Chicago WILDERNESS

EXPLORING NATURE & CULTURE

WINTER 2003

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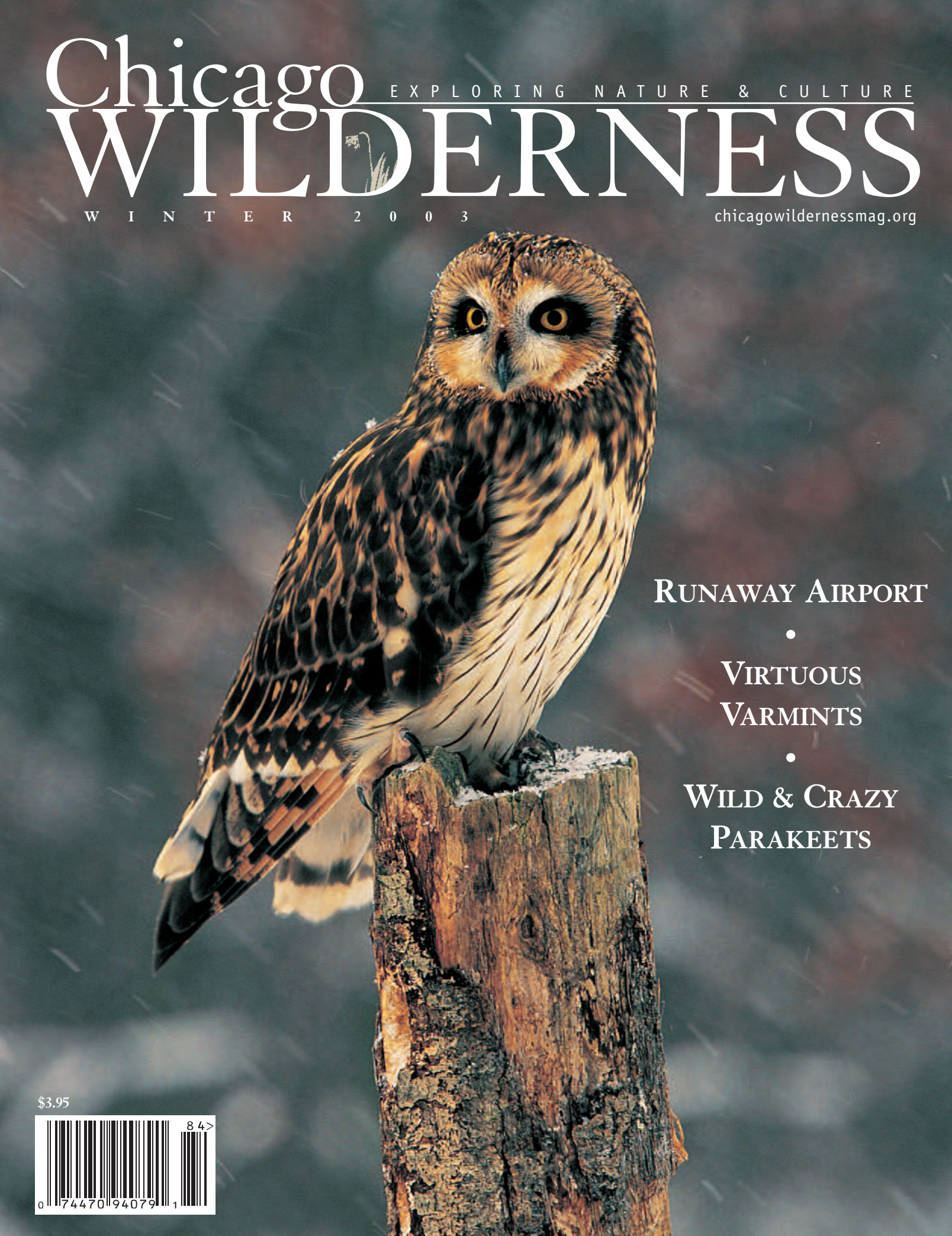

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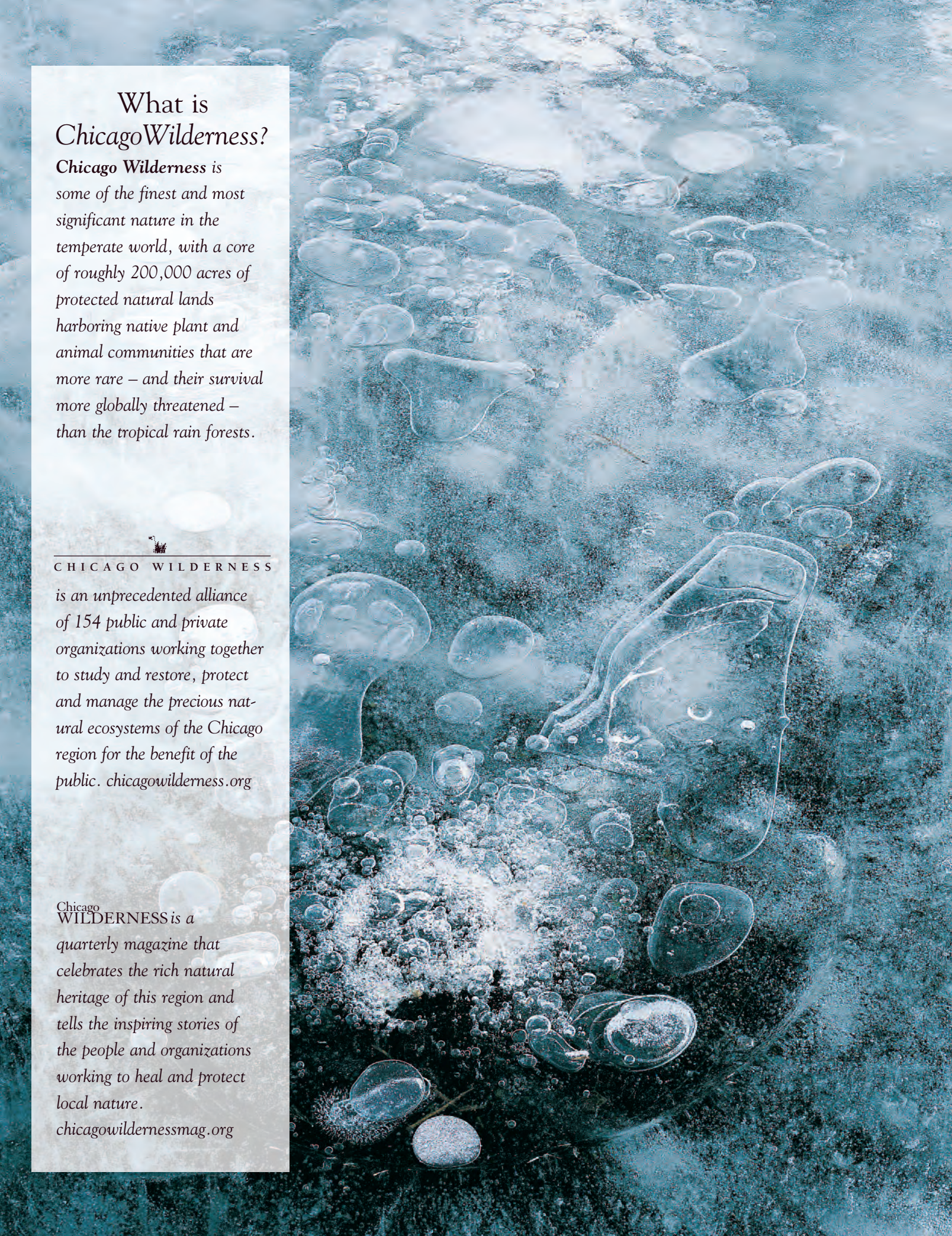

What is *ChicagoWilderness?*

Chicago Wilderness *is some of the finest and most significant nature in the temperate world, with a core of roughly 200,000 acres of protected natural lands harboring native plant and animal communities that are more rare – and their survival more globally threatened – than the tropical rain forests.*

CHICAGO WILDERNESS *is an unprecedented alliance of 154 public and private organizations working together to study and restore, protect and manage the precious natural ecosystems of the Chicago region for the benefit of the public. chicagowilderness.org*

Chicago WILDERNESS *is a quarterly magazine that celebrates the rich natural heritage of this region and tells the inspiring stories of the people and organizations working to heal and protect local nature. chicagowildernessmag.org*

OPPOSITE: *Bubbles and ice patterns along the frozen Dead River in Illinois Beach State Park. Photo by Willard Clay.*

The Gifts of Nature

"Where's the reciprocity?" I was asked by, of all beings, Mother Nature.

This is the season when many of us join family and friends at tables laden with the bounty of recent harvests to give thanks – for our prosperity, for our fragile peace, for health and good fortune. Let us add to that list a humble thank you for the gifts of nature.

Without a doubt, Mother Nature is our life support system. We are 70 percent water. Air is our life breath. The fruits of the land sustain us each day. The tonic of wild nature refreshes our spirits. Woods, prairies, and wetlands are our first and best playground, the real Discovery Zone.

Photo: ©Tom Vezo/VIREO

We receive so much from nature. But what do we do not only to be mindful of nature's gifts, but to give back?

Sometimes we don't even know what we've been given until it's gone. The disappearance of crows virtually throughout our region first alerted birders to the grave sweep of West Nile virus early last summer. Then the absence of birdsong and flitting chickadees, documented by the Bird Conservation Network in a special census conducted in October (see page 33), revealed the tentacles of this disease – and the aggressive spraying of pesticides undertaken to contain its spread – had reached far into our bird populace.

Like a symphony reduced to a handful of instruments and a few lingering notes, how much more diminished will our lives become if the colors, the sounds, the textures and tones of our rich diversity of life continue to disappear?

This issue offers faith, hope, and charity. Documenting faith, Jean Pascual reports on the increasing and serious reflection by many congregations, environmental groups, and others on our role and responsibilities as stewards of creation (see page 14). We have a moral imperative, many people are saying, to protect Earth's life support systems. "What larger moral question have we faced," asks Jane Elder of the Biodiversity Project, "if not the future of our species and the rest of life on Earth?"

Hope rests in the efforts, described by Peter Friederici on page 6, to determine how much habitat wild creatures need to thrive and to ensure they get it through major restorations at places like Bartel Grasslands, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, and Rollins Savanna. This is a form of reciprocity, for sure, when caring humans act on behalf of birds and butterflies, frogs and voles.

As the scientists, land managers, and citizen advocates of Chicago Wilderness continue to work in concert to protect and restore habitat for species under stress, we can have hope that our future will embrace far more successes than failures.

For charity, look to pianist Dave Green (see page 25), who readily admits he is no Nature Boy, but who loves what Michael Howard has been able to do for his community at Eden Place Nature Center. Green (no, we didn't pick him for his name) lends a hand by opening his wallet and contributing as generously as he can to help a small nature center thrive.

Perhaps the most hopeful thought for the new year is that each of us can reciprocate nature's abundance. Volunteer to participate in habitat restoration in a natural area near you. Join one of the many Chicago Wilderness organizations working on conservation projects in this region. Give subscriptions to *Chicago WILDERNESS* to your library and village officials. Testify at public meetings on behalf of land acquisition and land management. Become a benefactor.

The great naturalist E. O. Wilson has said, "There is no purpose more enspiriting than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us."

Let this great work thrive. Right here. In Chicago Wilderness.

Debra Shore
EDITOR

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Opposite: *Morton Arboretum woods in winter. Photo by Sam Rowell.*

Photo: ©Tom Vezo/VIREO

Photo: Courtesy of Faith in Place

Photo: Lawrence J. Godson

Photo: Carol Freeman

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Letters

Photo: Kanae Hirabayashi

Program Death Greatly Exaggerated

To the Editors:

In the Fall 2002 edition of *Chicago WILDERNESS*, you reported that state budget cuts could mean "the virtual elimination of the Illinois EcoWatch program." To clarify, EcoWatch did sustain a serious one-year budget cut that forced the cancellation of some training sessions in 2002, however the program has not been eliminated – virtually or otherwise!

While the program is temporarily without the services of its regional personnel, all program staff were retained, as was the vital scientific support EcoWatch receives from the Illinois Natural History Survey. Support for EcoWatch Citizen Scientists is continuing from our Chicago and Springfield offices, and we are doing the best we can to fill the void left by the temporary loss of our regional trainers. Meanwhile, we are using this time to improve our electronic data management capability and to integrate the data collected by professional scientists and our volunteers into a more user-friendly format.

With the completion of fall monitoring, we have begun planning for the 2003 program year. We anticipate offering fewer, more targeted, training sessions, and we will be dependent on the continued dedication and participation of our existing volunteers, now more than ever. People who are interested in learning more about EcoWatch training opportunities in 2003 should call (312) 814-4747.

Marvin Hubbell
Manager, Division of Ecosystems
Office of Realty and Environmental Planning
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Dogs or Birds?

Dear Editors,

David Cohen's article, "Chicago's Park Revival" (*CW*, Fall '02), is appropriately praising of the Chicago Park District's new commitment to restoring natural areas throughout the park system. But in one important respect, the park managers have shown a disappointing lack of sensitivity. The Park District has decided to allow unleashed dogs at Montrose Beach, a key key beach for this region's migratory birds.

Shorebirds migrate north great distances each spring, some from the tip of South America to the Arctic Circle. After breeding, they return south from the 4th of July through the end of October. Shorebirds migrate at night and must find a beach where they can feed and rest after their long journey. Montrose Beach, of all the beaches on Chicago's North Side, is uniquely attractive to shorebirds because its horseshoe shape and east-west orientation catches much organic matter that feeds the tiny insects and crustaceans shorebirds need to survive.

Shorebirds need all of Montrose Beach in order to get enough food to continue their migration, and that's why permitting dogs on any part of the beach will have a negative impact. Birds and dogs have a natural prey-predator relationship that cannot be legislated by humans. When a dog nears a shorebird, that bird looks on the dog as it would a fox or a coyote and will fly to escape, using up precious calories it needs for migration and successful breeding.

Dogs and their owners can frolic most anywhere. The Bird Conservation Network (BCN) and others in the conservation community do not oppose the designation of a dog beach area elsewhere, for instance, at nearby Foster Avenue Beach.

The BCN has consulted with state and federal agencies, local ornithologists, major conservation organizations, and a national shorebird data collection center. All have strongly urged that Montrose Beach be kept dog-free. The Lake Michigan Federation and the Chicago Group of the Sierra Club also oppose dogs being permitted on Montrose Beach.

The Park District has ruled that dogs be allowed to run free only in a small, specified area. However, many dog owners ignore the rule as well as the prominently posted signs, and run their dogs not only all along the entire beach, but also in the recently restored Montrose Point area, where the district has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on new plantings. In the absence of adequate enforcement it makes little difference what rules are made, as many dog owners simply ignore them.

The designation of part of Montrose as a dog beach is especially ironic considering that it was just over two years ago that Chicago and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service signed a treaty wherein the city promised to take all possible steps to protect migratory birds.

The BCN and other conservationists are very appreciative of the park board's adoption of the bird-friendly habitat guidelines in its landscaping and the significant financial commitment made to improve habitat throughout the park system. We strongly urge that they extend this sensitivity to the needs of native wildlife and keep dogs off Montrose Beach, and that the rules established be strictly enforced.

Donald R. Dann
Vice-President, Bird Conservation Network
Highland Park, Ill.

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Big is Beautiful

The Theory of Preserve Relativity

By Peter Friederici

Illustration by Liita Forsyth

Anyone who travels will quickly become familiar with what I think of as "the ethnic restaurant rule of city size and diversity." A city of a million people is likely to support a far greater diversity of restaurants than a city of one hundred thousand, perhaps including such rare varieties as Afghan or Tunisian restaurants. The city of one hundred thousand, meanwhile, will still be considerably more diverse than a town of one thousand, where restaurants might be restricted to a diner, a fast-food franchise or two, and a pizza joint. There isn't necessarily anything wrong with those places, but they're the culinary equivalents of starlings, pigeons, and raccoons – the common, cosmopolitan species on the restaurant scene.

Photo: Courtesy of Huddleston-McBride Co.

Ecologists have known for some time that a similar pattern holds true for natural habitats. In the 1960s, biologists Robert MacArthur and Edward Wilson codified this notion with what they called the "island biogeography theory." By studying the collections of species that grew on oceanic islands of various sizes, they were able to generalize that smaller islands tend to support fewer species of plants and animals than large ones do. As an island's distance from others grows, it also is more likely to have fewer species, since fewer new species can colonize it from other islands.

Island Biogeography

Biologists readily apply the island biogeography theory to all kinds of places that aren't real islands but that do behave like them. A marsh or woodlot is an island if it's surrounded by fields; a prairie is an island if it's entirely surrounded by housing developments. Biologists have found that the same mathematical rules that govern real islands often hold true on these other sorts of islands. A 100-acre marsh is likely to support more species than a 10-acre one; a 10-acre marsh that's close enough to a 100-acre marsh that frogs or other animals can travel between the two is far more likely to maintain its

At Bartel Grassland in Cook County, four miles of hedgerows fragmented the habitat into 40-acre squares (center). Its size restored to 375 acres by brush cutting (top), the grassland now is a better home for the rough-legged hawk and hundreds of other species.

populations than a 10-acre marsh totally isolated among shopping malls.

A truly isolated and small island can easily lose species through random events of predation, disease, or accident. When this happens, only the most mobile species, such as birds, are likely to be able to reestablish themselves. Others, such as reptiles or amphibians, will likely never make it back across acres of unsuitable habitat. Populations on an isolated island may also suffer from inbreeding as they are unable to exchange genes with others of their species.

The Chicago Wilderness area is a great place to eat, but as far as its nature preserves are concerned, it is quite obviously an archipelago of many different sorts of islands. It is, first of all, a naturally fragmented place in which a diverse topography of moraines, beaches, and wetlands caused marshes, prairies, and forests to grow in intermingled patches. Like much of the Midwest, it has also been drastically fragmented by development, transportation corridors, and other forms of human intervention. When the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory was conducted in the 1970s, survey crews found 1,289.9 acres of high-quality prairie in the six-county Chicago metropolitan area – a mere sliver of the more than 1.7 million acres estimated to exist here in 1820. About 80 percent of these remnants were ten acres in size or less. Other habitat types have become dramatically fragmented too. Chicago Wilderness, then, is a great case study in island biogeography – and a challenging place to apply some of its lessons.

Photo: Ron Panzer

The leadplant flower moth survives on some small prairies – if leadplant is plentiful.

Why Bigger Is Better

The central message of island biogeography theory is that bigger is better. For some species, the relationship between preserve size and survival is very clear. Many birds of forests and grasslands, for example, can't survive in small habitat patches. Wood thrushes and other songbirds might try to nest in woodlots of 30 acres or so, but if they do they are likely to lose their nests either to the predators that are common in fragmented landscapes, such as crows, jays, or raccoons, or to have their nests parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds, which lay their eggs in the nests of other species.

One recent study by Purdue University biologist Peter Fauth found that 90 percent of wood thrush nests in scattered forest patches in northwest Indiana were parasitized by cowbirds and 58 percent were lost to predators. Adult thrushes in these patches, in other words, were not able to raise enough young to replace themselves. Over the years, such rates are not sustainable. Wood thrushes persist in that area only because they have bigger forest patches to nest in elsewhere, from which "surplus" thrushes can disperse into the smaller, unsuitable patches.

Researchers have found that a similar pattern holds true of grassland birds, which may avoid small prairie patches entirely or are more likely to suffer nest predation in them than in larger areas. Meadowlarks, for example, generally need fields of at least 20 acres, Henslow's sparrows grasslands of at least 80 acres, and upland sandpipers far larger areas still.

