

McLean County Greenways News

Winter 2014: Volume 2, Issue 1

From the Chair

Michael Brown, Ecology Action Center

365 Days of Greenways

Okay, everyone raise your hand if you have ventured out on the Constitution Trail during any of our recent snow episodes. Is your hand up? It should be—our local trails and greenways are open year-round.

The benefits of greenways take many forms, but most often we think of recreational usage of trails and natural areas.

With the establishment of regular clearing of snow from the Constitution Trail that has been going on for the past few winters, the functionality of the trail increases from a few winter sports such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing to similar usage as any other time of year. In fact, a number of local bicycle commuters use the trail year-round to get to work and other regular destinations.



While it may seem like you have to be a glutton for punishment to venture out on the trail on a bike in the winter, some simple preparations can keep you warm and dry all the way to work and back home again. We are fortunate to have many local cycling organizations and programs that would be happy to guide you on becoming a year-round bicycle commuter—Good To Go, Bike BloNo, Friends of the Constitution Trail, or the McLean County Wheelers.

And yet there are those that are seeking a little more adventure and prefer the trail pre-plowing. A dedicated but small minority of riders this winter are timing rides on the trail prior to the clearing of snow to “take advantage” of the more challenging conditions. Interested? Seek out other snow aficionados or “fat-tire” cyclists through [CORBA – Comlara Off-Road Biking Association](#).

So whether you bike, run, walk, hike, snowshoe, or cross-country ski, the greenway amenities of our community are a good way to recreate, get good exercise, get where you’re going, and enjoy the great outdoors.

Constitution Trail Turns Twenty-Five in 2014 **By Mercy Davison, Town of Normal**

In what may seem like the blink of an eye to some, The Constitution Trail turns 25-years-old in 2014.

A 25th birthday is a big deal. It will be marked with several celebrations and events. Stay tuned throughout 2014 for more information.

Staff at the Town of Normal, along with others, is in the process of compiling historical documents and photos of the trail's first quarter-century. The history of the trail is a dramatic one, and a story of how a big idea was turned into a reality. At the time, turning an abandoned railway into a trail was inconceivable to many. Would it be utilized even after it was constructed? Was it going to be a waste of taxpayer dollars? Would it negatively affect neighboring property values? With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, all the answers are no.



The trail is routinely cited as the most popular park feature in all of Bloomington-Normal. Thousands of residents and visitors use the trail throughout the year. While the primary use is exercise and recreation, an increasing number of users see the trail as a commuter corridor.

If you have any interesting stories, news pieces or photographs of the trail, please consider sharing with me at the Town of Normal so we can include them in our anniversary celebrations. I can be reached at mdavison@normal.org or at (309) 454-9590.

County Hazardous Waste Collection A Success **By Ecology Action Center Staff**

The turnout was great, and wait times shorter as the Ecology Action Center hosted its second consecutive household hazardous waste collection in two years on Sat., October 5.

In 2012, wait times to dispose of hazardous waste were often over two hours due to an unprecedented turnout. A change of venue which allowed for more vehicles onto the dump site saw wait times decrease anywhere from 45 minutes, to ten minutes during peak disposal hours.

A total of 20,693 gallons of hazardous materials were collected from approximately 1,800 households during the all-day event. Thousands of gallons of oil paints, pesticides, aerosols, and combustible substances were properly and safely disposed. The volume of materials reflects a slight decline from the 2012 collection which is among the best, if not the best ever.

The 2013 collection was the first state-sponsored collection for McLean County in six years through a formal application process. Other partners making the event possible were: Mitsubishi Motor Manufacturing of America (which provided the venue and parking for the event,) the County of McLean, Town of Normal, and City of Bloomington. Home Sweet Home Ministries provided e-waste collection services.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), an average American household generates about 30 pounds of hazardous waste a year. Locally, a one-day hazardous waste collection event can cost from \$110,000 to \$165,000.

While such events are the most convenient means of safe disposal, the most cost-effective and safest strategy for hazardous waste mitigation is source reduction. In other words, consciously avoiding generation and use of hazardous materials whenever possible.

Route 66 Bikeway Continues Development

The Historic Route 66 Bikeway continues to be developed along the north and south corridors. The McLean County Highway Department will be informed if it has been awarded two Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) grants in the next few months. One grant application was for Phase One Engineering from approximately 2.55 miles north of the Village of Towanda, to the City of Lexington. That portion of the project would be close to 3.91 miles in length. The other grant application was for Phase Two Engineering from Shirley to approximately 1.1 miles south of the village.

The highway department has also applied for funding for a section of the trail that would stretch from Towanda Avenue in Normal to approximately County Highway 29 in the Village of Towanda. It is anticipated an official announcement on that award should be made sometime in early summer of 2014.

Officials from both Livingston and Logan Counties have been in contact with McLean County highway officials on future cooperation in developing the Route 66 Trail Corridor. The conversations have been preliminary and include discussions on how to promote the trail and seek preliminary engineering funding to connect with the trail on both ends of McLean County.

