

A Prairie Rendezvous

Celebrating 20 years of natural
areas stewardship.



Prairie
Grove
Volunteers

SPRING VOL. 6, NO. 2, 2004

RESULTS FROM GPF AND PGV MERGER MEETING

by Jason Koontz, President GPF-PGV

Around 40 people attended the GPF winter meeting, Friday February 27th. Unfortunately our guest speaker fell ill and was unable to give his presentation. We hope to invite Dr. Changnon to speak at a future meeting. Business and announcements were discussed as well as the troubling budget proposal by Governor Blagojevich to eliminate funding for the IL Nature Preserves Commission and Natural Heritage Program of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Board of GPF has sent letters to Senator Winkel, Representative Jakobsson, and the Governor. If you would like to send letters and need an example, please feel free to contact Jason Koontz at 351-8839 or j_wa@hotmail.com.

The main item of business was to vote on the revised Constitution and By-laws of GPF. A packet was mailed to the members of both GPF and PGV in early February explaining the broadening of GPF's Constitution and By-laws which would allow the two groups to become one organization. With a vote of thirty in favor to three opposed (only paid GPF members could vote), the revisions were accepted. For the time being, our group's legal name will be Grand Prairie Friends-Prairie Grove Volunteers. Suggestions for names were collected and this issue will be revisited in the future.

Thanks to all who attended, and here's wishing everyone a happy spring!

CELEBRATING VOLUNTEER STEWARDSHIP

by Sue Gallo and Connie Carroll

Before the time of fire suppression, human impacts, and introduced species, natural areas maintained themselves, but now they need a helping hand. Local people in groups like Prairie Grove Volunteers (PGV) and Grand Prairie Friends (GPF) volunteer time and energy to visit these sites regularly and help maintain them in their natural condition. Working in conjunction with landowners, and local, state and federal agencies, the volunteers visit the sites on designated workdays and pull garlic mustard or wild parsnip, cut and spray honeysuckle or multiflora rose, or do whatever is needed at these sites to help prevent exotic invasive species from establishing in these natural remnant areas. It is a constant effort to keep non-native species and invasive weeds from encroaching and taking over these remnants of our natural heritage.

On Saturday February 7th, we held our ninth annual stewards' luncheon, celebrated in honor of the stewards, volunteers, students, and professionals that

dedicate their efforts toward managing and preserving local natural areas in our region. Thirty-three participants, incorporating 11 different organizations, met to share their accomplishments and future visions on the many areas we help to manage in East Central Illinois. PGV and GPF have been finalizing the discussions of merging our two long-standing volunteer organizations. Between the two groups, 42 stewards help to manage 31 sites in Ford, Iroquois, Piatt, Champaign, and Vermilion counties, plus approximately 10 areas along the Middle Fork Scenic River. Stewards and volunteers come from a wide diversity of backgrounds, interests and expertise including teachers, homemakers, biologists, farmers, manufacturers, natural resource managers, students, janitors, carpenters, and many others. Many are often involved in other volunteer capacities as well. Groups represented at this year's luncheon included, Red Bison (U of I volunteer stewardship), Grand Prairie Friends, Prairie Grove Volunteers,

Audubon Society (Champaign County Chapter), Urbana Park District, Champaign County Forest Preserve District, Master Gardeners. Because of recent (and not-so-recent) budget cuts, professional DNR staff have a greatly reduced capacity to maintain many of the State's natural areas and nature preserves. Without volunteer stewardship and monitoring, many of these areas would suffer unavoidable neglect and degradation. Thank you for all your hard work, enthusiasm, and dedication!

As volunteers we are dependent on the guidance and advice from local professionals that never seem to tire of our incessant questions. We extend our immeasurable thanks to Mary Kay Solecki (Illinois Nature Preserve Commission), Eric Smith and Bob Szafoni (Natural Heritage Division), Steve Buck (U of I Natural Areas Commission), and Karen Billo and Fran Harty (The Nature Conservancy).

A special feature of this year's

(More Stewardship on page 3)

A Prairie Rendezvous

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Layout: Raymond Meredith

A Prairie Rendezvous is a joint publication of the Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois (GPF) and the Prairie Grove Volunteers (PGV) for the restoration community of east-central Illinois.