But the story changes when we talk about species such as red-headed woodpeckers, yellow-breasted chats, blue-winged warblers, and orchard orioles, all of which are species that prefer shrubby patches or savannas. Recent research by Jeffrey Brawn of the University of Illinois in the Palos Hills area and elsewhere has shown that a savanna patch of as little as two acres will attract some of these species and one of ten acres will support quite a few. He has not been able to identify any shrub- or savanna-dependent species that require larger areas than that.

"It looks like shrubland birds have a different level of sensitivity to fragmentation than forest and grassland birds," Brawn says. "This is good news for conservation because it means that small patches in a chronically fragmented landscape are still useful for them." And this, he says, is really good news because many shrubland and savanna species are declining on a national level more than forest species are.

Insects Disobey

Some insects appear also to disobey the recommendations of island biogeography. Ron Panzer of Northeastern Illinois University has been intensively studying insect populations on many prairie fragments in Chicago Wilderness since the late 1970s. When he began, he read that sites of less than 2,000 acres would not support many "conservative" insect species, those restricted to high-quality prairies. But he has found conservative species on each site he's looked at, and they have remained over the years.

There is a relationship between area and insect diversity, Panzer says, up to a point. Sites of five acres or less "are very much in need of expansion," Panzer says. "But 150-acre sites

essentially are as rich in species as sites ten times larger, and sites over 100 acres in size have 'leaked' very few species. So we can approach the conservation of these insects with some real cautious optimism."

Birds tend to look for a particular type of habitat structure more than particular plant species: a large forest or grassland, a savanna with scattered trees. Insects, on the other hand, are often tied to particular plant species, so they depend more heavily on a habitat's quality than its quantity. A small prairie preserve that has never been plowed and has experienced regular fires may, then, support many more rare plant and insect species than a much larger tract that has been heavily impacted by human uses.

Photo: Alan G. Nelson/Root Resources

The northern harrier needs at least 500 acres of grassland to raise its young. If more grassland is in easy flying distance, so much the better.

The same holds true for reptiles and amphibians, most of which are not evenly spread across the landscape. Instead, particular species tend to require very particular microclimates, such as vernal pools, moist downed logs, or sandy tracts. As a result, says herpetologist Tom Anton, "we're finding that in some cases, the bigger the place, the more diverse the species; but in other places it's more a matter of microclimate and particular disturbance regimes, as well as of the footprint that we left in the past. There are some small preserves out there with a surprising number of species."

Conservation Design

Conservationists behind the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan are currently writing designs to provide for the long-term conservation of three threatened ecological community types in the region: grassland birds, savanna reptiles and amphibians, and oak woodlands (see sidebar). The idea is to establish general guidelines regarding how much acreage of appropriate habitat is necessary to ensure that these community types persist, how the preserve acreage should be distributed across the landscape, and how the habitats should be managed.

By analyzing species and ecosystem requirements, planners have come up with specific recommendations – a wish list. One such wish is for 7,500 acres of grasslands more than 500 acres in size each that will be managed at least in part for the nesting requirements of grassland birds. Karen Glennemeier of

This newly protected preserve at Corron Farm, in Kane County, transitions from sedge meadow (foreground) through savanna to woodland. A variety of adjacent habitats provides viable preserves for animals that require different habitats at different life stages.

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

Grassland birds and forest birds both need large habitats. Shrubland birds, like the blue-winged warbler, can nest successfully in small sites.

Audubon-Chicago Region, who is helping to write the plan, estimates that there are currently about 7,200 acres in such sites, though they are not necessarily of high quality. For that reason, she says, "mostly what we're talking about with prairies is getting the places we have into good shape."

For reptiles and amphibians, she says, the picture is more complex, largely because those animals often require a variety of habitats – such as wetlands for breeding and moist woodlands for adult life – and because their habitat requirements are generally not as well known as those of grassland birds. For that reason, planners would like to see preserve complexes with a connected assortment of habitat types. "If we have one big habitat complex in each natural subdivision, that assures diversity," Glennemeier says.

Dave Mauger, natural resources manager of the Forest Preserve District of Will County, tries to follow a similar strategy as the county increases the extent of its preserve system. He, too, doesn't like to think so much in terms of individual habitat types. Rather, what he would most like to see is preserved areas that maintain the transitions between habitats.

In order to do that, he says, Will County planners try to "build out from existing preserves. We try to increase their size and to provide buffers and remove gaps. We try to craft a plan that expands on existing high-quality areas."

Butting Heads with Politics

Of course, the ecological theory behind preserve design quickly butts heads with politics, funding issues, recreation, and many other factors when planners try to implement it. Will County still can buy up relatively large tracts of farmland for restoration, a luxury that is not possible in many of the more densely settled parts of the Chicago Wilderness area. In those places, conservation is to be practiced more through focused management than through land acquisition.

Some of that management can certainly be informed by island biogeography theory. For example, Jeffrey Brawn suggests that from the perspective of bird conservation it's probably better to manage a small, isolated preserve as a shrubland or savanna than as a grassland or forest, because only shrub or savanna birds are likely to nest successfully there. Large tracts of forest or grassland, on the other hand, should be kept intact, because forest and grassland birds absolutely need them.

When designing preserve patterns, planners also focus on corridors that allow animals to move back and forth between preserves, though some conservation biologists consider them overrated. Ron Panzer, for example, believes that a lot of corridors in the Chicago area serve mainly to allow such invasive species as purple loosestrife to move from one preserve to another. He cautions that corridors need to be carefully managed for the species they are intended to serve.

For the insects he studies on isolated prairie fragments, true habitat corridors are probably never going to be a possibility. For that reason, he proposes that insects will probably need to be translocated from site to site by hand to assure genetic exchange between populations. "We're going to need some artificial linkages between sites, or 'volunteer corridors,'" he says.

On the one hand, this seems a lot of work: people doing what nature used to do by itself. On the other, though, it's compelling to think of biodiversity in the Chicago Wilderness region as not limited to its established preserves, to think of the region's large preserves as core areas from which native plants and animals spread into backyards, and to think of the citizens of Chicago Wilderness transporting rare plants or insects from preserve to preserve to assure their long-term survival. In the long run, it is this interconnection between places managed for a diversity of natural and human communities that will make people full members of the region's natural community.

Photo: Mike MacDonald/www.ChicagoNature.com

Many frogs need two habitats. This spring peeper needs temporary ponds in spring, and forests in summer.

Preserve Recommendations from the Chicago Wilderness Conservation Design

The plan for amphibians and reptiles calls for at least one 800-acre habitat complex in each of five different natural subdivisions of the Chicago Wilderness region: Grand Prairie, Western and Kettle Morainal, Lake Plain, and Gary Lake Plain.

For grassland birds, planners want to see tracts of at least 500 acres without trees or shrubs. There should be at least 2,500 acres each of three prairie types: dry, medium, and wet. The entire region should also have at least five prairie complexes of at least 4,000 acres, and a total of at least 27,000 acres of grassland.

For various oak woodland types, there should be from two to ten 400-acre sites each. Plus, there should be at least one site for each subtype that is at least 800 acres. The region should have at least 51,000 combined acres of dry, medium, and wet woodland.

Photo: Jack Shouba

Runaway Airport

The strange case of the environmental study that didn't consider the environment.

By Robert Heuer

Pied-billed grebe

On a hot July afternoon, the tall oak trees of eastern Will County's Raccoon Grove Forest Preserve provide a shady refuge. Bird songs echo through the forest as visitors follow a trail through the thick green understory containing at least 174 native plant species, among them the state-threatened goldenseal.

This woodland prairie grove has avoided the axe and plow, enjoying relative tranquility over the 170 years since European settlers arrived. Yet here on the edge of this 78.7 -acre nature preserve with its 132.5-acre dedicated buffer, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is intent on building a massive airport.

Photo: Jim Nachel

One Peotone neighbor displayed this editorial sign.

The proposed south-suburban airport is best known as "Peotone" after one of the five semi-rural towns that encircle the site. The Peotone airport would be much bigger than generally recognized. Blueprints call for eventual acquisition of 24,000 acres of eastern Will County – 35 square miles of real estate, an area nearly three times the size of O'Hare. Boosters envision the "third" airport becoming Chicago's primary airport, an "engine for economic development" that would "create" 236,000 jobs and bring 400,000 new residents to southern Cook, eastern Will, and northern Kankakee counties.

The Sierra Club's Illinois chapter sees an ecological disaster in the making. "One of the biggest threats to biodiversity in the Chicago region is poorly planned suburban real estate development," chapter director Jack Darin contends. Between the airport and a related network of over 100 miles of proposed toll roads, Darin sees a scheme by local, state, and federal interests to promote sprawl with no regard for nature. Darin underlines this by pointing out that the Peotone site's rural location 35 miles from Chicago's central business district encourages low-density development.

The airport site is near a mid-continental divide. To the north is the Little Calumet River watershed. Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) Senior Engineer Bill Eyring says some south Cook County suburbs there can expect Peotone to bring more flooding and poorer water quality. Most

runoff, however, would flow south into the Kankakee River watershed, a predominantly rural area consisting of remarkably healthy tributary streams and a diverse fishery. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) calls this river basin "one of Illinois' greatest natural resource treasures." Flowing westward from northern Indiana en route to the Illinois River, the 90-mile Kankakee has a diverse and abundant mussel population that the Illinois Natural History Survey's Larry Page has called "a resource of national importance."

According to an environmental impact statement (EIS) released in July 2002, the airport plan would fill in some waterways (including a seven-mile length of Black Walnut Creek) and transform others into channels that quickly move large volumes of polluted water. More than 180 acres of wetlands would be destroyed, and 1,200 acres of floodplain impacted.

Innovative management of water quality, water supply, storm water runoff and flooding doesn't appear to be a priority for airport planners. A source who has failed to convince IDOT consultants to be more proactive concludes: "They aren't trained to incorporate energy-efficient or ecological designs into their plans."

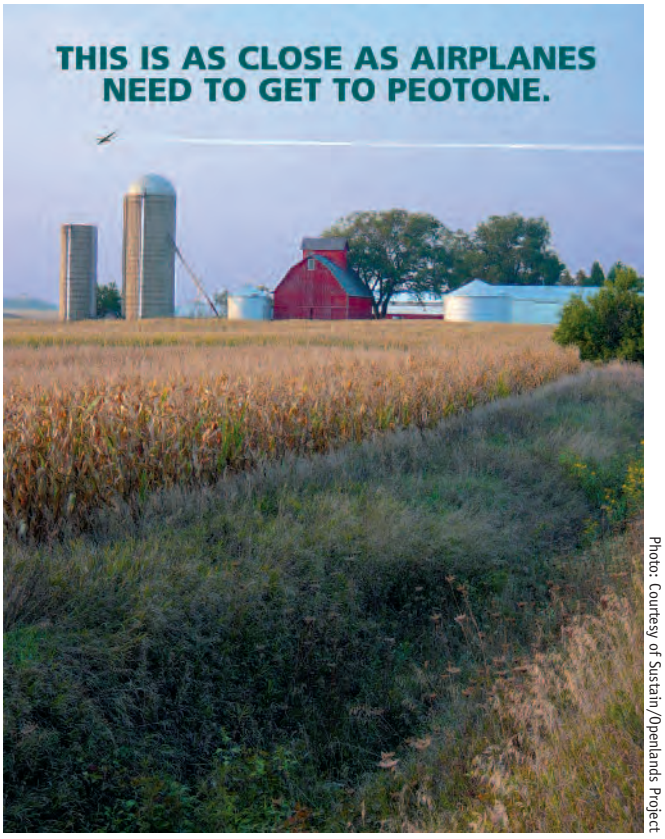


Photo: Courtesy of Sustain/Openlands Project

Openlands Project recently published a guide (above) that outlines the consequences of IDOT's plans for eastern Will County. To order a copy, go to www.openlands.org/reports.asp.

Photo: Art Morris/BIRDS AS ART

What About Runoff?

Elaborate systems would be built to trap such pollutants as jet de-icing chemicals. This is not the case, however, for runoff from parking lots, rooftops, and most runways – let alone all the new development that the project is intended to stimulate. After a heavy rain, the runoff would rush into on-site storm sewers and local streams to be detained in large on-stream basins a mile or more downstream. These detention ponds would trap some effluent. But a significant volume of partially treated water contaminated by oil and grease, sediment, heavy metals, and nutrients would be funneled into the watershed's tributaries and dumped in the Kankakee.

One such tributary is Exline Slough – a farm drainage ditch with a diverse fish community, now classified as a class A stream. IDNR Streams Biologist Steve Pescitelli says about half of its 23 species, including several types of darters, are intolerant to major changes in habitat or water quality.

Last summer Pescitelli, with a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers fisheries biologist and three interns, developed a new appreciation for the Kankakee during a river survey near the city of Wilmington. He knew that the river has the highest rating of any in the Chicago region – "B" with pockets in the "A" range. Indeed, previous studies have shown that the river has as many as 89 varieties of fish and an abundant mussel population. Using multiple collection techniques over the course of several hours, this team found nearly 50 fish species – including the state-threatened river red horse and the endangered pallid shiner. "That was a career day for me," Pescitelli says.

According to the EIS, the new airport would create a daily demand for two million gallons of water. Induced growth of an additional 400,000 area residents would mean a daily demand for an additional 47.6 million gallons. Where all this water would come from is unknown. Lake Michigan isn't likely to be an option, as Illinois has already exceeded its quota for what it can draw. And an airport and related growth would create an ever-larger footprint of impervious surfaces that would block water from taking its natural course, thus diminishing underground water supplies.

The EIS doesn't calculate the amount of storm water runoff that would result from paving over so much land. Openlands Project Regional Land Use Coordinator Richard Acker estimates that a second O'Hare and its resulting suburbs would mean the annual production of tens of billions of gallons of storm water runoff. One billion gallons could fill two Sears Towers.

River Down a Slippery Slope

Sierra Club's Darin agrees that airport planners don't "seem to have made any effort to quantify whether the Kankakee can sustain all these added inputs, let alone the draw-downs." Such government-sanctioned neglect could send the Kankakee down the same slippery slope that so badly degraded the upper Des Plaines and DuPage Rivers.

Poring through the EIS, Acker has found other food for thought. The fully built-out 24,000-acre airport would pave over 15,595 acres of "prime" and "important" farmland, so designated for its capacity to maximize yields with minimal inputs. He predicts airport-driven suburbanization would eventually cover an area larger than the city of Chicago – the lion's share of this, too, would be high-quality farmland. Additionally, the airport would annually generate 140 million pounds of

Yellow-headed blackbird

Photo: Joe Nowak

new air pollutants in what today is a rolling countryside blessed with fresh air. The EIS also acknowledges the wealth of wildlife in the area, including such state-endangered species as the three-toed and blue-spotted salamanders, and the Massasauga rattlesnake, but doesn't quantify what development would do to them.

The FAA has a good reason for failing to study environmental impacts in its EIS: the agency didn't have to. The document was an unusual "Tier 1" EIS, pertaining only to IDOT's interest in acquiring land, which, of course, won't affect ecosystems. FAA officials promise a thorough analysis of direct and indirect impacts in the yet-to-begin Tier 2 EIS pertaining to development of an actual airport. Critics say the tiered process appears designed to avoid discussion of ecological challenges until IDOT owns the land.

In September, the FAA awarded IDOT $3 million to develop a phase-one airport design, prompting IDOT spokesman Richard Adorjan to tell reporters that federal approval for actual construction is a foregone conclusion. But many conservation and smart-growth organizations oppose such government expenditures and their encouragement of rapid suburban development. They say tax dollars could be better spent investing in strategies to make existing communities more attractive. This same logic could apply to Chicago's airport system, as well as other transportation modes such as high-speed rail.

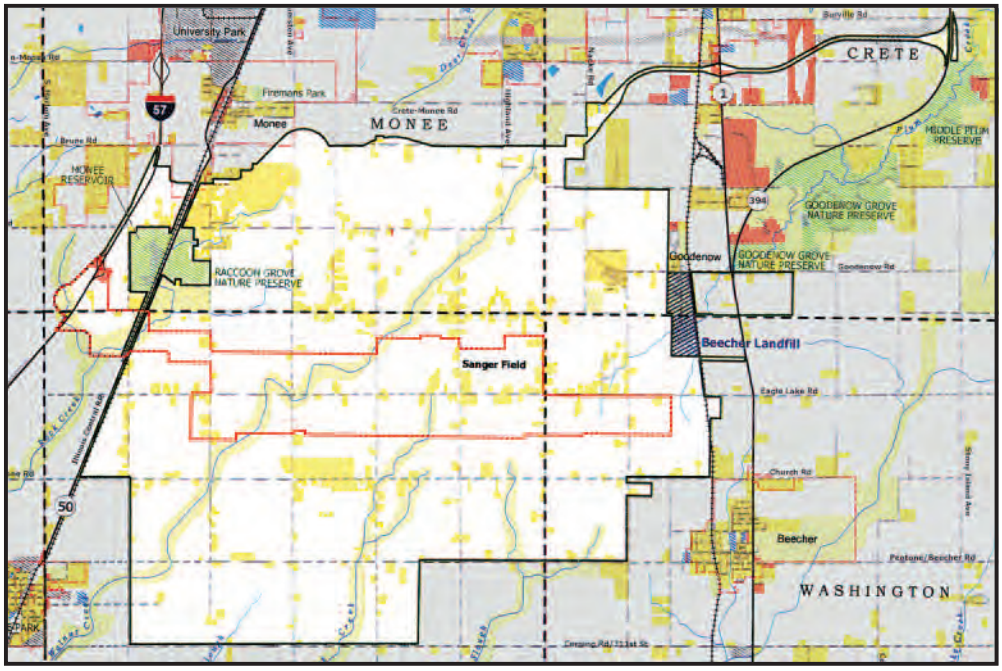
Fifteen years ago, Indiana officials began touting their Midway-sized airport in Gary as ready to serve the south suburbs. IDOT countered that growing aviation demand dictates the need for a second O'Hare. Plopping another O'Hare atop the existing Gary airport, IDOT officials gleefully observed, would be an ecological disaster. Nearby, the mostly scattered remnants of a globally rare dune-and-swale ecosystem contain the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered species in Indiana.

The FAA has recently approved a more modest 20-year Gary airport expansion plan. Lake Michigan Federation Habitat Coordinator Joel Brammeier has come away from a series of EIS meetings with concerns about how the Gary expansion will affect the Calumet River. But he doesn't think the airport will damage the rare ecosystem.

Liz McCloskey disagrees. A biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) north Indiana suboffice, she says additional traffic at the barely utilized airport would harm Nature Conservancy and State of Indiana holdings located within a half mile of the end of the runways. Migratory birds would be deemed a danger to planes, and a nearby population of the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly could be adversely affected. However, McCloskey concedes that the Gary plan isn't nearly as bad as "the monster airport" that IDOT once proposed for the site.

More Than Enough Capacity

Acker has tracked both the Gary and Peotone proposals, contending that the Gary/Chicago airport appears to be "a useful part of the solution. IDOT has set up a false choice, claiming Gary isn't viable because it can't solve 100 percent of the problem," Acker says. "What IDOT never



Map courtesy of IDOT/FAA.

The fully built-out airport footprint (in white) would cover 24,000 acres of land that feeds tributaries of the Kankakee River. The airport's first phase is outlined in red.

Photo: Carol Freeman

Wetland birds, such as these great white egrets, the yellow-headed blackbird, and the pied-billed grebe (previous pages), are threatened by the impacts the proposed Peotone airport will have on wetlands and water quality.

asks in its EIS is whether using a combination of all available resources – such as Gary, Midway, O'Hare, and high-speed rail – can help meet some percentage of the projected travel demands." "The Peotone EIS ignores the fact that combining these alternatives will give the region more than enough capacity."

USFWS Field Supervisor John Rogner made a similar common-sense request in a letter to the FAA. Rogner asks for something that's been missing throughout the airport planning process – an explanation of "the relationship among several projects (or project alternatives) to improve air service."

