



Co-Partners of the Volunteer Stewardship Network

Gatherings Online

**A monthly email newsletter of the Volunteer Stewardship Network
published by The Nature Conservancy**

To unsubscribe to this newsletter or if you would like to contribute articles, stories, or announcements to be published in future newsletters, please send them to Karen Tharp at ktharp@tnc.org by the first day of each month.

The next newsletter deadline is **Monday, January 1, 2007**

DECEMBER 2006

Prairie was, in fact, a community of plants and animals so organized as to build, through the centuries, the rich soil which now feeds us. - Aldo Leopold

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I. NEWS

APHIS Expands Emerald Ash Borer Quarantine

To prevent the destructive emerald ash borer beetle from spreading farther, The US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service announced the expansion of its emerald ash borer (EAB) quarantine to include the entire states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, a move which more than doubles the previously quarantined area. The quarantine restricts the movement of lumber, logs, wood chips and firewood across state lines unless the material has been treated to remove the threat. The new quarantine became effective on December 1 following the issuance of a federal order. Regulated items under the federal order include ash nursery stock and green lumber and any other ash material, including logs, stumps, roots, branches and wood chips. Also, all hardwood firewood, including ash, oak, maple and hickory are restricted, due to the difficulty of distinguishing different species of hardwood firewood.

The Floral Report Card: Monitoring Floristic Changes in an Era of Global Climate Change

The Chicago Botanic Garden and partnering organizations are developing a program that will test and implement a citizen science plant monitoring program that will help achieve a better understanding, through active data collection and reporting, of the impacts of global climate change on plant biodiversity. The program will seek to engage students and youth in real-world scientific practices and to develop a scientifically literate citizenship, able to understand and make decisions about current scientific issues. Partners include the National Phenology Network, the National Institute of Invasive Species Science, and the Northwestern University Collaboratory. The Garden is actively looking for community partners that would like to participate in the program by hosting a climate change monitoring garden at their site. Materials and implementation support will be provided to participating community partners. For more information on how to participate, contact Jennifer Schwarz Ballard, Chicago Botanic Garden, jschwarz@chicagobotanic.org or 847-835-6832.

II. WORKSHOPS AND OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

An Afternoon with Short Eared Owls – December 17

Come for a dusk walk to see a winter visitor in [An Afternoon with Short Eared Owls](#), Sunday, December 17 from 3:30 – 5:00 pm at Glacial Park, 6512 Harts Road, Ringwood. The short eared owl is an Illinois endangered species but comes to visit Glacial Park every winter! Come dressed for the weather and be prepared for a hike. We will meet at the Snowmobile and Horse Trailer Parking Lot on Keystone Road. This program is designed for ages 8 and older, and is

sponsored by the McHenry County Conservation District free of charge. Program Registration is required; please call Prairieview Education Center at 815-479-5779 to register.

Effects of Savanna Restoration on Bird Populations - January 10

Dr. Jeff Brawn from the Illinois Natural History Survey, University of Illinois will give a presentation on the effects of savanna restoration (fire, cutting, etc) on bird populations and communities. The program will be held on Wednesday, January 10 from 7 to 9 p.m. at Pottawatomie Community Center. Dr. Braun has studied savanna restoration at a dozen sites in northeastern Illinois, the Peoria area and Kankakee Sands area. In each case the study would compare the species of birds in the restored savanna to those in a nearby closed forest similar to what the savanna was before restoration. The differences in bird species using these two types of habitat is the subject of his talk. The results of his studies have important implications for the conservation of birds associated with disturbance/mediated habitats. Pottawatomie Community Center is located on the east side of the Fox River at the north end of 2nd Avenue approximately 7 blocks north of Route 64. This free program is sponsored by Kane County Audubon, St. Charles Park District, and the Kane County Forest Preserve. Call Bob Andrini at 630 584-8386 for more information.

Owls of McHenry County – January 28

Join the McHenry County Conservation District as we study the Owls of McHenry County. Sunday, January 28 from 4:30 – 6 pm at Prairieview Education Center, 2112 Behan Road in Crystal Lake. Winter is an ideal time to observe owls and owl behavior. The owls are busy staking claim to territories and seeking a mate to share it with. Learn more about these ‘tigers of the sky’. Meet live owls, share stories and folklore, and go for a short hike in search of owls. Please be on time and dress for the weather! This program is designed for adults only, and is offered free of charge by the McHenry County Conservation District. Program registration is required; please contact Prairieview Education Center at 815-479-5779 for more information.

