



# CFC NEWS

*Saving Living Space for Living Things*

Vol. 25, No. 1, Winter 2006

## One of nature's engineers builds dam on Flint Creek

by Linda Moses Novak

Illustration by Laura Arndt

When the water level in the wetlands along Flint Creek rose during the 2005 summer drought, CFC volunteers knew something unusual was happening. They discovered that the preserve has a new resident – a beaver, or possibly a pair, which has built a dam across the creek.

The dam is in the southern part of CFC's property. It consists of sticks and mud, measures about three feet high and twenty feet long and is slightly curved, with the top of the arc downstream and the ends jutting into the stream banks at an angle. As a result, the water level has increased, covering property that normally is submerged only during the spring. Neighbors are understandably concerned, so CFC volunteers have attempted to lower the water level while allowing the beaver to stay in his newfound home.

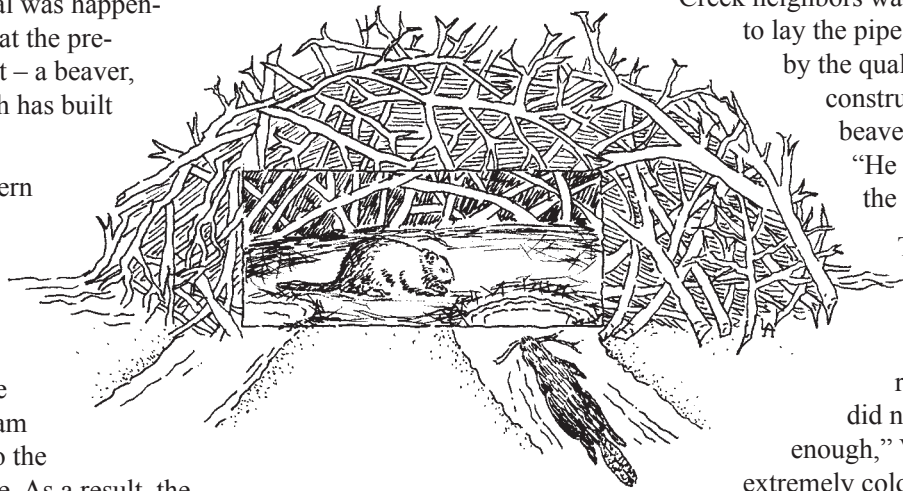
"We want to work with the neighbors because CFC can accomplish its mission only with community support," said Tom Vanderpoel, CFC volunteer.

The solution is to install a PVC drain pipe through the dam below water level and then cover the pipe with sticks to fool the beaver into thinking nothing has been disturbed. Other groups have used this method with success. (Simply knocking out a section of the dam won't work since the beaver would quickly repair the breach.)

On November 11, CFC members Vanderpoel, Wes Wolf, Carol Hogan and John Schweitzer as well as several Flint Creek neighbors waded into the water to lay the pipe. "We were amazed

by the quality of the design and construction done by the beaver," commented Wolf.

"He is truly the engineer of the animal world."



The water quickly began to go down and then stopped.

The wetland remains flooded. "We did not place the pipe deep enough," Vanderpoel said. "The extremely cold weather has prevented us from going back and re-laying the pipe." CFC volunteers will return to the site during

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## Nature's engineers (continued from page 1)

the spring to see what further steps they can take. Placing the pipe somewhat deeper and weighing it down with sandbags may be the answer.

In the meantime, CFC is asking the neighbors to be patient. Vanderpoel said, "We want the beaver to stay so that the area can continue to enjoy the benefits of his work." Beaver ponds allow stream water to soak into the ground and restore the water table. Dams help prevent erosion and filter silt so that water downstream is cleaner. Most important, beavers create habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, amphibians and fish. In fact, beavers' ability to change the landscape is second only to that of humans. CFC feels very fortunate that a beaver has found its preserve.

## About Beavers

Wildlife rehabilitators find beavers to be gentle, reasoning beings that learn quickly from imitation and experience. They are intelligent creatures (scientific name: *Castor canadensis*) who build their dams to make ponds where they can construct their homes, called lodges. Unlike other mammals, which either hibernate or spend the winter cold and hungry, beavers spend the frigid season in their cozy, safe lodges with food stored nearby. They can enter lodges only from under water. Therefore, the beavers' ponds must be deep enough so the water at the bottom doesn't freeze and the beavers can come and go.

