



*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](mailto:ktharp@tnc.org) by the first day of each month. The January newsletter deadline is **Tuesday, January 1<sup>st</sup>**.*

### DECEMBER 2007

*"Volunteers don't necessarily have the time; they have the heart." --- Author Unknown*

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## I. NEWS

### **Major Victory for Ecosystem Restoration Projects; Congress Overrides Presidential Veto**

On November 8, 2007, the U.S. Congress voted to override the president's veto of the Water Resources Development Act, a \$23 billion piece of legislation that authorizes more than \$5.5 billion for key ecosystem restoration projects. The president issued his veto on Nov. 2, citing the bill's cost. Audubon has lobbied for passage of WRDA for five years and urged the congressional override because of the bill's funding to key Audubon priorities like the Everglades, the Great Lakes, coastal Louisiana, and the Mississippi River. To read more about the Water Resources Development Act, go to:

<http://web1.audubon.org/news/pressRelease.php?id=62>

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## II. WORKSHOPS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

### **Webcast – Status of Significant Plant Invaders in Michigan & Prioritizing Control Efforts**

Join the Stewardship Network during the eastern time zone's lunch hour (11:45am to 1pm EST) on the second Wednesday of each month for a free interactive online discussion and presentation about various topics relating to caring for natural lands and waters.

This Wednesday, December 12, 2007 from 11:45 to 1 pm Eastern the topic will be “Status of Significant Plant Invaders in Michigan & Prioritizing Control Efforts”. Michigan Natural Features Inventory has been studying the distribution of invasive plants across the state and working on an early detection protocol for new invaders. This webcast will provide the opportunity to learn about and discuss the development of a comprehensive response to these invaders, looking at this both from the site-specific perspective as well as from a regional or statewide scale.

**Location:** [www.stewardshipnetworkwebcast.org](http://www.stewardshipnetworkwebcast.org) (this link becomes live the day of the webcast, until then it will just take you back to the Stewardship Network website.)

Webcast led by the following experts:

- Phyllis Higman, Michigan Natural Features Inventory - has served as a Michigan Natural Features Inventory botanist since 1993. She has teaching experience at multiple levels from grade school outdoor education programs to University courses in environmental dynamics. For the last seven years she has coordinated multidisciplinary training workshops for the Michigan Natural Resources Department, identifying evolving needs and developing innovative field-based workshops focusing on a suite of topics related to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. Additionally she has conducted extensive field surveys throughout the state for fourteen years. She brings a solid base of knowledge on Michigan's natural ecosystems with particular expertise in highly significant and vulnerable elements of biodiversity.
- Lisa Brush - Executive Director, Stewardship Network. Lisa has been working to bring groups and individuals together to build capacity to manage our natural areas.

Once you have logged in to the meeting, you will be able to ask questions of and share information with these experts and others who join us online. You will be able to hear the facilitators through speakers on your computer (make sure they are turned on!). You will be able to share your thoughts, ideas, questions, and perspective via your keyboard. Participants will be able to see everyone's typed comments. If you encounter any technical difficulties, please contact Hailee at 517-432-1950. We'd also encourage everyone to do a quick trial run AHEAD OF TIME (by going to [http://www.instantlyglobal.com/system\\_test](http://www.instantlyglobal.com/system_test) ) to make sure you are able to access the meeting on your computer. If you try beforehand and encounter difficulties Hailee may be able to help you discover what the problem is.

## Herbicide Training and Testing Workshop – Saturday, January 19, 2008

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, January 19, 2008 at The Brookfield Zoo from 8:00 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, January 19, 2008, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Sign-in registration starts at 8:00am, the training will run from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (lunch on your own); the testing will run from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. *For those interested in identifying and reporting new potential invasive species in northeastern Illinois, a training to participate in the New Invaders Watch Program will be offered during lunch.* The workshop is located at the Brookfield Zoo in the Discovery Center. **Please register with Karen Tharp, VSN Coordinator, by phone at 866-VSN-LINE (876-5463) or email at ktharp@tnc.org by Monday, January 7, 2008.** 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.

