



Sauk-Calumet Group

November 2017 Newsletter Volume 36, Issue 3

Sierra Club a Partner in Fight against Phosphorus Pollution by Steve Baker

Most of us have observed the algae blooms that afflict our waterways during warm weather. They are primarily caused by excessive levels of phosphorus in the water. That phosphorus can, and does arrive in the rivers through runoff from fertilized lawns, dumping of grass clippings, and from discharges from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District plants. Discharges from MWRD facilities have been spilling phosphorus into the rivers at levels that were felt to encourage algae blooms and reduce excessively the oxygen levels in the water.

A few years ago the National Resources Defense Council filed a suit against the MWRD in an attempt to force a tightening of the phosphorus discharge levels. Sierra Club and the Prairie Rivers Network joined the action and several members provided testimony at deposition hearings.

In January a tentative settlement was reached which seems to have been finally approved. The key points are:

1. MWRD is to pay for some badly needed monitoring of nutrient pollution and its effects on the Lower Des Plaines
2. IEPA is to monitor at a number of places on the Illinois River
3. A study is to be done of what phosphorus levels should be in the Chicago Area Waterways to determine what reductions of phosphorus levels may be necessary and to develop a plan for reductions found necessary
4. MWRD's discharge of phosphorus from its Calumet, O'Brien and Stickney plants is limited to 1 mg/L and in 2030 will drop to 0.5 mg/L annual average subject to various conditions
5. Certain studies will be done of the costs of reducing MWRD discharges below 0.5 mg/L

In the words of Albert Ettinger, our Sierra Club attorney for the case: *"Obviously, this is a complex settlement and no one can say for sure where the world will be over the next decade. We are very pleased, though, that important steps are being taken now to control phosphorus pollution and that steps will be taken in the future to assure that discharges from MWRD plants do not cause or contribute to algal blooms or other problems in the Chicago Area Waterways, the Lower Des Plaines or the Illinois River."*

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Concerns with Will County’s Freight Plans

by Ann Baskerville

Will County is home to the 6400 acre CenterPoint Intermodal Center, the largest master-planned inland port in North America, adjacent to the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Both Union Pacific and BNSF Railroads operate intermodals at CenterPoint. Intermodals are facilities where shipping containers are moved from a train to a semi for delivery to a warehouse or store.

An additional 2000 acre NorthPoint distribution center has been proposed for the area, and is drawing opposition from citizens, such as Sierra Club Sauk Calumet member Tim Kahney of Manhattan, who wrote the following letter:

Dear Editor,

Before even considering allowing another large intermodal distribution site into our area we should stop and consider what CenterPoint Properties, which is only half complete, has done to surrounding communities. My wife and I live in Manhattan and travel to Joliet for our doctors, shopping, and much of our entertainment.

Traveling to Joliet in the morning usually isn't too bad, as long as there are no accidents or road work. Interstate 80 from Briggs to the Larkin Street exit is always heavy with semi traffic. Any small traffic snafu or road work is devastating to travel in this area. Returning in the afternoon, however, is another story. Traffic on I-80, which seems equally balanced between cars and semi-trucks, is almost always bumper to bumper east bound as far as you can see. The exits back up and trucks stop the flow of all traffic on I-80. Trying to go around I-80 through town is little better as many of the trucks do the same thing making back routes as bad as the interstate. Travel times are especially influenced by winter weather. Route 53 is now owned by the semi traffic between I-80 and the east entrance to CenterPoint just north of Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery. There are large truck stops on opposite corners of Route 53 and Laraway Road guaranteeing constant congestion in this area.

Of equal concern is the pollution from large truck exhaust. Many of these trucks drive through our small towns with houses and schools lined along the roadways. "Diesel exhaust has

been classified a potential human carcinogen by the Environmental Protection Agency. Diesel powered vehicles and equipment account for nearly half of all nitrogen oxide (NOx) and more than two thirds of all particulate matter emissions from US transportation sources. Particularly susceptible are children, the elderly and individuals with preexisting respiratory conditions." (Union of Concerned Scientists).

More stringent fuel standards to reduce sulfur, that will enable the use of advanced emissions technologies, went into effect in late 2006. The new standards only apply, however, to equipment in dealer showrooms assuring there will be many high polluting trucks and buses on our roads well into the future.

