

October 2020



Newsletter

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Welcome to our new Board President, Eric Smith!

After being introduced as the new board president at the Annual meeting in September, I quizzed the members in attendance. I asked them how many years does it take before a land trust to runs out of quality candidates for board president? I told them 54 years, as ParkLands Foundation was entering their 54th year.

That about sums up most conversations with me; I am quick with a one liner. During my adolescence, my mother used to tell me all the time, "Eric, you are such a nice boy, why do you always have to be joking?"

Some folks are great conversationalists. My brother could sell anything to anyone. That is not me. Small talk makes me uncomfortable. I am not shy, I just do not have much to say. You can imagine my initial anxiety when I was placed next to George Farnsworth at the ParkLands Foundation's 50th Anniversary Banquet. I enjoyed my conversations with George that night.

I have been a Natural Heritage Biologist with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the last 24 years. I manage and restore high quality prairies, woodlands and forests. I control exotic species and conduct prescribed fires. I survey for rare plants and animals. Jason has nothing on me on the amount of exotic bush honeysuckle he has killed, or sweet clover pulled.

My involvement with ParkLands Foundation began 15 years ago. We had some loooooong board meetings back then. Jason was just starting as our Land Steward. The President was responsible for everything. It was a huge time commitment. Todd Bugg, Mary Horgan, and Don Schmidt were a few of the past presidents that freely gave vast amounts of time to this organization. I teamed up with various board members to write the initial board policies. And Matt Fraker was popping in and out of board meetings between surgeries and trips to wherever.

Did I mention that I like to bass fish? I can throw a blue jig or a Carolina rig for hours whether I catch fish or not.

Fast forward to the present day. Today we have committee and subcommittees meetings every other month to make up for the slightly shortened full board meetings.

Erin works her tail off cramming an enormous amount of work into 20 hours a week as our Administrative Director. Jason gets 2 summer interns to help manage an increasing number of properties. We hold almost monthly events to get the public out to appreciate our properties. Craig Lutes joined us part time earlier this summer to help organize events and solidify our volunteer program.

You all know I was born and raised outside of Portland, Maine, right?

Anyway, to put a wrap on this article, ParkLands Foundation is a wonderful organization. I was there 15 years ago for the start of the most recent turning point. Was this organization going to own a few marquis properties and be happy with their accomplishments over the past 40 years (as they well should be), or were they going to take the next steps to grow the organization?

Every business or organization faces that decision. We chose to grow. It has not been easy charting a course through untraveled waters. There have been growing pains. But its members and board members are committed to getting it right. I am humbled more than you will ever know that you have asked me to temporarily lead this organization.

And yes, Matt Fraker is still popping in and out of meetings between surgeries and trips to wherever.



Eric Smith

ParkLands Board President

2020 Annual Meeting Recap

ParkLands hosted its 54th Annual Meeting of the Members on September 13, 2020. The event was an outdoor picnic at the Hazle Preserve which is on the northwest corner of our Chinquapin Bluffs Land & Water Reserve. Forty five members joined us for a day of hiking and a recap of the last year.

We started the morning with a hike to the bluffs and then returned to have a picnic lunch from A to Z catering. Our outgoing President Jessica Chambers recalled some of our accomplishments over the past year including several socially distanced outdoor events and the hard work of our faithful volunteers.

We had five board members reach the end of their nine-year term: Nancy Armstrong, Matt Fraker, Given Harper, Krista Kirkham and Maria Lemke will be taking a much needed year off but we hope they won't go far! Bill Davison also stepped down after 3 years of service to ParkLands.

Our members elected six new members to our board: Morgan Armbrust, Ginny Eves, Jim Franks, Deanna Frautschi, Mark Kotte, and Corrie Scott. The members also elected a new slate of officers: Eric Smith will be our incoming President, Frank Sanders will be Vice President, Michael McKinley will take over as Treasurer and Cristina Almeida will serve as Secretary.

We thank everyone that attended our Annual Meeting this year. We are all looking forward to an exciting 2021 and look forward to seeing all of you out at the Mackinaw!



