

# Bluffviews

A quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

January, 2015

Vol. 5, No. 1

## The Journey to Two Hundred

By Joann Fricke

The journey began in January, 2011, when Clifftop became an organization with dues-paying members and I accepted the position of Membership Chair. My goal was to garner 200 member households for Clifftop by the end of the year. I may have been a tad ambitious, as that number was not reached until December, 2014! Our current membership stands at 204 households and spans the continental United States, from Michigan to Makanda, IL; from North Carolina to California; from Ava, IL to Ava, MO.

On this journey, I have given presentations to numerous organizations, most of which have been very attentive and engaged, asking many intelligent questions. (I can be seen in the photo at right, giving one of my first presentations at the Morrison-Talbott Library in Waterloo.) I've met the most fascinating people, some of whom have attended our events and others who were our guest speakers. It seems everyone has a story to tell—about exploring the bluffs as a child, a critter they've seen, a fire that got out of control, a cave they've explored, or a hike at a local trail. Sometimes there is a question, "How big can a bobcat get?", "What's a good native plant to use as a ground cover?", "What the heck is talus?", "What kind of flower is that?", "Can I ride a bike on this trail?" I must admit, I've had to research some of the answers, but I learn as you learn.



Photo courtesy Paul Feldker

And, oh what I've learned! Having retired from a career with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, I was used to acronyms, but I've had to learn a whole new set with Clifftop in addition to the answers to the above questions. I possess a number of reference materials and have found some valuable websites to which I refer frequently.

I am encouraged by the number of loyal and generous members we have. Many of our life members continue to make donations each year and the response to the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Challenge Grant has just been phenomenal. (See progress graph later in this issue.) But, perhaps what gratifies me the most, is the support of our young people. This is illustrated in the Guestviews article that follows. As our volunteer base ages, it is heartening to see the next generation step up to take an interest in their natural heritage. Let's each one of us pass on our conservation values to a young friend, neighbor or relative and continue on this journey with us.

# Clifftop Sparks an Outdoor Addiction

By Jennifer Lesko

Clifftop has been an influential part of my life for the past 5 years or so. I first discovered it by accident, when I came home the summer after my freshman year of college. I had no plans for the break and was looking for something to do. My dad and I saw a notice in the paper, I believe, for some type of nature walk at Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve. Curious, we decided to give it a try. I remember enjoying myself in the sunlight, observing some skittering lizards, and being slightly amused by the plant name 'scurfy pea.' I'd been to Fults Hill Prairie before, but not with anyone who knew much about local natural areas. At the end of the tour, we talked a bit with Natural Heritage Biologist, Marty Kemper, and got his contact information.

The rest of the summer was a blur. I was lucky to get the opportunity to help out with all sorts of things, from surveying Missouri coneflowers and endangered cave snails, to invasive species removals, to seed collection for prairie restoration. All of this was through a combination of the Illinois DNR and Clifftop. I developed a working knowledge of ecosystems in southern Illinois. By the end of the summer, I knew I wanted to continue doing this. But it was time to get back to school.



Jenny in full fire gear before a prescribed burn at White Rock Nature Preserve, November, 2013. Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, [ThomasRollinsPhotography.com](http://ThomasRollinsPhotography.com).

At college, due to my frequent discussion of it, 'the Bluff' became well known to my friends. I graduated with a degree in Environmental Science in 2013, spent the summer in Montana, and then came back home to Monroe County that fall. Over the next 9 months, I got reacquainted with the area. I was able to help Clifftop with 4 controlled burns, see some great talks on archaeology and owling in the area, and happily hear about the acquisition of land to protect Fogelpole cave. The people of Clifftop were the number one reason I enjoyed all these events, and I was constantly amazed at the youthfulness of all the members I came in contact with, even though many were retired. Without them, a lot of the natural areas I have encountered would be inaccessible and overgrown by invasive plant species. Plus, spending time with people with similar interests to mine is always a treat.