Herbicide Training and Testing Workshop – February 10

Interested in becoming certified and licensed to use herbicides on public lands? If so, The Nature Conservancy will be hosting the next herbicide training and testing workshop for volunteers on Saturday, February 10 at The Brookfield Zoo from 8:15 am to 4:00 pm. All volunteers are invited to attend this annual one-day weekend clinic that includes General Standards training (for Operators license) in the morning and (Operator’s and Applicator’s license) testing in the afternoon.

- To be certified as an Operator (a person who uses herbicides and who is “sponsored” by a licensed Applicator), volunteers must pass the General Standards test.
- To be certified as an Applicator (the person in an organization who has responsibility for all Operators licensed under him/her with regard to the use of herbicides), volunteers must pass both the General Standards test and one or more Category exam. Those category exams most appropriate to VSN work are listed here; choose the one you think is the most applicable to the herbicide application you will be doing:

Right-of-way pest control: chemical weed control on noncrop sites such as parking lots, along roads, in access rights-of-way, and in fence lines. [This is the license that most volunteers acquire.]

Aquatic pest control: herbicide use for weed control in standing or running water.

Please bring a photo ID and calculator for the testing session. The clinic is scheduled for Saturday, February 10, 2007, 8:15 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. The training will run from 8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (lunch on your own); the testing will run from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The workshop is located at the Brookfield Zoo in the Discovery Center. (see directions on back of this page).

Please register with Karen Tharp, VSN Coordinator, by phone at 866-VSN-LINE (876-5463) or email at ktharp@tnc.org by Friday, January 26, 2007. When registering, please relay the following information: your name and address, phone number, your landowner/sponsoring agency and/or volunteer site, your volunteer title (i.e. Steward, Co-Steward, volunteer, etc.), what test(s) you are taking (if just operator, who is your sponsoring applicator), and if you are planning on attending the morning training session or just the test in the afternoon.

NOTE: the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA) will only offer weekend training and testing if we have at least 50 attendants at this workshop! So please avail yourself of this excellent opportunity and spread the word to other volunteers! Please note that this workshop is offered for volunteers of the VSN; this year it may be possible to open the workshop to agency staff, although volunteers will have first priority.

We recommend that you purchase and review the training materials BEFORE the workshop. Study materials are available by phone, fax, or mail order. Call 1-800-644-2123 for phone orders. Fax your order to 217-244-3469. To order by mail, write to the University of Illinois, PAT Program, 1201 S. Dorner Dr., Urbana, IL. 61801. Specify when ordering which study materials you would like (i.e., for the General Standards exam and/or for one of the Category tests). Allow 1-2 weeks for delivery.

The Wonders of Wolves – February 11

What words come to mind when you think of wolves? Big? Bad? How about "Awesome!" At this interactive family program Krissy English, representing the International Wolf Center, Ely, MN, will help dispel the myths and explain the facts about these magnificent creatures. Krissy's presentation features hands-on activities, a variety of wolf artifacts, slides and a video. Sunday, Feb. 11, 1 – 2:30 p.m. at the Red Oak Nature Center in North Aurora. Call 630 897-1808 for more information - \$6 per person / \$14 per family.

Native Fish of the Floodplain Lakes along the Illinois River – February 17

The Illinois River valley was once one of the most productive aquatic systems in the world. Changes to the system over the last 150 years have greatly altered and destroyed much of the natural functions of the floodplain and river. However, efforts are underway to return large areas of the floodplains along the Illinois River to more natural states. Dr. Mike Retzer of the Illinois Natural History Survey will discuss his efforts to reintroduce native fish species to three areas in the Illinois River valley. To be held on Saturday, Feb. 17, 1 – 3 p.m. at the Pottawatomie Community Center in St. Charles. Call 630 584-1885 for more information - \$15 per person.

Frog Monitoring Workshops 2007

These frog workshops are for both beginning and experienced monitors. We'll teach and review the calls of our 13 species of frogs and toads, help new monitors find survey sites, and discuss the monitoring protocol. Experienced monitors are encouraged to attend, in order to learn any protocol changes, obtain data sheets, review frog calls, and share lessons learned from last year.

