

What is a Nature Preserve?

Did you know that less than 1% of the original Illinois landscape exists today? You can help preserve these remaining rare and natural communities by promoting land preservation and stewardship.

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission promotes the preservation of significant lands and oversees their stewardship, management, and protection by offering various land protection options designed to assist landowners who wish to voluntarily preserve their land. The Nature Preserves Commission field staff consists of nine biologists located throughout the state, however 3 of these positions are currently vacant. These Natural Areas Preservation Specialists are educated in the biology of natural areas and trained to assist landowners in the preservation of these important lands. They work with the owners of natural areas to tailor a conservation agreement that protects the natural features of the land while addressing the landowners' use of the property. Nature Preserves Commission programs are voluntary and are available to private and public landowners. The three land protection options are available:



Dedication as an Illinois Nature Preserve. Only high-quality natural areas qualify for this land protection tool. Dedication is the strongest protection that can be given to land and provides permanent protection. The owner retains custody but voluntarily restricts future uses of the land in perpetuity to preserve its natural state and to perpetuate natural conditions. Qualifying lands in private, corporate, or government ownership can be dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. This agreement may result in financial benefits to the landowner, primarily in the form of a charitable contribution deduction on federal income taxes and a local property tax reduction. The biggest benefit to the landowner is the assurance that their cherished land will be permanently and legally preserved while still allowing them to enjoy it now and pass it on to their heirs.

Registration as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve. Lands and waters of Illinois that support significant natural heritage or archaeological resources qualify for this land protection tool. The agreement to register an area as a Land and Water Reserve determines allowable uses and stipulates management objectives. Registered Reserves may be in public or private ownership. The agreement may be for a term of years or permanent. The property can be sold or passed on to heirs subject to the agreement. Land and waters permanently registered may qualify for reduced tax benefits in the form of a local property tax reduction and possibly a charitable contribution deduction on federal income taxes.

Natural Heritage Landmark. This is a recognition program that introduces a landowner to the concept of natural area protection and allows the state to assist with management of the natural area. It is a voluntary program that increases understanding of the value of natural areas and encourages their preservation by private landowners. An agreement document determines provisions and can be terminated by either party on sixty days notice.

These programs are designed to preserve the natural features of the land and do not require public access to private property.



Eagle Scout Project

By Matthew Thompson
Eagle Scout Candidate, age 13

On Sunday, October 14th, 2018, at the Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve, I led a group of volunteers in trimming and eradicating the invasive "Bush Honeysuckle" plant from this Illinois forest area as my Eagle Scout project. I had a group of 15 volunteers from my Boy Scout Troop and from the "Friends of Stemler Woods" volunteer conservation group, and they worked from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM at the Stemler Woods. They removed a lot of honeysuckle plants, and the adults with herbicide licenses sprayed the cut roots with herbicide to ensure the invasive plant species does not grow back.



The forest area was much more clear after the work was done, and you were able to "walk through the woods" again! Removing this invasive plant also helps for the natural trees and bushes to get sunlight and water that the plants need. The Thompson family also replaced a very useful "Outdoor Boot Brush" that is installed at the entry trail to the Stemler Woods. The boot brush will allow hikers to remove excess dirt and mud, and help prevent the spreading of germs or other species in/out of Stemler Woods.

Above: Proffesor Weck giving instructions on where to begin working. Right: Eagle Scout candidate, Matt Thompson and his brother, Brad, work on replacing the boot brush. Photos courtesy Steve Thompson

"Bush Honeysuckle" is considered an invasive species of plant, which can overtake the natural ecology of a forest. The Honeysuckle plant has distinctive red berries that have little nutritional value. Birds and animals will eat these berries, and that will cause the seeds to spread. Also, the Honeysuckle roots must be completely removed, or immediately sprayed with herbicide, or else the plant will regenerate and continue to grow. It is a very hearty and robust plant, and that is why it is such a great threat to the natural landscape and forest.



Thank you to everyone who volunteered.



Girl Scout Gold Award

Speaking of Scout awards, Clifftop member, Lauren Wratchford, is working toward a Girl Scout Gold Award, the Girl Scout equivalent of Eagle Scout. Her project will be featured near the public engagement area at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve. Lauren designed the interpretive signs that will highlight the historic preservation of the property as well as explain karst topography, prairie restoration, the recharge basin ecosystem and the role of volunteers in all aspects of stewardship. As if that wasn't enough, Lauren also designed and built a kiosk to display a welcome to PWSNP, rules to be followed at the Preserve and a trail map with room for pamphlets, which she also designed. In the photos below, Lauren can be seen digging the holes for the kiosk, left, and building the kiosk, with the help of sister, Shelby, and dad, Phil.



Photo courtesy Jim Hill.



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke.

Upcoming event...

Mushrooms/Fungi of the Bi-State Region, Saturday, November 17, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois Avenue, Waterloo. Judi Thomas, Missouri Mycological Society, will cover a brief history of mushrooms/fungi on Earth, the abundance and diversity of mushrooms in the Midwest, the vital role they provide for Earth's ecosystems as well as some medicinal benefits and commercial applications. She will also discuss some of the most common edible and poisonous mushroom found in the bi-state region and how to tell the difference. This seminar is free and open to the public. Register to attend by calling 618-935-2542 or emailing cliffmbr@htc.net by November 15.



Purple-gilled laccaria. Photo courtesy Joann Fricke.



bluff lands and karst terrain. Monroe County's bluff corridor is home to a vast ecosystem that includes nationally listed endangered species that live both above and below ground. In order to ensure the lasting protection of this ecosystem, the Clifftop Board of Directors is opposed to the current wind factory proposal.

