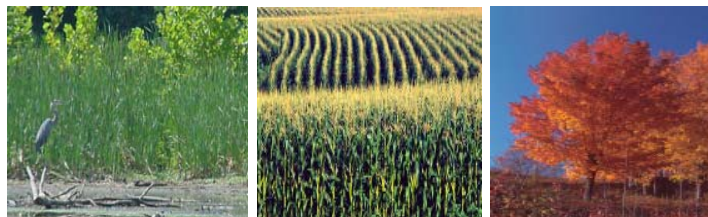




Protecting Land For Future Generations



Newsletter

Volume 5
Winter 2006

Wildlife Habitat & Open Space in O'Fallon

Southwestern Illinois RC&D Council

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Sally Brown and the Brown family established conservation easements on their 178 acres several years ago to protect the wildlife habitat and maintain a piece of the natural world in her rapidly developing area located just north of O'Fallon, Illinois. "The surrounding land use changes were closing in on us so quickly there was no ignoring it. We were also getting calls from developers and were concerned about the property tax implications," Sally commented. "I was greatly relieved when I signed the conservation easement and knew the issue of urban development for this land was off the table forever."

"I love and crave the experience of sitting quietly in nature and experiencing the surroundings and the wildlife present. Urban development was not an option for this property", stated Sally as she pointed out the locations of various wildlife. "I have an emotional attachment to this land and the natural resources that are present."



Sally feels it is better for a landowner to enter into a conservation easement on their own time frame rather than being hurried into it because of an impending crisis, but many times a crisis makes us deal with an issue when it becomes real rather than abstract.

Sally said she would do it all over again today to protect the land she loves, even though there are some frustrations in being surrounded by urban areas and in maintaining the conservation values on the property. She has utilized a number of conservation programs to establish wildlife habitat and plant trees. Some areas of the farm are also still annually cropped to corn, wheat, and soybeans.

Water quality is negatively impacted in watersheds that are urbanized between 15-30% due to the changes in water flow, pollutant concentration, and loss of natural habitat.

Thanks to TLC Supporters

A special thanks to new members Richard Bossler, Sally Brown, Miriam Huelsmann, Dave and Tamara Eustis, Melvin Feig, Jack Norman, Gene and Wanda Pitra, Stephen Gonzalez, Patricia Watkins, and for the gift from Anonymous.

Conservation Proposal for Kaskaskia Watershed

The Kaskaskia Watershed Association has been working towards development of a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) application for the Kaskaskia River. The State of Illinois currently has one authorized CREP area which has converted tens of thousands of acres of marginal farmlands along the Illinois River and its tributaries to wetlands, grasslands, and bottomland hardwood forests. The CREP has been successful because it takes the normal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and adds a significant state-funded enhancement in exchange for an extension of the program. This extension may be for an additional 15 years, 35 years, or a permanent easement.

To become an authorized CREP area, an agreement must be reached between the State and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). A key component of this agreement is the State's ability to show that it can deliver the 20% matching funds that are required for the enhancement portion of the program. The objectives of the Kaskaskia CREP are:

1. To reduce the amount of sediment entering the Kaskaskia River by 15%.
2. To reduce the number of impaired streams by 10%.
3. To reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus in the Kaskaskia River by 10%.
4. To increase in the Kaskaskia Watershed the populations of waterfowl, shorebirds, non-game grassland birds, and threatened and endangered species by 10%.

U.S. Senate Passes Tax Bill on Land Conservation

The US Senate recently passed a tax bill that included significant expansion of the deductions available to landowners who donate a conservation easement to the land conservancy. The bill provides for extending the carry-forward period for tax deductions from 5 years to 15 years and raising the cap on conservation deductions from 30 percent of a donor's income to 50 percent - and to 100 percent for farmers. The US House of Representatives counterpart bill does not include the conservation incentives listed in the Senate bill.

