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**ParkLands Foundation  
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Don Schmidt

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Find us on the web at:  
[www.parklandsfoundation.org](http://www.parklandsfoundation.org)

**Newsletter  
June - July 2009**

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**PARKLANDS CAPTURES VALUABLE STATE GRANT**



ParkLands Foundation has received a Land Owner Incentive Program grant for many of our properties. Land Owner Incentives is an IDNR program. The LIP program gets grant money each year from the Fish and Wildlife Program. They then turn

around and reach out to private land owners to get them interested and help them to properly manage their lands. LIP funds 75% of each project. We are getting around \$120,000 to help with our management projects.

The grant will help hire contractors to do projects on Lexington, Merwin, Woodrum, Wyatts Ford, Letchers Bottom and Chinquapin Bluffs preserves. It will fund exotics control, timber stand improvement, prairie restoration and tree planting. We will be planting 91 acres of prairie, enhancing natural community composition and structure on 187 acres of dry-mesic oak hickory forest and woodland, and planting 64 acres of oak/hickory seedlings.

One of the projects is re-planting the Merwin Prairie, located at PJ Keller Highway and County Road 29. This prairie was planted in the past with few prairie forbs in the mix. It is now mostly prairie grass mixed with non-native grasses and weeds.

This grant gives us a unique opportunity to plant the prairie with a high percentage of prairie forbs/flowers. Once grasses take over it is hard to get the prairie forbs to come up if you just plant the seeds alone. Because of this we are planning on applying herbicide that will kill the grasses and weeds. Once the grasses and weeds are killed, we plan on planting the area with fresh seed in the winter, using an air flow seeder machine. The seed will be mixed with potash as fertilizer and blown on in the winter of 2009/2010. This allows the seed to get cold wet stratification which will help the seed sprout next spring. The prairie might take two to three years to become a healthy restored prairie, but we are confident that it will be a Merwin Preserve show case. So in short, if you see the prairie killed off we are doing this on purpose!

*Thanks for your support!  
Jason Shoemaker*

**ParkLands hosts visitor from the frozen North**

The winter of 2008-9 brought frigid temperatures and challenging travel for Central Illinois residents, but it also led to a historic invasion of winter finches to the area. Common Redpolls and both Crossbill species were found in numbers not seen in many years. This winter also brought another avian visitor to Merwin Nature Preserve which had never been seen before in McLean County .

Hoping to find some of these finches ourselves, my wife Keely Austin and I headed out on Jan. 25 to look through the pine plantings at Merwin. As luck would have it, we happened upon a small group of finches feeding in a planting of Sweet Gum trees west of the Elizabeth Stein trail. As we enjoyed the Redpolls, Pine Siskins and Purple Finches searching for Sweet Gum seeds, I noticed a Redpoll that was much paler than the rest. Closer observation convinced me I was seeing a Hoary Redpoll finch. This was a big deal!

While we rushed to get the camera, I called Matt Fraker and Matthew Winks to help verify the sighting.

By day's end, they, along with Angelo Capparella, Dale Birkenholz and several others had verified and enjoyed a first for McLean County; it was a life bird for all of us.

Hoary Redpolls are finches of the Arctic. They nest in small willows in sheltered areas of the northern tundra and have very fluffy body feathers to help keep warm in extreme cold. When food sources become scarce, Hoary Redpolls (along with other finches) move south of normal wintering grounds.

In some years, just a few finches dribble into Illinois; in others, they pour into the state in what some scientists refer to as a "superflight." In superflight years, a scarce few Hoary Redpolls are mixed in with the dozens of Common Redpolls seen. Most don't make it this far south, as there are only a handful of Hoary Redpoll records south of Chicago. During the cold winter of 2008-9, we were lucky enough to find one right here at ParkLands.

*Todd Bugg*

# Meet your ParkLands board member — Guy Fraker



My name is Guy Fraker and my history with ParkLands goes pretty much all the way back to the beginning (of ParkLands, that is) including the gestation period where we would have regular planning meetings called by founder Loring Merwin at the old YWCA. These went on several years before the actual founding. The visionary Merwin foresaw the impending disappearance of habitat before most. ParkLands went from saving land as a conduit for appropriate units of government on the Mackinaw at Lilly in Tazewell County to doing it ourselves.

We went from merely preserving to actively managing natural areas to minimizing the threat of invasive species. This second revelation was thanks to the influence and leadership of our Illinois State Biology Department experts, Dale Birkenholz, Roger Anderson, Don Schmidt, and

Angelo Capparella whose efforts made ParkLands a model for small land trusts, renowned throughout Illinois.

My own increased awareness of this mission led me to serve on the the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy board, including as Chairman, on Jim Edgar's Task Force on Land Use and Water Conservation and a five year term on the Nature Preserves Commission, including the chairmanship. I was also Director of Land Protection for The Nature Conservancy for two years.

I am currently writing a book about Abraham Lincoln and the Eighth Judicial Circuit where he practiced law, riding through tall grass prairie and savannah, some of which ParkLands now protects, including his regular crossing of our beloved Mackinaw River at Wyatt's Ford. There's a certain symmetry in all of that.

I am very proud of ParkLands success and my son Matt's commitment to habitat and species preservation. ParkLands will go on for generations. Perhaps one of his children will carry the torch and will be serving on ParkLands Board 42 years from now.

Man has been endowed with the ability to damage and destroy nature. Man has also been endowed with the moral sense and will to preserve it. We are fortunate ParkLands gives us all an instrument with which to participate in that sacred duty.

*Guy Fraker*

## ***Demonstration Farm Open House*** ***Thursday, June 11 (rain date 18th)*** ***8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.***

TOUR the 250-acre Franklin family farm with its wide variety of conservation practices installed, including constructed wetlands, grass waterways, woodland restoration and prairie reconstruction.

### SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

8:30am-Registration opens  
9:00 am-11:00am Farm Tours  
11:00am-1:00pm Lunch and Speakers  
1:00pm-3:00pm Farm Tours  
Tours are free! Food available for lunch

RSVP to the county SWCD office by June 5  
309-452-0830 Ext. #3

Directions: 3/4 mi. west of I-55 Lexington exit, on south side of County Hwy 8 (PJ Keller Hwy) Look for signs.

## Calendar of Events

Invasives Control  
Saturday, June 6, 9 a.m.  
Merwin Preserve South Gate

Sweet Clover and Parsnip  
Saturday, June 13, 9 a.m.  
Merwin Prairie  
west side

Trail Maintenance  
Saturday, July 18, 9 a.m.  
Merwin Preserve West Gate

**NOTE: Dates are subject to change. Join Jason's e-mail list or log on to [www.parklandsfoundation.org](http://www.parklandsfoundation.org).**

Demo Farm Open House  
Thursday, June 11  
RSVP by June 5  
452-0830, ext. 3

Annual Meeting  
Sunday, Sept. 13  
Sugar Grove Nature Center  
[more in next newsletter]

Workdays Leader:  
Jason Shoemaker  
309-531-7065  
[shoemaj@hotmail.com](mailto:shoemaj@hotmail.com)

**Have an article, idea or photo for the newsletter?**  
Contact editor Gretchen Monti, 309-829-2450, or [gretchen.monti@verizon.net](mailto:gretchen.monti@verizon.net)

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