Clifftop has helped to give me some direction in life, and I hope that other young people will be similarly affected. Because of Clifftop, I am developing a serious outdoor addiction. I feel myself getting restless if I don't spend a couple hours outside at least three days a week. Also, I have just started a graduate program in forestry. Once I finish, I would like to hint at the possibility of returning home to work with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources or a similar organization. A lot of people don't think that places in the Midwest are worth much, but I have come to think otherwise. Because a large fraction of Illinois' natural areas are now used for agriculture and towns, I feel that the remainder should be protected at all costs.

*About the author: Jenny resides in rural Columbia and graduated from Gibault High School in 2009 and the University of Notre Dame in 2013. Her family became Clifftop members in July, 2012.*



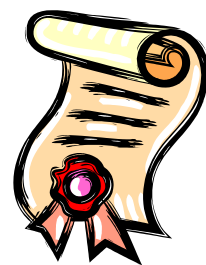


Photo courtesy Joann Fricke

At a recent meeting of the Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee, Rich Dependahl, center, announced the re-naming of two natural areas at the Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve (SLP) to honor two dedicated volunteers. Rock City Prairie will now become known as Burke's Prairie, in recognition of the volunteer hours that Steve Burke, left, has worked at SLP. Steve resides in Valmeyer and is retired from Union Pacific Railroad. In 2013, while on his customary early morning constitutional through the village, Steve asked a local police officer if he knew of any volunteer opportunities in the area. When SLP committee member and village trustee, Jim Pflasterer, right, got wind of Steve's inquiry, Jim quickly tracked Steve down. The two started working together on the reserve the very next week and in only one year, Steve amassed 1,100 volunteer hours. Steve can be found somewhere at SLP on most days, in all kinds of weather, but prefers lower temperatures to the heat of summer.

Jim Pflasterer is a retired school administrator who also lives in Valmeyer and who served as principal of Valmeyer High School from 1991 to 1994. After his stint at VHS, Jim's career took him away from the area, but when he retired in 2002, he and his wife, Dinah, decided to settle in Valmeyer. Jim is a six-year member of the Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee and also donates countless volunteer hours to SLP. In 2014 alone, his volunteer hours totaled 775. In honor of his dedication, Bluestem Glade will now be known as Pflasterer's Glade. Jim enjoys woodworking and will perfect the temporary signs that are shown in the photo, heralding the two newly named natural areas. He uses planed cedar planks and a router to carve the letters.

Other namesake locations at SLP include Newman Prairie and Newman Trail, both named for Debbie Scott Newman, a Natural Areas Preservation Specialist with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, who was instrumental in the dedication of the reserve. Johnson Trail is named for Brian Johnson, a retired, 35-year Village of Valmeyer employee who did a great deal of work in constructing the trail that bears his name. Rich's Prairie is named for Rich Dependahl, head of the SLP committee and Bandit's Glade is named for the beloved pet of committee member Robert Mohr.

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## January upcoming events...



### Fogelpole Cave Groundwater Research

Saturday, Jan. 17  
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.  
Monroe County Annex  
For more information:

<http://www.clifftopalliance.org/upcoming-events/>

<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=11234>



### Invasive Pest Workshop

Thursday, Jan. 29  
9:00 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
\$40 fee includes lunch



## ...makin' a list and checkin' it twice...

By Pen DauBach

We've altered that holiday song refrain to increase the number of "checkings" by, if not an order of magnitude, at least a couple dozen times as we envision a new prairie / savannah on top of the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve. Coneflowers (check), spiderworts (check), June grass (check), milkweed (check), side-oats, little blue stem, prairie dock...(check, check, and check), and even more.