## 2008 Bird Monitoring Workshops

The Bird Conservation Network, in cooperation with the Forest Preserve Districts of Cook, DuPage, Kane and Lake (IL) counties, the Chicago Park District and the Morton Arboretum, will conduct a series of five workshops for current and prospective bird monitors in the Chicago Wilderness region. **Anyone interested is invited to attend any of these free workshops.** Monitors are needed at many sites. Each workshop will run for four hours on a Saturday afternoon and will feature forest preserve and park district staff and experienced birders. Each will feature the following agenda:

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- ❖ **Birding by ear.** An instructional presentation on the songs and calls of the region's breeding birds. (Optional. Noon-1 pm)

#### MAIN SESSION (1-3 pm)

- ❖ **Recommended monitoring practices: What works and what doesn't.** A discussion with experienced monitors.
- ❖ **Working with land managers and stewards.** Tips and resources from FPD staff and stewards at restoration sites. Updates on bird habitat restoration projects.
- ❖ **The 2007 trends analysis of monitoring data.** Brief explanation of the recently completed analysis of Chicago Wilderness monitoring data. Includes information on accessing results of the analysis.
- ❖ **Using eBird to report monitoring data.** Brief presentation on the most efficient ways to report your survey data to the local and national databases.

❖

#### FOR BEGINNING MONITORS (3-4 pm)

- ❖ **How to monitor with local protocols.** Instructional session for beginning monitors: How and when to do surveys. How to set up a transect. How to set up a point count. (One hour)

#### **Preliminary Workshop Schedule**

(Visit [www.bcnbirds.org](http://www.bcnbirds.org) for any changes plus presenters and directions)

*Kane County, March 1, 2008 - Noon-4:00 pm. Aurora West Forest Preserve, Aurora.*

*DuPage County, March 8, 2008 - Noon-4:00 pm. Morton Arboretum, Lisle.*

*Lake County, Illinois, March 15, 2008 - Noon-4:00 pm. Ryerson Woods Welcome Center, Deerfield*

*Cook County North, March 29, 2008 - Noon-4:00 pm. Crabtree Nature Center, Barrington.*

*Chicago and Cook County South, April 5, 2008 - Noon-4:00 pm. South Shore Cultural Center, Chicago.*

**Important:** If you plan to attend one of these workshops, we would appreciate an RSVP. Phone or email Judy Pollock, giving your name, contact information, and the workshop you will attend: 847-965-1150, ext 21 or [chicagowildthings@yahoo.com](mailto:chicagowildthings@yahoo.com).

#### **2008 Plants of Concern Workshops**

*Saturday, April 5, 9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Volo Bog*

*Thursday, April 17, 9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Midewin Tallgrass Prairie*

*Sunday, April 27, 9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Chicago Botanic Garden*

Plants of Concern is a rare plant monitoring program for Northeast Illinois, funded by Chicago Wilderness, the Wildlife Preservation Fund, USFS (Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie), CorLands, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and C2000.

The Plants of Concern workshops train volunteers in the basics of monitoring techniques, including measuring and mapping populations using a GPS unit. The workshops also present an opportunity to meet representatives of the Forest Preserve Districts and Illinois Department of Natural Resources as well as experienced monitors.

Registration is required. For more information or to register, please contact Marian Hofherr, POC Program Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator at [mhofherr@chicagobotanic.org](mailto:mhofherr@chicagobotanic.org) or 847-835-6873. For more information on Plants of Concern, visit the program web site at <http://www.plantsofconcern.org>

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### **III. CONFERENCES AND OTHER EVENTS**

#### **National Association for Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) Workshop January 14 – 18, 2008, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago**

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County and The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum are hosting the CIG workshop at a discounted rate of \$133.00 (instructor charge waived). The method-based program covers the basics of thematic interpretation, and is appropriate for both new and experienced non-formal educators and interpreters. Attendance at all four days is required to qualify for certification. For more information or to register, please contact Cheryl McGarry, FPDCC, at 773-631-1853 or [camcgarry@cookcountygov.com](mailto:camcgarry@cookcountygov.com); or John Elliott, FPDCC, at 708-771-1332 or [jelliott@cookcountygov.com](mailto:jelliott@cookcountygov.com). Details on NAI and the certification program can be found at <http://www.interpnet.com/certification/index.shtml>

