

CONSERVATION CATCHALL

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LOWER NITROGEN LOSSES WITH PERENNIAL BIOFUEL CROPS

Perennial biofuel crops such as miscanthus, whose high yields have led them to be considered an eventual alternative to corn in producing ethanol, are now shown to have another beneficial characteristic -- the ability to reduce the escape of nitrogen in the environment. In a 4-year University of Illinois study that compared miscanthus, switchgrass, and mixed prairie species to typical corn-corn-soybean rotations, each of the perennial crops were highly efficient at reducing nitrogen losses, with miscanthus having the greatest yield.

"Our results clearly demonstrate that environmental nitrogen fluxes from row-crop agriculture can be greatly reduced after the establishment of perennial biofuel crops," said U of I postdoctoral research associate Candice Smith. "Because of the establishment variability, we were able to compare annual row crops with perennial crops. Although in the first two years, nitrate leaching remained high in the non-established miscanthus crop, once a dense, productive crop was established in the second year of growth, nitrate leaching in tile drainage quickly decreased."

Smith said that this ability to reduce the loss of nitrogen into the environment will prove to be greatly beneficial. "Intensive corn production with large fertilizer inputs leads to large losses of nitrogen into the environment, both through gas emissions of nitrous oxide and leaching of nitrate to surface waters through tile drainage systems," added Mark David, U of I biogeochemist. "Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas, and nitrate can contaminate drinking water supplies and leads to coastal ocean problems. The hypoxic zone that forms each summer in the Gulf of Mexico is a result of nitrate leaching from the tile-drained Corn Belt of the midwestern United States -- a likely location for biofuel production," he said.

In the study, funded by the Energy Biosciences Institute, miscanthus, switchgrass, and mixed prairie species were compared against a typical corn-corn-soybean rotation. Harvested biomass and nitrogen, nitrous oxide emissions, and nitrate leaching in the mid-soil profile and through tile drainage lines were all measured.

The researchers found that the perennial crops quickly reduced nitrate leaching in the mid-soil profile as well as from tile lines. "By year four each of the perennial crops had small losses," Smith said. "Nitrous oxide emissions also were much smaller in the perennial crops--including switchgrass, which was fertilized with nitrogen, while prairie and miscanthus were not. Overall, nitrogen levels were higher for the corn and soybean treatment as well as switchgrass, but were lower for prairie and miscanthus. Prairie and miscanthus levels were lower due to harvest of the plant biomass (and nitrogen) each winter, with no fertilizer nitrogen additions to replace it, as occurred in corn and switchgrass," she said.

David added that the miscanthus and mixed prairie also had very wide carbon-to-nitrogen ratios in the harvested material -- as much as 257 to 1 for miscanthus. "Miscanthus efficiently moved nitrogen from leaves to root and rhizome systems after the growing season, where it could be used again the next year," David said. "The lower nitrogen level suggests that the small amount of nitrogen removed by harvest in prairie and miscanthus came from the large pool of soil nitrogen and/or nitrogen fixation. If the soil is the source, this could lead to depletion of this resource without fertilization. If microbial fixation supplied the nitrogen, this would be a more sustainable input," he said.

David said that although more research is needed to fully understand the nitrogen cycle in these new and exciting biofuel crops such as miscanthus, results from this study clearly show these crops have the potential to quickly and greatly reduce nitrogen losses that have important environmental effects, while providing a large biomass harvest.

"Reduced Nitrogen Losses after Conversion of Row Crop Agriculture to Perennial Biofuel Crops" was published in an issue of the *Journal of Environmental Quality*. In addition to Smith and David, Corey Mitchell, Michael Masters, Kristina Anderson-Teixeira, Carl Bernacchi, and Even DeLucia contributed to the research.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - LONNIE WILSON

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We have been hearing for some time now that to meet the world's projected needs for corn by 2025 we will need to be regularly producing 300 or more bushels per acre. Maybe this will help get us there.

The following article appeared in ScienceDaily on February 4, 2013

PLANT SCIENTISTS DEMONSTRATE NEW MEANS OF BOOSTING MAIZE YIELDS

A team of plant geneticists at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL) has successfully demonstrated what it describes as a "simple hypothesis" for making significant increases in yields for the maize plant.

Called corn by most people in North America, modern variants of the *Zea mays* plant are among the indispensable food crops that feed billions of the planet's people. As global population soars beyond 6 billion and heads for an estimated 8 to 9 billion by mid-century, efforts to boost yields of essential food crops takes on ever greater potential significance.

