



# Shawnee Trails



<http://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/shawnee>

Sierra Club – Shawnee Group

June – August 2026 QUARTERLY

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**New Board Member:** Laura Basanta,

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## Illinois' Pending Power Act Addresses Data Center Issues

By Sabrina Hardenbergh

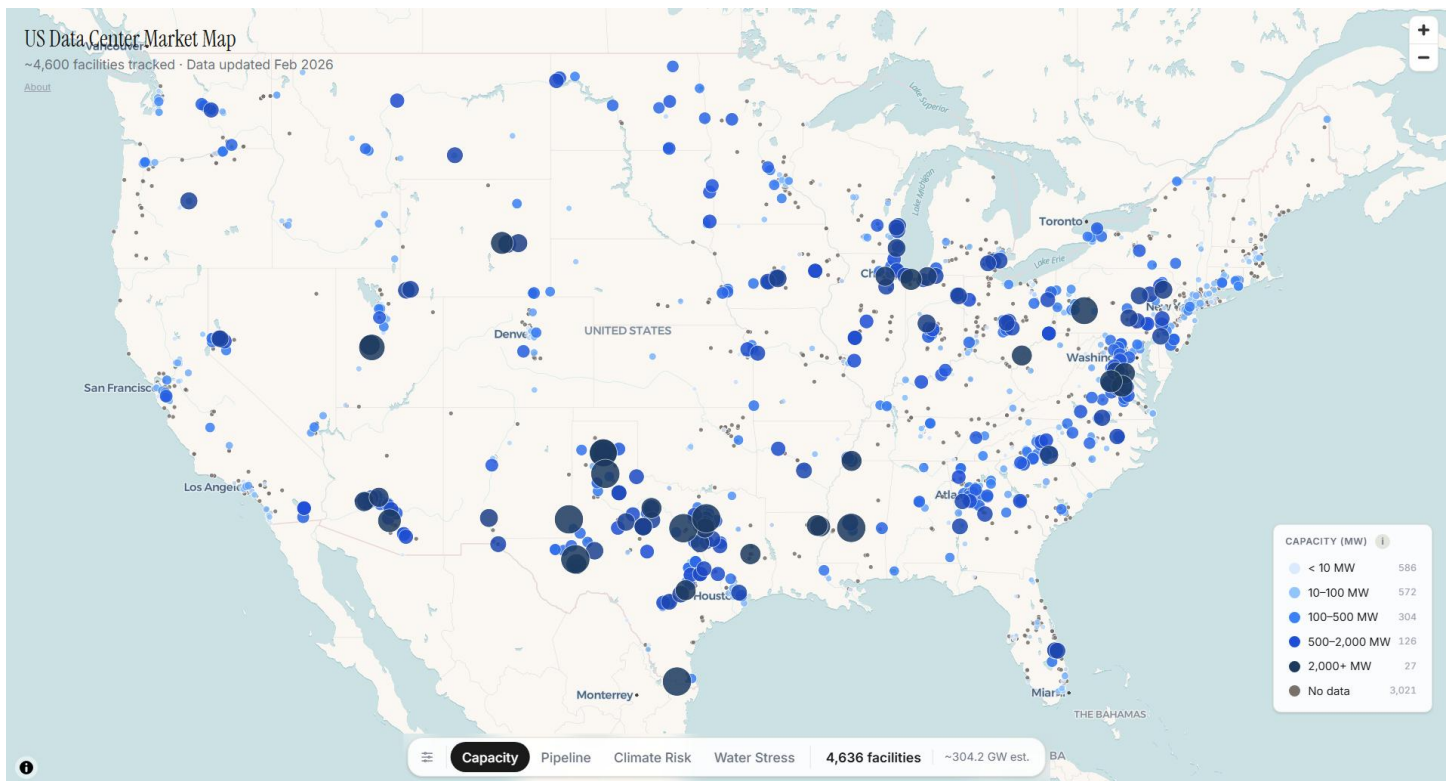
“He may be a millionaire, a billionaire — whatever kind of ‘aire he is,” ...  
“But what we need here is clean air.” — *Easter May Knox, Memphis 74-year-old with COPD wearing KN95 mask*

