

## Stewardship at Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve

By: Frank Sanders

Through the guidance of ParkLands Land Steward, Jason Shoemaker, Mary Jo Adams, Suzie Rogers and I have been working hard to develop Chinquapin Bluffs into a great regional asset. Once predominantly farmland, made up of dry hill prairie, sand prairie, mesic seeps, marsh, woodland floodplain, it is the largest ParkLands Preserve with 765 acres and two miles of Mackinaw River frontage. Split by the Mackinaw River, it is composed of two nearly equal sections which are called the North Chinquapin Preserve and South Chinquapin Preserve. You can probably guess how it got those names.



Formerly owned by The Nature Conservancy, it was acquired with constructed wetland areas already on each section. The wetlands are one of the key aspects that make Chinquapin

special in our collection of preserves. It is frequented by frogs, toads, herons, egrets, song birds, beaver and river otter. If you visit the prairie of North Chinquapin, it stands out almost like an oasis in the desert. Once just a wetland depression in the prairie, it has now grown to be a fairly dense stand of willows and cottonwood. This provides habitat for many species, especially birds and river otter.

So, what do we do there as stewards? Our most demanding work is fighting invasives. North Chinquapin has large growth Autumn Olive and significant areas of Teasel and Lespedeza. While Black Locust has been sporadically located around the prairie, we now have an area that has taken hold adjacent to the wetlands. We have made strides in reducing the Autumn Olive and Teasel but in the last two years, Lespedeza has spread rampantly between the wetlands and the river.

This year we plan to herbicide Teasel rosettes in the early spring. In order to facilitate locating them more easily, we will mow over their locations. Then we will follow up with the herbicide. For the Lespedeza, we will attack them more toward the end of the summer to early Fall. The idea is to hit the Lespedeza before it goes to seed.



*Lespedeza cuneata*

Other work at North Chinquapin, with time permitting, will be to develop a new trail that will parallel and eliminate the current trail that comes down from the access near the golf course. This new trail will be more of a hiking trail with fairly steep slopes and a narrow path.

It will take the hiker down through the woodland and across a steep ravine to the prairie. It is hoped that it will be one sought out by the serious hiker.

## Chinquapin Continued

At South Chinquapin, the invasives are not as big a problem at this time. There is some Lespedeza and Teasel, but it is much more limited than at North Chinquapin and we feel we will be able to hit it this year and reduce it further. If necessary, we will follow the same techniques with the invasives that we plan at North Chinquapin.



With the approval and support of Jason, Mary Jo has been working on a trail from the large, majestic oak near the bluff of South Chinquapin down to the prairie. She blazed the trail last year, then held a workday and cleared additional brush and will be developing it further this year with the removal of logs and other heavy debris. It has turned out to be a great addition and allows for a more circular walk through the woodland, to the prairie and then back to the access point without having to backtrack areas already walked.



While Letcher Basin and Ridgetop are considered the jewels of ParkLands Preserves, we stewards feel we are making a significant contribution by working hard to improve the Chinquapin habitat and its access. Looking for long walks? Come to Chinquapin. Want to see a "young" prairie blooming? Come to Chinquapin in the Summer and Fall. Want to hear quiet? Come year-round.

**All photos were taken by  
Frank Sanders!**

*Written by Frank Sanders, with help from Mary Jo Adams and Suzanne Rogers*



# ***“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end”***

**-Seneca**

Friends,

It's hard to acknowledge that my time on ParkLands staff has come to an end. I'm thrilled to have begun my teaching career, but there is plenty I already miss about being Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator: community workdays at our beautiful preserves, brainstorming the next outdoor experience for event guests, sharing the history of the selfless and determined people who made ParkLands a reality. There's one thing I miss most of all, though – the people.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Erin Herbez, Jason Shoemaker, Jessica Chambers, Eric Smith, the ParkLands Board, and all the volunteers, supporters, and event attendees who collectively make this organization special. A particular thanks also goes to the Outreach Committee for their support and guidance.

-Craig Lutes



Hello,

My name is Morgan and I am proud to say I am the new Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator! In 2019 I was introduced to ParkLands as a summer intern. This experience allowed me to grow and learn firsthand the impact ParkLands has on its community. After talking with Jessica Chambers the following spring I decided to join the board - and I am glad I did! Being a board member has served as a wonderful introduction to the ins and outs of the organization.