If the House adopts similar language in their bill it would provide for expanded federal income tax benefits for those who donate a conservation easement. Farmers could eliminate federal income taxes for up to 15 years in those years where they had eligible conservation easement donations.

Potential Property Tax Increases on Idle Lands

Some counties have notified landowners of potential increases in land assessments. Owners of idle land, timberland, hunting land, and other recreational land were notified that those types of property may be classified for real estate purposes. In the past, this type of land has received preferential assessment under the farm assessment law. Beginning in 2006 the Department of Revenue is requiring assessment officials to review how idle land and timber is valued. Land which is not part of a larger farming operation and is not being used for agricultural purposes will be assessed at 33 1/3% of market value.

A conservation easement may be one method of avoiding this tax increase. The conservation easement would restrict future urban development potential on the property and thus reduce the appraised value. Landowners should contact their local Supervisor of Assessments to discuss what is being proposed and how a conservation easement would impact the situation. If you would like to find out more about the conservation easement option, contact The Land Conservancy office at 566-4451. Representative Granberg has also introduced HB 4175 which would address this assessment issue statewide and provide some relief on the potential increases in assessments.

CLIFFTOP Alliance Forming to Protect Bluff Areas

CLIFFTOP (Conserving Land In Farms, Forests, Talus, or Prairies) is an alliance of local landowners, organizations, and communities focused on protecting and conserving the Mississippi River bluff lands corridor in Monroe and Randolph Counties. The priority area includes a 35-mile corridor of bluff lands from Columbia to Prairie du Rocher containing 33,000 acres of mostly contiguous forests. The bluffs host 4,000 acres of designated Illinois Natural Area Inventory sites. Within the bluffs are nearly half of Illinois' remaining loess hill prairies, half of Illinois' 102 species of reptiles and amphibians, plentiful game populations, and over a dozen rare plant and animal species.

These unique features are in peril from insensitive development, destruction of valuable farmland, steep slope mismanagement, habitat fragmentation, watershed pollution, poor forestry practices, and invasive and exotic plants. The Alliance will work in cooperation with The Land Conservancy to help protect and conserve these bluff lands and the important natural resources using conservation easements and other programs to assist landowners and assist overall stewardship practices. CLIFFTOP Alliance will be fully operational in 2006. The photo at the right shows INPC Staff Person Debbie Newmann explaining to participants on the TLC/CLIFFTOP outing in November the ecosystem of the loess hill prairie.



Join The Land Conservancy!

Join us in protecting land for future generations. Your membership dues will help us reach more people in the community about the tax advantages of conservation easements, preserve more land through donations, and provide a voice to policy makers about the importance of land conservation.

As a TLC member, you will receive a quarterly newsletter, invitations to exclusive outings to some of the most beautiful private land in this area, and numerous social opportunities.

Yes! I want to become a friend of The Land Conservancy.

Name _____

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- Student/Retired \$25
- Friend of Open Spaces \$40
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- Wildlife Patron \$100
- Forest Benefactor \$500
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Give a Gift to TLC



MISSION OF THE LAND CONSERVANCY

To work regionally to protect agricultural, forest, and other natural lands in order to provide for open space, landscape diversity, sustainable agriculture, wildlife habitat, and conservation benefits for present and future generations.

The Land Conservancy is a member of the national Land Trust Alliance www.lta.org

Get the tax advantages of charitable giving by donating now to The Land Conservancy. Your donation will help preserve natural lands and protect our water resources. Cash is the simplest and most common way to help save the natural areas in our community. Become a member of TLC or just make a donation by completing the form inside and *your gift will be tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

Stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and other publicly traded securities are easily donated, and can often provide you with exceptional tax savings. When you donate appreciated securities, you will usually receive the benefit of a fair-market value income tax deduction, and *your gift will be exempt from capital gains tax.* Please check with your financial advisor before deciding on the best way to make a gift of this type.



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Protecting land and water resources in Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington counties.

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