



# Sauk-Calumet Group

Fall Issue 2013 - Volume 32, Issue 3

## Illinois Chapter Says NO to Illiana Expressway

The fast-paced planning for the proposed Illiana Expressway may have finally been slowed. Three organizations including the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club have filed a lawsuit questioning the process that the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) used to justify the selection of the proposed path for the Illiana. The path would stretch 47 miles from I-55 near Wilmington, Illinois to I-65 near Lowell, Indiana and pass largely through agricultural land. It would also pass right next to the Des Plaines Conservation Area and Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, raising concern that critical habitat for grassland birds and other state and federally endangered wildlife would be impacted.

A recent Action Alert also made the argument that "The speculative, 1.25-billion dollar highway project poses too great an economic risk to both taxpayers and private investors for too little payoff. IDOT overstates economic benefits, and the project would likely siphon funds from other regional priorities already included in CMAP's (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning) GO TO 2040 plan. With strained financial resources, we need to invest in sustainable and strategic solutions, not projects such as Illiana that would undermine key regional planning efforts."

The Illinois Department of Transportation has asked CMAP, the agency charged with developing Chicagoland's regional plans, to add the proposed Illiana tollway to its limited list of priority major capital projects and include it in the region's transportation plan. If you do not want to see this happen, you can help by contacting CMAP and telling them that you are opposed to adding the Illiana to Chicago's comprehensive regional plan. Feel free to use the following letter as a template, or create your own letter of concern. Comments should be sent to: CMAP, Att'n. Plan and TIP amendments, 233 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60606. (or e-mailed to: [info@cmap.illinois.gov](mailto:info@cmap.illinois.gov))

*To: CMAP Board and Staff*

*Please do not add the Illiana Tollway to the GO TO 2040 Plan. It undermines the plan's collaborative vision, core principles, and recommendations. As your own staff report states, the road is inconsistent with the plan's call for investing in existing communities and modernizing our current transportation and infrastructure assets. Located ten miles outside the existing urbanized area, the proposed tollway would foster sprawl rather than support existing communities.*

*The Illiana is an overpriced and unsustainable project for a number of reasons:*

- *IDOT hasn't shown how tolls could generate enough revenue to cover the \$1 billion plus cost of the road.*
- *CMAP observed that the IDOT cost estimates for the road are much lower than other similar major capital projects across the nation.*
- *If the remotely-located Illiana Tollway does not generate needed tolls, the public will likely need to bail out the project.*
- *There are better investments for our limited transportation dollars than this speculative project.*
- *The Illiana Tollway will diminish the habitat value along the border of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Des Plaines Conservation Area, and it will degrade the high quality waters of the Kankakee River.*
- *The Illiana will pave over rich, productive agricultural land and farms that have been owned by families for generations.*

*The Chicagoland region cannot afford this expensive project that is inconsistent with the principles of the GO TO 2040 Plan. Please continue to protect CMAP's responsible and sustainable vision for the region and do not add the Illiana Tollway to the GO TO 2040 Plan.*

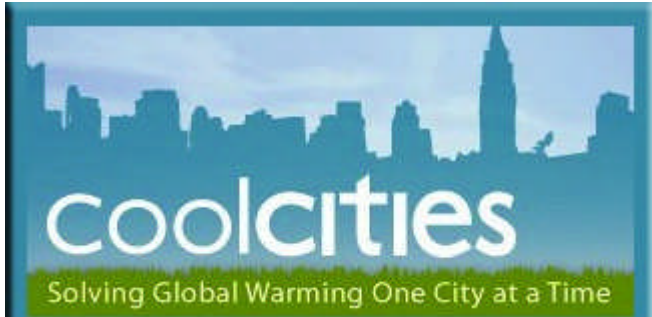
*Sincerely,*

*[Your name and address]*

# Cool Cities Update

By Christy Mazrimas-Ott with information provided by Lonnie Morris, Cool Cities Chair.

In the first six months of 2013, eight mayors of original Cool Cities have signed on to Cool Cities 2.0. These cities include Algonquin, Blue Island, Bolingbrook, Homewood, Lake Forest, Lombard, Oak Park, and Park Forest; and two new communities have joined the network, Hanover Park and Tinley Park. Thanks to Jeff Mech for getting Tinley Park on board, but help is still needed from folks who live in Hazel Crest, Oak Lawn, Orland Park, Oak Forest, Plainfield and Olympia Fields. I have started reaching out to Lansing about being a Cool City, and Lois Lauer will try to reach out to Palos Heights too. Kane County recently became a Cool County while Will County, after considerable discussion by the County Board, decided to continue pursuing the energy and sustainability goals previously approved by the board.



