

Prairie Flyer



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: <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?SUBED1=il-prairie-alerts>, where you can subscribe or unsubscribe.

The underlined text are internet links, so you can click on them to bring up the pages referred to. All the main articles in this newsletter are by members of the Executive Committee of the Prairie Group.

Chair's Corner

What's new since our August newsletter?

Thanks to Nancy Dietrich, in September we held a wonderfully successful showing of the Naomi Klein film, "This Changes Everything." See her article in this issue. This was a great exercise in bringing together a bunch of disparate groups, each of which sees addressing climate change as a pressing concern. The event brought people out not only to appreciate the film's message, but to connect them with ways to take action.

We were happy to co-sponsor a talk by Tom Conway of the Blue-Green Alliance, a ten-year-old organization of labor and environmental groups (Sierra Club was among the founding orgs). Labor groups and environmental ones don't always agree - as on questions like the desirability of fracking, or of oil pipeline construction - but on many issues they can agree, from supporting renewable energy investment, to infrastructure needs for water supplies (Flint, MI is not alone) and stormwater management, to rail transport and support of public transit, to promoting fair trade and opposing agreements like the TPP.

We helped campaign in support of State Sen. Scott Bennett, urged on by Terri Treacy and others from Sierra Club Illinois Chapter staff.

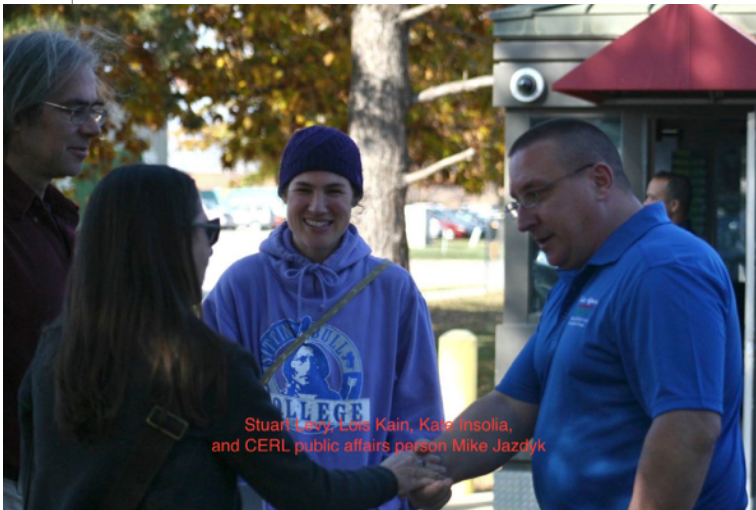
Sen. Bennett has a good environmental record, among other things on the Illinois Clean Jobs Bill, and his race was one of a handful around the state deemed high priority. As it turned out, Bennett won handily in November.

We held a couple of informal happy hours - Nancy Dietrich's idea - at Crane Alley in Urbana and Quality Bar in Champaign, a welcome chance to sit and talk about the issues we care about. We'll be doing more of this. You're welcome to join us.

We worked with others, especially Robert Naiman of Just Foreign Policy and Lois Kain of Food and Water Watch, on pipelines, particularly the Dakota Access pipeline carrying North Dakota fracked oil to southern Illinois. The Urbana City Council passed a resolution on it! See Jackie Potter's articles in this issue.

Further, the Standing Rock Water Protectors asked for nationwide support in their opposition to the Dakota Access oil pipeline. On November 15th, groups across the country held rallies outside Army Corps of Engineers offices. Lois Kain (of FWW) and SC Prairie Group organized a rally at the Corps of Engineers Research Lab in Champaign, asking them to revoke or suspend the pipeline's construction permit, and to require an

environmental impact statement. About 55 people attended. Thanks to Irenka Carney for taking pictures on Nov 15th! And, we're very grateful to Hobbico for allowing us to use their visitor parking spaces - without their generosity, holding any sort of rally there would have been difficult.



Stuart Levy, Lori Kain, Kate Insolia, and CERL public affairs person Mike Jazdyk

As this newsletter is about to go to press, and as the thousands of water protectors encamped at Standing Rock, ND were joined by thousands more veterans ready to shield them from attacks by the authorities, the Corps of Engineers announced on December 4th that they would not grant the easement needed to drill under the Missouri River. They will require an environmental impact statement, involving public input and analysis, to consider at least whether the route of the pipeline should be changed. This is welcome news. The project may yet go forward, but not without public consideration of issues - water safety, tribal sovereignty - that should have been addressed before it was started.