Greenways Committee Highlight-Prairilands Preservation Foundation

Editor's Note: So that readers may acquire a better understanding of organizations that make up the McLean County Greenways Committee, we are planning on featuring a member organization in this and each following newsletter. Hopefully, readers will find these small features educational and worthwhile.

The Prairilands Preservation Foundation has been organized as a not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of our natural resources. The foundation is comprised of parties who promote natural open areas, conservation easements and public donations that support the Foundation's mission of conserving and protecting the natural environment. The organization works to preserve natural habitats on properties primarily located in the Midwest.

The goals of the foundation is to develop natural habitats for wildlife through native prairie seeding, restoration of wetlands, reforestation through woodland plantings, and preserving existing woodlands.

Goals of the foundation are pursued and met by restoring, protecting, and maintaining natural habitat for insects, birds, mammals, amphibians, flora and fauna. Prairielands also works with interested landowners in establishing conservation easements, as well as promoting activities that help educate the public on environmental awareness. The organization also works with various government agencies to advance the natural and environmental sciences.

Prairielands accepts donations of ecologically sensitive lands and monetary gifts to fund land acquisitions and plantings. All contributions are tax deductible. The organization is active in seeking grants from public and private entities in an effort to accomplish its goal of land preservation.

Foundation holdings include a 52-acre conservation easement donation along the Mackinaw River near Gridley. It has also received a \$500,000 grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation in conjunction with the City of Bloomington. The parcel is an extension to the COMLARA Park/Lake Evergreen area and will be kept under a conservation easement to promote land stewardship, and to guarantee the parcel remains in its natural state.

Anyone interested in finding out more about Prairielands Preservation Foundation is urged to contact Chip or Sue Henrichs at 309-452-9124 or by e-mail at prairielandspf@aol.com.

Conservation Easements Explained

Conservation easements are voluntary and permanent legal agreements that restrict some land use to protect land that is deemed beneficial to the general welfare. A conservation easement preserves land by limiting the rights of land ownership—such as rights to develop, subdivide or harvest. The organization holding the easement, a non-profit land trust or public agency, shares the responsibility to make sure terms of the easement are upheld.

The easement agreement is between two parties that defines the limits on land use in order to protect specified natural resources on the land. The landowner and easement holder both have legal obligations to make sure the easement is honored.

Once the easement is conveyed, the landowner has agreed to forego some rights of ownership to protect the land. The easement holder does not own those rights and cannot transfer or sell the land to another party. The land trust or other organization holding the easement is responsible for making sure the terms of the easement are upheld.

While the landowner retains the right to own and sell the property, the easement restrictions remain permanently attached to the property's title. Any future owners of the property are bound by the agreement.

Easements are flexible legal tools. Some may restrict or prohibit development, or may allow for restricted harvest if obtained while in crops. Each easement is “customized” to the land it protects by the easement holder and landowner. Conservation easements can be either donated or sold to a land trust or public agency easement holder. Even if no money may change hands, conveying an easement is technically a transaction of a partial interest in real estate. Land value is determined by a defined and regulated appraisal procedure.

(Taken from “Gathering Waters” website ---www.gatheringwaters.org)

Trail Counts Planned for February

The Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington will be utilizing staff and other volunteers in another effort to gauge trail usage on the Constitution Trail. The “trail count” will commence on February 8 and run through February 15. Sixteen locations in Bloomington and Normal will be monitored during peak usage hours to determine how the trail is being used.

Trail counting not only involves counting individual usage by gender but also includes the type of usage (i.e. walkers, joggers, bicyclists and rollerbladers.) The municipalities have also attempted to determine economic impacts from trail users through on-site surveys.

Trail counts are done four times a year in the winter, spring, summer and fall.

Bloomington Bicycle Plan

The City of Bloomington is embarking on creating a bicycling master plan for the entire city. The goal of this plan is to help guide bicycling infrastructure investments to achieve the greatest results with limited funding.

League of Illinois Bicyclists (LIB) and McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) are assisting the City in the planning and public outreach of this project respectively. This three month planning project is scheduled to begin the first week of February.

Citizens will have three different options to participate in this very important planning process.

**Bloomington Bicycle Plan
Public Brainstorming Workshop
March 18, 2014 7:00-8:30 p.m.**

**Bloomington Police Department
Osborn Room**

Option 1) A Public Brainstorming Workshop, led by the League of Illinois Bicyclists will be held March 18. This interactive workshop will allow residents to learn about the project, types of bikeways, and to provide input in person.

Option 2) A survey will be mailed to all Bloomington residents along with their February water bill. This seven-question survey is designed to understand the bicycling needs and priorities of Bloomington residents. Residents will have the opportunity to mail the completed surveys back with their water bills.

