



CHICAGO WILDERNESS™

A Regional Nature Reserve

THE CHICAGO WILDERNESS HABITAT PROJECT

# 2008 GRASSROOTS CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AWARDS

*The Habitat Project is about effecting change. It is about building a culture of conservation that connects people to our natural heritage and brings neighbors together to protect, enjoy, and know it. The following people exemplify the Habitat Project spirit. They are changing the world, and we are all a part of their success.*

*These awards are “the Academy Awards of conservation”. All nominees are proposed by the region’s leaders and volunteers – and all decisions are made by a review committee of leaders and volunteers.*



## BATAVIANS FOR A HEALTHY RIVER

**Batavians for a Healthy River** was formed by local citizens in 2003 to support efforts to remove Batavia’s structurally-failing North Dam on the Fox River. The group focused on educating the community about the benefits of the removal, including enhanced water quality. They also made a long-term commitment to help with the river restoration. While the Batavia City Council and Park District voted in favor of dam removal, funding has not yet been appropriated by the State of Illinois. In the interim, Batavians for a Healthy River has focused on stewardship activities for the Fox River and the tributary streams in Batavia, conducting more than 15 clean-ups and riparian area restoration events. Through these endeavors, the group is steadily expanding the awareness, appreciation, and active involvement of Batavia citizens in protecting and enhancing the Fox River and local streams for the betterment of the environment and the community. More information about BHR can be found at: <http://bataviansforahealthyriver.org>.

## PAUL BOLLINGER

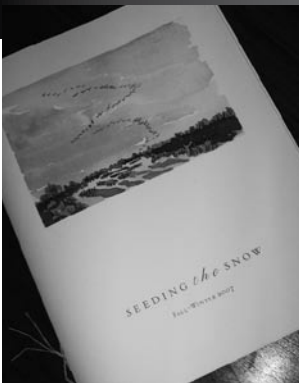
**Paul Bollinger** is a wetland ecologist and crack botanist, and he has used these skills each of the past four summers to collect data for the *Chicago Wilderness Land Audits* of woodlands and grasslands. In 2007, he went a step further and began recruiting other professionals from within the landscaping and consulting communities. He organized a seminar to introduce these pros to the audits, and he followed through with letters and phone calls to invite them to participate. The result was a new influx of highly skilled botanists, dedicating their free time to assess the health of our forest preserves.



## DAVE CARSON



**Dave Carson** has been an inspiration to the “Wednesday Volunteers” at the *Orland Grassland* in *Cook County* for more than six years, as a steward, friend, restoration interns supervisor, and really hard worker. He does it all, outreach projects, brush cutting, savanna clearing, plant rescue, and seed collecting; he has never missed a meeting and has valuable input in every project. He has made the control of teasel his personal mission, going out almost every day in the growing season, in the wee hours of the morning, hunting out the offending plants over the entire 960-acre site. He herbicides them or leads workers in cutting the seed heads at just the right moment. He obtained his herbicide license with the sole purpose of eradicating every last plant. The result is that he is winning! It will take years for him to completely reach his goal but if anyone can do it will be Dave. The Orland Volunteers admire him, respect him, and fondly call him “The Teasel King”.



## NANCY FREEHAFER AND KAREN RODRIGUEZ

In 1995, **Nancy Freehafer** and **Karen Rodriguez** created *Seeding the Snow*, a semi-annual journal of women's art, poetry, essays and stories about the natural landscape. With the other current editors - art director Eileen Sutter, graphic designer Corasue Nicholas, and website coordinator Chris Urban who followed the footsteps of Christiane Rey, Jennifer Masi, and Ellen Locatelli, the journal has bound together a community of women interested in the connection between art and nature. The journal's mission has been to "provide a medium for written and artistic expression of women about nature; to foster connections to our Midwestern landscapes; to build a sense of community among writers, artists, and readers through social and cultural events." This group was born out of the **North Branch Restoration Project** and its ecological restoration work but has expanded to other parts of the Midwest. Seeding the Snow editors have represented the journal at national and local conferences and held poetry readings at women's groups like Women-Made Gallery. After 11 years of raising consciousness and creativity, the current editors announced their last issue in November 2007, but other may be in the wings to carry on.

## KATHY GARNESS AND PAT HAYES

**Kathy Garness** and **Pat Hayes** love to spend time with kids outdoors, and they wanted to help nourish the young steward in all of them. So they created the **Chicago Wilderness Field Book** series, a set of field books for kids to take with them on work days that will help the young folks to see, smell, hear, and touch their surroundings, while also thinking about the impact of their restoration work on the wild world around them. Pat has been the force behind the concept and its distribution, while Kathy created the beautiful drawings and layout of the books themselves. Diane Huebner and Dick Riner also are part of the team that has made these books a reality. Hundreds of stewards, educators, and kids have the field books now in hand, helping to enrich their time outdoors. Kathy also is a steward at Grainger Flatwoods in Lake County, IL, monitors rare plants at eight sites with the Plants of Concern program, and is an indefatigable leader in pursuing knowledge of orchids through monitoring and art. Pat is a steward at Orland Grassland in Cook County and has been a dynamic leader of the strong restoration community that cares for this site.



