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A Gem in Middle Illinois: A Shared Legacy President's Message

by Shannon Fulton

Dear Friends,

Imagine standing on a bluff overlooking the Mackinaw River, its waters winding through the vibrant tapestry of the fall forest. Sunlight filters through the leaves of majestic oaks and hickories. The air is crisp with the scent of fallen leaves and damp earth, a reminder of the season's turn. Listen closely, and you might hear the whisper of wind through the prairie grasses, or the echoing call of a red-tailed hawk circling overhead. You find the perfect spot to sit, perhaps read or journal, soaking in the serenity of this special place. This is the magic of the Mackinaw River watershed. In these moments of tranquility, surrounded by the sights and sounds of nature, a deep sense of connection and belonging arises, making you wonder if everyone had access to these experiences, how much more balanced the world might be. The good news is, ParkLands Foundation's preserves are open and accessible to all.

We acknowledge that this land was originally stewarded by Indigenous peoples, and we honor their deep connection to this place. Following in their footsteps, the founders and early organizers of ParkLands Foundation had the foresight to protect these lands (today nearly 4,000 acres). Trying to do what's best by nature is a guessing game with long-term stakes. Good decisions mean that the soil and water will prosper. The trees will prosper. The wild things will prosper. In that natural prospering all of us will become wealthier in richer dawn choruses and endless golden sunsets. The investment is called legacy. It's our shared responsibility—yours, mine, and every member and donor—to be good stewards of these ParkLands Foundation preserves and ensure their preservation for generations to come.

We know you cherish the memories you've made on these lands – sharing a quiet afternoon with a dear friend, teaching your children or grandchildren the names of the wildflowers, or simply breathing in the fresh air and feeling the stress melt away. And who hasn't paused on a hike, captivated by birdsong that makes you wish you had your Merlin app, but also happy you left your phone behind? These stories are at the heart of our mission. Share them, and inspire others to join us in protecting these special places.



Continued on page 2.

President's Message, continued from page 1.

We have ambitious goals for the coming year. We need to strengthen our strategic plan, grow our membership, and increase donor support. Our incredible staff and dedicated volunteers do amazing work caring for our preserves, but to truly manage and protect these lands for the long-term, we need to grow our capacity. Comparatively-sized land trusts have twice the staff and volunteer support to actively manage the lands in their care. This means we need more funding to expand our team and provide even better support for the volunteers, like you, who make our work possible.

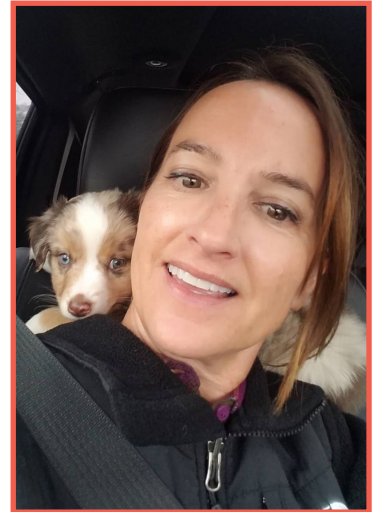
Speaking of support, the new Bluebells Circle empowers Parklands Foundation to make a lasting impact. Over 60 founding members have already generously increased their historical contributions and committed to annual giving of \$1000. Join this incredible group by the end of 2024 and help us set a course for 2025 to appropriately manage and protect the lands we love.

Do you have a group or organization that would be interested in learning more about Parklands Foundation? I'd love to come speak with the people you care about and share the stories of these amazing preserves. Reach out to me at Shannon@StraightUpSolar.com or 309-830-5039 to schedule a time!

With gratitude,

Shannon Fulton, Board President

Lanham, J. Drew. The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature. Milkweed Editions, 2016.



Important Notice

All preserves will be

CLOSED

to the public on:

Nov. 22, 23, 24

Dec. 5, 6, 7 and 8

&

Dec. 13, 14 and 15

for ParkLands Deer Management Program.

Please do not enter the preserves at this time.

Thank you

Thank You to Our Sponsors in 2024!

Oak (\$2,000)

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Dr. Catharine Crockett, Vision Point

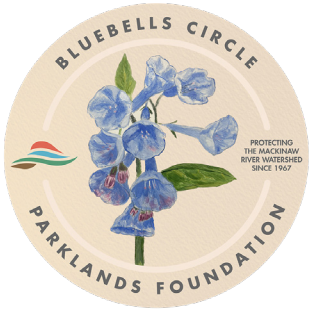
Gentle Family Dentistry • Heartland Bank

Kemp's Upper Tap

David Osnowitz, CFP, Merrill Lynch

Dr. William Ray • The Vein Specialists

Bluebells Circle



ParkLands has established our new “Bluebells Circle” donor group in 2024.

While ParkLands is truly grateful for every single member and volunteer, the newly launched Bluebells Circle recognizes a special community of conservation enthusiasts who have generously committed to making annual unrestricted donations of \$1,000 and above.