## **Stewardship Network Conference 2008:**

### **The Science, Practice & Art of Restoring Native Ecosystems**

January 25 & 26, 2008, East Lansing, Michigan

This information –packed two-day conference links wildlife enthusiast, nature lovers, land managers, and researchers from throughout the Midwest to improve the science, practice, and art of caring for natural lands and waters. Stephen Packard, director of Audubon-Chicago Region, will give the keynote presentation. For more information visit [www.stewardshipnetwork.org](http://www.stewardshipnetwork.org)

## **Solstice Celebration – McHenry County Conservation District**

Celebrate the longest, darkest night of the year with McHenry County Conservation District at **Solstice Celebration**, Friday, December 21 from 7 – 9 p.m. at Prairieview Education Center, 2112 Behan Road in Crystal Lake. For centuries, the winter solstice has been a call for celebration; come find out why! We'll investigate old and new ways to celebrate this celestial event and demonstrate traditions to bring home for a family solstice celebration. Participants will make their own Yule log to take home. Come prepared for both indoor and outdoor activities, weather permitting. The fee of \$5.00 per person must accompany registration. This program is designed for adults. *NOTE: There is a separate but simultaneous "Why Winter Begins" program for children ages 6 – 12.* Pre-registration is required for all programs; for more information, please contact Prairieview Education Center at 815-479-5779 or visit [www.MCCDistrict.org](http://www.MCCDistrict.org) to register online.

## **Winter Solstice Celebration at Somme Woods**

**Sunday, December 23, 2008**

Celebrate the winter solstice with music, a bonfire, and friends at Somme Woods. On the darkest day of the year, when the sun sets at its earliest for the last day this fall, come gather around a warm fire with a few friends and reflect on things past and yet to be. We will have spiced cider, hot chocolate, and some treats to tempt your palate. The annual event, jointly sponsored by North Branch Restoration Project, the Cook County Forest Preserve District, and Friends of Northbrook Preserves, is a peaceful and sweet celebration. Everyone welcome. For more information, call Linda Masters at 847.509.0431.

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## **IV. GRANTS AND OTHER RESOURCES**

### ***Plants Of The Chicago Region (4th Edition)***

Floyd Swink and Gerould Wilhelm published the definitive catalog of plants that occur in the 22-counties of the Chicago region. *Plants of the Chicago Region, 4th Edition*, is now available at The Arboretum Store of the Morton Arboretum. To order, call 630-719-2454.

### **Secret Weapon of Invasive Plants Revealed**

University of Delaware scientists say they've found the secret weapon invasive wetland plants use to kill off their weaker neighbors. Plant biologist Harsh Bais determined that the roots of *Phragmites australis*, considered the most invasive plant in marsh and wetland communities in the eastern United States, exude an acid so toxic the substance disintegrates the structural protein in the roots of neighboring plants. To view the study, published in the *Journal of Chemical Ecology*, visit <http://www.springerlink.com/content/d541623625v55734/>

### **A Habitat Guide for Chicago Landowners: Enhancing Your Property for Birds**

Audubon Chicago Region and the Chicago Department of the Environment have just published "A Habitat Guide for Chicago Land Owners: Enhancing Your Property for Birds." This is a collection of suggestions and resources for creating, restoring and improving nesting and migratory bird habitat in Chicago's ecosystems and landscaped properties. The publication is being distributed to major Chicago landowners, and may be of interested to other local municipalities and landowners as well. You can download a copy at

[http://egov.cityofchicago.org/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC\\_ATTACH/BirdHabitatGuidelines.pdf](http://egov.cityofchicago.org/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_ATTACH/BirdHabitatGuidelines.pdf) or request one from Judy Pollock at [jpollock@audubon.org](mailto:jpollock@audubon.org).

