

# Bird's-Eye View

September  
2002

## The Newsletter of The Peoria Audubon Society

A Chapter of National Audubon since 1981

Ornithological-Audubon Chapter of The Peoria Academy of Sciences since 1930



### Calendar

**Wednesday, September 11, 7:00 PM**

**Membership Meeting, Forest Park Nature Center**

Program: **Conserving Grassland Birds in the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie**, presented by Greg Butcher, Regional Coordinator of Partners In Flight, an international coalition dedicated to the preservation of migratory land birds.

The Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Bird Conservation Region is one of the most altered regions in North America and is now dominated by corn, soybeans, and human construction. Partners in Flight has identified the bird species most in need of conservation attention, such as Greater Prairie-Chicken, Northern Bobwhite, Henslow's Sparrow, and Bobolink. Greg will suggest actions that can be taken to help these birds.

**Wednesday, October 10, 7:00 PM**

**Membership Meeting, Forest Park Nature Center.**

Program: **Silent Spring Revisited?: Pesticide Contamination of Songbirds**, presented by Angelo Capparella from the Department of Biological Sciences at Illinois State University.

In the mid-1990s, awareness of the hormonal disruption abilities of numerous industrial chemicals, especially organochlorine pesticides, received a new focus. Although well known for their egg-shell thinning effects in earlier years, new data revealed that reproduction of wildlife can be affected negatively in a variety of ways by very low levels of these hormone mimics. To better assess the meaning of these discoveries for neotropical migratory songbirds, a group of scientists at Illinois Wesleyan University and Illinois State University have been characterizing the type and levels of potential endocrine-disrupting chemicals in songbirds of all types throughout the Americas. Some of their findings have been rather surprising.

**Saturday, October 26, 8:00 AM.**

**Field Trip to Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.**

Meet at 8:00 A.M. at downtown Farmington or at 8:30 AM at MWRDGC Headquarters on Cuba Blacktop. For more information and participation, call Bert Princen, 691-0519.

**Saturday, November 2, 9:00 till 11:00 AM.**

**Birdseed Sale Pick-Up.**

Pick up your pre-ordered seed in the parking lot at Kelly's Seed and Hardware between 9:00 and 11:00 AM.

### State Budget Cuts Hard on Natural Areas and Wildlife

by Maury Brucker

State budget cuts in July hit disproportionately hard on Natural Areas, Open Space, Endangered Species and C-2000 funding for all 2003 programs under the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Natural areas funding and open space purchases have both been funded for many years from a portion of the real estate transfer tax, which had taken advocates a long time to get into place. The long-term funding has been cut to one third (1/3). In addition, \$2 million was removed from natural areas accounts and \$29 million was removed from open space accounts, which had accrued from the tax for planned public land purchases. For the Nature Preserves Commission with an appointed volunteer board, which has protected over 300 nature preserves of particularly high-quality land parcels, there is now inadequate money to maintain them. Of the most natural parcels remaining in Illinois from the original 1970's survey, only about half (1/2) have any formal protection.

The Endangered Species Protection Board fared even worse. Their budget was reduced to \$0. The staff of one has been laid off, and the volunteer board has not been reappointed. So, it appears that the state law-mandated list of endangered and threatened plants and animals cannot be updated until the board is reconstituted.

The C-2000 ecosystem program has been funding grants to local (non-state) groups in priority watersheds for mainly habitat improvement projects. We are in the watershed called the Illinois River Bluffs Ecosystem Partnership, which covers the area from Starved Rock to Rice Lake. Over the past several years we have received more than 10 habitat grants. The state budget cuts removed \$8 million from the accounts, which were scheduled mainly for grants for 2003. Three previously awarded grants to our area for last year were also canceled, and the advance money was recalled. The C-2000 program was one of the very few that considers local group input in project selection. Hopefully, this multi-year program will return to regular funding in 2004. So, if you are concerned about endangered species or natural area stewardship, please make your input known to legislators, candidates or in the polls in November.

# You Build It, They Will Come

by Bert Princen

At one time Illinois had an abundance of potholes and other wetlands in its landscape, but almost all of them have been drained to make way for agricultural land or for the development of subdivisions or commercial properties. The disappearance of these wetlands has contributed greatly to the deterioration of our Illinois river basin and its tributaries. Rapid dissipation of storm waters through gullies, creeks and rivers takes along much topsoil and erodes stream banks and fills in the main river channels and backwaters with silt. It also has reduced nesting opportunities for specialty bird species, which have consequently become threatened, endangered or even extirpated in our state.