CFC volunteers have not located the lodge on Flint Creek. It may be under a stream bank.

A beaver is well-equipped for its semi-aquatic life. It has a thick, water-repellant coat, webbed hind feet and a wide, flat tail that acts like a rudder. A beaver can swim about five miles an hour and stay under water for more than ten minutes. When it is under water, the beaver's transparent eyelids protect its eyes while still allowing it to see. This largest of North American rodents also has membranes in its nose and ears that close to keep out water and a flap behind its teeth that can seal off its throat so it can chew while holding its breath.

Beavers grow to be about four feet long, including the one-foot tail. They weigh between 30 and 70 pounds and eat plants such as grasses, clover, water lily tubers, apples, and tree leaves and cambium, the green underside of bark. They prefer to feed on willow, cottonwood, aspen and other fast-growing trees but, unfortunately, not buckthorn. The beaver prunes trees with its one-inch-long incisors (front teeth), which grow continuously. After eating, these nocturnal animals use the peeled sticks to build their lodges and dams.

Beavers mate for life. They produce a single litter of one to four kits a year. The young have all their fur when born and learn to swim within hours of birth. They stay with their parents for two years and then leave to build their own lodges. Their lifespan is about ten years. Predators include coyotes, hawks, owls, otters, dogs, wolves and lynx.

Trapped to near-extinction for their pelts, beavers have begun to grow in numbers again, but the current population is estimated to be only five percent of that prior to European settlement. Beavers seldom overpopulate an area because they breed just once a year and because their young leave home. Also, they decrease their reproduction when habitat gets crowded.

## Protecting trees from gnawing

So far, CFC volunteers and neighbors have seen no evidence of beaver damage to trees. As a preventive measure, Eagle Scouts working with CFC members have installed hardware-cloth cages around hickory and oak trees near the preserve's wetlands.

Experts recommend such cages be four feet high and large enough to leave six inches between the cage and the tree. These barriers can be anchored to the ground with stakes. Another proven method to prevent damage is to coat tree trunks with a sand-paint mixture consisting of eight ounces of fine sand to each quart of oil or latex paint. Tree trunks should be painted up to about four feet. Avoid painting young trees less than six feet tall as this may harm the trees.

CFC's members hope that people and the Flint Creek beaver will cohabitate successfully. The environment will reap the rewards of his handiwork.

## Thanks to ...

...**Carol Sheehan** for her gift in memory of her friend Angie—"another gardener and lover of Barrington."

...**Jeffrey A. Kobish** in memory of Cathy Andrews.

...**Steven Alpert of Civil Design Group Consulting Engineers**, for their in-kind donation.



*Ruth Vanderpoel*

## **Ruth Vanderpoel: volunteer nonpareil**

CFC lost a loyal, knowledgeable and extremely dedicated volunteer with the passing in early December of Ruth S. Vanderpoel, 83, after a struggle with cancer.

Ruth's commitment to habitat restoration and devotion to the natural environment were readily apparent, and she was harvesting, cleaning and sowing seed just weeks before her death. During 25 years of volunteering her time and labor to CFC, Ruth was awarded almost every award in CFC's arsenal: the Shooting Star Award for 10-year volunteers (twice), the Mighty Oak Award for 50-plus hours of volunteering in one year (20 times), and CFC's prestigious Great Blue Heron Award for outstanding work in CFC's mission.

Ruth Vanderpoel was matriarch of a family of conservation activists and experts. Her late husband, Waid, was president and long-time Real Estate Chairman of CFC, and one of her five sons, Tom, is CFC's restoration director and a recognized authority in tallgrass prairie restoration.

Those of us who worked alongside Ruth Vanderpoel in the field or office remember her as a very friendly and helpful colleague with extensive knowledge of nature.

## **Volunteer bonfire a success despite rain**

by Patsy Mortimer

CFC volunteers are intrepid! Despite a forecast of afternoon and evening showers, volunteers didn't scrub plans for the volunteer bonfire November 5 – and they were right! While the evening air was damp with light sprinkles, thirty volunteers and their families dined at tables inside CFC's garage surrounded by their fall work, garbage cans full of seed ready to be spread on the prairies and savannas. CFC provided delicious vegetarian chili prepared by Melissa Washow and chili *con carne* as well. Volunteers brought a variety of salads, muffins and desserts that filled eaters to the brim.

