

Bringing Nature to Our Community's Youth



Jean and Given Harper are educators through and through. From literacy to ecology, their careers have opened doors for generations of young people. Their passions bridge nature and learning.

Environmental education is part of our mission at ParkLands. Yet we know not everyone, especially underprivileged youth, have the means to seek outdoor experiences on their own. So, with the Harpers' lead, we brought nature to the youth.

Over several months, Jean partnered with the Boys & Girls and YMCA to develop an educational series designed to introduce nature in a way that sticks – through repeat hands-on experiences in a safe space – culminating in a guided visit to Merwin Preserve.

During the classroom segments, Jean and Given taught students about everything from oak trees to centipedes and why they are important to protect. Spittlebugs, with their foamy protective sack emitted from their rear end, were a huge hit.

A week later, the students took the trails armed with a scavenger hunt and bold curiosity, eyes well-primed for deer tracks, woodpecker holes, and, yes, spittlebug sacks. Their outdoor experiences varied widely from an aspiring marine biologist to many with very little exposure.



One of the children quickly spotted menacing thorns encircling a tall tree just inside's Merwin's north gate. "A honey locust!",

he exclaimed. Several pencils scribbled a checkmark on their nature hunt sheet. Another student noticed the tell-tale flares of a shagbark hickory just down the trail.

Given stopped the group in front of one of 700 house wren nesting boxes at Merwin. "Leave this for the scientists", he reminded as he gently reached inside, cupping a days-old chick in his hand. Necks craned to glimpse the young bird. Further on, shrieks of joy signaled multiple bright blue indigo buntings responding to artificial territorial calls. A

young boy spotted a three-foot long common water-snake at the river's edge on his own.



Several other volunteers were stationed throughout the preserve. Aquatic biologist Krista Kirkham introduced preserved samples of the other-worldly bugs found near the river. Marilyn Freese sampled honey and explained why pollinators are crucial for a healthy world.

As is usually the case, these sessions proved to make educators of the students. We were reminded of the universal joy comes that comes from discovering what creatures live under a log.

Perhaps the proudest moment for our team came when a child, who began the day nearly paralyzed with fear after a harvestmen crawled up his pant legs, boarded the bus full of smiles. His lesson was clear –

reverence for nature resides in everyone if only given a chance to discover it.



Upcoming Events

Sept

12

Annual Meeting

Join us for our 55th annual Meeting of the Members at Sweeney Woods Preserve. The day will start with a guided hike at 10:30am. A box lunch will be served at 12:00pm, followed by the meeting at 12:30. See details on page 4 of this newsletter, and to register visit: parklandsfoundation.org/event/annual-meeting-of-the-members/

October

2

Rescheduled - Night Under the Stars Astronomy Event

Experience the stars, moon, planets over the prairie of Letcher Basin Land & Water Reserve while enjoying wine, fruit, and cheese included with admission. Experts from the Twin City Amateur Astronomers will be on hand to educate us about the night sky, astronomy, and star maps using high-quality telescopes. parklandsfoundation.org/event/night-under-the-stars-meteor-event/

October

9

Archeology Guest Speaker - Dr. Michael Wiant

Dr. Michael Wiant, one of Illinois's most renowned archaeologists, has a long and distinguished career culminating with his tenure as the director of the Dickson Mounds Museum. In 2016 he was appointed as Interim Director for the Illinois State Museum, serving until December 31, 2017 when he retired. Among Michael's interests, experiences and specialties are the recovery technique of flotation, contract archaeology, as well as interpretations of the prehistoric residents of the Illinois River valley, and dissemination of archaeological knowledge to the public. (Biography credit: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum). www.parklandsfoundation.org/event/guest-speaker/

4th Annual Bike Ride

The threat of rain didn't stop nearly 200 riders from a two-wheeled tour of the Mackinaw Valley's rolling hills. Cyclists welcomed unseasonably cool temperatures and a faint breeze, intermixed with only a few light showers. Fortunately, everyone had made it to their vehicles or Kemp's Upper Tap before the skies opened with storms.

A 100 kilometer route was introduced this year in addition to the 20 and 50-mile options. Congratulations to all who finished the ride, especially those on their first long ride. A big thank you our sponsors (below) and to all of the volunteers who supported the ride with smiling faces.



