

A Big Year for Parklands

We entered 2021 with big plans for an exciting year and hope that life at Parklands would soon return to something close to normal. Despite the continuing challenges, we are very happy to tell you that many of our plans worked out – from looking for mussels in the river, planting thousands of trees, to hiking through Letcher in the dark on the lookout for owls, this was a truly another great year at Parklands Foundation.



Early in the year we joined with the Ecology Action Center with a goal to plant 5,000 trees at our Mohr preserve. With both financial and volunteer assistance from the EAC we did that—plus thousands more at the Merwin preserve. We followed this up with hundreds of volunteers

spread throughout our preserves on a four-day Earth Day challenge to the community. After that great start, our growing corps of volunteer stewards worked all year keeping our preserves beautiful and accessible.

Parklands Foundation also was able to resume our work sharing these amazing properties with our community. We had children from the Boys and Girls Club at Merwin, families at Letcher's Basin and Hayes Woods, and an adult event star gazing at Letcher's Basin. Every event takes money for supplies and time to prepare but every event is also an opportunity to introduce someone new to the mission, beauty, and passion for preservation that is Parklands.

We are planning now for early spring work and knowing the financial resources we have on hand will give us the much-needed ability to prioritize

our growing to-do list. These needs do exceed what we raise through memberships fees alone. Your year-end gift of \$100 will support our planned restoration work on the prairie at the Kenyon-Baller preserve and ongoing restoration of the Merwin north savanna.

Changes to our insurance have made prescribed fire, our most important prairie management tool, even more expensive. Your contribution can be the gift that allows one more prescribed burn. You can make the difference in the health and diversity of our prairies. We are deeply grateful for your past support. It has been critical to the success of Parklands and we could not do what we do without your support THANK YOU!!!

If you have not yet done so and still wish to contribute to our annual campaign, please make your tax-deductible donation online at parklandsfoundation.org/donate or you may return the enclosed envelope with your check made payable to Parklands Foundation. If you are looking for a good use for mandatory annual distributions from retirement funds, please keep Parklands in mind.

As we enter the cooler months with continued physical distancing, remember you don't have to distance yourself from nature. Be sure to come out to Parklands preserves for a walk or to cross-country ski this winter. What you find in the winter season just may surprise you.

Thank you,



Eric Smith
Board President



2021

Jan

Winter Hike

Our New Year's Day hike became a New Year's Eve hike ahead of a severe ice storm. 20 guests soaked up the winter sun as we explored the bottomland loop, oak bluffs, and Dorothy Shelley prairie at Lexington Preserve.



Ice Storms

A January 1st storm brought heavy snow and ice for weeks, leaving a dazzling winter wonderland but damaging many trees.

Feb

Cross-country Ski & Snowshoe

Eight inches of accumulation hung around just long enough for 30 guests to enjoy the Mackinaw Valley dressed in a blanket of snow.



Mar

Spring Break of Stewardship

ParkLands hosted 25 Honors Students from ISU's Alternative Breaks program for three days full of stewardship, laughs, and more than a few dance breaks.



Earth Day Volunteer Challenge

140 volunteers comprising 12 teams across 8 preserves slashed mounds of invasive brush and planted nearly 1,000 trees! Our 2021 challenge winners, Team Cyclepaths of Kenyon-Baller Woods, were awarded over \$250 in prizes!



April

Plant Mohr Trees

In partnership with the Ecology Action Center, more than 50 volunteers helped plant 10,000 trees at Mohr and Merwin Preserves.



May

College Interns

Steven Burkett and Allyse Barnowski spent the summer spraying invasives, cutting brush, and clearing trails. Chris Bush-Moline assisted with member database maintenance, graphic design, and event coordination.

Wildflower Walk

90 guests enjoyed Merwin's ephemeral spring wildflowers through the eyes of hike leaders Dr. Roger Anderson, Dr. Joe Armstrong, Mary Jo Adams, and Jan Turner.

June

Tale of Two Prairies

Mild July temps awarded the perfect conditions for tours of two unique prairies: Ridge-top and Letcher Basin.



Night Event

While historic rains and early firework celebrations dampened the nocturnal activity we hoped for, the glow of 45 flashlights still bravely followed Dr. Angelo Capparella into the night in search of bats, owls, frogs, and insects at Letcher Basin.

