



Sauk-Calumet Group

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Midewin Legislation Threatened – Act Now!

by *Connie Heinrich, Editor*

Things are really heating up on the Illiana front. IDOT recently identified the “preliminary preferred alternative” route for the Illiana Expressway which, if built, would connect I-65 in Indiana to I-55 in Illinois. The alternative, identified as B-3, would run in a line starting near Lowell, Indiana and finishing in Wilmington, Illinois. It would pass along the southern boundary of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

The public comment period on this alternative ended on March 9th. Jerry Heinrich submitted comments on behalf of the Midewin Alliance and he also worked with Openlands to draft a letter that was signed by a number of other groups including the Sierra Club. The primary concern was to protect Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the DesPlaines State Fish and Wildlife Area from encroachment and adverse environmental impacts such as the light, air, and noise pollution that an expressway would bring.

In a public open house held near Wilmington on March 21, IDOT attempted to explain how it arrived at its decision to choose the B3 alternative from the dozens of other alternatives. The people of Wilmington were not convinced that the best route was directly through their “backyards”. The “no build” alternative, which is a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), did not appear to be under serious consideration by IDOT.

Unfortunately, a suggestion was raised that the B3 route could be modified so that it would run through Midewin if an exception to the federal legislation were allowed. Midewin was created by an act of Congress called the Illinois Land Conservation Act of 1995. The law specifies that there will be no new roads built on Midewin property. Although Midewin is currently protected by this legislation, it is possible for someone to try to change the “no new roads” provision. Based on comments made by the mayor of Wilmington, it appears that this is the tactic that the mayor of Wilmington is planning to use.

In an effort to help ensure that the Federal legislation protecting Midewin is not changed and is left fully intact, Jerry and I requested that we be afforded the opportunity to meet with IDOT planners. They granted our request and we were able to meet with them the next day. We explained to them why it is so important that no exceptions be made to the legislation. If the legislation protecting Midewin were to be opened up, there might be no end to the assaults from

development interests. We were interested to learn that IDOT is still willing to look at possible routes that had not been previously considered. Unfortunately, the IDOT planners also felt that they must consider a route through Midewin if the city officials of Wilmington successfully lobby for a change in the legislation that would allow for an exception to the “no new roads” mandate.

Our next step is clear. We must make sure that the U.S. Congress does not initiate any legislation that would allow for such an exception. Midewin was created as a gift to future generations, and that legacy should be preserved, not destroyed. Children from urban and suburban areas are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature, and Midewin provides an outdoor experience that might not otherwise be available to them. Midewin also offers opportunities for recreation and to see wildlife in its natural habitat. It is a Monarch habitat area and home to grassland birds, deer, turkey and other wildlife – and bison may be coming. Less than one-tenth of one percent of prairie remains in Illinois, and nowhere can people see the sweeping vistas that greeted early settlers to the area. Midewin will once again offer that opportunity if given the chance.

Visit www.IllianaCorridor.org to learn more about the Illiana corridor alternatives and planning process.

Contact Congressman Adam Kinzinger

If Adam Kinzinger is your U.S. Congressman, tell him that it is not acceptable to change or make exceptions to the ILLINOIS LAND CONSERVATION ACT OF 1995. Also, tell him that it is not acceptable to allow for land swaps that would enable an expressway to be built on what is now Midewin property.

Tell him that any modification to the legislation will set a bad precedent and will encourage further encroachments on Midewin lands.

Let him know why Midewin is important to you. Midewin is something Illinois can be proud of – the nation’s first National Tallgrass Prairie.

FOR ADAM KINZINGER’S CONTACT INFORMATION, VISIT:
www.kinzinger.house.gov

Bald Eagles Save the Day

by Sharon Rolek and Judy Lihota

Even if you do not believe in miracles, one must believe a higher power helped save the Lake Calumet area from the proposed Regional Outdoor Police Gun Firing Range. The City of Chicago had planned to build a police firing range on Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) property near the CID landfill on Chicago's south side. While the environmental community was successful in delaying the process by demanding a wildlife survey, public officials did not seem to be listening to the many, many objections to this gun range even though it would be built next to a migratory bird nesting area along the Calumet River. Despite our concerns, the board of the MWRD voted 5 to 4 to lease the 33-acre site to the City of Chicago.