### **Lake Michigan Watershed Ecosystem Partnership: Strategic Sub-Watershed Identification Process and Restoration Prioritization - RFP: Deadline December 21, 2007**

The Lake Michigan Watershed Ecosystem Partnership (LMWEP) is a coalition of public, private and not-for-profit entities created to promote, preserve, protect and enhance the natural, cultural, recreational and sustainable economic resources of Lake Michigan and its watershed in Illinois. The LMWEP seeks a consultant to identify strategic sub-watersheds within the Lake Michigan basin in Illinois; identify sites appropriate for restoration activity within these sub-watersheds; and identify appropriate indicators to evaluate progress toward improving the watershed in strategic sub-watersheds. To receive proposal requirements and submission details and for general questions, please contact Frances Canonizado, LMWEP Coordinator, at [fcanonizado@greatlakes.org](mailto:fcanonizado@greatlakes.org) or 312-939-0838x228.

### **Action For Nature Offers International Young Eco-Hero Awards Deadline: February 28, 2008**

Action For Nature, a nonprofit organization that encourages young people around the world to carry out individual environmental action projects, presents the International Young Eco-Hero Awards to recognize the individual accomplishments of young people (ages 8-16) whose personal actions have significantly improved the environment. Action For Nature will award cash prizes of up to \$500 each to young Eco-Heroes for their outstanding accomplishments in environmental advocacy, environmental health, research, or protection of the natural world. For complete program information and application guidelines, visit <http://www.actionfornature.org/eco-hero/ecoheroawards.html>

### **Planning for Inclusive Urban Ecological Restoration**

Allegra Newman, a graduate student of York University, Toronto, Canada, created a handbook on the involvement of diverse communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of urban ecological restoration projects. The handbook has created interest in the restoration community of Toronto to further examine the question of how to plan more inclusive green urban landscapes. If you would like a pdf copy of the handbook, please email Michelle Mohney, CW communication coordinator at [mmohney@chicagowilderness.org](mailto:mmohney@chicagowilderness.org).

### **Americans and Climate Change**

In 2005 the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies convened 110 leaders and thinkers in Aspen, Colorado, and asked them to diagnose the reasons for the gap between climate science and action, and to generate recommendations to address it. The conference report outlines Americans beliefs and misconceptions about climate change, as well as recommendations for more effective communication and action. The report is available at [http://environment.yale.edu/climate/americans\\_and\\_climate\\_change.pdf](http://environment.yale.edu/climate/americans_and_climate_change.pdf)

### **Illinois Department of Resources C2000 12-Year Report**

Conservation 2000 (C2000) is a long-term approach to protecting and managing Illinois' natural resources through partnerships with grass-roots organizations. Governor Blagojevich signed a bill to renew the program until the year 2021 under the new name Partners for Conservation. A report spanning the progress of C2000 from 1996 – 2006 is available at <http://www.dnr.state.il.us/publications/pdf/00000548.pdf>

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## **V. JUST FOR FUN**

### **“Natural Expressions” Art Exhibit**

The public is invited to experience “Natural Expressions”, an art exhibit inspired by the beauty of the natural world, hosted by McHenry County Conservation District. Over twenty pieces of artwork will be displayed in this multi-media exhibit, featuring artwork from a variety of mediums including photography, etchings, and intricate wood carvings. All of the submissions are created by local artists, Conservation District staff members who gain their inspiration from daily exposure to the beauty of nature.

"The exhibit focuses on the natural wonders and landscapes of McHenry County as well as those found beyond our borders," said Deb Chapman, Education Services Manager for McHenry County Conservation District. "**Natural Expressions**" opens Saturday, December 1 and runs through December 30<sup>th</sup> at Prairieview Education Center, 2112 Behan Road in Crystal Lake. The exhibit is free and open to the public during the following times: Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 4 p.m. For more information, contact Prairieview Education Center at 815-479-5779.

### **Great Lakes Artwork Contest**

The Alliance for the Great Lakes is hosting a contest for original two-dimensional artwork depicting special places around the Great Lakes. Past examples are online at

[http://www.greatlakes.org/store/Products/ProductDetail.asp?PROD\\_ID=200](http://www.greatlakes.org/store/Products/ProductDetail.asp?PROD_ID=200).