Youth Program

Jean and Given Harper developed an immersive educational experience at Merwin Preserve for youth from the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club of McLean County.



June

4th Annual Bike Ride

The threat of rain didn't stop nearly 200 riders from a two-wheeled tour of the Mackinaw River Valley's rolling hills.



July

River Adventure

35 guests of all ages waded into the river at Hayes Woods for the second straight year of mussel and fish surveys with local biologists.

Night Under the Stars with TCAA

Twin City Amateur Astronomers (TCAA) Carl Wenning and Sharon MacDonald opened eyes to the night sky of Letcher Basin and told stories around the campfire about their time afield. Guests enjoyed wine, local cheese, and other refreshments.

Aug

Annual Meeting at Sweeney Woods

Board President Eric Smith recapped a big year for ParkLands and welcomed 3 new board members. Letcher Basin Stewards Douglas Kaufman-Dickson and Jack Pfaffmann were recognized with the Angelo Capparella Volunteer Service award.



Sept

New Stairs at Merwin

Bloomington High School sophomore Hayden King rebuilt the dilapidated stairs at Merwin for his Eagle Scout project. The entire project was planned, designed, fundraised, and executed under his excellent leadership.



Oct

Indigenous Culture of the Mackinaw Valley with Dr. Michael Wiant

Renowned archeologist, anthropologist, and historian Dr. Michael Wiant pulled from his extensive research on local indigenous



societies to discuss the pre-settlement history of the Mackinaw River valley, focusing on Native American culture and land use, including an artifact ID session after the presentation.

Nov

#OptOutside

Lenore Sobota was the first to solve our day-after-Thanksgiving riddle to locate the hidden



sign at Lexington preserve, earning her a ParkLands Foundation t-shirt and other gear.

Dec

Prescribed Burns

Land management demands heat up as the temperatures cool down. Late fall and early spring are ideal times for prescribed burns of prairies and woodlands.



Upcoming Events

January

1

New Year's Day Hike

What better way to bring in the new year than time outside? Join us at Kenyon-Baller Woods on January 1st at

1pm for a guided hike through one of our best-kept secrets. We'll explore new trails and point out the must-see spots of this landscape while enjoying some fresh air. Register here:

<https://www.parklandsfoundation.org/event/new-years-day-hike/>

April

23

Merwin Wildflower Walk

A spring favorite is back! Local naturalists will lead guided tours of Merwin Preserve's vibrant spring

wildflowers on Saturday, April 23rd. Four sessions are available: 10:00am, 10:15am, 10:30am, and 10:45am.

Register here: <https://www.parklandsfoundation.org/event/merwin-wildflower-walk/>



Volunteer Updates

Our volunteer workdays continue to focus on the usual suspects – bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, teasel, and the like. But 2021 stands out for the sheer number of volunteers involved with the foundation. Stewardship projects started with a bang as 140 volunteers participated in our Earth Day Volunteer Challenge. Community workdays continued throughout the season, ranging from a sweltering afternoon at Weston Cemetery Prairie removing bristly locust to chilly November seed collections.

We were also fortunate to benefit from the work of several independent groups. Directors of several midwestern Target stores chose honeysuckle removal for teambuilding at Kenyon-Baller Woods in July. Eureka College and Illinois State Biology students each coordinated multiple workdays. In the fall, representatives from AmeriCorps and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources also designated significant resources to thinning trees at Ridgetop Hill Prairie Nature Preserve.

Our 20+ **Volunteer Stewards** continue to carry the bulk of our stewardship work. On average, stewards attend to projects at their preserve every other week. They will tell you it is a labor of love! [Click here](#) to learn more and contact us about getting involved!



Annual Meeting of the Members

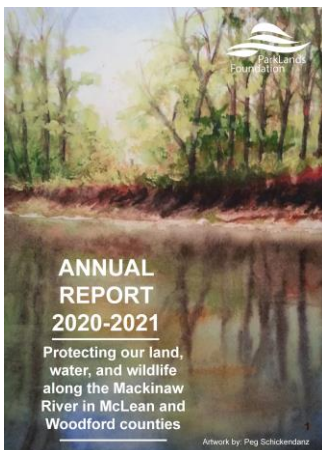
The 55th gathering of ParkLands members took place on September 12th at Sweeney Woods Preserve in McLean County to celebrate another year of conservation and vote on three new board members.