We've put our restoration plans into high gear and have begun the process of enrolling nearly 300 acres into USDA's Conservation Reserve Program and have selected the Natural Resource Conservation Service's pollinator habitat practice as most beneficial to fulfill our goal of raising perennial crops of wildlife. This conservation-oriented version of crop planning means our focus includes:

- host plants for insects at all life stages: The monarch pictured at right is enjoying a nectar drink, but the plant's leaves provide food for silvery checkerspot skipper butterfly caterpillars. Several native grasses and sedges are sole-food sources for larval stages of many species of butterflies, skippers, and moths.
- foraging areas and food for birds and small mammals: Native grasses, like side-oats and little blue stem, grow in tufts and bunches with bare earth spaces around and between, providing ideal foraging areas for quail and turkey poults, as they gobble up insects and larvae that flourish on their host plants. Those young birds, along with voles and mice that also scurry in-between and between the plants, can make a meal for hawks, owls, bobcats and snakes.
- special care as we ready wetland areas and pond edges for restoration planting: Nearly all herbicides are toxic to wetland-area invertebrates and vertebrates, so we'll handle these areas with distinct methods to rid them of unwanted non-native vegetation before setting out native seed and root stocks.



Photo courtesy Pen DauBach

Our list checking also factors in our hopes for perennial crops of human satisfaction, as we plan a trail system that includes ah-factors of viewshed, panoramic color, serene settings by ponds, and dynamic up-close enjoyment of our area's historic flora and rich fauna.

Our list now includes 11 grass and sedge species and more than three-dozen forb (flower) species. We'll be planting more than 41 seeds to each square foot of ground, which means nearly one and half tons of seed will be used for this effort.

We drew on a number of resources for help in planning. Clifftop has its roots in hill prairie stewardship and our volunteers have learned a great deal about prairies and the particulars of care and management for grasslands and glades. We also turned to both new and old library resources for lessons, with the 1997 publication, *The Tallgrass Prairie Restoration Handbook* (Stephen Packard and Cornelia Mutel, editors), serving as overall go-to source and guidebook. And, we took advantage of Clifftop's networked-in status among conservation groups in Illinois to draw on a wealth of advice, counsel, and cautions. Last September Jim Hill and Carl DauBach, members of Clifftop's Board of Directors, attended a three-day workshop on prairie/grassland restoration. The workshop, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy-Illinois,

was held at their Nachusa Grassland property, a 25-year restoration effort on more than 3,000 acres in northwest Illinois. TNC-Illinois continues to experiment with prairie restoration in a big way at Nachusa, as with their October reintroduction of buffalo at the site – the first wild, free-roaming buffalo to feel Illinois’ soils under their hooves in more than 150 years.

Fortified with ideas and with visions of butterflies, bats, birds, beetles, and voles, moles, and – yep – insect instars growing fat and healthy as they chew up leaves, we spent some serious time working our way through seed mix calculations to arrive at our list.

Right now, during the winter cold, we’re still putting the final touches on our list of to-dos. Right now, the prairie / savannah of the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve remains a work of imagination. But very soon, we’ll begin planting and turning a vision of wildlife crops into reality.

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# CRP & CREP Provide Long-term Stewardship Incentives

*Information for this article was taken from a December press release from The National Great Rivers Research & Education Center (NGRREC)*

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) gives landowners the opportunity to receive a guaranteed payment during a contract of up to 15 years for replacing crops on marginally productive and environmentally sensitive ground with conservation practices. These practices can include planting trees, native grasses and/or flowers, creating natural habitat buffers on the edges of fields and streams and restoring wetland areas.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is an offshoot of CPR. CREP, which is a partnership between federal, state and local units of government, provides a unique opportunity by allowing landowners with some of the most environmentally sensitive floodplain lands to voluntarily enroll acres in conservation practices and receive additional financial incentives. This program provides landowners the option and incentives to set aside conservation acres with 15-year, 35-year, or perpetual conservation easements. On eligible acres, the CREP program stacks the annual payments of a 15-year federal CRP contract with an additional upfront payment from the state. In addition, the landowner may receive a reimbursement for up to 50% of the cost of installing the conservation practices.

“These programs are beneficial in that they give landowners guaranteed income for the length of the contract on cropland acres that may flood frequently, reducing their risk of loss,” said Elisa Royce, Land Conservation Specialist with NGRREC. “They also provide excellent habitat for wildlife, prevent erosion and keep nutrients out of our waterways.”