Also in early December, it looks as though the descendant of the Clean Jobs Bill will become Illinois law - see article below. Congratulations to the Sierra Club staff and many volunteers, who have worked very hard

over the last couple of years to reach this point.

Rachel Vellenga led us on a couple of autumn hikes - at Kickapoo in early November, and a post-election hike at Allerton Park on a cool sunny day in late Nov.



Oh yes. The US also held a general election last month. Our new president-elect flatly dismisses human contributions to climate change and supports aggressive development of fossil fuels from gas to oil to coal, and the majorities of both houses of Congress are likely to agree with him.

Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune wrote <http://sierraclub.org/michael-brune/2016/11/trump-resist-sierra-club> on SC's approach to going forward -- "Resist, Recruit, Train, and Sustain". He closes this way: "Donald Trump may be President for the next four years, but Sierra Club has been doing this

work for 125 years. We'll still be here when he is gone, and our movement will be bigger, stronger, and more innovative than ever for having opposed him. For many of us, these will be the biggest environmental fights of our lives, but they'll also be the most meaningful. We're ready to give it everything we've got."

Rachel gave a name to her post-election Allerton hike. She called it, "Get Ready to Bring the Fight".

Let's try to live up to that.

-- Stuart

Prairie Group organizes successful film screening about Climate Change

On Wednesday, Sept. 14th, 2016, Prairie Group of the Illinois Chapter of Sierra Club hosted a film screening of "This Changes Everything", a film about communities around the world taking action on climate change, inspired by Naomi Klein's best-selling book, "This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate".

The film screening was followed by inspiring calls to action by representatives from our many

co-sponsors, as well as community members who shared information about local environmental activities to get involved in, including actions involving protests of the Dakota Access pipeline. Co-sponsors also had the opportunity to have table space where they could share materials about their work and connect with community members who wanted to get involved with their organization. This included Prairie Group, which collected signatures from community members interested in getting involved in the local Bennett for Senate campaign and the push for a clean jobs bill in our legislature.

Over 100 community members came out to Channing-Murray Foundation, who generously donated the use of their space; to watch the film, connect with Sierra Club and our film co-sponsors, and to network and get involved with other community members and activists in the local environmental movement. Prairie Group also raffled off a copy of Klein's book, and had extra copies on hand for sale.

Our generous co-sponsors, who helped promote the event, gave money, brought refreshments, and/or shared information about their activities, were:

- AWARE, Central IL Jobs with Justice ,
- Champaign County Health Care Consumers,
- Channing Murray Foundation, C-U Friends Meeting,
- Eco-Justice Collaborative, Faith In Place,
- Illinois Environmental Council, Just Foreign Policy,
- People Demanding Action, Prairie Rivers Network,
- Social Action Committee & Green UUs of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Urbana-Champaign,
- Students for Environmental Concerns (SECS),
- YMCA at the University of Illinois, We're Against Toxic Chemicals (W.A.T.C.H.),
- and Wesley Methodist Church Green Team.





Representatives from Food & Water Watch, SOIL (Save Our Illinois Lands), and STEM Boycotts the War Machine also informed the attendees of activities they were organizing and how they could get involved.

It was a very informative, exciting, and worthwhile event, and we hope to organize similar events in the future.

- Nancy Dietrich

“Future Energy Jobs Bill” Passes

Quoting from Jack Darin, Director of the Sierra Club Illinois Chapter: “The Sierra Club has worked with partners for more than two years to build a stronger, more inclusive clean energy economy in Illinois. Today we see the results of that grassroots effort made possible by the widespread popular support for advancing clean energy investment in our communities and acting on climate. We’ve made thousands of calls to Illinois legislators, knocked on doors, and rallied thousands of supporters from Chicago to Springfield to Alton.”

As this issue goes to press, the “Future Energy Jobs Bill” (SB 2814), a descendant of the Illinois Clean Jobs Bill, has passed the Illinois

House and Senate, and Gov. Rauner is expected to sign it. Sierra Club and many other groups in the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition have been working hard toward this goal over the last two years, gathering public and legislative support for aspects which we wanted -- especially the renewable portfolio standard (25% renewable by 2025), improvements in energy efficiency (especially in ComEd’s northern Illinois areas, but also modest improvements in Ameren’s areas), targets for minority and low-income hiring for energy efficiency work, support for community solar, and other provisions.

