

Southwestern Illinois Wildlife Action Plan Partnership 2010 Annual Report

I. Introduction: In December of 2007 a coalition of conservationists formulated a sub-regional implementation plan for the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan's Hill Prairie Corridor and Karst Sinkhole Plain Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs). Taken together, the two COAs comprise a 130,000-acre contiguous corridor in Southwestern Illinois.

The Southwestern Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (SWIWAP) establishes definitive implementation goals and guidelines, serves USDA's Locally Led Conservation Initiative, and sustains the vision of the Monroe County Comprehensive Plan to protect the largest geographical extent of the corridor.

Principal SWIWAP Partners include: the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Illinois Speleological Survey (ISS), the University of Illinois Extension Service, Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development Inc. (SWIRC&D), the Kaskaskia Valley Audubon Society (KVAS), the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Friends of Stemler Nature Preserves, the Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve Stewardship Committee, and Clifftop. Clifftop serves as the Partnership's administrative agent.

The SWIWAP Partnership met again, for its fourth time, on December 15th, 2010. This report of the meeting highlights the current status of conservation in the corridor, details the significant actions accomplished during 2010, and refines timelines and divisions of labor for out-year SWIWAP Partnership efforts.

II. Summary of Protected Land in the Corridor

- IDNR manages 2052 state-owned acres.
- INPC manages 1319 acres of privately owned land enrolled, in perpetuity, in INPC programs. In addition, 276 privately owned acres are enrolled in shorter-term, renewable easements. Ten acres of short-term easements were added in 2010.
- The Land Conservancy holds donated conservation easements on 108 acres in the corridor.
- 897 privately owned acres are enrolled in USDA's Wetland Reserve Program and are protected in perpetuity (though not within the COA boundaries, this Mississippi River bottomlands area and the Hill Prairie Corridor are linked ecotones and provide significant breeding/wintering grounds for herpetofauna).
- In total, 4376 acres in the corridor and adjacent wetlands are afforded a permanently protected status.

III. Future for Land Protection

The State's budgetary crisis has catalyzed a drastic reduction of state revenues for land acquisition. New roles for local nonprofit conservation and land trust organizations are necessary to help with the purchase or donation of development rights and fee simple acquisition of lands of important conservation value in the corridor. The SWIWAP Partnership completed a strategic land conservation and protection plan in 2009 for the corridor that will aid in the selection and prioritization of tracts for enhanced outreach efforts to landowners for stewardship and permanent protection. The SWIWAP Partnership will continue to work with landowners to encourage enrollment in protective conservation easement programs.

IV. SWIWAP Goals 1 & 2: Protect, manage and preserve existing wooded habitat, hill prairies and glades. Increase wooded acres by 3500 acres. Increase hill prairie acreage to historical boundaries.

Efforts for permanent land protection through conservation easements/acquisition increased in the year.

In keeping with SWIWAP Partnership objectives to protect additional high-quality natural areas in COA, Clifftop and the SWIRC&D jointly purchased a 475-acre INAI-designated tract in the corridor on 21 December 2010. The tract will be permanently protected through enrollment with the INPC. The tract will be opened to the public. This is the first joint ownership / joint venture nonprofit acquisition in Illinois. The purchase was made possible by generous grants from the Grand Victoria Foundation, the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, and a USF&WS State Wildlife Grant, administered by IDNR.

The same two organizations also partnered to attempt the purchase of another tract of 486 acres adjacent to Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve. The scheduled partition sale through auction limited the land trusts' time to seek sufficient financial resources to fully fund the purchase; the property was purchased by a conservation-minded investor.

Stewardship and management to enhance and restore natural communities is equally important. The majority of acreage within the COA remains in private ownership; therefore, efforts to enhance stewardship and management on private acreage as well as on acreage enrolled in permanent protection programs remain vital components of the Partnership's overall strategy. Increasing enrollment of landowners in cost-share programs, participation in stewardship and management programs and restoration efforts remain ongoing activities.