Shannon Fulton, Michael Doherty, and William Snyder were elected to 3-year Director terms. Shannon is Vice President of Development at StraightUp Solar in Bloomington, IL. Michael is an economist and policy analyst at the Illinois Farm Bureau. William is retired from State Farm. Eric Smith returns for his second year as board president, joined by current treasurer Michael McKinley. Katy Everett was elected secretary.

Annual Report

Keep an eye out for the latest version of our Annual Report on the [News](#) section of our website taking a comprehensive look at 2021, covering topics such as stewardship accomplishments, professional research at the preserves, the financial condition of the

foundation, outreach events, and everything in between. Special thanks to Jessica Chambers, Morgan Armbrust, Mary Jo Adams, and Peg Schickendanz for their work on this report.



ParkLands Legends Honors

It is easy to argue that ParkLands would not be the organization it is today without the leadership of Guy Fraker, Roger Anderson, and the late Dale Birkenholz. These figures in conservation were recognized through stories by Fran Harty, Don Schmidt, and Matt Fraker, respectively, for their lifetime of service to ParkLands.



Angelo Capparella Volunteer Service Award

Jack Pfaffmann and Douglas Kaufman-Dickson were awarded the 2021 Angelo Capparella Volunteer Service Award for their dedicated stewardship at Letcher Basin for nearly a decade. The pair, along with Dianne Feasley, meet for several hours every week to care for the 130-acre prairie restoration at Letcher Basin, as well as being active with outreach event, prescribed burns, and other projects. Douglas is current chair of the Stewardship board committee. Thank you Jack and Douglas!

Indigenous Culture in the Mackinaw River Valley with Dr. Michael Wiant

Dr. Michael Wiant jokes that he and his wife, Terri, experience nature differently. Terri, a birding enthusiast, hikes with her eyes to sky. Michael, on the other hand, cranes downwards, learning about the land through the resources at his feet.

Michael is retired Director of the Illinois State Museum at Dickson Mounds and one of the country's leading anthropologists and educators, spending most of his career in the Illinois River valley. ParkLands was privileged to host Michael and 150 guests at Chiquapin Bluffs over two days in October to explore the 12,000-year human history of the Mackinaw Valley.

"What I hope to leave you with is something about the Native American heritage in this river valley," Michael told guests. "It is an incredible story. A true story. A remarkable story. There are events that occurred on this continent over the last 12,000 years that continue to shape our world today."

Michael's observations began on arrival. He rolled hunks of soil from several locations in the palm of his hand, looking to its structure for clues about land use. Later, he returned from a hike with pockets full of material collected along the trails – hickory nuts, chert, acorns – items everyone else stepped over without a glance but were vital

to the survival of Native Americans just two lifetimes ago. "They had the same basic needs we do but met them in different ways... The way we meet our needs

Wiant compares lithic tool structure, function, and age using examples brought by guests during Friday's small group session.



100 guests gathered on the prairie of Chiquapin Bluffs to hear Dr. Michael Wiant speak and identify artifacts.

today, in large part, stems from this deeper history and decisions they made that we are the beneficiaries of."

Being October, native people would have been particularly attentive to the sequence of nut mast occurring in the forests. "When we excavate the food remains of the sites during the archaic period, nuts account for a significant amount of food." Fish, squirrels, and hooved mammals also complemented their diet.

Native people of our region existed primarily in small family-related groups that remained mobile to take advantage of specific resources at certain times of year. For example, they spent summer near the river to harvest mussels and fish. In winter, they moved upland to pursue the more concentrated herds of deer, elk, and bison. Mobility meant survival.

Local history points to one such nearby seasonal camping site known as "Indian Point" or "Lookout Point" which was likely among a series of nondescript highpoints not far from Chiquapin Bluffs. Native people still camped there in numbers when the first settlers arrived in the early 1830s. Trails between the major river systems are known to have crossed in this area.

Several archeological sites along the Mackinaw River also document Native American culture. To

date, two particular discoveries stand out. A collection of 34 chert stone blades, known as the Mackinaw Cache, were uncovered in 1916 by boys digging gravel near the town of Mackinaw. The blades, likely decorative in nature, were around 5" long and intricately thin, described by experts as "undoubtedly... the most skilful [sic] work in stone flaking that has yet been found in this country" and "one of the premier examples of chipped-stone technology in North America."