Meanwhile, the City of Chicago, which owns O'Hare and Midway, and IDOT want to substantially increase capacity at O'Hare. O'Hare foes quietly concede that the expansion of O'Hare, which would require less than one square mile of land, could create enough capacity to preclude the need for a brand-new mega-airport. Such an increase at the world's busiest airport won't approach the landscape alteration that Will County would experience with Peotone, for much damage has already been done. Since the 1950s, suburbanization of lands around O'Hare has unfolded with little regard for the natural environment.

Photo: Jim Nachel

Raccoon Grove Nature Preserve could be degraded by the proposed airport.

Remarkably, the 13-square-mile airport harbors coyotes, red fox, migratory birds, winter raptors, snowy owls, and geese, but their existence there is tenuous. To minimize the chance of collisions with aircraft, county and state officials constantly relocate wildlife. According to Chris Anchor of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, O'Hare appears to have had little observable ecological impact on intact terrestrial ecosystems, though he knows of no studies on factors such as airport noise and pollution. Busse Woods, only four miles away, remains the largest high-quality flatwoods east of the Mississippi River. Unlike Busse Woods, however, Will County's Raccoon Grove is immediately adjacent to the proposed Peotone airport site and sits downstream.

O'Hare neighbors' concerns about noise and toxic emissions "are very real," Darin says, noting airport pollution is a largely uncharted territory that demands closer scrutiny than ever. Staff of the Spring Brook Nature Center in nearby Itasca must schedule their nature programs around flight schedules due to noise. Further evidence of off-site environmental damage occurred a couple years ago after airline de-icing agent wound up in the Des Plaines River. Nobody much noticed until mountains of foam appeared ten miles downstream at the Hofmann Dam in west suburban Riverside. Maybe nothing noxious, but, then again, human beings don't drink from the Des Plaines.

By contrast, Kankakee, Bourbonnais, and Momence all take water from the Kankakee River, and Joliet wants to. "If the Peotone airport fulfills its promise, the additional demand for water would be much bigger than the sum of what these cities would use," CNT's Eyring said one day last summer, sitting on a shaded picnic table above the river's tree-lined banks. "The airport is designed to be unsustainable."

Robert Heuer is an Evanston-based journalist and consultant. He has written about the airport debate for Illinois Issues, Crain's Chicago Business, Conscious Choice, *and the* Chicago Reader.

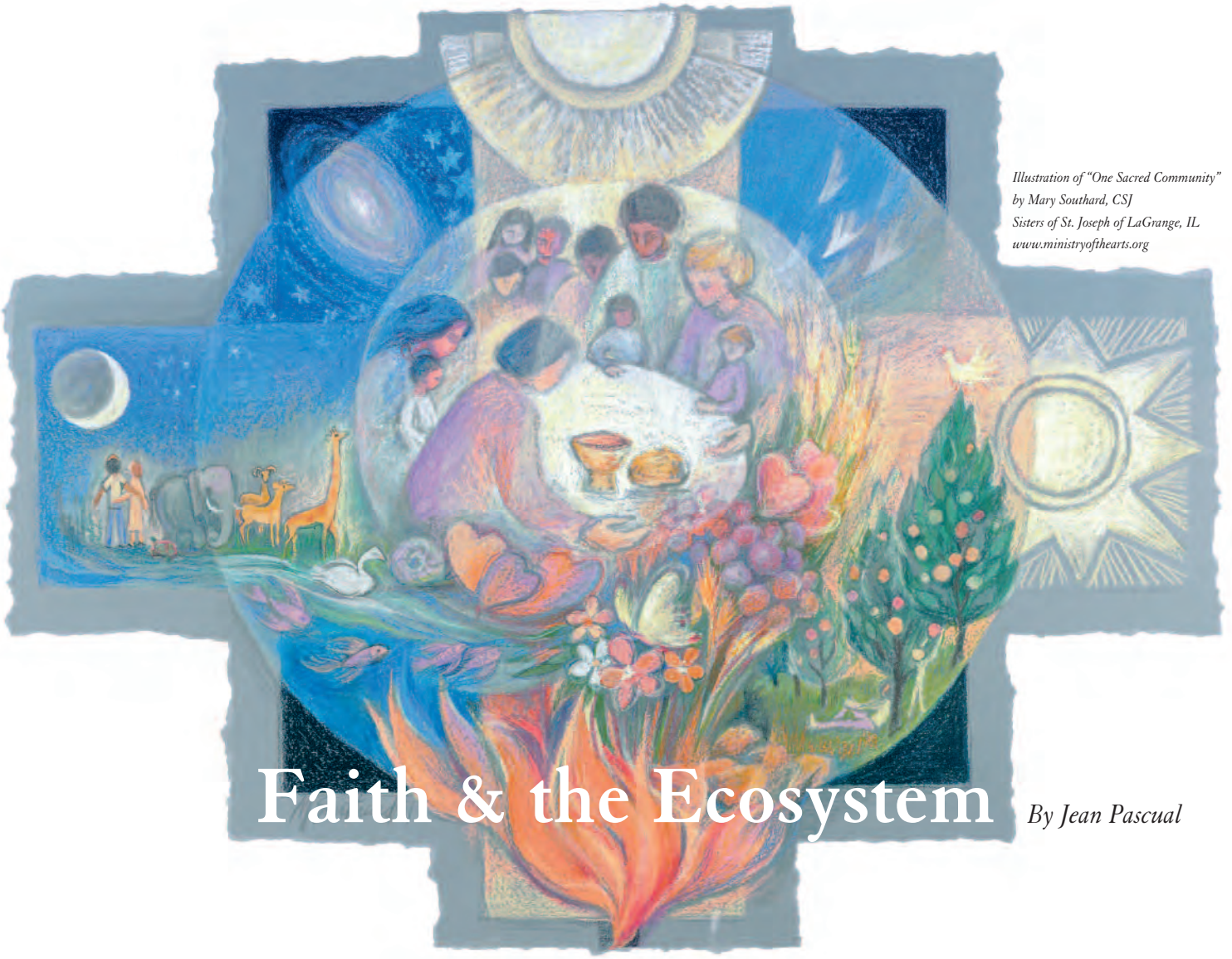


Illustration of "One Sacred Community" by Mary Southard, CSJ Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, IL www.ministryofthearts.org

Faith & the Ecosystem

By Jean Pascual

If the idea of religious groups doing environmental work conjures images of slaying buckthorn with mighty scythes and pulling the weeds of iniquity (e.g., garlic mustard) out by their very roots, you have an inkling of a worldwide and Chicago-wide trend. If the image extends to feeding the masses with locally grown, organic food from farmers' markets, you are right on the mark. And if you further imagine people of faith providing shelter for the poor, with a vision encompassing wildlife as well as human beings, then you begin to understand the impact of a relatively new trend in "ecospirituality."

What Will the Trees Say?

Almost every religious denomination contains teachings that urge believers to care for all living things. They all say, in one way or another, that it's not a matter of us versus the environment but rather that we're all in this together – the birds, the animals, air, water, humans, the Earth, the whole universe. We've met nature and we are it.

Dirk Ficca, executive director of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR), a Chicago-based international organization founded on the tenets of peace, justice, and sustainability, has found the concept of sustainability is intrinsic to all world religions. "All religions express their concern for ecology in terms of either sacredness, interdependence, or stewardship," he says.

The concept of stewardship, for instance, is evident in the Jewish tradition of Tu B'Shvat, New Year for the Trees, which heralds the time of year when sap starts rising, a harbinger of springtime. It's based on the seasonal cycle that eventually leads to the grain harvest. "This holiday is a reminder that the land is more than an inanimate holy entity," says Barry Dredze of Beth Shalom in Naperville. "It's something to grow food on. It's something we need to care for because it sustains us."

Muslims have similar beliefs about the importance of treating others, including the Earth, responsibly. Shireen Pishdadi describes the Islamic belief that everything worships God. "We display our worship by how we live our lives; whether we eat healthy food for our bodies, are kind to our neighbors and parents, or take care of nature. We believe in a judgment day, on which everything – the trees, our bodies, animals – will testify for and against us," she says. "When the trees stand up and speak about how I lived, will they have something good to say about me?"

Buddhist and Hindu traditions both incorporate the concept of karma, loosely translated as "what goes around, comes around." Sri Eknath Easwaran, author of *To Love Is to Know Me*, comments on the sacred Hindu writings in the Bhagavad Gita: "The very air we breathe is exhaustible.... If we loved our children as we profess to, we should remember that the air is

limited, exhaustible, a perishable member of the family of life. Treat it gently, the Gita says; treat it with care."

The Christian corollary from the Bible might be disciple James' letter to Christians in the early church, in which he says, "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith." This means a person's belief in God should be accompanied by actions that reflect the teachings of that faith – in this case, caring for all of the things God made. Sister Janet Bolger helped to establish The Well, an ecospirituality center sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange. "For a long time," she explains, "Christians interpreted the world in a patriarchal manner. This approach put God at a distance above everything else, followed by humans, and then animals, plants, and inanimate objects at the lowest level of importance. Christian theology has always proclaimed that God is everywhere, and now with the emerging holistic worldview, people seem drawn to celebrate creation-centered theology – the realization that everything in creation reveals God." Bolger believes that people connect to God – or to "spirit" – when they recognize this spirit's presence in all of nature.

Steve Perkins, also a Catholic and associate director of the Center for Neighborhood Technology in Chicago, agrees that religious thought has evolved to make people more aware of their role in caring for the environment. "Catholic theology has a tenet called 'preference for the poor' that says care for the poor and the marginalized – traditionally, lepers, women, and Samaritans – should be incorporated into public policy," he says. "Today, marginalized populations include nature as well as the poor."

Photo: Courtesy of Faith in Place

Children learn good stewardship of the Earth, starting with worms.

Clare Butterfield, a Unitarian Universalist minister and director of Faith in Place, an interreligious environmental initiative sponsored by the Center for Neighborhood Technology, describes another view, called "process theology," which draws a clear connection between our actions and their consequences. Origin-ating in the religious and philosophical writings of mathematician Alfred North Whitehead, process theology simultaneously acknowledges the existence of God and the laws of physics, asserting that material reality consists of a series of events rather than a concrete thing. It says all living things exist in relationship with one another, and our choices and actions cannot help but affect every other living thing. Therefore, according to Butterfield, to say that we are accountable to all of creation is not hyperbole. "Ecology itself is perhaps the grandest example of process theology in practice," she says. "As humans who make choices, we play an undeniably accountable role in this process."

Action in Solitude

To fill this role, some people act individually, and others within organizations. Cindy Crosby walks and meditates almost daily at the Schulenberg Prairie at the Morton Arboretum in Lisle. She collected her essays about nature and spirituality into a book called *Waiting for Morning*. She considers nature "an exterior landscape that influences our interior landscapes" – our emotions, our moods, our most deeply held values and beliefs. "The first account in the Bible is that of God creating a beautiful garden," she says. "I think of our physical world as a divine notebook. God has jotted down all kinds of beautiful things about faith through this journal of the outdoors that help us understand this crazy life we are born to."

Because of the spiritual sustenance she derives from nature, Crosby sees the need to protect it and to help educate others. She is involved in Wild Ones, a Naperville-area gardening club that promotes native habitat landscaping. In one of her essays, she writes about her back yard in Glen Ellyn being a harmonizing buffer between her adjacent neighbors' back yards – Jim's, a horticultural masterpiece, and Gerry's, the epitome of native landscaping. (Neighbor Gerry is noted conservationist and author Gerould Wilhelm.) Crosby's yard is a blend of wild native and manicured.

Circles of Activism

Others prefer to marshal the collective energies of like enthusiasts. The efforts of Beth Shalom's Barry Dredze have spurred the Social Action Committee at that congregation to encourage members to schedule periodic Sundays as restoration days at West Chicago Prairie Preserve. Dredze says Judaism's teachings about ethical and social responsibility motivated him to organize a regular Mitzvah Day of restoration work at Danada Preserve in Naperville for the past two years. "Our religious beliefs are reflected in how we treat each other and all living things – the old 'we all live downstream' theory," he says.

Dredze is also involved in a possible start-up of a Chicago chapter of the national organization Coalition of the Envir-onment and Jewish Life (COEJL), which he feels would enable individuals to extend their reach by taking advantage of educational opportunities and tools provided by the organization.

Steve Perkins is founder and co-director of Faith in Place, formerly named the Interreligious Sustainability Project. Faith in Place grew out of a publication, "One Creation, One People, One Place," which was written by a committee of individuals who were Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Unitarian Universalist, Bahá'í, and Buddhist. "We pray in different languages and we express our deepest commitments in different religious terms," their mission statement reads. "But we share a place on this planet – the area at the southernmost tip of Lake Michigan, around the great human settlement called Chicago." Within its pages is a call for regional sustainability – a challenge to act with the knowledge that everything is interdependent and that we must "use our gifts responsibly as citizens, not as owners, of Creation."

Perkins, who has been a political and environmental

activist for most of his 60 years, says there's a different tenor in the Faith in Place organization that doesn't exist in secular organizations. "If your passion for caring for the world around you stems from your personal spirituality, participation in a strictly environmental organization doesn't allow you to fully express your reason for being there," he notes. "Faith in Place offers permission to share greater depth around issues you care about."

More than 100 individuals, representing nearly 70 congregations throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, participate in one of seven regional Faith in Place "circles." These people are members of Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Bahá'í, Unitarian Universalist, Buddhist, Sikh, Zoro-astrian, and Ifa (an East African animist tradition) congregations. Circles exist in Austin, County Line, DuPage County, Evanston, Humboldt Park, Oak Park, and Hyde Park, and each group determines its own projects, which range from advocacy on public transportation, affordable housing, and energy policy to seed planting at habitat restoration workdays. Circle members educate neighbors and local businesses about illumination pollution from night lighting, and help coordinate and promote farmers' markets. The County Line circle even built a labyrinth, a circular, gridlike walking path surrounded by native plants, which will become a seed source for prairie restorations.

Photo: Ron Dahlborg

Schulenberg Prairie at the Morton Arboretum. Restoration as resurrection.

The Humboldt Park circle chose an urban agriculture theme. One of their programs is called From the Ground Up/*De la Tierra Para Arriba*, in which congregations from the Episcopal Church of the Advent, Nuestra Señora de las Americas, Bethel Lutheran Church, and San Lucas UCC Church make boxes for worm composting. They also grow organic vegetables and are planning to start a system to raise food fish in indoor pools.

Clare Butterfield says, "I find it irresistible to spend time with the Humboldt Park kids in the worm farms and gardens. I've seen statistics about their school dropout rates and low reading levels, and I see how beautiful and smart and curious they are. I know the numbers aren't intrinsic to these kids. I take it for granted that the natural world is a wondrous and astonishing place, but these kids wouldn't know it if someone didn't share the experience with them."

She adds, "I love working in a setting that's based on the positive assumption that people have the capacity to act for the highest good and will do the right thing if they are informed about the consequences of their choices."

Sister Bolger makes similar observations about the people who participate in The Well programs. The organization is committed to a mission of "unity, in communion with God and all creation." In striving to promote an ecologically sustainable and socially just world, The Well's programs include workshops, concerts, retreats, and creative approaches through art, music, and labyrinth-walking to foster awareness of our spiritual connection to this Great Lakes bioregion.

Without this positive motivation, says Ficca of CPWR, people will never fully respond at the level required to heal the environment. "Sharing doomsday data is not motivational," he says. "As alarming as the facts might be, they paralyze us. Unless we recover some sense of sacredness about the creation in which we live, we won't be able to make it or ourselves whole again."

A Blip or a Trend?

So, are these just scattered examples of good works by several isolated groups of well-intentioned souls? Some group leaders detect an optimistic trend.

Perkins now hears the word "sustainability" from the pulpit of St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Evanston on a regular basis. He didn't used to. "It's as though an ethos has permeated the congregation," he says.

In the three years that Butterfield has been organizing the Faith in Place circles, both the number of congregations and the number of individuals participating within each congregation have grown. When the County Line circle hosted a labyrinth-building day in April at the Sisters of St. Joseph ministry in LaGrange, the event drew 60 people from eight congregations. And Dredze says it's a lot easier now to find a Tu B'Shvat seder to attend than it was a few years ago.

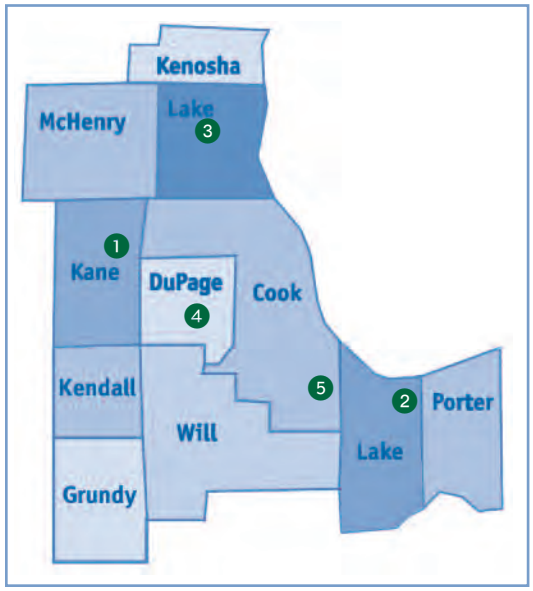
As for Sister Bolger, she says, "We can't worry about numbers. We are seeing real people whose hearts are changed because of their faith." And with their hearts, Chicago Wilderness.

For links to organizations listed in this article, see chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/winter2003/faith.html. The Biodiversity Project has just published Ethics for a Small Planet: A Communications Handbook on the Ethical and

Into the Wild

OUR GUIDE TO THE WILD SIDE

Photo: Joe Nowak



1. CAMPTON FOREST PRESERVE – Kane County
2. DEEP RIVER COUNTY PARK – Lake County, IN
3. MCDONALD WOODS FOREST PRESERVE – Lake County
4. EGERMANN WOODS FOREST PRESERVE – DuPage County
5. WAMPUM LAKE WOODS FOREST PRESERVE – Cook County

Maps: Lynda Wallis

CAMPTON FOREST PRESERVE – Kane County

Directions

Campton Forest Preserve is on Town Hall Road in Wasco, Illinois. From I-90 west of Elgin, exit at Randall Rd. Follow Randall Rd south to Rte 64. At the intersection of Randall Rd and Rte 64, turn right/west. Continue on Rte 64 five miles to Town Hall Rd. Turn left/south on Town Hall Rd. Campton Forest Preserve is the first drive on the left/east.

A blanket of fresh snow transforms Campton Forest Preserve into a sparkling wonderland – a delight to explore on a clear winter day. Rolling morainal hills, fringed by forest, frame long, lovely vistas.

Trails originating from the knoll just beyond the parking lot lead to roughly seven miles of mowed and dirt paths throughout the property. This feature makes Campton an ideal destination for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding, and hiking. In 1972, the Forest Preserve District of Kane County (FPDKC) bought the 305-acre site, which stretches more than a mile west to east. "Because of its shape – an elongated rectangle – Campton Forest Preserve seems larger than it is," observed Valerie DePrez, FPDKC nature programs supervisor.

To explore the perimeter of the property, head east down the hill past an oak-hickory woodland on the left. Red, white, and bur oaks, along with shagbark hickories, thrive in the gravelly moraine. In March and April, red trillium, toothwort, and spring beauty will carpet the woodland floor. Further down the path is a pond, encircled by a thick stand of wetland plants including cattails and river bulrush. In spring, this area attracts great blue herons seeking an appetizer of amphibians. The trills from troupes of western chorus frogs, green frogs, and American tree toads will resonate across the water. But today, except for the creaking ice on the pond, silence rules.

In a field beyond the wetland, clumps of American plum trees flourish. These woody copses provide cover for birds and forage for gnawing mammals. A year ago the district, following its habitat restoration plan, hired a contractor to clear brush and invasive trees from 40 acres in this area.

