



Natural Area Guardians

MONTGOMERY CO. SWCD
 1621 VANDALIA RD
 HILLSBORO, IL 62049

Reflections of the Past President—Henry Eilers

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The leadership of NAGs is in new hands and that is good. Such change avoids stagnation, it encourages new ideas. I am grateful that I had the support of the board and our members during our formative years. I am also thankful for the support of our parent organization, the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District and finally the Montgomery County Board. Not all our efforts worked out quite like we envisioned. That goes with the territory. Nothing ventured, nothing gained; Rome was not built in one day – or as such clichés go.

I look forward to continuing participation in NAGs on numerous projects. First and foremost for me will be the Old Route 66 prairie, also called the weigh station project. We will need to come up with a definitive name for the site. I am grateful and elated about the support received so far. More about that later.

The Illinois Department of Transportation has signaled its willingness to enter into an intergovernmental agreement with us to allow us to manage nearly 8 acres as a prairie. They will provide access and two parking spaces.

Some time later this winter we hope to hold a planning meeting with the participation of nearby residents, volunteers, and stake holders from IDOT, City of Litchfield Tourism Committee

and the Illinois Route 66 Heritage Project. We will discuss weed management, restoration issues and the site's potential value as a major tourism draw.

In addition to agriculture and industry, tourism can be a major economic force. But you truly have to 'build it if you want them to come'. We welcome your input and need your participation for this could turn out to be a major project.

Land protection and management will continue to remain dear to my heart. We would like to work far more with the land owning agricultural community than we have accomplished so far. Land of low production value, mostly woodland in Montgomery County, is not low value. At a time when 'Global Warming', 'Climate Change' is becoming increasingly accepted, we need to remind ourselves that natural lands are the only carbon sinks that we have locally. Research has shown that it is especially fire managed woodlands that tie up excessive carbon.

Our local efforts will hardly stem this world wide problem. But let us remember that it is important not to think just in global terms, but to act locally. 'A journey of many miles begins with one step at a time'. Again, thanks for all your support.

Natural Area Guardians is a subcommittee of the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District and exists under State Statute. They consist of dues paying members and are led by a panel of officers.

President: Ken Schaal

Vice President: Dave Rahe

Secretary: Anne Foster

Newsletter

Editor: Richard Slepicka

NAGs Takes On More Work At Hillsboro Area Hospital

Early last year the Hillsboro Area Health Foundation board commissioned the Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians to develop a management plan for the recently acquired Jenkins property to the south of the new Fusion building. HAH Foundation's goals of LEED Gold Certification and community involvement is compatible with the philosophy of the Montgomery County NAGs.

The property is a 24 acre site composed of 9 acres of grassy fields and 15 acres of woodland. The property is adjacent to the hospital and is bounded by Tremont Terrace, HHS woods/Miller property, and the Mo Pac railroad tracks.

Members of NAGs walked the entire property last winter, developed a management plan, and presented it to the HAH Foundation board last March.

The goal of the project is to restore the field with native grasses and wildflowers to mimic a prairie. A walk/jogging trail (fitness trail) will be incorporated into the project with the goal of promoting community health.



Eight volunteers spread seed at the Fusion pond site near Hillsboro Area Hospital. They included Bill Brink, Barry Foster, Mark Joy, Don Krefft, Jerry Prater, Glenn Savage, Ken Schaal and Richard Slepicka.

Management practices began on the 3 acre grassy field adjacent to the Fusion pond. Exotic species (fescue and various broad-leaf weeds) control began in the spring of 2008 when the field was partially mowed. The entire field was sprayed (M & M Service) with Round-up herbicide in November, 2008 after the native warm season grasses were dormant. We anticipate the need for additional mowing and spraying in 2009 to continue the control of exotic species. We also expect to perform a prescribed burn on the management area this fall (November, 2009).

The NAGs will provide the following. 1) Scheduled management practices to develop a native stand of grasses with some native wildflowers. 2) Procurement of appropriate seed mixes and their planting. 3)

Continued exotic species control. 4) Assistance in prescribed burning at the appropriate time. 5) Development of a walking/jogging trail (fitness trail) around the site in conjunction with the HAH Foundation board.

Join Natural Area Guardians!! (or renew your membership)

Use this coupon to join NAGs of Montgomery County. Membership is open to individuals, families, students and corporations, and is renewable annually.