Option 3) An interactive website, powered by MindMixer, will be launched on February 7, 2014 to gather feedback on the Bicycle Plan. This site will allow residents to communicate with City officials, and each other on what they want for the future of bike planning in the City of Bloomington. Users can post opinions and ideas on current bicycle conditions within the City, and how they can be improved. They can locate areas for improvements on an interactive map. This site can be accessed at bloomingtonil.mindmixer.com.



Public feedback is crucial to the process of creating a bicycling master plan, and residents are encouraged to take advantage of any and all opportunities to provide their input on the City of Bloomington Bicycle Plan.

Sugar Grove Nature Center
By Angela Funk, Sugar Grove Nature Center

Sugar Grove Nature Center has announced that Maple Sirup Experience Tours will begin Sat., Mar. 1, 2014. Tours last approximately two-and-a half hours and begin promptly at 10:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. Tour size is limited and pre-registration is required. Tours include a campfire learning session, a visit to the Center's sugar shack and the experience of tapping a maple tree. A variety of treats made from maple sirup will also be made available to sample. Tour costs are \$5.00 for adults and \$3.00 for children who are Center members and \$7.00 and \$5.00 for non-members.

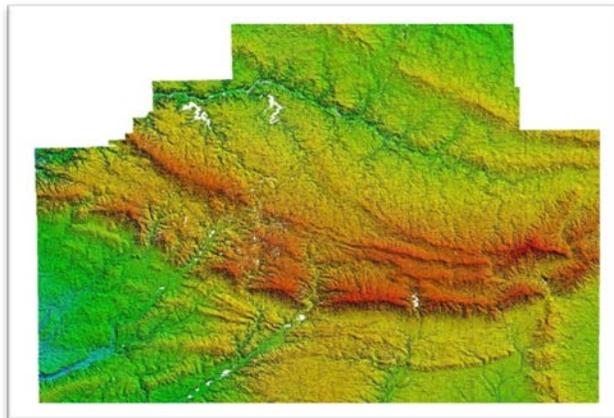
The Center is sponsoring an Adult Hiking Program. Hikes are the second Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Upcoming dates are: February 13, March 13, April 10 and May 8. Duration and distance of the hikes vary and general last one hour or a bit over. Participants are urged to pack a sack lunch and stay after each hike to enjoy a picnic.

More information on these and other events are available on the Sugar Grove Nature website at www.sugargrovenaturecenter.org

Natural Resource Inventory
By Vasudha Pinnamaraju, McLean County Regional Planning Commission

The high quality of life in our community is intertwined with a high quality of our natural environment. It should be our goal to use this environment wisely and preserve it for our future generations. Often, urban development is viewed as a threat to the natural environment, but they don't have to be mutually exclusive. Natural resources are positive components of any development and add value where integrated appropriately into development projects. This harmonious coexistence begins with a good understanding of our natural environment.

In an effort to provide the environmental data that can form a basis for local planning and development review process, the McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) is creating a comprehensive Natural Resources Inventory for the entire County. The goal of this inventory is effective integration of nature into the manmade environment by compiling the natural resources of our County in a usable format and interpreting the findings. While an inventory at the parcel level might be quite useful, this county-wide Natural Resources Inventory is, by necessity, more generalized.



As you can imagine, this project is quite ambitious and time consuming. At the present time, we have gathered information from a host of public sources including the Illinois State Geological Survey (ISGS), the National Soil Survey and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. MCRPC has compiled this data,

along with additional data generated in house, in an interactive map format that enables users to query, locate and analyze a variety of natural resources. The "Natural Resource Inventory" application now available via the www.McGIS.org website includes resources such as lakes and streams, flood zones, wetlands, aquifers, soils, slopes, watersheds, hydrology, bedrock geology, surficial geology, coal resources, wind resources and the natural areas in the County. Data gathering for this project is a work in progress and will be for the near future. The application will be enhanced with additional layers of data as they become available. This application is created in the same format as our other GIS applications that you may be familiar with. If you are new to this system, please go to the technical assistance information on the www.McGIS.org website.

While MCRPC is leading the effort in the Natural Resource Inventory, we welcome the expertise and assistance of environmental professionals in the community with the second phase of this project, the interpretation of the data. Please feel free to contact me in person with questions, comments or suggestions about this project.

Vasudha Pinnamaraju, Executive Director
McLean County Regional Planning Commission
(309) 828-4331 ext. 22
vpinnamaraju@mcplan.org

Upcoming Greenways Events

Event	Date	Location
MCRPC Information Forum	Wed. April 9, 7:30-8:30 a.m.	Marriott Hotel & Conference Center, Normal
IWU Wellness Expo	Sat. April 12, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.	IWU Shirk Center, Bloomington
Illinois Bike Summit	Tues. April 15, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.	I Hotel & Conference Center, Champaign
Constitution Trail Celebration	Sat. May 10, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.	Connie Link Amphitheatre, Normal
Funks Grove National Trails Day Celebration	Sat. June 7, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.	Sugar Grove Nature Center, Funks Grove