Craig has done an amazing job and will be a hard act to follow, but I am very excited to get to know and work with you all!

-Morgan Armbrust



## Upcoming Events

April

14

**Aldo Leopold Speaker: Curt Meine**  
Conservation biologist, writer, and historian, Curt Meine, will be speaking at the Bone Student Center on the ISU campus. The Leopold scholar is the author of several works, including *"Aldo Leopold: Life and Work."*

April

22

### Earth Day Volunteer Event

This year our Earth Day celebration will take place at our Bunney Preserve to help cut the resprouts of the ever stubborn invasive honeysuckle. When the work gets overwhelming, our ParkLands community will come together to help out our stewards as much as possible! Come out to celebrate earth day by helping restore our beautiful prairies together!

<https://parklandsfoundation.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/parklandsfoundation/projectList.jsp?query.project.id=72>

April

23

### Wildflower Walk

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

spring wildflowers on Saturday, May 1st. Four sessions are available: 10:00am, 10:15am, 10:30am, and 10:45am.

<https://parklandsfoundation.app.neoncrm.com/eventReg.jsp?event=246&>

July

9

### 5th Annual Bike Ride

Who would like to go for a bike ride through some beautiful restored prairie and woodlands along the Mackinaw River this summer? That's right!

ParkLands will be hosting our fifth annual bike ride on July 09, 2022. Won't you join us and support the ParkLands mission of preserving prairie and forest habitat along the Mackinaw making it one of the cleanest rivers in Illinois? We again will have a 20 and 50 mile route as well as a 100 kilometer ride. The ride will be supported with a SAG wagon by Bloomington Cycle & Fitness and a mechanic from Vitesse Cycle Shop along with strategically placed rest stops along the routes. After the ride, Kemp's Upper Tap will be serving their usual fare. Register Here!

<https://parklandsfoundation.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/parklandsfoundation/eventRegistration.jsp?event=708&>

## Volunteer Workdays

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

Date	Location
April 25	Dungey Canoe Launch
April 29	Sweeney
April 29	Dungey Canoe Launch
October 28	Sweeney



## Volunteers Needed!

Inform visitors of ParkLands mission and recruit new members (talking points and informational tables will be provided). Shifts will be scheduled in 4 hour blocks. One from 8-12 then 12-4 on April 16th, 17th, 23rd, 24th, 30th, and May 1st.



SATURDAY,  
APRIL  
23<sup>rd</sup>

10:00  
TO  
12:30 PM

WILD FLOWER  
HIKE  
@ParkLands Foundation's  
MERWIN PRESERVE

April is a wonderful time to see and learn about the wildflowers, oak savanna, and the Mackinaw River. Join our culture guides as they share their knowledge and expertise of one of Central Illinois Natural Gems.

This is a free event but donations are encouraged!

Please meet in the North Gate parking lot.

This event is limited to 45 guests so please RSVP at the link below

<https://tinyurl.com/wildflowerwalk2022>



## Looking Back Down the Trail

by Bill Kemp

Settlers waged vicious war of extermination against wolves, coyotes

Permanent Euro-American settlement along the upper stretch of the Mackinaw River watershed dates to the 1820s. The arrival of pioneers in ever-greater numbers—with their insatiable demand for land and tireless drive to transform a natural landscape into real estate—proved calamitous for native people, the last of whom were forcibly removed by the 1830s. Settlement also wrought unfathomable devastation to the wider landscape of tallgrass prairie, savannah, and old-growth timber. Pioneers mostly understood the bounty of the natural world in utilitarian terms—flora and fauna and other “resources” such as soil fertility were but fuel for the merciless engine of the market economy. Little thought was given to the loss of biodiversity, and the passing of once-common prairie grasses, wildflowers, and creatures.

Most often this destruction occurred methodically, almost dispassionately. Yet wolves and coyotes represented an untamable expression of the prairie ecosystem that so enraged settlers that these canine predators were targeted for all-out extermination. As such, they were subjected to unsurpassed cruelty in an age when violence upon the natural world was a defining principle of American settlement.

During these dark days, Central Illinois settlers killed wolves and coyotes by the untold thousands, making “warfare on them in a thousand different ways.”