During the 2024 campaign season, [several articles](#) about the [southside Memphis community speaking out](#) against the [pollution and energy problems](#) associated with a new neighbor, xAI. Over summer 2024, Elon Musk’s or [xAI’s Colossus](#), the [world’s largest AI supercomputer \(based on GPUs\)](#) and artificial intelligence (AI) training/modeling data center, suddenly appeared in 122 days, opening Labor Day weekend, with little public input amid nondisclosure agreements with local government officials. [Grok](#), an AI tool among others like [GPT \(OpenAI\)](#), [Gemini \(Google\)](#) or [Claude \(Anthropic\)](#), is its main focus, but Colossus also supports computing for Musk’s [X](#) (formerly the Twitter social media app) and [SpaceX](#) enterprises, and recently [Anthropic](#). This project was different from other developments that go through EPA NEPA or Commerce Commission public hearing and comment processes. Placed beside the data center or just south over the Mississippi state line in [Southaven](#), around 18-35 gas generators energizing the facility emit a hazy smoke including [nitrogen oxides](#) into the air. Residents living near this industrial park zone with orange level ozone levels, already experienced high asthma rates, cancer rates four times the national average, and ten years less life expectancy than residents in other parts of greater Memphis, so additional xAI pollution exacerbates the air pollution and health problems. I wondered where in the [TVA grid](#) and leases the requested 150 megawatts (later 250 megawatts, ramping up to 1.2 gigawatts or a [million households’ energy use](#)), would come. Would it be Illinois coal or our New Albany Shale oil, given the new federal administration’s fossil fuel energy orientation? While Colossus is near the Mississippi River, the center apparently needs a million gallons of water per day for cooling processes. After community pushback, the [merger of unprofitable xAI](#) with [SpaceX](#), and [dismissal](#) of recent [litigation](#) with [Open AI](#), Musk and Google and NVIDIA are contemplating [data centers in space](#) to circumvent the land-based issues with energy, water cooling and siting, albeit new issues will arise. [Others](#), including Peter Thiel and [Panthalassa](#), are attempting [data centers in the ocean waves](#), scaling back from earlier offshore libertarian [seasteading](#) visions. [China](#), learning from Microsoft’s Project Natick pilot, is now [commercially deploying](#) offshore wind powered data centers in the cooling ocean.

A year ago, a [few people became aware](#) that a [data center was possibly developing at the vacant Grand Tower Energy Center site](#) in the Mississippi River floodplain near Oakwood Bottoms and *(Continued on Page 2)*

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the Big Muddy River. [Rockland Capital](#) acquired the coal and natural gas fired power plant from Ameren in 2014; the power plant eventually sold to [Perdomo Worldwide](#) (a New York demolition and construction company) in 2021 after [it went offline](#). The [Jackson/Union County Port Authority Board](#) met with Perdomo during a conference call on Feb. 2, 2026 where data center and industrial construction was discussed. While local construction jobs could initially occur, very few long-term engineering jobs are likely to happen with data center operations. Perdomo and the Port Authority discussion included energy sourcing (from the existing gas line and grid), energy cost changes in the region, water management (even if sourced from the river), flooding issues, potential destruction of Fountain Bluff for floodplain fill to build on, and coal ash remediation. What doesn't seem much discussed is other ecological disruption along the Mississippi Flyway used by many migratory birds or the Big Muddy and bottomland habitat for other wildlife. Or air, noise and possibly [PFAS](#) pollution. Because of earlier overcharged property taxes, the Grand Tower power plant leaves a \$6.5 million tax burden on Jackson County residents who have seen further increases in property taxes, where nine taxing districts must refund the power plant owner within eight years. Apparently, much of the tax burden is being charged to residents in 2025 and 2026, which may influence decision-making on new land use. A different company would build or own the data center since Perdomo's operations are just demolition and basic preparation of land for new use. Nearby across the Ohio River, pay attention to [General Matter](#), a new [enterprise](#) of former SpaceX employee Scott Nolan and technology financier Peter Thiel (of Palantir), wherein their [lease agreement with the DOE](#) to develop a commercial uranium enrichment facility at the former Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant site [supports AI data center energy needs](#). [RIoT's](#) acquisition of [Block Mining Inc.](#), a [bitcoin mining](#) facility at Paducah, makes one wonder which collocational data centers they use. The high-assay low-enriched uranium ([HALEU](#)) contained in canisters would be used in [small reactors](#) that power data centers elsewhere in the [US](#), or [Japan and South Korea](#). General Matter advertises about six construction and engineering [jobs](#) in Paducah, but most of its technical work appears to be in Los Angeles. (Continued on Page 5)