A Prairie Rendezvous is published quarterly. Article submissions should be sent electronically to the editor at rmeredith@parkland.edu

Prairie Grove Volunteers

The PGV is part of The Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network. Its stewards help coordinate volunteer workdays at native prairie, savanna, wetland, and woodland remnants. Inquiries and tax-deductible donations should be sent to: PGV, PO Box 2577, Champaign, IL 61825.

www.prairienet.org/pgv

Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois

GPF is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to prairie preservation, restoration, and education in east-central Illinois. Inquiries and tax deductible donations should be sent to: GPF, PO Box 36, Urbana, IL 61803-0036.

www.prairienet.org/gpf

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Summer Issue '04 (June, July, Aug.)
✂ May 15

Fall Issue '04 (Sept., Oct., Nov.)
✂ August 15

Winter Issue '05 (Dec., Jan., Feb.)
✂ November 15

Member Submissions Encouraged

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STEWARD SPOTLIGHT: JIM HOYT

by Brenda Flores-Molano

Jim has lived most of his life in Champaign County and attended Champaign Central and Centennial High schools. His earliest memories are of mushroom hunting with his parents along the Sangamon River. One of his neighbors was an older gentleman, a forest ranger in the early 1900's when he acted as a fire lookout. Jim and his dad would listen to him talk about his wilderness experiences by the hour. He also learned to respect nature by hunting and fishing with his dad and uncles.

It was on a quail hunt at Steven Forbes State Park that he saw members of the Illinois Natural History Survey doing research into the local habitat. As a result, Jim became more interested in the link between birds and animals and their habitat.

In addition to his nature outings with his family, Jim's love for nature has been shaped by non-fiction writers such as Aldo Leopold, Edwin Way Teal, Paul Errington, and Durward L. Allen; fiction by forest rangers such as Montgomery Atwater and Jim Kjelgaard; and

most writing with a certain Jack London quality.

Today Jim helps with the monitoring of our National Scenic Waterway on the Middlefork River downstream and the Urbana natural areas. Also, he was just named the co-steward of Parkland College Prairies. In addition, as a Master Gardener, Jim has the privilege of tending the Champaign Humane Society Native Prairie Garden, which led to GPF being awarded a certificate of appreciation from the Master Gardener program. Jim says he has been fortunate to have these activities as part of his life and he hopes that children a century from now will have a chance to walk our nature trails in this area.

Jim believes PGV/GPF has some of the nicest people, and that he has made lifelong friendships. "We always see something interesting while in the field." Finally, Jim is looking forward to seeing you and sharing some fresh air and adventures on one of our workdays this spring.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Urbana Park District Volunteer Stewards Needed

The Urbana Park District is seeking volunteer stewards for its two newest natural areas. The first is Weaver Park, home to several large oaks and a largely healthy shrub layer. We know from General Land Office surveyor notes that southern edge of the big grove coincided with the wooded area of this park. The vision for the site is to restore the area to savanna by thinning invasive and weedy species from the wooded sections, planting additional oaks to the north, and transitioning to prairie to the south. Weaver Park will also feature a native planted storm water basin/wetland and several ball fields to the south. With the assistance of several volunteers and UPD staff, clearing of invasive shrubs and removal of garlic mustard has already begun at this park. We look forward to investing much more work at this site in the coming year.

The second area in need of a volunteer steward is the Perkins Road wet prairie restoration, located just south of the Dog Park and adjacent to the Saline Branch. This site contains several lagoons that were formerly used by the Urbana Champaign Sanitary District for treated biosolid sludge storage and drying prior to field application. Most of the lagoons have been filled in, but all remain ephemerally wet to some degree. One lagoon remains wet year around and with several mud flats, provides refuge for wading birds and waterfowl. The Urbana Park District has received an Illinois Department of Natural Resources Conservation 2000 grant for this restoration and will begin working on the site this spring.

Urbana Park District volunteer stewards are asked to help lead and recruit for volunteer workdays, develop restoration plans and attend regularly scheduled management committee meetings. Additional questions can be directed to Derek Liebert at 344-9583 or can be sent via email to daliebert@urbanaparks.org

SITE SPOTLIGHT: LODA CEMETERY PRAIRIE

by Brenda Flores-Molano

Our featured site this issue is Loda Cemetery Prairie (LCP). Located in Iroquois County and owned by The Nature Conservancy, this 3.4 acre black soil prairie is one of the jewels of East-Central Illinois. Over 130 native plants species flourish here including shooting star, downy phlox, and yellow star grass during the spring; rattlesnake master, compass plant, and wild quinine during the summer; and goldenrods and asters in the fall.