Pioneers chased them down on horseback, where they could be trampled under hoof, clubbed to death, or mauled by hunting dogs. Settlers also employed poison; trapped

them in pits and cages; staged carnival-like ring hunts to encircle and slaughter them; and dug into dens to kill their pups. In this era, territorial, state, and local governments offered bounties for these animals. In 1860, for instance, McLean County’s board of supervisors advertised a reward of three dollars for grown wolf scalps and fifty cents for pups, making no distinction between wolves and coyotes.

There are accounts aplenty of wolf and coyote hunting in Etzard Duis’ 1874 compilation of pioneer biographies, *The Good Old Times in McLean County*. It includes stories from Money Creek Township, which today includes ParkLands’ 713-acre Merwin Preserve and other foundation landholdings. Money Creek settler William Wilcox “has done his share of wolf hunting, and has caught these cunning and treacherous animals in pens, with dogs and horses, and in every way that ingenuity could suggest,” notes *Good Old Times*. “He once went with a party after some gray wolves, and killed the mother of the pack and twelve wolves two-thirds grown.”

Settlers often made little distinction between wolves, *Canis lupus*, and coyotes, *Canis latrans*, though as with the description above, “gray” (sometimes spelled “grey”) usually referred to *Canis lupus*, while “prairie wolves” described the smaller *Canis latrans*.

Why did settlers act with particular cruelty when it came to wolves and coyotes? One answer lies in the influence of folklore. After all, wolves were long associated with sin and the supernatural, so wolf hatred was deeply ingrained in Euro-American culture. From a more practical standpoint, predators such as wolves and coyotes represented an existential threat to livestock, an essential component of successful pioneering.

*This illustration, “Hunting prairie wolves in an early day,” appeared in various Illinois county histories from the 1870s.*

The seemingly devious nature of wolf depredations infuriated settlers and promoted a siege mentality. Farmers who lost livestock thus viewed themselves beleaguered and victimized. It was this sense of outrage that partly accounted for the pitiless war waged against the wolf.

Albert Dodd, a Yale-educated lawyer who established a Bloomington law practice, wrote home to Connecticut in the early 1840s about one such spectacle. "Men from all round to the distance of 10 miles start off in the morning on horseback with clubs, & ride toward the [center] pole," he wrote. "Gradually the circle contracts & the wolves & deer are driven in towards the centre, & when the circle gets small enough then comes the general slaughter of the animals, chasing them down & killing them with the clubs."

According to Donald F. Hoffmeister's *Mammals of Illinois* (1989), wolves disappeared from the Illinois landscape "sometime before 1860." Yet other sources offer conflicting dates, and some wolves in Central Illinois may have survived into the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

*Written by Bill Kemp, ParkLands member and "Looking Back Down the Trail" author Kemp is the librarian for the not-for-profit McLean County Museum of History.*

## Board Member Spotlight – Shannon Fulton



### Profession

Vice President of Development at Straight Up Solar

### Favorite ParkLands "Spot"

My favorite ParkLands "spot" is the Merwin Savanna Nature Preserve. It was the first ParkLands preserve I visited and the Virginia Bluebells are spectacular and remind me of my childhood. A close second is Chinquapin Bluffs Land and Water Reserve with its diverse natural communities and glacial history, and I look forward to exploring it more in the near future.

### Years with ParkLands and How You Got Involved

I've been a member for just under 2 years, and I wish I had become one long before. I have lived in rural Woodford County along the Mackinaw River for more than 20 years, and I deeply appreciate and rely on my connection to nature and the preservation of its richness. I became involved as a member initially as a way to engage my coworkers at StraightUp Solar in volunteering with a purpose that aligns with our company values. Our first volunteering project was collecting native seeds at a special remnant prairie. I became a board member in September of last year so that I could assist the Foundation's efforts to protect the Mackinaw River ecosystem.

### Why Volunteer?

I believe that we are all responsible for caring for the Earth, and volunteering for Parklands Foundation to protect the Mackinaw River watershed lands is one way that we can act as a caretaker. I realize how special these lands are, and that access to such places can be life-changing. Through my volunteer work I hope to bring awareness to others who may be unaware of how powerful a connection to the land and its history can be.





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