The new findings obtained by CSHL Professor David Jackson and colleagues, published online February 3 in *Nature Genetics*, represent the culmination of over a decade of research and creative thinking on how to perform genetic manipulations in maize that will have the effect of increasing the number of its seeds -- which most of us call kernels.

Plant growth and development depend on structures called meristems -- reservoirs in plants that consist of the plant version of stem cells. When prompted by genetic signals, cells in the meristem develop into the plant's organs -- leaves and flowers, for instance. Jackson's team has taken an interest in how quantitative variation in the pathways that regulate plant stem cells contribute to a plant's growth and yield.

"Our simple hypothesis was that an increase in the size of the inflorescence meristem -- the stem-cell reservoir that gives rise to flowers and ultimately, after pollination, seeds -- will provide more physical space for the development of the structures that mature into kernels."

Dr. Peter Bommert, a former postdoctoral fellow in the Jackson lab, performed an analytical technique on several maize variants that revealed what scientists call quantitative trait loci (QTLs): places along the chromosomes that "map" to specific complex traits such as yield. The analysis pointed to a gene that Jackson has been interested in since 2001, when he was first to clone it: a maize gene called FASCIATED EAR2 (FEA2).

Not long after cloning the gene, Jackson had a group of gifted Long Island high school students, part of a program called Partners for the Future, perform an analysis of literally thousands of maize ears. Their task was to meticulously count the number of rows of kernels on each ear. It was part of a research project that won the youths honors in the Intel Science competition. Jackson, meantime, gained important data that now has come to full fruition.

The lab's current research has now shown that by producing a weaker-than-normal version of the FEA2 gene -- one whose protein is mutated but still partly functional -- it is possible, as Jackson postulated, to increase meristem size, and in so doing, get a maize plant to produce ears with more rows and more kernels.

How many more? In two different crops of maize variants that the Jackson team grew in two locations with weakened versions of FEA2, the average ear had 18 to 20 rows and up to 289 kernels -- as compared with wild-type versions of the same varieties, with 14 to 16 rows and 256 kernels. Compared with the latter figure, the successful FEA2 mutants had a kernel yield increase of some 13%.

"We were excited to note this increase was accomplished without reducing the length of the ears or causing fasciation -- a deformation that tends to flatten the ears," Jackson says. Both of those characteristics, which can sharply lower yield, are prominent when FEA2 is completely missing, as the team's experiments also demonstrated.

Teosinte, the humble wild weed that Mesoamericans began to modify about 7000 years ago, beginning a process that resulted in the domestication of maize, makes only 2 rows of kernels; elite modern varieties of the plant can produce as many as 20.

A next step in the research is to cross-breed the "weak" FEA2 gene variant, or allele, associated with higher kernel yield with the best maize lines used in today's food crops to ask if it will produce a higher-yield plant.

Source: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. "Plant scientists demonstrate new means of boosting maize yields." [ScienceDaily](http://www.sciencedaily.com), 3 Feb. 2013.

Editors Note: President Wilson requested that we find a substitute for his article for this issue of the Conservation Catchall. After attending the NACD Annual Meeting in San Antonio, he is tending to his farm and other duties.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTES - *RICH NICHOLS*

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If you have been receiving and reading your email messages from the AISWCD, you know that the amendment to the Open Meetings Act, HB5315, was signed into law on January 25th. The amendment will allow soil and water conservation district directors and drainage district commissioners to take the required Open Meetings Act training in a group setting instead of electronically as was previously the case.

For 2013, newly elected and re-elected directors will be required to take the training within 90 days of taking office. Since soil and water conservation district directors take office on the first Monday in March in the year in which they are elected then the training must be completed before June 3, 2013. The AISWCD is currently planning to host a series of meetings for newly elected and re-elected directors prior to June 3 where the training can occur. Of course, those who wish to take the training on-line can still do that but it must be completed within the 90 day period.

As I write this, the outside temperature is 65 degrees. Not too bad for the end of January! But I have to wonder if we are being set up for another summer like 2012. We had a nice rain to go along with the high temperatures. Hopefully the ground will thaw enough to allow some of the rain to soak in and not just run off. We really need the moisture here in central Illinois. Hopefully this rain is a sign that the drought will end this spring.