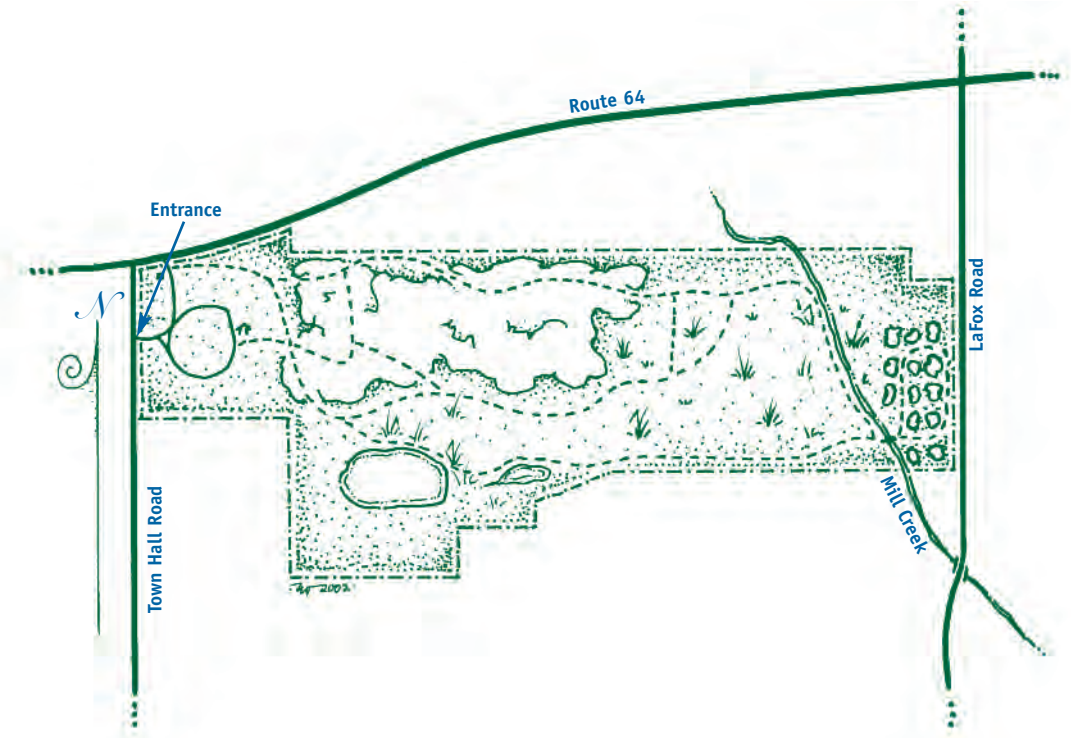
Near the eastern boundary is a re-created prairie of roughly 50 acres. In 1986, assisted by a $2,800 grant from the Kane-DuPage Soil and Water Conservation District, the FPDKC initiated the transformation of cropland into prairie. "It's the second oldest re-created prairie in the district. Seed harvested from the prairie at Fermilab was sown in bands across the field," noted Drew Ullberg, FPDKC habitat restoration manager. More than 50 species of native grasses, forbs, and sedges grace this large field. On this day in early winter, the frigid fronds of big bluestem ("turkey foot") sound like a sigh when they brush a dry stalk of prairie dock. Clinging to the delicate, swaying stems of tall coreopsis, goldfinches become "bungee birds" as they pluck seeds from the expired flowers.

Turning north, the trail parallels Mill Creek, which bisects the east end of the preserve near LaFox Road. Soon the path turns west and winds through a stand of oaks and hickories. As the path emerges from the woodland, the shelter and parking area come into view.

At Campton Forest Preserve, horses, bicycles, and snowmobiles are welcome, but they must stay on the designated trails and avoid the preserve when the ground is soft – especially in the spring. Leashed pets also are welcome.

The fireplace at one end of the open-sided shelter allows sledders to warm themselves between downhill runs. Enclosed pit toilets are at the opposite end of the shelter. For information about volunteering for ongoing habitat restoration workdays, call Shelly Brown, FPDKC volunteer coordinator, at (847) 741-9798.

— Ann W. Davis



DEEP RIVER COUNTY PARK – Lake County, IN

A cross-country skiing or snowshoeing expedition to Deep River County Park offers an opportunity to combine outdoor activity in a large, diverse hardwood forest with discoveries about the economic and social history of Northwest Indiana.

Long before steel and oil moguls claimed most of the Lake Michigan shore in Lake County, Indiana, Potawatomi Indians set up summer encampments along Deep River, according to Joanna Shearer, the park's historical program coordinator. When European settlers arrived in the 1830s, the river became a magnet for business enterprises. Fortunately, it was valued mostly as a source of power for such relatively benign establishments as grist and saw mills. Now those are nearly gone, with one notable exception: the brick gristmill built in 1876 by Nathan Wood. He built the mill at the site of an earlier mill established by his father, John, arguably the county's first industrialist. Today, it stands as a prominent landmark near the entrance to Deep River County Park, which has grown steadily over time to become 1,400 sprawling acres.

From its source near Crown Point, Indiana, Deep River wanders across Lake County before it enters the park. From there, it flows north past Hobart — where it becomes truly deep — into the Little Calumet and finally Lake Michigan. It has been largely freed from commercial demands and today serves mainly recreational purposes.

A broad, generally flat trail follows the meandering river for almost two miles. The trail passes through a woodland rich with native species, including substantial cottonwoods and sycamores, basswood, swamp white oak, sweetgum, shagbark and bitternut hickory, and Kentucky coffee trees.

More adventurous skiers or hikers may want to cross Ainsworth Road where a rougher section of trail continues along the river to an overlook. A field adjoining the picnic area is accessible to those who prefer open ground.

Beginning February 8, park staffers will tap the maple trees and collect sap. On the second and third weekends in March, the woodfired evaporator in the sugar shack will be going full tilt. The syrup produced there is for sale, a blessing to those who regard it as nature's tastiest nectar.

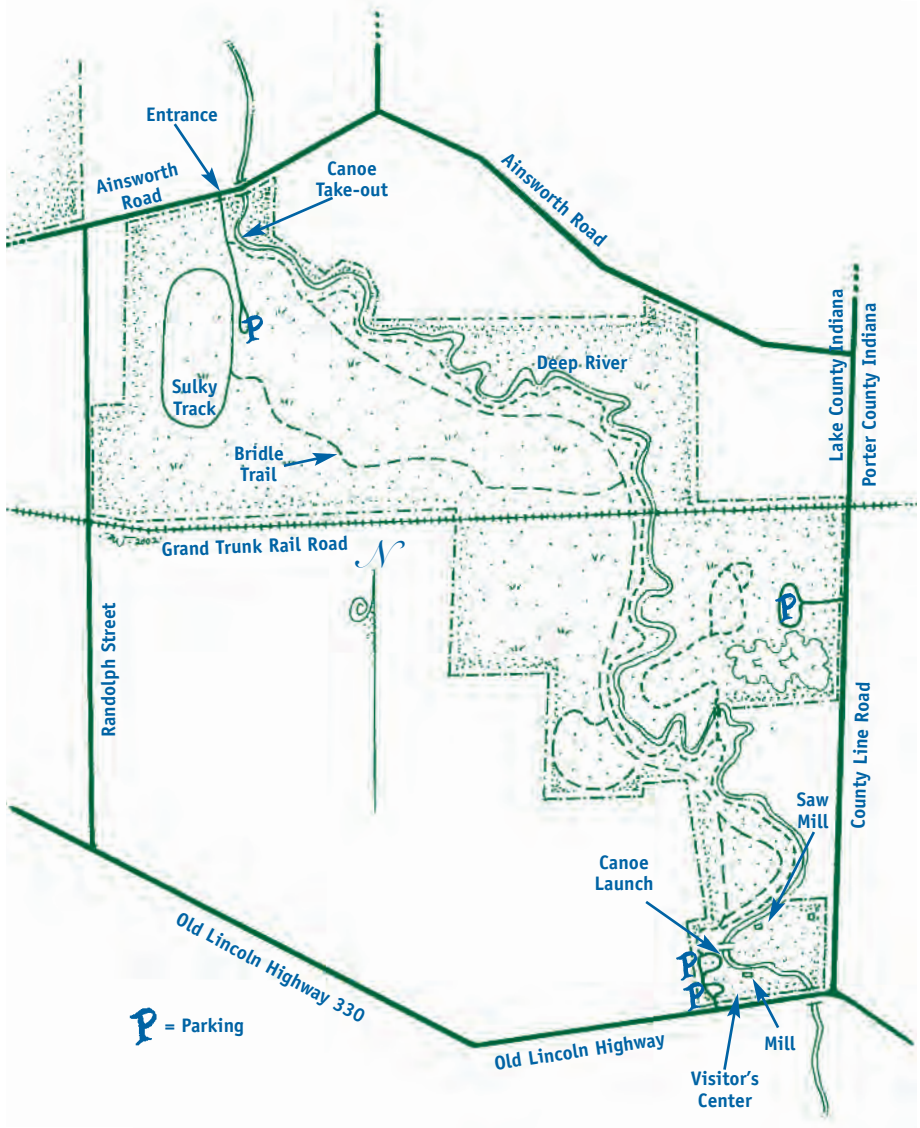
A few weeks later, spring beauties, trillium, May apples, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and bloodroot appear at Deep River. In late summer and fall, goldenrod, sunflowers, and especially white and purple asters are abundant in sunnier spots along the trail. New waves of bird species appear each season, including warblers, scarlet tanagers, Baltimore orioles, wood thrushes, Acadian flycatchers, and barred owls. Spring also brings the Deep River Grinders, who play vintage baseball as prescribed by the 33 rules in effect in 1858, taking on teams from across the Midwest at their home field in the park.

Deep River County Park is open from 7 a.m. until dusk. Pit toilets are available at two locations, but no indoor restrooms are open in winter. For more information, call (219) 947-1958 or (219) 945-0543.

— Warren Buckler

DIRECTIONS

Deep River County Park is east of I-65 and north of U.S. 30 near the Lake/Porter county line. Follow U.S. 30 to State Rd 51 and turn north. At first stop sign, turn right/east and follow Old Lincoln Highway 2.5 miles to park entrance.



Weekend Explorer

McDonald Woods Forest Preserve, Lake County *by Gail Goldberger*

A wide-open scenic landscape greets visitors to McDonald Woods, located between the towns of Millburn and Lindenhurst in northern Lake County. The trails at these woods are comfortably wide and gently sloping, good for side-by-side walking and excellent for cross-country skiing.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Arthur B. McDonald excavated three large lakes and planted extensive pine forests in an effort to improve wildlife habitat. Though not indigenous, the pine trees do attract wildlife. The Lake County Forest Preserves (LCFP) acquired this property in the 1970s and expanded its holdings by purchasing adjacent farm fields. Today, 304 acres offer a pleasant escape from city and suburban environs.

Restrooms and a pump for drinking water mark the start of the 3.5-mile crushed-stone trail. On one side of the trail, successional fields naturally seeded with dogwood, ash, and sumac have replaced farmland. On the other side, Queen Anne's lace, goldenrod, and thistle have taken over where beans and corn once grew.

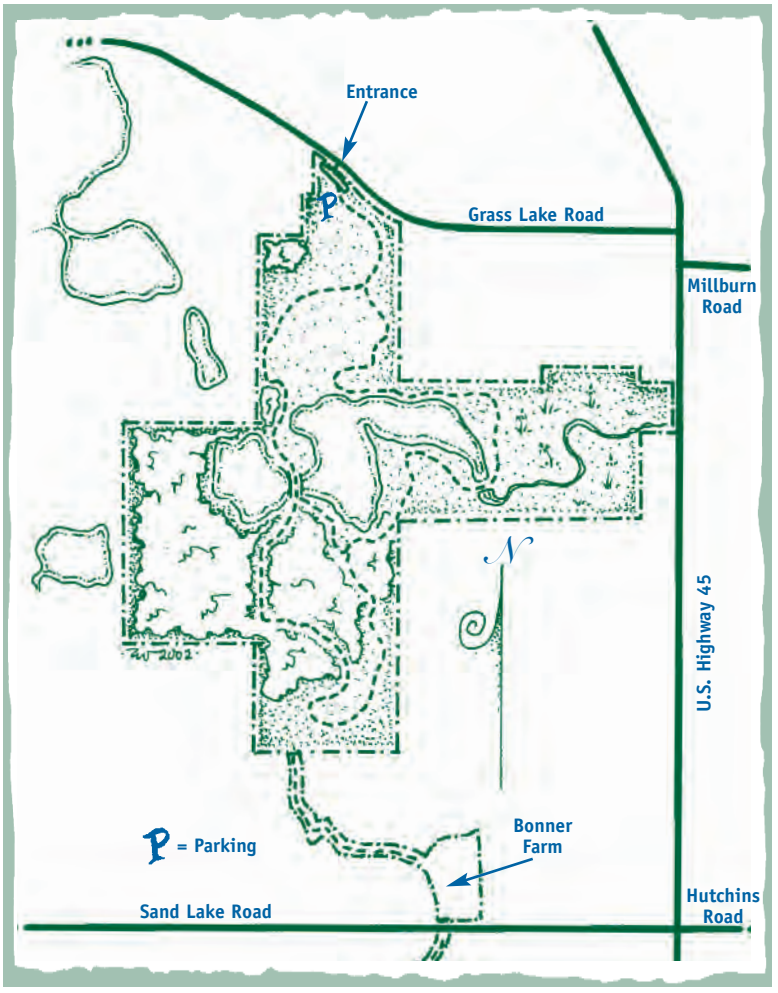
About a half mile down the trail lies a small remnant prairie that volunteers are expanding by seeding new areas. Indian grass, big bluestem, rattlesnake master, wild quinine, and cat briar grow here amidst shagbark hickory trees. LCFP Restoration Ecologist Ken Klick plucks a dried gray-headed coneflower. "Smell this," he says, and I breathe in its pleasant, pungent aroma. There are a few private homes just east of the trail. Otherwise, nothing impedes the view and no civilized sounds penetrate.

Wildlife abounds in this preserve. Hedgerows of pine and oak harbor deer, coyote, and fox. Fifteen-year-old shrub thickets attract the rare blue-winged warbler and yellow-breasted chat. Juncos and white-throated sparrows overwinter from Canada, and the northern shrike has been sighted here.

Three connected ponds stud McDonald Woods. Small, wood-plank water control structures keep these shallow basins filled. Two state-endangered birds, the yellow-headed blackbird and the pied-billed grebe, can be found here. Great egrets and great blue herons, muskrats, and snapping turtles also enjoy these ponds and are often visible from the trail.

Rounding the south end of the trail, a stand of wild raspberry bushes – a deep magenta in the fall – line the westernmost pond. To the south is a one-mile wood-chip trail that loops through more woods.

We walk north, cross over a bridge, and see signs of beaver. On a late winter's afternoon, great horned or long-eared owls may roost in the pines.



As we circle north, we enter oak woodlands. Weeping willow and black walnut trees line the path. The ground here is littered with hundreds of dark yellow walnuts.

As part of a recent restoration effort, volunteers are clearing buckthorn from several acres near the trail. We stop to pinch pennyroyal, also fragrant, and view grassy Pennsylvania sedge springing up in the shade of oak and hickory trees. From May through August, geraniums and trillium grow here too.

Back on the trail, we walk through a wooded ravine cut by an ephemeral stream with bur oak, basswood, and more hickory. As we emerge onto the last few steps of trail, a ruby-crowned kinglet, its high-pitched "zzz" sounding like the tiniest of saws, calls from some aspens.

Hiking and cross-country skiing are allowed on all 4.5 miles of trail – biking only on the stone trail. Leashed dogs are allowed, and there are picnic tables throughout the preserve. In season, fishing is allowed, with restrictions. The preserve is open year-round from 6:30 a.m. to sunset.

To join volunteers on restoration workdays at McDonald Woods or nearby Sun Lake

Directions

From I-94, head west on Rte 132 to Rte 45. Turn north/right and follow Rte 45 to Grass Lake Road. Go west/left on Grass Lake Road and continue for about .5 miles. The entrance to McDonald Woods is on the left side of the road.

Forest Preserve, call Tom Smith at (847) 968-3329. All ages are welcome.

Roaming

In one of the fastest-growing counties in Illinois, it is heartening to see so many green Forest Preserve signs proclaiming land obtained from "Another Lake County Referendum." Driving north on Route 45 past the turnoff to McDonald Woods, visitors will find **Ethel's Woods** and **Raven Glen Forest Preserve**. **Fourth Lake Preserve and Fen** is south and west of McDonald Woods on Route 132. Additional signs dot the roadsides with preserves and acreage yet unnamed. All of these areas are newly acquired and will be open to the public in years to come.

Due south of McDonald Woods on West Sand Lake Road is **Bonner Farm**, the oldest farmstead in the region. Settled by Scottish immigrants in 1842, this expansive farmstead consists of hay and dairy barns, storage silos, a pump house, a chicken coop, a smoke house, and a carpentry barn. Currently under renovation and not yet open to the public, it will be a working farm when finished. Visit the LCFP Web site for information on future events at Bonner Farm, www.lcfpd.org, or call (847) 968-3400 to receive a copy of Lake County's free quarterly newsletter, *Horizons*.

A hiking trail running south from McDonald Woods to Bonner Farm is under construction and will become part of the 35-mile Millennium Trail. This longer trail will connect **Lakewood Forest Preserve** in Wauconda to the **Des Plaines River Trail** in Wadsworth. The first three miles are open and extend from Holly Road in Mundelein to Lakewood FP.

On Grand Avenue (Route 32) near Lake Villa is the Forest Preserve's **Duck Farm-Dog Exercise Area**, 350 acres of woodland and prairie, including a 48-acre fenced dog exercise area with hiking trails. A duck farm on a small lake within this preserve was once home to 50,000 ducks. There is still a variety of waterfowl and wildlife in this preserve, a section of which connects to nearby Sand Lake. The dog exercise area is open daily, 6:30 a.m. to sunset. From April 1 to October 31, the area opens at 11 a.m. on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

More Daytripping

Just east of McDonald Woods, at the intersection of Route 45 and West Grass Lake Road, is the town of **Millburn**. A few small antique shops hug the four-cornered stop, and the Millburn General Store, a two-story brick store built there in 1856 by the original Scottish settler, is on the national register of historic places.

The landscape in this part of Lake County has always been dominated by small lakes, formed when blocks of ice melted into potholes left by glacial debris. No fewer than 167 pothole lakes survive here. Though small – their mean size is 22 acres – they often form the centerpiece of towns like Fox Lake, Grayslake, and Lake Villa.

Dubbed "Gateway to the Lakes Region," Lake Villa, south and west of McDonald Woods, is the next-to-last stop on the Antioch Metra line. Across the street from the train station is **Lehmann Park**, named after one of the founders of this area. The large and sprawling park with playground fronts Cedar Lake. A few small bar-and-grill restaurants line the main street.

The **Lake Villa Library** is on the south side of Grand Avenue just west of Route 83. Further west on Route 132 are the **Cultural Center of the Danube-Swabians** and the **American Aid Society of German Descendants**.

The village of Antioch is located north of Route 132 on Route 83. Antioch is restaurant-rich and holds some cultural attractions, an inn, and a family-run motel.

The Antioch Fine Arts Foundation, (847) 838-2274, www.hrqhome.northstarnet.org/afaf, 983 Main Street, is open Thursday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m., or by appointment. The Foundation is a center for interaction among northern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin artists. At the same address, The Gallery houses a rotating array of Foundation member artwork, ranging in price from $35 to $3,200, in addition to hosting classes and workshops. Admission for viewing art is free.

A community theatre group has shows year-round in Antioch at the **PM & L Theatre**. Call (847) 395-3433 for their schedule of performances.