### [US Data Center Map — 4,629 Facilities Tracked](#)

(Note, there is no single repository listing all data center facilities. Numbers are higher.)

## SUMMER 2026 – SHAWNEE GROUP SIERRA CLUB MEMBER PROGRAMS

**SPEAKERS SERIES:** Shawnee Group is again taking a break in its speaker series during June, July, and August of this year, with the series starting up again in September (watch for announcements of the Shawnee Group fall speaker's series programs on Shawnee Group's Fall newsletter issue, Facebook page and website). Do consider other Illinois Sierra groups' virtual presentations listed on [www.sctrips.org](http://www.sctrips.org).

### UPCOMING WIDER COMMUNITY EVENTS

#### **Let's Talk Data Centers: Our Water, Our Power, Our Communities**

Shawnee Group Sierra Club, Citizens Utility Board, Faith in Place, Church of the Good Shepherd, Illinois Environmental Council, and Carbondale Unitarian Fellowship just co-hosted Prairie Rivers Network's free public [presentation](#) on Monday evening, May 18, 2026, at the Carbondale Unitarian Fellowship. Well over 100 people attended in the large sanctuary, overflowing into the adjacent meeting room. Break-out sessions, Q&A and a survey allowed participants to share concerns about data centers, their impacts on communities, and [potential solutions and protections](#). Several news reporters were present, including from [WFCN](#) and [The Southern Illinoisan](#). Discussion topics were immediately useful background at the Tuesday evening meeting of the [Jackson County Board](#), many who attended Monday's data center event. The [Board authorized](#) \$20,000 for Heyl Royster to do a comprehensive zoning assessment and proposal for establishing zoning and regulation of data centers within Jackson County. In addition to the news articles, read more about data centers and action alerts on the [Prairie Rivers Network website](#) and in this newsletter.

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**POWER Act Lobby Day: Support the POWER Act (SB4016/HB5513) – nation-leading legislation that protects Illinois from data center harms.** Let's take action together to ensure Illinois establishes nation-leading guardrails that protect our water, energy, ratepayers, and frontline communities!

**What: POWER Act Lobby Day**

**When:** Saturday, May 30, 2026

**Where:** Illinois State Capitol Building, 401 S. 2nd St. Springfield, IL 62756

**Registration: Free and open to all! Buses to Springfield will be organized for most regions once the May 30th Lobby Day approaches.**

**[Register to Fight for the POWER Act:](#)** To register, go to [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeuFPW1T\\_W3b3oc9yfJHyl988c2WZmOvM2734Xi1q59S0uePw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeuFPW1T_W3b3oc9yfJHyl988c2WZmOvM2734Xi1q59S0uePw/viewform)

Read about and sign the [petition](#) supporting the POWER Act.

Read the lengthy POWER Act bill on the Illinois General Assembly website: [SB4016](#) and [HB5513](#).