The Illinois House comes back to town the last two days of January and we start all over with a brand new General Assembly. The Senate is due back February 5th at which time they will get their preliminary business out of the way, including the adoption of the rules under which they will operate for the next two years.

To the interested observer, this is always a fun time to sit back and watch. Every time the majority party adopts rules that will in some way hamper the minority party there is a great cry of "foul" but for the most part, it is the same set of rules that were adopted when the current minority party was the majority. So, round and round we go....

There are a couple of issues we are working on that might be of interest to you. The first is updating the old Cooperative Agreement that was signed in 1998 by the NRCS, IDOA, AISWCD, SWCD and the Association of

RC&D Areas. This agreement is out of date and needs to be revised to reflect current conditions including the sharing of technology and other tools that were not readily available almost fifteen years ago. A taskforce has been named and will have its initial meeting February 13th. It is hoped that over the course of three or four months, the taskforce can develop a set of recommendations that can serve as the foundation for a new agreement.

The second issue we are trying to address is the Prevailing Wage Act and its impacts to local government, including the SWCDs. We have contacted a number of organizations representing various local governments to gauge their interest in forming a coalition to pursue legislation that would exempt certain public works projects from the requirements of the Prevailing Wage Act. As of this date, four groups (including the AISWCD) are very interested in forming such a coalition. We hope to eventually involve more and will continue to contact other organizations to request their participation.

As it stands now, countless thousands of dollars are being used to pay prevailing wages for small projects that would normally cost much less and save tax dollars. Many of those projects are also going to non-local vendors because of the bidding requirements imposed by the Act. Many smaller vendors can't meet the requirements set forth in the Act and are therefore prevented from bidding. We believe this is discriminatory and a poor use of tax dollars. Further information will be provided as we progress with this issue.

We expect there will also be the usual issues of budget and introduced legislation that may in some way impact the SWCDs or their ability to perform their legislatively mandated duties. We fully expect some sort of gaming bill to be introduced fairly early in the session and we will report on all of these legislative initiatives as soon as we have any information to report. Stay tuned. The real action starts the first full week in February.

All in all, it should be an interesting and perhaps, even exciting year.

Rich



PROGRAM COORDINATOR'S PAGE - KELLY THOMPSON

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Greetings everyone!

The month of January seemed to whirl right by us. It's hard to believe we are beginning the second month of 2013! Below you will find various topics of interest that have been keeping my schedule filled, so far this year. As always, if you have any questions pertaining to the information below please send me an email. I hope everyone has a great month of February!

IUM TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

The TRC will meet in February at the McLean County SWCD in Normal, IL. The meeting agenda is a full one. The committee will talk with the newly appointed consultants, Tetra Tech, who will be updating the post-development standards. Jeff from Cardno ENTRIX will also be present to discuss their update of the wetland standards. Other agenda items will include discussion of permeable, porous and pervious pavements. The committee will also discuss a possible IUM Newsletter and other grant related items. I will have a full report in the March Catchall article.

IUM FACT SHEET

I have had some interest in an IUM fact sheet. Currently I am designing a fact sheet that will explain how the Illinois Urban Manual update process works and who is involved. Once complete, the fact sheet will be posted to the IUM website. Feel free to use as you see fit. If you would like more information developed feel free to email me with your request. Look for the IUM Fact Sheet in late February!

NACD URBAN AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

I attended the NACD Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas the last week of January. I was invited to the Urban and Community committee meeting on Sunday morning. The committee has an abundance of great ideas and ways to reach the Washington D.C. Legislators. The committee also conducts the monthly webinars that you see advertised through the Illinois.All listserv. If you have more questions about the webinar, contact Deb Bogar from NACD. While at the conference, I met some great, conservation-minded people from all over the United States and attended very informative talks and presentations. The NACD Annual Conference is a conference I think everyone should attend. You get to hear about different programs going on at SWCDs all throughout the nation. I highly encourage everyone to attend the 2014 Annual Conference in Anaheim, CA next year.