Wednesday January 24th - 6:30-8:30 pm - DuPage County, IL

The Grounds and Resources Complex at 29 W 220 Mack Road in West Chicago, within Blackwell Forest Preserve. From Route 59, travel east on Mack Road for 0.6 miles. Turn north into the complex. Pass through the chain link gate and gas tank area. Park in front of the center building. Follow the signs to the workshop at the rear of this building. Contact Cindy Hedges, 630-876-5929.

Tuesday February 6th - 7:00-9:00 pm - Lake County, IL

Welcome Center at Ryerson Woods. Located about a mile south of Half Day Road, between I-94 and Hwy 45. Head west on Half Day road from I-94, then turn south on Riverwoods Road and look for the entrance on your right. Contact Tom Smith, (847) 968-3329.

Wednesday February 7th - 7:00-9:00 pm - McHenry County, IL

Prairieview Education Center, Crystal Lake. At 2112 Behan Road, just south of Hwy 176, between Hwy 31 and the Fox River. Heading NE from -Crystal Lake on Hwy 176, turn right on Behan Rd after passing Valley View/Silver Lake Rd, and take another right at the end of the road. Please call (815) 479-5779 to pre-register. For questions, contact Sara Denham, (815) 728-8307.

Saturday February 10th - 9:00am-noon - Kane County, IL

Pottawatomie Park, St. Charles. Coming west on Route 64 (called Main St. in St. Charles), turn north at 2nd Ave., two blocks before the river. Second Ave. ends at Pottawatomie Park - head west and go to the large building down by the river. Contact Mary Ochenschlager, (630) 584-1885

Tuesday February 13th - 7:00-9:00 pm - Will County, IL

Sugar Creek Administrative Building of the Forest Preserve District. At 17540 W. Laraway Road in Joliet. Take Rte 80 to Briggs, head south on Briggs (turns into 52-S), then west on Laraway Road, and look to the north side of the street after about a half mile. Contact Renee Gauchat, rgauchat@fpdwc.org.

Thursday February 15th - 7:00-9:00 pm - Southern Cook County, IL

Camp Sagawau, 12545 111th St., Lemont, IL. One-hundred yards east of Archer Ave., or four miles west of Swallow Cliff Toboggan Slides on Rt. 83. Contact Diana Krug, (708) 839-0696, diana.krug@comcast.net.

Monday February 19th - 7:00-9:00 pm - Northern Cook County, IL

Edgebrook Community Center. Located at 6100 N. Central on Chicago's northwest side. Contact Diane Huebner, d-huebner@northwestern.edu.

Thursday February 22nd - 7:00-8:30 pm - Porter County, IN

Valparaiso branch of the Porter County Public Library, located at 103 Jefferson Street in Valparaiso, IN. Workshop will be in Meeting Room A. For location details, see: <http://www.pcpls.lib.in.us/>. Contact Alan Resetar with questions, 219-465-7231.

Kane County Certified Naturalist Program February 20 & 22

If you enjoy working in and learning about nature, then the Kane County Certified Naturalist program may be for you! Sponsored by the Kane County Forest Preserve District and the Geneva, Fox Valley and St. Charles Park Districts, this 10-course program, in conjunction with 20 volunteer hours, will provide you with the knowledge and skills you need to lead

educational activities and sponsored programs. Course work begins April 2007. An informational meeting will be held on 9:30 – 11:30 am Feb. 20, and 6:30 – 8:30 pm. Feb. 22, at Pottawatomia Community Center in St. Charles. For registration and additional information, please contact Lisa O'Brien at 630 584-1885 x435.

CW Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training Workshops*

The CW Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training course is designed to provide staff and volunteer stewards with the fundamental knowledge necessary to safely participate on the crew of a controlled burn in the Chicago Wilderness region. The CW Natural Resources Management Team continues to organize both weekday and weekend sessions. The following two-day workshops are planned for Spring 2007: 1) February 22 & 23 at Brookfield Zoo and 2) February 24 & 25 at Brookfield Zoo. For registration information, contact Chris Mulvaney, CW Science & Natural Resources Management Teams Coordinator, at 847-242-6424 or cmulvaney@chicagowilderness.org.

III. CONFERENCES AND OTHER EVENTS

Invasive Plants in the Midwest Program - December 13-14; Milwaukee, WI

The North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN), and the Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin (IPAW) will cosponsor a two-day program on invasive plants in the Midwest. This meeting will give land managers and landowners the opportunity to meet with researchers, extension agents, and herbicide and restoration company representatives to discuss the need for further research and products for invasive plant control. For more information on the conference, visit the NCWSS web site at <http://www.ncwss.org/>.