Some of the goals of Cool Cities in Illinois for 2013 are:

- Have thirty mayors sign on to Cool Cities 2.0
- Identify and train lead volunteers in 8 to 10 counties
- Work with volunteers in Will and Kane on Cool Counties
- Discuss Cool Cities Law updates and revisions with IEPA
- Identify funding source for Cool Cities signage
- Explore the feasibility of establishing an Energy Efficiency funding stream for municipalities
- Post news, accomplishments and resource information on Facebook, Cool Cities list-serve and website.

Work is ongoing at the Illinois Chapter level to find ways of delivering data to municipalities who want to track energy usage data, assess progress towards greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, and compare the impact of energy initiatives. Efforts are also underway to find new resources for communities working on local solutions to climate change. Illinois Sierra Club recently hired Lisa Medearis, Clean Energy Advocate, who will be exploring the best avenues for expanding energy efficiency and renewable energy programs.

If the Cool Cities program interests you, the Cool Cities chair position will soon be open. This is a volunteer position. Lonnie Morris, the current Cool Cities chair for the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, will be moving out of state in October. Lonnie will be available over the next two months for mentoring the incoming chair and introducing him or her to the various parts and people that make up Cool Cities. If interested, contact Lonnie Morris at [herbdove@comcast.net](mailto:herbdove@comcast.net)

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## Legislative Update

By Mary Lubertozzi, Political Education Chair

We ended the Illinois General Assembly spring session with some wins and some losses this year.

First, some really positive news: Tenaska is dead - yes, the plant that we have likened to a zombie that keeps resurfacing appears to be truly dead. Tenaska or the Taylorville Energy Center (TEC) was a "clean coal" project we fought for 7 years. There were some scary times with close votes but ultimately, we prevailed. Tenaska announced that "these projects are no longer viable," and they cited "lack of state legislation" as one of the reasons the project was dropped.

In the Legislature, there was a lot of action on energy and environmental issues including very promising steps toward a clean energy future, and the very difficult challenges that the specter of massive new oil and gas drilling pose to all of us. The following is a summary of successful clean energy bills as reported by Jack Darin and Jen Hensley:

**Clean Power for Communities – House Bill 2623** Hundreds of communities across Illinois are lowering their electric bills through municipal electric aggregation. A growing number of these communities are also leveraging their buying power to not only save money, but also to support cleaner sources of energy that offer cleaner air and the potential to create jobs in the technologies of the future.

(cont. on page 3)

*House Bill 2623* This bill will empower communities to see exactly what its options are in terms of power supply. Based on this information from potential suppliers, communities will have more choices about how to support clean energy, such as sourcing their clean power purchase locally, to create jobs in their community. Communities could also use this information to reduce or eliminate dirty fuels from their power mix, as the City of Chicago did when it eliminated coal from its power supply.

*Planning for Lake Michigan Wind Energy – House Bill 2753* The strong, sustained winds over Lake Michigan offer tremendous promise as a future clean energy resource for Illinois. HB2753 directs the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to oversee the next steps in planning for the future potential of offshore wind energy, including conducting research on wildlife migration patterns and developing maps of the areas of greatest potential for wind energy that avoid impacts to our precious Lake Michigan.

#### *Protecting Illinois from Fracking*

Illinois is horribly unprepared for fracking and its threats. Our Oil and Gas Act dates from 1941 and, obviously, doesn't even consider the most troubling aspects of fracking. Adding to our vulnerability is the lack of any oversight over water withdrawals from ground or surface water, and the lack of a comprehensive environmental impact law that many states have. The safest and smartest way to protect ourselves would be to immediately enact a moratorium to allow for thorough study of the risks of fracking and to learn from experiences in other states.

The Sierra Club has been working for a moratorium on fracking in Illinois for over a year, and supported HB 3086 and SB 1418 to call a two-year timeout. Unfortunately, these bills did not pass, although nearly half of the Senate supported a motion by Senator Don Harmon (D-Oak Park) to bring a moratorium to the Senate floor for a vote. This was the strongest showing of support yet for a moratorium.

The General Assembly did pass, and Governor Quinn signed, SB 1715 which establishes substantial new controls on fracking. These new regulatory measures are essential to provide a measure of protection for the environment and public health. However, new regulations will not make fracking safe, and our support for additional protections does not mean we have confidence that fracking can be done safely or without pollution.