The history of LCP, as with many prairie remnants, is one of perseverance. This prairie was never cultivated or pastured, but it was mowed. In 1981, the Pine Ridge Cemetery Association

made plans to expand the cemetery into the prairie area, however the Natural Land Institute arranged a farmland exchange for the cemetery's expansion. In turn,



the Association agreed to dedicate the prairie as a nature preserve in 1983. As a site, LCP not only provides a place to connect to what was once the dominant landscape around East-Central Illinois, but also provides an invaluable resource to conduct research and learn more about prairies. To visit LCP from Loda, go west on a blacktop road for .3 miles to 200E Road, then north .6 miles to Loda (Pine Ridge Cemetery).

One more thing: we are looking for a new steward for the Loda Cemetery Prairie. Please contact Paul Marcum (217-333-8459 or pmarcum@inhs.uiuc.edu) if you are interested.

RESEARCH CORNER: PLANT-INSECT INTERACTIONS IN PRAIRIES

by Brenda Flores-Molano

In an ongoing study at several sites stewarded by GPF/PGV such as Shortline Prairie, Loda, Pelville, and Prospect Cemetery, I am investigating a plant-insect interaction associated with *Eryngium yuccifolium* Michx. (Apiaceae) or rattlesnake master in native and restored prairies. Although thought to be a conservative species, *E. yuccifolium* can become very abundant in some native prairies and weedy in some restored prairies. I am investigating a connection between this phenomenon and the lack of flower herbivores. My main objective is to determine if the presence or absence of these herbivores has an impact on the reproductive output of *E. yuccifolium* and therefore the size of *E. yuccifolium* populations. Preliminary data show that fewer flower herbivores and damaged flower

heads are found on *E. yuccifolium* in restored prairies than in native prairies, suggesting that this plant-herbivore interaction can take a while to become established in restored prairies. This plant-herbivore interaction becomes even more complex if prescribed burns are conducted at the study sites. I am finding that sites with an extensive prescribed burn history have lower percents of flower/fruit herbivory, due to fewer flower/fruit herbivores found in the flower heads. Although prescribed burns may reduce flower/fruit herbivory benefiting *E. yuccifolium*, herbivores seem to recover if these prescribed burns are not done every year. For more information on this research project, please contact Brenda Molano-Flores (molano@inhs.uiuc.edu).



(Stewardship continued from page 1)

luncheon was a donation received from the Dynegy Midwest Generation, Inc. Kristopher Coombs, plant manager of the Vermilion Power Station/Tilton Energy Center, awarded PGV and GPF with \$3000 to aid in restoration and maintenance of Orchid Hill Natural Heritage Landmark on their Vermilion County property. Dynegy Inc. has voluntarily set aside

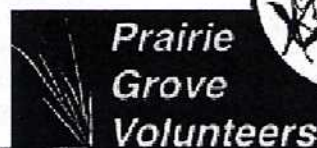
this area, maintained its state designation and now donated a large amount of money that was doubled by a State matching fund grant. These funds will go a long way toward helping PGV and GPF restore high quality habitats, protect rare species and help keep east central Illinois beautiful.

(Photos accompanying this story are located on page eight.)

Volunteer Workday



Calendar



SPRING 2004

Spring burns will be scheduled in March and early April for several sites. Burns are needed at these sites to discourage the competing non-native species and encourage growth of native plants and native wildlife habitat. Wear natural-fiber, non-flammable clothing (long pants, long sleeves, boots, and gloves); *no synthetic fabrics*. Bring drinking water and a snack. Call Dan Busemeyer (wk: 244-2470, hm: 378-5352) or Jamie Ellis (jamese@inh. uiuc.edu, 244-5695) for more information.

Every Friday Evening: Enjoy a nice afternoon of Native Gardening at the Champaign County Humane Society in East Urbana. We have native American Toads and Redwinged Blackbirds to serenade us. Most work will include the removal of common goldenrod, wild parsnip, and sweet clover. We will also be transplanting and watering. Work times are every Friday Evening at 4 p.m., beginning in May, unless posted on ecostewards@prairienet.org. Please bring gloves. Contact Jim Hoyt at 352-6733.