We’re grateful for the support of State Rep. Carol Ammons, who immediately co-sponsored the original Clean Jobs Bill, and to State Sen. Scott Bennett, who also supported it and ended up voting for the final bill.

The resulting final bill is a compromise. To get what Sierra Club most wanted, we accepted other things we would rather not have. Especially troubling, to some of us in the Prairie Group and elsewhere, is the bill’s support for two Exelon nuclear power plants over the next several years. The Clean Jobs Coalition did succeed in blocking the worst proposals for the bill, such as subsidies for coal-burning power plants, and “demand charges” for electricity - those are gone.

Closing with another quote from Jack Darin: “Clean energy technology is growing every year in Illinois. These policies will nurture that shift away from fossil fuels, bolster our energy economy, and help ensure that every Illinois community can thrive in the clean energy economy. With federal climate action being more uncertain than ever, it is more important than ever that states act decisively on climate change, and Illinois is doing just that.”

-- Stuart, Chair

Small Victories Matter

A celebration of joy erupted in the cold, snowy and wet camp at Sacred Standing Rock the other day, with reports of traffic jams and crowds of people dancing, singing and hugging. There was a good reason for this collective expression of happiness; this large exhale of relief. An important breakthrough was recently made regarding the recognition of Native American tribal rights and lands, when President Obama kept his word when he said “there is a way for us to accommodate the sacred lands of Native Americans”, making the final decision to deny the easement for the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) underneath Lake Oahe, and to reroute the pipeline away from native sacred homelands. In response, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe expressed that they would be “forever grateful to the Obama Administration for this historic decision”. Although this decision falls short of stopping the pipeline entirely, there are reasons to celebrate it as a milestone. This decision sets a precedent regarding human rights and land rights vs. unchecked exploitation by corporations. This decision has mandated that the Army Corps of Engineers requires an Environmental Impact Statement and public input, both of which, at least by law, are a check and balance of protection in the process.

This milestone was hard-won by the many Native American tribes, protesters, supporters and US military veterans who all came together as Water Protectors to peacefully stand up to the unlawful, abusive and often violent oppression by privatized para-military forces, government agencies and militarized police forces that were hired by or serving the will of the government support of Energy Transfer Corporation. This has been a huge turn of events since just days earlier the Army Corps of Engineers had attempted to order the Water Protectors to evacuate after

weeks of abuse by police and para-military using “less lethal” weapons such as cold water sprays in freezing weather and rubber bullets that injured Water Protectors both young and old, sometimes severely (as well as injuring horses ridden by Water Protectors). Such actions constitute human rights abuses and have already brought consequence in the form of a federal lawsuit against county sheriffs and 73 different police agencies.

The decision to explore alternate routes for the DAPL crossing came after a delay allowing discussions between the Army Corps of Engineers and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, whose reservation is located 0.5 miles south of the proposed pipeline crossing that would jeopardize the water supply and infringe Native American treaty rights. Corps Assistant Secretary for Civil Works, Jo-Ellen Darcy, stated that “Although we have had continuing discussion and exchanges of new information with the Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access, it’s clear that there’s more work to do”, and that “The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously is to explore alternate routes for the pipeline crossing.” Darcy said this could be accomplished via Environmental Impact Statement and public input and analysis.

The DAPL issue not only brings up environmental concern in general, but also would have direct impact on the environment here in Illinois. The proposed DAPL, over a thousand miles in length, would connect the Bakken and Three Forks oil production areas in North Dakota to a terminal near Patoka, Illinois. It would amount to a 30-inch diameter pipe transporting approx. 470,000 barrels of oil per day. It not only would run over sacred Native American lands and water sources, but also over hundreds of communities and farms, with Corporate misuse of Eminent Domain to pressure or force property owners off their properties. It would threaten natural areas and wildlife

habitat, running underneath the Missouri River as well as many other rivers, streams and creeks on its way to Illinois. Within Illinois, this pipeline also poses direct threat to rivers, streams and creeks, as well as potentially threatening recharge areas of our Mahomet Aquifer near the Illinois River. History shows clearly that the question is not if a pipeline will break and spill, but when. There were several pipeline ruptures and spills just within the past few months as the DAPL protests occurred.

Throughout the tumultuous DAPL events, the Sierra Club has supported the Water Protectors. Prairie Group members participated in several different facets of the opposition to the DAPL, including attending and participating in protests, rallies, petitions and meetings with local and state government. Along with the ongoing protest at Sacred Standing Rock camp, there have been protests all across the Midwest, including in Illinois. One of the protests took place in Patoka, Illinois, where Prairie Group members joined other activists and Native Americans in peacefully protesting the area where the DAPL is proposed to end up before it heads south to Texas, where it would be shipped out of the country to the international market.

