

# The Conservation Communicator

A Partners for Conservation Publication for the Ecosystems Program and Critical Trends Assessment Program of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Spring 2008

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## Habitat Restoration in the Mackinaw River Basin: Riparian Corridor Reforestation Project on Denman Creek

A habitat restoration project was recently completed along Denman Creek, a high-quality tributary of the Mackinaw River. The project site is located in the Southeastern region of Woodford County in North Central Illinois. The grantee, Julie Elzanati, along with her husband, Saad, and at least 27 volunteers (friends and neighbors) removed invasive species and planted a wide variety of native trees and shrubs on over 20 acres of retired pasture fields and bottomland woodlands. The old fields were originally cleared for farming, which resulted in open patches within the contiguous woodlands near the Mackinaw River. When the Elzanati's bought the property, cattle were grazing both the fields and woodlands. This was one of the factors contributing to erosion problems along the 2400 linear feet of stream bank on Denman

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## The Bellrose Habitat Restoration Project: Working Together in the Lower Sangamon Valley

The Bellrose Habitat Restoration Project in the Lower Sangamon Valley Ecosystem Partnership has benefited from a partnership between several different conservation incentive programs, namely the USFWS Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), and IDNR's Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and C2000 (now Partners for Conservation). By utilizing funding from two or more sources, a landowner can achieve greater conservation goals and reap the benefits of technical assistance from several agency sources. The Bellrose Habitat Restoration Project serves as an excellent example of multi-program conservation efforts.

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To monitor, maintain, enhance and restore the biodiversity and ecological conditions of Illinois' landscapes through local partnerships.

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Creek. After the cattle were removed from the area, honeysuckle, hawthorn, multiflora rose and garlic mustard grew rapidly. For this C2000 funded project, the grantees cleared out the invasive species and planted tree and shrub species to restore the native habitat. They also planted water-loving species along the creek to enhance their 2003 stream bank stabilization project. This project succeeded in restoring 11 acres of forest, 20 riparian acres, and 2,400 feet of stream. All in all, the restoration increased riparian buffer width, provided food for wildlife, connected the fragmented forested habitat, and is serving as a demonstration site for ecosystem best-management practices.

This project site is directly adjacent to another C2000 riparian restoration project site completed in 2005 (awarded to landowner, Mary Lou Mercier) that restored 15 acres of forest, 10 acres of prairie, and 2 acres of wetlands along Denman Creek. There are several mid-to-high quality habitat conservation areas in close proximity, including large landowner conservation easements and large nature preserves managed by ParkLand's Foundation and the Nature Conservancy. That makes this habitat restoration project even more significant as it connects and improves fragmented wildlife habitat and increases riparian services such as water quality improvement.

The Elzanati's will continue to remove invasive vegetation and plant native trees and shrubs after the C2000 grant expires. For this project, they partnered with Trees Forever ([www.treesforever.org](http://www.treesforever.org)) to demonstrate best-management practices for landowners in the Mackinaw River watershed. Julie and Saad are encouraging their many friends and neighbors who own land to consider restoring the native habitats for the benefit of wildlife as well as for their own economic benefit. Julie points out that in addition to providing food for wildlife, the fruit and nut trees may supply a minimal source of food for their family. Additionally, they have a honey production business and several of the native tree species they planted will provide valuable nectar and pollen as food sources for their bees.

The Elzanatis are also members of the ParkLands Foundation, the nonprofit organization that manages many conservation lands in the Mackinaw River watershed, including the Nature Conservancy's Chinquapin Bluffs preserve located less than a mile from their property.

For more information about the Mackinaw River Partnership and how you can get involved, please contact the Partnership's Chairman, Michael Brown, at 309/454-3169 or at [mbrown@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:mbrown@ecologyactioncenter.org), or contact IDNR's C2000 Ecosystem Administrator for the Partnership, Jim Hemingway, at 309/446-9184 or [jim.hemingway@illinois.gov](mailto:jim.hemingway@illinois.gov).

