



Sauk-Calumet Group

Feb.-Apr. Issue 2016 - Volume 35, Issue 1

Lobbying for the Future

by Patrick Coffey, Political Chair

It's been my privilege over the past few years to do political work for the Sierra Club. Political work usually involves two activities. One is lobbying, which involves going to a legislator's office and promoting bills that would be good for the environment or voicing opposition to bills that would be bad. The second political activity that we do in the Sierra Club is to decide which legislators the Sierra Club should officially endorse. The political committee sends out questionnaires and does interviews with the candidates. Once the candidates who will receive the endorsements have been decided, some of us lend a hand by doing phone work or door-to-door campaigning to help the good candidates get elected.

This sort of work may seem intimidating at first; but, as it turns out, legislators are usually quite happy to talk to their constituents. The Sauk-Calumet Group has about 2,000 members in its territory, covering an area from the south end of Chicago down to Kankakee and from Grundy County all the way to the Indiana border, so candidates are very interested in what our Sierra Club members have to say. Representatives are often approached by big companies and powerful interests, but there is nothing more powerful than an ordinary citizen talking directly to his or her representative.

This spring, there will be buses going to Springfield, as they do every year for Environmental Lobby Day. In addition, some of our members will lobby their representatives at their home district offices. To participate as a Sierra Club lobbyist, it's best to do some training ahead of time. The 11th Annual Issues Briefing will be held at the Chicago office on Saturday, February 27th from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Specific bills will be explained, and techniques for talking about environmental issues with legislators will be described. Lunch and parking are free.



Please RSVP for the Annual Issues Briefing by calling the Chicago office at 312-251-1680, or e-mail me, Patrick Coffey, at pjc1000@comcast.net if you have any questions.

Ordinary people *can* make a difference!

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Tales from the Trails

by Bob Schwaan & photos by Bob Schwaan

2015 was a great year for Sierra Club local outings. Even though we started late in the year, we enjoyed eight memorable hiking experiences. We visited the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Palos and Sag divisions of the Cook County Forest Preserves.

The I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor is a place near and dear to my heart. I live and play here. Even though I am quite familiar with the trails in the Lemont, Romeoville and Lockport sections, I did some pre-hiking to determine six different possible routes for the hikes. It's good to have options in the event things don't go according to plan. I chose two of my favorite routes, each being five miles in length. We spent time observing wildlife, enjoying beautiful scenery and viewing historical artifacts from the 1800s. Afterwards we talked about our experiences over good food and craft beer at local establishments.



A red eared slider and a green heron share a log in the I&M Canal. To the delight of visitors, the I&M canal provides habitat for a variety of aquatic and semi-aquatic species.

We visited Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in August and again in September. At over 19,000 acres, Midewin is one of the largest tracts of public land in northeast Illinois. Since I have not led a hike at Midewin in over 10 years and due to its impressive size, I knew some research and pre-hiking were in order. I pre-hiked about 38 miles to determine interesting hiking routes for the enjoyment of the participants. The familiarity of the terrain gained from pre-hiking is very important for safety reasons. Knowledge and experience also minimize the risk of avoidable and embarrassing mistakes which may lead to lack of confidence in the outing leader.

The first Midewin hike was seven miles long. We saw a variety of wildlife including birds that are unique to grassland habitats. Exposure to the sun was not a problem with the use of sunscreen, wearing a hat and an early start. The second Midewin hike was scheduled to be five miles long. Because we were enjoying the prairie at its peak, we decided to hike an extra mile. We ended each Midewin outing browsing antique stores in nearby Wilmington followed by a delicious lunch at a nearby eatery.



A male dickcissel sings atop a compass plant at Midewin



*Clouds float in the blue sky above the blooming wildflowers of Midewin.
As you can see, Midewin is not flat or treeless.*

The four Palos/Sag outings occurred in October and November. Each hike through forested terrain formed by the ice age was about five miles long and each hike followed a unique route. The fall colors were a real crowd pleaser. Some participants expressed how they wished to reserve spots for next year's fall color hikes.



Autumn colors at the Cook County Forest Preserves leave many visitors awestruck.

I sincerely enjoyed the company of the participants. I am grateful that they were kind and respectful to others and to the environment. They are very welcome to attend future outings and I look forward to seeing them again.

Explore. Enjoy. **Protect!**

Green Living

tips about living "green"

Free Rain Barrels Available

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago has a free rain barrel program. Find out if your municipality or local Non-Government Organization has enrolled in the MWRD's free program: <http://www.mwrdd.org/irj/portal/anonymous/rainbarrel>

If your town is not involved in the program, encourage your municipality to sign up today. Rain barrels can also be purchased through the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago at: <http://enviroworld.us/mwrdd>.

International Polar Bear Day - Feb. 27, 2016

This is a global event that draws attention to the challenges polar bears face in a warming Arctic - and how we each can help. Celebrate with Polar Bears International and take the "Thermostat Challenge" and save energy for the Polar Bears.