Everyone was having such a good time that we had to convince them to go outside for the bonfire. Tom Crosh led the charge on the bonfire by removing the protective plastic and adding dry kindling. Cardboard spread around the fire provided mud-free standing areas. The bonfire was soon ablaze, adding warmth to a surprisingly pleasant evening.

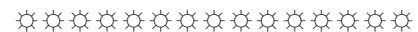
### ***Thanks to CFC!***

To Citizens for Conservation:

Thank you for offering our staff here at Sedgebrook the opportunity to participate in the important work you do in preserving habitat here in Lake County.

Continued success in your work.

—The Sedgebrook Volunteer Committee



Thanks for your assistance with our program. The Grigsby Prairie really is beautiful as others have told me. Meredith Tucker was so knowledgeable and we love her enthusiasm.

Thanks again.

—Chapter K.F. PEO Sisterhood

# Three local preserves are state-designated gems

by Meredith Tucker

**Editor's note: Many thanks to Patsy Mortimer for providing information about these CFC properties.**

CFC has lavished publicity and attention on Grigsby Prairie and Flint Creek Savanna. We write about them, and we have large anniversary celebrations for them. Because we are working to restore these properties to presettlement condition and because much of our outdoor volunteer time is devoted to them, we dote on these preserves. At these two locations we have taken pastures and farm fields nearly devoid of native plants and animals and have striven to recreate (restore) natural habitats. We have burned, removed brush, and sprayed herbicide, planted plugs, sown seed. The habitats are flourishing, and we are proud of our progress.

However, CFC owns other preserves of immense natural value. These are properties for which we provide stewardship rather than restoration. Restoration often begins with a blank canvas or an immensely degraded one and attempts to return it to

presettlement condition. Stewardship is care-taking in which volunteers use some of the techniques of restoration, but the methods are less pervasive. Properties for which we provide stewardship often have existing natural habitats that need our support and attention so that they can thrive and resist the influx of additional invasive alien species. On these properties CFC burns, pulls garlic mustard and sweet clover, cuts brush, and herbicides invasive species. Volunteers do not sow seed or plant plugs. Many native plants are already there; a seed bank already exists. However, in this time of massive disturbance to land and water, the properties need our help so that they can maintain healthy native habitats.

Three CFC properties are designated Illinois Nature Preserves. "The mission of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission... is to assist private and public landowners in protecting high quality natural areas and habitats of endangered and threatened species in perpetuity, through

voluntary dedication or registration of such lands into the Illinois Nature Preserves System.

"The Commission promotes the preservation of these significant lands and provides leadership in their stewardship, management, and protection." Such preserves receive the highest existing protection available in Illinois. The Commission monitors activities at the properties and sometimes works with owners, in this case CFC, to formulate appropriate stewardship activities. To maintain the integrity of the ecosystem, it carefully examines any efforts to reintroduce additional native species. Following are the three CFC properties that are designated Illinois Nature Preserves and for which our volunteers provide stewardship.

**Barrington Bog** is located in Lake Barrington at the



northeast corner of Route 59 and Miller Road. Citizens for Conservation received the 44.7 acres of wetland from the Grandview Estates Association and from Kenneth and Edward James between 1984 and 1989. It was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1988. A bog is a wetland that accumulates substantial deposits of peat moss. It depends primarily on precipitation for its water source and is usually acidic and rich in plant residue. Because the water is acidic, organic matter breaks down slowly so that thick layers of sphagnum moss accumulate. Bogs have poor drainage, poorer than do marshes; they are closed systems. Besides representing a locally rare ecosystem, Barrington Bog is distinguished by being home to the state-endangered large cranberry. Additionally, it is a quaking bog. The layers of peat moss (*Sphagnum*) float on water so that the ground trembles when one jumps on it.

CFC's objective at Barrington Bog is to return it to its healthy, natural state. Stewardship activities include brush clearing, controlling purple loosestrife, and implementing

controlled burns whenever they are possible. Since run-off from the slopes surrounding the Bog provides some of its moisture, CFC hopes in the long term to restore the slopes with native plants thus helping to maintain the Bog's water quality.

