



Sauk-Calumet Group

First Quarter 2012 - Volume 31, Issue 1

A Friend in Need

by Judy Dolan Mendelson, Secretary-Friends of Thorn Creek

The Thorn Creek Nature Preserve had to lay off its valuable staff on June 30, 2011 because of the dire financial situation. The Management Commission that oversees the Preserve initially hoped to hire a part-time naturalist on December 1, 2011 once finances had stabilized. However, the Preserve lost half its annual funding from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (\$5,000 instead of \$10,000) and lost the nearly \$10,000 per year income from a rental house in the Preserve because of a very serious mold problem. Nonetheless, with the continued in-kind support and annual financial contributions from the Villages of Park Forest and University Park and from the Forest Preserve District of Will County, the Commission plans to hire staff around April 1, 2012.

In the meantime, volunteers and Friends of Thorn Creek Woods stepped in to keep the Nature Center and preserve trails open and to offer some limited programming. Since July, volunteers have been trained to staff regular nature center open hours. Trail Watchers regularly walk the 3½ miles of trail and report on any problems or repairs that are needed. Some programming continues using "guest naturalists," Forest Preserve District of Will County naturalists have been able to offer a nature program each month at Thorn Creek Woods.

Many volunteers, new and long-term, are making all this possible. And the tasks are many and varied – anything from open hours staffing, trail walking, trail and building repairs, baking, making deliveries, leading hikes or singing at the recent Woodland Carols event. 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. The 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 provides supplies, posters and materials for programs. Contributions from individuals and organizations are critical and are 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.

Thorn Creek Nature Center is located at 247 Monee Road in Park Forest. The nature center is open Friday-Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. Trails are open from dawn to dusk. For more information, call 708-747-6320 or e-mail thorn_creek@att.net

Note from S.C. Chair: The Sauk-Calumet Group of the Sierra Club recently donated \$500 to the Friends of Thorn Creek Woods to help support their work at this critical time. We encourage our members to also contribute if possible by sending a check to Friends of Thorn Creek Woods, 247 Monee Road, Park Forest, IL 60466, and/or to volunteer time for the tasks mentioned in the article in order to keep the preserve and Nature Center open to visitors.



Upcoming programs at Thorn Creek Nature Preserve for January – March 2012:

- Winter Night Hike - Saturday, January 28
from 4-6 p.m. – all ages, free, registration required
- Great Backyard Bird Count - Saturday, February 18
from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. – all ages, free
- Snowshoe Safari - Monday, February 20
from 1-3 p.m. – age 7 or older, \$3 per person, registration required – call 708-534-8499
- Build a Birdhouse- Sunday, March 18
from 1-3 p.m. – all ages, \$10 per house, registration required
- Woods Music: A Benefit for Thorn Creek Woods
Friday, March 23 from 7 p.m.
\$10 for adults, \$5 for children age 10 and under

IDOT Making Plans for Illiana Expressway

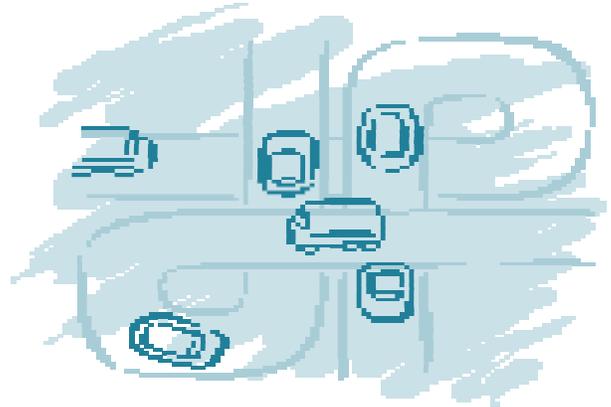
by Jerry Heinrich, Conservation Co-Chair

The Illinois Department of Transportation and Indiana Department of Transportation are working feverishly to develop a plan for a tollway or expressway that would connect I-65 in Indiana with I-55 in Illinois. It is probably fair to say that this transportation proposal is on the political "fast track".

In less than twelve months, the two transportation agencies have

- defined a corridor or "study area" through which the proposed expressway might be routed if developed. As currently proposed, the Illiana Corridor study area is roughly bounded by I-55 on the west, I-65 on the east, I-80 on the north, and a line passing east-west through Kankakee on the south
- collected data concerning possible route obstacles, issues, and concerns (with provisions for input from the general public)
- developed statements concerning project "purpose" and "need"
- identified a number of route alternatives – subject to further study and evaluation

Scheduled public meetings will be held in 2012 with the purpose of allowing the general public to participate and provide input into the "preferred alternative route" evaluation and selection process. If you are interested in learning more about the Illiana Expressway, if you are interested in protecting green-space that might be in "harm's way", or if you are interested in learning whether or not the Illiana might pass through your backyard, visit www.illianacorridor.org to learn more.

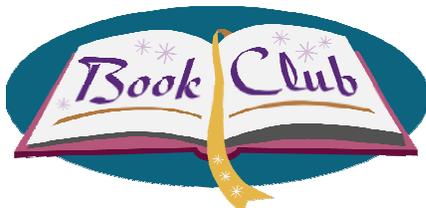


Nature & Environment Book Discussion Group

by Pat Coffey, Sauk-Cal ExCom Member

Are you an avid reader? Would you like to read books about nature or the environment and share your thoughts with others about them? We can read environmental classics like *Silent Spring* or *A Sand County Almanac*. Or we can read newly published books available from the local library. Some ideas would be: *Big Coal* by Jeff Goodell, *Chasing Molecules* by Elizabeth Grossman, *No Family History: Environmental Links to Breast Cancer* by Sabrina McCormick, *Shadows on the Gulf* by Rowan Jacobsen or *The Ten Trusts* by Jane Goodall. Pat Coffey, a librarian who has led many book discussion groups, will be the facilitator. The place and times have not yet been determined, and will be decided by your input.