Then the Eagles Landed! While touring the proposed firing range site with WBEZ reporter Michell Eloy, Carolyn Marsh of Chicago Audubon saw a large nest amidst the smaller heron nests. They then watched as a Bald Eagle landed on the nest. Eloy took a photo of the eagle and put it on the WBEZ website. Later, two Bald Eagles were filmed by *Channel 2 News* and the *Chicago Tribune*. There had not been a sighting of Bald Eagles in this area for over 100 years!

Because the Bald Eagle is still protected, the Chicago police withdrew their plans to build a firing range on the site. Although no longer on the endangered species list, the Bald Eagle is still protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Act. The Act prohibits anyone from "disturbing" the eagles without a special permit from U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

As word spread of the Bald Eagles at Whitford Pond, requests for visits have been coming into the Calumet Stewardship Initiative Office at 133rd and Baltimore Avenue. The Southeast Environmental Task Force has been planning tours focused on birds, energy alternatives, toxics-to-treasures, etc. and may include a visit to the eagles in a few of these tours. For more information, phone 773-646-0436.



Save the Chicago Conservation Corps

by Sharon Rolek, Conservation Liaison – Calumet Region

Volunteers with the Chicago Conservation Corps (C3) fear that this very successful program could be defunded. The contract for C3 expires June 30, 2012 unless funding is secured. C3 and other environmental programs hosted by the City of Chicago, such as the Center for Green Technology, GreenCorps of Chicago, and the Sustainable Backyards Program, are all at risk of having to severely cut service because of funding issues. C3 was originally a program of the Chicago Department of Environment. Although Mayor Emanuel had pledged that he was "committed to fostering opportunities for Chicagoans to make sustainability a part of their lives and their experience in the city," the DOE was dissolved effective January 1, 2012.

During the past six years, the city-wide C3 program has touched fifty wards and built a diverse environmental network that is open to all Chicagoans under the motto, "You Care. Do Something. We'll Help." The mission is to recruit, train and support a network of volunteer



leaders who work together to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods and schools through environmental service projects that are aimed at protecting water and clean air, restoring land, and saving energy.

C3 leaders have requested a March meeting with the Mayor, David Speilfogel (Chief of Policy and Strategic Planning-Mayor's Office), Karen Weigert (Chief Sustainability Officer), and Aaron Joseph (Deputy Sustainability Officer) to discuss the future of the C3 program and its funding.

Go to <http://chicagoconservationcorps.org> for more information, but especially go to the website: www.change.org/petitions/city-of-chicago-sustain-chicago-conservation-corps-for-our-environment-neighborhoods to sign a petition to the Mayor to keep these City Programs. These resources are tremendous!

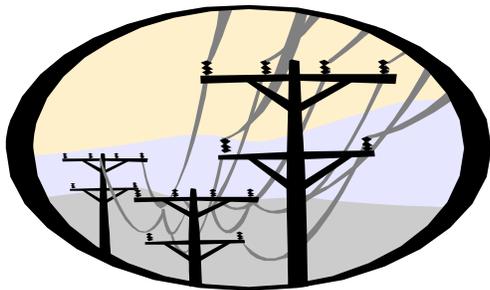
Scuttlebutt has it that the meeting with Karen Weigert was "a good conversation" and that she is deciding the final amount of funding she will allocate to C3. Thank you, thank you!! But, be sure to sign the petition to the Mayor to support this decision.

Legislative Update

by Mary Lubertozzi, Political Education Chair

The Illinois General Assembly spring session began in January and the Sierra Club has three major legislative priorities this year.

First: Tenaska. A Sierra Club priority bill, the Taylorville Energy Center coal bill (SB 678) that we opposed has succeeded in passing the Senate despite our efforts. Action on the bill is currently pending in the House Rules Committee. The bill, if passed by the House, would force Illinois citizens and businesses to purchase power from a proposed coal plant operated by Tenaska, an out-of-state corporation. The bill had been repeatedly rejected due to concerns about the exorbitant cost of the project (which will be paid for with huge increases in electric rates), the amount of new pollution it may emit, and the unproven nature of its pollution controls. Please contact your State Representative to voice your opposition to this bill and ask him/her to vote against it when it comes up in the House.



Second: Adequate funding for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The IDNR budget has been on a downward spiral since 2002. General Revenue Funding is down 50%; staff count is down 60%; the projected FY13 budget shortfall is \$22.2 million. The IDNR cannot sustain itself without a permanent and secure revenue stream. We are working with legislators on a comprehensive bill that will assess fees to pay for services rendered and costs to sustain the Department in the future.