Foraging

A few eateries are located on the way to Lake Villa, as Sand Lake Road becomes Grand Avenue (Route 132). **Grande Jakes**, (847) 265-1411, at 2122 Grand Avenue in Linden Plaza offers old-fashioned homestyle Mexican cooking in a family atmosphere ($1.50-$14.95). Their extensive menu includes Fish Taco Fridays – $1.50 all day. Open daily from 10:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. **Rigby's Family Restaurant**, (847) 356-4440, at 1910 Grand Avenue serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner ($6-$15), with carry-out service.

In Antioch, a pleasant restaurant with fine American and European cuisine as well as French impressionist paintings on the walls is **JT's Roadhouse**, (847) 838-2015, at 1500 Main Street, about .5 miles south of 173 on Route 83. JT's offers soups, salads, burgers, and a full range of entrees ($6.95-$17.95). Closed Mondays.

Another **Grande Jakes**, (847) 838-4491, is at the corner of Routes 173 and 83 in Antioch. You can find German-American cuisine at **Mark's Wunder-Bar Restaurant**, (847) 395-8282, 40805 N. Route 83. Sausages, schnitzels, duck, schweine hacksen, and beer/wine specials are priced $12-$30. Closed Tuesdays.

Bedding Down

The Best Western Regency Inn, (847) 395-3606, is at the intersection of Routes 173 and 83 in Antioch. Rates range from $81.50-$117.50 per night. Children and youth under 17 are free.

Also in Antioch on Route 173 just east of 83 is the **Sunset Motel** (847) 395-1339. With 16 rooms (one with a new hot tub, six with kitchenettes), rates range from $50-$90 per night. Ask about special holiday rates.

For details about Weekend Explorer destinations, visit chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/winter2003/weekend-explorer.html

Events

Photo Exhibition

As the most recent century turned, 60 African-American photographers from Chicago were commissioned to capture events in their communities across eight subject areas: the arts, the streets, brothers, sisters, families, the next generation, challenges, and faith. Over 180 black-and-white photos in this traveling exhibit were on display this year at O'Hare International Airport, Museum of Contemporary Art, South Side Community Center, UIC, and now in Lake County.

"The Journey: The Next 100 Years" runs through January 12, 2003, at three facilities: Greenbelt Cultural Center in North Chicago, (847) 689-1600; Independence Grove Visitors Center in Libertyville, (847) 968-3499; and Lake County Discovery Museum in Wauconda, (847) 968-3400. Call for dates and times.

EGERMANN WOODS FOREST PRESERVE – DuPage County

Directions

Take I-355 to 63rd St/Hobson Rd, and exit onto Hobson Rd west. Take Hobson west to College Rd. The preserve is on the northeast corner of Hobson and College Rds in Lisle Township.

The 92-acre Egermann Woods Forest Preserve is one of the more modest parcels owned by the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. Purchased in 1974 from a housing developer and named for a previous owner, the preserve is scarcely developed. There is no parking lot, and the 1.3 miles of mowed turf trails follow the same paths used more than 200 years ago by Indians, and later by European farmers. With 270 native plant species, however, Egermann Woods has been the focus of many significant district restoration efforts.

The main mowed trail starts at the north end of the preserve, at a subdivision off Old College Road, and runs south to Hobson Road. On this trail, chipmunks and an occasional coyote skirt the edge of the 75-acre dry mesic forest that grows along the east and northwest sections of Egermann Woods. Few ancient oaks and hickories remain, a testament to the popularity of plank roads in the 1840s, but numerous new elms, hickory, and oaks mark 30 years of replanting efforts.

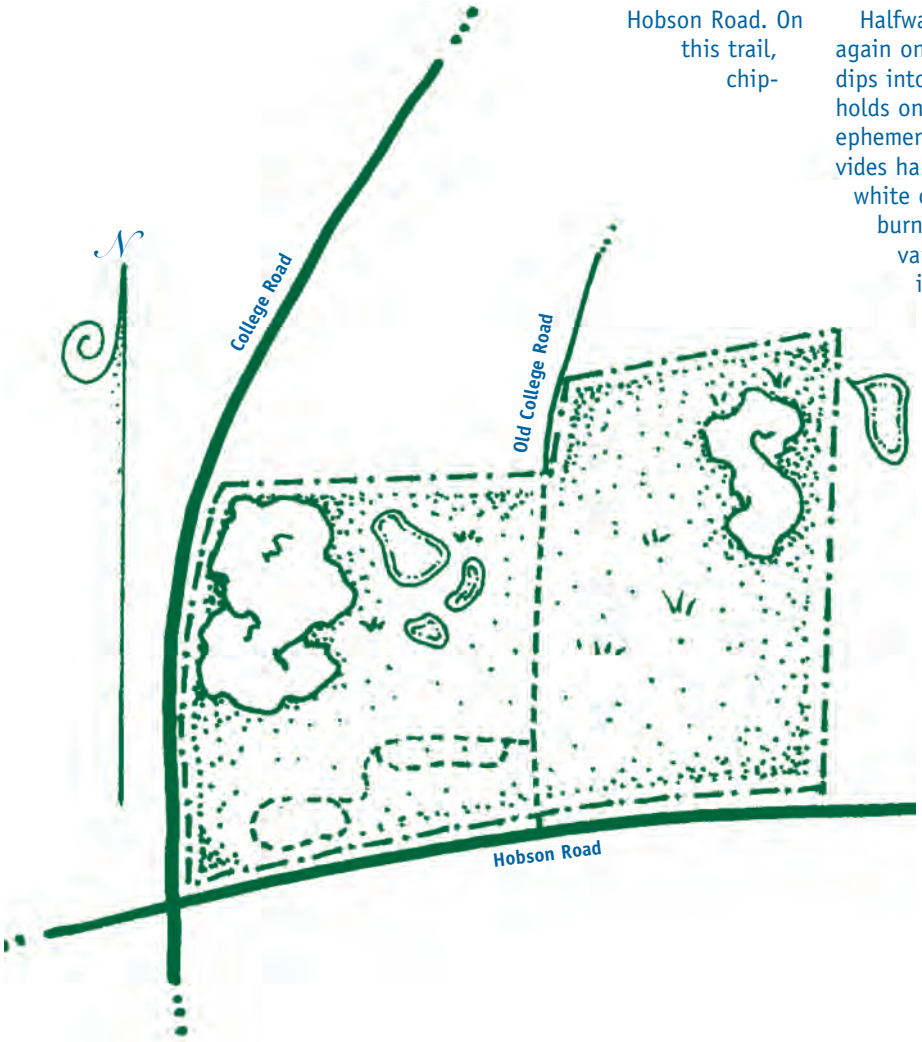
In the northeastern part of the forest, last year's foliage of dormant elm-leaved goldenrod, aster, Jacob's ladder, Solomon's seal, hyacinth, and columbine pattern the forest floor. District staff and volunteers have been managing this section for more than eight years, removing invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle, herbiciding the stumps, then scattering new seeds.

Halfway down this trail, again on the east, the grove dips into a depression that holds one of the preserve's ephemeral ponds and provides habitat for swamp white oaks. Controlled burns help maintain a variety of flora here, including purple Joe-Pye weed, bottlebrush grass, and white snakeroot.

As Hobson Road comes into view, a second mowed trail appears on the right. At this intersection, the calls of chickadees, downy woodpeckers, and the occasional white-breasted nuthatch seem to compete for attention. The trail to the right leads to an immature forest of box elder and elm in the southwest corner of the preserve. There, the weather-worn foundation of a barn and rows of Osage orange along College Road are nearly all that remain of an old farmstead. Today, an open field bounded by the looped trails brims with reed canary grass (a problem species) and more desirable, native, reintroduced flora such as big bluestem, Indian grass, and cream gentian. A buffer zone of trees and smaller woody plants stretches along Hobson to the south and is known to be home to a great horned owl whose well-camouflaged young have been spotted by late-winter hikers.

Like other DuPage County forest preserves, Egermann Woods is open from one hour after sunrise to one hour after sunset. Hikers, joggers, and cross-country skiers are welcome, as are pet owners with their leashed dogs. Additional preserve and volunteer workday information can be found at www.dupageforest.com or by calling the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County at (630) 933-7200.

— Jayne Bohner



WAMPUM LAKE WOODS FOREST PRESERVE – Cook County

Though its location and geology have periodically placed it in the sights of human industry, these qualities have also made 375-acre Wampum Lake Woods an unusual and interesting place to explore. Springs flowing through dolomitic limestone once carried salt up from underground deposits left by a prehistoric inland sea. The salt is mostly gone from the woods, but seepage springs still crisscross acres of forest floor, most noticeably during spring.

The sandy soils around Wampum Lake Woods foster trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and other plants uncommon in this region. Skunk cabbage, wild geraniums, cinnamon ferns, phlox, and toothwort scatter color among the trees in warmer weather. Paul Strand, a local naturalist, observes that as temperatures drop, "Sandy soils seem to make the fall colors richer, more colorful." A marsh nestles against the northeast corner of Wampum Lake, but it is dominated by cattails and the stately but invasive *Phragmites*.

In late fall and winter, geese and mallard ducks tread the lake water. Loons in their winter colors, eagles, and osprey migrate through the preserve in fall. In spring, birders may spot the red-breasted merganser, the great blue heron, and many warbler species. The yellow-rumped warbler is a particularly dependable visitor to Wampum Lake.

According to Strand, Wampum Lake is one of the best working archaeological sites in the Chicago area. Archaeologists have found human artifacts that date back to the last glaciation, 10,000 years ago. Among these are fish remains, scraps of rock from arrowhead production, and evidence that a long house once occupied the site. Archaeologists have also discovered several shallow pits, six to ten feet in diameter, that they believe Indians may have used to process salt, possibly for use in trade. Since it is still being studied, the site is off-limits to the public.

Wampum Lake itself is a human artifact of a more modern sort. In the late 1950s, the Illinois Toll Road Commission removed tons of earth from the preserve for use as fill for I-294. The project created a large pit, which filled with water and now attracts shoreline fishing for such species as largemouth bass and bluegill. The toll road, only a few hundred feet from the preserve, continues to affect the area. Some level of background noise is a frequent companion on a visit to Wampum Lake.

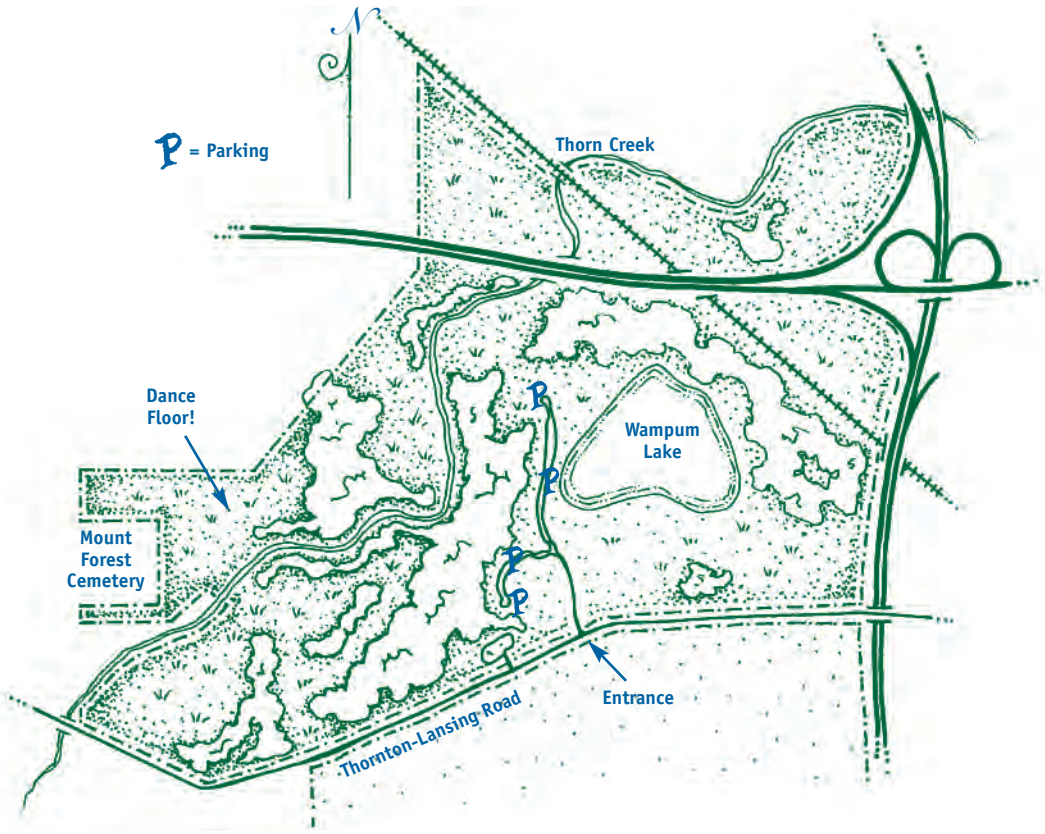
Cross-country skiing is fast becoming the most popular winter pastime in the region, and the Wampum Lake area is a good spot for this. And when ice on the lake gets thick, the hardy come here to ice fish.

Visitors to this area may want to stop by the Sand Ridge Nature Center, (708) 868-0606, to pick up the Forest Preserve District's Thorn Creek Division map. The map includes adjacent sites, including Zanders Woods. Boating, swimming, and wading in Wampum Lake are not allowed. Snowmobiles are prohibited, but dogs on leashes are welcome. To volunteer for workdays at Wampum, contact Land Management Volunteer Coordinator Bill Koenig at (708) 771-1334.

— Susan Larys

DIRECTIONS

Wampum Lake is situated between the towns of Thornton and Lansing. Take I-94 (Bishop Ford Freeway), exit at 159th St east. The entrance to the Sand Ridge Nature Center is on the north side of 159th, on Paxton Avenue a short distance from the expressway. Continue east on 159th to Torrence. Go south/right on Torrence, over the Kingery expressway, to Thornton Lansing Rd. Go west/right on Thornton Lansing, past a cemetery and over the Bishop Ford Freeway. The entrance to Zanders Woods will be on the left, but a right turn will lead you to Wampum Lake.



Natural Events

Here's what's debuting on nature's stage in Chicago Wilderness by Jack MacRae

WINTER 2003

Early Winter

Hush

It seems cardinals should learn to go to bed early and be quiet. Their noisy, pre-roost maneuvering – in addition to their bright color – most certainly attracts the attention of evening hunters. One local expert discovered that the pellets of long-eared owls contain cardinal beaks more often than all other avian prey species combined.

C'est la vie

Those clever Cornell University ornithologists predict a 0 to 5 percent decline in regional sightings of evening grosbeaks for the next two years. They're not too worried, though, as these birds are well known for their years of irregular irruptions. On occasion, a few flocks of these handsome, black-and-gold finches descend from the north and might be seen hanging out in maples and box elder trees. Some lucky folks may have evening grosbeaks show up at their sunflower feeders. But they won't stay around long. They usually split for their breeding grounds in the northern pine forests before the snow melts.

Middle Winter

Real Big Fish

There are thousands of lake trout eggs just off the west end of the Port of Indiana breakwater in southern Lake Michigan. The four-millimeter eggs were laid during the fall and will develop slowly in the cold water over the next few months. They will begin to hatch toward the end of winter. Isn't it nice to know that more and more of these massive, majestic fish live deep under the waves?

Our Mounds

I know of a 1930s-era map that purports to show a prehistoric effigy mound, in the shape of a 40-foot-long serpent, along the east bank of the Des Plaines River. I may try and look for it this winter. Rumor has it there used to be a large bear effigy, also along the Des Plaines, near Park Ridge. This might not interest everybody, but the leafless season is a great time to explore the thousand-year-old mounds in the area. While the locations of many mounds and earthworks are known only to archaeologists and are off-limits to the public, some of them, such as Winfield Mounds in DuPage County and Will County's Oakwood, Fischer, and Briscoe Mounds, are not difficult to locate and are public-friendly. The mysterious prehistoric earthworks at Higginbotham Woods east of Joliet are also fun to explore. The mounds are another fascinating piece of our cultural history.

Small Faces

In the winter of 1949, a storm covered the northwest suburbs with ice. Seeking refuge, a pair of shrews entered a Palatine garage. One was a masked shrew, a nervous, mouse-like insectivore typically found in forests. The other diminutive creature was a pygmy shrew. This is significant for two reasons. First, the *Guinness Book of World Records* rates pygmy shrews as among the smallest mammals of the world, certainly the smallest mammal in North America – they weigh less than a dime. Second, this particular pygmy shrew was the first of only three pygmy shrews ever found in Illinois.

Chicago Wilderness is at the extreme southern edge of the pygmy shrew's range, but they're rarely encountered anywhere else, either. Their habitat is old boreal forest, flatwoods, and mossy bogs, where they root around in the leaf litter – and garages – for worms and insect larvae.

Late Winter

Days of Cordage

During a previous life, I spent many late winter days harvesting basswood bark. My choice spot was from a grove of saplings that were growing next to a small pond near Plum Creek in Will County. Bright, sunny days when the sap was rising were the best times to tear long, wide strips of bark off the young trees. The smooth, tan inner bark was then separated from the outer bark, soaked, and plaited into a durable, nearly unbreakable rope.

In late winter, basswood saplings are readily identifiable with their smooth, gray bark and bright red terminal buds. Basswood trees are common in moist wooded areas.

Hoo are you?

Barred owls aren't found in every town, like great horned owls are, but they certainly seem to like Park Forest. During January, their distinctive nine-note call is often heard coming from the lovely, forested banks of Thorn Creek in the predawn hours. Barred owls inhabit wooded river valleys and bottomland forests. Despite their large size – they're nearly two feet long – barred owls have relatively small talons. They dine chiefly on small rodents, leaving rabbits to the big-foots.

Strah Poll

Some naturalists, myself included, like to point out that late winter and early spring is a dangerous time for skunks. We paint a vivid picture of single-minded male skunks, still groggy from their winter downtime, stumbling in front of cars while in search of a mate. It made sense to me. And I certainly thought I saw more dead skunks in March than in other months. But then I learned of the Strah Poll, named after Cathy Strah, a Department of Transportation employee who began recording the roadkill picked up by her crews in Mentor, Ohio. Crunching three years of data, the Strah Poll indicates that late summer and early fall is a far more dangerous time for most of our woodland mammals, including skunks. Another flattened-fauna researcher who uses the name Dr. Splatt corroborates the poll's results. Obviously, this is a research area that seems to be picking up.

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Dave Green: Eden's piano man

Photo: Courtesy of Dave Green

On the South Side of Chicago, squeezed between a railroad track and an alley, lies a scrap of long-neglected land, once an illegal dump site but now a blossoming urban oasis. Nurtured by the volunteer efforts and contributions of community members, students, and church youth groups, Eden Place Nature Center also has another benefactor – well-known Chicago musician Dave Green.

Dave stands as one of the nature center's staunchest supporters, though he's admittedly unfamiliar with ecology. "I don't know a tulip from a rose," he laughs, flashing a broad smile.

"I just do what I can," he modestly explains, shifting his lean frame and lifting his long hands skyward. And that, in fact, is quite a bit. Dave and his wife LaVerne are the largest financial benefactors of both Eden Place Nature Center and its parent organization, Fuller Park Community Development (FPCD). Twice annually for the past ten years, Dave has donated his services to draw guests to fundraising dinners and an annual Gospel Fest. Tapping into his vast network of contacts, Dave recruits fellow musicians to donate their services and join him on stage.

Known as "The Chicago Piano Man," Dave is an accomplished self-taught jazz pianist and vocalist with a long career performing in Chicago-area venues, from the Civic Opera House to piano bars, shopping malls, and restaurants such as Toulouse and Palette's. He's toured the country with the Ebony Fashion Fair and performed at the Smithsonian Institute. Clad in tuxedo and trademark bowler, the 74-year-old musician entertains audiences with a repertoire of over 2,000 songs. Only a less-than-straight nose and an athletic grace betray his first occupation – boxing. Before becoming a professional musician, Dave boxed for 11 years, fighting over 70 bouts and serving as Sugar Ray Robinson's sparring partner.