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You are invited to Keep Carbondale Beautiful's Second Annual **Bee & Butterfly Friendly Yard & Garden Tour, Sunday, June 7, 12:30pm – 4:00pm.** Come explore beautiful local yards filled with native plants, pollinator-friendly gardens, and ideas for creating healthier outdoor spaces in our community. We encourage everyone to [PRE-REGISTER](#) early to reserve your spot and be part of this special afternoon. [[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPsi2dO5faWH2Kx4pf\\_EMerRppqW8b0boJtwIgf0f4ep5V7MA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPsi2dO5faWH2Kx4pf_EMerRppqW8b0boJtwIgf0f4ep5V7MA/viewform)]

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[Giant City State Park is seeking input](#) regarding the possible reestablishment of their former backcountry airstrip and its impact on other outdoor recreational users. Give them your opinions: [Community Feedback Survey: Airstrip at Giant City State Park](#)

## SUMMER 2026 – SHAWNEE GROUP SIERRA CLUB OUTINGS

Given bugs and heat, we will not offer our monthly outings during the summer month this year. The exception to that: the Tunnel Hill bike ride. Here are the details:

### **Tunnel Hill Bike Ride, Sunday, July 12, 2026**

Bob Mulcahy will lead a bike ride through the Tunnel Hill Trail. Meet at the Tunnel Hill trail head in Vienna before 10 am. The ride will cover about 18 miles. Bring your own bicycle and water. You must call Bob Mulcahy at 708-471-7500 in order to go on this outing.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT OUR FALL 2026 EVENTS: Watch for announcements in the Shawnee Trails newsletter's fall issue, on our website, and our Facebook page.

**Browse** the lower right Index on our old blog page for numerous southern Illinois **hiking trail** descriptions, and explore some of these during your own time: <http://shawneegroup.blogspot.com/>. Check the Illinois Chapter listings for other outings across the region: <https://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/events-calendar>.

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### **Service Outings – Help Save High Quality Natural Areas**

Shawnee Group is committed to helping rid high-quality natural areas of non-native invasive plants (NNIS) that are threatening to crowd out our native plant communities at La-Rue Pine Hills Research Natural Area (Snake Road) and at Fern Rocks Nature Preserve (Trillium Trail) in Giant City State Park.

To volunteer, contact Barb at 618-549-9684, [babitaji@aol.com](mailto:babitaji@aol.com) or text 618-534-7440.



#### **Piasa Palisades Group Outings Chair:**

Carol Klinger, 618-288-5506, [ciklinger@yahoo.com](mailto:ciklinger@yahoo.com)  
<http://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/piasa-palisades>

#### **Eastern Missouri Group Outings Chair:**

Doug Melville, 636-288-1055  
[douglas.k.melville@gmail.com](mailto:douglas.k.melville@gmail.com)  
<http://sierraclub.org/missouri/eastern-missouri>

#### **Future Outings TBA:**

Updates listed on our or Illinois Chapter websites:  
<http://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/shawnee>  
<https://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/events-calendar>  
Other short notice outings and events may be announced on our Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubShawnee>

*(Power Act, Data Center Issues, Continued from Page 2)*

Soon after xAI appeared, a data center near [Birmingham](#), Alabama prompted similar [local resident concern](#), but [moved forward](#). Many other data center energy, water, land and labor [impacts](#) are reported across the country, including [Illinois](#). While some data centers including Microsoft initially tried to use renewable energy, many use [fossil fuel](#) given the high energy needs. Now with the recent federal administration, and its many changes in federal government, we are much more in need of what states like Illinois can do regarding the costs and benefits of AI data center development. We can learn from other states, like [Wisconsin's recent community and regulatory actions](#) on data centers.