**Farm Trails North** is another Illinois State Nature preserve. It is located in Lake Barrington at the south-east corner of River and Roberts Road. The property was donated to CFC by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hagemann and Richard and Bonnie Johnson between 1981 and 1984. The preserve encompasses 18.3 acres and was dedicated by the state in 1993. The property contains marsh, sedge meadow (open, damp land carpeted with grass-like plants belonging to the family *Cyperaceae*), fen, and prairie. Especially noteworthy at Farm Trails North are state-threatened small white lady's slipper and beaked spike rush. CFC hopes to upgrade the existing habitats by clearing brush, managing purple loosestrife, and supervising controlled burns. A top priority of volunteers is to drastically reduce stands of invasive reed canary grass.

**Wagner Fen** is another type of wetland owned by CFC. Fens are less acidic than bogs, deriving most of their moisture from groundwater rich in calcium and magnesium. Of necessity, the physical condition of the surrounding terrain is vital to the health of the fen since it relies on water that percolates through the upland soil and down into the fen. Without the continued flow of water through this substrata, the alkalinity of the water will change with an accompanying disastrous impact on its native plants.

In 1980, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hagemann donated 39.6 acres of Wagner Fen to CFC while a few years later, Mr. and Mrs. William Muench and Gregory Daul donated additional parcels so that CFC now owns 42 acres. Tower Lakes Improvement Association owns about nine acres. Lake County Forest Preserve District's 55-acre contiguous portion makes Wagner Fen an Illinois Nature Preserve of about 100 acres.

This ecologically valuable wetland is home to four endangered species and four threatened species including the bog violet, white and showy lady's slippers, grass pink orchid, beaked spike rush, and Baltimore checkerspot butterfly. The Fen has an incredible assortment of wildflowers, especially in late summer. CFC volunteers and LCFPD natural resource crews have worked together to successfully protect and restore Wagner Fen to a semblance of its former pristine condition. The recent release of loosestrife beetles, a biological control project, has almost completely eradicated invasive purple loosestrife from the site.

Local newspapers have recently published articles revealing a threat to the health and integrity of Wagner Fen by development. To protect this rare ecosystem, CFC is working with the Village of Lake Barrington, its hired experts,

Lake County Forest Preserve District, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, and our fen expert Jim Miner. You can support this local native ecosystem by monitoring the progress of the Honeybee Hills subdivision in the local news.

Citizens for Conservation invites any interested neighbors or other residents to join our stewardship at these preserves. Because the properties are Illinois Nature Preserves, their accessibility is limited as are the activities we can conduct on the properties. However, we always welcome the willing hands and watchful eyes of neighbors and others who are interested in protecting these fragile and singular natural areas. Please contact us at 381-SAVE if you would like to join us.

## “Watch list” program targets new invasives

by Meredith Tucker

CFC is participating in a new program called the New Invaders Watch List and in its associated Rapid Response Network. This is a partnership of government, non-profit, and volunteer organizations geared toward early detection and control of exotic invasive plant and insect species in the Chicago region. Created by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Lake County Forest Preserve District, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Chicago Wilderness, the program is designed to identify invasive species new or uncommon in our area and to quickly provide member organizations with information on the location and methods for controlling the invader.

Debbie Maurer, an ecologist from Lake County Forest Preserve District, will present a training program for CFC members and volunteers as well as any interested Barrington area residents. Training will include an overview of the project, species identification (seventeen have been targeted so far), and use of the online database. In addition, all attendees will receive field identification cards.

CFC will present the program on Saturday, April 1, at 9:30 a.m. at the Barrington Library. We hope our friends and neighbors will join us for coffee “and” as well as a great program. Please call CFC at 381-SAVE for more information.

# Preserves' 'happy face' belies hurt of drought

by John Schweizer

It's too soon to know the full impact of the ongoing "extreme" drought on restored natural areas. Certainly wildlife is suffering; but despite a growing season with essentially no rainfall, CFC's preserves - diverse mixes of native grasses, forbs and trees - seemed as robustly brilliant as ever, right into autumn.

Nevertheless, seed production was down by 25% to 35% in some species. That means there was that much less seed available for harvesting, cleaning, mixing and sowing during fall and early winter.

