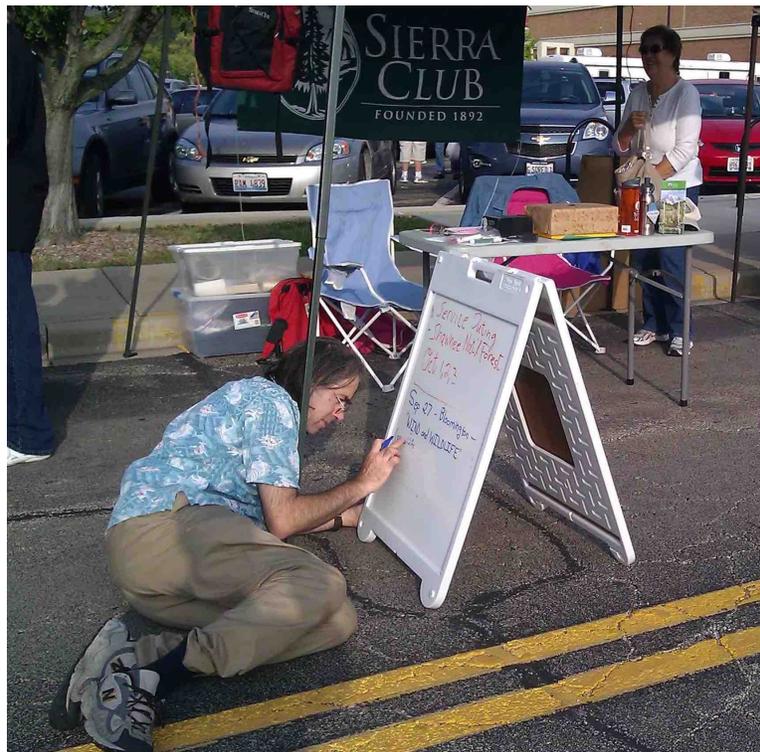
Alice Englebretsen

## 8 New Website

The Prairie Group website has migrated here: [sierraclub.org/Illinois/prairie](http://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 Excom member Stuart Levy for making this transition possible.

Our Facebook page remains at the address given above in the red heading.



Our new Excom chair Stuart helps setup at the Urbana Farmers’ Market