

**ParkLands Foundation**

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Find us on the web at:

[www.parklandsfoundation.org](http://www.parklandsfoundation.org)

**Newsletter  
August –  
September 2010**

**It's Time For Our 44th Annual Meeting**

Please join us for our annual meeting scheduled for Sunday, September 12th at the Lexington Community Center. Doors will open at noon and the meal will be served at 1 p. m. The luncheon will be buffet style and offer fried chicken, roast pork, scalloped potatoes, green beans, lettuce salad and dessert. If you prefer a vegetarian selection please write that on your registration form. **Mail the form below by September 1 so we will have an accurate lunch count.**

After our meal there will be a brief business meeting, then Dr. Roger Anderson and Jason Shoemaker will give us a slide presentation on the history of ParkLands and our recent restoration efforts at the Chinquapin and Merwin Natural Preserves, Letcher Basin and Lexington Prairie. Following the meeting, Dr. Dale Birkenholz, Roger and Jason will lead a tour through the Lexington Prairie where they will talk about the natural history of the site, explain recent management activities and point out indigenous flora. Please bring comfortable walking shoes if you would like to join us for the walk.

*Directions to the Lexington Community Center — At I-55 Lexington Exit #178, turn east onto P.J. Keller Hwy; less than a mile further, turn right onto Spencer Street, then a slight left onto Main Street. The center is at 207 W. Main, on the north side.*

*Mary Horgan*

**Sept. 12, 2010 ParkLands Foundation Annual Meeting Reservation Form**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

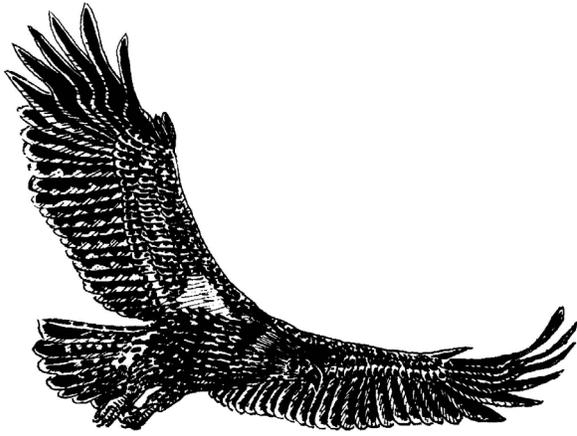
Total number of Meals: \_\_\_\_\_ Make mine/ours vegetarian: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

\$12.50 per meal. Make check payable to ParkLands Foundation.

**Please make your reservation with Mary Horgan by September 1st by mailing this form to:  
Mary Horgan-Siegworth, 580 Fairway Drive, El Paso, IL 61738**

Questions or messages for Mary: [horgan@mcchs.org](mailto:horgan@mcchs.org) or 309.527.5636



## Fantastic Finding

again...it was a baby Bald Eagle! We don't know if there were multiple eggs laid, since we weren't able to look down into the nest, but we were only able to see one eaglet. But this was still a fabulous occurrence!

And the good news continues, as this eaglet is thriving and growing. It has fledged from the nest recently, and is flying around the area. We now see her perched in a different tree, one that has lower branches over the river. We have observed one of the adults bringing her food (small fish), and I would think that she should start learning to hunt for herself soon. One of the adults is usually around each day in the area, making sure that all is safe.

ParkLands members may or may not be able to observe the eagles from the parking area at Letcher Basin. If you do go, take a good pair of binoculars and look south into the tall cottonwood trees along the river, especially the trees with open, bare branches.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends that someone observing eagles and their nest and young should keep at least 100 yards away.

There is little enough good environmental news these days, especially in light of the ongoing Gulf Oil spill, so I thought that I would share a bit of fantastic news about an event that has occurred in our local area on ParkLands property in Woodford County.

On April 2, 2010, a baby Bald Eagle was hatched in a nest that was built by a pair of eagles who decided that a large cottonwood tree on the banks of the Mackinaw River at the Letcher Basin Preserve was a prime spot to build a nest and raise a family. This is the first time in a VERY long time that Bald Eagles have not only nested along the Mackinaw, but successfully hatched young. In fact, I'm not sure if there are any records that exist that have documented this ever occurring, although I'm sure that it has in the distant past.

The eagle pair was observed months earlier (October of 2009) perched in several different trees along the river, and then we (my husband Sandy and I) started observing nest building in late December of 2009. Since we could see the nest tree pretty well from a bluff on our property, we set up a deer blind as a protected "observatory" in hopes of watching them without causing any disturbance. We hiked out to the blind almost daily, and were able to see the pair diligently building on to the nest. In February of 2010, after sitting in the blind for about an hour getting colder and colder, I was stunned when the female eagle flew into the tree where the male was perched and they briefly mated. Wow, I certainly wasn't expecting that, but it sure made me forget the cold!

Based on my Internet research of eagles, this meant that they were serious about staying, and eggs, if laid, should hatch around the end of March or early April. In March, it was pretty obvious that the eagles were incubating eggs. One eagle was always in the nest, and we observed them switching duties and bringing each other food. And then on April 2, 2010, I observed one small head bobbling up from in the nest! Wow

### *Annual Meeting Business*

The nominating Committee is re-nominating Don Schmidt, Roger Anderson and Dan Deneen to additional terms. The committee is working to fill positions being vacated by Guy Fraker, Matt Fraker and Dale Birkenholz, who have reached the nine year limit for serving on the board.