As the DAPL events were unfolding, our Sierra Club Prairie Group also learned of the proposed pipeline expansion by the Canadian

corporation Enbridge to “twin” (expand) the Line 61 pipeline (renaming it Line 66) running through Illinois from Canada. Our Prairie Group has been busy coordinating efforts with Save Our Illinois Lands (SOIL) to head off the expansion of the Enbridge Pipeline as it poses direct threat to land and water sources, including sensitive recharge areas of the Mahomet Aquifer, of which many communities depend upon. Coordinated efforts also included contacting, informing and mobilizing Illinois land owners about the dangers the pipelines pose and the tactics used by the corporations to take their land. There have been meetings with local and state government. Earlier this fall, members of Prairie Group, local Native American representatives and other environmental groups and activists came together to speak to the Urbana City Council about the dangers of the DAPL and how such pipelines threaten

water sources close to home. Our Urbana City Council responded by drafting a resolution similar to that drafted in Minneapolis, MN, but also including language about the risks to our aquifers and the need to protect them. This too, is a small victory, but is important

precedence to show the will of the community and its leaders to protect water, land and human rights.

The state of affairs regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline has been in constant flux, with headlines (increasingly now in



mainstream media) telling of progress and challenges. The response to the Obama administration's refusal to approve the easement for the DAPL has been swift and arrogant. Pipeline corporatocrats said that they would continue to go ahead with construction and simply pay the \$50,000 per day fine. When faced with this outright and outrageous level of wealth and corruption, we know that the fight is far from over and we must not relent. What we've had through the Obama administration's decision, is a validation (albeit at the 11th hour) of Tribal Treaties, Native American land rights and an emphasis on environmentally-responsible procedure. Although this may not be the 'big' victory we wanted, it is still important and should be celebrated. As we get to the close of 2016, we must celebrate these small victories as they can give us incremental momentum and precedence for further victories. At the very least, requiring a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement will show that the pipeline would endanger the water sources and safety of every community it goes through. And, by also requiring public input and analysis, the voice of the people is underscored as being integral to the decision-making process, as it is supposed to be in a democracy. Strategically this may be more of a victory than we realize. As our Prairie Group chair has wisely said, "This kind of procedural step may be the best thing that the Obama administration could do – it probably can't be immediately un-done by the incoming Trump administration". However, it is, as ever, up to us, the people, the environmental activists and organizations; the Water Protectors, to hold our government accountable to enforce its own environmental laws and agency procedures. We must demand that corporations be held accountable for actions against the environment and human rights. In 2017 you can bet we will bring the fight!

- Jacquelyn Potter

About the Prairie Group

The current Prairie Group Excom consists of Alice Englebretsen (a.englebretsen at comcast.net), Bob Illyes (illyes at illinois.edu), Nancy Dietrich, whose terms end in December, 2017; Don Davis (zoots2005 at gmail.com), Stuart Levy (stuartnlevy at gmail.com) Rachel Vellenga (rlvellenga at yahoo.com), and our newest appointee Jacquelyn Potter, whose terms end with December, 2016. Usually we have an election towards the end of each year, but if there are no more candidates than positions to fill or if a position becomes vacant, the current Excom may appoint people for those positions. It has been difficult to recruit candidates and we would be extremely pleased to have more people come forth with an email to any of the current members.

The Excom has the responsibility to decide on all activities and expenditures of the Prairie Group. Usually these decisions are taken at the regular Excom meetings, which occur 6 times each year in the odd-numbered months on a Sunday afternoon. In January of each year we decide on who will be the elected officers and designated activity positions. Membership in the Excom is open to any Prairie Group member, but ordinarily we have been unable to recruit anyone outside of Champaign-Urbana, mainly due to the long distances required to attend the meetings. The Excom meetings are usually held at one of the Excom members' homes. They are open to the public but not usually actively publicized.

The current officers are Chair: Stuart; Vice-chair: Don; Treasurer: Alice.

Some activity positions are Secretary: Dick Bishop; Delegate to Chapter Excom: Alice; Alternate Delegate: Don; Outings: Rachel Vellenga; Sales of Calendars: Trent Shepard; Editor of this newsletter: Dick (richardl.bishop at gmail.com)