The first and third Saturdays of every month: Busey Woods. Enjoy a woodland close to home, help cut brush and remove non-native species. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 a.m. Contact Derek Liebert (344-9583) for more information.

The fourth Saturday of every month: Meadowbrook. Have an interest in volunteering at a highly visible local prairie restoration? Help remove invasive plants, improve trails, plant prairie species, and assist with general clean-up. Tools will be available and refreshments will be served. Meet at Race St. parking lot at 9:00 a.m. Contact Derek Liebert (344-9583) for more information.

Every Sunday: Red Bison. Workdays held every Sunday unless otherwise noted. Members and non-members welcome. Meet at the University YMCA at 1:00 p.m.. Contact Lori Kae Schwab (schwab@uiuc.edu) or Valerie Sivicek (sivicek@uiuc.edu).

Sunday, March 14: Middle Fork Woods Nature Preserve. Middle Fork Woods is a high quality woodlands with ephemeral ponds and steep ravines that borders the Middle Fork River in Vermilion County. Help us to maintain this site as we remove garlic mustard and honeysuckle that have become problems. We'll follow up with a nice hike! Wear gloves and bring plastic bags, loppers, and pruners if you have them. Bring drinking water and a snack. Meet at the Cypress parking lot (the parking lot and playground west of the river) in Kickapoo State Park at 10:00 a.m. Contact Grant Cunningham (733-2660) for directions or more information.

Saturday, March 20: Middle Fork Bluffs. We'll pull some garlic mustard. Then we'll hike around the woods. The hike will feature the Snow Trillium (*Trillium nivale*). Bring gloves and drinking water. Bring a snack too if you'd like. Water, food, and restrooms are also available at the Salt Kettle Rest I-74 rest-stop. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 a.m. to carpool or at the Salt Kettle rest-stop at 10:00 a.m. This rest area is just west of Danville. Contact Dan Busemeyer for more information (244-2470).

Sunday, April 4: Middle Fork Woods Nature Preserve. Middle Fork Woods is a high quality woodlands with ephemeral ponds and steep ravines that borders the Middle Fork River in Vermilion County. Help us to maintain this site as we remove garlic mustard and honeysuckle that have become problems. We'll follow up with a nice hike! Wear gloves and bring plastic bags, loppers, and pruners if you have them. Bring drinking water and a snack. Meet at the Cypress parking lot (the parking lot and playground west of the river) in Kickapoo State Park at 10:00 a.m.

- APNC (Anita Purves Nature Center) is located at 1505 N. Broadway Ave. in Urbana.
- NATURAL RESOURCES STUDIES ANNEX: 1910 Griffith Drive, Champaign. Griffith Drive runs south from St. Mary's Road just east of the Illinois Central railroad viaduct (next to St. Mary's Cemetery).
- Please leave your pets at home. Pets are not allowed on Nature Preserves. Activities such as prescribed burnings may endanger pets, even if they are on leashes or otherwise supervised.

(Calendar continued from page 4)

Saturday April 10: Horseshoe Bottom and Windfall Prairie Nature Preserves Spring Wildflower Hike. Hike the long way to HBNP. See hill prairies, seeps, marsh marigolds, and breath-taking views of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion!!! Pull garlic mustard along the way!!! Be prepared for several miles of rough (and maybe a bit wet) hiking. Wear good boots and bring water and a lunch (we WILL be MOST of the DAY). Meet at APNC* at 9:00 a.m. to carpool to the site or at the Lake Mingo dam parking lot at 9:45. Contact Rick Larimore (hm: 337-7006, w: 244-6716) or Jim Smith (hm: 896-2079) for more information.

Saturday April 17: Jasmine Hollow. We'll be pulling garlic mustard, and thinning coralberry and gooseberry. The spring wildflowers should be showing nicely! Meet on site at 9:30 a.m. We'll work until noon, then have refreshments and take a hike afterward if folks are interested. We'll be having an open house that afternoon and evening for anyone who wants to visit but can't help - feel free to stop by! The address is 1172 N. 200 East Rd., Piatt County. Phone 344-7840 or email jpayne@shout.net if you need directions.