Soils and Restoration Ecology Conference, December 18-20, DePaul University, Chicago, IL

This conference will be a wonderful opportunity for the exchange of information and insight between different constituencies in the field of restoration, and may facilitate a variety of new collaborations. Organizers and many of the potential participants are particularly interested in restoration project being undertaken by managers and volunteers in the Chicago Wilderness region. For information and to register visit www.srs.fs.usda.gov/events/sre/

Emerald Ash Borer and Other Invasive Species Telenets - February 13 and 15

Emerald Ash Borer and Other Invasive Species telenets will be offered by local University of Illinois Extension offices throughout the CW region. A local slide presentation is combined with live audio of University of Illinois Extension Entomologist Phil Nixon, located off site, allowing live Q & A between Dr. Nixon and people throughout Illinois. Presentations start promptly, so arrive 15 minutes early to sign in and pick up handouts. To find a location near you, go to <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/state/> click on Today's Events on the left bar. Choose the month of February and look for local programs scheduled on one of these two dates: February 13, 2007 at 1 PM or February 15, 2007 at 7 PM.

A Strand in the Web - 15th Annual Natural Landscaping Seminar - February 24

The Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee of McHenry County Presents "A Strand in the Web". Our 15th Annual Natural Landscaping Seminar on Saturday, February 24th, 2007,

8:00-3:00 at the McHenry County College Conference Center located on 8900 U.S. Highway 14, Crystal Lake, IL. Guest Speakers include: Carol Reese, University of Tennessee Extension - The Wilder Side of Gardening, Nationally known television personality and garden writer for Horticulture Magazine; Guy Sternberg, Starhill Forest Arboretum - Native Trees and their Understory, Author, Native Trees for North American Landscapes; Michael Jeffords, Illinois Natural History Survey - Pollinators and their Native Hosts, Entomologist, photographer and author of Illinois Wilds; Sandy Sjoblom and Nancy Gonsiorek - Rain Gardens, WPPC natural yards mentors. Registration includes lunch: \$30 in advance, \$35 at the door. Vendors will display natural gardening products and services, and garden art for sale. Sponsored by: The Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee of McHenry County - A non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of native species through preservation, propagation, and education. For registration or more information, contact Nancy at 815.455-9462

Save the Date - Wild Things Conference; March 3, 2007

You are invited to a day-long conference that brings together the region's best experts, most dedicated volunteers and anyone interested in nature. Technical presentations and interactive workshops will explore the latest in natural areas preservation, wildlife protection and monitoring. The conference is organized in "tracks" designed for everyone from beginners to experts. There is special focus on empowering citizen scientists, stewards and advocates with information, networking and good ideas. Wild Things will feature more than 80 large and small-group sessions drawn from real-life experiences with everything from the nitty gritty of habitat management, botany, and zoology to advocacy, education, art, culture, history and backyard and neighborhood ecology. It's a great opportunity to listen, ask questions, and contribute to the effort to conserve the natural ecosystems and habitats of the greater Chicagoland area. More information is available at <http://habitatproject.org/WildThings/>.

IV. GRANTS AND OTHER RESOURCES

Funding for Environmental Research and Development

The Department of Defense, through the Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program (SERDP), will be funding environmental research and development efforts to identify, develop, and transition environmental technologies that relate directly to defense mission accomplishment. Proposals in the following areas are requested:

- Environmental Restoration — innovative technologies for the detection, characterization, containment, and remediation of a wide range of contaminants in soil, sediments, and water.
- Munitions Management — advanced geophysical sensor and signal processing technologies for the detection, discrimination, and remediation of Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) and technologies for range clearance and reduced generation of UXO.
- Sustainable Infrastructure — natural resources management (e.g., ecosystem management, threatened and endangered species, invasive species), facilities management (e.g., solid waste, noise, water/air quality, energy), and detection and evaluation of cultural resources.
- Weapons Systems and Platforms — advanced alternative environmentally benign technologies and materials that reduce, control, or eliminate the waste and emissions associated with the manufacturing, maintenance, and use of DoD weapons systems and platforms.

SERDP intends to fund multiple projects within each core focus area. Projects will be selected through a competitive selection process. PRE-PROPOSALS FROM THE NON-FEDERAL SECTOR ARE DUE BY THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2007. PROPOSALS FROM THE FEDERAL SECTOR ARE DUE BY THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2007. Detailed instructions for federal and private sector proposers are available on the SERDP web site: <http://www.serdp.org/Funding/index.cfm>.