Thank you to our Bike Ride sponsors: Bloomington Cycle & Fitness, Kemp's Upper Tap, Keg Grove Brewing Company, Commerce Bank and Commerce Trust Company, Heartland Bank and Trust Co, William Ray, M.D., Dan and Paula Deneen, Prairie Oak Veterinary Center, Capen Frank Proctor and Bowles, Capodice Efaw Ocheltree & Elger, L.L.C., the The Vein Specialists, Jan Brandt Art Gallery, Jeff Bess Art, Deer's Mill Farm, and the Athlete Factory.

Volunteer Workdays

Time and date may change. More workdays may be added. Visit <http://bit.ly/ParkLandsEvents21> to sign up!

Date	Location
September 3	Chinquapin Bluffs
September 11	Chinquapin Bluffs
September 17	Letcher Basin
October 15	Merwin
November 7	Cayuga Ridge
November 13	Kenyon-Baller Woods

Night Event

While historic rains and early fireworks celebrations dampened the nocturnal activity we had hoped for, the glow of 45 flashlights still courageously followed Dr. Angelo Capparella in search of bats, owls, frogs, and insects. Though we came away with few avians and amphibians, the prairie, lightning bugs, and nesting bald eagles did not disappoint – and neither did the s'mores! The calming atmosphere and wonderful people made the event special.



Tale of Two Prairies

Mild July temperatures awarded the perfect conditions for a tour of two of our most unique prairies: Ridgetop Hill Prairie Nature Preserve and Letcher Basin Land & Water Reserve. Summertime favorites, such as Ridgetop's Yellow False Foxglove and Letcher's Prairie Blazing Star, were kicking off blooms. The expertise of volunteer leaders Sherrie Snyder, Douglas Kaufman-Dickson, and Eric Smith only added to the experience.

Musseling the Mackinaw

By Eric Smith

It was a great day to look for freshwater mussels in the Mackinaw River at the Hayes Property this morning. Temperatures in the 80's, the water was low and warm, and the sky was overcast. A perfect day to play in the river. Thirty different attendees thought it was a great day too. This is the second time we have held this event. We had perfect conditions then, too. Some folks had so much fun last year they signed up for the event again this year. I thought I recognized some faces.



Why have a program about mussels? Well, they are important indicators of water quality. They siphon water to extract their food, meaning that everything that goes into the river goes through the mussels. In some parts of the country, mussels have been found to have anti-depressants in their system because folks flush their medicines down the toilet instead of recycling them. So, a healthy and diverse mussel population in the Mackinaw River means the water is relatively clean. Plus, clams come in all sizes and shapes, have great names like fat mucket and pimpleback, and are easy to catch.

Today we found 2 yellow sandshells, 5 large pocketbooks, 4 small pocketbooks (this shows reproduction in the river, always a good sign), 3 round pigtoes, 5 pimplebacks, and 2 fat muckets, and recently dead shells of pink heelsplitter and white heelsplitter. Not as good as last year, but it was made up for by one kid finding a bowl, another a golf ball, and another kid earning a free t-shirt by dislodging a tire from the sandbar so we could recycle it.

It's easily my favorite ParkLands event. The kids are adorable. Today, a little girl show up with flotation devices around her arms and waist. I made a new friend named Alex. He and I might be the next Abbott and Costello. On the downside, some of the volunteering board members were hurrying me along. You would think the Foundation President would be cut some slack. And the Everett kids are starting to get a little too big for their britches. I blame that on their mother, as the father seems like a rock-solid guy.

Bottom line: When this program shows up on the schedule next year, don't wait to sign up because it will be too late. It's a great way to spend a dog day in August.

2021 Annual Meeting of the Members

Dear ParkLands Foundation Members, We would like to invite you and your friends to join us at the ParkLands Foundation Annual Meeting Sunday, September 12, 2021 at Sweeney Woods Preserve. Signup online at www.parklandsfoundation.org/event/annual-meeting-of-the-members/ or by mail using the slip below. We will begin the morning with an optional guided hike to learn about Sweeney Woods unique flora, fauna, topography, stewardship, and history.

Agenda:

10:30am Optional Guide Hike

12:00pm Lunch (boxed or bring your own)

12:30pm Formal Membership Meeting, Year in Review, and Volunteer and Board Member Recognition

Directions: From Kappa, IL, turn right onto County Rd 600N/State St for 1.3 miles. Continue onto County Rd 2700N/Kappa Rd for 2.4 miles. Turn right onto N 1725 East Rd for 0.1 miles. Sweeney Woods is on your left.