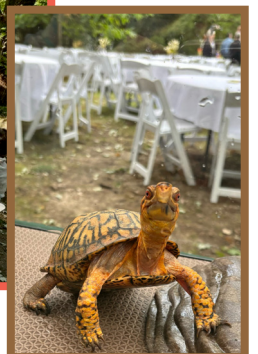
Bluebells Circle Membership includes the donor and their immediate family members (i.e., spouse or partner). As we move forward, Bluebells Circle members will be appropriately recognized at events, in our newsletter, annual report, and more. They will also be invited to participate in occasional Bluebells Circle outings and gatherings throughout the year.

Our Development Committee began establishing the Bluebells Circle in early 2024 by contacting donors who have supported ParkLands at a heightened level in the recent past. We’re proud to have 61 Founding Members of the Bluebells Circle so far, who together have pledged over \$125,000 this year!

Our first celebration of the Bluebells Circle was hosted by Deanna Frautschi and Alan Bedell at their home on a gorgeous fall day. We had 65 attendees, one Eastern box turtle, and one painted turtle in attendance. The turtles were an acknowledgement of the Native Americans that lived here long before the early settlers arrived. Mackinaw means turtle in Ojibwe. Guy Fraker spoke about his efforts as a founder of ParkLands 57 years ago and Shannon Fulton spoke about the future of ParkLands.

While our limited resources prevented us from being able to personally reach out to all of our ParkLands Foundation Members and friends regarding this opportunity, we are pleased to now extend this written invitation to all of our ParkLands community. Join our Bluebells Circle as a Founding Member before the end of the year!

We extend our deepest gratitude to our Bluebells Circle Members for their extraordinary generosity and commitment. Together, we are making a difference. If becoming a Founding Member of the Bluebells Circle sounds like a good fit with your charitable priorities and giving plans, please scan this QR code, visit <https://tinyurl.com/parklandsbluebells> or contact Erin Herbez at: erin@parklandsfoundation.org.



Looking Back on 2024

January
& February

March

April

May

June

New Year's Day Hike

Social, Stave Wine Bar Market

Herbicide Training

Hike with a Naturalist
at Merwin Preserve



Home, Lawn, and Garden
Day with U of I Extension

Hike with a Naturalist,
Lexington Preserve

Presentation to
Rotary Club

4-H Presentation



Presentation to the
Professional Employer
Organization

Tour for the Herb Guild

Wildflower Walk



Ripple: A Clean Water
Extranaganza with the
Ecology Action Center

El Paso Library Presentation

First Aid & Hands Only CPR
Training



Hike With a Naturalist,
Kenyon-Baller Preserve

Scribbles Day Care
Field Trip

Summer Social,
Analytical Brewing



July

August

September

October

November
& December

BioBlitz of McLean County,
with Normal Public Library

Annual Bike Ride

Scribbles Day Care
Field Trip

FBT (For a Better Tomorrow)
Kite Fest



Bloomington-Normal
Pride Fest

Wild Ones
Stewardship Presentation

River Adventure: Musseling

Hike With a Naturalist,
Letcher Basin

Festival ISU



Annual Members Hike &
Meeting at Moon Preserve
& Davis Lodge

New Member Hike,
Letcher Basin

Master Naturalist
Nature Trails Day

Bluebells Circle
Garden Party

Stargazing with the Twin City
Amateur Astronomers at
South Chincquain Preserve

Stewardship Presentation for
Master Naturalist program



Hike With a Naturalist,
South Chincquain Preserve

McLean County
Chamber of Commerce
Nonprofit Showcase



Board Member Spotlight: Chuck Croxton

What do you do when you are not volunteering for ParkLands?

I'm retired after working 39 years in the Farm Credit System, with the last several years serving as the Principal Compliance Officer. In retirement, I enjoy serving as a volunteer land steward along with Andy Smoot at Kenyon-Baller Woods. We also mow the trails on most of the other ParkLands properties. I spend my spare time playing golf, riding my bicycle, traveling, and playing euchre.

What is your favorite ParkLands spot?

No clear favorite, but I like the view of the large bend in the Mackinaw River together with the sandbar near the Southwest corner of the Kenyon property.

How long have you been with ParkLands?

Four years.

Why do you choose to volunteer with ParkLands?

I grew up on a farm in Southern Illinois in which we had 80 acres of timber. I gained an appreciation for nature as I worked and played in those woods over the years. I support ParkLands' mission to protect, ecologically restore and manage its properties along the Mackinaw River watershed. I also enjoy building and maintaining hiking trails to hopefully draw more of the public out to our properties.

What is your favorite memory with ParkLands?

I have a lot of good memories, but one of the best was participating with several of my friends in a workday contest to see who could remove the most invasive honeysuckle. Our group worked really well together on the Kenyon property and we ended up winning the contest.



A Volunteer's Story:

Sherrie Snyder

I was first introduced to ParkLands Foundation by Dale Birkenholz as a Biology major at ISU. In his outdoor ecology class, we spent most days in the field and several of them were at ParkLands preserves. After graduating, I maintained my relationship with ParkLands by frequent visits to the Merwin Preserve.