Board Member Spotlight

The next few newsletters will introduce you to new board members, including two who joined the board midterm. We'll start with Frank Sanders, Volunteer Steward at Chinquapin Bluffs Land & Water Reserve and newly appointed ParkLands Vice President. Here's a little about Frank.

Years with ParkLands

"I got involved in 2017 after hearing about it during the Master Naturalist training program."

Why Volunteer?

"It was a way to do something for the environment while working outside, in the field."

Profession

"Retired from a career as a Professional Environmental Engineer in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina."

Favorite ParkLands "Spot"

"The wetlands of South Chinquapin Bluffs. It is located in the center of the prairie and visited by beavers, river otters, herons and songbirds."



Announcing the Angelo Capparella ParkLands Service Award

ParkLands was built by volunteers. In fact, we were entirely volunteer-driven for more than 30 years, and we continue to rely heavily on a diverse team of people dedicated to carrying out our mission.

In an effort to recognize the exceptional volunteers who make ParkLands possible, we are pleased to announce the creation of a new annual award - the **Angelo Capparella ParkLands Service Award** - in honor of one of ParkLands' most legendary volunteers, Angelo Capparella.

"(Angelo) has been a passionate, dedicated, and tireless worker for the ParkLands Foundation," said friend and colleague, Given Harper. "Angelo's list of accomplishments for Parklands and for other issues related to conservation is nothing less than stunning."

Angelo has served as ParkLands President, Vice President, Director, and on the Stewardship Committee. He remains, without hesitation, many board members' first resource for all things stewardship.

Angelo is known within the organization for accepting the tedious, arduous work crucial to operating a land trust. He pours over grants, permits, plat maps, and property tax records with knowledge and grace.

Through this work, Angelo has secured over \$1.3 million in grant funding to protect well over 300 acres of high-quality natural areas throughout central Illinois.



Angelo Capparella in his element.

Angelo's grants have also funded everything from honeysuckle removal to heavy equipment. In 2003, Angelo wrote the successful grant proposal to employ ParkLands' first Land Steward for one year.

Yet, it is not the back office work for which Angelo is widely known. He is recognized across central Illinois for his expertise in conservation biology, ornithology, herpetology, and education. His research appears across our website and outreach material. He is a regular leader of nature hikes, such as our night hike last fall in search of owls.

One recent story perhaps best summarizes Angelo's contributions to ParkLands. When asked for a rough summary of his 2020 volunteer hours, Angelo had a hard time accounting an accurate total. "ParkLands is just a part of my everyday life", he said humbly.

"With these many noteworthy achievements, the one thing that impresses me the most about Angelo is his selfless nature.", Harper continued. "There is no ego. Angelo has been driven to protect and conserve our natural world, and he derives great satisfaction from making a difference in central Illinois."

We hope to nominate at least one volunteer for this award each year. A committee of ParkLands leaders will decide on the recipient of this award every spring and the award will be announced at the annual meeting.



The Angelo Capparella ParkLands Service Award.

Saving Sweeney

By Craig Lutes, Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator

At first blush, the carnage of trees left after any of the recent volunteer workdays at Sweeney Woods would have bystanders scratching their heads. Why would an organization that has spent decades planting trees, spend time and resources cutting them down? Fair question.

It all comes down to diversity of habitat. After Sweeney Woods was acquired by ParkLands in 2009, hundreds of bottomland trees were planted across the floodplain to restore the native woodland. Still more were planted to restore the upland savanna.

However, within a few years, the bottomland trees were quickly out-competed by silver maple saplings whose seeds were deposited during spring floods. Silver maples are native to this region and a part of most wet-mesic landscapes. But, in this case, the maples thrived uncontrollably in the exposed, fertile soil, leaving our slower-growing oaks, sycamores, and walnuts straining for sunlight.

We knew these silver maples needed to be addressed this year. A substantial chunk of the 2020 stewardship budget was set aside to contract arborists for the work. But, when an adjustment to operating expenses was needed, we turned where we have turned for more than 50 years; volunteers.