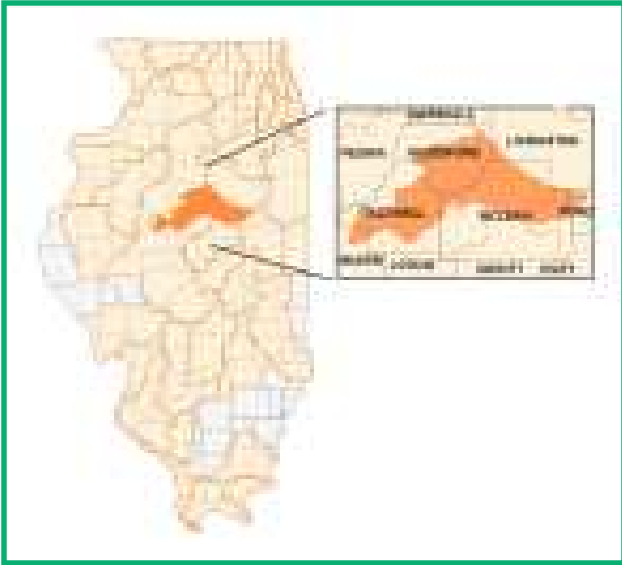


**Before**



**After**

## Mackinaw River Ecosystem Partnership



Mackinaw River Ecosystem Partnership  
Boundaries

Designated as a C2000 Ecosystem Partnership in 1996, the Mackinaw River Ecosystem Partnership is located in the Northern part of Central Illinois encompassing parts of Tazewell, Mason, Woodford, McLean, and Ford counties. Since its designation, the Partnership has received more than \$774,099 of C2000 funding and they have leveraged an additional \$253,937 of matching funds for a total of \$1,028,036 for 27 projects through out the watershed. To date, the Partnership has restored over 1,050 acres of forest, prairie, and wetland habitat as well as 5,970 feet of stream bank in the Mackinaw River Basin.

The Mackinaw River Basin boasts a long and rich history. The elevated lands of the area have been inhabited since about 10,000 B.C. Several American Indian tribes, such as the Potawatomi, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Kickapoo dwelled along the river. The name Mackinaw was bestowed by early inhabitants, the Ojibways, which means turtle.

One of the earliest accounts of the river was composed by Patrick Kennedy in 1773, “The land is high on the eastern bank of the river, but on the western are large plains or meadows, extending as far as can be seen, covered with fine grass.” Today these meadows are rich and productive soils and 77 percent of the Mackinaw River watershed is used as prosperous agricultural crop lands.

Concern about the condition of the Mackinaw began in the 1950’s when the Mackinaw Valley Improvement Association (MVIA) was formed to deal with problems on the river. From 1991 to 1993 the Nature Conservancy worked with a number of agencies to discuss strategies for gaining scientific consensus and setting priorities for protection and restoration of the Mackinaw River. The Nature Conservancy then collaborated with Prairie Rivers RC&D and formed an alliance with the MVIA. The Mackinaw River Ecosystem Partnership was then designated in 1996 proclaiming the mission to “preserve and enhance the natural resources of the Mackinaw River watershed through education, good management practices and voluntary cooperation while respecting property owner rights.”

For more information about the Partnership and how you can get involved, please contact the Partnership’s Chairman, Michael Brown, at 309/454-3169 or at [mbrown@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:mbrown@ecologyactioncenter.org), or contact IDNR’s C2000 Ecosystem Administrator for the Partnership, Jim Hemingway, at 309/446-9184 or [jim.hemingway@illinois.gov](mailto:jim.hemingway@illinois.gov).

### Unique Features and Resources of the Mackinaw River Basin:

- One of the sites for river otter reintroduction. During April of 1996, twenty-eight otters were released along the Mackinaw;
- Home to three state threatened or endangered species: the chorus frog, western hognose snake, and mud turtle.
- Its biological stream characterization is “A,” the highest possible.
- Contains 527 significant archaeological sites.
- The only central Illinois location for the state endangered heart-leaf plantain.