POST DEVELOPMENT STORMWATER WORK GROUP

The PDSWRS Work Group met on Thursday, January 31st in Springfield, IL. The work group has begun to respond to the numerous public comments that were received after the two public meetings held in October of 2012. The work group has decided to extend the length of their efforts from March to the end of June, 2013. There are numerous, unresolved comments and research that still needs to take place before the group can agreeably decide to submit one cohesive set of recommendations to IEPA. I will be presenting this information at the upcoming Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management Conference at the Marriott in Bloomington on March 7, 2013. If you would like to attend this conference please see the link below for more information. http://www.illinoisfloods.org/13_conference.html. As always, I will keep everyone posted in my Catchall articles or you may check out the website for more information: http://www.aiswcd.org/Programs/PDSWRS_WorkGroup.html

Mark your calendars and start planning your groundwater event today!

national
groundwater

awareness week
March 10-16, 2013

Kelly Thompson



ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT'S UPDATE - *SHERRY FINN*

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January Activities

319 CREP Resource Specialist:

- Completed new employee forms including tax forms, insurance forms and expense vouchers for CRS Ray Geroff
- Prepared proof of employment form for Ray Geroff
- Prepared expense sheet for IEPA for all expenses for CRSs.
- Ordered laptops for the six (6) new CRSs; approved by NRCS, IDNR, and IEPA.
- Prepared invoices for CRS' laptops for housing Districts to submit to IDNR for reimbursement to them and forward to AISWCD
- Prepared paychecks and mailed to CREP Resource Specialists for January
- Prepared proof of employment form for Stefanie Fitzsimons
- Mailed postcard and forever postage stamps to Sheryl Phillips and Stefanie Fitzsimons
- Prepared checks for pesticide licensing renewals for Jeremy Pruden & Ray Geroff
- Set up teleconference call for CRSs and e-mailed information
- Mailed pesticide id card to Jake Vancil
- Made list for required licenses and information needed from CRSs to present at teleconference call.

OTHER DUTIES:

- Phone calls, mail and e-mail correspondence
- Compiled expense reports for Credit Cards
- Maintain Patio Paver and Rain Barrel Database
- Updated Records Retention, Mgmt & Destruction Folder
- Forward to Rich the monthly SWCD/LUC agenda and meeting minutes that are e-mailed to me; file these after seen by Rich
- Proofread Conservation Catchall and Legislative Newsletter; contacted Districts for upcoming issues spotlight information
- Maintaining Earth Stewardship Bank Account
- Maintaining IL Envirothon Bank Account
- Contacted selected auditor to set up audit date.
- Working on Conservation Tour for 2013 Annual Meeting with Sangamon County SWCD staff; working with Northfield Inn and Ramada to establish conference rooms and hotel rooms.
- Updated AISWCD website with December QB information.
- Resent NACD Annual Meeting Registration information, agenda information, and travel information to Lonnie Wilson, Tom & Judy Beyers, and Kenny Vosholler.
- Sent letters to District Chairmen with copy of updated Teacher of the Year Award Application, and copies of Employee of the Year and Farm Family Applications with reminder to submit an applicant for each.
- Sent FY 2013 Delinquent notices to District Chairmen; sent copies of Delinquent information to AISWCD officers and Area VPs.
- Worked with Gina to update 2013 AISWCD Annual Meeting forms.
- Worked with Gina to send the December & January Conservation Catchalls and Legislative Newsletters to AISWCD Board Members without e-mail access.
- Sent December QB packet additional packet information to Darrell Roegge per his request.

- Posted December QB meeting information to AISWCD Website.

ANNUAL MEETING TASKFORCE:

- Organized Annual Meeting Taskforce teleconference call; contacted members; prepared agenda & emailed to all members; took meeting minutes; sent to Planning chair for approval

ACCOUNTING/OFFICE ADMIN:

- Completed Payroll and Payroll Taxes for January; mailed payments to Federal & State
- Reconciled all bank accounts for December; forwarded info to Kenny Vosholler, AISWCD treasurer
- Completed bookwork for All AISWCD & SWCD Insurance Accounts
- Completed Checks for Payables; Completed Deposits for Receivables; Completed Monthly Financials; sent to Kenny
- Filed all Completed Payables & Receivables Documentation
- Wrote checks for SWCD various insurance premiums; had Rich sign; mailed; e-mailed copies to Melissa Cauble
- Completed Semi-Monthly IL Lobbyist Expenditure Data for IL Secretary of State for January.
- Ordered additional checks for Envirothon and Grant Accounts
- Paid Registration and hotel expenses for NACD Annual Meeting for Kelly Thompson.
- Completed 1099s & mailed; completed W-2s for AISWCD & mailed or passed out to employees

LOOKING AHEAD:

- Annual Meeting Taskforce teleconference calls
- Submitting Annual Meeting Award Forms; registration forms; and hotel information to Districts and updating website
- SWCDs Annual Meetings/elections
- AISWCD March QB meeting

A time to think: A single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows.