Lop by lop, saw stroke by saw stroke, our volunteers have not only rescued the bur oaks and walnuts but our budget, as well. Since July, we have held 7 workdays at Sweeney Woods, totaling more than 200 volunteer service hours across 70 volunteers.

The tools of the trade for this project are standard loppers, pruning saws, and hand-held herbicide sprayers. There's no way around it - this makes for some hard work. But, from stifling July to chilly September, volunteers have shown up in big ways with the big smiles you see to the right.

Thanks to all who have lent a hand at Sweeney Woods this year. Once these silver maple trees get thinned out, ongoing maintenance will be much more manageable.

Speaking of, we are search of a Volunteer Steward for Sweeney Woods. If interested, please contact Craig Lutes at craig@parklandsfoundation.org.



A successfully restored mix of trees, grasses, and forbs on Sweeney's east end (top), the current reality of Sweeney's western edge (middle), and restoration in action (bottom).



Upcoming Events

- **Saturday, November 7th** - Volunteer seed collection workday
- **Friday, November 27** - Need to walk off that Thanksgiving turkey? Have your holiday shopping done? Join us the day after Thanksgiving as we #OptOutside with family and friends. Whether you explore a new preserve or share your favorite trail with those you love, there is plenty to be thankful for in the natural world. Share your ParkLands adventure to our Facebook page and use the hashtag #OptOutside.

Stay up-to-date on volunteer workdays and other events such as group hikes this fall and winter by visiting parklandsfoundation.org/events/.



Douglas-Kaufman Dickson at home in the prairie.

Stewards of the Prairie

By Douglas Kaufman-Dickson

The sun was shining; it was just warm enough to be comfortable while you were working; the job was to lead 20 eager college students around Letcher Basin. It really doesn't get much better than this. So it was on a late September afternoon that my fellow volunteer stewards and I were privileged to share Letcher Basin with Dr. Kelvie's Nature Writing class from Eureka College. In return, the class spent an hour helping us control teasel in Letcher Basin by removing seed heads from the maturing plants.

Jack Pfaffmann, Dianne Feasley and I really do consider ourselves privileged to be the volunteer stewards for Letcher Basin. It was in 2013 that Jack and I began working as volunteer stewards. We were both relatively new Illinois Master Naturalists although Jack came with years of personal experience as a volunteer in various prairies. Dianne joined us as a volunteer steward after she completed Master Naturalist training in 2019.

As stewards, most of our time is spent removing the various invasive species that have found their way into Letcher Basin. Our first couple years were focused on cutting and spraying autumn olive. In those early years, the prairie was still maturing from its seeding in 2007 and the autumn olive was widespread along the northern boundary of the prairie. As we have brought the autumn olive under control, we find more and more of our time being spent on teasel which spread into the prairie just as it was spreading all along roadways throughout Illinois.

This year, the three of us spent the winter and early spring cutting honeysuckle along the eastern edge of the basin. Because of the steep incline, which seemed to be either solid ice or very unsolid mud, all cutting was done with hand tools. Sometimes the cutting was done with one hand while holding onto someone else's hand to keep from sliding down into the river. Fortunately we have no video of the times (yes, more than one) when grabbing a tree as we were sliding downhill was all that kept us from a chilling dunk in the Mackinaw.

While we work hard on our semi-monthly work days, the many rewards make it more than worth the effort. There is some time on almost every work day spent just looking at the plants, insects and birds that live in the basin. Whether it is seeing an old favorite for the hundredth time or spotting something new, we get to see the diversity of Letcher Basin every time we visit.

There is also the profound sense of peace that comes with spending our mornings in the quiet that prevails in the basin. There is no better place to step away from the chaos and divisiveness of our modern world than Letcher Basin. On top of all that, we leave each day with that satisfaction of contributing to the preservation of this special habitat which so many species share with us.

As we walked around the basin in September with Dr. Kelvie's class, we were proud to share the fruits of our labor. What a joy it was to be joined by these students who will now be able to say that they too were a part of making Letcher Basin the best little prairie in Woodford County.



Jack Pfaffmann and Dianne Feasley educating students about one of the many prairie plants blooming in the fall.



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