ParkLands members may nominate candidates for director positions by petition filed with the Secretary of the Corporation (Terry Caines) at least seven days prior to the annual meeting. Each petition must contain the signatures of 15 members of the corporation.

No nominations may be made from the floor at the annual meeting.

*Barry Brenneman and Matt Fraker*

# Hiking the New Sweeney Woods Property

You have to think about the future when you hike the 77-acre Sweeney Woods Nature Preserve, ParkLands Foundation's latest acquisition. To those unfamiliar with how the organization operates, it might look like typical Illinois farmland: a long, flat field with oats pushing up through the rich Mackinaw floodplain, a rising hillside leading to another cleared field above, the meandering river guarded by a narrow belt of silver maple and hackberry. A desolate cabin where a raccoon peers out suspiciously. A small seep that harbors grasses and sedges. A little pond where red-winged blackbirds dart through the bordering cattails. A doe bounding through the oats.

But of course ParkLands sees something more. A recent visit leaves another impression: what an experience awaits future generations of hikers, birders, nature enthusiasts and solitary dreamers at the Sweeney property—not to forget the deer, raccoons, opossums, otters, year-round bird residents and those merely passing through the new property and the previously-purchased narrow band of forest along the bluff on the north side of the river. Already, hardwood trees have been planted into the upland former cropland, replacing soybeans, and soon bluebird and kestrel houses will grace the area from posts that still futilely stand guard, although now unencumbered with barbwire.

Parklands' vision for this Mackinaw River watershed property includes hiking trails through the eventual

woods, and a more accessible canoe launch by the Coonsford Bridge on County Road 1725E. By announcing such projects, in fact, the organization secured grants to purchase the land from Sweeney descendants, grants awarded by the Grand Victoria Foundation Vital Lands-Illinois Program and the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.

A hike by two ParkLands members encountered several longtime ParkLands friends already happily at home on the Sweeney lands: a pair of Lark Sparrows, Great Crested Flycatchers, Eastern Phoebes, Eastern Kingbirds, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, a Canada Goose leading her brood south away from the river, and several other species on that sunny May morning.

The Sweeney property is just beginning as a ParkLands site. By now that is an old, old story for the organization. Our grandchildren will see something far, far different.

*Mark Wyman and Dale Birkenholz*

**DRIVING DIRECTIONS:** Cross the Lake Bloomington dam and take the first turn to the left. Drive north, turn left at the T intersection, and follow the road to just short of the Coonsford Bridge across the Mackinaw River. Park along the road (1725E) or by the narrow lane that enters the floodplain field (do not drive into the property). You are on the Sweeney property.

## Meet your ParkLands board member — *Todd Bugg*



I grew up on a grain farm in Christian County, Illinois, in an area some conservationists would refer to as a “corn desert.” Despite the lack of natural habitat, my father always pointed out the Red-Tailed Hawks soaring above us and the Indigo Buntings flying between the telephone poles while we worked in the fields.

I had always been interested in birds, but had very little opportunity to really study them. After becoming a full-time Bloomington resident in 1990, I soon discovered (with Matt Fraker's help) the wilds of McLean County and the birds to be found there. It wasn't long before the Merwin Preserve was a regular stop in my developing birding fascination. Now my wife Keely Austin and I live right next to the south gate at Merwin and have the good fortune to hike and bird ParkLands' crown jewel right out our back door.

As a board member for ParkLands, I enjoy the opportunity to use my skills and experience as an attorney to meet the legal needs of the organization. In the last few years, I have helped draft corporate documents, farm and pasture leases, and easement monitoring policies. Even more exciting, over the last few years I have been able to provide legal assistance to ParkLands for its acquisitions of the McClure Farm, the Sweeney Woods Nature Preserve and Chinquapin Bluffs.

In the time I have been involved with ParkLands as a member and director, I have developed a deep respect for the dedication and imagination of the foundation, its directors and the members who gladly donate their time and treasure to local conservation. ParkLands Foundation demonstrates its commitment to the preservation, restoration and stewardship of the natural lands of Central Illinois every day. I am privileged to be involved with the organization and better for it.



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*Ecology Action Center*

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## Meet the 2010 Interns



*Cruising around ParkLands are this year's interns, left to right: Bethany Evans, Ken Breiner, and Laura Jacobi*

## Calendar of Events

### Annual Meeting

Sunday, Sept. 12

doors open at noon; lunch 1:00 p.m.

Lexington Community Center

Mail page 1 form by 9/1/10 to Mary Horgan

309.527.5636 or [Horgan@mcchs.org](mailto:Horgan@mcchs.org)

### Seed Collection

Saturday, Oct. 2, 9 a.m.

Cayuga Ridge (Pontiac)

BP Gas Station, Lexington Exit

Leader: Jason Shoemaker

309-531-7065 or [shoemaj@hotmail.com](mailto:shoemaj@hotmail.com)

### Seed Collection

Saturday, Oct. 16, 9 a.m.

Cayuga Ridge (Pontiac)

BP Gas Station, Lexington Exit

Leader: Jason Shoemaker

309-531-7065 or [shoemaj@hotmail.com](mailto: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](http://www.parklandsfoundation.org).