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Find us on the web at:
www.parklandsfoundation.org

**Newsletter
February -
March 2010**

Sweeney Woods — major acquisition

ParkLands Foundation has increased the amount of protected natural areas locally thanks to two grants (\$167,875 each) from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Grand Victoria Foundation, and a \$59,250 acquisition match from ParkLands. We have purchased the 77-acre Sweeney-Hewitt farm in northwestern McLean County along the Mackinaw River to extend our nature preserve system, improve the ecological health of the river, and provide public access for nature enjoyment and recreation.

The new Sweeney Woods Nature Preserve is located in Gridley Township (T26N, R2E, Section 36). It is one mile north of Lake Bloomington and entry is on the east side of county road 1725E, just south of the river (signage and a parking area are forthcoming). The preserve is contiguous with other land owned by ParkLands, which all together form a 115-acre habitat block protecting over a half mile of the Mackinaw River.

We will restore the currently farmed land to native floodplain and upland forest, and we will create trails for public use. We also plan a canoe launch that will provide a safe access and exit site along the Mackinaw. This acquisition brings the total area of ParkLands-protected land in McLean County's Mackinaw River watershed to more than 1,500 acres.

Many volunteer Board members helped with the complicated grant process and we thank all of them. Receiving these grants is a credit to the years of membership support that makes ParkLands a statewide model for doing effective land conservation. Our biggest challenge now is raising funds for reforestation and enhancing public access for passive nature recreation.

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation supports land preservation efforts that enhance natural areas and wildlife habitats throughout the state. ParkLands has previously received grants from ICECF, including assisting our purchase of the Letcher Basin Nature Preserve. The Grand Victoria Foundation Vital Lands-Illinois Program supports acquisition and preservation of natural lands across the state with the goal of a statewide connected system under long-term ecological stewardship that provides public access. This is their first land preservation grant in McLean County.

*Angelo Capparella
President*



ParkLands grows again — new Bloomington office

Well, after 43 years, the Board of Directors has decided to rent an office! Our new location is 418 N. Main Street in downtown Bloomington (1 building north of the Reality Bites restaurant). After a year long search, this location was selected for its central location, available parking, square footage and reasonable rent. Our landlord Debra Risberg is a ParkLands supporter and conservation advocate. We sincerely appreciate her willingness to accommodate our needs.

You may wonder why after 43 years we have decided to rent an office now. Our reasons are numerous. First, we desperately need a permanent location to house our records, many of which have been kept in the offices and homes of various directors. Accessing these records and documents, especially for grant applications and land purchases, has been cumbersome to say the least! Second, as part of our application for accreditation through The Land Trust Alliance, we must demonstrate a commitment to perma-

nent and safe storage of all legal documents and correspondence. Finally, a permanent office will afford the various committees a convenient location in which to meet and conduct business.

Over the next month we plan to create a window display and "drop-in" area where people can obtain information about ParkLands, including trail maps, membership brochures and workday schedules. At this point though, we do not have staff available to answer phones or answer questions in person so all mail will continue to be delivered to our post office box and phone calls will go through the Ecology Action Center (309.454.3169). Or you can contact us at our email address: info@parklandsfoundation.org. Remember to put ParkLands in the subject line.

If you happen to be in downtown Bloomington later this spring grabbing a cup of coffee at the Coffee Hound, please cross the street and take a look at our window display!

Mary Horgan

Meet your ParkLands board member — *Eric Smith*



I was born and raised outside of Portland Maine. As a kid I was always building forts in the woods, skating on beaver ponds, searching for sand dollars and fishing for eels with my friend Bones. I was also fortunate that my folks bought acres and acres of forestland when they first got

married. It was in those woods where I spent much of my time cutting firewood for the stove, camping, hunting, hiking, running, snowshoeing, cross country skiing and tapping sugar maples to make syrup.

Naturally I went to college to study the something related to the outdoors. I traveled to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and received a BS degree in Natural Resources Management.

Then I was off to Eastern Illinois University to earn an MS degree in Environmental Biology in 1991. I originally wanted to be a plant physiologist. However, less than stellar grades in two semesters of organic chemistry and a frank talk with my academic advisor put an abrupt end to that.

After graduation I worked a number of jobs including land manager, adjunct instructor, private consultant, ornithologist and research scientist. In 1996 I was hired by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources as a Natural Heritage Biologist. In that role I manage the state's rarest resources (prairie, forest and wetlands) and the plants and animals associated with them. The Mackinaw River contains wonderful heritage resources. There are several hill prairies that are always a pleasure to walk through. And the river itself contains a wonderful diversity of mussels and fishes.

I was honored when ParkLands Foundation asked me to be a director. Land trusts are where the passionate habitat conservation and restoration is taking place. Everyone associated with land trusts is on the same page. At ParkLands Foundation this means protecting and managing habitat along the Mackinaw River while providing compatible recreation to the general public. Who wouldn't want to be a part of this?

When I retire I am returning to Maine's forests and oceans. But meantime, the bluffs, hill prairies, and woodlands of the Mackinaw River suit me just fine.

Calendar of Events

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

Invasive species control
Saturday, Feb. 20, 9 am
Merwin Preserve Gas Well

Invasive species control
Saturday, **April** 17, 9 a.m.
Merwin Preserve North Gate



Spring Wildflower Walk
Saturday, **April** 11, 1:00 p.m.
Merwin Preserve South Gate
Dale Birkenholz, leader
309-452-8086
dbirke@ilstu.edu

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

NOTE: Dates are subject to change.
Join Jason's e-mail list or log on to
www.parklandsfoundation.org

Have an article, idea or photo for the newsletter?
Contact editor Gretchen Monti, 309-829-2450, or
gretchen.monti@verizon.net

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