- Individual \$ 5.00
- Family \$ 10.00
- Student \$ 2.50
- Corporate \$ 25.00

Name:

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Montgomery County SWCD
 Natural Area Guardians
 1621 Vandalia Rd
 Hillsboro, IL 62049

Interests, skills or ways I would like to help:



Diverse Conservation Efforts Important In Montgomery County

A huge part of the United States and Illinois economy would not exist without conservation and resulting public ground. According to the Illinois State-wide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, SCORP, published in 2004, the State of Illinois recorded four **billion** dollars in economic output, 42,000 jobs, and \$315 million in state and local taxes in 2001 from hunting, fishing and wildlife watching.

Glenn Savage, NAGs board member and Pheasants Forever member, in concert with Kelly Bassett, University of Illinois Extension, compiled a list in 2007, which recorded at least 20 non-profit, non-governmental, conservation groups in Montgomery County. Glenn and Kelly were able to contact officers or representatives of Pheasants Forever (one chapter), Quail Forever(1), Tri-County Quail Unlimited (1), Ducks Unlimited (3), Montgomery County Whitetails Unlimited(1), National Wild Turkey Federation (2), Litchfield Sportsmen's Club, Nokomis Sportsmen's Club, Rountree Sportsmen's Club, Shoal Creek Fox Hunter's Club, Natural Area Guardians, Shoal Creek Conservation Area (Volunteers), Shoal Creek Fox

Hunters Association, the Illinois Audubon Society's Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary, and Litchfield Bass Anglers.

The Montgomery County organization's goals are diverse. Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever specialize in the establishment and preservation of upland game habitat and the education of youth about the outdoors. The three sportsmen's clubs have shooting ranges as well as ponds for fishing and facilities (Nokomis) for camping. The Bremer Wildlife Sanctuary preserves and maintains habitat for all Illinois species and provides educational opportunities for children and adults at their facility north of Hillsboro. The organizations with turkey and whitetails in their names aim to preserve healthy forest eco-systems as well as educate youth in conservation. The Shoal Creek Volunteers and Natural Area Guardians preserve land under their stewardship for the benefit of all.

Additionally, the Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians offer confidential, no cost surveys of landowners holdings that may be used for purposes of estate planning or conservation.

Two Upcoming Programs Focus on Our Smallest Hawk and a Trip to Greece

Saturday, Feb. 21 - Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, stewards of the Bremer Sanctuary, will hold a program and lunch beginning at 11 a.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Hillsboro. The free program will feature naturalist Tom May who will discuss American Kestrels, the most common falcon in North America. A colorful raptor, it is found from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, and in towns as well as wild lands. The program and a very short business meeting will be followed by a carry-in lunch. Those attending are asked to bring a covered dish to share.



On Sunday, Feb. 22, at Litchfield City Hall, the Shoal Creek Volunteers, the stewards of the Shoal Creek Conservation Area on the east side of Lake Lou Yaeger will hold their annual meeting. Henry Eilers will present a slide presentation on his recent trip to Greece. There he joined a group of naturalists for a tour of the Peloponnesus, including some examination of the areas that burned a few years ago. The program will begin at 2 p.m. Drinks and cookies will be served.

NAG NUGGETS—"NUGGETS" ARE HELPFUL TIPS PROVIDED BY NAG MEMBERS. IF YOU HAVE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, CONTACT NAGS; WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS IN FUTURE ISSUES.

A newly planted native, warm-season grass stand oftentimes must compete with non-native, cool-season weeds like fescue (and some broad-leaf lawn weeds). One way to control cool-season weeds is to spray Glyphosate (Round-up) on a warm, dry day in late fall.

After a hard frost warm-season grasses like little bluestem, big bluestem and Indian grass become dormant. Dormancy turns these grasses brown and unable to metabolize the herbicide. Whereas, cool-season weeds like fescue thrive in the cool fall weather, metabolize the herbicide and die. The process is slow, but browning of the fescue is evident by spring. There may be weed seeds left in the seedbed, and a repeat dormant spraying may be needed next fall.

If any mature fescue remains after the fall dormant spraying, it should be mowed in the spring before it can add any new seeds to the weed seed bank. Timing is important. Mow the fescue after it flowers in the spring but just before the seeds turn gold and ripen. If the timing is right, the seeds will not be viable, and the fescue will not bloom again.