Residents of the far South Side, Dave and LaVerne are driven by their faith to help give people a hope in life. They share that passion with Michael Howard, a fellow member of Grove Heights Baptist Church and executive director of FPCD.

Eden Place, begun as an attempt to bring nature into a community without much habitat, has grown into much more. It serves as an outdoor learning area, a community gathering place, and a visible indication of community renewal.

"It's something fresh, something that's never been done before," declares Dave. "We're making a new community with new ideas."

Planted in soil paid for by Dave, the re-created prairie and restored savanna at Eden Place offer school children opportunities to learn about their heritage and the environment. The DuSable Trail winds past the Mighty Oak story tree, a Che-Ca-Gou American Indian wigwam, and Hope Mound, a place of inspiration and reconciliation constructed by high school church groups from the largely black Fuller Park neighborhood and the nearby, largely white community of Canaryville.

A capital campaign will raise funds to create a wetland planned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a new multipurpose community center to house FPCD and provide a permanent home for Eden Place. Seeing the impact Eden Place and FPCD have on the community, Dave is pleased to support their expansion. "That's something I got an urge to do. I like to see something happening," he says.

Two summer fundraisers held at Eden Place have recently pulled the community together, an accomplishment in a neighborhood where crime can keep people indoors. Struck by her husband's zeal in playing a game at the Family Fun-Festival/Fashion Show, one young woman marveled, "I was raised in this community, and we've never had anything like this in Fuller Park."

The free Jazz Festival lured older residents with the promise of superb entertainment in a safe, local venue. Dave spearheaded entertainment, recruiting bassist Cecile Savage, drummer Michael Thompson, and saxophonist Ron Salter.

"Eden Place is part of the whole," explains Dave, referring to FPCD's other initiatives including housing counseling and development, adult tutoring, job training, racial reconciliation, lead pipe removal, and a resource center featuring computers, video production equipment, and a library. Dave helps here too, recruiting job training students, buying uniforms, donating books, giving motivational talks, and providing bus fare. But Dave's greatest contribution, according to Michael, is that "he has served as a surrogate father to many young men."

"A lot of people's lives have been changed by what's happening here," says Dave. Indeed, the work at Eden Place is healing lives as it heals the land.

– Cindy Mehallow

Prairie Vole: faithful highway engineer

Photo: Michael R. Jeffords

In this era of fast living and high divorce rates, the prairie vole is an inspiration to us all. But before you get inspired, perhaps you need to know the basic biology of *Microtus ochrogaster*. Voles (also called "meadow mice") are heavy-bodied grassland rodents. They have short fur, a short tail, and small, rounded ears. The fur on the prairie vole's back is blackish-brown, while the belly is yellow to reddish-tan. Its body is from three to five inches long, slightly larger than that of a mouse, while its tail is about one inch long.

The meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), a close relative of the prairie vole, can also be found in the grasslands of Chicago Wilderness. Although the two species can occupy the same habitat, the prairie vole tends to be found in drier areas than the meadow vole.

Vole populations tend to fluctuate widely depending upon environmental factors, but during periods of high population, voles can be the most common mammal on the prairie. They're prolific breeders: females can give birth within 60 days of their own birth and can have several litters of three or four young during their one-year lifespan.

Although both prairie and meadow voles make the most of their short lives by being avid breeders, they do so in strikingly different ways. The polygamous meadow vole lives on the "wild side," roaming readily from mate to mate. The prairie vole, on the other hand, is famously monogamous. When a male and female prairie vole mate, they tend to stay together through the good times and bad. Even if one partner dies, the other seldom seeks out a new mate. And the young join in on the family togetherness, too: they may stay around and help raise later siblings.

Voles maintain an extensive network of runways that can be found in most grassy fields by parting the grasses above. These tunnels through the grass and duff allow the vole to move, unnoticed by predators, between underground burrows and food sources. Look for a main runway route and many branching side routes. In winter, these miniature highway engineers continue to use their runways to tunnel through the snow. As the snow melts in spring, their thoroughfares can be the last snow remaining, icy tubes of safety snaking across the brown leaf litter.

Vole runways can be especially evident after a prairie fire when the floor of the "tunnel," compressed and often somewhat damp, remains unburned. Land managers and visitors occasionally see these long, winding paths of grass surrounded by the blackened burned areas.

It is rare to get a good look at a prairie vole, as they are always wary of predators. If disturbed, prairie voles readily speed down their grassy escape routes back to their underground burrows. They are generally more nocturnal (active at night) during hot weather and more diurnal (active during the day) when the weather is cold.

Have you ever seen a marsh hawk making slow, low loops over a field, hunting for food? Voles are one of its favorite foods, so it's likely that the hawk was looking for one. The vole has even been called the "Big Mac of the prairie" because it is just the right size for the marsh hawk to get the most energy for its hunting effort. Prairie voles aren't especially safe at night either, when the night shift of predators, including coyotes and short-eared owls, takes over.

Besides being a critical part of predators' diets, prairie voles are important grazers, feeding on grasses and forbs. They also loosen and aerate the prairie soil as they build their underground burrows. Sometimes we forget that prairies are more than just plants, and unseen animals such as the prairie vole are crucial to these complex networks.

— *Bill Glass*

Photo: Greg Neise

The compressed sides of vole tunnels often melt more slowly than surrounding snow.

Lichen researcher Rich Hyerczyk reported his recent Chicago region discoveries of lichens on "a deer bone, on rusted metal, on painted surfaces, and even on an old tire!"

Lichens: symbiotic mysteries

One of the greatest rewards of a nature hike is finding something you've never seen before. You may think that because you've traversed a favorite path or neighborhood street dozens of times, there is nothing new to discover. But if you are willing to think small, you will discover the world of lichens. Neither plants nor animals – they're part fungi and part algae – lichens fill an important role in Chicago Wilderness. Careful observers are most likely to notice them growing on trees, sidewalks, buildings, and rocks, but lichens can adapt to more unusual surfaces such as sandy soil, old shoes, and even glass.

"Whenever I teach classes, people are just amazed when I show them lichens on the sidewalk right under their feet," says Rich Hyerczyk, a machine designer and botanist who teaches classes for the Morton Arboretum. The lichens found throughout Chicago Wilderness range in color from yellow to olive green and black. Two of the most common species in the region, the battleship-gray *Physcia millegrana* and the candle flame-yellow *Candelaria concolor*, adorn many trees with familiar patches and smears.

A lichen is a compound organism created only when a particular fungus and a particular alga get together. Each part has a role: the fungus provides the bulk and shape of the organism, while the alga supplies food through photosynthesis. Science knows relatively little about lichen reproduction, according to Gerould Wilhelm of Conservation Design Forum. "No one can cultivate a lichen," he says. "Scientists don't even know exactly why a certain lichen will appear on a gravestone, for instance. It comes down to an exquisite relationship of minerals, rainfall, wind, sun exposure, and countless other factors that Western science can't measure."

Photo: Carol Freeman

Two lichens, Candelaria concolor *(orange) and* Physcia millegrana *(gray), are among the few that can live in the dry air over mowed lawns.*

An established lichen may spread when natural forces such as wind, rain, or an animal break off a piece and carry it to a spot with such favorable conditions.

Lichens require a stable surface on which to grow. Although they can be the first organisms to colonize bare rock, they often succeed on less solid surfaces only after other organisms, such as mosses or trees, have taken hold. Over time, lichens release acidic chemicals that help to break down these surfaces into soil, creating new habitat for plants and animals. Lichens can proliferate overnight or expand only millimeters over hundreds of years, depending on conditions. If left undisturbed, these organisms can live more than one thousand years, growing outward from their center to form a ring.

Many living things depend on lichens for food, including spiders, caterpillars, moths, snails, and even some mammals. Insects often use lichens for shelter, while local birds use lichens in nest-building. The hummingbird and the blue-gray gnatcatcher line the outside of their nests with the foliose, or flaky and leaf-like, lichen *Parmelia sulcata.*

Humans have found uses for lichens as well. Native Americans have used lichens to make medicine and dyes, and now ecologists are using lichens as indicators. Because many lichens are sensitive to air pollution, they are effective natural monitors of air quality. Unfortunately, this sensitivity has led to their decline in urban and industrial areas with high levels of air pollution. Additionally, because each species does best in a specific set of conditions, ecologists can follow their population patterns to detect shifts and disturbances in natural communities. Another threat to lichen health is acid rain. According to Hyerczyk, acid rain collects inside a lichen and kills off the algae, causing the fungus to die as well.

Wilhelm estimates that researchers have identified at least 200 species of lichens across Chicago Wilderness. Only a few species survive deep in the forest where the thick tree canopy prevents the penetration of most sunlight – an essential ingredient in lichen photosynthesis. Some lichens respond well to controlled burns in the oak woods. The fires thin the woods enough to allow light, warmth, and rain to reach the surfaces that lichens call home.

The next time you decide to explore the neighborhood or the backyard, Hyerczyk recommends, "Get on your hands and knees and get a hand lens – you'll see a whole world down there!"

— *Chris Hardman*

The Past & Future of Nature

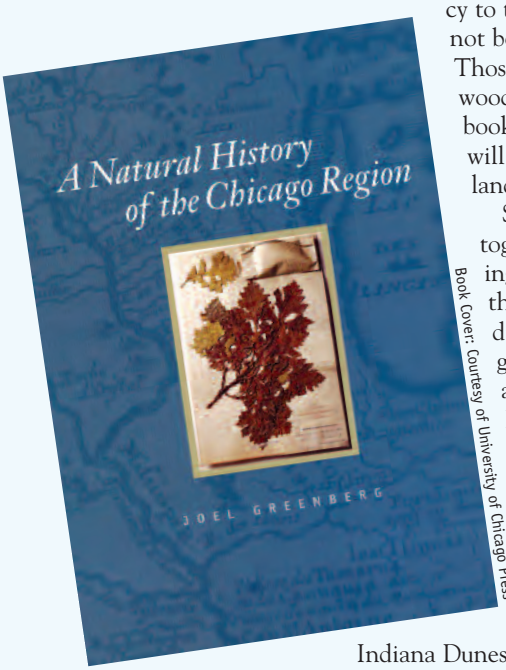
by Kenneth S. Mierzwa

Joel Greenberg's *A Natural History of the Chicago Region* (University of Chicago Press, 2002) is an epic work 17 years in the making. The story of the Chicago region is often a litany of habitat destruction, human greed and shortsightedness, and carnage. The tales of wonderful natural places we will never be able to experience are beautiful, but sad beyond comprehension.

Greenberg's book begins with an overview chapter on "the great forces": glaciation, soils, climate, fire, and human modification of the landscape. It then launches into a series of chapters which I characterize as follows: Ecosystems and plant communities (prairies, savannas, forests, wetlands), aquatic systems and biota (Lake Michigan, rivers, and small lakes), unique places (The Kankakee and Calumet marshes, and the Lake Michigan rim), animals (insects, reptiles and amphibians, birds, and mammals), and a closing chapter titled "Prospects for the Future," a compendium of trend summaries, conservation strategies, and selected protection and restoration success stories.

The tales of wonderful natural places we will never be able to experience are beautiful, but sad beyond comprehension.

Greenberg uses a wealth of information from historical accounts to help us visualize a place very different from the one we know today. Excerpts from the writings of early naturalists and ordinary settlers bring a vividness and immediacy to the descriptions that could not be achieved any other way. Those who know the remaining woods and prairies will read this book with enjoyment. Others will come to know the natural landscape because of it.



Book Cover: Courtesy of University of Chicago Press

Small black-and-white photographs, maps, and line drawings scattered sparingly through the text add another dimension. The 1909 photograph of a lakeshore ridge-and-swale site near Miller, Indiana, has at last helped me understand what that area looked like before the last of the white pines and white cedars were gone. Other favorite photos include the before-and-after shots of the central Indiana Dunes area by Herbert Read and the exquisitely composed modern image of herons and egrets against a hazy Calumet industrial background by Greg Neise.

Greenberg's heavy use of published historical accounts and interviews with regional experts is simultaneously the strength and the weakness of the book. This approach pulls together a vast range of information with quotes from a long list of well-known area ecologists. It provides context for research. It also helps to make the book fun to read. I found the chapters on Lake Michigan and on the Kankakee and Calumet marshes particularly enjoyable. In other places, for example in discussions of fire and woodland management, I would have liked a little more detail.

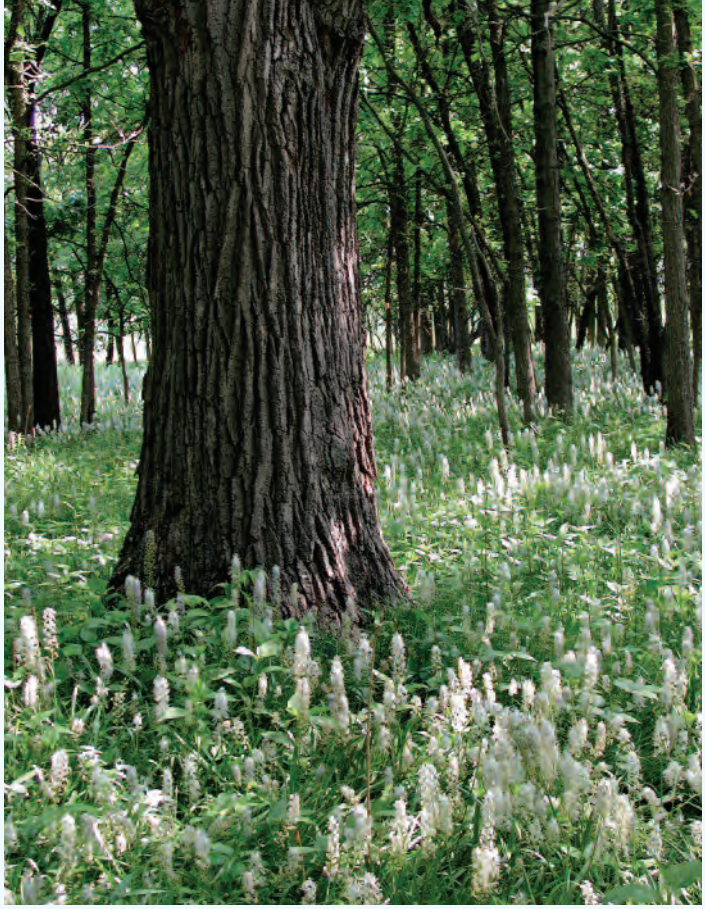
There are two risks, however, in relying on anecdotes. First, even the best scientists are subject to bias that can be traced back to their education and experience. Science at its best consists of competing hypotheses. Eventually enough data is gathered to determine which of several theories is closest to the truth. But ecology is a rapidly changing field, and much remains unknown. For the most part, Greenberg has been careful to identify uncertainty or controversy, and to include multiple viewpoints. In a few cases, though, only one side of the story is presented.

An example of this is his account of the Hine's emerald dragonfly. Greenberg identifies the need for land acquisition, protection of water quality, and controlled fire and brush clearing to maintain the necessary habitat. But subsequent statements that site management can "severely harm the insect" are based on opinions and not on research. On the only site with long-term adult population data, numbers peaked two years after part of the site was burned. The only clear short-term effect of fire on Hine's emerald dragonflies is that adult habitat use shifts within the site, with increased breeding activity where fire has made small seeps and rivulets accessible to the animals.

The second danger of anecdote is that whenever so many individuals provide information, some percentage of it will be inaccurate or incomplete. Greenberg has probably weeded out much of this, but no one author can be enough of an expert in every field to catch everything. For example, the reptile and amphibian chapter relies heavily on anecdote and includes at least eight factual errors.

Greenberg's discussions of conservation issues sometimes seem cautious, tentative, and incomplete. A discussion of the Kirtland's snake states that this is "the one species which seems to occur most often" in "trash strewn wastelands." Of course, it is not that the habitat of the Kirtland's snake is limited to suburban vacant lots with piles of sheet metal and old tires. Instead, the presence of surface cover makes it possible to find a species which otherwise spends

The 1936 edition of Birds of America offers this interpretation of the bobolink's call: "Oh, geezeler, geezeler, gilipity, onkeler, oozeler, oo."



Photos: Lawrence J. Godson

The Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan gave high priority to controlled burning in the oak woods. The woods adjacent to Wolf Road Prairie in Westchester are shown above during and after a burn.

much of its time inside crayfish burrows. Trash piles happen to exist on some of the old habitat. But saving fragmented vacant lots will not save the Kirtland's snake, and might even hasten its demise. A deeper review of the literature would have revealed that Kirtland's snake records often are from ephemeral wetland margins on clay soils, with scattered trees, basically a specialized type of wet savanna. We already know of several larger Chicago region sites that harbor the Kirtland's snake and that can be restored. One of them is the northern Cook County location from which the species was first described to science by Robert Kennicott.

The final chapter discusses early prairie restorations in the 1960s and 1970s. There is a very brief discussion of the relative merits of alternative savanna restoration strategies. Earlier in the book, in chapter five, Greenberg suggests that it might be acceptable to allow forests to gradually lose oaks in the absence of fire, a suggestion which strikes me as dated and dangerous. The restoration era is only about 40 years old, and much of our still limited knowledge about savannas and woodlands has been acquired in only the past five years. We have barely begun to understand forests. We must monitor what we have done so far, and learn from it: this is called adaptive management. But we must also look to the future.

Our Native American predecessors on this land burned it for thousands of years. Some places burned often, some infrequently. If we wish to keep part of what they once had, we too must burn. The alternative is to lose diversity. Where burning is feasible, we cannot expect to change the landscape in a few years. Humans are impatient creatures, but restoration takes a while. Over time, over hundreds of years, the oaks will continue to grow in managed areas, and the sun-loving plants and animals will have a place among them.

Greenberg suggests that it might be acceptable to allow forests to gradually lose oaks in the absence of fire, a suggestion which strikes me as dated and dangerous.

Greenberg's book does a fine job of describing the historical diversity of the Chicago region, and an even better job of documenting the sad story of its destruction. It will long be a useful historic reference. Now that we have set aside most of what little habitat remains, it is our job, and that of future generations, to restore sustainable health to natural areas and buffer lands. If because of this book, a few special places are saved, if a few more people are moved to help heal the land, then Greenberg's 17 years of toil will have paid rich dividends.

Ken Mierzwa grew up near remnant bur oak groves just north of Chicago. Following 20 years of wildlife inventories, his recent studies examine the effects of fire and changes in habitat structure on amphibians. Mierzwa is currently a senior ecologist and project manager with Earth Tech, where he specializes in endangered species and wetlands projects. He resides in Ferndale, California.

Monk Parakeets: Urban Outsiders

by Katherine Millett

The bird's squawk sounds like a cross between a chirp and the hee-haw screech of a rusty pump. Its bright green plumage clashes with the dignified church steeples and ivy-covered bricks of its Hyde Park neighborhood. For 22 years, feral monk parakeets have lived in this southern part of Chicago, draping their twiggy nests over tree branches, electrical poles, roof rafters, and satellite dishes. This raucous caucus of about 200 birds is the coldest, and perhaps the oldest, colony of monk parakeets in the United States. But should this species, introduced from South America, live wild in Illinois?

The monk parakeet, also known as the Quaker or gray-headed parakeet or parrot, was imported for the pet trade during the late sixties and early seventies. From 1968 to 1972, for example, more than 64,000 were brought to the United States from their native Argen-tina, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Since enactment of the Wild Bird Conservation Act in 1992, however, it has been illegal to import wild members of the species.