Saturday April 24: Windsor Road Prairie Reconstruction. Pull sweet clover; spray vetch and Canada thistle with broad-leaf weed killer; pick up trash; weed and mulch in garden around sign; cut brush. Time: 9:00 a.m. to noon. Meet on-site on the north side of Windsor Road between Neil and First Street. Pull in at curb cut at the west end of the site. Bring gloves, water, tree saw and/or hand pruners. Rain date will be Sunday, April 25. Contact Ruth Green (355-8125, 649-9978) for more information.

Saturday - Sunday (April 24-25): Camping at Middle Fork State Fish and Wildlife Area (hike-in only). Go north from Oakwood about 6 miles to 2350N, go right about 100 feet to the lot. Park at the Parking lot #4. Go east down the lane a good ways and then follow the signs south to Pondside Campground about one and a half miles (I will try to put up some pink flagging occasionally to mark the trail). There are fire pits with grills for cooking. Garlic mustard should be going strong and we will help the Stewards of areas along that part of the Middle Fork by doing some pulling while getting a tour. Try

out your favorite garlic mustard recipe for supper! Please let me know if you can come or if you have questions and maybe for a map - call Rick Larimore (hm: 337-7006, w: 244-6716, rllarimo@inhs.uiuc.edu).

Saturday May 1: Nettie Hart Memorial Woodland. Help us remove one of the more insidious invasive plants - garlic mustard, as well as other non-natives. This woodland includes upland forest and floodplain forest along the Sangamon River. Wear gloves and bring drinking water too. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 a.m. to carpool. Contact Bryant Barnes (493-8686; email: bbarnes@prairienet.org) for more information.

Saturday May 1: Horseshoe Bottom Nature Preserve. Spring Wildflower Hike. A hike, the short way to HBNP. See hill prairies, seeps, and breath-taking views of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion!!! Pull garlic mustard along the way!!! Be prepared for moderate (and maybe a bit wet) hiking. Wear good boots and bring water and a lunch. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 a.m. to carpool to the site or at the Newtown School parking lot at 9:30. Contact Rick Larimore (hm: 337-7006, w: 244-6716, rllarimo@inhs.uiuc.edu) or Jim Smith (896-2079) for more information.

Sunday May 2: Baber Woods Nature Preserve (an Embarras Valley Stewards site south of Kansas!). Wander around this beautiful woods and get a look at the result of prescribed fire and sugar maple removal while pulling some garlic mustard with some volunteers from Charleston. Bring a lunch and some water etc., we will be back mid afternoon. Meet at Anita Purvis at 7:45 a.m. to carpool or for information contact Rick Larimore (hm: 337-7006, w: 244-6716, rllarimo@inhs.uiuc.edu).

Sunday May 9: (Mother's Day) Orchid Hill Tour led by Bob Szafoni (Illinois District Heritage Biologist). 10:00 a.m. Come see the orchids in spring bloom and enjoy some topography! This is a rare chance to explore this natural area which is usually closed to the public. Contact Connie Carroll (352-4731, 244-7741) or Mary Ann Feist (355-3174, 244-6858, mfeist@inhs.uiuc.edu) to sign up and get directions. Space is limited. Meet at site at 10 a.m. or at APNC* to car pool at 9:15 a.m.

SEEDLINGS TRANSPLANTING AND PLANT SALE SCHEDULE

Help Grand Prairie Friends plant, transplant, and sell plants for the annual spring native plant sale! No experience necessary; just a willingness to get your hands dirty. Join us on Thursday evenings this spring at the NRB greenhouse at the corner of Sixth and Pennsylvania in Champaign to help out. Call Jamie Ellis (244-5695, jamese@inhs.uiuc.edu) to volunteer or for more information.

- ☞ March 4, 6:30-8 p.m., NRB greenhouse, seed flats
- ☞ April 1, 6:30-8 p.m., NRB greenhouse, transplant seedlings
- ☞ April 8, 6:30-8 p.m., NRB greenhouse, transplant seedlings
- ☞ April 15, 6:30-8 p.m., NRB greenhouse, transplant seedlings
- ☞ April 17 (Saturday), Plant sale at Allerton Park
- ☞ April 22, 6:30-8 p.m., NRB greenhouse, transplant seedlings
- ☞ April 29, 6:30-8 p.m., NRB greenhouse, transplant seedlings
- ☞ Friday May 7, 6 p.m., move plants to Lincoln Square Mall
- ☞ May 8 (Saturday), 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Grand Prairie Friends Annual Mother's Day Plant Sale!