Many of our members and supporters have asked about Clifftop's stance on the wind turbine proposal in Monroe County. Clifftop's mission is to promote the preservation, protection and conservation of the bluff lands corridor. Therefore, at our recent meeting, the Board of Directors voted to take a position opposed to the industrial wind factory. While Clifftop supports the use of renewable fuel sources such as wind and solar, we feel that the location of the industrial sized turbines has the potential to do serious damage to the bluff lands and karst terrain. Monroe County's bluff corridor is home to a vast ecosystem that includes nationally listed endangered species that live both above and below ground. In order to ensure the lasting protection of this ecosystem, the Clifftop Board of Directors is opposed to the current wind factory proposal.

Clifftop Board Retirements

Ralph Buettner recently announced his intent to retire from the board of directors. Ralph was the last of the founding members of Clifftop remaining on the board. Instrumental in the inception of Clifftop in 2006, Ralph was always ready to help, no matter what the task. From prescribed burns to offloading over 1,200 one and three gallon potted plants, Ralph was often the first to reply to a call for volunteers. A retired electrician, Clifftop depended on him for not only his electrical expertise but also his vast knowledge of construction, mechanical and farming practices. As seen in the photo below, left, Ralph particularly enjoyed volunteering for prescribed burns and helping others learn the practice. Ralph plans to spend more time with family and learning to relax.

Earlier this year, Steve Gonzalez retired from Clifftop's Board of Directors. Steve joined the board in January 2008 and served for 10 years. Steve often drove his tractor from his farm south of Prairie du Rocher to the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve when mowing was needed for upcoming events. He was quick to volunteer wagons to haul visitors around the preserve on Members' Day and often provided hay bales on which we could sit and chat under the shade of a big maple tree at PWSNP. Steve provided a wealth of knowledge regarding farming practices and welcomed questions, no matter how trivial. As seen in the photo below, right, Steve was most at home inside the cab of a tractor. Steve's increased farming demands were the reason for his departure.

While both men will no longer be board members, they have promised that they will still be available to assist Clifftop whenever possible.

We wish them both well. They will be missed.



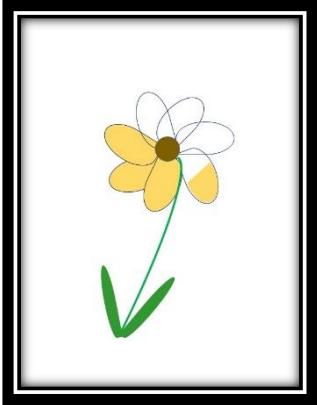
Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, Thomas Rollins Photography.



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke.

ICECF Community Stewardship Challenge Grant Update

While we are more than halfway toward our goal of raising \$7,000 to receive **three dollars** in matching funds, up to \$21,000, from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, we are still accepting donations. If you would like to contribute, send a check payable to Clifftop to P.O. Box 131, Maestown, IL, 62256. Please note in the memo line of your check that this is a donation toward the Stewardship Challenge Grant. If you have any questions, please call Joann at 618-935-2542 or email cliffmbr@htc.net. THANK YOU!





Dicamba Drift

Dicamba herbicide has been sold and used successfully for decades for weed control in the production of field crops. Due to the appearance of several weeds resistant to many herbicide families and the development of herbicide resistant crops growers now have the need and opportunity to use dicamba in ways they were not previously able to combat the hard to control weeds. New lower volatile formulations, use restrictions, environmental and equipment requirements, etc. have been put in place to regulate the use, but observations of dicamba symptoms have increased on off target plants.

There has been much in the press lately about the drift of dicamba to several plants, including non-dicamba tolerant soybeans, fruits and vegetables and even trees in lawns and woodlands. Dicamba is a growth regulator; symptoms therefore will occur on the new growth. Leaves will be puckered up, crinkled or cupped. Symptoms will be evident 7-14 days following application to nearby fields. Off-site drift can be due to either physical drift or volatility. Severity of the symptoms will depend on several factors including the herbicide concentration, weather conditions and sensitivity of the non-target plant.



Dicamba drift damage on shagbark hickory. Photo courtesy Mark Brown.

If you have suspected damage, you can report it to the Illinois Department of Agriculture at DriftWatch (<https://il.driftwatch.org>). The DriftWatch site is a voluntary communication tool that enables crop producers, bee keepers and pesticide applicators to work together to protect specialty crops and bee apiaries through the use of mapping programs.



Many thanks to Anova Furnishings in St. Louis for the donation of seven benches—4 black with backs, 2 grey with backs and one grey flat bench. They will make a lovely addition to our public engagement area at PWSNP.



Ongoing work at our nature preserves...



Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve:

In early August, the floor for the pavilion was poured. In the very near future, two handicapped parking pads and sidewalks from them to the pavilion will also be poured. We have several programs planned next year that will make use of the pavilion, most notably the grand opening and dedication of the Preserve on May 18. Stay tuned for details.



White Rock Nature Preserve

Also in August, volunteers braved the heat and mosquitoes to alleviate erosion problems on Ridgetop Trail South.

With the permission of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, we installed swales and diversions so that rainwater could not pick up speed and cause deep ruts in the trail. Volunteer Luke Edler and his skid steer saved the backs of the other volunteers by doing the heavy lifting and dirt moving, while the rest performed cosmetic work with shovels and rakes (photos above, left and right). INPC approved moving rock from the creek on White Rock Land and Water Reserve to the Nature Preserve to further stabilize the trail (finished project, right).