A recent Gallup poll found [71% of respondents were against data centers](#) for [supercomputing](#) and AI training/modeling in their communities. Yet computing has been a part of business, government, military and household operations for some decades, just ever expanding and increasing to [hyperscale](#) with recent widespread [use of cloud computing, cryptocurrency mining and AI](#). Think digital medical records, financial data, logistics and energy grid systems. Sending email, watching streamed video (news, podcasts, movies or TV shows), saving photos to the “cloud”, querying a chatbot or googling info, [all involve data centers](#). Hyperscale (warehouse facility with 5000+ data servers), enterprise (business with its own data servers) or collocational (dispersed rented data space) data centers. Illinois, particularly in and around [Chicago](#), is already a major national technology hub and home to among the largest and smaller data centers, with more planned. The [Lakeside Technology Center](#), owned by [Digital Realty Trust](#) (a [global data center company](#)), with Facebook, Centurylink and other clients, is an example. Initial [moratoriums](#) may allow [time to gather information and organize to enact regulatory legislation and local ordinances or zoning](#) to determine where and how data centers should be sited. But statewide, regulating this sector and making such enterprises opt for more environmentally friendly siting, energy sourcing, building and operations, as well as safety and security protocols, may be the pragmatic route. In the Illinois General Assembly in Springfield, the pending lengthy POWER Act bill, [SB4016](#) and [HB5513](#), addresses many data center [issues](#). [Senator Adam Schiff \(CA\)](#) just introduced a [bill](#) in Congress so data centers pay for their energy use and upgrades, and for the government labs to research efficiencies. Our local [Jackson County Board just began looking into zoning](#).

Residents, businesses and community officials must weigh the myriad uses of data, now done in a highly technical digitized manner, and reframe its structuring in a civic manner to avoid some of the dystopian ends we've glimpsed. What is for civic good but also viable in shorter and long-term timeframes? Cost? Safety? Environmental and health impacts? Who pays? Policy re access, ethics, surveillance. Cloud computing, digital services, IoT (networked sensors), crypto, Generative AI (GenAI) now create unprecedented demand for data centers; GenAI requires hyperscale data centers. What should policy and regulation be?

Seventeen years ago, I remember quality improvement work at a Federally Qualified Health Care (FQHC) system of multiple clinics across rural medically underserved southern Illinois counties. President Bush had earlier given a [State of the Union Address](#) and [Executive Order](#) for electronic health record (EHR) system implementation in health services by 2014. I was on Core Team that helped get funding and chose the EHR, learn the software (remotely on a website and webinars!), set it up, modified the EHR software to our clinics' workflow, train staff, go-live and troubleshoot. In that day, local clinics and hospitals implemented EHRs such as NexGen and EPIC that ran on computer servers at their businesses. Presently, these EHRs' data might be in [contracted “cloud” space](#), or [data centers](#), which means [intermediary data center](#) companies set up data centers and lease HIPAA (privacy law) compliant and other data space to major companies like [Oracle](#) or [Amazon](#). Or the [large companies](#) also have their own [data center](#) operations across the country and other places. Some like EPIC have their own [renewable energy production](#) nearby, but many data centers increase the use of fossil fuel. Use of AI in [clinical](#) and [health insurance](#) decision-making is presently being scrutinized, so its expansion in this sector is not just a data center cost/benefit issue, but has wider ethical, labor and scientific parameters requiring guidelines. *(Continued on Page 6)*

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Large banking and financial data centers, such as for [JP Morgan](#) or [Bank of America](#), are dispersed across a region or the globe, secured, with redundant features to ensure resiliency to deal with disruptions that might impact them. Lately, [cryptocurrency is intertwined with data center](#) expansion in the US and offshore. Some like the convenience of payments bypassing use of a bank, but crypto bypasses regulation that banks and wire transfers are supposed to do for regular currency. Questionable examples involving offshored digital assets include the [Honduran ZEDE](#) (Zone for Employment and Economic Development; a libertarian neocolonial free enterprise construct devoid of much regulation), [Próspera](#), financed by [Peter Thiel](#) of Palantir and others, and [part of the politics](#) behind our president's recent pardon of convicted drug trafficker ex-Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández. Congress, the [SEC](#), and other institutions in the past have attempted to regulate the financial sector, but processes have changed lately.