CHICAGOLAND PLANT MONITORING PROGRAM SEEKS VOLUNTEERS

by Karen Billo

Plants of Concern is a rare plant monitoring program for the Chicago region. In the three years Plants of Concern has been operating, 143 volunteer monitors have worked with public and private landowners in 6 Northeast Illinois counties. One hundred seven sites have been visited, and 244 populations of 110 species have been monitored with POC's standardized region-wide data gathering protocols.

Plants of Concern is a program of Chicago Wilderness, funded in part by Chicago Wilderness, and coordinated through the Chicago Botanic Garden. It is affiliated with The Habitat Project, Audubon - Chicago Region and works closely with Forest Preserves and other landowners.

Volunteers new to Plants of Concern must attend one of three workshops offered in different parts of the area in early spring to be trained in the data gathering protocols of the program and to receive their monitoring assignments. Returning monitors are strongly encouraged to attend a workshop also to catch up on new developments, and as a refresher.

Workshops

Note: workshops are required for new monitors and recommended for returning monitors.

DuPage County

Saturday, April 3 9:00 – 2:30

Grounds & Resources Complex, Blackwell Forest Preserve, Warrenville IL

Lake County

Saturday, April 17 9:00 – 2:30

Reed Turner Woodland, Long Grove IL

McHenry County

Sunday, May 2 9:00 – 2:30

Wiedrich Barn, Glacial Park, Ringwood IL

To register for a workshop, new and returning monitors should contact Lailah Reich, POC Intern, Chicago Botanic Garden (lreich@chicagobotanic.org; 847-835-6856).

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(Politics continued from page 7)

beliefs and not just to those who share our sympathies.

Second, we need to participate in the electoral processes. Whether we choose to identify ourselves as independents, Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, or Greens, we advocate environmentalism well when we volunteer personal support to one of the local political parties or to a local candidate or to both. This election year let's wear our environmental hearts on our sleeves for all to see. Participate in that noble experiment: American democracy!

GOVERNOR'S PLAN FOR IDNR FOCUSES ON CORE PROGRAM

Governor Rod R. Blagojevich announced today plans to expand recreational and educational opportunities across the state through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

The proposed budget for IDNR includes funding for new and upgraded facilities and programs at state parks. The Fiscal Year 2005 proposed spending plan for the IDNR is \$190.7 million, a nearly \$20 mil. reduction from Fiscal Year 2004. The FY05 General Revenue Fund (GRF) budget is \$96.4 mil., an \$11.0 mil. decrease from the current year. The department's proposed head count in FY05 is 1,842, down from 1,990 in the current year. The proposed budget redirects funding to the priority programs indicated below.

The budget includes \$3.6 mil. in new funding to meet the operational needs at newly acquired or expanded sites, including visitor centers. Nearly 60,000 acres in 57 counties have been added to the park system during the last few years and additional programs have been added at several sites.

"Maintaining our parks for public enjoyment is one of our core missions," said Department of Natural Resources Director Joel Brunsvold. "Investing in our parks for the people of Illinois is a sound fiscal choice in these tough fiscal times." The department is also aggressively pursuing new ideas in FY05 that focus on consolidation and accessibility of services. For example, IDNR is working to implement a point of sale system that would enable citizens to purchase a variety of licenses electronically on a locally accessible system. "This new, state-of-the-art system is a new way of doing business that will provide tremendous convenience to the constituents we serve," Brunsvold said.

In an effort to increase efficiency of public services, the Bureau of Land and Water Resources from the Department of Agriculture will be consolidated into the Department of Natural Resources. The bureau will continue to provide financial, technical and educational assistance to the 98 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) throughout the state. SWCDs provide rural and urban citizens with technical assistance and educational information on a variety of topics including, erosion control, water quality protection, wildlife habitat preservation, flood prevention, land use issues and streambank stabilization. In FY05, the department will devote \$240,900 to assist urban communities with revitalization and greening initiatives such as tree planting, vacant land and pocket park enhancement, green roof projects and the trimming or removal of trees for public safety.