To be eligible for the Illinois CREP program, lands must be within the Illinois River or Kaskaskia River watersheds (including tributaries of these rivers). Some or all of the cropland must be in the designated 100-year floodplain. Other adjacent highly erodible cropland, wetlands, prior converted wetlands or wetlands farmed under natural conditions may also be eligible. To determine eligibility, landowners can contact Elisa Royce at (618)468-2831, or their local Soil and Water Conservation District—in Monroe County, call Wayne Johanning at (618)939-6181, ext. 3, in Randolph County, call Andy Schlichting at (618)443-4381, ext. 3 and in St. Clair County, call John Harryman at (618)233-5583, ext. 102.

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**THANK YOU to those members who responded positively to our annual appeal letters that were mailed in early December. If you haven't yet renewed your membership, please consider doing so at your earliest convenience. We appreciate your continued support!**



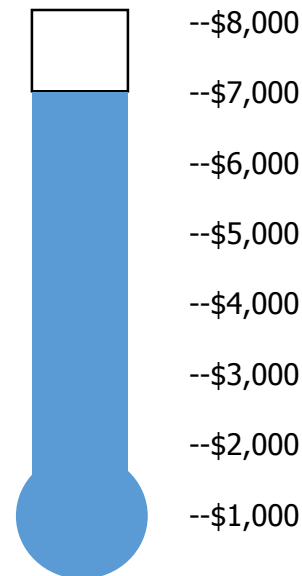
# ICECF Challenge Grant Update

In just six short months, you have contributed nearly 90% of the total funds needed for our Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Stewardship Challenge Grant! The dollar challenge includes a 3-to-1 match for up to \$21,000 in ICECF funds and an 80% match for equipment purchases of up to \$5,000 in ICECF funds.

To date, Clifftop members and supporters have generously contributed a total of \$6,925 -- which means we have just \$1,075 more to go to qualify for the full \$26,000 in matching funds from ICECF. And, our volunteers have worked hard to get us well on the way to meeting ICECF's additional generous offer of \$4,000 for 400 total stewardship hours at White Rock Nature Preserve in one year. Clifftop and ICECF are making great stewarding progress!

If you'd like to help us reach our goal, here is a link to the donation form:  
<http://www.clifftopalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/ICECF-Stewardship-Challenge-Grant.pdf>

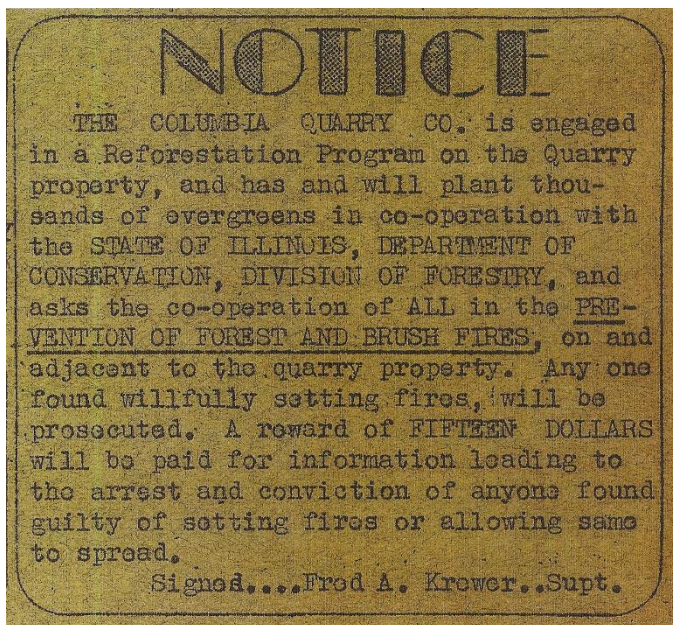
A big **THANK YOU** to all for your generous support!



## Coming soon, another call for volunteers...

In the near future and weather permitting, Clifftop will issue another call for volunteers in order to perform two large prescribed burns—approximately 217 acres at Salt Lick Point Land & Water Reserve and a total of 170 acres at the White Rock Nature Preserve. No date has been set for either burn, but large crews will be needed for both. For those of you who have indicated your willingness to volunteer, watch your email accounts for these important calls for volunteers.