Collective noteworthy stewardship activities in 2010 included:

- 39 contracts on 1938 private-/village-owned acres totaling \$327,454 in cost-sharing incentives through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative--a special focus area program for EQIP and WHIP funds

- 6 contracts on 409 privately owned acres totaling \$196,350 in cost-share incentives to landowners through USFWS'/IDNR's Landowner Incentive Program.
- \$115,740 in contract services for habitat improvements on 8 sites, within a 2000-acre project area, through a State Wildlife Grant, administered by IDNR.
- \$10,450 of IDNR funds for contract services for Stemler Nature Preserve.
- \$6270 in Forest Development Act (IDNR) cost-share incentives to landowners
Totaling: \$656,264 (Life of Contract dollars)
- Currently, 64 landholders have enrolled 3189 acres of woodlands in the Forest Development Act forestland improvement stewardship programs. Some of the EQIP funds detailed above were dedicated to such forest improvements.
- IDNR / INPC monitored and culled invasive species on state-managed lands throughout the corridor.
- IDNR / INPC conducted 7 prescribed burns on 127 acres in the corridor.
- IDNR / INPC collected, with the help of the Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee volunteers, large quantities of native plant seeds in the Hill Prairie Corridor for use in overall restoration efforts.
- Friends of Stemler Nature Preserves contributed 191 volunteer hours to site maintenance, sinkhole cleanup, and invasive plant controls.
- The Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee contributed 1563 volunteer hours to site maintenance, trail development, invasive plant controls, and seed collection and plant restoration.
- Clifftop contributed 906 volunteer hours assisting IDNR / INPC with prescribed burns, plant restoration, and invasive plant control; and, helping private landowners with invasive plant control, 7 prescribed burns on 84 total acres, and writing prescribed burn management plans and wildlife habitat management plans.

Volunteer stewardship groups in the corridor could benefit from further training. See Section X below.

The Mississippi Lime Company spent \$4000 over the past three years to remove cedars and other woody invasive plants on a portion of its hill prairie complex.

A concerted, focused honeysuckle campaign is merited for the corridor. See Section X below.

Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve has the greatest infestation of bush honeysuckle of any state-managed lands in the corridor. The Friends of Stemler Nature Preserves do not have the resources to combat the problem in a timely and effective manner. Additional funds must continue to be secured to address Stemler's stewardship. See Section X below.

V. SWIWAP Goal 3: Restore and maintain wetlands.

Wetland areas near the corridor on the Mississippi's flood plain have ecological and hydrological underpinnings in the bluffs. They serve as important herpetological breeding areas for species that winter in the bluffs, and are important habitat for avifauna. As such, the SWIWAP addresses the need for their stewardship.

Extant wetland areas were drained by the early 1900s, and are currently under restoration. Many now serve as waterfowl hunting clubs. Wetland owners have enrolled 897 acres in USDA's Wetland Reserve Program. The Kidd Lake Marsh State Natural Area accounts for 444 additional protected acres.

The SWIRC&D has signed a purchase agreement for approximately 100 acres located near Kidd Lake Marsh. When the acquisition is completed in 2011, the parcel will be conveyed to IDNR.

At the local level, an informal affiliation of waterfowl hunting club owners, "The Friends of Kidd Lake," is working together to insure the long-term sustainability of the wetlands. At the regional level, the Middle Mississippi River Partnership (MMRP), a much larger scale organization of governmental and non-governmental entities, for which the SWIRC&D serves as administrative agent, is addressing wetland vitality, restoration and maintenance, throughout the Mississippi's flood plain, from the confluence of the Illinois River to the confluence of the Ohio River.

Bluff Road, a well-trafficked county highway, demarcates the ecotone between bottomland wetlands and the bluffs' talus slope. During the migration of herpetofauna across the highway, significant road kill occurs. A study is necessary to determine if mitigation measures are possible. See Section X below.

VI. SWIWAP Goal 4: Increase karst protection.

Bringing definition and a realistic suite of achievable objectives to increase karst protection is challenging. The large geographic recharge areas of the sinkhole plain overlap political, jurisdictional and regulatory boundaries. The Illinois Department of Public Health has regulatory authority over residential well construction and onsite sewage systems. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has regulatory authority for Class III groundwater, landfills, and municipal sewage treatment. The Monroe, St. Clair and Randolph County governments and various municipal authorities legislate karst protective ordinances, but conform to no set of standards in issuing variances.

Approval of a State Wildlife Grant for partial funding for acquisition of a parcel of land adjacent to Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve was viewed as of limited value for karst and karst faunal protection as the addition of the small acreage offers limited groundwater filtration potential. The planned acquisition, however, also protects forested lands and joins together two permanently protected areas.

The inability to purchase a tract of land adjacent to Illinois Caverns State Natural Area that was sold in 2010 was criticized as loss of an opportunity to create a fauna refugia.