To Act: Share your time willingly with others!

Happy Valentine's Day!!!!

Be extra nice to that special someone!

XOXXOXXOXXOXXOXXOXXOXXO

Sherry



Office Assistant's Information - Gina Bean

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I have a great love for children and was very excited when Rich and Sherry asked me to work on coming up with a craft or activity to do with the photo and poster contest winners at the annual meeting this summer. As I was going through websites I stumbled across possible crafts that used old water bottles. This led me to DASANI's website. I'd like to share with you what DASANI is doing to shrink their eco footprint.

"DASANI is taking steps to reduce its impact on the planet with a major innovation in bottle design. PlantBottle® packaging is made from up to 30% plant-based material that replaces some of the non-renewable petroleum or fossil-based resources used in conventional PET plastic. Still designed to be 100% recyclable, it helps save our world's precious resources.

Since its introduction, DASANI has reduced the weight of its bottles, because lighter weight bottles require less plastic, which helps to conserve natural resources and lower CO2 emissions. In fact, our current half liter DASANI bottles contain 45% less plastic than our original 2001 bottle.

This is only the beginning of our quest to help design a future where every plastic bottle is made from materials that are 100% renewable as well as recyclable.

We all know how important it is to recycle and reduce, and our innovative bottle design is doing both. The 100% recyclable half-liter bottle can be twisted down to half of its original size. That means an end to overflowing recycle bins and the beginning of a fun new way to remember to recycle your empty bottles. So Twist loud and proud because recycling your DASANI bottles helps create new backpacks, t-shirts, rugs, shoes and of course, more DASANI bottles."

Hopefully if other manufacturers aren't actively trying to shrink their eco footprints, they will take note of what DASANI is already doing. If we have to drink bottled water, then we might as well be supporting someone who is trying to do what's better for the environment.

Quote from: www.dasani.com

Gina

AMBOY MARSH

(continued from page 8)

help safeguard our natural heritage. We have come to Amboy Marsh in time to reverse the insidious, destructive processes that have threatened to change it forever. Actively communicating the value and richness of natural areas to the public is vital. We will establish and strengthen partnerships, and will cooperate with entities and individuals dedicated to our mission. Utilizing accepted management techniques, and seeking innovative methods, will provide stable and responsible professional administration and on-ground management for Amboy Marsh.

Much of the native floral regime remains intact. Likewise, herpetological surveys since 1986 document a sustainable population of Blanding's turtle, *Emydoidea blandingii*. Western hognose snake, *Heterodon nasicus*, is present as is ornate box turtle, *Terrepenne ornata*. Two lizard species, the six-lined race runner, *Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*, and the legless glass lizard *Ophisaurus attenuatus*, also inhabit the stabilized dunes of Amboy Marsh. Red-headed woodpecker, *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*; common gallinule, *Gallinula galeata*; American bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus*; Eastern meadowlark, *Sturnella magna*; and Cooper's hawk, *Accipiter cooperii*, are among avifauna known to frequent the site. The small and reclusive sora, a native rail, nests in Big Marsh, the large central wetland. Goat's rue, *Tephrosia virginica*; earth star, *Geastrum saccatum*; and both white and cream wild indigo, *Baptisia leucantha* and *B. leucophaea* are found on the sand prairie inventory. Pinweed, *Lechea intermedia*, found in only a few counties in Illinois, graces the savanna/sand forest roster. The native wetland vegetation is diverse with wild lowbush blueberry, *Vaccinium angustifolium*, thriving in dense thickets with stunted viburnums on acidic sands bordering several of the wetlands.

Back in 1986, the owners of a portion of the site were Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Spears; they were gracious, kind and caring people. Mr. Spears would call in springtime to tell us "those turtles (Blanding's) are crawling across my yard again". When Mr. Spears passed away, after the death of his wife, his son told me Marvin had expressed a desire that the site be saved for the turtles and the orchids. Nothing could be sweeter than to know that his wishes have been carried out, thanks to the Illinois Audubon Society.

OMPAGE: Now you know.... the word Amboy comes from the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) Native American language and originally was spelled *ompag* which evolved into Amboy. *Ompag* means "place resembling a bowl", or a low area, a wetland. That's very apropos for Amboy Marsh.