My first volunteer effort was working with Barry Brenneman, then ParkLands Treasurer. I assisted by sending out the monthly renewal reminders to members. I deposited the membership renewals and maintained a member list.

After retiring, I began to participate in scheduled workdays. Through these workdays, I met other volunteers. After ParkLands started using volunteer stewards, I volunteered to help preserve Ridgetop Hill Prairie where I am currently the Lead Steward. I work closely with Jason Shoemaker, ParkLands full-time Land Steward, to determine what work needs to be done at Ridgetop and when. I schedule workdays with other volunteers to remove invasive plants, use iNaturalist to document the plants I find on the preserve, provide input into the site's management plan, and lead tours of the preserve.

What goes around comes around. Barry and I are now working together again at Ridgetop Hill Prairie. I have met many more dedicated volunteer stewards. We all work together to help ParkLands manage its over 3600 acres. There's a sense of satisfaction knowing that you are a part of preserving what remains of the natural landscapes that once covered the state of Illinois.

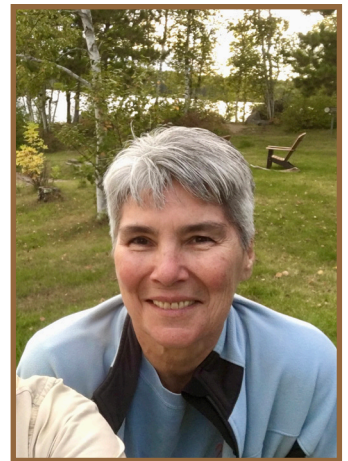


Photo by Mary Jo Adams



Photo by Mary Jo Adams



Photo by Mary Jo Adams



Photo by Mary Jo Adams

Upcoming Programs

To register for programs, visit parklandsfoundation.org/events/.

New Year's Day Hike

Date & Time: Wednesday, January 1; 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Cost: \$5/group, up to 10 people

Location: Letcher Basin

All ages welcome!

Breathe in the crisp air and get your blood pumping on the first day of the New Year! A naturalist will guide us as we take in the scenery and explore nature in wintertime.

Step Into Winter: Snowshoeing Basics

Date & Time: Saturday, February 8; 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Location: South Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve, Carlock, IL



Learn the basics of this fun winter activity! Whether you're a beginner to snowshoeing or looking to brush up on your skills, we'll cover everything from how to put on your snowshoes to navigating snowy trails. All gear and snacks are provided, so just bring your enthusiasm and a sense of adventure! PK Koranda will be our leader, and a huge thank you to WildCountry for supplying snowshoes. Note: This program will take place even if there is no snow! While it is more fun with snow, it isn't needed to learn!

Stewards

Our volunteer stewards dedicated their time and energy into protecting and improving ParkLands Preserves in 2024. Working on their own or in groups, they remove invasive plants, maintain trails, and anything else that is necessary.

Several organizations also donated their time to the cause, including For A Better Tomorrow, Eureka College, Illinois State University, and even a fraternity from Augustana College in Rock Island!



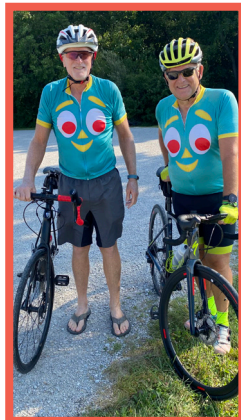
Program & Event Highlights of 2024

Hike with a Naturalist

Over the course of 2024, nearly 200 people took part in our Hike with a Naturalist programs. This a recurring program that brings together people that love to hike and take walks, learn about nature, and meet new friends along the way! Hikes were held throughout the year, each featuring the history, flora, and fauna of one of our many preserves.

ParkLands Annual Bike Ride

The heat was intense, but our bikers were not swayed. Choosing between 20-mile, 50-mile, and 100 km routes, they peddled their way through Central Illinois, raising money for ParkLands Foundation! 250 Cyclists took part in 2024. Let's top that in 2025!



Musseling River Adventure

This program never disappoints, and 2024 was no exception! Everyone became a mussel grubber for the day, feeling along the riverbed of the Macknaw River for shells, then pulling them up to see if they were actually mussels or rocks. Discoveries were given a hoot and holler, announcing another one found. Other aquatic creatures were found as well, including a hellgramite. This is the larval stage of the dobson fly and, where found, is an indicator that the water is very clean!



Stargazing, Wine Tasting, & Snack Grazing

Carl Wenning, member of the Twin City Amateur Astronomers, delivered a presentation on the night sky before directing attention to his telescope. Enhanced by an image intensifier, attendees were treated to spectacular views of the emission nebulae of the Milky Way, open and globular star clusters, planetary nebulae, galaxies, and even early-evening views of Venus.

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We invite you to join us in 2025! Keep your eyes on Facebook, our website, and incoming emails to find out when and where. If you don't receive our emails but would like to, contact jill@parklandsfoundation.org.



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