2021 PARKLANDS ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12th at Sweeney Woods Preserve

A to Z catering will be supplying our boxed lunches this year. Cost is \$12 per box (choose a sandwich, wrap, or salad). Water will be provided.

LUNCH ORDER DEADLINE: Friday, September 1st

A to Z's Catering & Parties

SALAD LUNCH INCLUDES:

SALAD, APPLE, COOKIE OR BROWNIE

(CHEF'S CHOICE)

House Salad

lettuce, carrots, tomato, cucumbers; your choice grilled chicken or grilled vegetables

Caesar Salad

lettuce, grilled chicken, parmesan, caesar dressing, crouton, tomato

Chef Salad

turkey, ham, boiled egg, lettuce, tomato, red onion, colby jack cheese

Choose your dressing:

French, Ranch, Italian, Balsamic

dressing served on the side

BOXED LUNCH INCLUDES:

SANDWICH OR WRAP, CHIPS, APPLE, COOKIE OR BROWNIE

(CHEF'S CHOICE)

Ham & Swiss Sandwich

on rye with house mayo, lettuce, tomato

Turkey & Cheddar Sandwich

on wheat with house mayo, lettuce, tomato

Beef & Colby Jack Sandwich

on sourdough with horseradish mayo, lettuce, tomato

Corned Beef & Swiss Sandwich

on rye with house mayo, lettuce, tomato

Turkey Club Wrap

turkey, bacon, house mayo, lettuce, tomato, colby jack cheese

Sicilian Wrap

ham, salami, pepperoni, lettuce, pepperoncini, mozzarella, house mayo

Grilled Veggie Wrap

grilled veggies (bell pepper, onion, zucchini, mushroom, seasonal vegetables), spinach, colby jack cheese, house mayo

Chicken Caesar Wrap

grilled chicken, lettuce, red onion, tomato, caesar dressing

Chicken Bacon Ranch Wrap

grilled chicken, bacon, ranch, lettuce, tomato

gluten free wrap or bun available



Attendee #1

Name: _____

Salad: _____

or

Sandwich: _____

Attendee #2

Name: _____

Salad: _____

or

Sandwich: _____

Attendee #3

Name: _____

Salad: _____

or

Sandwich: _____

Attendee #4

Name: _____

Salad: _____

or

Sandwich: _____

2021 Annual Meeting of the Members

In conformance with Article V, Section 11 and Article VII, Section 2 of the Bylaws, the following slate of nominations for Directors and Officers is hereby presented:

To fill three vacated seats as Director, the following individuals are hereby presented for nomination for a three-year term (21-24):

Shannon Fulton
Michael Doherty
William Snyder

The following current Directors are hereby presented for nomination to continue for three-year terms (2021-24):

Eric Smith
Douglas Kaufman-Dickson
Paul Van Ness

In compliance with Section 11 of the ParkLands bylaws, the following slate of nominations for Officers is hereby presented for one-year terms (2021-22) for election by the membership present at the annual membership meeting to be held Sunday, September 12, 2021:

Eric Smith	President
TBD	Vice President
Michael McKinley	Treasurer
Katy Everett	Secretary

These nominations are also being presented for election by the Board of Directors at its annual meeting held in conjunction with the annual membership meeting on Sunday, September 12, 2021.

The following Directors have agreed to serve as primary standing committee chairmen for the next term year (2021-22):

Eric Smith	Administrative/Executive
Michael McKinley	Finance
Eric Smith/ Douglas Kaufman Dickson	Stewardship
Jessica Chambers	Outreach
Dan Deneen	Real Property



Summer Internship Recap

Early mornings. Hot days. Night outreach events. The tasks of a ParkLands summer intern are enough to make most feel exhausted. Ask the interns, though, and they will tell you they do because they love it – the cause, the setting, the impact. In a world that could use more stable conservation funding, we are proud to continue offering paid stewardship internships because of generous support from our members and donors.

ParkLands was fortunate to host three summer interns this year. From pulling weeds to leading hikes, our stewardship interns Allyse Barnowski from Illinois State University and Steven Burkett from Illinois Wesleyan pushed through the tall vegetation and heat of summer to leave ParkLands better than they found it. Chris Bush-Moline, an incoming junior from Illinois Wesleyan's Summer Enrichment Program, updated trail maps, reorganized our membership database, helped coordinate events, and created much of this newsletter.