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## Sauk-Calumet Fall Outing(s)

**Nov. 30:**

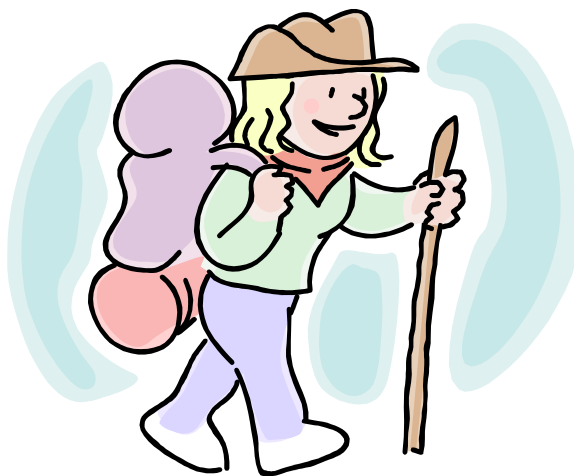
### **The Umpteenth Annual Walk Off the Turkey Hike**

Shake off the Triptofan blues and join us for a morning stroll through the canyons of Starved Rock State Park. This will be a walk of approximately five miles across varying elevations and trail surfaces. All this to make lunch afterward especially enjoyable.

Bring water and hiking boots. Water resistant footwear will make crossing small streams much easier.

Preregister by emailing Steve Baker at:  
trinitysb@msn.com

Other outing opportunities may arise on the spur of the moment. If you are interested in being on the contact list, let Steve know by emailing him at the address listed above.



# Nature Sunday Hikes a Success!

By Pat Coffey, Sauk-Calumet Board Member

The Nature Sundays program, led by Bob Schwaan and Pat Coffey, was a success this summer. We visited a different nature site every Sunday from June 2<sup>nd</sup> to August 25<sup>th</sup>. Attendance was good – we had as few as three but as many as thirteen on the walks. Participants came from Sierra Club members, Orland Grassland volunteers, and a few came from Meetup.com. Thanks to regulars, Elise, Jack and Georganne, for their attendance and enthusiasm.

The walks were occasionally led by experts. Dick Riner led the walk at Bartel Grassland. George and Kathy Derkovitz led the walk at Gensburg Prairie. Also, Jeanne Muellner and Gary Clinkman led the walk at Orland Grassland. These people do extraordinary work on their sites.

But what did we see while we were out there? Twice we saw Bald Eagles – once at Long John Slough at the

Little Red Schoolhouse and the other time at Lockport Prairie. We also saw Indigo Buntings and a Band-winged Meadowhawk Dragonfly at Lockport Prairie, the latter of which Gary Clinkman, butterfly monitor at Orland Grassland, said he had seen only four times in the last 24 years. Also, we heard the abbreviated calls of the Henslow's Sparrow at Bartel Grassland, and we saw a good swath of Cardinal Flower at Hegewisch Marsh.

After visiting 13 sites this summer, it's safe to say we are now educated on what makes prairies so different and valuable, and we learned never to underestimate a natural site, whatever its history, as we always found something special at whatever site we visited. Nature is on the march again, thanks to the work of so many.

Thanks to all for a wonderful summer filled with nature and friends!

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## Rollin' on the River

By Steve Baker, Outings

Having seen that the September meeting will screen "Everglades of the North," it seemed appropriate to spend a sunny Sunday on the Kankakee River near the state line, the epicenter of September's documentary.

The Kankakee River in this area has long been a favorite paddling destination; always beautiful, always changing. The mega-floods of earlier this year have hastened the process of change. New channels are opening up that one day will replace the current ones, just as they too will be replaced in time.

Launching at the State Line Bridge, we were struck, as always, with the clean, clear water that is seen so rarely in Illinois streams. Equally notable was the effect of the never-ending wash of sand into the riverbed from the channelized sections of the river in Indiana. The bottom of the river is steadily rising with some interesting results.

Rounding each bend in this stream is always an adventure, but this time, it was especially so. On two occasions, we found formerly wide channels severely shrunken and completely blocked by log jams. (no doubt to the chagrin of the guy with 170 hp john boat parked just upstream.) As the stream widened, we saw that local property owners are parking their boats in the

middle of the channel and walking ashore on expanding sand bars. Quite a change in a very short period of time, but still a nice float on a beautiful summer day.

The Kankakee River remains a jewel among Illinois streams but its condition illustrates the constant assault, both natural and man-made, on natural areas that will continue to challenge us for a long time to come.