As can be seen, a field trip to visit the IAS Amboy Marsh will offer sundry opportunities for side visits to a great number of natural areas in the Green River Lowlands. Come and visit - spend the day - or the week!



ISWCDEA CORNER - *SHERRY HUFFSTUTLER* *ISWCDEA REGION ONE REPRESENTATIVE*

website: <http://www.il.ncdea.org>

Greetings Everyone! Even though the winter weather is still here and the majority of the counties have held their annual meetings, we turn our thoughts to spring and begin focusing on activities at both the local and state levels. As Kara Downin, ISWCDEA RC Vice Co-Chair mentioned in the January *Conservation Catchall*, Ag Legislative Day will soon be here. This is an excellent opportunity for Directors and Staff to visit with their representatives and senators especially if you are one of the counties' to have been re-districted and have new legislators covering your area. The ISWCDEA will keep you posted on the date of Ag Legislative Day.

Just a reminder to all Districts that all new directors or re-elected directors must complete the Open Meetings Act training no later than the 90th day after assuming his/her responsibilities as director. We will be waiting to hear if Governor Quinn will sign HB5315.

I hope that all of the employees who attended the December Training session enjoyed the event as much as I. The sessions this year were very informative and just the opportunity to have the chance of connecting with our fellow co-workers was worth it all!

Just in case you do not know who the ISWCDEA representatives are for your region, they are as follows:

<u>REGION 1</u>	<u>REGION 2</u>	<u>REGION 3</u>	<u>REGION 4</u>	<u>REGION 5</u>
Kara Downin	Sondra Baker	Jane Brangenberg	Tara Hopkins	Keith Livesay
Sharon Matson	Thad Eshleman	Betty Buckert	Stephen Miller	Meghan Polacek
Sherry Huffstutler	Spring Duffy	Cindy Moon	Renee Weitekamp	
Shannon Pence	Vicki Heath	Abby Sperry	Cindy Poppenhager	

The 2013 ISWCDEA officers are: AC Co-Chair-Betty Buckert; RC Co-Chair-Kara Downin; AC Co-Vice Chair-Sondra Baker; RC Co-Vice Chair-Keth Livesay; Secretary-Meghan Polacek; and Treasurer-Sharon Matson. As always, if you have any concerns or ideas for the ISWCDEA please contact one of the area representatives in your region.

Plans are underway for Envirothon competitions in local Land Use Councils throughout the State. This competition among high school students is an excellent tool to promote environmental education and it gives students a better understanding of our natural resources. We hope SWCD directors/staff will visit with the high schools in their county and encourage their participation in this event. Following the local Land Use competitions, the 2013 Illinois (State) Envirothon competition will be held on May 1st and 2nd at Allerton 4-H Memorial Camp in Monticello, IL. The winning team will compete on the national level at Montana State University, August 4th-9th. I hope your team will be a winner!

Until next time!



ILLINOIS CHAPTER - IAAP - *SHARON MATSON, PRESIDENT*

website: <http://iaap-swcd.tripod.com>

Our next IAAP meeting will be a webinar/phone conference scheduled for Wednesday, February 20, 2013. We will be sending details as soon as possible. Our annual meeting will be held Wednesday, April 24, 2013 and we invite all to attend.

I would like to congratulate the members who joined the IAAP in 2012. Stacy Hill from Marshall/Putnam; Annyce Winters from Greene; Joan Whitney from Knox; Sherry Finn from AISWCD; Melisa Long from Winnebago; Sally Ferguson from Rock Island; Tara Hopkins from Edgar and Joyce Scholl from Stark. Congratulations to all these ladies!

If you are interested in joining the IAAP (International Association of Administrative Professionals) please contact any member of the organization or go to our website <http://iaap-swcd.tripod.com> and view what is happening.

**national
groundwater
awareness week**
March 10-16, 2013

Celebrate National Groundwater Awareness Week

Groundwater is a precious, limited resource. It is worth protecting.

You can find information on National Groundwater Awareness Week at www.wellowner.org.

~NAGS~

Natural Area Guardians - Debra Carey

demydoidea@gmail.com

AMBOY MARSH

The Lee County Natural Area Guardian committee would like to welcome the Illinois Audubon Society (IAS) into our county. On 4 December 2012, IAS took possession of an amazing 273-acre parcel that had been on our minds for a long time.....