Here is more from Chris:

Hello! I'm Chris Bush-Moline, a Psychology Pre-Medicine student from IWU. While I did not work with the preserves directly as a stewardship intern, I was able to assist with events and technological work. I grew up surrounded by nature preserves and was immersed in that lifestyle, so working with Parklands Foundation was a step from home.

I've learned so much working with Parklands, and understanding the Mackinaw River watershed and its relationship with Parklands was only the beginning. The most impactful part of my experience came from working with volunteers, members, and hardworking staff. Not only was I able to develop the communication and interpersonal skills I was hoping to achieve through this internship, but I was also able to learn more about myself and our local community.

Parklands prides itself most on its member base and interacting with its supporters, which I find to be truly special among the various nature preserves and organizations I have frequented.

Although my short time with Parklands was short, I saw the passion and dedication in each and every



One of Chris' summer projects – updating our online trail maps, including new trails at Kenyon-Baller Woods.

member, staff personnel, and volunteer, especially throughout all of their hard work. I was also able to witness the glorious preserves and enjoy what Parklands has to offer, the person behind the face or so-to-say.

I was not the only intern this year, Allyse Barnowski from ISU, and Steven Burkett from IWU, were the two stewardship interns who worked on the preserves to help volunteers, cleanup trails, weed and get rid of invasive species, and take care of the preserves and properties of Parklands.

Looking Back Down the Trail

Birth of ParkLands: Guy Fraker recalls Loring Merwin and the old YWCA

Given its mission to preserve, protect, and restore natural lands along the Mackinaw Valley watershed, one might assume ParkLands was born among the springtime bluebells, or perhaps under a stand of chinquapin oaks some long ago fall. Metaphorically speaking, that's likely true, but literally speaking, the story of ParkLands birthplace is a tad more prosaic.

Before ParkLands formal organization in the summer of 1967, community leader Loring Merwin spent many months laying the groundwork for a private land trust to acquire and protect natural areas—that is, to do what a tax-adverse, penny-wise and pound-foolish McLean County board and citizenry refused to do!

Anyway, at this time, Merwin, a great-grandson of Town of Normal founder Jesse Fell, was nearing the end of his three-decade run as publisher of The Pantagraph. In order to generate interest in—and rally support for—what would become ParkLands, Merwin invited potential supporters to lunch at the old downtown YWCA. Located at the corner of Jefferson and Roosevelt streets, this “YW” occupied the same block as The Pantagraph (the building was razed in 1976 to make way for a windowless, two-story storage building to hold Pantagraph newsprint.)

So when it comes to ParkLands beginnings, let's leave behind the mottled sycamores towering over the Mackinaw River bottomlands, or any such sublime, splendiferous scene of Nature with a capital “N.” Instead, let's turn our attention to the YWCA.



“Loring Merwin was the most influential man in this community in my 60 years here,” Honorary ParkLands Board Member Guy Fraker tells us. “He ran The Pantagraph with the community welfare as a goal, an attitude that was one of noblesse oblige. Because of the proximity of the YW, and the good food served cafeteria-style, he lunched there

regularly. There was a small private room off the main dining room, where we met once a week for one to two years, to discuss the myriad of issues and challenges organizing such an effort would entail.”



The former YWCA, where ParkLands was born. Photos courtesy of the McLean County Museum of History.

Here Merwin connected with local leaders and decisionmakers—both those naturally supportive of the ParkLands vision, and those requiring varying amounts of cajoling and arm-twisting. “I was a young lawyer, new to the community, with no interest, at the time, in conservation,” recalls Guy. “At the suggestion of Tim Ives, Loring asked me to do the routine work of incorporating under the Illinois Not-For-Profit Act. Because a man of his stature asked me, I was happy to do it. That invitation led me to a lifetime of land preservation activity.”

“The meetings included five to ten people, diverse in stature and community roles,” continues Guy. “One was Stanley Lantz, then The Pantagraph’s farm editor. Another was Dorothy Sands, an Illinois State University accounting professor; another was Loring’s cousin, Tim Ives, then an owner and the manager of WJBC, which was also a strong supporter of the community. Loring was hopeful that Hazle Buck Ewing would render major support for the effort, so once a month we were joined by her attorney, Alice Bright, the first woman partner in the prestigious Chicago firm of Sidley and Austin.”