Where is the funding for this large project coming from? Typically that would be an investment group, not from local sources but from people that have never seen our area and have no interest in what the quality of life is here. They also have no interest in whether their investment helps the area or harms it as long as the investment ultimately fulfills their objective of making them more money. They would be people who already have money to spare and are looking for investment opportunities to increase their wealth. They would not think of building this kind of business in their own neighborhoods because it would degrade their tranquility, create unwanted types of traffic, pollute their air and reduce their property values. These are the same things that will happen in our area. Ask yourself: is this what you want for your community?

In my opinion, the disruption to the advantages of our quiet rural farming community, the increased pollution, the likely reduction of property values and the concomitant costs for roads and associated additional health issues outweigh any perceived benefit of jobs and additional tax revenues. After all the incentives given to CenterPoint by the town of Elwood what have they gained and why are the residents of Elwood fighting so hard to prevent NorthPoint?

We should all join the people of Elwood and "Just Say No" to NorthPoint. Who knows more than they do? CenterPoint is in their back yard. They do not want to add to what already exists and Manhattan does not want this in our township. Other surrounding communities should join the fight to kill this project as these distribution warehouses seem to be expanding exponentially throughout the entire region. Now is the time to stop them. Tom Kahney, Manhattan

Editor's note: The Illinois Sierra Club hears and shares the concerns of members like Tom. The Illinois Chapter has launched a petition calling for a moratorium on the zoning of more land for warehouses in Will County until we have a comprehensive land use and transportation plan in place that protects the environment and quality of life for residents. Please read the petition and consider taking action: <https://www.addup.org/campaigns/time-for-a-time-out-on-massive-warehouse-and-distribution-centers-in-will-county>

Save the JJC Fen!

by Patrick Coffey

On the property of Joliet Junior College there is a natural area just north of campus which contains a rare geological and biological formation known as a fen. A fen is a wetland which has alkaline water or soil and which harbors rare alkaline-loving plants. At JJC some of these plants are what are known as conservative species, species that only thrive on original natural sites, sites not significantly affected by human influence. These plant species receive a numerical rating that is known as the coefficient of conservatism. There are several plants on the site with these high ratings. In addition, fens are rare formations. JJC's fen was formed when glaciers receded about 10,000 years ago. There are only about 350 acres of fen wetlands remaining in the entire State of Illinois.

Unfortunately, it's not all good news. A developer, which owns property near the fen, wants to build a mall and build an access road through the site that would destroy the fen. The College, however, owns the property where the road would go (and where the fen is) and has to sell that land to the developer in order for the deal to go through. Activists at the College, known as Fen Fighters, are fighting to have the developer, Cullinan Properties, re-route the road. Re-routing the road would save the fen.

Some of our local group members have written letters to the College's President and Board Chairman to let them know that we care about the fen and want to see it protected. Please join the Fen Fighters and others in our group in this campaign. Addresses are listed below for the President of the College and the Board Chair. There is also an online petition that is slowly accumulating signatures. We ask everyone to sign it. To learn more about what you can do to save the fen, email Patrick Coffey, Political Chair, at patrick.coffey@illinois.sierraclub.org.

Write letters to:

President Judy Mitchell /AND/ Board Chair Robert Wunderlich
Joliet Junior College
1215 Houbolt Road
Joliet, IL 60431

Sign the online petition at:

<https://www.change.org/p/joliet-junior-college-board-of-trustees-reroute-the-road-joliet-junior-college>

Thank you!

Looking Back on Nature Sundays Hikes This Summer

by Patrick Coffey

This summer we took 10 hikes at nature sites around the region. We saw some great wildlife which breathed some much needed hope and inspiration into us.

At a hike at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie we stood and watched a group of bison lounging and resting just 100 feet from us on the other side of a fence. It was an opportunity for some good photos, and we felt very privileged that day, especially since you do not always have a chance to see the bison from the trail. Someone remarked how great it was that you can see large wildlife like this only an hour from downtown Chicago.

Another of the sights we saw this summer appeared at most of the sites we went to. We saw monarch butterflies. Some sites we saw only one or two monarchs, but at other sites we saw many. In fact, at Hegewisch Marsh in Chicago, we even saw a monarch caterpillar on a common milkweed leaf. To me, that was the greatest thing I saw all summer.