SERDP will also be funding environmental research and development through the SERDP Exploratory Development (SEED) program. The SEED program is designed to provide initial funding for high-risk, high-payoff projects. For FY08, SEED proposals are being requested for Munitions Management and Sustainable Infrastructure. All SEED proposals are due by THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2007. Detailed instructions for both federal and non-federal proposers are available on the SERDP web site at <http://www.serdp.org/Funding/index.cfm>.

Earthwatch Educator Fellowships Available to Sponsor Participation in International and U.S. Conservation Expeditions - Deadline: Rolling

The Earthwatch Institute (<http://www.earthwatch.org/>) and its partners offer a number of Educator Fellowships every year to elementary, middle, and high school educators and administrators. Earthwatch seeks adventurous, innovative science educators who have an interest in conservation, sustainability, and life-long learning. Participating educators work alongside leading field scientist on some of the most important environmental issues facing the planet today, like climate change and biodiversity. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis during the school year. Applications received by March 2007 have the best chances of being funded. Note: This program requires an application fee of \$35, which includes a free year of Earthwatch membership). For more information visit: <http://fconline.foundaitoncenter.org/pnd/10005404/earthwatch>

V. JUST FOR FUN

Stories in the Snow

From: Essays on Nature by Virginia S. Eifert, 1967

When snow hides bare earth and blankets fallen leaves, it puts upon the woods and fields a fresh covering which is almost immediately imprinted with tracks and stories of the local inhabitants. The creatures themselves usually are difficult to see. They travel about at night, preferably, move inconspicuously under bushes, or hide among leaves so that human beings are seldom aware of the extent of the wild populations dwelling so close to houses and roads. Except for the tell-tale marks left on dusty paths and muddy shores in summer and on snowy fields in winter, we would know little of what has been going on around us. But when snow comes, the creatures cannot move about without leaving their autographs. After a newly fallen snow has been arranged with crystalline nicety over log and meadow, upon slope and woodland, we may go out and, as with a newly sharpened vision, find fresh chapters in the story of the wild.

Now it is plain to be seen that clumps of prairie grass jutting from the snow really are fortresses of the meadow mice. The stalks provide a citadel with old, tough leaves matted around the bases of the plants where the mice retreat for shelter. Heaped over snowflakes, the shelter is warm and is concealed from the hungry eye of hawk or fox. The mice, however, cannot stay inside forever. They must go out to forage and although for a time they may tunnel beneath the snow, they also emerge and leave small quartets of tracks, the tail marks

nically imprinted to show which way their makers have gone. Mouse tracks lead to the stalk of a wild aster still holding seeds; to the corn stubble to find forgotten nubbins; to the ebony-dark stalks of partridge pea whose splitting pods still hold seeds.

By dawn, also, the rabbits have marked the new snow. The young ones which have never before seen snow are gay and reckless in their dancing about, imprinting numberless tracks in a most dangerous sort of prodigality while the old rabbits are more cautious. They follow well-traveled paths, putting their tracks together so that they eventually pat down the snow in rabbit-roadways which blur the identity of individual scents. Only the very young or the very reckless strike off for themselves in independent directions which are marked with dreadful clarity for any fox or weasel to follow.

In pursuit, the hunters leave their own tracks. The fox sets down its small, dog-like feet in an almost straight line, tracks made with purpose, following along the top of a log, disappearing when the fox changes course and walks in the still-open shallows of the creek, emerging again...and pouncing. The pounce marks are plain, and so are the small spatters of blood and scattering of brown feathers where a bobwhite was not quite fast enough to escape the hunter. The rest of the covey – the snow is plain in its narration here – had slept in a circle, tails together, heads out, in a hollow in the snow. They had been lightly covered with it as it fell last night, had all burst out in a concerted rush and a roar of wings as the fox leaped – all but the slow one. The slow and the inept and the weak are quickly taken to give energy to other creatures which are fast and efficient and strong. The story is all told there in the snow.

And the star-shaped tracks of an opossum show where it walked cautiously and with some distaste over the cold snow to look for fallen persimmons under leaves and snow or to dig out the remains of a dead robin, or an apple core thrown away by yesterday's hiker. The opossum searches, and its ambling tracks, as photographed in a city park last winter, tell stories in the snow, meeting and mingling with others on different errands and with different tales to tell, and going on again as part of the small drama of a winter's day. (December 1964)

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