As you know, prescribed burning is essential in controlling invasive plant species, reducing thatch in prairies, stimulating seeds to produce beautiful flowers and ridding the forest floor of leaf litter so that young hardwoods can sprout. In contrast, please note the warning issued by the Columbia Quarry Company in the November, 1941 issue of the Valmeyer Tribune in the photo at right.



Courtesy Dennis Knobloch

## February upcoming events...



### Eagle Fest

Sat., Feb. 7, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Kaskaskia Lock and Dam

### U of I Ext Service Weekend Gardner

Sat., Feb. 21, 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.  
Our Lady of the Snows Shrine



### Paleontology of Monroe County Cave Systems

Sat., Feb. 28, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.  
Monroe County Annex

For details on these events please visit: <http://www.clifftopalliance.org/upcoming-events/>

# Should We Stop Saying “Never Again”?

By Pen DauBach

September 2014 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Martha, the world’s last Passenger Pigeon, at the Cincinnati Zoo. Martha’s death, of course, was the final act in the extinction of a North American species. And what a species it was: with flocks totaling around 5 billion birds in flights across the Eastern and Midwestern United States, Passenger Pigeons were believed to be the most single numerous creatures on earth at that time. Enormous pigeon roosts in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota attracted the deadly attention of market hunters.

Many of the news stories, editorials and comments made in doleful recognition of this sad anniversary implied that Martha’s and other species that went extinct in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, might have continued to survive if their crises had occurred in our time. Many cited the wonderful and recent recovery of American Bald Eagles from endangered and threatened status. This narrative line suggests that we’ve moved beyond driving species to extinction and that our laws, our customs, our beliefs and our energy will enable us to prevent extinction level events. The further implication is that extinction of species such as the Passenger Pigeon have taught us to mourn loss and are unthinkable, “Never Again” events.

In August 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) received petitions requesting that the monarch butterfly be granted threatened status under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act. Let’s be clear about what this means by reviewing the definitions USFWS uses: *“An ‘endangered species’ is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A ‘threatened species’ is one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”* ([fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/listing.pdf](http://fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/listing.pdf)).

Let’s continue to be clear about both what the petition means and the process. Right now, monarch butterflies – the species – is not endangered. But, the twice annual monarch migration between eastern North America and Mexico is under threat and may end due to loss of the insect’s breeding range in the Upper Midwest. The process of “listing” for any species is a long one, with many considerations through many years, if, indeed, it ever happens.

But, let’s also be clear about the species.

Monarch butterflies. That’s the one everybody knows, all dressed-up eye-candy in gorgeous orange and black. It’s the Illinois state insect. It’s also the state insect in Alabama, Idaho, Minnesota, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia-- testament to its beauty and wide range. Monarch butterflies: the teachable moment and illustration of metamorphosis. Monarch larvae on milkweed: the one caterpillar a curious-minded child might cajole her parents into allowing in the house (in a jar) while she collects milkweed leaves to feed it, watch it spin into a chrysalis, and then, with breath held in wonder, release the glowing adult butterfly into a sunny morning of freedom. Monarch butterflies: so common, so everywhere, so many that they’re just a part of summer.

Can something so numerous, so common really be “threatened?” Could it eventually even be “endangered?” Are monarchs destined to be our next “never again” species?







Photo courtesy Pen DauBach

What if we acted before the 'never again' time?  
What if we made and kept our own 'never again' resolutions instead of waiting for somebody or some agency to do it for us?

- Look around your yard.
- Plant some native milkweed plants this spring.
- Don't use pesticides, especially if you're lucky enough to host some caterpillars.
- Plant some additional native plants and grasses in a corner of your yard and

enjoy freedom from having to mow (and water, if you choose plants wisely).

- Celebrate some chewed leaves on your native plants and grasses and wait to see what hatches.
- Resolve not to say "never again" after the fact, but act to make never again a reality.



## Prescribed burn photo gallery...



December 13 burn at Groom property.  
Photos courtesy Mary Ann Groom

