

McLean County Greenways News

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From the Chair

Michael Brown, Ecology Action Center

Protecting our greenways can take many forms, some direct and some indirect. Recently, as part of Bloomington-Normal Clean Up Week, thousands of local residents made a difference by cleaning up litter from around our community in order to address some of the causes of local greenway pollution.

One group, which consisted of dedicated volunteers from Bike BloNo, McLean County Wheelers, Friends of the Constitution Trail, Lake Run Club, and the Ecology Action Center, cleaned up a stretch of Constitution Trail and Sugar Creek from Tipton Park to Audubon Gardens. Volunteers from the group have cleaned up this area for a number of years, and they were happy to haul out more litter than ever before.



It was a cool but sunny morning and an impressive 35 volunteers showed up to assist with cleanup efforts. Working our way down the trail and creek, we filled bag after bag of every type of trash imaginable, from boxes and bottles to Styrofoam and plastic bags. We even found a discarded electronic tablet, vandalized trail signage, and a \$20 bill!

After a mid-day lunch break, a smaller, but yet equally dedicated group set out to finish up the designated section of the trail. At the end of the day, after tallying up our total number of bags and average bag weight, we succeeded in removing **nearly one ton of trash** from Sugar Creek and Constitution Trail. When combined with the number of similar efforts going on elsewhere in the community that week, it is clear that our residents care about our local environment. The cumulative results of all those participating were almost Herculean. It's quite impressive what a dedicated group of individuals can accomplish.

With a multitude of environmental challenges facing us these days, cleaning up litter might seem like a low priority. However, as a storm water pollutant, litter plays a big role in contributing to nonpoint source pollution, a leading cause of water pollution in our nation today. We know that

much of our discarded litter will wash into our creeks, streams, and storm sewer systems. Litter can clog the storm sewer, causing flooding, impairing habitat, or even directly threatening the safety of wildlife.

Fortunately, we don't have to wait for another clean-up week to help better protect our local greenways and waterways! Here are a few suggestions:

- **Reduce or completely avoid using conventional synthetic fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn or garden.** These easily wash off when it rains, running first into the street gutter and then into the storm sewer, and ultimately discharging unfiltered and untreated into a local creek or stream.
- **Don't mow too close to waterways.** Allow stream buffers to grow, which help filter out storm water pollutants.
- **Install a rain barrel.** In addition to conserving water, rain barrels help reduce the driver of storm water pollution—storm water. By capturing rain water on site and releasing it deliberately when and where we want it, we reduce the means by which pollutants are carried into our creeks and streams.
- **Install a rain garden.** Like a rain barrel, these help reduce the volume of storm water. But better yet, a rain garden restores natural absorption and filtration functions into the landscape, removing pollutants from water before it merges with other surface or ground water.
- **Don't wash your car in your driveway.** The soap, grime, and automotive fluids you rinse off your car will wash again into the storm sewer system and local creeks, acting as pollutants. Wash your car as a commercial car wash or even on your lawn, where the soil will help absorb and filter out these pollutants.
- **Dispose of household hazardous waste properly – don't dump it in the storm drain.** I know, this one is a given, but apparently it still happens!



For more information these or other means to help protect our local greenways, refer to online resources such as the EAC's [Yard Smart Program](#), consult the [McLean County Greenways Plan](#), or check out the McLean County Watersheds Clearinghouse at mCLEANwater.org.

Constitution Trail Celebrates 25th Anniversary Mercy Davison, Town of Normal

About 150 people gathered at the Connie Link Amphitheatre on Saturday, May 10 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the opening of Constitution Trail. The event included remarks from Normal Mayor Chris Koos and Bloomington Mayor Tari Renner, both of whom emphasized the positive impact the trail has had on the community.



The event was also an opportunity to thank some of the people who played a key role in the trail's development, including, from left: retired Bloomington Parks and Recreation Assistant Director Jerry Armstrong, retired Bloomington Parks and Recreation Director Keith Rich, Former Normal Town Council member Garrett Scott, retired Normal Parks and Recreation Director Ron Blemler, and Gene Brown, Town of Normal Town Engineer.

Representative Dan Brady noted the importance of partnerships between the community and the state, which have resulted in hundreds of thousands of grant dollars toward trail expansion over the years.

The opening remarks were followed by a walk to Colene Hoose Elementary School, a run to Rosa Parks Commons, and three bike rides to various destinations. The Town and City parks departments also offered family-friendly activities at Rosa Parks Commons and Tipton Trails into the early afternoon.

The Route 66 Trail Executive Council

Marla Gursh, IDNR

The Route 66 Trail Executive Council met April 17 in Lincoln. The Healthy Communities Partnership of Logan County was the featured organization at the meeting. The Partnership is looking for opportunities to become involved with agencies promoting healthy lifestyles, and is seeking ways to become more involved with the Executive Council and the promotion of the Route 66 State Trail.

The McLean County Historic Route 66 Bikeway was cited as a leading example of accomplishing trail development segment by segment through extensive collaboration between county governments and communities along the Route 66 Corridor.