Third: Hydraulic Fracturing (Fracking). The Sierra Club is supporting legislation to strengthen fracking regulations to protect against the risk of surface and ground water pollution by undisclosed toxic chemicals in the fracking fluid and to avert ecological impacts on fresh water resources. Regulations would also be aimed at reducing the risk of air pollution from escaped toxic, volatile compounds.

For more information on these issues and to get current updates on the progress of these issues in the State Legislature, check the Illinois Chapter Sierra Club website: www.illinois.sierraclub.org and look under Act: Legislation. And if you want to participate in meetings with our state legislators to discuss these issues, please contact me at larmarke@att.net or 708-747-1359.

The Calm Before the Storm

by Sharon Rolek, Conservation Liaison – Calumet Region

One more environmental “assault” on the Lake Calumet area is being launched by a company called Leucadia that is proposing to build a coal gasification plant on Chicago’s southeast side (114th and Burley Avenue). As a result, local environmental and community groups have coordinated to form the Southeast Chicago Environmental Justice Forum. The group usually meets on Monday evenings at 7:00 p.m. at The Zone Youth & Community Center at 117th and Avenue O in Chicago. Supported by the Sierra Club Beyond Coal Field Team, new members are learning how to rally, write letters, and give comment at public hearings.

Currently, Leucadia has not applied for a permit, etc. No doubt, this is the time when they are rallying their political support and preparing for opposition. Therefore, we are “keeping our eyes and ears open” for rumblings of additional action.

In the meantime, a recent article in an Indiana newspaper provides a picture of what Leucadia is facing in trying to build its Rockport power plant in southwestern Indiana. The article is enlightening:

www.indystar.com/article/20120318/LOCAL/203180347/1001/news

No More Landfills!

by Sharon Rolek, Conservation Liaison – Calumet Region

Alderman Beale of the 9th ward in Chicago has introduced legislation in the City Council that would lift the 20-year moratorium on landfills in Chicago. This means that current landfills on the Southeast side would now be allowed to expand and operate once again. With new “assaults” on the way (see previous article), our resolve is clear to stop the reversal of our current environmental protections.

Since 2005, residents of Chicago’s south side could literally breathe a bit easier, knowing that the landfill moratorium would prevent further dumping of municipal and household waste in Chicago landfills. Alderman Beale’s move to encourage more landfills in Chicago will particularly hurt our neighbors in Altgeld Garden who already spend days smelling foul odors emitted from the MWRD Wastewater Treatment Plant. We need to prevent this environmental injustice from happening again. Urge Alderman Anthony Beale (312-744-4096 or 773-785-1100) to stop his plans to lift the Landfill Moratorium in Chicago. The residents of the 9th and 10th Wards deserve to live in a green and healthy community.

Thorn Creek Nature Preserve Update

by Judy Dolan Mendelson, Friends of Thorn Creek Woods

As reported in the last newsletter, Thorn Creek Nature Preserve has experienced severe financial problems which caused it to lay off its valuable staff on June 30, 2011. The management Commission that oversees the Preserve is tentatively planning to hire a part-time staff person this spring, but the strong need for volunteers and donations continues.

Many, many volunteers – new and long-term – are making it possible to keep the Nature Center and preserve trails open and to offer some limited programming. And the tasks are many and varied, anything from open-hours staffing, trail walking, trail repairs, cleaning, building repairs, baking, website design, preparing press releases, fundraising, leading hikes or helping with programs. Anyone interested in volunteering can call the nature center at 708-747-6320 or e-mail me at thorn_creek@att.net

Financial assistance is vital. Friends of Thorn Creek Woods provides funds for things great and small at the preserve. Its Capital Fund is helping pay for the new hiking bridge, and it regularly buys supplies, posters, and materials for programs and maintenance. Contributions from individuals and organizations such as the Sauk-Calumet Group of the Sierra Club and the Thorn Creek Audubon Society are critical and very much appreciated. Keeping Thorn Creek Nature Preserve, the fifth largest nature preserve in the State of Illinois, open and accessible to the public is indeed a worthwhile task.

Spring events include a **WORKDAY** on Saturday, April 14 from 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., the **FROG FROLIC NIGHT HIKE** on Friday, May 4 from 7-9:30 p.m., and a **MORNING BIRD HIKE** on Saturday, May 5 from 8:00-10:00 a.m. Call 708-747-6320 to learn more.