It was on a sunny day in June, 1986 that I first waded into what has been christened Amboy Marsh. Our NAG committee was fortunate to have become involved with the Illinois Department of Conservation in a project to survey rare turtles (wow, we were in the big time now). What a lot of excitement this brought to our farming community! Previously no one gave turtles a second thought – now everyone was looking for them. Common painted turtles were carefully examined in case one magically transformed itself into an endangered *Kinosternon flavescens spooneri* (Illinois mud turtle, target species of the survey) or uncommon *Emydoidea blandingii* (Blanding's turtle).

But the real transformation was in me. That turtle survey changed my life forever. This sandy, oak-studded cow pasture, with wetlands harboring orchids, wild blueberries and turtles, opened my eyes to what the Great Winnebago and Inlet swamps must have looked like in pre-Eurasian Lee County. And it opened my heart to what was really important. In the years following the turtle survey I, and other members of NAG, returned again and again to the future Amboy Marsh. The quest to find some responsible entity to purchase and preserve the site would continue for 26 years; finding \$1.36 million was not an easy task.

Truly the mission of IAS.. *to promote the perpetuation and appreciation of native plants and animals and the habitats that support them..* has come to fruition in their generous purchase of Amboy Marsh. We are grateful to the Grand Victoria Foundation and to the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation for financial assistance. And we are doubly grateful to these organizations, along with other donors, for stewardship funds which are critical to the near-term and long-term restoration efforts.

Amboy Marsh offers unparalleled opportunities for restoration.

1. First priority will be given to the identification of those areas which have best resisted succession and retained their natural, pre-settlement integrity, and to the implementation of management strategies designed to preserve indigenous characteristics with the least possible negative impact.
2. Portions of the site more severely degraded and requiring extensive measures to control invasive flora will be our second area of concern.
3. Agricultural fields showing the greatest potential for restoration, in most cases those with wet and wet/mesic natural histories, will be returned to natural habitat in the final phase.



Woodpecker Woods in Amboy Marsh

As with most extant natural areas in Illinois, parts of the site are degraded. Volunteers from the Middle Rock River Conservation Partnership (MRRCP) are already involved at the site since Amboy Marsh is designated as a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. COAs are the highest quality remaining remnants of Illinois' primeval landscape as it was before non-native species like honeysuckle, garlic mustard, buckthorn and a plethora of other nasty things invaded our natural areas. MRRCP pledged to be stewards of the site.

And of course the Natural Area Guardian Committee of the Lee County Soil & Water Conservation District has held the site near and dear to their hearts for 26 years. NAG members are highly gratified by the acquisition. In retrospect they perceive that the effort to provide permanent protection for the site had its inception during the course of that inauspicious 1986 turtle study.

The late Henry Allan Gleason referred to the vegetation of the Green River Lowlands in his extensive study of Illinois sand deposits. Gleason specifically studied a site near Amboy on 21 August 1910 – oh, what we would give to have walked with him as he investigated the remains of the great swamps. He notes:

"This name – the Amboy area – is given to the irregular complex of sand ridges and marshes along the Green River in Lee County, well-illustrated in the vicinity of Amboy. The drainage of the whole valley is poor, and two large marsh areas, known as the Inlet Swamp and the Winnebago Swamp, are as yet not entirely reclaimed."

Volume IX, October 1910, Article III, Bulletin of the Illinois State Laboratory of Natural History – The Vegetation of the Inland Sand Deposits of Illinois.

The land of Amboy Marsh is diverse with sparsely-vegetated sand dunes which provide top-notch turtle nesting grounds, oak savannas, sand forests, seasonal wetlands strewn with lily pads and patrolled by intriguing dragonflies; sand prairies, and lichen and moss fairylands (technically, perhaps, not a scientific term, nor one that Gleason would condone).

And with only a very small portion (< 0.10%) of Illinois' original landscape remaining, it is our goal to protect representative examples of intact native ecosystems and unique natural features that persist. Identification, protection, preservation and management of extant natural areas

(continued on page 6)



Legislative Corner - Mike Hoffmann

Governor Ok's Open Meetings Training Through AISWCD.

On January 25, Governor Pat Quinn signed [HB5315](#) (Rep. Jason Barickman, R-Champaign Co./Sen. Don Harmon, D-Cook Co.). An initiative of the AISWCD and the IL Association of Drainage Districts, HB 5315 enables a director of a soil and water conservation district to satisfy the training requirements of the Open Meetings Act through an alternative training provided by the AISWCD. Our thanks to Sen. Don Harmon for agreeing to our request to move the bill in the waning days of the 97th General Assembly – and to Rep. Jason Barickman, our House sponsor and Gov. Quinn for quickly signing the bill. This should make it convenient for directors to comply with another state mandate.