First seen locally at a Blue Island, Illinois, bird feeder in 1968, a pair of monks nested, hatched a few offspring, and disappeared in 1970. Three years later, a compound nest was discovered in Hinsdale. That same year, 1973, the Hyde Park colony got its start. The birds probably escaped from pet stores and residences, accord-ing to Stephen Pruett-Jones and other biologists at the University of Chicago who have studied the birds. The rumor that they escaped from a shipping crate at O'Hare has not been substantiated and was probably appropriated from New York, where an escape at Kennedy airport was documented in 1967. Some defenestrations may not have been accidental. Not everyone appreciates the birds' constant loud chatter, which consists of 11 kinds of shrill calls and whistles in addition to local sounds they imitate.

About a foot in length, slightly larger than a cockatiel, the monk parakeet is a flamboyant, highly social bird. The monastic reference in its scientific name, *Myiopsitta monachus*, derives from the hood of green feathers that covers its head and neck, set off by a gray face and yellowish breast. The rest of the bird, whether male or female, is chartreuse green except for its orange beak and a fringe of blue feathers on its tail and wings.

The Hyde Park colony has survived Chicago's nastiest weather, a significant feat since the bird originates in the temperate, dry lowlands of South America. This is the harshest climate the birds survive anywhere in the world, according to Pruett-Jones. They do exist further north, in Amsterdam and Paris, for example, and during the 1980s they bred in Montreal, but only in the Chicago area do they currently withstand windstorms and ice baths, rain, snow, hail, and temperatures far below zero.

Some farmers and conservationists wonder whether a bird that can adapt from Argentina to Illinois may become as common as the starling, which increased from 120 individuals to 200 million in a century, and wreak havoc with American crops as well as local species. Monk parakeets have fed on fields of wheat and corn in South America and fruit orchards in Florida.

Photo: ©Rob Curtis/VIREO

Such concerns appear so far to be unsupported, yet many conservationists remain wary. Though the parakeets are tenacious survivors, many outlying colonies have remained small or disappeared. Monk parakeets fed in cornfields in Kane County for five years and then disappeared, says Bob Montgomery, a compiler for the Illinois Spring Bird Count. Two pairs built a nest on a grain elevator in Carlyle, Illinois, 250 miles southwest of Chicago, and have been there for five years without expanding. Area birder Dan Kassebaum said he has seen three birds there, and he has never heard of more than four being sighted since 1997.

Michael Avery, a biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), asserts that they pose no threat. "There is no documentation of their causing damage to cereal crops in the U.S., and no indication that they are displacing other birds. They are not cavity nesters, like starlings, which displace woodpeckers. Overall, there seems to be no competition for food or nest space."

Between 1970 and 1975, a national eradication effort by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA eliminated them from most Northeastern and Midwestern states. They have since re-established themselves in several areas and continue to thrive in Florida, Texas, Connecticut, and New Jersey, as well as Illinois. States vary in their regulatory approaches – Illinois currently has no restrictions against the birds.

When the USDA proposed to eradicate the Hyde Park

Photo: Joe Nowak

Monk parakeets maintain one of their massive nests in the spreading limbs of a bur oak.

colony in 1988, outraged residents formed a protest group and a legal defense fund. The agency backed off when the citizens, led by long-time bird advocate Doug Anderson of Hyde Park, demanded a public hearing. Rather than produce evidence of crop damage, the agency dropped the eradication plan.

In 1996, Pruett-Jones predicted the population would grow exponentially if left unchecked. During a study he supervised from 1992 to 1995, the Hyde Park population tripled. But subsequent counts show the population holding fairly steady at about 200 birds, according to Mathew Leibold, also a professor at the University of Chicago.

Mark Spreyer, director of the Stillman Nature Center in Barrington and an avid student of the monk parakeet, notes that monk populations tend to control themselves because only a certain number of birds breed each year. The proportion of breeding birds may vary with environmental conditions, he says. Spreyer adds that the principle cause of mortality among monks is nests falling. Researchers are not certain whether the Hyde Park colony could survive without supplemental birdseed. From mid December through February, according to a 2000 study published in *The Condor*, the birds eat nothing but store-bought seed and the occasional frozen holly berry.

Another secret to the birds' success in colder urban and suburban areas lies in their nests and social nature. Unlike others of the 350-odd parrot species, monk parakeets weave free-standing nests wherever they find appropriate materials and supports, usually as close as possible to the nest where they hatched. Each spring, they pluck twigs from trees and vines from chain-link fences to weave compound structures that often house several family groups, each entering through a separate hole in the bottom. The communal nest keeps them warm and sheltered year-round, as they do not migrate. The birds forage as well as live together and use a sentinel system by which a lookout parakeet shrieks a warning when a bird of prey approaches.

Monk parakeets have an unfortunate habit of building on electrical poles, especially around heat-generating transformers. Commonwealth Edison fears the nests will cause fires or power outages, so the company routinely removes the nests, says company spokesperson Meg Amato. She cites only one instance of damage caused by a nest, a fire in 1996, but says "anytime we find a nest on a pole, we take it down." The company formed an agreement with the Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club whereby established members may adopt displaced parakeets, says club member David Hynes.

A combination of local expansion and separate releases has resulted in nests of monk parakeets as far north as Zion, to the west in DuPage County near the Bensenville police station, and in the Calumet City and Wolf Lake area to the south.

Some have suggested that monk parakeets could occupy the niche vacated by the Carolina parakeet, the only parrot indigenous to North America. Extinct from the wild since 1913, the Carolina parakeet had much in common with the monk parakeet. It frequented bottomland hardwood forests in the southeastern United States and lived as far north as Connecticut and at least as far west as Illinois.

Like the monk parakeet, the Carolina parakeet was a colorful, small parrot that lived on an eclectic diet of seeds, buds, and fruits and was kept as a caged bird. Both birds have tolerated extreme weather conditions, and both have been hunted by farmers who thought their crops were threatened. The biggest behavioral difference between the two species is that the Carolina parakeet was a tree-cavity dweller. The clearing of forests and the introduction of European honeybees, which competed with the birds for hollow trees, reduced the numbers of Carolina parakeets.

"There is a niche that the monk parakeet could fill," said Spreyer. "Maybe not the same one as the Carolina parakeet, but the monk parakeet is well adapted to this area. I just can't help but admire these transplanted survivors."

Tuning in to "The Sopranos?" Chicago's parakeets have built nests on electric transformer poles, braces under the El tracks, and (shown here) on the back of a satellite dish.

Photo: Joe Nowak

Field Notes

NEW PLANTS DISCOVERED IN KANE COUNTY

In late September, Drew Ullberg, habitat restoration manager for the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, was herbiciding weeds and evaluating young plantings on newly protected land, when he saw some "huge" plants that were obviously too big to have come from the new plantings.

The county had recently purchased a 310-acre farm abutting Dick Young Forest Preserve (formerly called Nelson Lake Marsh). Farmed for well over 120 years, the parcel included a drained prairie pothole. To begin restoring the county's new purchase, Ullberg had seeded some sedge meadow species on the edge of the property's mud flat the prior fall. In January of 2002, he broke up the drain tiles to restore the hydrology. He scattered more seed last spring.

When Ullberg spotted the plants, Dick Young himself – author of *Kane County Wild Plants and Natural Areas* and namesake of the preserve – just happened to be clearing brush nearby. Ullberg asked him if he had time to come and look at some funny plants. A two-foot-tall arrowhead-like plant was growing from the mud flat, with tiny white flowers. Out in the water, a plant like an enormous water lily spread its leaves. Young, a revered regional conservationist with more than 50 years of experience, had never seen them before in Kane County.

American lotus

Photo: Rob Curtis/The Early Birder

The plant on the mud flat is *Lophotocarpus calycinus*, also called arrowleaf. It was last reported locally in Grundy County in 1978. Though it is native farther south, most Chicagoland botanists have never seen it. The arrowleaf has broad, triangular leaves about six inches long, with a flower cluster that resembles water plantain. The water lily is *Nelumbo lutea*, the American lotus. Young had seen this plant once at Volo Bog, Swink and Wilhelm's *Plants of the Chicago Region* lists it in Will and Grundy Counties, some reports place it in the headwaters of the Fox River in Lake County, and large colonies do occur downstate in the Illinois River, but this lotus is not known to occur anywhere else in Chicago Wilderness. The large leaves standing on stalks like the spinning-saucers-on-sticks circus trick cannot be confused with any other plant. Though none appeared this year, the flowers are very large and pale yellow. They have a raised center column like a shower head with the nut-like seeds embedded in it.

Since lotus seeds can live for hundreds of years, Ullberg speculates that a seed may have persisted from before the land was farmed. Late spring plowing due to wet conditions may have allowed the lotus to survive by growing a little each year before being plowed under. The arrowleaf is more of a mystery – biologists know very little about the plant's reproduction.

Further explorations revealed a bush of very uncommon false aster, *Boltonia latisquama*, about ten feet in diameter and six to seven feet tall, and several *Eleocharis* colonies that none of the several botanists on hand could identify more specifically in the field. That makes four new county records for this one restoration effort.

Young says it makes glad an old botanist's heart. "We must be doing something right when exciting plants from the distant past appear in newly restored wetlands," he says. He believes we should not be in such a hurry to introduce seed until we give nature a chance to show us what was there historically.

Ullberg says it is rewarding to see such astonishing plants appear so soon. This is the first of many wetland restorations in Kane County. It gives great hope for the future.

– Patricia K. Armstrong

Photo: Perry Rech

Giant floater and paper pondshell mussels.

Sentenced to Desk, Mussel Granted Eleventh-Hour Pardon

Inspecting a future restoration site along the West Fork of the Chicago River in Glenview, Friends of the Chicago River staffers Nathan Aaberg and John Quail discovered a mussel they didn't recognize. Judging it had passed on, Aaberg brought the mussel back to the Friends office.

Aaberg later took the mussel to Roger Klocek, senior conservation biologist at the John G. Shedd Aquarium, who revealed that the specimen was the uncommon pondhorn mussel, *Uniomerus tetralasmus*. To Aaberg's surprise, Klocek called him two days later to say that the pondhorn had recovered fully in Klocek's office aquarium. This, despite the fact that it had spent the prior seven days being shuffled between reports and memos on Aaberg's desk.

"I've only seen one live example from the streams I've sampled in northern Illinois, and perhaps a half dozen dead examples," said Klocek. "I'm pretty surprised, but happy, to see one in the Chicago River." The pondhorn mussel has never been recorded in the Chicago River. Its discovery suggests a river regaining its health.

Friends staff and Klocek returned to the West Fork on October 30th to release the pondhorn and to search the river for other mussels. They found several recently dead mussels (a giant floater, a squawfoot, and a paper pondshell) as well as one live paper pondshell, also a new Chicago River record. Friends and the Shedd Aquarium hope to launch a comprehensive mussel survey of the Chicago River in 2003.

A pair of virgin prairie voles may mate continuously for 30 to 40 hours, after which they usually form life bonds.

❶ West Nile, People, and Wildlife

A study by Audubon and the Bird Conservation Network (BCN) in October of the effect of West Nile disease on songbirds throughout the six-county Chicago region found that the black-capped chickadee, a common bird of our woods and towns, appears to have been completely extirpated in large areas.

"The data gathered by 74 trained monitors tells a dramatic story," stated Judy Pollock, Audubon project manager for the Chicago region. "In three areas of our region – parts of eastern Lake County, some south suburbs, and a large area of northern Chicago and nearby suburbs – chickadees were almost completely gone."

The study, the first that focused attention on the effect of West Nile disease on songbirds, raises questions about the effects of chemicals used to control mosquitoes. The pesticide spray kills fish and many species of insects, disrupting the chain of life that birds and humans depend on. Audubon recommended carefully weighing the needs of birds in developing the next season's pest control strategies.

The area where chickadees were missing in the north suburbs coincided with the area of the highest incidence of human West Nile Virus cases.

Twenty-two chickadee searches totaling 81 hours turned up only two birds in an area of approximately 120 square miles extending from northwest Chicago through west to Des Plaines, north to Northbrook, east to the lakefront at Winnetka, and south to the northernmost neighborhoods in Chicago.

"One hundred and twenty-four species of native birds are known to have been affected by the virus," added Pollock. "We still don't know the fate of many of the birds that breed here in summer and which were preparing to migrate when the disease hit."

❷ Orland Tract Restoration

Volunteers filled 20 industrial-sized garbage bags with cut teasel seedheads this summer at the Orland Tract in southern Cook County, clearing the way for an "Autumn on the Prairie" celebration. The 960-acre forest preserve is the focus of a restoration initiative that brings together the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, CorLands, Audubon, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A major goal is to restore sustainable habitat for grassland birds and other prairie species.

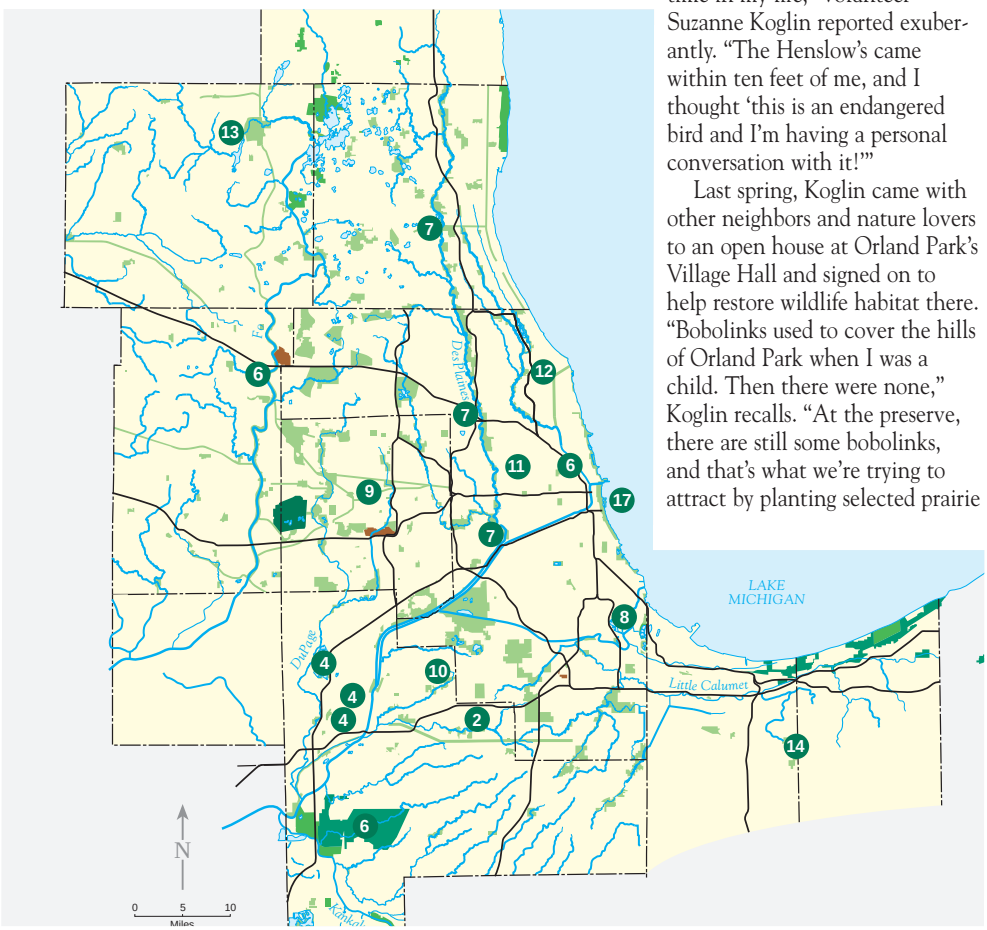
"At Orland this summer, I saw a dickcissel and Henslow's sparrow for the first time in my life," volunteer Suzanne Koglin reported exuberantly. "The Henslow's came within ten feet of me, and I thought 'this is an endangered bird and I'm having a personal conversation with it!'"

Last spring, Koglin came with other neighbors and nature lovers to an open house at Orland Park's Village Hall and signed on to help restore wildlife habitat there. "Bobolinks used to cover the hills of Orland Park when I was a child. Then there were none," Koglin recalls. "At the preserve, there are still some bobolinks, and that's what we're trying to attract by planting selected prairie species and taking out the invasives."

When the project is completed, about 700 acres will be quality grassland, making this the largest grassland restoration in Cook County. A little more than 250 acres, mostly around the periphery of the site, will be oak woodland. Some of these areas will be maintained as shrubland and open woodland to provide habitat for birds such as the rare yellow-breasted chat, orchard oriole, and black- and yellow-billed cuckoos already at home there. The central grassland will support the prairie birds, possibly including such larger species as the short-eared owl and king rail. Restoration plans include connecting grassland patches that had been fragmented by 30 acres of invasive trees and brush. Many grassland birds require a large contiguous area of grassland for nesting success.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has pointed out that drain tiles underlie the grassland, reminders of a time when the Orland Tract was all farmland. Sometime next year, the drain tiles will be blocked to improve wetland quality. Retaining rainfall on the site will reduce flooding and siltation downstream, one of the reasons that the Corps helped find $800,000 for this ambitious project. To volunteer at Orland Grassland, contact Judy Pollock at (847) 965-1150 or jpollock@audubon.org.

— Alison Carney Brown



❸ Voting Pro-Environment

In Illinois on November 5th, voters chose pro-environment candidates from both parties, in local and statewide races. Open-space measures also were supported by the voters, as most other funding proposals failed.

A key example is Governor-elect Rod Blagojevich, who showed strong support as a representative in both Washington and Springfield for environmental legislation. He proposed ambitious plans to clean up water pollution, promote clean energy, and help manage urban sprawl.

Lisa Madigan won the post of Illinois Attorney General. Madigan has worked in the Illinois State Senate on water pollution, clean air, and natural areas protection issues. Her campaign platform included a proposal to beef up enforcement of Illinois' environmental laws.

In federal races, voters elected pro-environment Republicans Mark Kirk and Tim Johnson, and Democrats Dick Durbin, Jan Schakowsky, Luis Gutierrez, Danny Davis, Rahm Emanuel, and Lane Evans.

On an election day when most tax increases were defeated, all tax increases to protect open space passed. In Kendall County, voters approved a bond refer-

endum to raise $5 million to protect natural areas from development. In Lake County, voters approved a tax increase to improve Lake County's forest preserves. In Lake Forest, voters approved spending $6 million to save a 25-acre parcel of open space from development.

Pro-environment candidates also prevailed in the Illinois General Assembly. Key contests included narrow victories in Illinois House races by Republican Beth Coulson and Democrats Kathleen Ryg, Elaine Nekritz, and Naomi Jakobsson, as well as Democrat Susan Garrett's election to the Illinois Senate.

Also, in DuPage County, voters elected a separate board for the Forest Preserve District for the first time.

— Jack Darin

4 Renwick Wetland Project – a Buffet for Birds

Call it plumbing with a purpose. In one of three large-scale restoration projects currently underway, the Forest Preserve District of Will County has transformed a 64-acre abandoned soybean field adjacent to the Lake Renwick Heron Rookery in Plainfield into a buffet for birds. In July, more than 3,500 linear feet of drainage tiles were removed and replaced with almost 4,000 perforated tiles to recreate quality wetland habitat.

The egrets and black-crowned night-herons that have made a seasonal home in the Lake Renwick Heron Rookery (*CW*, Spring '98) will soon be able to feast on garter snakes, crayfish, and bullfrogs attracted to the native species planted in the restoration. Compass plant, rattlesnake master, Ohio spiderwort, and monkey flower are among the 38 species of prairie seeds planted in the fall. Blue joint grass, sweet flag, marsh blazing star, cord grass, and switch grass are a sampling of the 50 species of wetland plugs that will help return the land to high-quality foraging ground.