## DuPage River Coalition: Spring Brook Remeander Project Tour

On April 11, 2008, the DuPage River Coalition, the Conservation Foundation, and the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County held a tour of the remeandering project of Spring Brook at the Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve in Naperville, a suburb of Chicago. The project is part of an ongoing restoration and habitat improvement plan for the Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve. Prior to the Forest Preserve District acquiring Springbrook Prairie in the 1970s, the land was used for agricultural production and Spring Brook Creek was “channelized” or straightened to keep water in a controlled area to prevent the flooding of crops. Recently, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County constructed a new, meandering stream channel on approximately 2 miles of Spring Brook Creek, a tributary of the DuPage River. C2000 awarded \$200,000 to the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County in 2002 to help in the restoration of 15 acres of prairie, 25 acres of wetland, and 7,290 feet of stream. The primary objective is to improve habitat, reduce bank erosion and improve water quality by reconnecting the stream to the flood plain and reduce channel entrenchment. Stream channel design incorporates improved fish, mollusk and macro invertebrate habitat.



Location of Spring Brook Remeander Project within the DuPage River Watershed

Over 20 years of USGS gage station data combined with detained cross-sectional and longitudinal profiles of the stream are the scientific basis for developing dimensions, patterns and profiles for the new stream. The new stream bed is elevated to normal entrenchment conditions and features a pool and riffle pattern. The new channel is constructed with the use of natural materials and designed to re-saturate a riparian wetland/floodplain zone. Construction zones are being stabilized with native species consistent with preserve wide restoration plans.

For more information about the Partnership and how you can get involved, please contact the Partnership’s Chairwoman, Jennifer Hammer, at 630-428-4500 x14 or at [jhammer@theconservationfoundation.org](mailto:jhammer@theconservationfoundation.org), or contact the C2000 Ecosystem Administrator for the Partnership, Lynn Boerman, at 847-608-3100 x2041 or at [lynn.boerman@illinois.gov](mailto:lynn.boerman@illinois.gov).



Habitat Restoration and Tree Plantings



Touring the Spring Brook Remeander Project

**Meet the Staff**  
*Tammy Watson,*  
*C2000/Partners for Conservation*  
*Ecosystem Program Manager*

Tammy Watson has worked for the C2000, now Partners for Conservation, program since 1996. During the last 12 years, Tammy has worked in the C2000 program as an administrative assistant, budget manager, outreach manager and in the last four years as the C2000 Ecosystem Program Manager overseeing the operations of the program. Working out of the IDNR Headquarters in Springfield, Illinois, Tammy is responsible for overseeing all operations of the program including grant administration, funding, outreach efforts, land acquisitions, planning, and special projects. She insures that the Ecosystem Partnerships are receiving assistance to achieve their missions and goals, and to secure additional grants and funding by partnering with other conservation programs. Additionally, Tammy attends workshops and public meetings to promote the program across the State and also volunteers at the Illinois State Fair.



Tammy attended Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, and graduated with a Bachelors of Science degree. After graduation, she worked as a regional sales manager in Tennessee and then became a fiscal officer for a company in Illinois. Tammy has four very active kids, J.J., 14, Adam, 12, Matt, 10, and Katie who is about to turn 8. In her spare time, she loves outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, canoeing, gardening and horseback riding. Tammy became scuba certified last year and just returned from her second scuba diving trip to Cozumel. Additionally, she is currently playing on a co-ed softball team.

If you are interested in conservation and restoration efforts in your community or would like more information pertaining to the new Partners for Conservation Program, please contact Tammy at (217) 524-1266, or at [Tammy.L.Watson@illinois.gov](mailto:Tammy.L.Watson@illinois.gov).

**Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.**  
**- Chief Seattle**

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Location of Bellrose Habitat Restoration Project in the Lower Sangamon Valley Ecosystem Partnership

In Logan County, Illinois, lies the 387 acre property of Ron and Sandra Bellrose. 71 acres of this property is designated as the Sandra Miller Bellrose Nature Preserve. Within the nature preserve flows Sugar Creek, identified as a high quality stream by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory and which supports a rich assemblage of freshwater mussels (17 species have been confirmed). The presence of a diverse mussel assemblage within the nature preserve indicates that the water quality of Sugar Creek is consistently very good. The purpose of this habitat restoration project is to protect and improve the already good conditions present in and around Sugar Creek.