2013 Session/Fiscal Year 2014 budget

The new, 98th General Assembly began its two-year term on January 9 when the senators and representative were sworn into office. Now the legislative process begins over again. Any legislation pending in the old G.A. is now dead; bills must be introduced again and wend their way through the legislative process. Legislative leaders are appointing committees to hear legislation, which will begin meeting in February.

Now is a good time to talk to your legislators in their districts about funding for SWCDs. A new state budget must be passed by the end of May. Legislators will be setting their priorities for the year, and we want to be on their lists. This will again be a difficult budget as state government continues to go through a budget squeeze resulting from the pension obligations. Your legislators need to know the effects of their actions on soil and water conservation.

Gaming Legislation

Once again a gaming bill containing funding for SWCDs and other Ag groups in on the Governor's desk. [SB0744](#) was quietly released by Sen. President John Cullerton in the final hours of the 97th G.A. This is the bill that passed the legislature in May of 2011, but was held in the Senate through a parliamentary maneuver. The Governor is expected to veto the bill, but since the 97th G.A. is now dissolved, legislators will not have the opportunity to override.

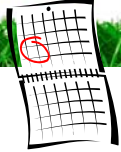
Senate President Cullerton has indicated that he will present a new gaming bill in the coming weeks. We do not know how closely that legislation might conform to past bills with regard to Ag funding, but we will be watching for it and doing our best to keep SWCDs a part of the discussion. We will be looking for other funding opportunities as well as legislators look for other ways to fund the budget (by raising fees or instituting new ones).

You may recall that the following funding initiatives were included in SB1849. We will be working to make sure these levels are also in any new gaming legislation that might be introduced.

Downstate Budget Initiatives in SB 1849 (House Amendment #2, November 7, 2011)

Transfer to the Partners for Conservation Fund for Soil and Water Conservation Program	\$12.5m
State Fairgrounds Infrastructure Improvement Fund	\$10.0m
County Fairs funding	\$6.0m
Cooperative Extension: match 100% of local funds	\$5.0m
Future of Agriculture Fund (for county fairs, FFA, extension)	\$5.0m
Transfers to Parks and Conservation Fund for operations and grants	\$3.0m
IL Historical Sites Fund	\$3.0m
IL Forestry Fund	<u>\$1.5m</u>
Total	\$46.0m

REMEMBER: KEEP YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS EDUCATED ON SWCD ACTIVITIES



MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

- Lincoln's Birthday - Tuesday, February 12, 2013 - Office Closed
- Valentine's Day - Thursday February 14, 2013
- Presidents Day - Monday, February 18, 2013 - Office Closed

2013 QUARTERLY BOARD MEETING DATES

- March 2013 Quarterly Board Meeting - March 11th (Executive Comm. at IDOA) 12th - Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL
- June 2013 Quarterly Board Meeting - June 10th & 11th - Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL
- September 2013 Quarterly Board Meeting - September 10th - Teleconference (Only if Needed)
- December 2013 Quarterly Board Meeting - December 9th & 10th - Northfield Inn - Springfield, IL

January IS:

- National Blood Donor Month
- National Braille Literacy Month
- National Hobby Month

January dates of note:

- Chocolate Cake Day - 27th
- Fun at Work Day - 28th
- National Cornchip Day - 29th
- Backward Day - 31st

February IS:

- American Heart Month
- Black History Month
- Canned Food Month
- National Cherry Month
- National Children's Dental Health Month
- National Grapefruit Month

February dates of note:

- National Freedom Day - 1st
- Ground Hog Day - 2nd
- National Weatherman's Day - 5th
- Boy Scout Day - 8th (celebrates the birthday of scouting)
- Umbrella Day - 10th
- Clean out Your Computer Day - 11th (second Monday of Month)
- National Organ Donor Day - 14th
- Random Acts of Kindness Day - 17th
- National Chocolate Mint Day - 18th
- Hoodie Hoo Day - 20th
- Be Humble Day - 22nd
- National Tortilla Chip Day - 24th
- Pistol Patent Day - 25th
- Polar Bear Day - 27th

AISWCD Mission: *To represent and empower Illinois' SWCDs*

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