The ParkLands Foundation held its first formal gathering of trustees on July 29, 1967, at East Bay Camp along the shores of Lake Bloomington. ParkLand’s first land gift came two months later when sisters Elisabeth and Louise Stubblefield donated a five-acre timbered tract known as the Hougham property.

Loring Merwin passed away on September 6, 1972, at the age of 66. “Only a man of his stature, influence, persistence and vision could have launched ParkLands,” concludes Guy Fraker.

‘Looking Back Down the Trail’ contributor Bill Kemp is a ParkLands member and librarian for the not-for-profit McLean County Museum of History.

Everyday Adventure

By Dan Deneen, ParkLands Board of Directors

Any day is a great day to walk at one of the ParkLands Foundation Nature Preserves. On Sunday, August 1, Paula, Patrick and I visited the Chiquapin South Preserve. Several photos are attached.

We enjoyed a snack of blackberries along the trail, the bergamot was in full bloom, mountain mint was out, and we observed one unusual little plant complex that I could not identify. We observed the usual birds including hawks and an eagle. Patrick believes he spotted an otter in the river. There were more monarchs and dragonflies than we could count!

Every day can be a special day at the ParkLands preserves, year-round. **Get out to the Mackinaw with your family and friends!**



Nature For All: ParkLands' New All-terrain Wheelchair



Photo: Extreme Motus

Thanks to private donations including a generous gift from the Miracle League of Central Illinois, ParkLands is now the proud owner of an Extreme Motus Emma X3 All-terrain wheelchair. With its lightweight frame, low center of gravity, and low-pressure wheels, the chair is designed to assist people of all abilities access and enjoy nature.

The chair is part of ParkLands' larger efforts to make our preserves more accessible, including for those with disabilities. The chair will be available for our events, workdays, and on demand when needed.

Contact Craig Lutes at craig@parklandsfoundation.org to schedule a time to use the chair or volunteer as a hike aide.



Targeted Support

We asked for your support in our last newsletter, and you responded. Target's Circle community giving program recently awarded ParkLands \$1,700! Target also separately awarded ParkLands a \$2,500 grant for signage at our preserves. We plan to use this money for much-needed informational kiosks at the entry to multiple preserves, such as Hayes Woods and Lexington preserves.

But Target wasn't done yet. On July 30, a team of eight store directors from various locations across our region pulled together for a workday to remove invasive brush at Kenyon-Baller Woods, while also making a generous donation to ParkLands.

Thanks, Target!

Board Member Spotlight

Meet ParkLands board member, Paul Van Ness.



Profession

I grew up in Bloomington and went to college (Wabash College/University of Illinois) and law school (DePaul University College of Law) here in the Midwest. Following graduation, I moved to Dallas, Texas where I lived for 25 years. I left private practice after 10 years as a trial attorney and started State Farm's staff counsel office in the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex in 1992. I was promoted back to Bloomington in 2006 with oversight responsibilities for 10 staff counsel offices around the country. I've been happily retired since 2016 staying busy by traveling extensively and restoring prairie and timber habitat on my farm, Deer's Mill Farm. In addition to the ParkLands Board, I also serve on the McLean County Museum of History Board.

Years with ParkLands

My first introduction to ParkLands (despite being a townie) was the Bike Ride in 2017 as a rider. I volunteered to work on the ride the following year and joined the board shortly thereafter. I was astonished to learn that ParkLands owns 7% of all privately held conservation land in the state.

Why Volunteer?

I find the physical exercise provided from the many volunteer opportunities to be quite rewarding. Whether planting trees, gathering wild flower seeds or removing deer guards from planted oaks, it is very satisfying to have physically done something that will truly benefit the plant and wildlife of our community and beyond. The learning opportunities too are quite extensive and that is true whether volunteering to help put on an event or simply attending as a member or guest. To take these learnings and apply them to my farm, my home garden and discuss them with my neighbors has turned out to be quite a treat.

Favorite ParkLands "Spot"

There are so many but if I had to pick one spot of the 3,600 + acres ParkLands is responsible for, it would be the restored prairie of Letcher Basin. Depending on the season, it can be a virtual sea of color. Beautiful doesn't begin to do it justice. Even on a hot summer night, to see roughly 260 acres absolutely filled with countless fireflies is thrilling.



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