A more recent discovery reshaped our understanding of bison in Illinois. An adult male bison skeleton uncovered in 2005 at the confluence of the Mackinaw and Illinois rivers was carbon dated to 300 B.C., suggesting it to be around 2,300 years old. Until then, archeologists believe bison arrived in Illinois less than 600 years ago, meaning the finding nearly quadrupled the length of time bison were known to roam our prairies. Perhaps most astonishing, though, was the discovery of a spearpoint between two rib bones, confirming the animal had been hunted by local humans.

A highlight for many was the chance to present their personal collections of spearpoints, arrowheads, axes, and other tools. These collections were often heirlooms passed down through their family or found on family property. More than one guest choked back tears as they learned just how precious their collections are. Michael informed two separate ParkLands board members that their spearpoints were at least 9,000 years old, including one that sat unattended in a shoebox for decades.

Above: Michael explains the age and use of a spearpoint, and stone axes brought by a guest. Below: A guest offers the best of her collection for Michael to discuss.



Moments like this were the real magic of the gathering. Perhaps no ParkLands event in memory has drawn such a diversity of people at the widespread crossover of passion, intrigue, and curiosity.

Michael closed the event by drawing strong parallels between the crowd's interest in anthropology and the work of ParkLands. "One of the great things about natural conservancy is you can throw cultural conservancy in there as well. Not only are you on a place that is conserving nature – you are conserving a cultural record, a heritage record, as well."

Michael's goal was accomplished that day. He is a master educator who led us on a journey through his own knowledge, wit, and charm to better understand the remarkable story that has unfolded here for thousands of years and to the countless ways in which we are all inextricably linked to the health of our land.



Looking Back Down the Trail

Birth of ParkLands: East Bay Camp, July 1967

ParkLands Foundation held its first meeting of directors and trustees on July 19, 1967. Although that doesn't sound all that exciting, that meeting 54 summers ago was notable for several reasons.

First off, featured speaker William L. Rutherford gave a "blistering" presentation on the need to preserve land for conservation and recreation. "He ran a verbal bulldozer over the manmade ugliness of the Central Illinois countryside," noted Pantagraph reporter Dick Streckfuss.

Second, a challenge grant unveiled at the meeting—successfully met one year later—set the stage for the stability and seriousness of purpose that has marked this organization ever since. Finally, the meeting was held at East Bay Camp along the eastern shoreline of Lake Bloomington. Although contemplating the lake's origin gives the ardent naturalist pause—created as it was from the impoundment of a once thickly wooded, serpentine stretch of Money Creek—there's no doubting the lake's standing today as a vital conservation asset. And East Bay Camp itself is a marvel—the vision of the Rev. Frank L. Breen, an eloquent champion of nature and the healing power of connecting everyday folk to its wonders.

Anyway, as mentioned, the speaker for the inaugural ParkLands meeting at East Bay Camp was William Rutherford, a Peoria attorney and head of the Forest Park Foundation since its establishment in the late 1930s. That foundation served as a model for comm-



Back in the summer of 1967, ParkLands held its first meeting of directors and trustees at East Bay Camp. Photos courtesy of the McLean County Museum of History.

unity leader and Pantagraph publisher Loring Merwin as heset about garnering support for ParkLands. Merwin, though, was unable to attend the July 19, 1967 meeting due to illness. In his stead, Clarence Ropp, a ParkLands director and Normal Township dairy and grain farmer, served as temporary chairman.

At East Bay Camp, Rutherford delivered his "dual slide presentation" contrasting the gleaming, well-planned, well-funded public parks and open spaces in Europe with their depressing counterparts in his hometown of Peoria. "We use these to insult and offend people back home who are a little too complacent," he said of his slides. But for all the glib remarks, he also spoke with the single-minded purpose of someone devoting their lifetime to a worthy cause. "Not every child can go to a cabin in Michigan or to a cottage in Florida to enjoy space and clean water," he said. "Why in heaven's name don't we have them here?"