"We're learning that native plants are very resilient, at least through the first year of this kind of drought," says CFC restoration director Tom Vanderpoel. "But there's no doubt it's slowing our progress. It's clear, though, that natural areas with native vegetation can survive extreme conditions.

"But I have to say, this drought is much more of a concern now as we head into this year," he says. "We don't know whether there'll be enough germination."

While compass plant, leadplant and purple prairie coneflower were particularly prominent during the dry summer, yellow coneflower and prairie dock languished.

"The sedges have always done well, and the wetland plants appear to be okay so far. But now, going into the second year of this drought, we'll find out whether we've been guessing right. Extreme conditions are very telling."

CFC's major restoration activity last fall was seed work. Volunteers collected, cleaned, mixed and broadcast precious seed on prairie grasslands and savanna understories at Flint Creek Savanna, Bakers Lake Savanna, Grigsby Prairie and a huge area at Spring Creek Forest Preserve in Barrington Hills.

As temperatures dropped, the emphasis turned to brush work. We cleared invasive, gnarly buckthorn thickets at Wagner Fen, Ela Road Prairie, Bakers Lake and Grigsby Prairie.

Restoration work already is underway at CFC's recently acquired six acres that expands Flint Creek Savanna south to Henry Lane. We are cutting buckthorn and black locust trees and stacking the wood for burning. We'll deal with rampant reed canary grass later.

At Grigsby Prairie, we are planning restoration of the newly received five-acre addition that expands the 39-acre preserve northeasterward from Buckley and Oak Knoll Roads. Like the rest of Grigsby Prairie, the parcel was a gift from CFC's generous benefactor, Mrs. Peggy Richards of Barrington Hills.

## Grigsby Prairie enlarged as Mrs. Richards gives 5 acres

CFC is extremely grateful to Mrs. Peggy Richards who has donated an additional five acres to our Grigsby Prairie preserve!

The newly donated parcel is in the northeastern corner of the property and includes part of a lake, providing tremendous opportunities for restoration. Mrs. Richards has previously donated all of the land for Grigsby Prairie which is named for her father who farmed the area many years ago.

CFC extends a warm thank you to Mrs. Richards for her generosity and farsightedness. This restoration, less than twenty years old, already provides habitat for threatened bird species.

## Critical piece added to Flint Creek Savanna

CFC has taken title to approximately six acres of undeveloped land on the north side of Henry Lane in Lake Barrington. Adjacent to CFC's Flint Creek Savanna preserve, the parcel includes .9 of an acre of upland which CFC purchased and 5.2 acres of donated wetland.

We look forward to restoring the parcel to high quality wetland, thereby enhancing the water quality of Flint Creek. Thank you to our Real Estate Committee for its efforts and to all the donors who helped make this purchase possible.



*Dorothy Sigel working at CFC headquarters*

## **Ace volunteer heading West after years of CFC work**

by Melissa Washow

If you have spent time at CFC's office or been to any workdays or events in the last thirteen years, chances are you've run into Dorothy Sigel. This loyal and tireless volunteer has put in countless hours for CFC. As a Board member Dorothy has chaired the Membership and House & Grounds Committees and has served as CFC's liaison to Barrington High School.

Many of her tasks have entailed caring for CFC's headquarters. She has supervised roofing the house and improving the driveway entrance. She has undertaken unglamorous jobs that are seldom acknowledged but are vital to CFC's operation. Often at her own expense, she has cleaned carpets and toilets, painted, changed furnace filters, scrubbed and sealed the deck, weeded, shoveled the sidewalk, and used her own tractor and weed-whacker to mow the lawn.

Dorothy regularly participates in restoration workdays and says she particularly enjoys controlled burns because she can see the rebirth afterwards. She volunteers with CFC because she feels that "we have to give back—we take so much.... I enjoy the people. They're always happy in what they're doing." Dorothy is especially thankful for the great influence on her life of the entire Vanderpoel family since she joined CFC.

This super volunteer is moving to Wyoming for the next adventure in her life. While everyone at CFC will miss her commitment and enthusiasm, we look forward to hearing about her conservation efforts in the West.

## **From the Staff Director**

As Citizens for Conservation celebrates its 35th anniversary in 2006, there are three words that seem to have been with the organization, underlying its decisions, actions and activities, since the founders began meeting in 1970, leading to incorporation as an Illinois not-for-profit in 1971. The words are *vision, perseverance and generosity*.