Rock Run Preserve in Joliet is also getting a natural facelift. The project, scheduled to begin this winter, will enhance the existing wetland and prairies with several uncommon species, including wild rice, Ohio horsemint, prairie satin grass, scurfy pea, and glade mallow. The restoration will provide increased habitat for the state-threatened Blanding's turtle.

Wetland birds such as the common moorhen and pied-billed grebe will benefit from the restoration underway at Theodore Marsh in Crest Hill. A new wetland, adjacent to existing wetlands, will be created by removing fill dumped over decades. Tussock sedges will be among the plants used to return the more than 50 acres of wetland to its natural state. The project also includes restoring almost 25 acres of prairie. All three projects were funded, at least in part, by CorLands.

— Ann Hanson

5 *Chicago WILDERNESS* Holds Benefit Dinner

Chicago WILDERNESS Magazine held its first ever benefit dinner at Kendall College on October 7 with a quintet of chefs celebrating the harvest of the season by highlighting foods from local farms and vendors. The event, supported by corporate sponsors – BP, Boeing, ComEd, Whole Foods, Christopher Burke Engineering, and European Imports – and a full house of 120 guests at the Evanston culinary institute, raised $25,000 for the non-profit magazine, now entering its sixth year of publication.

Photo: Todd Brown

Ritz-Carlton chef Sarah Stegner, Brookfield Zoo director Dr. George Rabb, and CW editor Debra Shore.

Sarah Stegner from the Ritz-Carlton Dining Room (Chicago), Carrie Nahabedian from Naha (Chicago), Shawn McClain from Spring (Chicago), Michael Altenberg from Campagnola (Evanston), and Gale Gand from Tru (Chicago) each donated their services to cook a course for the dinner. Other magazine supporters such as Tryon Farms, Chicagoland Canoe Base, Art and Linda's Wildflowers, Eagle Optics, Scott Byron Landscape Design, John Fiore and Company, Blackbird restaurant, the Shedd Aquarium, Field Museum, Chicago Botanic Garden, and Brookfield Zoo, and photographer Joe Kayne and artist Peggy Macnamara donated items for a wildly successful silent auction. Thanks are also due to Two Brothers Brewing Company (for Prairie Path ale!), Heritage Wine Cellars, Midwest and Finer Foods, Red hen Bakery, and Hudson Valley Foie Gras for their donations to the meal and to The Natural Garden for supplying catchy baskets of native plants for table centerpieces. Phyllis Wier of The Talent Connection generously donated the design and printing of the evening's program booklet.

"This magazine has become an important voice for conservation in this region," said Dr. George Rabb, president of the magazine's board of directors, "as well as a tremendous treat for the eyes each season. There is none other like it. We hope that we can build an ever wider and larger audience for the message this magazine carries – that there is rare nature in this region and a wonderful coalition of organizations working to preserve and restore it."

6 BP Announces Environmental Leader Awards

Three Chicago Wilderness member organizations will receive Leader Awards from BP in the environment category, the company announced in early November. The Wetlands Initiative will receive $90,000 to assist in the restoration of 248 acres of rare wetland habitat at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Elgin High School will receive $30,000 to support its environmental science program in which high school students, under the tutelage of veteran teacher Deb Perryman, mentor 4th-6th graders in the Mighty Acorns program and manage the nature trail and outdoor classroom nearby. (*CW* profiled Elgin High School mentor student, Nestor Camarillo, in the Spring 2002 issue.) Friends of the Chicago River will also receive $30,000 to expand its Chicago River Schools Network to 260 teachers in 100 schools in Chicago, reaching 8,000 additional students.

A wood frog in the middle of winter freezes solid as a block of ice. But if you brought it inside to thaw out, it would hop away. A frozen duck would not.

This is the second year BP has recognized significant Chicago Wilderness conservation work through its Leader Awards. In 2001, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum received $100,000 to support research into captive breeding of rare butterflies and the reintroduction of rare species into prime habitat.

BP, with approximately 3,500 employees in the Chicago region, has also played a leading role in launching and promoting the Chicago Wilderness Corporate Council.

7 Des Plaines River Restoration Study

A major survey of the upper Des Plaines River is part of the $9.8 million Phase II Feasibility Study on ecosystem restoration and flood control. Supervised by the Army Corps of Engineers, the project brings together federal, state, and local organizations and is the first comprehensive look at the river's ability to support wildlife and native vegetation and also to evaluate the health of 21 tributaries upstream of the river's confluence with Salt Creek at the village of Riverside.

The upper Des Plaines has been severely affected by urban development. The river flows through communities in Racine and Kenosha counties in southeastern Wisconsin, and through eastern Illinois communities including Gurnee, Libertyville, Vernon Hills, Mount Prospect, Park Ridge, River Grove, Riverside, and, of course, Des Plaines. Major floods in 1986 and 1987 resulted in more than $100 million in damage in these communities, and significant floods occur, on average, every four years. Researchers and community leaders hope that the study can identify projects that will use environmental restoration techniques to help the watershed function as it should.

Data collection began this summer using five measures of biological health. To measure stream quality, Frank Veraldi of the Army Corps' Economic and Environmental Analysis Section led a group to evaluate water habitat quality and species diversity. They were pleased to find the Iowa darter – threatened in Illinois – as well as six species of freshwater mussels in the mainstream Des Plaines in Kenosha County, Wisconsin.

"These are mussel species that are relatively tolerant, but their presence still indicates some degree of water and substrate quality," notes Veraldi. "It's good to see them."

Other researchers have been at work on land, using a Habitat Evaluation Protocol (HEP) and a hydrogeomorphic (HGM) model to assess terrestrial and wetland habitat. The HEP measures availability of resources such as shelter and food for key species, while the HGM model measures the level of function for various community types, such as the flatwoods and depressional wetlands that are common to the watershed. A Floristic Quality Assessment has also been conducted, with help from, among others, Gerould Wilhelm, co-author of Plants of the Chicago Region.

Agencies involved in the project include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the EPA, forest preserve districts in Lake and Cook Counties, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and the Illinois DNR.

Data collection and analysis are ongoing. For more information about the Phase II study, contact Kimberly Fisher at (312) 353-6400.

— Rebecca Grill

8 Scientists Kibitz on Blitz

Over the past months, scientists from across the region have pored over the lists and specimens collected at the Calumet BioBlitz, a 24-hour species-recording spree held last August (*CW*, Fall '02). Their species count as of press time, though still unofficial, has risen to 2,405.

Among the discoveries made by the Blitz was the fungus *Hohenbuehelia atrocoerulea*, found on Powderhorn Lake. This fungus was last collected in Cook County in 1902, before airplanes and television.

The scientists will meet in early December to discuss any trends the results may reveal.

9 Research Helps Blandings Turtles in DuPage

The slow-moving and rare Blandings turtles are making an uncharacteristic charge towards recovery under an ongoing program administered by the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. This year, the program nearly doubled its number of hatchlings.

Once abundant but now threatened in Illinois, the turtle with the yellow markings and smiling face formerly was found from Quebec to the Midwest. But in DuPage County, they have found life in the fast lane harrowing. Development has encroached upon their traditional aquatic environment, and cars run them over as they attempt to cross highways.

Blandings turtles are late bloomers in the animal world and take from 14 to 20 years to reach sexual maturity. Females only lay 4 to 21 eggs at a time, with an average of 11, which they bury in six-inch holes that are vulnerable to predation. Once hatched, the babies struggle on their own to reach water. Very few reach adulthood. Only because the last fragments of their ecosystems are on Forest Preserve property have any survived.

A Forest Preserve survey undertaken in 1994 first highlighted the shrinking habitat and the high mortality rate of eggs and hatchlings. Not only were the numbers of hatchlings small, but also the county had become a sort of turtle Sun City. An alarming proportion of adults were over 30 and some were over 50.

Beginning in 1996, the district began an ambitious program to save the embattled turtles. Using radio telemetry, staff have been

Noguchi Fountain Drained To Save Birds

In early September, a catbird ran into a glass wall reflecting Grant Park's trees at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. It landed on the ledge below, lost its balance, and fell into the Noguchi Fountain, wings outstretched to keep it afloat temporarily. I jumped into the water, pulled it out, and within seconds it was unconscious from the blow. Had I not been there, the bird would have drowned.

I was then a new volunteer with the Chicago Bird Collision Monitoring Project, walking a route with coordinator Ken Wysocki. Monitors help migratory birds that get caught in the nighttime lights and canyons of Chicago's Loop high-rises. The catbird recovered and flew away, but we have found as many as four dead birds in a single visit floating in the Noguchi Fountain. In mid-September, when I found a drowned Cape May warbler and a mourning warbler, I knew I had to find a way to get the water drained.

After several days of phone calls and research, I talked to Eileen Harakal, executive director of public affairs for the Art Institute. She was upset by the situation, discussed it with Cal Audrain, vice president of operations, and called me back to say that the pond would be drained that very day or the next.

Wysocki believes probably half the birds that hit the Art Institute's glass wall have been saved by draining the pond. "The Art Institute of Chicago makes a difference every day in the lives of our visitors," commented Harakal. "How pleasantly unexpected it is to make a difference in the lives of the beautiful and varied birds whose presence in our gardens is enjoyed by many of our staff and visitors."

To monitor bird collisions in the Loop, e-mail redstart@telocity.com.

— Robbie Lynn Hunsinger

collecting the females and bringing them to Willowbrook Wildlife Center to lay their eggs. Afterwards, the females are immediately returned to the wild. The hatchlings live at Willowbrook for a year and then are transferred to Wheaton Park District's Cosley Zoo, where they reside in peace and safety until the age of two. Then they again go out into the real world and join nature (CW, Summer '98).

"The district's program will continue to improve as we make stronger inroads into the Blandings turtle's ecology," says District Animal Ecologist Dan Thompson. "Our hope is that by restoring their habitat, reducing human impacts, and boosting populations to a more sustainable level, our efforts will lead to a self-maintaining turtle community."

— Elizabeth Riotto

⑩ Community and Nature in Harmony at Homer Glen

The Village of Homer Glen made National Public Lands Day their own this year by proclaiming September 28 "Homer Glen Lands Day" and establishing the Community and Nature in Harmony Award.

The village was founded and incorporated in large part because its citizens wished to preserve the unique and diverse components of the natural environment within the village (*CW*, Summer '01).

On October 15, the village board presented certificates to 25 recipients. "We wanted to let the public know the scope of the work that has been accomplished since we began working on open space issues," said trustee Margaret Sabo. Subdivision developers, homeowners, teachers, and 4-H club, country club, and church leaders were among those recognized.

⑪ Cook County's Master Stewards Program

On August 28, Cook County volunteer stewards were given a vote of confidence by the board of the Forest Preserve District (FPD) of Cook County – and with that vote, a valuable new tool. Thanks to the leadership of President Stroger and committee chairman Roberto Maldonado, the board of commissioners approved the Master Stewards program, which will authorize trained stewards to supervise work that in recent years required staff presence.

The new program will train and accredit volunteers to be supervisors. Requiring staff supervision at workdays has limited restoration activities, some sites getting on the schedule only once a month for three hours. "The Master Steward program will make trained supervisors more available so volunteers can work more and at more convenient times," explained FPD Land Management Volunteer Coordinator Bill Koenig.

Master Steward accreditation will include passing a written and practical field test and attending safety, risk management, and other district seminars. District staff presence will continue to be required for prescribed burns and the use of power tools.

The FPD hopes to have the first group of Master Stewards accredited by December. Accreditation will be renewable every three years. Continuing education on ecosystem management will be offered from time to time.

"Habitat management is a district policy," Koenig points out. "Volunteers have always provided a key element to getting that done. Simplifying the work rules for volunteers helps accomplish habitat management."

For more information on the Master Stewards program or to volunteer for Cook County workdays or controlled burns, contact Koenig at (708) 771-1334.

— Alison Carney Brown

⑫ Prairie Water Watchers

A vigilant steward and a green village have adopted a variety of creative solutions to protect ground water quality as development progresses around the 32-acre Glenview Air Station Prairie (*CW*, Summer '99).

"We're trying to anticipate how construction will affect the prairie and mitigate the impact from the start," notes Robyn Flakne, natural resources manager for the Village of Glenview. "The ground water was in pretty good shape, and we're trying not to destroy it."

First, at the suggestion of volunteer steward Kent Fuller, the village altered its installation of an adjacent storm water system. Adding a series of clay dams along the underground pipes should prevent artificial drainage of ground water, which otherwise would likely flow through gravel surrounding the new sewers into the North Branch of the Chicago River.

Next, the village negotiated with the developer to construct a berm along a bordering parking lot to extend the prairie area and direct poor-quality water away from the prairie.

Finally, the village required the developer to bring clean run-off water from the roofs of two adjacent buildings into the prairie to help ensure sufficient surface water. "Many people are involved in a construction project, each with their own agenda, and each with tunnel vision," Flakne said. "Kent had tunnel vision for the prairie. He was frequently on site, watching construction and assessing its potential impact on the prairie."

For information on Air Station Prairie workdays, contact Robyn Flakne at (847) 998-9500.

— Cindy Mehallow

⑬ New Whoopers Migrate Through Chicago Wilderness

In late October, 16 young whooping cranes migrated south through Chicago Wilderness in a ritual as old as the post-glacial wetlands they rely on. The modern twist for the birds, whose species was extirpated from the region more than a century

The American golden-plover can fly from Canada to South America on less than two ounces of body fat. If our planes were that efficient, we might use one-eighth of the jet fuel we use now.

ago, was that they were guided by four ultralight aircraft. In year two of a five-year program to reintroduce a migratory population of whooping cranes, the most endangered of crane species, to eastern North America, the five- to six-month-old captive-reared birds took off from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin on October 13 (CW, Spring '02). Their journey will take them 1,224 miles to the Chassahowitzka National Wildife Refuge in Florida. The birds made three stops in Illinois, in Ogle, LaSalle, and Kankakee Counties.

During the 56-mile flight from LaSalle County to Kankakee County, one bird took a close look at the Illinois River, to the crew's alarm. "When I crossed the river," said ultralight pilot Joe Duff, "my bird dropped down, and with all the housing, I thought, this is a bad place to lose a bird. But I just powered up and sped ahead, and it followed."

Once the birds reach the offshore refuge in Florida they will go through a "soft release," monitored and assisted when necessary by biologists stationed at the refuge throughout the winter. If all goes well, the whoopers will head back to Wisconsin on their own in the spring. Through the summer, all five yearling birds from the inaugural whooper flock congregated with sandhill cranes in central Wisconsin. On November 13, one of the whoopers flew south with about 20 sandhills, resting in Glacial Park in Ringwood, Illinois, for about an hour.

The reintroduction is conducted by the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, a coalition of U.S. and Canadian conservation organizations and government wildlife agencies. For daily updates on the migration, and photographs, visit www.operationmigration.org.

— Karen Furnweger

14 Vintage Posters Promote Nature of Northwest Indiana

"Autumn in the Indiana Dunes" by artist John Rush is one in a limited edition series of painted images produced in poster format to promote the natural riches of Northwest Indiana. The series is based on the style of original 1920s posters produced to promote the South Shore railroad train

service between Chicago and South Bend, Indiana.

Copies of this poster can be purchased at the Dorothy Buell Visitor Center at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Posters can also be ordered by telephone at (219)-926-7561, ext. 247, and will soon be available for purchase through Eastern National's Web site, www.eparks.com/eparks/park_entrance.asp?park=249.

15 Sensible Growth Receives Funding Support

On August 6, Illinois Governor George Ryan signed the Local Planning Technical Assistance Act into law. The act updates the state's 1920s planning statutes, defines what should be included in a comprehensive plan, and authorizes the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs to offer a variety of planning-related technical assistance.

The act, supported by the Campaign for Sensible Growth, Illinois chapter of the American Planning Association (APA), and the Metropolitan Planning Council, is based on a model statute in the APA's Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook. For information about the guidebook, visit www.planning.org/growingsmart. See the text of the Local Planning Technical Assistance Act at: www.legis.state.il.us/publicacts/pubact92/acts/92-0768.html.

16 New Prairie Directory

Prairie lovers, hikers, and theme vacationers will be delighted by the recently published *Prairie Directory of North America* by Charlotte Adelman and Bernard L. Schwartz, retired lawyers, birders, and backyard prairie stewards.

This concise and useful resource includes information about hundreds of public prairies and savannas – ranging from nationally known landmarks to obscure remnants that miraculously escaped the plow. Sites in 30 states and four Canadian provinces are listed with brief descriptions, directions, and contact phone numbers. Tidbits of history, geology, and some sites' flora and fauna are also included in this 354-page treasure trove.

For more information, check out the publisher's Web site at www.lawndale enterprises.com. To purchase the book by mail, send a check for $19.95 +$4 S/H + $1.55 tax to: Lawndale Enterprises, PO Box 561, Wilmette, IL 60091-0561.

17 O'fish'al Fish of Chicago

The longnose dace (*Rhinicthys cataractae*), a.k.a. "the surfer," rode the waves to win a majority of the 10,447 votes cast in the City of Chicago's official city fish election. The election was orchestrated by the Department of Environment during Nature Week.

The longnose dace is a native North American minnow that lives along Chicago's beaches. For a land-based glimpse, visit w15.cityofchicago.org./environment/fish.

18 Openlands' Adelmann Wins Greenways Award

Last September, the Eastman Kodak Company, in conjunction with The Conservation Fund and the National Geographic Society, awarded Openlands Project executive director Gerald Adelmann one of its outstanding achievement awards. The winners were selected for leadership and contributions toward creating a nationwide network of trails, greenways, and protected open space.

In granting the award, Eastman Kodak cited Adelmann's early work in the Des Plaines River Valley, his leadership in creating the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor, and his continued guidance of Openlands' effort to create a 4,000-mile network of trails, greenways, forest preserves, and protected river corridors throughout northeastern Illinois. Congratulations, Jerry!

For a listing of winter events, visit chicagowildernessmag.org/calendar/.

The largest preserve in Chicago Wilderness is Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, at 19,000 acres. One of the smallest is Glenbrook North Prairie, only 1.45 acres.

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The Lost Owls of Prairie Creek

In the heart of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is a fine stream that's about to get better. This photo, taken toward the end of winter, shows the clean water, the bedrock bottom, and the troublesome invasive plants already beginning to green up.

Prairie Creek's 21 miles once flowed mostly through open grassland. Today, the skinny young trees along its banks – elms and ashes and buckthorns – are what happen in the absence of fire. Many of the birds that drank from Prairie Creek no longer live here – sandhill and whooping cranes, short-eared and barn owls, harriers. They can't live in brush.

There was a grove of savanna and open woods, 250 acres of it, along the lower mile of the creek, just above where it empties into the Kankakee River. Barn owls surely nested in the big old hollow oaks and cottonwoods; they hunted voles in both the nearby grassland and those open woods. But the habitat was gradually clogged with brush or denuded by farming. Not a single pair of barn owls nests anywhere in the northern two-thirds of Illinois today. Habitat restoration can bring them back.

"We'll cut that brush off the prairie. We'll thin those elms and ashes in the oak woods," says biologist Bill Glass, who's helping to plan the restoration of Midewin's 19,000 acres. When asked about the possible return of the cranes and the owls, he responds with a wistful confidence. "Sure. It's just a matter of time for all of them. I hope we'll all be around to see it."

It's one of today's challenges for conservationists. To see and love what survives of nature here – and at the same time to see and love what could be – restoring whole ecosystems to full health.

Prairie Creek photo by Bill Glass of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Captive barn owl photo by Carol Freeman. Words by Stephen Packard.

***OPPOSITE:** Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve, DuPage County, Illinois. Photo by Mike MacDonald/www.ChicagoNature.com.*

At Prairie Creek, the water is clean enough for indicator fish species like the slender madtom and orangethroat darter. Harriers and sandhill cranes have already returned to summer nearby at Goose Lake Prairie.

For a complete list of Chicago Wilderness members, please visit the Web site at chicagowilderness.org.

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