We're grateful to our guest leaders who showed us so much more. Gary Horn and Mary Anicich of the Nature Conservancy showed us Sundrop Prairie in Markham, IL. Jerry Heinrich, President of the Midewin Tallgrass Prairie Alliance, showed us the Henslow Trail at Midewin. And Andy Neill, a biology teacher at Joliet Junior College, gave us a good tour of the natural areas and fen at JJC. These people gave of their time so that we could feel closer to nature. And we did. Thank you to everyone that participated! We'll see you all again next year!

Walk The Line

by Melinda Elliot

This past September 30th I joined about 80 people in NorthWest Indiana on a 10K walk along an Enbridge tar-sands pipeline that runs through local neighborhoods, parks, and forest preserves. It was hosted by a co-founder of the 350.org Indiana-Calumet chapter, John Halsted. The purpose of the walk was to *peacefully* bring attention to the fact that pipelines exist right in our midsts, although many may not be aware.



John Halsted, co-founder of 350.org Indiana-Calumet



Mayor of Gary Indiana, Karen Freeman-Wilson

At the opening ceremony, Chris Wahmhoff, of Kalamazoo, Michigan spoke of a devastating rupture of a similar pipeline in Kalamazoo in which almost a million gallons of dirty sludge leaked from the pipeline into the Kalamazoo river. The spill affected the health of numerous residents, Chris included. Karen Freeman-Wilson, the mayor of Gary, Indiana spoke at the opening ceremony. She said that she was concerned for the water and land quality surrounding these pipelines. She said that she believes that we can have economic growth through clean

energy jobs, without sacrificing our water and health. Cyndee Fox-Starr, a member of the Omaha and Odawa tribes, spoke about the impact of pipelines on native americans. She said that we are all responsible for the care of mother earth and that all living things need clean water to survive.



Cyndee Fox-Starr, of Omaha and Odawa descent, lights sage

As I walked along the route, I realized that I had probably never noticed the yellow, red, and white warning posts myself. I promised myself that I would pay closer attention to what is in front of me. I was moved to hear the stories of Chris Wahmhoff and Cyndee Fox-Starr and how so many people were adversely affected. I was encouraged to hear that the mayor of Gary, Indiana recognized that we can sustain or grow our economy, while at the same time refraining from polluting the places where we live. There is a second-half of this walk planned on May 12th, 2018. I plan to be there. I hope many of you will join me. There has to be a better way.



Tar-Sands pipeline runs through NW Indiana Neighborhood Park

Sauk Calumet Sierra Club Shirts Now Available



This new shirt designed by our Conservation Chair, Christy Mazrimas-Ott is currently available until November 30, 2017. With the holidays just around the corner, this will make a great gift for yourself and everyone on your gift giving list. Click this link <https://www.bonfire.com/sauk-calumet-sierra-club/> to see all the different shirt options available.

Sauk Calumet Sierra Club Group Meeting Schedule

Meetings are held at 7:15 pm on the second Monday of every month at the Frankfort Library (21119 Pfeiffer Rd, Frankfort, IL) with the exception of June, July and August. All meetings are free and open both to Sierra Club members and to the public.

December 11: Exploring Newfoundland!



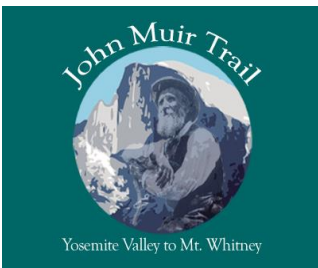
Gregg Ott and Christy Mazrimas Ott will tell tales and show slides of their adventures on this remote Canadian island, known for puffins, caribou, icebergs, black bears, and humpback whales! (Click on photo to see Newfoundland Tourism video)

January 8: Members' Slide Night



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

February 12: Backpacking the John Muir Trail



Mel Tracy and his 17 year old daughter Molly will share slides and tales of their joy filled 250 mile backpack trip this summer hiking north on California's John Muir Trail from 30 miles south of Mt. Whitney to Yosemite Valley. Their three week experience included snow, then floodwaters, and finally fire danger.

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.

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Clean Power Liaison

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Outings Chair

Maribeth Meaux* 708 712 5097
Community Activism

**Denotes an elected member of the Executive Committee*

The Sierra Club from the national level down to the local groups does so many positive things to help protect our planet. So let's get out there and enjoy our beautiful world. Click below for Sierra Club Illinois outings.



Remember to check our Sauk-Calumet Group website for current information and news updates on issues relevant to Illinois. Click below to for our website.



We are also available on Facebook. You can click <https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubSaukCalumet/> to find us on Facebook.