Conditions affecting the efforts of a volunteer group dedicated to "Saving Living Space for Living Things" have changed over the years, but the *vision* has remained, giving life and energy to the process.

The *perseverance* that was so evident in those early years has continued as shown by the recently completed expansion of Flint Creek Savanna through acquisition of property that has been in CFC's strategic plans for more than ten years.

*Generosity* is, to me, the most remarkable quality of all and has been an intrinsic part of CFC's culture since the beginning. The founders were generous with their time and creative efforts, carving out something entirely new and very important in the Barrington area. Through the years our boards of directors and volunteers have been incredibly generous with their time, energy, passion and many talents.

Our members and major donors have believed in CFC, carried it throughout its history, and continue to contribute the funds that make Saving Living Space possible.

Finally, in a wonderful example of generosity, Peggy Richards has just completed the gift of an additional five acres at Grigsby Prairie at the corner of Oak Knoll and Buckley Roads in Barrington Hills. Citizens for Conservation, the many volunteers who have enjoyed working at the restoration over the years, and all of the visitors and students who tour the prairie each year have received another extraordinary gift from a generous friend.

—Sam Oliver

### ***A good read***

*The Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv, Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2005 was recommended highly at the Rally 2005 conference held in October.

# Be on the look-out for coyotes and foxes

The native dogs of the Barrington area are coyotes, red and gray foxes. These animals benefit the human and natural environments by controlling rodent populations. Concerned residents can take steps to minimize contact with the animals and avoid potential wildlife problems.

Coyotes look like small, thin German shepherds and weigh from twenty to forty pounds. They have yellow eyes, yellowish-gray fur and bushy tails. They often live in family groups. Foxes are much smaller than coyotes, weighing only seven to fifteen pounds, and they are solitary. Reddish fur, a white belly and chest, and a white tip on its bushy tail distinguish the red fox, the type usually seen here. The gray fox has grayish fur above a reddish belly and chest with a black tipped tail. Rare in this area, it has short legs and can climb trees.

Coyotes and foxes breed during winter and give birth in early spring. During breeding season and when caring for pups, coyotes are more territorial than at other times. When occasional conflicts arise between coyotes and domestic dogs, it is often because a coyote is defending its territory not because it is trying to prey on a pet.

Foxes are much more timid than coyotes and rarely come into contact with domestic dogs. Both coyotes and foxes eat mice, rabbits and other small rodents as well as wild berries. However, coyotes have been known to eat cats and small dogs when pets are allowed to roam.

Homeowners can avoid problems with coyotes, foxes, and wildlife such as skunks and raccoons by implementing the following practices:

- \* Do not feed wildlife.
- \* Do not feed pets outside.
- \* Minimize conflicts between wildlife and pets by turning on outside lights, making noise, and observing the area for wildlife before letting dogs outside.
- \* Always keep cats indoors.
- \* Supervise pets when they are outdoors and keep dogs leashed when they are outside a fenced yard.
- \* If possible, keep garbage cans in the garage; alternatively, use cans with secure lids.

Coyote populations in this area increased during the 1980s but have leveled off in recent years. Fox populations are declining as is often the case where they compete with coyotes. Both species present little danger to people and usually flee when given the chance. If one is outside with a pet and sees a coyote nearby, he should restrain the dog and chase away the coyote by yelling and waving his arms. Instituting the above precautions will help keep native dog species at a distance from people and pets and will avoid risky interactions between them.

**Editor's note: Much of the above information is from the Lake County Forest Preserve District.**



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Sam Oliver

#### MANAGING EDITOR/LAYOUT

Doe Crosh

#### COPY EDITOR/STAFF WRITER

Meredith Tucker  
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#### PROOF READERS

Meredith Tucker  
Sam Oliver

#### STAFF WRITERS

Linda Moses Novak  
Tamara Oberholtzer

RECYCLED PAPER

**CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION**

459 West Hwy. 22

Barrington, Illinois 60010

*Saving Living Space for Living Things*

For membership information, visit us or call at:  
Office: 459 W. Hwy. 22 Phone: 847-382-SAVE  
[www.CitizensforConservation.org](http://www.CitizensforConservation.org)

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