The ability to define and refine criteria for permanent land protection in karst areas and to ensure increased sustainability of karst fauna populations through permanent land protection or other methodologies remains a Partnership concern. See Section X.

VII. SWIWAP Goal 5: Encourage landholders and policy makers to adopt sound land and wildlife management practices.

Information / outreach programs in 2010, focused on conservation and stewardship, included:

- January: "Living on the Land: Agriculture Land Management" seminar, hosted by Extension Service
- April: Monroe County 5th Grade Conservation Days, hosted by Extension Service and SWCD
- April: "Migratory Pattern of Shorebirds" presentation, hosted by KVAS
- April: "Bats of Monroe County" presentation, co-hosted by Clifftop & Extension Service
- April: Salt Lick Point public hike, co-hosted by Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee, Clifftop, and KVAS
- May: "Tree Identification" hike, hosted by KVAS
- May: Fults Hill Prairie public hike, co-hosted by Clifftop and the Illinois Native Plant Society
- June-August: native plant education component of Junior Master Gardener Summer Day Camp, hosted by Extension Service
- June: KVAS field trip to Ralph Buettner's property where extensive restoration and research efforts are underway on limestone glades
- June: "Where Have All the Birds Gone?" presentation, co-hosted by Clifftop and Extension Service
- July: KVAS Nature Festival (Master Naturalists informational booth; Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee informational booth), hosted by KVAS
- July: "Prairie Wildflowers" telenet, hosted by Extension Service

- July: Presentation on the Hill Prairies of Illinois by INPC, hosted by the Southern Chapter, Illinois Native Plant Society
- August: "Karst-Ground Water" seminar, co-hosted by Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) and Clifftop
- September: "Snakes: Facts & Myths" presentation, hosted by KVAS
- September-December: Master Naturalist Program, hosted by Extension Service, with teaching help by IDNR, SWIC and Clifftop
- October: "Plants Toxic to Livestock & Pets" presentation, co-hosted by Extension Service and Clifftop
- November: Honeysuckle Workshop & Work Day, hosted by Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee
- November: Honeysuckle Workshop & Work Day, hosted by Friends of Stemler Nature Preserves
- November: "Conservation & Natural History of the Barn Owl" hosted by KVAS
- Published a bi-annual newsletter, "U of I Extension-Monroe County Agriculture, Horticulture, Natural Resources News and Events"
- *CLIFFnotes*, monthly news article series, published by Clifftop

The SWIWAP Partnership, through Clifftop, has obtained Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund and Volunteer Stewardship Fund grant monies to conduct a BioBlitz and Festival of the Bluffs at Salt Lick Point Land & Water Reserve on 13 and 14 May 2011.

VIII. SWIWAP Goal 6: Improve and expand science-based evaluation, monitoring and research.

A bio-diversity database for the bluff corridor has been established and is posted at www.clifftopalliance.org. IDNR / INPC staff and volunteers are conducting bird, plant, mammal, butterfly, and herpetofaunal natural history surveys. The database is updated annually on the web site, in February of each year.

Citizen-science volunteers, associated with Kaskaskia Valley Audubon Society, the Illinois Native Plant Society, the Illinois Ornithological Society (IOS), the North American Butterfly Association, the St. Louis Herpetological Society, and local conservation oriented NGOs conducted 296 hours of surveys in the corridor in 2010. They tendered field notes and rare-sightings reports to IDNR, INHS, and IOS; and helped to build the

bio-diversity database. More volunteers are needed to assist with monitoring plant populations. See Section X below.

The following significant research was conducted in the COA in 2010:

- “Best Land Management Practices for Amphibian Habitat in Sinkhole Ponds”, intern study, funded with an NGRREC grant; Bob Weck will finalize; Clifftop will then convert to pamphlet for landowners. See Section X.
- Entomological study on Fults Hill Prairie NP begun; a two-three year study by Southeast Missouri State University graduate student
- Floristic study of limestone glade, Fults INAI site, two-three year study begun, by Bill McClain & Dr. John Ebinger
- Stemler Cave mapping (2393 additional ft), ISS
- “Status Assessment Survey for Springtails (*Collembola*) in Illinois Caves: the Salem Plateau”, study by Drs Steve Taylor and Felipe Soto-Adames, INHS
- Baseline Monitoring & Molecular Characterizations of state endangered Enigmatic Cavesnail (*Fontigens antroecetes*), ongoing, by Bob Weck, ISS, and Dr. Steve Taylor, Marlis Douglas and Jeremy Tiemann, INHS
- “Fauna of Camp Vandeventer Karst Features” – a literature review, by Philip Moss and Steve Taylor.
- “ Food Web Structure of Cave Streams in Southwestern Illinois & the Survival and Growth of the Stygophillic (*Gammarus troglophilus*) under Laboratory Conditions” – Dan Nelson’s Master’s Thesis, under Dr. Frank Wilhelm, University of Idaho

We need to continue to encourage universities to conduct natural history-related research projects in the corridor. See Section X below.