Using much less energy than xAI's Colossus (10-20 megawatts versus [150 megawatts to 1.2 gigawatts](#)), the [world's fastest supercomputer and data center \(most powerful in TOP500 rating\)](#) is recently [El Capitan](#) that services our national labs, Lawrence Livermore (LLNL), Los Alamos and Sandia, which earlier have had smaller but still large supercomputing and data center systems. These are used for complex modeling on large datasets with many parameters for stewardship of our nuclear stockpile's condition, weapon modernization design, nuclear security missions re nonproliferation and counterterrorism, material science and physics experiments, climate science, fusion energy, and biological health systems and drug interventions among other examples. LLNL recently incorporated AI into many parameters of their classified and civilian research operations, through contracts with [Anthropic's AI tool Claude](#), Google, OpenAI, and xAI. LLNL's [AI3](#) innovation incubator program collaborates with industry and academic partners on manufacturing, biology, environmental resilience, fusion, IT hardware and nuclear security R&D, where participation in global IT conferences on [Critical National Infrastructure AI](#) is encouraged. A list of conference [topics](#) indicates how these complex computing systems are now an integral element in national and global security matters. [Maven Smart System](#), a [Palantir](#) supplied AI-enabled platform interfaces various military and intelligence data sources and processes to find and strike targets. Debate over whether [Maven](#) is a command-and-control platform versus just a situation awareness tool with human decision-making about strikes is an issue, as well as the cloud security of some of the data. Related [hyperscale data centers](#) are at Fort Bliss and Dugway Proving Ground, while smaller data centers are at the various military [Command Centers](#). [GenAI.mil](#), a military version of the Google AI tool Gemini, went live at the Pentagon December 2025 for use with unclassified data. Residents near the military hyperscale data centers are pushing back on the [impact to energy use](#) and water, especially those in arid sites.

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The [Wall Street Journal](#) reported a 10-hour outage because of a cooling issue at the Cyrus One data center in Aurora near Chicago. This temporarily halted the Chicago Mercantile Exchange from its futures trading, associated with U.S. stock indexes, Treasuries, crude oil and other commodities right before Thanksgiving 2025.



*(Power Act, Data Center Issues, Continued from Page 6)*

Many people, organizations and states across the US have quickly organized around the AI data center issues, so, like the fracking issue this past decade, there is a good network to share experiences and coordinate efforts for legislation and local ordinances. Read about communities' actions with data centers:

### **Alliance for the Great Lakes**

[Data Centers - Alliance for the Great Lakes](#)

### **Sierra Club and Wisconsin's experience with data centers.**

[BigTechUnchecked\\_DataCenterToolkit\\_FINAL](#)

### **Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition and POWER Act support**

[The POWER Act: Protecting Our Water, Energy, and Ratepayers](#)

[ICJC Public Factsheet - The POWER Act - Spring 2026.pdf - Google Drive](#)

### **Halt the Harm**

(an environmental health information exchange network, with upcoming data center webinars to orient communities to approaches for regulating the industry at local, state and other levels of government)

<https://halttheharm.net/>

<https://network.halttheharm.net/> (listserv)

### **Prairie Rivers Network and Illinois Extension Community Economic Development**

[Watt's Up With Data Centers: Part 1](#)

[Watts Up with Data Centers: Part 3](#)

[Watt's Up With Data Centers: Part 2](#)

[Data Centers - Prairie Rivers Network](#)

**POWER Act (SB4016 & HB5513)** – [Following up from CEJA](#) (sign a petition in this [weblink](#)), this [very lengthy bill](#), detailing new permit regulations, would [make data centers responsible](#) for development of their own water and energy supplies, plus consumer rate payer protections.

