
ParkLands Foundation

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Find us on the web at:

www.parklandsfoundation.org

Newsletter June – July 2007

Four decades of a noble cause

Land where one could simply enjoy nature and would also provide habitat for wildlife was limited in the McLean County area in the early 1960s. Loring Merwin, however, in 1964 described his dream to a selected group of community leaders that private initiative could help to fill that need. The result was that, in 1967, ParkLands Foundation, a private, non-profit corporation, dedicated to fulfilling that need, was born. In its first years, the Foundation planned to accumulate land that would then be turned over to a public entity for management, and, in 1970, a total of 430 acres along the Mackinaw River in eastern Tazewell County was donated to the State of Illinois. We visualized the beginning of an area that would ultimately be a “grandest” natural area for non-intensive recreational use. Sadly, this was not to be and the area today is the Mackinaw River Fish and Wildlife Area, 1400 acres but with only 45 dedicated as a nature preserve. ParkLands Foundation realized that if it wanted its mission to advance, it would have to develop and manage its own land, and using volunteers whenever possible.

Fortunately, in 1970, 100 acres bordering the Mackinaw northeast of Lake Bloomington was offered to ParkLands at less than bargain price by the Emil Rediger family (read about Emil in Mark Wyman’s excellent history of our group). Thus began the assemblage and development of the Merwin Nature Preserve, something cherished as the cornerstone of our accomplishments.

How the Merwin preserve has grown: Gregory Tract (1971), Thatcher Tract (1972), Stewart Tract (1976), Henline Tract (1977), Benedict Tract (1979), Kinsella Tract (1981) and the Illinois Wesleyan Tract (1994). Today, the preserve totals 730 acres! It contains more than three miles of trails, has benches and bridges, and is used by individuals, schools, universities, and other community groups and institutions for non-intensive recreation. Seven nearby tracts (Moon, Champion Federal and Breen to the west; Chapman, Lexington, Bigger and Mohr to the east) are undeveloped but available for non-intensive enjoyment.

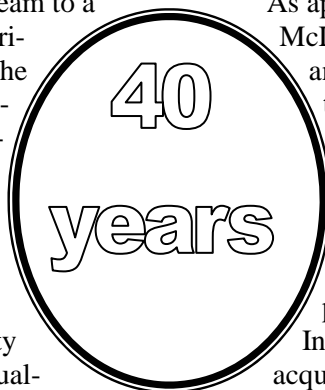
During these early decades, funds for management were limited and restoration of green space was sometimes with species not always appropriate to the habitat. Later, restoration was more in keeping with the pre-settlement vegetation. Such management utilizes practices such as burning, removal of exotics, and other labor intensive maintenance. The accomplishments in

these decades are, however, an appropriate embodiment of our mission; what John English stated as “lots of land and a noble cause”.

As appropriate land along the Mackinaw in McLean County became increasingly expensive and unavailable, attention was directed more toward Woodford County. This expansion began in 1989 with the gift of the Woodrum tract, and today ParkLands possesses about 370 acres and a vision of a “Mackinaw Corridor” with tracts increasingly linked together to form more contiguous, protected macro-sites.

In the latest decade, with our continued land acquisition, management has become more complicated. The Foundation has begun using easements to secure protection of additional land and applied for grants to purchase land, equipment, and hire personnel. But what else will be needed? In order to continue to restore and care for our additional land, I believe that an active and dedicated volunteer “army” will also be necessary to keep our mission alive and to assure pride in our past and future accomplishments.

Dale Birkenholz



Meet Jason

Hello my name is Jason Shoemaker, the new ParkLands land steward. I grew up just a few miles from ParkLands and the Mackinaw River. As a young boy I spent a lot of time exploring our trails with my parents. As a result I developed a love for nature, which carried through to my adult life. I knew that I wanted to work with or in natural areas as a profession so I enrolled at SIUC, recently receiving my B.S. with a specialty in Forestry Natural Resources.

I am really interested in restoring and preserving natural areas so other generations can enjoy the same experiences I did as a young person. In the past I worked at Funks Grove Cemetery Association and Sugar Grove Nature Center. While working at Funks Grove I learned various management techniques including the removal of exotic species and how to conduct prescribed burns. Some of my hobbies include hiking, biking, riding ATV’s, carving, and painting.

If you have any questions or concerns about any of the Parklands properties you can reach me by phone at (309) 531 7065 or by sending me an e-mail: shoemaj@hotmail.com.

Fifth decade brings new technology

ParkLands Foundation is continuing its progressive approaches to natural lands protection and management by incorporating GIS — Geographic Information Systems. This sophisticated computer technology utilizes digital geospatial data to optimize land conservation, stewardship, site management, outreach and fundraising.

GIS enables us to create detailed maps of all properties, develop a natural resources inventory, prepare site-specific vegetation and land use maps for ecological restoration projects, and identify potential future acquisitions and conservation easements. With GIS we can produce accurate, visually exciting maps of our properties, habitats and plants and animals for the website, membership materials, the annual report and trail guides.

We have two GIS projects that will begin this summer. The first is the inventory and mapping of all our

parcels in ArcGIS 9.2, thanks to the assistance of the Institute for Geospatial Analysis and Mapping (GEOMAP) at Illinois State University and help from ParkLands volunteers.

The second is setting up Erler's LandSteward software, a browser-based database program from the Land Trust Alliance to help us organize, store, and access ParkLands information, such as legal papers, photos, monitoring reports, etc.

Altogether, this entry into GIS will lead to further improvement of land management and restoration for the benefit of nature and the enjoyment of the public.

Gretchen Knapp

Check out the new web site - www.parklandsfoundation.org

Major gift received

The Merwin name is synonymous with ParkLands Foundation. Loring Merwin had the vision and was the driving force behind creating ParkLands Foundation in 1967. The Merwin Foundation has provided financial support for many years. ParkLands Foundation recently received a \$5000 gift from the foundation. Not only is the financial support greatly appreciated but it also signals continued support for our direction and mission.

Save the date — Annual Meeting

On Sunday, September 16, 2007, the ParkLands Foundation will hold its 41st annual meeting at Sugar Grove Nature Center. Chef DeAnna Belz of Kitchen Connection will cater a delicious lunch. Our keynote speaker this year is Eric Freyfogle, University of Illinois College Of Law professor. He has taught courses on property, natural resources, wildlife law, land use planning and environmental law and policy. He is the author of such books as *Bounded People*, *Boundless Lands*; *Envisioning a New Land Ethic*. Eric has been active in state and local conservation efforts for many year, currently serving as a Prairie Rivers Network board member.

Mary Horgan, President

Calendar of Events

Autumn Olive Control

Saturday, June 16, 9:00 a.m.

Merwin Preserve
Pasture at Gas Well

Leader: Jason Shoemaker
309-531 7065 or shoemaj@hotmail.com

Build a Boardwalk

Saturday, June 30, 9:00 a.m.

Merwin Preserve
Lantz Loop Trail

Leader: Dale Birkenholz
309-452-8086 or dbirke@ilstu.edu-

Trail Maintenance

Saturday, July 21, 9:00 a.m..

Merwin West Gate

Leader: Jason Shoemaker
309-531-7065 or shoemaj@hotmail.com

NOTE: Dates are subject to change. For up-to-date information, check with the leader or log on to www.parklandsfoundation.org.

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