Peoria Audubon has initiated a fund-raising program and has already accumulated over \$11,000 in less than 1½ years. A committee has been formed to initiate the search for suitable property and to get acquainted with various issues that need to be considered in obtaining property and developing it. That requires developing expertise in legal and financial aspects, understanding the requirements to build a successful wetlands, such as damming, excavating, planting, draining, protecting neighbors from burdens associated with adding or removing water, etc. Committee members are now visiting other successful developments of such wetlands. One major new development has been the flooding of farmland just south of Hennepin, about 40 miles north of Peoria along the Illinois River, by the Wetlands Initiative of DesPlaines, IL. This has been a tremendous success story. Within about a year after the pumps were stopped, the created lake pulled in enormous numbers of aquatic birds. Ducks, geese, swans, pelicans, eagles and ospreys, grebes, loons, sandpipers and plovers all make use in large numbers, especially during the spring and fall migrations, but also for breeding and wintering quarters. One can see why they are so drawn to this new lake; the water is so clear that one can see the remains of the corn stubble six feet below the surface. Aquatic plants have begun to grow out of nothing and fish are already abundant.

Recently the committee had the pleasure of visiting a private wetlands restoration project. This one is located in the northwest corner of Marshall County. In the spring of 2000 it was still covered with soybean stubble left after the harvest of fall 1999. In March 2000 the drain tile was stopped from moving the water out. A 20-acre shallow lake formed rapidly, which left a 10-acre buffer zone to separate it from the corn and soybean plots all around it. Cattails and other reed and sedge species shot up rapidly as did aquatic plants in the water, all from the existing seed base present in the soil. Aquatic birds also showed up in a hurry, already during the 2000 spring migration. Now, one year later, the property looks like it has never been farmed and has attracted many breeding species. For example, three pairs of Yellow-headed Blackbirds

have nested this year (we saw several of them), Sora and other rail species have stayed all summer, and American Coot has nested. Mallards and Blue-winged Teal have nested, and although three pairs of Wood Duck have brought in their baby young, there has been no evidence that they used any of the nest boxes. They may have walked their broods in from other locations. This summer one Snow Goose (blue morph) has decided to stay and seemed quite happy. Last year already 17 Sandhill Cranes stopped over during migration. While we were there we saw a good number of sandpipers and plovers. The owner has seen Black Rail, and it will only be a matter of time before he will run into Common Moorhen, Virginia Rail, King Rail, American and Least Bittern, Marsh and Sedge Wrens, plus a good number of other desirable species. It will become a boon to several endangered and threatened bird species in Illinois.

## Save these Dates

### 103<sup>rd</sup> National Audubon Christmas Counts

Saturday, December 14, Peoria Count. For participation and additional information, contact Bert Princen, 691-0519.

Saturday, December 21, Lake Chautauqua Count. For participation and additional information, contact Richard Bjorklund, 968-6502.

Saturday, January 4, Chillicothe Count. For participation and additional information, contact Tracy Fox, 579-3264.

### Annual Membership Meeting and Brag Night

Wednesday, December 11, Forest Park Nature Center. Show your slides, videos, art or specimens, and tell your stories of the past year.

## Your Action Requested

Congressional insiders report that when the U.S. Senate returns to Washington on Tuesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, it will take up and vote on the recently released White House plan to waive critical environmental laws under the guise of fighting forest fires. U.S. Senators Larry Craig (Idaho) and Pete Domenici (New Mexico) are expected to introduce the measure that is strongly supported by timber interests. It will:

- Remove our most basic environmental and wildlife laws and protections while giving the logging industry unprecedented access to the oldest and largest trees from basically any national forest, and particularly those in the Pacific Northwest.
- Eliminate or significantly restrict citizens' rights to appeal and bring lawsuits challenging forest restoration programs.
- Focus on fire-prevention efforts in back-country forests, rather than on neighborhoods and communities where people would be most affected by fires!

Your two U.S. Senators may cast the deciding votes on this amendment. For the safety of people and communities, and the health of our national forests, please contact them both

and urge them to oppose the Craig-Domenici forest fire amendment and instead direct the U.S. Forest Service to protect communities close to our national forests.

Click onto this link now to learn more and to immediately communicate with your two Senators today:  
<http://www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/contact/default.asp?subject=61>

#### BACKGROUND:

On August 22, the Bush Administration released its plan to protect neighborhoods and communities from forest fires by weakening environmental safeguards, granting additional logging on national forest lands, and limiting or eliminating public input, court appeals and lawsuits. Senators Larry Craig (R-Idaho) and Pete Domenici (R-New Mexico) are expected to introduce the bulk of this dangerous and destructive plan in the form of an amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill that will be up for debate on the Senate floor as early as the week of September 3, 2002.

While the White House plan serves as a boon to corporate special interests, it amazingly fails to accomplish its stated purpose of protecting communities from fire - which should be the goal of any national forest fire prevention plan. It lifts environmental laws and protections on national forests lands. It calls for the thinning of 25 million acres of national forest land in the next 10 years that will cost taxpayers close to \$4 billion, yet it leaves nearly 90% of these acres untreated. The plan gives the timber industry access to large, old trees -- which happen to be the most fire resistant trees - that are located in the remote backcountry, miles away from the nearest community. The plan calls for a number of legislative and regulatory actions, all of which must be approved by Congress in order to take effect. With that in mind, the Craig-Domenici amendment will likely include a call for the following:

(1) REMOVING THE MOST BASIC ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS. The plan seeks to lift portions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for projects that are considered an "emergency," ignoring the fact that procedures already exist with NEPA for expediting emergency federal projects. This provision of the plan basically lifts NEPA regulations to allow the timber industry to go in and log whatever areas have been deemed a "fire threat" often this determination will be made by politically-appointed government officials! NEPA is the backbone of environmental protective legislation, and serves a crucial role by providing federal decision-makers the proper scientific information needed to make an informed decision about public lands projects. NEPA also allows the public to participate in public lands decisions, which is of vital importance. Dismantling NEPA would eliminate the public's opportunity to participate in many federal land projects and remove safeguards that ensure that public lands managers understand what impacts a particular project will have on our increasing threatened wild forests.