Submissions can be of mixed media and include: watercolor and oil paintings, oil pastels, colored pencil and/or collage work. Artwork should reflect the awe-inspiring qualities of the Great Lakes. Five submissions will be chosen to be featured on our 2008 Artists' Circle Greeting Cards, which note the artist and title of the piece on the back. Winners will receive recognition in our quarterly newsletter and on our website. Awards and use of art for Artists' Circle Greeting Cards are an excellent marketing opportunity for artists, and proceeds from card sales benefit the Alliances' efforts to restore the Great Lakes. Please submit your artwork as a high-resolution digital image to [tpiper@greatlakes.org](mailto:tpiper@greatlakes.org) no later than the close of business on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007. Judging will take place during the first two weeks of the New Year. If you have any questions or would like further details please contact Tricia Piper at 312.939.0838 x 221.

### **Pick a Green Tree**

Below is an article from Treehugger.com with some good information to consider if you plan on purchasing a tree this holiday season. If you do go with a live tree, be sure to find out what options for non-landfill disposal are available in your area. A quick call to your local waster hauler should do the trick. For you folks in Chicago, there is a tree-recycling event in January where you can get a year's supply of blue bags (for all your other recyclables) when you bring your tree in to be chipped, check it out here:

[http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/news.detail/object\\_id/7ca33bb9-bc09-4b6d-8844-](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/news.detail/object_id/7ca33bb9-bc09-4b6d-8844-)

### **Real vs Fake Tree**

Which is better for the environment: real or fake Christmas trees? Some believe that cutting down juvenile trees, displaying them for two weeks, then throwing them in the garbage is destructive, wasteful, and highly unfriendly to the environment. Others say that the Christmas-tree business keeps land that would otherwise be developed in trees, if only for a short while. Besides, fake trees are made of plastic, which is made from petroleum, but you can keep using them for many years.

Go chop down a tree. Really, we mean it. An artificial Christmas tree might seem like the greener option, since no real tree is being destroyed and it can be reused year after year. But they're usually made of PVC (and contain lead), and our local recycling center certainly doesn't have a bin for old PVC trees. Christmas tree farms, on the other hand, have sustainability built into the business: when you cart your tree off for trimming, they'll plant another one to sell a few years down the line. In the meantime it'll be turning carbon dioxide into oxygen and providing habitats for animals. At least, that's the simple version of things.

In actual fact many tree farmers use harmful pesticides and other chemicals, so it's worth calling ahead to see if you can find a local organic grower. Buying from a local farm also means the trees haven't been hauled cross-country in a CO2-belching truck (though it's admittedly difficult to buy local if you live in a city or a desert where conifers aren't exactly common).

The key to making sure your Christmas tree is as harmless as possible and we assume you wouldn't be reading this if you'd decided to go the greenest route and skip the tree altogether is to plan ahead. Make sure you know what you're going to do with the thing when the festivities are over, it makes a big difference to how and what you buy. Here are some of the post-holiday uses that we've seen for your tree:

- Recycle it into compost. Some cities will collect your tree and compost it, or you can do it yourself. A tree can be turned into mulch, too, so it pays to think about what your landscaping needs are going to be when the snow melts.

- Sink it in a pond. A tree can offer refuge to fish if you live on a private lake or have a pond. We'd only recommend this if you're sure the tree hasn't been treated with chemicals that could harm the aquatic ecosystem.
- Plant it in the backyard. If you've got the space for it, getting a tree with roots and replanting it is obviously the most eco-friendly solution. But make sure you buy a species that will work with the soil type and climate at your house. Get advice on how to care for the plant while its indoors and how to plant it after—if the tree farmer can't help you, try a greenhouse or nursery. The tree should only be indoors for a week, so don't plan on the up-at-Thanksgiving, down-at-Valentine's-Day route.

If you're stuck with no backyard, no pond, and the city doesn't recycle, think again about a treeless Christmas. Nobody's forcing you to put up a tree—except a spouse and children, perhaps. Just assure them that there will still be gifts even if there isn't a tree to put them under.

[http://www.treehugger.com/files/2004/12/how\\_to\\_pick\\_a\\_g.php](http://www.treehugger.com/files/2004/12/how_to_pick_a_g.php)

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