The section of Sugar Creek located within the dedicated nature preserve is nearly completely bordered by second growth woodlands (dominated by oak, hickory, and sugar maple trees on the uplands, silver maple and sycamore on the bottomlands), which have remained undisturbed for several decades. However, the

woodlands have been inundated by invasive species such as garlic mustard, bush honeysuckle, and multi-flora rose. Additionally, the aggressive native species of black locust and Osage orange are also present. To address this problem, LIP funded 75% and C2000 the remaining 25% of the first step in the habitat restoration project, timber stand improvement. This greatly reduced the direct costs incurred by the landowners. The timber stand improvement entailed removing the invasive and aggressive species and planting oak and hickory seedlings. This improvement will benefit many bird species such as northern bobwhite, American woodcock, yellow-billed cuckoo, and barn owl.



Mussels from Sugar Creek



Timber Stand Improvement

In addition to the timber stand improvement are two other habitat restoration projects. IDNR's Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) helped fund the construction of two wetlands along Sugar Creek and the streambank restoration project to add a variety of in stream habitat structures to enhance mussel and fish habitats within Sugar Creek. The projects restore and preserve stream and floodplain habitat and the flora and fauna that utilize such habitat within Sugar Creek and the nature preserve. With the Nature Preserve dedication and the CREP permanent easements, the property is now under permanent protection.

The Bellrose Habitat Restoration Project is bringing together several different government organizations with private landowners to improve and preserve

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Sugar Creek, its floodplain habitat and the water quality within the watershed. It is a wonderful example of modern ecosystems management and conservation efforts, and should serve as a model for other projects. If you would like more information about LIP, please visit [http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/Conservation\\_programs/LIP/](http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/Conservation_programs/LIP/), or contact Stan McTaggart, LIP program manager, at [Stanley.McTaggart@il.nacdnet.net](mailto:Stanley.McTaggart@il.nacdnet.net) or at 217/241-6635 x3. For more information about NRDA, please visit [http://dnr.state.il.us/orep/contaminant\\_assessment/nrda/index.htm](http://dnr.state.il.us/orep/contaminant_assessment/nrda/index.htm), or contact Tom Heavisides, Contaminants Assessment Section Manager at [Tom.Heavisides@illinois.gov](mailto:Tom.Heavisides@illinois.gov) or at 217/785-5500. For more information about CREP, please visit [http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/conservation\\_programs/crep/](http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/conservation_programs/crep/), or contact Debbie Bruce, CREP program manager, at [Debbie.Bruce@illinois.gov](mailto:Debbie.Bruce@illinois.gov) or at 217/524-4111.



Newly Restored Wetland

### Good Luck, Jennifer!

On May 1, 2008, the C2000/Partners for Conservation Office Assistant, Jennifer Holloway, will be leaving the program to begin a new career venture with the Illinois Department of Public Health. Jennifer has worked for IDNR and the Conservation 2000 program for 11 years. As the Office Assistant for the C2000 program, Jennifer's main responsibility is processing grant agreements, justifications, and amendments. In addition, she processes pay statements and invoices for the Office of Realty and Environmental Planning, Division of Ecosystems and maintains general accounting books. Her hard work and dedication to the program has made her an invaluable asset to the rest of the C2000/Partners for Conservation staff. She will truly be missed. Good luck to you, Jennifer!



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**I would like to thank the C2000/  
Partners for Conservation staff and  
all of the Partnerships for a reward-  
ing and fun experience as the Out-  
reach Specialist for the past 2 years.  
I am graduating with my masters in  
Environmental Studies from UIS  
this May and will be returning to my  
home town of Nashville, Tennessee.  
I will miss everyone! Keep up your  
efforts in restoring Illinois' ecosys-  
tems and educating the public on the  
importance of protecting Illinois'  
natural resources.**

**- Melissa Smith,  
C2000/Partners for Conservation  
Outreach Specialist**

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Editor: Tammy Watson & Melissa Smith  
Graphic Design & Layout: Melissa Smith

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