Contact Pat to sign up at pjc1000@comcast.net. We only need a few participants to start the group, so don't delay.



Outings Calendar – 2012

XC Skiing: Whenever there is snow. We'll just have to watch the weather and decide when and where to go. Get in touch if you would like to be on an e-mail list for this and other outings.

Apr. 14: Paddle the Mazon River. There's a small window of opportunity on this river; but catch the water level and spring flowers right, and you're on one of the area's prettiest streams. My personal favorite

May 28: Paddle the Vermillion. A holiday tradition on another very nice, small stream, well upstream from the feared Wildcat Rapids

Various: Biking Local Trails. These tend to be spur-of-the-moment events. E-mail me to be put on the list.

General notes:

These outings are usually for participants of all ability levels, with the exception of the Mazon River paddle which is probably not the best site for beginning paddlers. Dry clothes in a waterproof carrier are recommended for canoe outings. Local conditions are subject to higher powers than me so e-mail for details. Typically, outings involve 3-4 hours of biking / hiking / paddling. Bringing a snack and a drink is usually a good idea.

Pre-registration is required so e-mail Steve Baker at trinity@msn.com for details.

Legislative Update

by Mary Lubertozzi, Political Education Chair

The Illinois General Assembly fall veto session ended with mixed results this year.

First, the loss: a Sierra Club priority bill, the Taylorville coal bill (SB 678) that we opposed, succeeded in passing the Senate despite our efforts. 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 huge amounts of new pollution it may emit, and the unproven nature of its pollution controls. Our Senators have a mixed record on their votes: Senators Crotty, Hutchinson and Wilhelmi voted for the project, while Senators Emil Jones, Maloney and Rodogno voted against it. We also need to contact our Representatives to renew our opposition to this bill and ask them to vote against it when it comes up in the House.

However, we had success in moving the clean energy agenda forward. SB 1652, which includes ComEd's "smart grid" provisions, will significantly expand clean energy and energy efficiency. It will also allow for a modernized electric grid that will empower consumers to make smarter energy decisions. Illinois may soon begin deploying rooftop wind and solar, thanks to two major policy changes in the legislation. SB 1652 was vetoed by Governor Quinn, but his veto was overridden in the General Assembly.

Rock Island Clean Line

by Connie Heinrich, Editor

A public meeting was held in Morris, Illinois on Dec. 5 to discuss alternative routes for the proposed Rock Island Clean Line. So, what is the Clean Line? It is an electrical transmission system that will link northern Illinois to the wind farms of Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota. Renewable energy is being produced in this country, but the source is often far from the towns and cities that need the power. Currently, most electrical transmission is in the form of alternating current. According to Rock Island Clean Line literature, high voltage direct current (HVDC) is more efficient due to low electricity losses over long distances. The Rock Island Clean line plans to construct approximately 500-miles of overhead transmission lines that will use HVDC technology to bring 3,500 megawatts of power to northern Illinois.

Is this technology a means of bringing clean, green energy to the Chicago area? To find out more information about the Rock Island Clean Line project, visit <http://rockislandcleanline.com>



Volunteer Workdays

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 - Call Dick Riner 708-720-5683

Kickapoo Prairie - 4th Saturday of each month
10:00 - 1:00 Contact Eileen Klees 773-968-3396

Orland Grassland - 2nd & 4th Saturdays of the month
at Old Plank Road Prairies
Contact Pat Hayes 708-220-9596

Powderhorn Prairie - 3rd Saturday of each month
9:00 - 12:00 Contact Alice Brandon 312-356-9990

Thinking Spring?

If you're a gardener, you know that January isn't too soon to start planning for your spring and summer planting needs. If you have been considering native plants for your home landscape, consider purchasing them from the Midwin Tallgrass Prairie Alliance and/or the Thorn Creek Audubon. Both organizations offer a selection of native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers.

For 2012 plant lists and order forms:

Midwin Alliance (to be posted mid-January)

www.midwinalliance.org

or to receive information by mail or e-mail, contact Jerry Heinrich at g.heinrich@sbcglobal.net or 815-476-6171

Thorn Creek Audubon

www.thorncreekaudubonsociety.org

or contact Dory Grosche at 708-481-3166

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 Lubertozzi* 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. All meetings are free and open both to Sierra Club members and to the public.

Jan. 9 Member's Slide Night

Calling all members! Please bring slides (film or digital images) or prints of your latest outdoor experience, be it a grand adventure on the other side of the globe or the beautiful butterflies of your own backyard. Call Lois Lauer at 708-923-1550 if you have slides to share.

Feb. 13 Birds of Illinois

Dr. Jeff Walk will show slides of Illinois birds and discuss changes in Illinois bird populations and habitats in the past century. Jeff is the Director of Science of the Illinois Nature Conservancy and a Board Member of the Illinois Audubon Society.

Mar. 12 Illiana Expressway

Sauk-Calumet member Jerry Heinrich will tell us about the proposed expressway that would connect Interstate 65 in Indiana with Interstate 55 in Illinois, and the potential environmental impacts of the project. The route is significant because it would access the proposed but controversial third airport in the Peotone area.

Apr. 9 Thorn Creek Nature Center

Friends of the Thorn Creek will show slides of the flora and fauna at the Thorn Creek Nature Preserve, and they will 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 trail and a small Nature Center 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.