IX. SWIWAP Goal 7: Seek resources and funding to implement goals.

All SWIWAP WG partners will continue to seek grants and funds to continue stewardship, acquisition, and information-outreach programs. See Section X below.

X. Action Items:

1. Complete a volunteer training manual, to include "plants of concern" monitoring protocols, and protocols for stewardship volunteers to work independently.

Tasked: Clifftop Deadline: June, 2011

2. Conduct BioBlitz / Festival of the Bluffs, 13 & 14 May 2011 Tasked: All partners.
3. Continue to secure additional, dedicated funding to eradicate bush honeysuckle at Stemler Nature Preserves. Tasked: IDNR Deadline: December, 2011
4. Develop "Invasive Species Campaign" protocols for the COA. Tasked: INPC & IDNR Deadline: December 2011
5. Continue to expand academic research in the COA. Tasked: Clifftop, IDNR, ISS. Deadline: December 2011.
6. Determine best practices to limit hepetofaunal road kill along Bluff Road. Tasked: Clifftop & Bob Weck Deadline: July, 2011
7. Finalize "Best Land Management Practices for Amphibian Habitat in Sinkhole Ponds" Then convert to a landowner pamphlet. Tasked: Bob Weck Deadline: July 2011. Then Tasked: Clifftop Deadline: December 2011
8. Develop a blueprint of concerted, doable, prioritized objectives and actions for increasing karst protection. Tasked: Diane Tecic, Steve Taylor, Jerry Lewis, Philip Moss, Bob Weck, and Frank Wilhelm. Deadline: December 2011

XI. Administration: The next meeting of the SWIWAP Partnership will be in December 2011. A listing of partnership members is attached.

SWIWAP Partnership Listing

Name	Affiliation	e-mail
Diane Tecic	IDNR (SWIWAP leader)	Diane.tecic@illinois.gov
Carl DauBach	Clifftop (SWIWAP administration)	Clifftop@htc.net
Pen DauBach	Clifftop (SWIWAP administration)	Clifftop@htc.net
Joan Bade	IDNR & Clifftop	Joan.Bade@illinois.gov
Ralph Buettner	Clifftop & SWCD	rakabuet@htc.net
George Obernagel	Clifftop & Farm Bureau	obernagl@htc.net
John Wagner	Monroe Co. Health Dept.	jwagner@monroecountyhealth.org
Bob Weck	Friends of Stemler & ISS	bnweck@htc.net
Mike Mason	IDNR (Chief Forester)	Michael.r.mason@illinois.gov
Mark Brown	IDNR (District Forester)	Mark.v.brown@illinois.gov
Martin Kemper	IDNR (District Heritage)	Martin.kemper@illinois.gov
Ben Dolbeare	IDNR (Invasives)	Ben.dolbeare@illinois.gov
Jim Renn	IDNR (IWAP)	James.renn@illinois.gov
Debbie Bruce	IDNR (Program Office)	Debbie.bruce@illinois.gov
Debbie Newman	INPC (District Preservationist) & KVAS	Debbie.newman@illinois.gov
Philip Moss	ISS (Professional Geologist)	Philipmoss@juno.com
Wayne Johanning	NRCS (District Conservationist) Monroe County	Wayne.johanning@il.nrcs.usda.gov
Kent Adams	NWTF (Regional Biologist)	kadamsrb@nwtf.net
Bob Mohr	Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee	Saltlick@htc.net
Jim Pflasterer	Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee	Saltlick@htc.net
Courtney Rothlisberger	Monroe Co. SWCD	Courtney.rothlisberger@il.nacdnet.net
Dave Eustis	SWIRC&D	Dave.Eustis@swircd.org
Andy Schlichting	NRCS (District Conservationist) Randolph Co.	Andy.schlichting@il.nrcs.usda.gov
Pam Jacobs	University of Illinois Extension Monroe Co.	Jacobsp@illinois.edu
Kelly Brandt	University of Illinois Extension Monroe Co.	kmbandt@illinois.edu