## ELIZABETH KESSLER



From every corner of **McHenry County**, stewards are raving about **Elizabeth Kessler**, the new Executive Director for the McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD). Elizabeth took the reins in June, 2006 and has been a non-stop catalyst for conservation ever since. One steward described her working philosophy as, "Let's figure out a way to get it done." Elizabeth puts the goals of restoration and the needs of stewards foremost, and she has an uncanny ability to work through obstacles to allow good work to move forward. She is a champion for MCCD staff and volunteers alike, and as a result, more acres have been restored and more lives have been enriched.

## JOHN KLOEMPKEN

**John Kloempken** never gives up. He has been the steward of **Kloempken Farm** in **McHenry County** for six years and, in memory of his conservationist father Robert he has taken up advocacy for the **H.U.M. Railroad Prairie**, a remnant that spans 15 miles of McHenry County soils. He has sparked new interest in the remnant among both experienced and new volunteers, after tireless efforts to bring attention to this rare prairie.



## DEBRA NELSON



**Debra Nelson** has been a dynamo of conservation leadership, combining on-the-ground restoration activity, superb botany skills, and clear, articulate expression of ideas in service of her conservation goals. As Illinois Natural Heritage Biologist for **Lake County, IL** from 2000-2007, she was responsible for ecological restoration work at **Illinois Beach State Park** and **Volo Bog**. Site stewards rave that they "can't help but catch her enthusiasm." Deb is both visionary and practical - she always seeks solutions. She sought out grants to contract out major management projects at her sites that could not be handled by DNR staff alone, while on her own for days at a time with an herbicide backpack, battling invasives.

Deb was a key player in leading **Montrose Beach Dunes** to Illinois Natural Areas Inventory status, the first to be so listed within the City of **Chicago**. Working closely with volunteers of Plants of Concern, the rare plant monitoring program she supported and championed enthusiastically with IDNR, she tracked numerous locations - some new finds - of threatened species at Illinois Beach State Park. In August 2007, Deb left the Chicago area for a new life in California, but her influence and personal spirit in the conservation community here will be lasting.



### DENNIS PAIGE

**Dennis Paige** is an Environmental Educator by training and a conservation activist in practice. He worked with the *Village of Schaumburg*, the *Fox Valley Land Foundation*, and the Chicago Tribune to gain protection for the Tribune's WGN Marsh, where their reception towers sit. A long-time birder of the marsh, Dennis wanted to ensure that the site would remain wild after the Tribune relinquished it in 2010. The site is now included in Schaumburg's Biodiversity Recovery Plan, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife is monitoring long term measures for preserving it. Dennis also has started Swiftdeer-Paige, an enterprise offering a Native-American storytelling program, green life-styles workshops, and native landscaping talks for residential landscapes. He has long sustained an award-winning native landscape on his condominium property. For four years Dennis wrote a weekly column for the Daily Herald titled "Green Light: Living With Nature" highlighting our natural heritage while exploring ways to simply live in balance with nature. Schaumburg's mayor has called him a "pied piper" for the environment, and The Chicago Tribune and Earth Island Institute have recognized him for being an individual making a difference for the environment.

### ANNETTE PRINCE

**Annette Prince** and a corps of dedicated bird lovers have helped save the lives of thousands of birds in the city of Chicago. As leader of the *Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (CBCM)*, Annette supports the work of more than 60 volunteers who conduct morning patrols in Chicago, looking for dead and injured birds every day of the week for more than 12 weeks each migration season. The CBCM maintains a hotline number for the public, for birds in trouble. They work closely with the *Lights Out* program to support the light reduction that prevents migrating birds from being fatally attracted to multi-story buildings at night. They work with building owners to reduce the dangerous effects of transparent or reflective glass. They refer injured birds to the Willowbrook Wildlife Center for rehabilitation. Annette's leadership is critical to the great success of all of these initiatives. Through collaboration with the Field Museum, CBCM's records of more than 120 different bird species found in the Loop have led to new insights about migration patterns. Annette and other CBCM volunteers also conduct outreach to the public, the media, schools, and other cities, to encourage bird safety efforts elsewhere.



### GREG RAJSKY

**Greg Rajskey** always has time for more. A steward at the *Rothschild Property* adjacent to *Lake in the Hills Fen* in *McHenry County*, he also co-organized the first and second *Wild Things Conferences* in 2005 and 2007, and his energy, competence and leadership are largely responsible for the conference being what it is. He collects expert botanical data for the *Chicago Wilderness Land Audits* of woodlands and grasslands, and he leads plant identification walks to help other auditors sharpen their skills. Greg helped to organize last summer's Habitat Clinic series and provides ongoing leadership and ideas for the Habitat Project. He is dedicated to supporting, growing, and celebrating the thriving community of citizen conservationists in our region.