### **Illinois Legislative Contacts: CALL YOUR LEGISLATORS TODAY!**

State Dist. 109 – Charles Meier: 618-651-0405; 217-782-6401; [repcmeier@gmail.com](mailto:repcmeier@gmail.com)

State Dist. 115 – David Friess: 618-282-7284; 217-782-1018; [friess@ilhousegop.org](mailto:friess@ilhousegop.org)

State Dist. 116 – David Severin: 618-440-5090; 217-782-1051; [severin@ilhousegop.org](mailto:severin@ilhousegop.org)

State Dist. 117 – Patrick Windhorst: 618-294-8703; 217-782-5131; [windhorst@ilhousegop.org](mailto:windhorst@ilhousegop.org)

State Dist. 118 – Paul Jacobs: 618-559-7018; 217-782-0387; [Jacobs@ilhousegop.org](mailto:Jacobs@ilhousegop.org)

Senate Dist. 55 – Senator Jason Plummer: 618-283-3000; 217-782-5755

Senate Dist. 58 – Senator Terri Bryant: 618-684-1100; 217-782-8137; Sec'y.: [cbrown@sgop.ilga.gov](mailto:cbrown@sgop.ilga.gov)

Senate Dist. 59 – Senator Dale Fowler: 618-294-8951; 217-782-5509; [senatorfowler59@gmail.com](mailto:senatorfowler59@gmail.com)

Governor J.B. Pritzker: 217-782-6830; <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/gov/contactus/Pages/default.aspx>

Speaker of the House Emanuel Chris Welch: 217-782-5350; 708-450-1000; [repwelch@emanuelchriswelch.com](mailto:repwelch@emanuelchriswelch.com)

Senate President Don Harmon: 217-782-8176; 708-848-2002; <http://www.donharmon.org/contact-senator-harmon>

### **Congressional Contacts: CALL YOUR CONGRESSMEN TODAY!**

Senator Dick Durbin: 618-351-1122; 202-224-2152; <http://www.durbin.senate.gov>

Senator L. Tammy Duckworth: 202-224-2854; <https://www.duckworth.senate.gov>

Representative Mike Bost: 618-457-5787; 202-225-5661; <https://bost.house.gov>

Representative Mary Miller: 618-240-3155; 202-225-5271; <https://marymiller.house.gov>

**President Donald Trump**, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500, 202-456-1111; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>

## Has Your Email Address Changed?

To receive notification when the latest Shawnee Group newsletter is posted online, be sure to inform the Group when you change your email address. Send email address updates to: [crusso1957@yahoo.com](mailto:crusso1957@yahoo.com).

Read current and past newsletters on our website: <http://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/shawnee>. The website also lists information on upcoming local programs and outings, plus state and national Sierra Club issues.

### Leadership Opportunities

**Run for the Board!** We need a few good women and men. Join the board of directors (the executive committee, also known as the ExCom) in overseeing the Shawnee Group's strategic direction and economic health. Board members meet monthly for about 2 hours. Board terms are for two years. We are always interested in potential candidates. Contact Jane Cogie, 618-713-7024, [jane.cogie@gmail.com](mailto:jane.cogie@gmail.com).

**Call for articles and photographs for Shawnee Trails!** The next issue will be published in August. Please send your Word, PDF or JPG files to [sabrina@midwest.net](mailto:sabrina@midwest.net) by **Monday, August 3rd**.



## Shawnee Group Sierra Club T-Shirts for Sale!

Show your support for our local group's activities.

Contact Mike Covell at 618-201-4928 or [emike@siu.edu](mailto:emike@siu.edu).

White logo on blue T-Shirt \$15  
Medium Large or X-Large

## Step up and Serve

### Call for Shawnee Group Executive Committee Candidates

The Sierra Club Shawnee Group is inviting members to apply for the Executive Committee (ExCom). The Shawnee Group is guided by an Executive Committee of eight members who attend monthly board meetings and share in leadership responsibilities. Each year, four positions are open for a two-year term beginning in January. All current members may apply and can do so by submitting a biographical summary of 200 words or less describing your interest in running, along with a portrait photo. Applicants will be reviewed by the Nomination Committee, and selected candidates will be published in the Prairie State Protector and the Shawnee Trails newsletter for the Fall 2026 election. Candidates are elected via online voting by the Shawnee Group members.

Please email your application to **Rick Steger**, NomCom Coordinator, at [rwsteger@gmail.com](mailto:rwsteger@gmail.com) by **July 20, 2026**. Thank you for your interest.