The Executive Council is focusing on getting trails signs erected on any Route 66 Trail section where there is an interest. If any community has an interest in acquiring additional signage, they should contact Marla Gursh at IDNR in Springfield. She can be reached by e-mail (marla.gursh@illinois.gov) or by telephone (217-524-6854).

IDNR has also published a new Illinois Bike Trails map for 2014. They are available by contacting Rick Nolan at the McLean County Regional Planning Commission at 828-4331, ext. 26 or by e-mail at rnolan@mcplan.org

National Trails Day at Sugar Grove

The Illinois Grand Prairie Master Naturalists will sponsor its second annual National Trails Day celebration at the Sugar Grove Nature Center at Funks Grove on Sat., June 7. Festivities will begin at 10:00 a.m. and conclude at 2:00 p.m.

Sugar Grove Nature Center has over seven miles of hiking trails where participants can enjoy a diversity of plants and animals that live in prairie, woodland, and savanna habitats. Guided hikes will be available that day for those who wish to participate. Others are encouraged to explore the area on their own and take in the various displays and information booths.

The Center will also be featuring other activities that day and throughout the summer which include: geocaching, photography, first aid, and trail safety. The indoor nature center also provides an opportunity to see some amphibians, reptiles, and songbirds up close through special one-way observation windows. Participants are encouraged to pack a picnic lunch and spend the day.

For more information access the Center website at info@sugargrovenaturecenter.org or call (309) 874-2174.

Greenways Committee Highlight-Good To Go

Editor's Note: In an effort for readers to acquire a better understanding of organizations that make up the McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee, a member organization is featured in each edition of the newsletter. We trust readers will find these features educational and worthwhile.

Good To Go is a community-wide project sponsored by WGLT radio and "ISU Sustainability." The organization encourages healthy lifestyles and promotes the use of alternative transportation. One of the organization's primary events is the "Good To Go Commuter Challenge" in May of each year. The Challenge is a week-long event designed to encourage non-motorized travel and healthy lifestyles. It is a friendly competition between workplaces for the highest employee participation rate to see who can tally the most non-motorized or "shared" commuting miles throughout the week. During the Challenge, participants track and report their commutes by walking, bicycling, rollerblading, carpooling, car sharing, and/or telecommuting. Prizes are awarded to winning teams in various categories.

Good To Go is also highly visible within the community. You will see their banner and volunteers at most public functions including bike and trail promotion events, public markets, community celebrations and numerous festivals. Stop by their booth and introduce yourself and see how you can become involved or contact WGLT or ISU Sustainability.

Rhymer Nature Preserve Gifted To Dry Grove Township Bob Bradley, Preserve Board Member

The Rhymer Nature Preserve is a 15-acre nature preserve located approximately five miles northwest of the Town of Normal.

The preserve features several natural habitats that include a prairie grass area, a small pond, an arboretum and Songbird Grove that includes approximately 130 trees that have been donated in partnership with the Children and Elders Forest.

The nature preserve is the result of a gift to Dry Grove Township by Ione and Phillip Rhymer who did so in honor of M.J. Rhymer.



Trails allow visitors to walk easily from one habitat to another. Benches are located along the trails, and a gazebo with picnic tables provides shelter for picnics and outings. The preserve is

designed to provide a peaceful and relaxing setting where visitors can experience a natural environment native to rural McLean County. The preserve is open from dawn until dusk with no admission or parking fee.

If traveling from Bloomington or Normal, the preserve can be accessed off of Northtown Road about a half mile past the Ropp and Northtown Road intersection. More information on the Rhymer Nature Preserve can be obtained by contacting Nancy Boitnott at boitnottfarm@frontier.com.

There are also many ways to get involved with the preserve and assist in developing this new educational, environmental, and recreational resource for the area.

McLean County Receives ITEP Award

In April, the State of Illinois announced an Illinois Transportation Enhancement Award to the County of McLean in the amount of \$420,000. The money will be used for additional engineering and construction to extend the Historic Route 66 Trail at Shirley another 1.1 miles to the south. The award is part of the \$52.7 million from the federally-funded program.

In March, the McLean County Board approved an agreement with the Illinois Department of Transportation to use state right-of-way to construct close to 2.5 miles of trail from Normal to County Highway 29 near Towanda. That construction is planned for some time next year.

State Bike Summit

Champaign-Urbana played host to more than 300 attendees at the Illinois Bike Summit on April 15. The summit featured an early morning bike ride, “coffee talks”, breakout sessions and a day-ending network reception.

The State of Illinois Bicycle Transportation Plan was unveiled at the event. The plan can be obtained by accessing the IDOT website. Executive summaries and copies of the entire plan are available. Breakout sessions covered Local Bike Advocacy, Bicycle Friendly Universities and Colleges, Illinois Bike Trail Project Success Stories, Turning Complete Street Policies into Good Practices, Bicycling and the Health Community, Bicycle Education and Enforcement, Mountain Biking in Illinois, Bike Share Programs, and Life With A Bike.