- Turn down the heat a degree or two
- In the summer, set your air conditioning thermostat higher
- Install a programmable thermostat for year-round savings

Go to Polar Bears International's website to learn more about the "Thermostat Challenge":

<http://www.polarbearsinternational.org>

Big Marsh Nature Park - Restore All 278 Acres

The Future Ford Calumet Environmental Center Should be in Hegewisch Marsh

by Sharon Rolek, Conservation Liaison, and Carolyn Marsh

Chicago Park District Big Marsh Park, No. 564, is 278 acres. It is part of a mosaic of Calumet wetlands, prairies, and woodlands in SE Chicago. Conserving nature has been a community priority for decades.

There are on-going community concerns that Mayor Rahm Emanuel is privatizing the new South Deering Park. The Chicago Park district (CPD), without community oversight, repurposed 45 acres of Big Marsh for a SRAM corporation BMX and cyclocross sports arena. SRAM made an agreement with CPD to use the area for product testing and for sports competitions that would attract thousands. The "Big Marsh Bicycle & Eco-Recreation Park" is a private-public partnership experiment that was not vetted by the public and could be a Chicago boondoggle.

Despite the area pollution, Big Marsh can be restored for passive recreation - it's a premier birding spot that attracts tourists to the nature preserve. The wetlands once supported over 700 pairs of nesting state-endangered black-crowned night-herons among other nesting birds. Egrets, herons, bald eagles, ospreys, owls, migrating ducks and songbirds are seen in the area. It is listed in the Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan (2006-2016). It is distinguished as a nature preserve in the federal and state Millennium Reserve. Millions of dollars in grant money are available for wildlife restoration. See: http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/chicago_nature_andwildlifeplan.html

Public bike riding trails are important for physical, mental, and spiritual freedom, but so is passive nature appreciation and connecting with wildlife. Big Marsh provides those things plus the peace and comfort that residents desperately seek in order to make urban life more bearable. That is what the community wants. We ask that you:

- support nature conservation goals to restore the Calumet Area after decades of environmental abuse
- support private economic investment on private land that will produce tax revenue, not private use of public land that is subsidized by taxpayers
- support making available the environmental studies that back up Chicago Park District claims that the area is healthy and safe for extreme sport training and races
- support the need for public meetings within the Southeast Side community area to address the suitability of a BMX bike park in the Big Marsh.

Sauk Calumet Group - People You Should Know

Pat Coffey*	708-720-2725
Political Chair / Publicity	
Melinda Elliott*	708-792-7240
Clean Power Liaison	
John Field*	630-852-8202
Treasurer / Web Site	
Connie Heinrich	815-476-6171
Newsletter	
Jerry Heinrich	815-476-6171
Midwin Liaison	
Georganne Higgins*	815-936-9040
Membership	

Lois Lauer*	708-923-1550
Chair / Programs	
Christy Mazrimas Ott*	708-825-4163
Conservation Chair	
Sharon Rolek	773-646-0990
Conservation Liaison - Calumet Region	
Rich Treptow*	708-747-0649
Secretary, Climate Change Liaison	

*Denotes an elected member of the Executive Committee

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 Program Schedule

Meetings are held at 7:15 p.m. on the second Monday of every month at the Frankfort Library (21119 Pfeffer Rd., Frankfort). We do not meet in June, July, or August. All meetings are free and open both to Sierra Club members and the public.

Feb. 8 Sigurd Olson -**Conservationist of the Northwoods**

Avid canoeist Lois Lauer will talk about the life and work of Sigurd Olson, who led the struggle to protect the Boundary Water Canoe Wilderness near Ely, Minnesota, a million-acre wilderness that contains no roads or motorized traffic. Last summer, Lois visited Sigurd Olson's wilderness sanctuary called "Listening Point" which inspired much of his writing before she took off with three other women for a weeklong canoe trip in the wilderness about which Olson wrote so poetically. Lois will share photos and stories, and she will read some of Olson's reflections about the value of wilderness and solitude for our souls.

Mar. 14 Solar Energy...A Local Success Story

William Lorch of Joliet installed photovoltaic panels for his electricity and a

Program Schedule (Cont.)

solar thermal system to heat his hot water and warm his house, and he recouped his investment in three years! In addition to his energy independence, William has a fruit orchard, garden, and honeybee hives. Come and meet this man who has figured out some successful ways to live more sustainably.

Apr. 11 Biking the Camino de Santiago

With a slide show of beautiful pictures, Al Sturges will take us vicariously on his 490-mile bike trip on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in Spain that pilgrims have been travelling since the Middle Ages. Hundreds of people now travel the main pilgrimage route each year from the foothills of the Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela near the Atlantic. Al is an active bicyclist and a board member of the South Suburban Folks on Spokes Bicycle Club.

May 9 Birds!

Mel Tracy of Wild Birds Unlimited will show slides and talk about how to offer food, water, space and protection for visiting and breeding birds in your backyard. He will also tell us how to attract orioles and hummingbirds, how to deter squirrels and raccoons from your birdfeeders, and how to clean and maintain feeders and birdbaths. Mel will talk about warblers and other birds that will be migrating through our area in May, and about their amazing long distance migration journeys. He will also provide tips on good locations for viewing birds, and he will discuss the effect of climate change on breeding sites.

No meetings in June, July & August