In an effort to balance the budget, the Open Space Land Acquisition programs, as well as programs supported by Natural Areas Acquisition Funds, have been eliminated from IDNR's FY05 budget. These programs were supported by diversions of the real estate transfer tax, which will now be deposited in the General Revenue Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: CHAMPAIGN COUNTY 2004

by Dwain Berggren

Much-publicized national and state political races now invite us to look ahead and speculate about which candidates will best address our environmental concerns. However, it's also a good time to look back and think locally about the political forces and personalities that have affected the environment in our own backyard.

In 2000 Democratic majorities drew new legislative districts in our county and the state. Subsequently, in 2002 Naomi Jakobsson was elected State Representative to the 103rd District, and Democrats increased their county board seats from their first-ever majority of 14 (won in 2000) to 16 seats of the 27. By and large, these Democrats have had connections to the environmental community and have involved themselves constructively with some of our causes. Let's consider some of their actions and what can be done to influence them further . . .

Appointments to the Board of Commissioners of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District: In general, the appointments of the Democratic majority have been consistent with the view that the county's preserves and parks should safeguard vital natural resources and provide public access to ample greenspace. Since 2000 their appointments of Bob Toalson, Edwin Herricks, Ruth Wene, and Vern Zehr to the CCFPD Board have demonstrated their intention that people chosen possess a variety of suitable professional, academic, and environmental credentials. We should keep in mind that there is at least one vacancy a year and that few candidates present themselves. To continue a positive trend, we should urge conscientious, well-informed people to apply and vigorously recommend them to Board!

Appointments of Commissioners to County Drainage Districts: Our soggy county has 73 active drainage districts. These governmental units manage vital surface drainage and do much that affects the riparian and aquatic habitats of

all of our streams. Their major efforts to maintain stream channels and banks periodically spark controversies about their methods. Last year, out of consideration for environmental issues and in the face of strong opposition, the Democratic caucus appointed a Commissioner to the Upper Salt Fork District who was earnest to consider alternatives to the usual practices. Vacancies for appointments come up every year. (Not all commissioners are appointed by the County Board: some are elected.) We can help by finding qualified resident property owners for these obscure offices—people who are attentive to environmental needs and who favor more openness in district operations!

Creation of the Champaign County Environmental Advisory Panel:

The Democratic Caucus was instrumental in creating the Panel and appointing a group of qualified citizens to produce a report that describes and assesses the state of the environment in Champaign County. The report also will discuss policies that County Government can enact to improve environmental quality. After meeting last year with local experts to determine what topics and information their report should include, the Panel will hold a number of public meetings in the County to solicit citizen concerns. (Meeting times and locations are yet to be announced.) We can attend these meetings and get our ideas and information on record.

Comprehensive / Master Planning for Champaign County:

For almost four years the county's Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) and the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), the County Board's Environment and Land Use Committee (ELUC), various special interest groups (notably Farm Bureau), and the public at large have participated in the process of revising the county zoning ordinance. This process has demonstrated many times how difficult it is for an environmental cause to trump a property right. It has, however, served to clarify and highlight various dissatisfac-

tions with the zoning ordinance, the draft revisions, and lack of a comprehensive plan.

A number of public and political interests are now advocating for a Comprehensive Plan. The Regional Planning Commission is auditioning a "visioning process" that might be used to get such a planning effort underway. Some county board Democrats and Republicans favor the idea. There are many opportunities for us to comment on the zoning revisions under consideration. It seems likely that we and the general public will have occasion soon to advocate for comprehensive planning and help shape the plan's development and contents.

Jakobsson Environmental Concerns Advisory Board:

State Representative Naomi Jakobsson formed this Board in 2003 to obtain feedback and information about pending environmental legislation and related matters. The 18 people now serving are community activists and members of local organizations and participate in two scheduled meetings each year and others as necessary. Most recently the Board considered House Bill 6566 which deals with recycling electronic equipment. Locally, ideas or questions about environmental legislation can be directed to her District Office: 373-5000. Residents of her district interested in serving on the Advisory Board may also call this office. Those living outside her District might try to interest our representatives in forming similar advisory groups.

Finally, a Bipartisan Appeal:

These achievements are a mere beginning but they illustrate some of the good effects that result when a local party in power supports our policies and efforts. But how to continue building on this beginning? First reflect that political fortunes can change with the next election. Environmentalism is best advanced by implanting its doctrines into the programs of all parties, rather than just one. As individuals we must speak on behalf of the environment to people of all political

Photo Montage

Volunteer Steward Lunch, 2004

*All photos by Sue Gallo
Story on front page*