One of the more influential and colorful figures in the history of Illinois land conservation, Rutherford spent two contentious years (1969-1970) as Gov. Richard Ogilvie's Illinois Department of Conservation (now Natural Resources) director. Disdainful of politics, patronage, and bureaucracy, Rutherford was perhaps the least-temperamentally suited department head in state history, and upon reading about his many clashes and quarrels with elected officials, party hacks, and fumbling bureaucrats, it's a wonder he lasted that long!



ParkLands temporary chairperson Clarence Ropp (right) chats with guest speaker William L. Rutherford. Photos courtesy of the McLean County Museum of History.

At the meeting at East Bay Camp, it was made known that an anonymous someone (later revealed as Rutherford) had put up a challenge grant of \$25,000 (adjusted for inflation, that's the equivalent of more than \$200,000 in today's dollars.) The grant, however, was contingent on Parklands raising another \$75,000 by the following summer. Happily, by July 15, 1968, the foundation had received \$80,600 in donations, more than enough to secure Rutherford's \$25,000 in seed money.

Among his other accomplishments, Rutherford played an instrumental role in the creation of Wildlife Prairie Park outside of Peoria. He remained head of the Forest Park Foundation almost until his death, which came in 2006 at the age of 91.

"Though a well-traveled man," read the Illinois

Senate resolution in his memory, "he considered Peoria the center of his world." Rutherford's dedication to one's home place, and his love of the Central Illinois landscape and its remaining natural areas, are values central to Parklands' mission today.

"There are practical people who aren't practical enough to dream a little bit," Rutherford said at East Bay Camp. "I'd be very much surprised—if you can believe this dream Loring Merwin has—if you don't succeed."

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

Board Member Spotlight – Finn Amble



Profession

Retired Head and Neck Surgeon.

Favorite Parklands "Spot"

Moon Tract and the Sweeney Tract. My favorite "spot." It would be on the Northwest backside of that trail on the Moon Tract, commonly in shallow mud. Bring good boots - not your comfortable leaky ones in the back of your garage which let the water seep in... There, in that blessed "spot," you cannot hear traffic. You cannot see houses or cars. It is the perfect ecologic place. I recommend between 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. You have timber to your back, the sun on your face, the prairie before you with the lake beyond. Cross-country skiing there, my young daughter and myself almost got run over by three scared does. What a great day – a day that would not exist without the Parklands!

Years with Parklands

Seven. I know of no more humbling experience in my life than to be an exceedingly minor cog in a hugely passionate organization which oversees 3,700 acres of wild land.

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering for the Parklands is kind of like waking up in the morning and not wanting to do what you know you need to do. You put on your Carhartts or whatever. Wool socks over your cotton ones. Feed your dog. Put on multiple layers. Grab your tools and protective gear. You show up while the frost is slowly disappearing. Show up early so Jason or Craig can tell you where to go and what to do. You look around to see volunteers that look just as grumpy as you feel, doing the best with coffee.

You get to work, slowly at first. You break a sweat and take the first layer off. The sun is coming up. Your fellow volunteers are feeling the vibe, just like football in the early second quarter. You and your teammates have cut down so many invasives that lunch seems to come way too soon. You put in an afternoon and head to the car as the sun is fading and the wilderness is looking as it should. You curse yourself for being so grumpy that early morning but you pat your teammates shoulders for a day's good work as they do the same for you



ParkLands Foundation / PO Box 12 / Normal, IL 61761-0012
(309) 454-3169 / Address Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. Postage

PAID

Champaign, IL
Permit 499



<http://smile.amazon.com>

Shopping at smile.amazon.com can benefit the ParkLands Foundation. You must begin at the previous web address specifically for AmazonSmile. Be sure to select ParkLands Foundation (Bloomington, IL) as your charitable organization.

Officers, Board of Directors and Staff

Eric Smith
President

Frank Sanders
Vice President

Katy Everett
Secretary

Michael McKinley
Treasurer

Directors

Finn Amble
Morgan Armbrust
Jessica Chambers
Dan Deneen
Michael Doherty
Shannon Fulton
Jim Franks
Deanna Frautschi
Douglas Kaufman-Dickson
Mark Kotte
Mark Larsen
Corrie Scott
William Snyder
Paul Van Ness

Honorary Directors

Roger Anderson
Guy Fraker

Staff

Jason Shoemaker
Land Steward
Erin Herbez
Administrative Director
Craig Lutes
Volunteer/Outreach
Coordinator