Sauk-Calumet Outings

People like to paddle and people like to pedal so here are some interesting dates and places.

Apr. 28 - Saturday: Bike Illinois' original rail trail: the Rock Island. We'll meet at the half-way point with an eye to exploring the other half some time.

May. 19 - Saturday: Check out the latest improvements on the Wauponsee trail from the saddles of our bikes. Lunch is at the world-renowned Quigley's Tap.

May 28 - Monday: Our traditional Memorial Day paddle on the Vermilion at Streator. Lunch is at Duffy's in Utica.

June 20 - Wednesday: The annual Solstice Day paddle on the DuPage. This is an early evening paddle, with dinner at a local establishment to be determined later.

Some say that we only do these trips to have an excuse to eat out. What do you think?

Now that Yours Truly is retired, it's quite likely that there will be spontaneous trips during the week. E-mail Steve Baker at trinitysb@msn.com to be included on notifications.

Outings are typically suitable for participants of all skill levels. You will usually need all your own equipment, and bring a change of clothes for water trips. Unless otherwise noted, bring your own lunch.

Volunteer Workdays Near Your Home

If you enjoy working outdoors, please consider volunteering in one or more of your local natural areas. Contact information for workday schedules is listed below:

Cook County Forest Preserves www.fpdcc.com or www.fotfp.org

Will County Forest Preserves www.fpdwc.org

Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie
www.fs.usda.gov/midwin

Bartel Grassland - 3rd Saturday of the month from 9:00 to noon. Contact Dick Riner 708-720-5683

Kickapoo Prairie - 4th Saturday of each month 10:00 – 1:00 Contact Eileen Klees 773-238-4221

Orland Grassland - 2nd & 4th Saturdays of the month at 9:00 a.m. Contact Pat Hayes 708-220-9596
Also, 2nd Wednesdays of each month at 9 a.m. Contact Bill Fath 708-864-0006.

Powderhorn Prairie - 3rd Saturday of each month 9:00-12:00 Contact Alice Brandon 312-356-9990 (Friends of the FPD of Cook County, Illinois)

Dress for the weather (layers) and wear gloves and sturdy shoes or boots.

Letters to the Editor:

Letters on content within the Sauk-Calumet newsletter should be sent to the editor at: sc-editor@illinois.sierraclub.org

Please include your full name and address, and reference the article on which you are commenting.

Sauk-Calumet Group
People You Should Know

Steve Baker Outings	815-485-5273
Pat Coffey* Book Discussion Group	708-720-2725
John Field* Treasurer / Web Site	630-852-8202
Connie Heinrich Newsletter	815-476-6171
Jerry Heinrich* Conservation, Co-chair (West), Midewin Liaison	815-476-6171
Georganne Higgins* Membership	815-936-9040
Lois Lauer* Chair / Programs / Publicity	708-923-1550
Mary Lubertozi* Political Education	708-747-1359
Carol Strand* Secretary	708-333-6474
Paul Strand* Conservation Co-chair (East), Programs	708-333-6474
Sharon Rolek Conservation Liaison, Calumet Region	773-646-0990
Mike Rzepka River Watch Program	708-532-1419

*Denotes an elected member of the Executive Committee

Sauk-Calumet Program
Schedule

Meetings are held at 7:15 p.m. on the second Monday of every month at the Frankfort Library with the exception of June, July and August. All meetings are free and open both to Sierra Club members and to the public.

The Frankfort Library is located on the south side of Lincoln Highway (Rte.30), about three miles south of I-80, between LaGrange Road (Rt. 45) and Harlem Avenue (Rt. 43). The address is 21119 Pfeiffer Road.

April 9 Thorn Creek Nature Center

Friends of Thorn Creek will show slides of the flora and fauna and tell us about this south-side natural jewel. Thorn Creek Nature Preserve is a 985-acre oak-hickory woodland with the distinction of being the 5th largest dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve. It contains 3½ miles of trails and a small Nature Center on Monee Road in Park Forest.

May 14 Greenfire!

We'll view this newly released documentary that explores the life and legacy of famed conservationist Aldo Leopold and the many ways his land ethic philosophy influences the modern environmental movement and our lives today. Learn how Leopold's vision of a community that cares about both people and land offers inspiration and insight for the future.

June, July, August - No meetings

Sept. 10 Reptiles of the Chicago Area

Herpetologist Mark Bavetz will share pictures and information about both the common and the rare reptile species of the Chicagoland region.