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

**Newsletter  
December 2009  
January 2010**

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## **LTA – Guided Organizational Assessment**

On Saturday, September 19, members of our Board of Directors met with Johanna Garsenstein, LTA Chicago Field Representative, to complete the LTA Guided Organizational Assessment. This is the first step towards applying for full accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance.

As Board member Julie Elzanati so eloquently explained at the annual meeting, there are several reasons why ParkLands will benefit from becoming accredited. First, accredited land trusts will meet nationally recognized quality standards for protecting important national places. Accredited land trusts will demonstrate their commitment to excellence by adopting appropriate Land Trust Standards and Practices, the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust, and meeting the accreditation requirements drawn from them.

Secondly, nonprofit agencies, including land trusts such as ParkLands Foundation, are increasingly called upon to demonstrate their accountability to the public. Accredited land trusts will have voluntarily submitted their organization to an external, independent review of their practices. As a result, accreditation will provide the public with the assurances that land trusts displaying the accreditation seal meets established standards for organizational quality and permanent land protection.

Third, land trusts help conserve land that is essential to our health and well-being. When land trusts agree to protect land for the benefit of the public, in most cases

they do so by promising for protection in perpetuity. The accreditation program will verify that ParkLands has the policies and programs in place to keep this promise.

In late October we received comprehensive written feedback from Johanna outlining the steps necessary to allow ParkLands to apply for full accreditation. Our goal is to complete this process in two years—2012.

*Mary Horgan  
Vice- President*

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### **Chinquapin Bluffs Gains Protection**

On Sept. 22 the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission approved our application to register the 756.98 acres of Chinquapin Bluffs as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve.

The INPC protects a tapestry of nature's treasures in the nationally acclaimed Illinois Nature Preserves System reaching from the Cache River Basin's cypress swamps in southern Illinois to the Illinois Beach dunes along Lake Michigan. Properties dedicated as ILWRs may be used for hiking, wildlife watching, photography, fishing and other approved scientific activities. By registering Chinquapin Bluffs as a Land and Water Reserve our goal is to permanently protect the varied landscapes, flora and fauna that make up this unique habitat in Woodford County. It is important to note that ParkLands retains all ownership and management responsibility for this property and that passive nature recreation will continue to be allowed.

*Mary Horgan*

## **RESTORING THE MERWIN PRAIRIE**

A common question for ParkLands is: what happened to the prairie at the Merwin Preserve? Short answer: we are undertaking a more effective ecological restoration.

The Merwin prairie was established in the late 1970s before best practices for tallgrass prairie restoration were well understood. Back then, restoring a prairie meant planting a lot of prairie grass seed with a little bit of prairie wildflower (forb) seed and without using a large number of species. In part, diverse species and local sources of seed were hard to obtain back then. And the overabundant deer herd was reducing growing success.

Since then, the science of prairie restoration has advanced considerably and the interest in high-quality prairie restorations has enhanced seed sources. To get a high-quality prairie, one must (1) start with a high forb:grass seed ratio; (2) use a high, natural diversity of species; and (3) use local seed (ecotypes). Ecotypes within species are important to preserve genetic biodiversity and to ensure adaptation to local conditions.

From the 1980s onward we adopted these practices at our other prairie restorations, and later added effective deer management. The southeast corner of the Merwin prairie was planted during



*Little Bluestem at  
Weston Prairie*

# Meet your ParkLands board member — Don Schmidt

I have been a member of the ParkLands Board since about 1993, serving as President for 2 years at the end of the 1990's. I have always been interested in natural plant and animal communities. I have served as the "leader" of the volunteers who work on the restoration at Sugar Grove Nature Center in Funks Grove. Guy Fraker thought that this experience gave me some credibility and so he nominated me to the board, and I quickly agreed.

I am not an Illinois native and had to learn to love the flat land. I was born in Pittsburgh and moved to Baltimore for my early teenage years. Later my family moved to the Chicago suburb of Flossmoor. I attended the University of Illinois where almost by accident I was exposed to horticulture as a viable career option. I earned a B.S. in Ornamental Horticulture in 1978.

I worked as a landscape designer for two. Overwhelmed with Chicago after having discovered central Illinois during college, I moved to Bloomington in 1980 and started my own little "pick-up truck" landscape operation. I then enrolled at ISU to work on a biology degree. After taking classes for about six months I found out the position of horticulturist in the department was vacant. I got to know the people that were attempting to manage the greenhouse and the rest is history. I have been very lucky and ISU has been very good to me.

First and most important, I was very lucky to have met my lovely wife Carol who was also a graduate student at Illinois State in 1983; we were married in

1988. Second, in 1992 Marc Boon asked if I would come over to WGLT, the ISU public radio station, to talk about "things in the garden". I did and people liked it (hard to explain). The folks at the radio station asked if I would keep coming back, and the "Dean of Green" was born.



And my last lucky break came in 1997 when a woman who taught woody landscape plants in the Agriculture Department suddenly left and they needed a replacement. This happens to be something I love and know very well, so I have been teaching a woody landscape plants class ever since then.

Carol and I had lived on the east side of Bloomington when on New Year's Day 2000 we got this crazy idea that we could buy a rural property, build a house and plant trees. Within about three weeks we were introduced to a wonderful piece of property in south-east Woodford County. We fell in love with the land—it was a whirlwind romance. We started planting trees and moved into our new home in May of 2004. It is truly spectacular, and this little five-acre parcel is now the center of our lives. I love to dig holes and grow plants. Carol loves to cook what I grow and I love to eat what she cooks, it is a perfect match. Our lives could not be any happier.

that later time period, and therefore has been retained. Letcher Basin Nature Preserve in **Merwin Prairie** cont'd

Woodford Co. shows how effectively such practices entice native birds and insect pollinators to the site.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to adjust an older planting that is primarily a dense stand of grass. With concurrence from both ParkLands and IDNR biologists, we applied herbicides to the 1970s planting this year, and soon we will replant using a high forb:grass seed ratio with many species and local ecotypes.

The restored prairie won't look too great the first year, but by year two you'll see the baby prairie plants bursting forth, and it will be well on its way to a full prairie. This will provide a better place for all organisms and will help people appreciate a high quality prairie restoration.

## Calendar of Events

### Invasive species control

Saturday, Jan. 16, 9 am  
Merwin Prairie Gas Well

### Invasive species control

Saturday, Feb. 6, 9 a.m.  
Merwin Preserve North Gate

### Forest restoration

Saturday, Jan. 30, 9 am  
Merwin Preserve South Gate

### Invasive species control

Saturday, Feb. 20, 9 am  
Merwin Preserve Gas Well

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

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**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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