# Touring Midewin

By *Connie Heinrich, Editor*

The Sierra Club had been very involved in the formation of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, but the Sauk-Calumet members had never been out for a group tour. My husband Jerry and I, both tour guides at Midewin, decided it was time. On a sunny Saturday morning, seventeen members of the group were treated to a combination driving tour and hike. Normally, Midewin is not open to motorized vehicles, but an exception is made for authorized tours. At 20,000 acres, it takes more than a day to see Midewin on foot. Even by car, we were only able to visit a small part even though the tour was two hours long with an extra hour hike at the end.

Fortunately, our abundant spring rains brought the prairie back to life after last year's horrible drought. The prairie was in bloom with shades of yellow, purple and red. Not only did our members see prairie and woodland, but they also got to see the inside of a bunker (see photo below.) The "tour bunker" contains some of the artifacts that were collected by Midewin staff and volunteers after the Army had left and the property was turned over to the Forest Service.



*Photo by Rich Treptow*

If you had hoped to come on the tour but couldn't make it, public tours are available on most Saturdays from May through September. Tours can be by car caravan, on horseback, on bike, or on foot and they have different themes i.e., history, geology, birds - to name a few. There will be one more general tour similar to the one given to the Sierra Club on September 21. This tour does not include the hiking component, but trail maps are available at Midewin's Welcome Center on Route 53. Contact Midewin for more information on tours and registration at 815-423-6370.

# National Public Lands Day Events

National Public Lands Day will be celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> year on September 28, 2013. The objective of the day is to provide "Helping hands for America's Lands". Many of your local natural areas will be hosting workday events. A quick check of the National Public Lands Day website showed only a few locations in our area had registered so far. Check [www.publiclandsday.org](http://www.publiclandsday.org) for future postings.

## Will County

### *Eaton Preserve Park - Plainfield*

Workday begins at 8:00 a.m. Volunteers will be planting native plants. Continental breakfast provided.

### *Isle a la Cache - Romeoville*

Workday begins at 8:00 a.m. Projects include seed collecting and brush cutting. Snacks provided.

### *Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie - Wilmington*

Workday begins at 8:00 a.m. Several projects have been scheduled: invasives removal, trail maintenance, stream monitoring and seed collecting. Lunch provided.

## Volunteer Workdays Near Your Home

If you enjoy working outdoors, please consider volunteering in one or more of your local natural areas.

**Cook County Forest Preserves** [www.fpdcc.com](http://www.fpdcc.com) or  
[www.fotfp.org](http://www.fotfp.org)

**Will County Forest Preserves**  
[www.reconnectwithnature.org](http://www.reconnectwithnature.org)

**Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie**  
[www.fs.usda.gov/midewin](http://www.fs.usda.gov/midewin)

Dress for the weather 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](mailto: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* ExCom Rep. / Publicity	708-720-2725
John Field* Treasurer / Web Site	630-852-8202
Connie Heinrich Newsletter	815-476-6171
Jerry Heinrich Midewin Liaison	815-476-6171
Georganne Higgins* Membership	815-936-9040
Lois Lauer* Chair / Programs	708-923-1550
Mary Lubertozzi* Political Education	708-747-1359
Christy Mazrimas-Ott Cool Cities Coordinator	708-825-4163
Sharon Rolek Conservation Liaison, Calumet Region	773-646-0990
Bob Schwaan* Vice-Chair	630-243-0305
Rich Treptow Publications, Climate Change Liaison	708-747-0649

\*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.

**Sept. 9 *Everglades of the North: The Story of the Grand Kankakee Marsh***

We'll watch this excellent documentary explaining the history of the Grand Kankakee Marsh and why it disappeared when Indiana decided to channelize its section of the once meandering Kankakee River.

**Oct. 14 *Side Channels: Birds and Other Wildlife along the Illinois River***

Thomas Lerczak, writer, musician and naturalist with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, has captured his love of birds and nature in his new book, *Side Channels, A Collection of Nature Writing and Memoir*. He'll tell stories, show slides and he would like to play his guitar, but that probably will have to happen at the pizza parlor after the meeting rather than at the library.

**Nov. 11 *The Environment and the Internet***

Sauk Calumet Sierran Pat Coffey will discuss environmental news sites, blogs and websites, including those that help you keep track of environmental legislation and the votes of our elected officials, and those in which you can debate and share as a member of the online community.

**Dec. 9 *Wolves!***

Conservation writer Chris Johnson will discuss the controversial efforts to protect and restore the endangered wolf population in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Wolves have made a remarkable comeback due to the Endangered Species Act and an increased tolerance for predators and an appreciation of the role they play in our natural ecosystems.