(2) ELIMINATE OR RESTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE LAWSUITS AND APPEALS challenging forest restoration projects and proposed treatments to reduce fuel

accumulation. The Administration's plan suggests an exemption be made regarding some or all fuel reduction and restoration projects nationwide from judicial review. The impacts of such an exemption would likely be similar to the 1995 "Salvage Rider" (a.k.a. Logging Without Laws), which effectively barred appeals and lawsuits of salvage timber sales.

(3) UNPRECEDENTED BENEFITS TO TIMBER INDUSTRY. The Administration's plan authorizes use of long-term "stewardship contracts" for forest fuel reduction treatments and restoration projects. This will allow logging companies and the U.S. Forest Service to trade "goods for services" - i.e. to cut federal timber in return for reducing fuel loads. A similar provision was considered but dropped from the Farm Bill earlier this summer, because it would create a perverse incentive for loggers and Forest Service managers to cut bigger and more valuable trees.

(4) INCREASE TIMBER SALES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST by removing what the White House refers to as "needless administrative obstacles" in the Northwest Forest Plan and by expediting implementation of projects determined to be consistent with the Plan. It is important, and revealing of the real intent of the administration's plan, to note that this part of the Initiative is not limited to fuel reduction and restoration projects. Instead, the primary impact would be to increase logging of old-growth forests in the relatively moist western Cascades, where fuel reduction generally is not a management objective.

The overall White House plan, which will be the basis for the Craig-Domenici amendment, is remarkably narrow in its scope: it focuses almost exclusively on reducing "needless red tape and lawsuits" as the key to improving forest health and preventing unnaturally intense wildfires. It does not mention the need for additional funding to implement the country's existing National Fire Plan; nor does it address many key issues in fire prevention, such as actions to reduce fire risks in the wildland-urban interface. Thus, from an environmental perspective, it is clear that the goal is more about overriding environmental laws and eliminating public participation than it is about developing a comprehensive and broadly supported strategy for reducing wildfire risks and restoring healthy forests and rangelands.

There is a better way to protect these communities. Research by the U.S. Forest Services shows that homes and other structures are safe from wildfire if their roofs are nonflammable and the landscaping near the buildings is made as fireproof as possible. A recent Forest Service report estimates there is only 1.9 million high-risk acres with homes and other structures near national forests, nearly all of them private. To protect these communities, we should treat these acres and fireproof the homes. This could be done in just one or two years, and at a cost to taxpayers that is far, far less than \$4 billion.

Rather than supporting the Craig-Domenici big on logging, short on conservation measure, Audubon and our partners in conservation encourage our lawmakers to support measures that will actually make community protection from fire risk a top priority while ensuring healthy forests.

## **SAMPLE LETTER TO SENATORS:**

As a constituent concerned with the health of our national forests and more importantly, for the people and communities near our forests, I stand with the National Audubon Society in urging you to oppose the dangerous and destructive Craig-Domenici forest amendment, and instead, support a measure that will direct the U.S. Forest Service to protect communities close to our national forests that are at unnecessary risk from fire.

Please do not fall victim to the misleading information being made by those who support the recently released White House "Healthy Forest Initiative" which is the basis for the Craig-Domenici amendment. It lifts environmental laws and protections for national forests lands, and promotes the interests of the timber industry rather than the interests of those who live near our national forests. It calls for the thinning of 25 million acres of national forest land in the next 10 years that will cost taxpayers close to \$4 billion, yet it leaves nearly 90% of these acres untreated. It focuses on fire prevention efforts in

backcountry forest lands, rather than the neighborhoods and communities close to our national forests where the risk is greatest.

There is a better way to protect these communities. Research by the U.S. Forest Services shows that homes and other structures are safe from wildfire if their roofs are nonflammable and the landscaping near the buildings is made as fireproof as possible. A recent Forest Service report estimates there are only 1.9 million high-risk acres with homes and other structures near national forests, nearly all of them private. The focus should be to protect these communities, which could be done in just one or two years, and at a cost to taxpayers that is far, far less than \$4 billion.

Again, I urge you to oppose the forest fire amendment. Senators Craig and Domenici are expected to offer to the Interior Appropriations bill, or any other amendment that would waive environmental protects under the guise of fighting fires.

**Be Sure to Come and Join Us at Our First Meeting of the New Season on Wednesday,  
September 11 at 7:00 PM at Forest Park Nature Center**

**Peoria Audubon Society  
677 E. High Point Terrace  
Peoria IL 61614**

**Peoria Audubon**

### **Officers**

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