### BOB AND ANNE RIZZOLO

**Bob and Anne Rizzolo** have managed the large Native Plant Demonstration Garden at *Lake County's Independence Grove Forest Preserve* for five years. They guided and inspired other volunteers to turn it from a weedy mess into a beautiful example to inspire home gardeners to incorporate native plants into their own gardens. Bob and Anne have also been the backbone of a weekday chainsaw session attacking buckthorn in several Lake County Preserves for the last several years. The progress has been phenomenal, as acre after acre of buckthorn has disappeared. Bob and Anne plan ahead. They bring the proper equipment. The equipment operates as intended. They innovate. They offer sensible solutions to unforeseen problems. They lead. If situations can't be solved in the field, the Rizzolo's research the subject for a fresh approach. Best of all, the Rizzolo's enthusiasm is a magnet for new volunteers.



### JACK AND JUDY SPEER

**Jack and Judy Speer** are stewards and neighbors of 766-acre *Alden Sedge Meadow* in north *McHenry County* and have opened their home to conduct educational programming that supports the restoration of this distinctive tract of nature. The mostly undeveloped wetlands at the headwaters of the Nippersink Creek are considered among the highest-quality native ecosystems in the state, and the Speers join a team of stewards who assist the Conservation District at this site. The Speers' home is an energy-efficient transformation of an old hunting lodge. Their workdays are teaching events, focusing on restoration theory, ecology, cultural heritage, and the practical application of management techniques. Five years ago, they began by leading volunteers in restoring an abandoned 160-year old pioneer cemetery that was completely overgrown with brush, and are expanding the restoration into adjacent oak savanna and woodland. The Speers also are spearheading a county-wide initiative to improve the success of stewards at recruiting volunteers for work days.

## CRAIG STETTNER



**Craig Stettner** teaches biology at *Harper College* in *Palatine* that gets media attention for its environmental activism. His classes regularly go outside to cut brush, plant seeds and plants, count dragonflies and butterflies, and study monarchs. In addition, he encourages the students to do extra credit by volunteering at nearby natural areas. Craig is also the faculty advisor for the college's Environmental Club. Outside of his professional life, Craig is the coordinator for the Habitat Project's *Dragonfly Monitoring Network*, where he recruits monitors, conducts training workshops, leads field trips, and supports the network's 40 monitors. Craig also is a steward at *Spring Creek Preserves* in *Cook County*, volunteers for *River Watch*, and is an excellent bird, fish and dragonfly identifier. Craig has a prairie garden at his home, for those rare occasions when he is there.

## JOHN THILL



**John Thill** saw the need for change and got involved. He began his nature advocacy six years ago, at a public education event for *Miami Prairie*, asking the *Cook County* Board to lift its restoration moratorium at the site. Later he convinced the mayor and the entire board of trustees of *Morton Grove* to sign a proclamation asking the Cook County Board to lift the burn ban from Miami Prairie. He and his wife Marian were among the founding members of the Friends of Morton Grove Forest Preserves. Last year, he was elected to the Morton Grove board of Trustees, where he continues to advocate for local nature and conservation, including more recycling, ecologically sound yardwork practices, and hybrid cars for the village fleet.

## JIM VORIS, TOM VANDERPOEL AND THE CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION



**Tom Vanderpoel, Jim Voris**, and the other dedicated members of **Citizens for Conservation** had the foresight to find native seed populations and the smarts to grow them, so that they now have hundreds of thousands of conservative plants thriving on nearly 100 acres of high quality restoration at *Grigsby Prairie* and other sites in the Barrington area. Management at these sites has been so successful that Grigsby now produces enough seed each year to support restoration beyond their ownership. They are important partners who provide technical assistance and substantial amounts of prairie and woodland seed to the Forest Preserve District of *Cook County* for restoration of 3,910 acres at the *Spring Creek Preserves*.

## RICHARD WACHENHEIM



In October of 1990, **Richard Wachenheim** began volunteering at *Romeoville Prairie Nature Preserve* in *Will County*. Soon the Forest Preserve District hired him to supervise volunteers in all of the county preserves as Regional Steward; then he added responsibilities as Resource Management Crew leader. This move did not stop his volunteer commitment to the District, and he recently received the District's first 15 year pin for years of volunteer service. When he is not out cutting brush or killing weeds he is coordinating the efforts of what has risen to nearly 50 volunteer stewards, technicians, workday volunteers, and resource monitors, plus Eagle Scout candidates and corporate sponsored workdays.

## NANCY WEDOW, CYNDI DUDA, AND PRAIRIE WOODS AUDUBON



**Nancy Wedow and Cyndi Duda** of **Prairie Woods Audubon** led a successful effort to protect *Palatine Prairie*, located in northwest *Cook County*. Builders had proposed an adjacent seven-story residential facility with underground parking that would have blocked the prairie's sun and wind, increased stormwater runoff, and altered drainage from the prairie and its wetland. Through public education, public hearings, and persistence, these leaders helped sway the developer to withdraw their proposal. Instead, a completely different venue, a golf training business, will set up shop in the existing facility with minimal new construction and minimal impacts to the prairie. Palatine Prairie is a remnant prairie and designated Illinois Nature Preserve. This valuable site is owned by the Palatine Park District and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, and managed by Prairie Woods Audubon.