SWCD Tree and Fish Sales

Dig In and Do Your Part: Plant a tree, or better, plant several.

March 27 is the deadline to order trees through the Montgomery County Soil & Water Conservation District Spring Tree Sale. As usual the selection is great and the prices better. The trees will arrive on April 2, a perfect time to plant. An order blank is available at the SWCD office or online at www.montswcd.com. And if you're having trouble catching fish, grow your own. The District office is also holding its annual fish sale. You may also access this online, or stop by the office at 1621 Vandalia Road, Hillsboro.



NAG Membership News

The word is out! As a result of our first newsletter, membership drives at the PF annual banquet, word of mouth and other means, Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians dues paying members have reached 44 people. This includes individual, family and organizational memberships. Membership dues is \$5 for an individual membership and \$10 per family; organizational membership is also available.

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- Or go completely green and receive an electronic copy via E-mail (just notify us at melissa.cauble@il.nacdnet.net)

It Takes Foresight To Preserve Public Lands—by Nancy Bliss Slepicka

This is how it should be.

That thought has repeated in my brain almost daily since mid-April, when Richard and I left Hillsboro on an extended drive through the southwest and up the west coast, bound for Alaska.

Last October, when Montgomery County Board was considering purchase of the abandoned rail line between Hillsboro and Butler as a future hiking and biking trail, I wrote an editorial in support of the Natural Area Guardians' proposal.

I urged the board to approve the purchase because that particular strip of land is uniquely beautiful to the county area. It should be preserved and available for everyone to enjoy.

Public lands . . .

Except when we pause to visit friends and relatives, our Harvey the RV parks only on public land, where we wallow in the stunning beauty and historical value of state and national parks.

In northeastern New Mexico, we drove to the top of an ancient volcano at Capulin Volcano National Monument. It stands alone in the rolling grasslands, and the 360-degree view from the rim is spectacular. If you have the time and energy, you can walk completely around the rim and/or take a trail to the depths of the silent crater.

The volcano was declared a national monument by President Woodrow Wilson, and thanks to his foresight, it has been enjoyed by the public for decades.

That same day, we stayed overnight at Clayton Lake State Park, where we learned that eastern New Mexico was on the edge of an inland sea more than 100 million years ago. Dinosaurs once roamed the sea's shoreline, and actual footprints made by those creatures can be viewed up close from a walkway surrounding the hardened mudflats.

What a rare glimpse into ancient history this state park makes available to the public.

The desert cacti and flowers were in full bloom when we camped and hiked in Joshua Tree National Park in southeastern California. For that experience, we thank Minerva Hoyt, a local community activist of the 1930s, who persuaded President Franklin D. Roosevelt to proclaim the area a national monument. The park now protects 794,000 acres where the Mojave and Colorado deserts converge.



View of the former rail line between Hillsboro and Butler

Land and space for the public . . .

While visiting in California with my sister, Betsy, and later with Don Gregg, we pedaled on public bicycle trails in Sonoma and Chico. The paths wound through residential and business neighborhoods as well as parks and school grounds. Both trails were busy with other bikers and walkers of all ages, plus some wheelchair pedestrians. Each provides a safe, pleasant and "green" way to get around the city.

Part of our bicycle tour of Chico went through Bidwell Park, an ever-growing expanse, thanks to the foresight of Annie Bidwell, wife of the city's founder, Civil War General John Bidwell. Over a hundred years ago, Annie donated land to the city with the stipulation that the proportion of park land per capita would be maintained in perpetuity. As Chico's population has grown, the city has continued to acquire and develop land for public parks.

This is how it should be, I think. So, I'm glad that a majority of the members of Montgomery County Board had the foresight to approve purchase of the former rail line between Hillsboro and Butler. When that property eventually is open for the public to walk and to enjoy, you'll thank them, too.

Who Are The Natural Area Guardians?

We are called NAGs, Natural Area Guardians. The Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians was organized in 2005 and exists by Illinois statute as a committee of the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District. The purpose of our NAGs group is to provide an organized means for locating and preserving natural areas and open lands in Montgomery County. Our goals include encouraging and aiding landowners to manage their natural areas and open lands wisely, as well as providing educational programs concerning natural areas and our natural heritage. We are also available to assist land owners with management of natural areas and open lands and if necessary to aid in their purchase.

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